

## Timeless Transformations

### *Discipline with Unconditional Love*

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As a parent being responsible for a child's development is the single most important job we have. As a mother, the responsibility is even greater. As a mother of one daughter, two daughters, and then three daughters, the responsibility triples to the power of three. Until you have a child or children of your own and are faced with the task, you won't and can't comprehend the complexity. As daughters grow to be toddlers, school age and then teenagers, you might as well add another exponent. Just trust me when I say, it's the most difficult thing I've ever been responsible for. All the education and experience of taking care of students or someone else's child is not applicable.

I started this inspiration when I was in Las Vegas. I got side tracked with all the Knapp family drama then birthdays. I decided to come back to it today. My intent is to share my thoughts about how I used **discipline with unconditional love** to hopefully give you some insight into my discipline strategy as your mother. The great thing for you is that you can learn from me and toss out what you didn't like then or don't like now so you can be better than me. I don't think you'll be able to raise better children than me because no one could be better than you three. Of course, I'm your mother and I am biased. Only you can decide for yourselves what your strategy will be.

This has been on my mind because of my "spoiler alert" as a grandmother. People in general have different definitions of what spoiling is. To be clear, I am defining spoiling as the combination of these three things: when a child has no boundaries, when a child has little respect for authority from the caregiver and ignores what she is asked to do, and when the child misbehaves to get their way.

It's interesting because I tried thinking back of times when you three were defiant, misbehaved or acted spoiled. I could think of very few times, if any. I know that sounds ridiculous. I went through photo albums trying to jog my memory. Picture after picture, there wasn't anything to reference. I remember everyone telling me, you've been lucky with those three girls so far. Just wait until they are teenagers. They will be holy terrors. Those times never came. Why is that? For pictures in this inspiration, I went back to the year 2000 where Kendall was 13, Kevyn 10 and Karsyn 7. How about these three cute cheerleaders? Can you imagine the work it took to get you three ready on a Saturday morning to go cheer at games after a hard week, with breakfast, hairdos, clothes pressed, matching and organized, all with no fussing, fighting and with love and great ease? Let that sink in then think about what your strategy will be.



I just recently had this epiphany: I spent my childhood under psychiatric care. When Spencer started having emotional problems he went to a psychiatrist every week. That started when I was in 4th grade and lasted until I was in 11th grade. I was either listening to what the psychiatrist was saying, or I was participating in group therapy for 8 years! I remember driving from Denison to Galveston every other weekend to visit Spencer and to go to therapy. Once we moved Baytown, we went every Tuesday.



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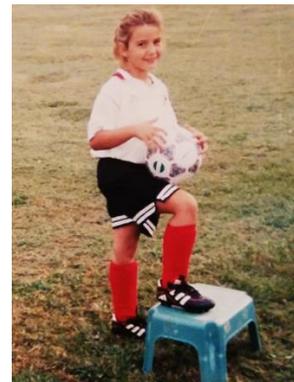
I'm not suggesting that my experience under psychiatric care gave me some parental insight that no one else has. I do believe however that those experiences caused me to be more aware of the power of discipline and its effects at an early age. It was traumatic yet thought provoking. I was there to soak it all up during the most impressionable years of my life.

Once I became a mother, no one I knew had the same discipline strategy as me. I caught a ton of flak from Mom, Neenie, friends, and other family members. Not that I didn't listen to their advice, but I was pretty headstrong on doing what I felt was best. One of my favorite quotes by Jackie Kennedy, "*If you blunder at raising your children, I don't think anything else you do matters very much.*" I combined my innate wisdom, fervor for educating myself by reading everything I could get my hands on, pursuing a B.S. degree in Holistic Childcare, observing other parent-child relationships and using my past experiences – plus and a big plus, using the help of your Dad. While everyone else listened to preachers, teachers, and friends and family, or used the same discipline strategy as their parents, I trusted myself and thought, we'll see. I had a lot of confidence that I was doing the right thing.

There is more content than I can write in one inspiration. I know in the upcoming years there will be more opportunities to share more thoughts. This is only a starting point. To level set, the word discipline comes from the word to teach. Normally when we think of discipline in the context of child development we think of it as reprimanding for negative behavior. When we think of unconditional love we think of loving no matter what, regardless of a child's behavior or actions. I put these two concepts together, **discipline with unconditional love** because that encapsulates my strategy which is to parent and teach "discipline" with unconditional love in everything I do.

Here is the first key point. Parents may have different ways of showing how they love their children but 99% of the time, parents love their children. However, not all children feel loved by their parents. How we express our love doesn't count as much as how it is received. We must think about how our parenting style affects our child. It doesn't matter how old children are either. They could be 2 or 30 or 28 or 25. The question is does the child feel like they are loved unconditionally? Or are we sending the message that we love them only when they are doing what we want them to do or they behave in a certain way. This is huge for me because I hope there was never a time in your lives that you knew I would love you, unconditionally, no matter what you did. At the root of most psychological problems, it's that children or adults don't feel loved, don't feel worthy of being loved, or don't love themselves.

These are some representative pictures of what we were doing in the fall of 2000. I took off work to go to Liberty with Kendall's class to participate in a field trip. Kevyn was in a band or recorder concert – looks like Baytown Juney, and Karsyn was playing soccer – or at least giving it a try to see if she liked it.



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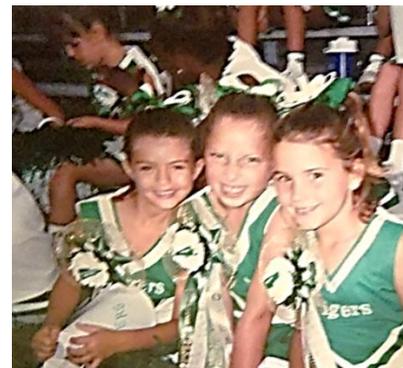
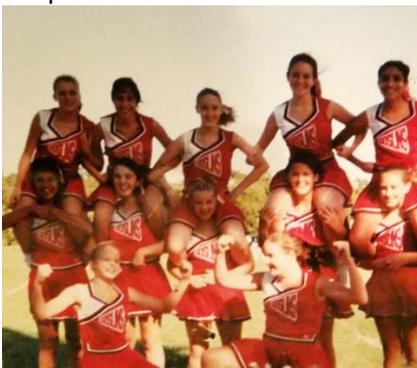
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My insight and experience say that when children don't feel loved unconditionally, they behave worse. They are usually insecure. They sometimes don't do things at all because they may think they do things wrong or not good enough. They refuse to act or are scared to act when someone else needs help or is in trouble. These patterns of behavior last into adulthood. If someone is driven by fear it doesn't make them a better person. It makes them act out of fear and over time they usually become lazy, anxious or defiant. Worse, it causes a child to create a false self. If you think a parent will only value, respect and love you if you behave in a certain way, you will figure out those ways to be that person. It doesn't mean you really feel like that, it just means you learn to be the person your parents want you to be otherwise you may not be loved. When a child reaches adulthood they may feel like they don't even know who they are because they have been trying to please their parents so people will love them, and at the same time, feel they empty and depressed.

Second, when we talk about a good child or a disciplined child we normally refer to a child that does whatever they are told without whining or giving us any trouble. Is that a good child? As a mother, you must define what a good child is. Even if you don't have children, you might as well think about that now. For me it is one that shares with others, one that is loving, one that is empathetic with those that have less, and one that does the right thing no matter who is watching, especially if the parent isn't there. It's not one that does everything I say. I wanted to raise independent children that thought for themselves and had their own opinion. I knew if that was my strategy I would need to take everything that goes with it, one of which is "you may not always do what I ask." That was OK by me if it didn't go against what I defined as a good child. I would however try and generate conversation around why I didn't agree or point out a different perspective but in a non-lecturing way.

Here's the question: do you want your child to suck it up and do what you say "for the moment at least or as long as you are watching" or do you want them to respect you and lean on you for guidance. Do you want them to have a higher emotional intelligence? Would you rather have a more thoughtful, empowered and successful child or is it just a power struggle and you want to have power over them? Rethink what it means to be a parent and what it means to be a good child.

Were you good children, especially in a group of friends when we weren't there? I believe with all my heart you were. You may not have known it, but I watched everything you did. I listened to every word you said, including what your friends said. I checked your backpacks, your purses and your computers. At the same time, I trusted that you were good children based on my definition of a good child. I can tell you I let a lot of stuff go just because it didn't matter. I stuck to what I valued most and most importantly what I thought a good child was. I tucked each one of you in every night and made time to talk about the final thoughts of the day. I tried to make the time I had with you count. I love these pictures with each of you in a group setting with your friends. It's interesting to see how each of their lives panned out.



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Third, consider discipline from a holistic perspective. This means to shift from thinking about the child's behavior whether it is good or bad to thinking about the whole child – their perspectives, their feelings, their thoughts, their context – why are they doing what they are doing? It's looking at what happened before a child misbehaved. That takes far more energy. Is it that you are tired? Are you in a social setting and not paying attention to them? Are they crying out for your love and misbehaving is the only way they can get your attention? I remember a lot of times my style of discipline had a lot to do with how I was feeling at that moment. I had to stop and ask myself is it me or is it you. We must guide a child from feeling that love is a privilege that you must earn to feeling love as something we give children because they are our children. It is shifting from controlling to working on problem solving.

Fourth, here's the touchy subject. How do you discipline, psychologically or physically? Spanking and hitting are the same thing. Most parents feel like they need to use punishment. Take timeouts. Most parents and caregivers believe timeouts are fine. Timeouts are better because you are not physically hurting a child, but you are still withdrawing your love from a child. When you isolate your child and ignore them, you are withdrawing your love because of their behavior, even if it is a timeout. That can have more detrimental effects than hitting a child. A child can often get over hitting faster than they can get over a mother and/or dad that doesn't care about them because of the way they behaved.

I don't judge a parent for the way they choose to discipline their child. You're Dad spanked you less than a handful of times if ever. I never did. I never did timeouts. That form of discipline just didn't align with my personal values. I might have said, *look here little lady* and grab your arm tightly but that is when I was at my wits end. Normally it was because I didn't have the energy and patience to talk through the issue or problem solve. It was mostly how I was feeling not how you were acting!

Punishment is tricky. When we are mad we don't think well. If a child does something you don't like and you punish them, now they are mad at you. They are not thinking about what they might have done wrong. They are just mad at you. It models the use of power which was never the model I wanted to instill. It loses effectiveness when a child gains power. I saw that with Spencer. Once he got older and stronger, no one around him had power over him. That is why they moved him to a boy's home. If you are spanking a child and now they are as big as you then what good is that? You don't have any hold on them. It damages the relationship that you have with them too. It distracts the child from the point. The point is their behavior and how it affects those around them. Punishing them is a distraction. It makes them more deceptive. It may make them change their behavior but only when you are looking. They are more likely to be sneaky and do things behind your back or when you are paying less attention.

Trust me, Neenie and Mom's discipline strategy was much different than mine. You're Dad, Toni and Gregg love to talk about being locked out of the house and going out to the tree and picking out their switches for a spanking. They turned out fine! For my Mother, she did spank, especially Spencer. She did send us to our rooms. I turned out fine. There's a lot to think about and only you will be able to decide for your children. This is a classic picture of Mom and Neenie together with Kevyn and Karsyn. I can tell you this, neither of them agreed with my discipline strategy. I need to also tell you this. After all three of you graduated from high school, both told me they underestimated my tactic for discipline. They saw firsthand that it worked. That meant more to me than anything in the world.



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Because Kendall was just recognized at the Goose Creek Board meeting this past week, on the same photo album page as some of other pictures was this one when she was recognized at the Board meeting the fall after she went to the National History Fair day competition in 7th grade. The picture is old but it's so classic. There's Steve Koester and Dr. Roy (who hired me at Goose Creek). I love it!



So where were your Dad and I at this time in our lives? He was working on the house. No one ever worked harder than him. No one ever did a better job at parenting three young girls! Where was I? There are few if any pictures of me. I guess I was too busy trying to discipline with unconditional love.



Lastly, what about rewards? The problem is when you give rewards it is an extrinsic reinforcement. A child's sense of intrinsic reinforcement weakens. Let's say a child makes good grades and you give a reward, maybe a dollar. A child then become less interested in making good grades and more interested in making money. We never gave an allowance or rewards. I always strive to keep an even keel. Regardless of the behavior, stay the course with teaching, modeling, guiding and disciplining without conditions. When you remove the reward and the punishment, a parent encourages more independence and less judgment. The more the reward is tied to behavior, it's almost the opposite of punishment. The more a child's extrinsic motivation is enhanced rather than thinking about the value to themselves or the people around them.

Using reward and punishment encourages self-centered thinking. If we think about what is this going to get me rather than how is this going to affect others, what good is that? A strategy without punishment and rewards is far more time consuming and difficult, I know. It's also tiring to use the same discipline and it not do any good with rewards and punishment. That's exhausting. As a parent you will have to pick your strategy and think about the greater investment for greater return. Rather than doing the easier thing think about what your strategy will be.

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So in closing, unconditional love with family and extended family carries a great amount of influence. I don't underestimate its power. I know that spending quality time together as a family and being disconnected from everything else puts life in perspective. As our family grows, I know we will never lose sight of that. I want your children to have a lot of times like these. We spent a lot of weekends waking up and sitting on the porch at Lake Livingston. That's when we had the fewest disciplinary issues and some of the strongest feelings of loving of unconditional love.



I know my discipline strategy will be different with Dahl and future grandchildren. I will always strive to follow your lead. At the same time, I feel I can add a different perspective and great value with the amount of experience and unconditional love that I can give.

I love you more than all the **discipline with unconditional love** than I have thought about and given in my life - Love Mom!