

Traci Baxley Social Justice Parenting

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What I'm doing in my home, how has that impacted. The kids who are not in my home.

Debbie Sorensen: That was dr Traci Baxley on psychologists off the clock We are three clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science-based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships, work, and health.

I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in mile high, Denver, Colorado, and coauthor of ACT Daily Journal.

Yael Schonbrun: I'm Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston based clinical psychologist, assistant professor at Brown University, and author of the upcoming book Work, Parent, Thrive.

Jill Stoddard: And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard author of be mighty and the big book of act metaphors.

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Debbie Sorensen: hi everyone. This is Debbie and I have an episode today for you on social justice parenting with Dr. Traci Baxley, who is like my new parenting hero. So I was so delighted to have the chance to talk with her and do this interview and, and bring you this information.

And I'm here with Jill today to just talk a little bit about social justice parenting in our own lives and what's ahead in the interview. And so let me turn it over to you, Jill, to hear some of your thoughts about the conversation today after, after you've listened.

Jill Stoddard: Well, I found this. Interview to be so incredibly helpful, like truly actionable, like immediately [00:03:00] actionable. And gosh, I just walked away feeling so much gratitude and appreciation for Dr. Baxley. And it's funny because Yael and I were just talking the other day about how much we appreciate this podcast because there have been so many.

So many topics that have helped us to truly make positive behavioral changes in our lives. And this episode with Traci Baxley was, was really no exception to the point where like immediately after I listened to the episode, I started doing things differently. And so you, you talk later in the episode about. An example, where one of your daughters asked you a difficult question, you know, kind of a social justice related question and you weren't sure you had handled it. Right. And I thought, oh my gosh, I had a really similar experience when my son came home and he asked me, what does the N word mean? He said the word and said, what is this word mean?

And I went, oh my God, like, I just had this panic response, like this fight [00:04:00] flight freeze. Where I was filled with fear. I didn't know what to do. I got really scared that he would say this word and cause harm to someone. And my instant reaction was just sort of like, oh my God, you can't say that, you know that this is a bad word and this is offensive.

And you can't say, and I just didn't know the right thing to do. Listening to this episode made me realize I didn't handle that well, which I knew already at the time, but it gave me a path forward for how to do things differently. And the idea that it's never too late. And I immediately went to the internet when I finished the episode and I looked up the history of the word and tried to better understand why it's offensive so that I could articulate that to, to my kids and have a plan for as soon as they come home from school today to say, Hey, you know, I was thinking about when you asked me this question and like, basically have a redo.

And the way that Traci Baxley presented this in the interview, like I said, it was, it was accessible. [00:05:00] It was actionable. Unintimidating, like it really gave me this path forward to have a more useful, helpful, productive conversation with my kids about, you know, a topic that really matters, but that where my own fear got in the way.

And I think that really happens to people a lot. We have the best intentions, but we sort of freeze because of our fear.

Debbie Sorensen: I love that example, how it was so immediate, Jill and also, I really think that, you know, it's hard out there for us parents who are doing the right thing and I think. The truth is these kinds of conversations happen all the time, especially as your kids get older and they ask so many questions. And I think there's just so many times like that where we don't know what to say.

We freeze up, we're trying to do our best, you know, to be good parents and to raise decent human beings. But sometimes we really don't know what to do. And it's funny because that example, but. In the episode after the fact, [00:06:00] I felt a little bit sheepish about releasing it because I think I want to know how to handle these situations well and how to really turn these conversations into a teachable moment and something really meaningful.

And I think the truth is we all probably have moments as parents where we don't know what to say, or it touches on an issue that really gets our own fear system activated and we might panic, or we might watch it and we can always go back and continue these conversations over time.

I think one of the things, there are so many things I appreciate about Dr. Baxley, but one of them is just how. It's just how she's so compassionate and forgiving. And she really looks at this as an ongoing process and a conversation and an exploration. And I'm, I think that this episode has really been helpful to me too.

Ever since I read the book and talk to her and I think it's going to just really help me as a parent moving from.

Jill Stoddard: I could [00:07:00] not agree more. And I love that. She talks about the difference. You guys have a conversation about the difference between kindness and social justice and how that lies in action. And that piece just really, really stuck with me.

And I'm going to take that forward with me. And like I said, I'm, I'm just incredibly grateful and I think people are going to get so much that they can so much out of this episode that they can actually apply in their, in their everyday life.

Debbie Sorensen: Well, we hope so. We hope you enjoy the conversation.

I'm very excited to introduce my guest today. Dr. Traci Baxley is an associate professor of education at Florida Atlantic university.

She's a consultant parenting coach and speaker and educator for over 30 years with degrees in child. Develop. Elementary education and curriculum and instruction. She specializes in diversity and inclusion, anti-biased curriculum and social justice education. Her terrific book that we're going to talk about today is called social [00:08:00] justice parenting.

How to raise compassionate, antiracist. Justice minded kids. And she also has some courses online. One is for white mothers who want to be allies for the black community and raise the anti-racist children. And another for parents who want to implement social justice parenting practices in their families daily lives. So, Traci welcome. I'm really delighted that you're joining us on psychologists off the clock.

Traci Baxley: Thank you, Debbie. I'm excited to be here. Thank you for having.

Debbie Sorensen: Well, you're most welcome. I really appreciate it. Um, one of the things that I really love most about your book is how you share personal stories to illustrate the concepts of your book. And you are of course, a parent

yourself and have had so many experiences related to social justice and making your own parenting decisions.

So I was wondering if you could just tell us a little bit about your family, which is an interesting one and why this work is personal [00:09:00] for you.

Traci Baxley: Yes. I am a mother of five. I have. I have one daughter and four sons raging right now ranging for ages from ages 22 down to 12. So we're in different kind of stages right. Of, of the parenting, um, process. And, um, I'm also in a multi-racial. Marriage, my husband is white and I am African-American.

And so, you know, we have to navigate what that looks like in our home versus what that looks like in the world. You know, how we raise our children to know who they are, um, be confident in their identity. Um, I'm as a black woman, it's really important that I raised my kids, knowing what it's like to be black in the world.

Um, we also give our kids kind of the free reign to identify self, identify how they want in their home. Um, and they all identify differently. And so we, that's part of, kind of our normal conversation, um, in [00:10:00] our house. And part of that, um, finding identity, being safe, being who you.

are, uh, being accepted in the world is part of the work that I do in general.

And certainly it inspired a lot of the things that are in the.

Debbie Sorensen: Well, yeah, I mean, I think that's really interesting that your children, you just have these very open conversations about things like identity and. Each navigating that, those kinds of questions in their own unique ways. I think it really ties to the concepts here.

Traci Baxley: Exactly. Yes. And this, the idea of, you know, accepting your kids for who they are and how they see themselves. And, um, like for example, my daughter identifies as a black woman, um, she doesn't really identify as biracial. She'll say she's biracial, but if you ask her she on her driver's license or whatever those things are, she identifies as a, as a. woman. And, um, I have, um, some of [00:11:00] my sons who identify as biracial, um, they don't feel like they don't want to choose one or the other. So they, they, they identify as both. Um, so I, I totally accept whatever they feel comfortable with in terms of their own identity. But, um, again, you know, as a black woman in a racialized world, I remain very upfront and honest and direct with my kids about.

How the world will see them and the importance of knowing how to navigate in that space as Well,

Debbie Sorensen: Well, I would really like to bring to life for listeners who maybe themselves hasn't personally experienced racism. I think, you know, you're a parent, right? You know, an African-American woman with, uh, you know, biracial children. And I'm just curious. I mean, I think one of the things that was really powerful to me, reading your book as a white woman, myself, was just about how you have to teach your own children about some of [00:12:00] the horrible things that they will face, or, you know, probably have faced and likely will face down the road.

And so I was just wondering if. Share your thoughts about what you've had to teach your children to equip them to deal with that, that maybe someone like me hasn't.

Traci Baxley: Yeah, I have a couple of thoughts on that. Um, the first is, you know, the common comment idea is the talk that black families have in their home. Right. They call it the talk, which is really when we're educating our kids. How to move in, in society, how to move around in the world to stay safe. But it also includes the things about, uh, being proud of being in the skin you're in, you know, really talking about.

The joys of being black or, uh, you know, what our ancestors have endured for them to have the opportunity that they have right now. So, um, I think often when people think about the talk, it's always like kind of positioning our kids to be on guard, but it's also positioning our [00:13:00] children to really be excited and love, uh, who they are.

So it's. You know, the, the combination of both parts of those, both sides of those coins, right. As we are raising our children. And I also think it's important. Um, and now more than ever, I guess, you know, we're starting to think about this a little bit differently that it's just not the responsibility of black parents to give this same kind of idea about the world to their black children, but we're, we're seeing more and more of that.

Really important that white families like yours really are proactive and saying, this is the way our world sometimes works. Um, sometimes we may not be at the short end of that stick. Right. But how do we then start to navigate in a way that we're supporting that we're aligning with that? We are, um, are aware that these things are going on around us and what is our responsibility as a family?

So I think the idea of the [00:14:00] talks should be happening in all of our families. Uh, if we're going to really kind of change the way that we show up and care more deeply about one another.

Debbie Sorensen: I love that. I mean, A. That it's not it's everyone's responsibility. And also just what you said, I think about. You know, it's not just fear based. Absolutely not. It's also very strength spaced. And that actually is a perfect segue. I wanted to talk to you about belonging. We've we've had an episode on the podcast with my colleague, Meg McKelvie about belonging and you have a whole chapter about that.

Um, you write that all children need to belong and belonging is a universal, fundamental motivation for all people. I was wondering. I say a bit more about belonging, like, and what do you want listeners to understand about belonging specifically when it comes to people of color or other marginalized group?

Traci Baxley: Yeah. I think we [00:15:00] would, like you said, belonging is. It's just a human, right, right. It's something. If we look at, I always go back to Maslov's, a hierarchy of needs. And when you look at where that is, it's, it's really one of the basic needs that we need to do to ever get to that idea of self actualization, right.

To get to the point where we feel capable of. Meeting our hopes and our dreams. Um, and if we're not creating these spaces of belonging, especially in our own homes, right. Starting in our own homes, our kids don't know what that, that feels like right. To really feel secure and feel safe, uh, as a, as they go out into the world.

And the more that we can create this sense of belonging in our homes, really the more, um, our children will. Uh, a normal way to feel in a normal way to be, and be able to spread that into the world when they, when they become adults. And there, there are, um, they are encountering other people in different situations.

And I think, um, [00:16:00] the idea of belonging, especially when we talk about, uh, if we're looking at it from a racial lens, um, A lot of, uh, children of color, um, don't they feel a lack of belonging often, right. And, and various spaces in the world in it. And I think, um, it all starts in our own homes. It all starts with us really creating safe spaces at home creating environments where our children will be safe spaces for others in the world.

And. I think if we don't start really thinking about that in terms of just the basic way that we treat each other, um, we're going to keep, I think we're at right now, we're in a spiraling, um, place in our, in our, in our country where we are caring less, uh, about other people. Um, and we're almost in this kind of ego selfish. Cocoon, you know, [00:17:00] where we're living. We're leading people who may not have the same opportunities who may not have the same, um, privileges really in the world. We're leaving them out to fend for themselves. Um, and I think it's a really bad and dangerous space for us as a country to be. Um, and I think if we start thinking about how we are creating spaces of belonging in all the parts of our lives, I think we could start to.

Change. Really some of the things, the divides that we are finding ourselves, stand in our country.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. Well, thank you for saying that this country has been breaking my heart. Lately. And it's really, I think your point about healing, you know, it has to happen at all levels, including in the families and starting with the kids. Um, And I love in your book. I mean, just to highlight this again, cause we already even talked about it a little bit with your own children and kind of letting them each be their own unique person with their own identity.[00:18:00]

I love the part in the book about parenting, the children we have and just there's so much pressure in the world too. I think for kids to be molded a certain way or something like that. So. You know, could you speak a little bit about accepting our children for who we are and how, what are some ways you do that with your own kids?

Traci Baxley: Yeah. And, and that's, it sounds obvious, right. But it's, it's sometimes it's very difficult. I mean, like you said, with the outside pressures too, um, for our kids to look a certain way to achieve certain things, to be involved in certain things. Um, and sometimes we are putting what we think is best or the things that we didn't have.

I mean, that was what I did. You know, the things that I didn't have in mind. Uh, growing up, I wanted to give that stuff to my children. And, Um,

it came at a, at a price, especially for my daughter. Who's the oldest, you know, I've learned through her to not do certain things as, as my younger boys are growing up.

But I think, uh, and I had a [00:19:00] very kind of great middle class. childhood really low field, lots of love, lots of things. Um, but you know, we

always want to do more and better what we w what we consider better, right. For our children than maybe what we had. And part of that was giving my kids more opportunities with, uh, you know, music lessons and more sports and more, uh, tutoring for higher class, all those things.

And, um, the. Idea that all my kids would play sports. What's kind of a given, right? My husband and I played lots of sports growing up and we had one, our, our, our third child who had no interest in team sports. And it was after years of trying to push him to play soccer and all the things we realized that's not who he was.

Um, and so I had to relearn who he was, you know, and spend time with them. Um, and asking him curious [00:20:00] questions so that I could get to know how to support him. And so I think sometimes our kids are interested in things that we are not interested in or that we don't know anything about. And we have to learn how to parent who they are instead of trying to get them to be.

Who we thought they would be. I'm an another thing too. You know, I have one child with ADHD, one child who battles, uh, with, uh, depression, another son who has, uh, was diagnosed with OCD. And those are also things that you don't think your kids will have to experience. And so, as a mom, I had to. Recognize those labels as not something negative, but as a way to see how I can help my S my children to grow and be the best, um, people that they can be with, with who they are.

Um, any neurological differences that they may have. And so I think accepting where kids are and then educating ourselves of how we can, um, show up [00:21:00] for them in ways to, um, help them grow. And I think that goes back to that belonging piece too. Right. You know? My son, who's the only one in the house that doesn't play sports.

I had to create a space of belonging for him amongst the sports family. Right. And so I think that goes back to how we creating these safe spaces for our children to be who they want, who they need to be, or who they are. Um, and how do we help to support that as they grow.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, I think, I think about this sometimes when I get hooked in this thought of, oh, I want them to have all the opportunities. I want them to be a certain way. I have to kind of let go of. And have a little acceptance around it and realize, you know, that that's coming from a place of fear or something like this and this worrying about them.

And to think I just don't want them to feel like they have to earn my love that they have to work really hard or be good at sports or get straight A's to be loved just to feel like they belong. Even [00:22:00] if you know, they're not perfect in every possible way. In fact, that's, especially what makes them unique.

Traci Baxley: Exactly. Yes. And I think that's something we have to make sure we're continually conscious of. Like, we have to do the, the reflection on that every day. Like, did I show up in a way which is pure, radical love or did I show up in a way that I'm putting my own ego first? Like, so I think just that idea of reflecting on that question each day really helps us to. Mitigate some of the pressure that we may be not intentionally, but that we may be putting on our kids.

Debbie Sorensen: Yep. Well, let's move a little bit into social justice parenting and kind of dive in specifically to how to do that and what that means. Starting very broadly. What is social justice parenting? What are we talking about?

Traci Baxley: Yeah, social justice parenting is really kind of, uh, this intentional and purposeful, purposeful way that we [00:23:00] want to raise children to be more compassionate and kind, um, raising kids to be conscious about, uh, leaning into actively. Um, and teaching our kids to create these spaces of belonging for people outside of our families.

So it's just unintentional and purposeful way of showing up to really raise children who will be change agents for the next generation.

Debbie Sorensen: Oh, that's such a great definition of it. So many elements to that. What do you think? Why, why do you think that some parents, even, maybe they have really good intentions? They're well-meaning kind people, but so often they're afraid to go there. They're maybe afraid to talk to their kids about social justices, like, or about social, uh, afraid to talk to their kids about social justice issues.

Why do you think that sometimes this is a difficult thing for parents.

Traci Baxley: I [00:24:00] think, and this is, I think this is what my book two's going to be on. Really this idea of fear fear-based parenting it's it's, it's why a lot of things are going on in our world right now. Right. I think. People are fearful, fearful of things that are unknown, right? Uh, they're fearful of maybe losing control or power, especially when they don't know the answers.

A lot of, a lot of adults don't want kids to see that they don't know the right answers. Right. Um, I think parents have their own fears, anxieties, and maybe childhood traumas that keep them from. Engaging in heart conversations and really kind of leaning in to this idea of social justice parenting with their children.

Um, I think sometimes parents.

are afraid that their kids are going to ask them questions that they don't, they don't know the answer to. And if we are raised. Our childhood is, was based on kind of this power structure with parents and [00:25:00] children. I'm trying to change that power structure sometimes it's difficult.

Um, I know I was raised a lot. My dad was very firm in what he says goes like we didn't get a lot of less discussion as kids and in my household. Um, and I didn't want that for my kids because I remember what that felt like. Not. Be able to say my opinion. And so I think sometimes it's trying to shift the way that we were raised to, to how we want to parent it's sometimes hard and sometimes you don't know what to do.

So I really think the idea of social justice parenting is really the antidote to this fear-based parenting. I think the more we, Really want to just protect our children, um, and not having these conversations. You are really unintentionally leaving a lot of other kids on unprotected. And so I think the idea of social justice parenting is the, is thinking about, everybody's children as your children, right?

What I'm doing in my home, [00:26:00] how has that impacted. The kids who are not in my home. And so I think what I'm trying to do with social justice parenting is have us answer the question, what is right for the hold and not just for my, my kids and my family. And so sometimes that does look scary, but I think if we can start to parent from a place of, uh, the village.

And not just our particular kids, we will start to kind of open up and be more intentional about the conversations we have with our children, being more intentional about having our kids, um, invite diversity and, and enter their own lives and, um, creating spaces for that in our homes and our conversations that we have with our child.

Debbie Sorensen: It's like going beyond yourself and your individual child and going beyond that, to the bigger humanity out there in the world and trying to raise kids that are going to be [00:27:00] compassionate toward, you know, it's

not just about your, your own child having success in the world. It's about. Making the world a better place starting with your child.

Traci Baxley: Exactly. That's exactly right. Yes.

Debbie Sorensen: Can you say a little bit more about why it's so important? I just want to emphasize this again, why it's so important for all parents to have a role in social justice, even, you know, privileged families that maybe aren't directly in an oppressed or marginalized group.

Traci Baxley: yeah, And I. The idea of social justice has gotten a bad rap lately. Right? I think it's used more as like

Debbie Sorensen: become

Traci Baxley: word. Yes, exactly. Yes.

Yes. And when we get to the, like, I even get people, like, why would you name your book that like it's people are not going to read it because of the name of the title.

And I'm like, you know, social justice to me is about making sure [00:28:00] everybody has opportunities. So to live their best life. It's like, how do we argue? Um, when, when I talk to kids about the definition of social justice, um, I talk about, you know, it's about that, making sure that everybody who is hungry has food, it's about making sure that everybody who needs a place to stay, um, has shelter.

Um, it's about making sure everybody has opportunities so that they can learn, they can grow, they can earn money and they can live their best life. I mean, that's really what social justice really is. And I think. If we look at it and strip it down to its basis, basics, um, we should all be on board with that.

We should all be excited about the idea of raising children, who will make sure that there's a lot of love and there's a lot of food and, and places for like on house, people are taken care of. Those are like really the basic things that, that. Social justice is really about, and [00:29:00] that's really what social justice parenting is about really raising our children so that they're not just nice human beings, but they're nice human beings who are willing to do the work to make sure that everybody has opportunities to grow.

And that there's, um, there's justice in the, in the world. And I, and I think if we look at it from that just from a human lens, Um, it's something that we all should be on board and feel good about doing

Debbie Sorensen: Can you talk a little bit about the difference between being a good person? I have, I'm using air quotes here, quote, good person and being quote pro justice, because I think this is a really important point. You know, that a lot of people out there are, you know, it's not like you're a wait. Hold on. How do I say this?

A lot of people out there, again, they might be well-meaning they, they don't want, you know, the world to be this terrible [00:30:00] racist, homophobic, sexist place, um, in theory, but then they're also maybe a few steps short of being pro justice. So what's the difference. And, and how can people move toward

Traci Baxley: Yes, that's a great question. I think if I had to sum it up in one word, it would be. Uh, action. Right? So the difference between really a good person being somebody who's pro justice is really the action that you do. And I think when we're raising our kids to be good people, I, I almost think it's like the safe thing to do, right.

It who, who who's going to argue with that who's going to argue with, it's a, it's a good thing to, to raise good people. And I think that's when you have to push through fear, uh, because. We, we all want to believe we're raising good people. And I think everybody's on board with that, but I think being a good person is sometimes more passive.

Um, and I think if you are trying to raise children who are pro justice, it [00:31:00] really will require us to. Um, to be more plugged in on the realities that are going on in the world and how they impact your family or how it impacts other people's family. Uh, raising kids who are pro justice also means that you're raising kids who are more courageous and more active in, um, standing up for other people.

And I think, uh, what I often say is raising good people is, uh, teaching. Kids to do no harm, but when you're raising pro justice children, you're teaching kids to intercede when harm is done. So those are, it's like raising the allies, the activists, the agitators, the anti-racist. Those are the kids that you're raising when you're raising pro justice children.

So they're the kids who are gone to stand up for others, um, and really be a change makers in the world. Um, so I think raising good kids, it's great. It's a great start, [00:32:00] but it's not enough if we really want to change the trajectory of some of the things that?

are going on in the.

Debbie Sorensen: I have this memory of grad school. I had a really good diversity class at one point when I was in my clinical training. And I remember going into that class kind of a little arrogant thinking like, well, I'm not. I'm not racist. I'm a good person. Like I want to learn about this, but I don't think it really applies to me.

And then kind of going through the stage of like a really hard look inward and thinking, oh yes, this does apply to me and I'm not doing enough. And I have not given this enough, uh, you know, consideration in my own life and just what a shock that was to me. Cause I kind of went into it. I think we're a lot of people do.

It's thinking like, well, I think racism is bad. I'm not. One of those people, but to kind of recognize that there is a difference between taking action and also really trying to tune into it more.

Traci Baxley: absolutely. And I think, [00:33:00] um, You know, some of the, the anti-racist scholars, you know, kind of identify that, that idea of that there there's no, um, um, not, not, uh, not racist you either a racist or anti-racist. Right. And there's not really something in between. So if you're doing nothing. Is it really helping to stop racism or is it really kind of, uh, allowing racism to continue?

Um, I know, um, Beverly Tatum talks about. Uh, she uses the, the example, uh, if you're like on a conveyor belt, like in the airport, if you are going with the flow of the conveyor belt and is helping you get ahead, that's kind of like an example of racism that you're using every opportunity you have to, uh, put yourself in the front and, and not worry about other people.

And then I'm not racist. Is that, uh, wait, let me back up. Um, [00:34:00] Racist is that you are walking with the conveyor belt so that you are using it to get ahead. You're moving forward and you're kind of passing everybody. If you're not racist, you are just on the conveyor belt moving forward. Like you're not actively walking, but it's still moving you.

Um, and you still have an advantage and then anti-racists would be the people who. Actively turn around and run backwards on this conveyor belt, that's going in one direction and that you're trying to, to undo what's already being done. So that's kind of like a visual of these kind of three ideas. Um, and, uh, candy says, you know, there is no in-between, you're either racist or you're anti-racist.

And so I think it's something that we all should think about where we positioned and, um, How do we want to raise children in that, in that space? What's our responsibility to our, our family, our children, and was our responsibility to just kind of human, [00:35:00] human humanity.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. Well, and I think even just using, uh, telling yourself something like, well, I'm not racist. It's like, it's a cop out. You know what I mean? Uh, way of, of letting yourself off the hook from having to do anything. And it's really not okay. You know, it's an, it just is not that dichotomy is a false one because we're so embedded in it.

Right. I want to actually, can I just give an example of this good person versus pro justice? Based on a podcast episode I had with Dr. Erin Andrews, this was a couple, well, several years ago, she's a disability advocate and we talked about. That episode, I would really encourage people to listen to because we talk about disability as a form of diversity, where there's a lot of stigma and it's often very much overlooked, I think, as a social justice issue.

Um, and she talked about with kids, sometimes we have this like, well, be nice. Like, don't [00:36:00] talk about it. You know, if you see someone in a wheelchair and a lot of kids are, they're not even around necessarily people. Disability. I mean, they probably are, you know, neurodiversity or other differences between people, but I think sometimes parents have almost this, like be nice.

Don't talk about it kind of vibe with children and it sort of shuts down the conversation, but it doesn't really teach them about inclusivity. Right? It's like, it becomes this like bad word we're not supposed to talk about. And that's actually not pro justice at all. That's shutting the conversation down.

Traci Baxley: Absolutely. Yes. And I think, I think I can't get to it from, from a race perspective to the color blind theory. Right. That we were all, we love everybody, you know, everybody's a good person, you know, that kind of thing. So I think that, um, When we talk about all of the ways that we are diverse and certainly a disabilities abilities is, is one of them.

Um, We, we [00:37:00] have to allow kids to lean into their natural curiosities, um, because it really does. It changes us, right? Because we get to see who our kids are and the questions that they're asking it gets us to learn more about topics and, um, issues. Um, and then it, it also gets them to trust their own voice, right.

To, to, to know that these questions are important to find answers to. To see the humanity in others. And when we shut that down, we're teaching our kids that these, these conversations on taboo, we don't talk about them. We don't talk about those people. Um, and it, it does more separating them. It does bring us together.

Debbie Sorensen: Absolutely. Yeah, taboo or something. That's like you said, blind, like, oh, we don't see that. We don't talk about it. And it just really minimizes the impact in a really unhelpful way. Yeah. So a lot of your book is really goes through the qualities of a pro justice home and kind of dives [00:38:00] into a lot of examples.

And just some of the ways in which you. Make your home more, your family, more pro justice, and people can read the book, I think, to really dive into that. But could you give just sort of a overview summary of some of what you consider to be the main qualities of a pro justice home?

Traci Baxley: Yeah. I think if I had to just name a couple of things, I would say open dialogue is really important, right? That you're having the conversations that they are embedded in who you are as a family on that kids are able to ask questions openly. And honestly, I think valuing each other, right. Knowing what each person has to contribute to.

To the house, to the world, right. And honoring and valuing those things in each person I'm seeing each person for who they are. Um, and I'm creating safe spaces around that is really important. Um, I also think if you're trying to create a pro justice home, you are [00:39:00] active in the things that are important to you so that you are. Showing up in spaces, you are, um, doing reading with your kids. You are, you know, you may not be at the protest or the rallies, but you are writing the letters. You are collecting the canned goods, whatever that is, but you're showing your kids that you are making a difference. And, um, you are engaged in the things that are important in the world, but.

Really the key qualities are really honoring each other, creating space for each other, allowing children to use their voices in the home. Um, so that when they

go out into the world, they're comfortable doing that. And I think we'll, we don't create spaces for kids to have those conversations, to say their opinions.

Um, we are, we really are shutting them down from really being, being more active in the world.

Debbie Sorensen: There's this philosophical approach to parenting. You [00:40:00] keep mentioning that I want to highlight, which is about allowing kids to have a voice, and there's always going to be a power archi. Power there's let me say it over. There's always going to be a power hierarchy between parents and kids, just the nature of the relationship.

But instead of thinking as the parent's job is to control the children or to be in charge of them, it's like letting the children have a voice, treating them with respect, even though they're younger and less powerful.

Traci Baxley: Yeah, I think that is so important because. We have to create a safe space to be for them to be able to practice using their voice. Now it doesn't mean that everything that they say they're going to get. So, you know, we, we have the dialogue. What do you think? What do you think? I understand I'm listening to you or hear you. Um, ultimately thank you for all everybody's opinion.

I think I, you know, I'm going to make the final decision on this because I think as a, as an, as somebody who's had more experience in this [00:41:00] space, this is what we're going to do. Like, right. It's not always that you're, you're listening to your kids in terms of the follow-through, but you'll listen to your kids, um, in a way that it allows them to know that their voice matters, that they have an opinion it's worth saying. Um, And I think about too, I think about, especially our girls, right? When they're not able to kind of use that their voices in our homes, when they get out into the work world, when they get out into the, when they start going through school, we, we know we live in a society. Really shuts girls down. I mean, there's studies after studies, even in schools, teachers not calling on girls, more boys and stem programs.

Um, when girls are raising their hands, boys are shouting out the answers and the teachers are acknowledging the boys shouting out. So we, we need to create spaces in our home where our kids. No, how to use their voices, know that their voices matter. Um, and they recognize the power in [00:42:00] using their voices.

And if we're not allowing them to do that, um, in our homes and on a regular basis, when they're out in the world and they're being. They're not standing up for themselves and we can't figure out why are they not standing up for themselves? We really had to reflect on how, how they were able to kind of stand up for themselves in our own homes.

And so I think it's really important if you're trying to create kids who are, who know how to set boundaries, kids who know how to self-advocate kids who can stand up for others. Right. The upstanders, it starts with them having that voice in our homes about small things, even, you know, even like what's for dinner.

Why do you think this is you should have this for dinner, so it doesn't have to be anything life shattering, but it's just a continuous process of allowing kids to use their.

Debbie Sorensen: And what about how might you start a conversation? Actually, let's get a little concrete here in terms [00:43:00] of conversations about things like racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia in the world. Um, and I don't know if you have one in particular, one particular issue you want to use to highlight this, but, you know, I think often people will read and care, but not know, like, what do I say?

What kind of words do I use with my kid to start these conversations? Do you have any, any very concrete strategies? And I know it's probably going to look different from like a four year old to a 17 year old. You know what I

Traci Baxley: Yeah. Yeah. I think the first thing, the mother, whether they're four or 17, the first thing you do is you ask them. What do you know about this already? Right? So you want them to start to have to lead the conversation in some ways, because you wanna know what they already know. You want to know where to start.

You want to know what things that you may have to redirect. Uh, there may be some stereotypes that the child may hold from social media, their friends, or whatever that [00:44:00] you have to undo. Um, and so I would start off asking them them question basic open-ended question. What do you already know? Tell me more, um, where did you learn that?

So you can get some idea of where the information is coming from. And so I think once you ask them open-ended questions about a certain topic, like the example that I'm going to use is, uh, the killing of the 19 people, the 19 kids in Texas. Right. I started off asking my kids, what have you heard already?

Um, how do you, how does that make you feel? What do you think happened? So I wanted to know where their heads were first, before I started giving them what details I thought they needed to have. And again, like you're saying, if my five-year old, which I don't have, but if my five-year old was asking these questions, the way that I respond would be very different from my, my 17 year old. obviously.

Yes. But [00:45:00] I think that the premise is to always find out where they are, where they stand in it first, before you start to give more information. The other thing that I would say to you. Not to wait until you have all your ducks in a row. Yes. You wanted to have some research done. You want to have some ideas, but you don't have to have it all figured out.

One of the, I think most powerful things that we can do is to figure things out together with our kids and empowers them to be researchers. It, um, shows them that. They don't have to have all the answers as they grow up. Right. And that they show you that the imperfections and the vulnerability that you, you, you have, it's something that they can also use as characters for themselves growing up.

Um, so I would encourage you to ask the questions and start the conversations even before you think you're really. it's in those moments that the most powerful learning [00:46:00] and healing really between you and your kid can really happen. Um, and so I, I would also, I guess the other thing that I would say when having these hard conversations is to not dummy it down so that it makes it doesn't make sense for the kids.

Right. Using real key terms. Um, whether it's scientific terms, You know what I'm thinking about body parts, right? We want to use real body. Terms. Um, when we're talking about racism, we want to use some of the, some words that really resonate with our kids. So they know what, what they mean when they see them in the real world.

Um, obviously you want to be very sensitive when you're doing it. You want to try to connect it back to something they already know Like, remember when we talked about XYZ last week, or when we read in the book that this happened to that character, that is what's really going on in real life right now.

Um, and so just so they have something to kind of connect what they [00:47:00] already know, where you're getting ready to take them. So that's always helpful if you can do that, even if it's something like. with young kids, you could talk about something that they saw, like a bug on the side of the road or something

small that died that, so that, that you may have had the conversation about what death looks like.

So if it happens to. Somebody that they know, or a pet, they already at least know kind of like the life cycle so that they can connect something bigger to something smaller that, that you've already talked about. Um, so those are some of the things that I would suggest when having hard conversations with our kids.

But I think you dive in, even when you're uncomfortable with it, right. Even if your fear tells you not to, because what I tell, say to my clients or people who are taking my courses. You by you not saying it, it does not mean the kids are not learning it, right. Somebody is teaching your kids about these hard topics and you have to decide [00:48:00] whether you're feeling. Um, is greater than your kids learning about something from your values, your perspectives, your, um, radical love and your kindness, or are you okay with the world, teaching your kids about these things wherever they're getting it from. And so I think if you look at it from the lens that they're learning it, I mean?

studies show that kids are learning stuff at three and five and seven that they already are making up their mind.

You know, they're natural. Way of trying to create categories and their, uh, in their minds are putting things together that are not necessarily right. And so you're leaving that to chance.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, opening up the door for hard conversations. They, my fourth grader came home with a question. I will not reveal the actual question on this interview, but I was a little shocked that fourth graders were talking about such a thing. It was sex-related [00:49:00] and I was just. A little panicked for a second. And then I said, I am so glad she can talk to me about this because she's hearing it.

And it is out there. And I think that just having that stance, that you're fit kids feel like they can come and talk to you. They won't always, probably, but that, to me, that's very important. Just I want them to know they can come to me with

Traci Baxley: absolutely. And I think that goes back to that belonging and safe spaces, right? If we're creating those safe spaces in our homes early, allow our kids to have voice early. When those things get hard or they have those tough questions, they already feel safe until they can come to do the talk and that they will be heard.

Um, and so you're setting, you're setting yourself up for those very tough conversation that comes in their tweens and their teens when, um, these issues are really kind of life altering, right? The decisions that they make in their lives. And it says to me, Debbie, [00:50:00] that you've made, you've created safe spaces for your daughter to be able to come home to say, Hey, this is what I've heard.

Tell me about it. Let's talk about it. Um, and I, and I think that's what you should lean into that I've created safe spaces for my daughter to have these hard conversations. Yeah.

Debbie Sorensen: I'm trying, I'm doing my best here. Um, what would you, how would you respond? Okay. I was trying to think of a personal example of this and I have one. How would you respond if your child says something that you have a little cringy, like, Ooh that's so here's the example is that this was just a few days ago.

One of my daughters was talking about the hair. Of her black friend in her class. And I just had this moment of, you know, that's a very racially charged, racist, charged issue, I think. And actually what she said was fine. It was just factual about, you know, braiding her hair and how long it takes it just based on a conversation.

But I remember [00:51:00] sitting there thinking. Where's this headed, you know, how do I explain to her that maybe something she just said had a racist tone to it or had, you know, was an issue that it was socially loaded. So if your child says something like that, what, what advice do you have for how to respond?

Traci Baxley: Yeah. Uh, okay. And this is again to where you have to do a little bit of educating of yourself too. I would say I would have said. As she talked about the hair or the braiding of the hair, I would have said something like, did you know that there are some places, some schools, some jobs that won't allow her to wear her hair like that, uh, she'd get fired or not be accepted.

And she was. Um, why do you think that that people care about the way that her hair looks? If it's braided? Like, I wouldn't have started conversations about some realities of black hair. Um, and, um, I would then say. [00:52:00] You know, why do you think that is? Um, did you know also that like the military wouldn't allow people to wear dreadlocks until last year?

There's a new law now. Um, there's a new law. That's out. That's called the, uh, Crown act. Did you know about the crown act? Um, let's look it up, you know, let's look up the crown act and see what that says and who that's for. And why do you think that that was put into place? Like, so I would use it as a way to kind of educate about what's going on around the world about black hair, um, and how it's used as a way to discriminate, which is why it's part of re why it's racially charged.

So I think, um, it could be a place where you can both kind of educate your own self. As a group as a, as a collective around. Um, but I w I would certainly kind of lean into some of those, that idea so that she could see the connection between why it could be racially charged and why it's not [00:53:00] just like talking about hair.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. Okay. I can see now. An opportunity here for a deeper conversation. It's never too late. It's never too late. Yeah, no, I appreciate that. It's like using a statement that a child makes or a comment that they makes or something as a chance to dive deeper into it. Again, that fosters more conversation instead of like a shutting down. Like, don't say that, you know what I mean? Cause that's what I was like conscious of not wanting to do in that moment is I didn't want to be like, oh, you can't talk about that. I didn't want to like, again, like with the disability thing, I didn't want it to become like a, you can't touch that topic.

Traci Baxley: Yeah, I I think that's, that's really important for us as parents to be conscious of that. We're not shutting down conversations because we're uncomfortable with it. Right. Um, that it really is, uh, a way for us to try to lean in to those harder conversations because. It expands the way our kids show up for others.

[00:54:00] It just, it really does. It just teaches them, um, about the narrative and stories of other people. And that's how we start to love and embrace people for who they are. The more we learn about who, the more we learn about our differences, uh, and then those things that tie us together. And I was going to say that. I think one thing that we underestimate as parents is It's never a miss opportunity is an opportunity to kind of, to, to, to, uh, circle back. Right. So I would go, I would, I would go back and say, remember, last week, when you brought up the question about your friend's hair, um, and I, I was thinking about it and trying to figure out how to answer and let me tell you why. It was a hard answer for me, you know, based on what's going on in the world and talk about what you were feeling at that moment. Um, but since then, let me tell you what I've been thinking about, you know, and then you can come back and say, let's

look up [00:55:00] the crown act and why that is let's look up the, um, dreadlocks or any.

Issues for blacks in the military and why it wasn't there, you know, like some of the, uh, you can just Google, um, black hair in private schools, like how many schools won't allow black girls to braid their hair, uh, because it's out of uniform, you know? So I think not knowing the answer at the time is fine, but I think also closing that loop and circling back to say, you know, I've learned more now, or I had time to think about your, your, your question and.

This is how I would answer that now. Um, I think is, is really, really grateful for one extending the conversation too. And teaching our kids that, you know, you know, you don't always get it right the first time and it's okay to say I didn't get it right the first time, but now I know better. And I know that.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, I love that. It's like a do over when you panic. I think there's topics that we kind of panic about for me. One of the ones is when my kids [00:56:00] bring up issues related to body image and. Body size and shape and that kind of thing. And I always so want to like, get it right. You know, that I, I panic. And then I think you can always kind of go back later and maybe share your own experience or talk about, you know, fat shaming or, or something like that in a way that just opens that dialogue.

Because I think it's just such a, some of these topics that's like, we're really coming from our own.

Traci Baxley: you know what? I need to think on that for a minute. Like, there's a lot of things running through my head right now, and I want to be able to answer this in a way, uh, that.

it reflects what I really feel and what I really know at this time. Give me a couple minutes. Yeah.

Um, or I need a day on this, you know, if it's something like that, I think that's okay too.

But the key is making sure you circle back, but I think it's okay to say, you know, I need a minute on this one. This is, this is a very curious question. And it's a very important question and I [00:57:00] want to try to get some of what I'm saying to you organize in my mind so that I can say I can respond in a way that. is representative of what I'm feeling, especially when the kids are older, right? Yeah,

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, really giving it the time and space to give it a thoughtful answer instead of just a knee jerk response. Yeah. Well, one more question. Um, this is a big one, so I don't know. Well, I don't know what your thoughts are, but sometimes I worry that people who would take the time to listen to a podcast episode like this, maybe already interested in social justice, maybe already having these conversations.

And as you said, it's become so politicized that I think a lot of people will not come near it and will not do it. Do you have any thoughts about how we might, we, you know, you meet the listeners, people who care about this, like how can we bring other people into this conversation who might be afraid to [00:58:00] talk about it or not just afraid of it?

They might have assumptions about what this mean.

Traci Baxley: Yeah, I think sometimes you have to meet people where they are, uh, in order for, to move them forward. Right? So this goes back to this creating safe space sometimes. And this is a, this is a really tough kind of. Tight rope to walk to walk. Sometimes we have to listen to other people before we can. Um, before, before they're able to hear what we're saying.

Like sometimes we have to let people kind of spew out the things that are on their minds for them to say what they feel and why. Um, and sometimes that. Once you are actively listening and compassionately listening to that, even if the views are completely opposite of your own, people still need a space where they feel like they're being heard.

Um, once we can [00:59:00] meet people where they are and hear what they're saying, um, then it's more. There's more of a chance that they will then be able to hear what you're saying. Um, and I think we can't move people in, in any direction if we're not able to, to listen with compassion and love, um, and then to meet with that, meet them where they are to maybe move them one step.

So like I'm showing you a couple of examples. I, um, sometimes we get feedback from other black activists that say I'm not being. Kind of hard enough, right. Then I'm, I'm giving too many passes that I'm, um, kind of, um, soft, you know, but I, my thought on that is especially as an educator, right, as a mom and as an educator, my job is to teach like that is what I was put on earth to do and whatever.

Spaces where whatever that looks like. Um, [01:00:00] and I, if I am not open to teach and to support people who are trying to go through the journey that I'm

doing, really my own kids, a disservice by saying that they need to learn on their own. I think there's conversations that should be had with people who don't agree with you in order to kind of find a middle ground.

That's the only way we can kind of start to get rid of the divide that we're seeing so often, um, in our country. And then this, this example is kind of like, uh, an actual practical example. So I was, uh, this one when I think I was going on the, uh, The good morning America show. Uh, and I put on my personal, uh, Renault's my personal Facebook posts amaze my social justice.

I don't know. One of them wish me luck I'm going online. Right. And so people were, you know, wishing me, luck, whatever, whatever. And then there's one gentleman said, [01:01:00] This is basically saying this is black racism. This is, uh, you, you don't, you get to tell me what I need to say to my kids. Um, if I was trying to tell you what to say to your kids, you know, I, I would be shut down.

It just like really just kind of, and so my response to him was thank you for taking the time to. To to respond. I see this as a really important topic to you. Um, here are my thoughts. I think we all need to be talking to our kids. It's the only way that we're going to change the world is that we get to know each other.

I want my kids to know your kids as much, you know, whatever. So I just kind of unpacked that for him. Um, and then his next, and then of course, all of the people who know me were like, why would he say that to you? Um, I can't believe you responded to him that way. And then his response back basically was like, thank you for your kind respond.

Um, that helped me [01:02:00] understand, like, so we were on different cans, but maybe not so much. Right. So sometimes it's just as idea of people needing to be seen and. We heard, um, creating a safe space, even if we think that people are not in our camps, I think is really important. It's the only way that we're going to be able to hear each other's story.

Um, so I think meeting people where they are allowing people to, to explain why they feel the way they do, um, and saying, thank you. Um, explaining to me, and then, you know, you can then open up and say, I hear what you're saying about this. Can I tell you how I feel? Um, and so I think, again, that's opening that dialogue for people to be able to hear each other and see each other.

Um, even when it looks like we're on different sides. Um, I think, again, going back to the human element, we all want to feel like we belong. We all want to

feel like we've heard and we're seen, [01:03:00] and we're valid. Um, and I think if we do that, we can get further than, than we than we think.

Debbie Sorensen: Well, Tracy, you are really. Good. The talk here. I just have this sense that you are living this in your own life and radiating kindness to everyone around you. And as an educator, you're doing your job because I have learned so much from you even during the course of this conversation and from your book.

And I'll just point listeners again, to your book, social justice parenting. It has. A much deeper dive into this and the qualities of social justice, parenting and resources. I mean, books, actions you can take. It's just a terrific resource, I think for any parent who cares about this and how can people find you online?

People who want to follow you and learn.

Traci Baxley: I think, um, most of the interaction happens on Instagram, um, at social justice parenting and we call it the village, the justice parenting village [01:04:00] there. Um, so that would be a great place to start. Kind of digging into some of the things that we do and trying to create a safe environment for us that ask the hard questions and to tackle some of the heart issues.

And then also, uh, my website, if you have any questions or want to contact me directly, uh, which is also, uh, social justice, parenting.com.

Debbie Sorensen: Wonderful. Well, I'm so grateful to you for your work and for joining me today, Tracy. Thank you so much.

Traci Baxley: Thank you. Thank you for having.

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