



Episode #207

**Dr. Tina Payne Bryson on
The Power of Showing Up**

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Debbie: Hello, Amanda, welcome back to the podcast.

Tina: Hi, thanks for having me again. It's good to talk to you again.

Debbie: Hello, Tina, welcome to the podcast.

Tina: Hi. So good to be with you, Debbie. I look forward to our conversation.

Debbie: Me too. And I feel like this conversation is a long time coming and there's so much that we could talk about but I'm really grateful to be... I don't know if I'm even introducing you to my community—I think everyone knows who you are—but to be sharing your new work with them and just have this conversation. So I always ask my guests to, you know, tell us a little bit about who they are in the world as a way to get started. Maybe because I've already introduced you kind of professionally, how would you just introduce yourself in terms of you know, your why maybe for what you do?

Tina: You know, I never meant to write books or be a professional speaker or own a clinical practice. Those were never goals for me. My goal always growing up and all the way into my early married years. was to be a stay at home mom. That's I want to do more than anything. That was like, to me the best thing, you know, my best job. And it turned out, we moved to California and I was home with my firstborn, my 18 month old and my husband who's an English professor was like, we can't afford to live here unless you work. And I was like, but that's not part of the plan. You know, we waited to have kids until he finished his dissertation so that I could, you know, stay home. So I said, Okay, we'll find if I have to work, then I need to get a PhD really fast, because I'm going to be a professor so I can be home with the kids more. And that's kind of how this, this journey started. Although I will say a little bit before that I had heard Bruce Perry speak, and my brain lit up. And I just couldn't learn enough about the brain. And I'm such a person that is just naturally super curious. And I always want to understand the why. And so when I started the PhD program in social work, as a grad student, I kept wondering about the why, and I never could get satisfactory answers. And then I heard Dan Siegel speak at a conference and this was probably in 2000. He was not known at the time very well. And his kind of theories and his way of approaching understanding reality, just lit my brain up and I was like, I have to study with this guy. So I started studying with him and I kept having babies. So I have three boys who are now 20, 17 and 13. And as I was raising them, and I was finishing this PhD in Social Work focused on child rearing science, I was also studying interpersonal neurobiology with Dan and I was learning about the science and how that could shape so much what we understand about our kids behaviors and what we were doing intentionally in the experiences we were giving our kids and so that's really where things started. And when I started teaching my three or four year olds the hand model of the brain that Dan invented, and I went to Dan and I said, you know, we really should write a book, he loved it, and that's how *The Whole Brain Child* happened. So anyway, I now

see myself as a mom who works when I can, but who's still very present with my boys and I only have six years left before they're gone. So there'll be more time to do more stuff. But I feel so grateful for the work I get to do. I believe in it. And I, I think all of us as parents, if we can just feel good enough about what we're already doing, and then also feel challenged to do things better and be more intentional, that's what we should all be doing all the time. So I feel excited to be part of that for many parents.

Debbie: I love that introduction. And at first I just wanted to say, I've never heard anyone say I need to get a PhD really fast. That's just incongruent to me but sounds like it is worked out very well for you. And I love that. I didn't realize that *The Whole Brain Child* was kind of at your urging, that was my introduction to your work, which I read many, many years ago. And it really just resonated so deeply with me and was, you know, probably one of the very first books that I read about, you know, what was happening inside my child's brain as opposed to, you know, how can I modify this or that behavior?

Tina: Right. It's funny, I still in lots of ways to see myself as a kind of a stay at home mom who crams work into really quick overnight trips to go speak. And, you know, lots of times I don't start my actual work day until they're, you know, off, getting ready for bed like I often will start work at like nine at night, or whatever, because I just really want to be with them. And I have a husband who is very present. He works from home a lot and so we really definitely co parent and that frees me up to do those things. But I don't think I've ever told this story publicly. And I know we're totally off topic. But when you're talking about *The Whole Brain Child*, I, you know, I pitched the book idea to Dan. And he loved it. And at the time, he knew me, but not super well. And before I knew it, you know, the book was being shopped around, because Dan already had an agent. So I didn't have to go through that process. Dan was already published at that time. And I was at a little league field, my son was playing and my husband was coaching. And I got the call from our agent that said, there's a bidding war for *The Whole Brain Child*, and I remember just jumping up and down with like, my diaper bag at a little league field being so excited that this was actually happening, and I couldn't believe it was happening, you know, so I'm just a dorky mom who likes the science and loves people. So anyway...

Debbie: I won't use that as the title for this episode—an interview with a dorky mom—No, that's great. I love that story. And I remember I'll never forget when I got that call from my agent about my very first book. There was no bidding war to be clear for my first book, but it was, I'll never forget where I was when I got that call and feeling. So I love that story. Well, let's talk about your newest book, which is, you know, everything that you just talked about in your introduction makes total sense why this book would come from you. It's called *The Power of Showing Up: How Parental Presence Shapes Who Our Kids Become and How Their Brains Get Wired*. Out of all of the books that you guys have written together, this is the one that for me, I just felt so deeply and I just had so many yes moments and highlight moments throughout. So can you start maybe this conversation by explaining or defining what you mean by showing up?

Tina: Yeah, so showing up is really about being present and attuned to what's happening in the moment with our children. You know, this book had to have been written, I was obsessed with attachment science. And I'll just be really clear that that's different from attachment parenting, as it's kind of commonly known. Attachment science is really based on 50 years of research that comes out of the developmental psychology umbrella. And it's this 50 years of research that has been done cross culturally. And what it really tells us is that one of the most important predictors for how well a kid turns out on many, many things that they're measured on, is that they have what's called secure attachment with at least one person. And when you really look at the fundamentals of what secure attachment is what a parent does, in order to have a child who has secure attachment, it really fundamentally is about showing up when they need us the most. And so Dan and I, as we look, you know, we love to play with language and we love acronyms and all that We talk about the four S's and when parents not perfectly, but repeatedly enough and predictably enough, help their kids feel safe, seen, soothed and secure, then they develop this thing called secure attachment and, and safety and soothed and secure are really, at their essence about, especially when the child is in distress. The parent shows up in that moment for their kids so that the kid has an experience where their brain wires to say, if I have a need, someone's gonna show up for me. And that's really the essence of the whole approach. And it's a mammal inborn instinct that we have to be attached to each other. The fundamental essence of it is so that we better survive so that you know, we actually live. So this is fundamental and like I said, this book hadn't been written. In fact, at the end of *The Whole Brain Child*, we had a whole section that said, you know, this is really the most important thing you need to know and our editor made us take it out because she said it was so important that it took away from all the other important stuff we had already written about in the book. So she's like, let's save this and do it as a separate book. So we actually thought we might do an attachment type of book, right after that, but then, you know, we got excited about other things. First, that this book, you know, when it came out, Dan was like, you know, we just have so much fun together getting to teach and when our books come out, we just really are celebratory. And it's sort of like you can't say this is my favorite like you wouldn't tell you wouldn't say that about one of your kids. You know, but both of us love this book so much we feel like it's really something we've been really wanting to share with people.

Debbie: So can you say a little bit more about why, you know, you've said said a couple times this book had to be written, you know, I don't know if what's at stake without the secure attachment is the right phrasing for the question, but why did you feel so deeply that this work needed to get out into the world?

Tina: That's a great question. I think one of the things that I feel really strongly about is that helping our kids feel safe, seen, soothed and secure. It's not always easy to do. But it's a very simple idea that no matter what's happening in the moment as a parent, like I might not know what to say or what to do, and by the way, anytime I say kid, you can insert significant other, best friends, sibling parent, like these attachment relationships are part are really fundamental to all of our relationships, this attachment, but I think for me, knowing that I can, number one

mess up all the time, as long as I repair with my kids, that if I hold this in mind, no matter what's happening in the moment, that if I can help my kid feel safety and and soothe so that they get secure, I'm actually building their brain in the most optimal ways every time that happens. So I love the simplicity of it. I love that there's tons of room for being a crappy parent. And I think this has to get out there because I mean, honestly, there are many, many things like all the things we write about, and *Whole Brain Child* and *No-Drama Discipline* and *Yes Brain* and, you know, all of the other kinds of content we produce, none of it matters as much as the parent showing up. To me, it's just the most important thing and the research bears that out. And then the last thing I'll say about why the message had to get out is that the attachment research is full of so much hope. It's not the kind of thing where you read and you're like, oh, man, that kid's screwed forever, or I've damaged my kid forever, actually, the opposite happens. So the single best predictor for how well a parent is able to provide the four S's or to provide secure attachment to their kid or to show up is not whether or not they had parents who did that for them, which is thank God because 40% of us did not have secure attachment with our own caregivers. We had a form of insecure attachment. Which can have really significant outcomes or more milder outcomes depending on how you know what the situation was. But that the best predictor for us being able to do that is not whether or not we had it, but rather that we have reflected on our own history and made sense of it, and are able to kind of have a coherent narrative or have told the story about how our parents did or didn't show up for us. And so there's hope for all of us that as we move toward that making sense process and reflecting on our own histories and our past and how it impacts our parenting now that we can always start making shifts, so it's never too late to do better. It's never too late to start helping our kids feel more securely attached to us. And as soon as we start to do that, our kids' brains start changing right away. So I love the hope in it, too. I think it's really important as parents to have hope and encouragement because it's so hard.

Debbie: Yeah. I really love the framing for that and that it's never too late and that it's not about doing it perfectly. You know, one of the things I hear from parents in my communities so much is that they may have spent years trying to discipline or star chart or you know, otherwise shape their child's. I always use air quotes when I say the word behavior, but you know, things that they were doing that may be perceived as bad or disruptive or inappropriate. And then when they discover that their child has some sort of neuro developmental difference, there's the why for everything, there's a lot of guilt often and that a lot of parents come to me in that place of regret. And I'm no different. I mean, I think that was part of my story. And it was, you know, after trying many years to kind of fit my kid into a system that clearly wasn't designed for him. It was when I, you know, we just did a radical thing and moved and homeschooled and changed how we parented, but it really was about being present and showing up for him. That's when everything changed. So that's why I think, for all parents, your message is so important. But for parents who just have maybe had a really hard time who their child is, to know that, through this process of which I'd love you to tell us a little bit more about the four S's, but through this process, we really can change the whole dynamic with our child and help them really thrive.

Tina: Yeah, I love what you're saying there, Debbie, because, you know, I think I want to reframe that idea of feeling guilt as a parent, because we all do that. And, you know, as I have consumed the research and other people's important work over the years, you know, I've learned things and I think, Oh, damn, I wish I had known that I had thought about that that way, you know, when my kids were younger, and I think what I want to say to all of us is when we feel that guilt and that regret or we feel bad about what we didn't know or what we did not what you know, what we didn't feel like we did well, is that that is actually an awesome, awesome experience. It's not a fun feeling to have. But think about this. Debbie, if you went back and read your middle school diary, and when you read it, you were like, this is awesome. Like, what would that say about your evolution and development and growth as a human being? Right?

Debbie: I'd be horrified. Yeah.

Tina: I would be horrified. Right. I mean, I did come across mine at one point, and I was horrified. And I thought, thank God, I'm horrified. Right, like, so as parents, when we feel those pings of regret or guilt because we see things in new ways. That means we're growing and developing and changing and we're starting to see our kids in clearer ways. And that is a really good positive thing. So I guess I want to say we should feel those feelings because it means we're moving in an evolving way. So I think that's key. You know one other thing I want to say too before I dive into the four S's is that I'm huge on honoring individual differences. And that's, I think one of the biggest mistakes we make when it comes to how we do things in schools, how things are done in mental health offices, how things are done in general regarding kids, and adults too, but particularly kids. You will notice that very rarely do Dan and I have a very specific formula or a here's a step 123 kind of thing. Because every kid is different. Every parent is different. Every relationship and circumstance and context is different. And the thing about the four S's and what I'm about to tell you regarding this idea of showing up is universal. And no matter what your kid is like no matter what you are like this is true. If you are a mammal, this is what you need in order to thrive. So safe is really about protecting your children from harm. But the second part is a little bit harder, not being the source of your child's fear, or danger. Now, abuse is far more likely than anyone ever knew. And so I'm for sure talking about that. And this is difficult to talk about. But it's important because some of us as parents that are listening may have had this experience. But if you have a biological drive to go to your attachment figure, so let's say you're a little lion cub, and you see a predator, threat and danger and distress and fear is what actually activates the attachment system. So when that little lion cub feels like oh my gosh, that's dangerous. I'm scared, something dangerous is happening. They run automatically to their attachment figure to help them survive. That's the essence of what the attachment system is there for. So as human infant babies, you know, we cry, that signals our parents to come and get us. And you know, I mean, even my dog if she hears something scary, she may run to me, right? So what happens if the caregiver is the source of your terror or danger or fear or threat, then you also have a biological circuit that's telling you to get away from what's dangerous. So you actually have disorganization in the brain. And this is called

disorganized attachment. And it has profound impacts on development and really, really difficult ways. So that's obviously one piece of this. And if you are in a situation where you know of a child whose parents are the source of their danger, that's really important to get help right away. But I want to talk about it. Regarding just more ways that is much more common for all of us. We have all violated this area of safety, in terms of activating our child's fear. So here are the things that we've all at least done to some degree either. We yell and scream and have scary faces and scary tones. voice and we're unpredictable, right? We kind of fly off the handle. I remember a story of a time with my boys. We were playing Yahtzee. And I lost my cool. And I started with a sarcastic comment, like, Oh, I'm so glad I'm playing with this with you guys. This is a great deal of fun, like something really immature. And then things escalated and ended up throwing the dice across the room. We now refer to it as the Yahtzee incident, right? So we all have moments like that where we yell and scream, we become unpredictable. Another would be if you are screaming and yelling at people on customer service, or if you're fighting with your significant other in ways that aren't respectful or that might frighten children. So there are ways that we do these kinds of things that violate that, the key takeaway here is that it's totally okay. And even healthy for our kids. When we have mild ruptures, not obviously abusive ones. Let's say I yell at my kids or I throw the dice across the room. yell at them. As long as I make a repair, it's actually good for our kids. So when I say oh my gosh, you guys, I'm so sorry, I did not handle that. Well, that must have been really scary when I did that. I am so sorry that that happened. Will you forgive me? Right? So I do something like that, I make a repair. If we make repairs with our kids, it actually gives them some predictability even in the face of unpredictability because they know Okay, my mom's kind of crazy right now, but things are gonna get okay again in a little while. And what it does is it expands their window of tolerance for knowing that relationships can be messy and can have conflict, but that things get okay again and feel good again. So, and it also obviously teaches them how to apologize and make repairs. So I think you know, the takeaways for safe are to not do any harm, but also to make repairs when we do, which we inevitably will do.

Debbie: Okay, thank you. That totally makes sense. I really appreciate that idea of repair. And I love the idea that anything, as you said earlier, anything that we do, and when we have bad moments, they can all become good moments, you know?

Tina: They can and, you know, one other thing, just to mention there is particularly if parents have substance abuse issues, you know, and they're unpredictable and unavailable at times. That's, you know, that would be another way to violate safety that can't just be repaired easily, like the parent needs to get home. Right. That's important, too, that we do what we need to to be able to really show up for our kids as best we can. But yeah, I think the repair is key, rupture repair, and I think we feel a lot of guilt after those kinds of moments, and I think if we start going into a shame spiral, we're probably more likely to flip our lid and lose our cool again. So in those moments if we can just be kind to ourselves and say everyone makes mistakes, you know, just talking to yourself like you would to your best friend, and give yourself some self compassion and then release it and make things right with your kid out. You know, I think whenever I find myself

doing something as a parent, that doesn't feel right or good. I really try to get to a place where it's more like an invitation to explore. So I can say, Okay, well someone else had talked to my kid like that I would have killed them. Like I would have never let anyone else talk to my kid like that. What was that about? And I might get to the point where I say, Oh, I was starving. I hadn't eaten all day. No one had let me pee for six hours. I'm under a lot of pressure at work and you know, whatever else and that makes sense that I was impatient, right? Or it might be that Gosh, every time my kid rejects me in some way, that really triggering for me... What's that about? You know, is that connected to anything from my past that can kind of take a look at and explore with some curiosity. So those are times we sort of want to think about is invitations to explore.

Debbie: I love that. I love that. Okay, Seen. Yeah, this is my favorite one.

Tina: It's the hardest, though, don't you think?

Debbie: Yes, but it just feels profound to me it really yeah. So tell us about ... I love it.

Tina: So seen is about looking at the mind behind the behavior. It's really looking at who your child is, in a bigger way, like who is my child, versus who I want my child to be or who I expect my child to be. So it's really clearly looking at who your child is and what their capacity is at this moment in time and loving and accepting that and on a more micro moment type of basis. It's really about tuning into their internal landscape and what they're feeling as opposed to what is happening on the surface. So you know, I remember I told my son I was going to take him to the movies. And he was like, Can I get popcorn? And I said, No, we're not getting popcorn this time. And he started to pout. And you know, my automatic instinct, even though I'm well trained and versed in chasing the why and getting to the internal landscape. You know, it triggered a fear response in me after I looked back because I think I was afraid he was like, spoiled and indulged, that he would pout that he wasn't getting popcorn when he was getting to go to the movies, which was a privilege, right? So I was focusing on the behavior, but once I could pause for a minute, and I could say, okay, what's happening inside, but forget the behavior, what's happening? He was feeling disappointment, okay. That's the feeling he was feeling. And I thought it was ridiculous, but that was what he was feeling in that moment. And then I was like, Oh, yeah, the last time I took him to the movies, I bought him popcorn. So he had an expectation. The expectation is not going to get met. So he's disappointed so then I could say to him instead of where I started, which was, you know, if you're going to pout about not getting popcorn, then maybe we shouldn't go to the movies at all right? So you guys hear how easily that rolls right off my tongue? To instead say you're feeling disappointed. You got excited when you thought about the idea of popcorn, is that right? And then the pouting turns into more of like a little, you know, sad face. And then I could say, yeah, it feels it feels hard when we're disappointed sometimes, you know, you really wanted it and it's not going to happen and so you just feel disappointed and it's totally okay to feel disappointed. You know, don't buy the popcorn still, it's not about permissiveness, but it's really getting to what their internal experience is. This same kid when he was little, he was in the bathtub and didn't want to get out. He

was four, I was like, it's time to get out and he didn't want to get out. I could say to him, okay, well, you can either get out or I will help you get out. And as I'm pulling him out, and he's screaming and yelling, this is so hard because it's so that's so that screaming and yelling -- nervous system arousal's really contagious -- to say to him, you're so disappointed that bathtime is over, you're just mad you have to get out. I know it's really hard. And so it's really just about attuning to what they are experiencing and seeing what's really happening. That doesn't mean we don't address behaviors. That doesn't mean we don't have boundaries, I can address those behaviors later in the moment. And that's, that's the No Drama Discipline book, which maybe we can have a conversation about it another time, which is that the whole purpose of discipline is to teach so that they have the skills and capacity to be self disciplined, but they have to be in a regulated brain state in order to learn. So really connecting with them and showering them with being seen and then eventually soothed is what actually helps, you know, you be a more effective disciplinarian, but seen is just, it's really hard to do because it's so hard to not be following just the behavior. I mean, what do you think is hard about it or what do you love about it? Why does this one resonate with you?

Debbie: I think, you know, for so many of these kids, these differently wired kids, a lot of the challenge in their lives comes from not being seen for who they are because so much focus is on behavior, especially in school systems. So as the parent of a child who was often dysregulated, and then would deteriorate because of not being seen or understood by teachers, that's really hard as a parent too and so we're trying to see them as who they are. But we're also recognizing that most of the outside world isn't seeing who they are. So, but when they are seen, I feel like that's where I feel like that's where we as a society need to do so much work to really see these kids, and it can be so powerful for them when they get to experience that.

Tina: I remember, you know, as a therapist, we always are careful about not, you know, joining our clients in, you know, intense places of distress. But I remember having this moment with this mom that I worked with, I was doing some parenting consulting. And I had gone to observe their son who was about to start kindergarten. And I had this moment where she and I just cried together. And it was actually a really beautiful moment. But I helped her and her husband see that their child who they thought was being manipulative and a spoiled brat and whom they had continued to try stricter and stricter discipline, that he actually had some sensory challenges and he was really overwhelmed by his environment. And he would act out in really big behavioral ways that were oppositional and all kinds of things. And when I finally got the parents to see what was really happening and that their child was in these intense states of stress and how much he needed them, for them to be able to move to from, um, you know, when he acted in certain ways they would punish him. And in fact, remember specifically, and this won't give away anything about their identity, so it's okay to share. The parents had told him if you don't, you know, go to school without crying or, you know, acting bad, if you if you keep doing that you can't go to SeaWorld and the rest of the family is going to go and we're going to leave you home. And when we talked this through, and the mom and the dad were able to

get to really see their child, they were like, what do we do about SeaWorld and everything else? And I said, I want you to go home and hold him. And I want you to say to him, now keep in mind, this is a little boy, he's been punished day after day after day for something he couldn't help. I want you to go home and I want you to pull him onto your lap. And I want you to say, I now know, something like this, that you've been trying really, really hard to be at school. You've been trying so hard, and it's just really, really hard for you to be there? Is that right? And I just got moved to tears in that moment because I thought what that experience would be like for that six year old to finally have his parents see what the struggle was and who he was and what he was trying to do. It's so powerful, we all want to be seen. And we want our kids all the time to have the experience of saying, my parents got me. My teachers got me, they got me and that's huge. It's hard to do. That's what we really want in all of our relationships.

Debbie: I love that story. And thank you for sharing that. That is just what I want for our kids so badly and they deserve so badly. And I love too that if there are parents listening to this, we're feeling like yeah, she's describing me. And this is what we did for many years. Again, just that invitation to have that conversation with your child, and that it's not too late to make that pivot.

Tina: Should we go to soothed?

Debbie: Yeah, let's move on to soothed.

Tina: So soothed is really about comforting and nurturing our kids, especially when they're in distress. Now, often when they're in distress, they actually act not very well. You know, we see again, it's the stress response. And so we see oppositional behavior, we see acting out behavior, we see disrespectful behavior. These are all things that happen when kids are when their nervous systems are flooded. And particularly if you have a differently wired kid that happens, you know, more frequently under more circumstances most likely. So comfort and nurturing is not easy to access when our kid is behaving in ways that are difficult. It's much easier to access when they're physically hurt or when they're sad, right when your kid is crying or they're physically hurt. We can move to helping soothe them pretty easily. So what I like to do is to try to think about when my kid is emotionally in distress or behavioral in distress that I really try to think about them is really needing me in that moment. Oh, they're needing me. They're telling me that things are too hard and too big right now. And it looks like bad behavior. But this is the time to show up. This is what's so important. It's about the idea that when kids are at their worst, that's when they need us the most. It's not always easy to do. But once you start doing it, and it works, you'll see how quickly your child will really relax into your care. And I'm going to give some exceptions for that. I think the main fear for parents wanting to say Oh, you're having a really hard time or you're really angry that your bath is over and you didn't want to get out. You know, the next thing I said to my son, It's okay, if you need to cry and yell for a little while I'm right here with you while you do that, that's soothed. So, you know, when I wrap the warm towel around him, and I hold him, you know, and with our teenagers sometimes, you know, they don't want that kind of connection. But we can say, you know, you look like you're

really stressed out, can I get you something to drink? So sometimes just meeting physical needs, or just saying, you know, I'm right here with you or not saying anything, and just being present. Those are all ways we can provide soothing. Now a couple things. One is, you know, we talked about connect and redirect in both the Whole Brain Child and No-Drama Discipline, and I almost always get the question after my talks. Well, what do you do if your kid doesn't want you to connect with them? What if they like rebuff your empathy? And I always want to say I always say, don't chase after them and say, you know, I'm gonna give you connection and empathy right now, you know, don't don't force it. That's actually intrusive. And we all have different needs at different times. You know, sometimes when I'm really angry, I want to be left alone. And so just making yourself available by saying, you know, if your kid goes to their room and they slam the door and they say, you know, leave me alone, you just give them a few minutes, go back, you know, knock crack the door and just say, Hey, I'm just checking on you, I'm here if you need me, Do you need anything, you know, you're just making yourself available. That's really key too so one of the best ways that I have had the most feedback, we talked about this in No Drama Discipline, the same family that I was telling you about where they didn't know that their kid had sensory challenges. The dad and the son would get into these massive fights where, you know, the kid would say, like, I want the blue cup, and the dad would say, sorry, you can't have the blue cup, it's in the dishwasher and the kid would just escalate, escalate, escalate rigidly demanding his blue cup. Now dad didn't know about his sensory challenges and that a lot of times when kids are super picky and rigid around stuff like that, it's because they're just trying to make their worlds work in a more controlled way. And maybe there was something like the feel of the blue cup versus the orange cup. Whatever it is, but the dad would start yelling at the kid and the kid would, you know, kick him and then the dad would say, you go to your room and the kid wouldn't go to his room. So then dad would put them in his room and then hold the door shut so the kid could get out. And it was just a lose lose situation every day. So I taught this Dad, I said, when you have an angry look on your face, and an angry tone of voice and an angry body posture, you're actually communicating a lot of threat. And your child's reptilian brain is just responding to that because the brain cares about safety more than anything else. And so what's happening is you're activating that reptilian brain so you're just gonna get fight, flight, freeze, and it was always fight for this kid. So I said, I want to see if we can activate a different response. And I want you to...and it was sort of an experiment at the time but it's as I've taught it to people, it's the thing that the most people have come back to me to say I cannot believe how well that works. So I taught the dad to sit below eye level, not at eye level, but below eye level. So sitting on the floor, criss cross applesauce, leaning back on his arms in a relaxed posture. So I say get below eye level. And then I want you to only say two things because this is a dad that would yell and yell and yell, and this kid had sensory challenges. So the dad talking at him a lot actually further dysregulated this kid, I think it probably does for all of us talking too much yelling at us. But I said, I only want you to say two things. One, something empathetic about how he's feeling like, oh, buddy, you're so upset right now. And number two, I want you to just say I'm right here with you. And the dad got mad. He was like, You want me to sit in a submissive posture to

my child and and I said, No, I want you to sit in a strategic posture that will down regulate his nervous system.

Debbie: But I didn't think I would ever see them again. A few weeks later, they came back and the dad said I thought that was total BS. I told my wife this was a waste of time and money to come and see you and I was like, well are you just coming back to share that With me, how can I help you today? No. Why are you here? And he said, No, we're back because in a moment of desperation, my child was raging and I sat on the floor. He said, I didn't do it, just like you said it. I was like, I can tell you're mad, but I'll sit here with you. But I was like, Great, that's progress, you know? And he said, he said, Tina, my kid calmed down faster than I've ever seen him calm down. But something else happened. He said, I stayed calm in a way I've never been able to. And I hadn't thought about that at the time when I sort of prescribed it, but it makes perfect sense that the way we posture our bodies actually activates different neural networks. So if you're standing over someone, you know, in an aggressive posture, you're activating the circuitry that goes with fighting but if you sit in a relaxed posture, even if you feel like yelling, within a few minutes, your brain and nervous system start to change into a more connected relaxed position so emotionally, so anyway, this is a great way to soothe our children is even physically by just sitting down getting below eye level making ourselves available even physically helps us get there to be more present emotionally and relationally.

Tina: Yeah, I again love that example. And I have experienced similarly, how quickly things can be diffused or we can our child can move through something when we can do that i what i hear from my community is just, we need to do our own work right and not getting triggered, because oftentimes, their behavior does trigger our own fears and things. So it's really about learning how to, you know, you write about holding this space and being okay with those big emotions. So I guess that's our continual work.

Debbie: It's absolutely our continual work. And I again, you know, back to that idea of the challenges and when we find ourselves not handling them well, those are invitations for us to do our own work right to really reflect on all of that.

Tina: Well, let's talk about the last s which is secure and this kind of brings everything together. So can you just touch upon that?

Debbie: Yeah, so secure is not really like I feel secure about myself, like self esteem. I mean, obviously that is an outcome of kids who have had secure attachment with at least one person. But what we really mean by that is that when kids have enough repeated predictable experiences of feeling safe, seen, and soothed, then their brain wires so that their their brain has what's called a mental model, which really is the idea that the brain securely knows that if I have a need, someone will see it and show up for me. Someone will see it and respond in a fairly quickly and fairly sensitively way, right? So someone will show up for me and what's so powerful about this secure this fourth S is that when when the brain wires to expect that in relationships, you know, just like when you touch us on a hot oven, and you pull your hand away, your brain creates a memory or a

mental model that says when you touch hot things that can be painful... don't do that. Our brains are creating these mental models or these memories for what relationships are like, so, and the more insecure forms of attachment and we don't have time to go into those in deep ways. All of us can have experiences where our brain wires to say, if I have a need, I'm on my own. No one's gonna really help me. They don't want to hear about my feelings or emotions or my struggles. I live in an emotional desert and my parents take care of my physical needs, but they don't respond well when I share needs or thoughts or feelings. So that's called a dismissive, dismissive, avoidant pattern of attachment, or another insecure pattern called anxious ambivalent or preoccupied, is where the kid's brain wires to say if I have a need, sometimes my caregiver will show up for me, but other times, they won't at all because they're so consumed in their own need and their own drama and sometimes I actually have to take care of them. Or in the disorganized that I mentioned, where the parent is the source of fear and can't be counted on at all but yet the child wants that connection. So there's this push and pull disorganization there, but rather what happens with secure attachment the brain knows securely, if I ever need someone, someone will show up for me and I am going to expect that other people show up for me. So that means what we see is that they choose friends and significant partners who do help them feel safe, seen, and soothed so they have healthier relationships, they expect people to show up for them. And if people don't, they're like, you're not a good friend. You're not a good mate. And then the best part Debbie, is and I know your son's getting you know, older and getting closer to being an adult. The best part about this is that when we help our kids feel safe, seen, and soothed, again, not perfectly but enough and their brain wires, for that fourth s of security, they learn how to show up for themselves. So they learn how to keep themselves safe and to see and understand and accept themselves, and to be able to soothe themselves. And then ultimately, to provide secure attachment to other people that are significant others and their friends and their siblings and eventually their kids. So this is really powerful. And, you know, we see this in terms of, you know, the part of the brain that is really responsible for all the social and emotional intelligence and mental health that prefrontal cortex. You know, the things that the prefrontal cortex does, such as insight and empathy and sound decision making and regulating the body and regulating emotions and a lot more. These are all outcomes of secure attachment. So we really believe that the reason that secure attachment relationships lead to the best outcomes for kids is because the brain is optimally developed in those areas because of the relationship, so relationships and the kind of parenting we provide, it doesn't just influence our kids minds or behaviors or character or spirits. It actually influences the architecture of how that brain gets wired and integrated.

Debbie: Oh, my goodness, this is just so powerful. And listeners, I hope you're having as many yes moments as I am. This is definitely one of those books that you should have on your bookshelf. So before we wrap up, then, you know, as we are recording this, we are early April, we're kind of weeks into what has been a very unusual time where parents are spending a lot more time many of us are spending way more time with our kids than we may have been in recent years, or maybe ever since our kids were little with the COVID-19 pandemic. So you know, maybe just in the context of your book and what you've been talking about and

showing up for our kids, are you seeing some unique opportunities for us as parents and kids to work on that attachment together and for us to really show up for them?

Tina: Yes, I'm so glad you asked that. Because if we remember that the whole foundation of attachment relationships is based on the idea that it's activated, and its purpose is to respond to distress. So in a way, these attachment relationships that we have, even if they're full of flaws, this is nature's way of building resilience into us for this very type of thing that when we are in distress, that is when we most need each other. And so your kids may be acting in ways that are more difficult right now, and you might be having a more difficult time as a parent as well. And this is when your kid needs you the most. So the first thing is, we have to take care of ourselves and do whatever we can to nurture and soothe ourselves so that we have the capacity to meet our kids needs as best we can right now. That being said, I think now's a great time to give yourself a huge pass in terms of feeling like you need to be a perfect parent. I read this great article, it was in New York Times parenting about a mom who said her daughter had eaten 47 quesadillas since the pandemic started and I thought a 47 quesadilla approach to parenting sounds awesome to me. Like, don't you don't have to fight every battle... you cannot be a perfect parent and the perfect homeschooler and the perfect chef and the perfect everything right now. It's impossible. And so I think giving ourselves some passes to let things be not perfect, letting our kids have a lot more leeway and grace to them is really important. And then a couple of really specific things. I've actually have videos about the short videos on my social media pages, which you can find by just going to my website tinabryson.com, there are two really important ways that we can practice this. The first one has to do with safety. One of the things that happens right now when we are in situations that are unpredictable and frightening is that, without meaning to, we're giving our kids a lot of threat, danger, fear-based messages, and keeping in mind that the brain is an association machine. And when we are saying like, you can't play with friends because it's dangerous or if you don't wash your hands, you could get sick and we could all get sick. So when we give these kinds of repeated messages, in a threat, danger kind of way, then I'm concerned that our kids are going to have their brains wired for, the world is a dangerous place. Playing with my friends is dangerous. Going to school is dangerous. Going to the playground is scary. Like all the things that are healthy and good and typical for our lives. So especially for young kids, I'm concerned that that repeated messaging undermines that first s of safety. So what we want to do is give our kids safety based messaging to say, we're not playing with friends for a little while; we're taking a break from playing with friends so that we can be safe, we wash our hands because it helps us be safe. And we just really shift our language so that your child does not leave the pandemic with the mental model of the world is a scary, dangerous place. But rather your child leaves this pandemic with the mental model of my parent keeps me safe. So when my parent then says it's safe to go be with friends, the kid's like, I rest assured knowing that my parent keeps me safe. And if she says that I'm safe, I'm good. So that's a really key one. And then I'll do a little quick seen one just because I know that so it's so hard for us is that your kids might be complaining a lot right now and fussing about things and again can trigger that

You're spoiled, indulged, selfish kind of fear within us as parents. So we might respond if your kids like I'm so tired of doing school on the computer or I'm tired, I'm so bored. That we might respond with something like, you know, you're so lucky you even have a house to be bored in, right? Or you're lucky you even have friends. Some kids don't even have any friends or you're being so selfish or whatever we say in those moments. When we respond to their complaining, criticism, it builds the mental model of when I share what I'm thinking and feeling in the moment, it doesn't go so well for me, so I probably shouldn't share it with them. Because they criticize me, Why would I want that? So we can practice seen here by responding to their complaining by first shifting how we think about it and go Okay, this isn't necessarily complaining. This is my kid. It sounds like complaining and they aren't complaining but what they're really doing is sharing how they're thinking and feeling in this moment. I mean, imagine if as an adult, if I told my husband like, Oh my gosh, I've had so many zoom sessions. My brain's so tired of that. And if he were to say, you're lucky, you even have a computer and you're lucky you even have a job and people who want to talk to you like I would be so mad, that would be such a horrible response. And we do that to our kids all the time. So instead, we want them to have the mental model coming away. by responding in this moment, say, I know it's hard to do things the way we're doing right now. I miss friends, too. I'm so sorry that we're having to go through this, but we're in it together. If you respond like that, instead, your kid's mental model walks away like that was a pleasurable and good experience when I share my thoughts and feelings with my parents. I should tell them more things, right? So we really are laying the groundwork for how their brains get wired based on how we respond to them. And if we do respond to them in a way that doesn't feel good or right, go back to them and say, You know what, earlier I was hard on you when you share that with me. I'm sorry, I wish I had responded differently. I wish I had said this. Give yourself a do over. So I think those are two things we can practice just really focused on is that safe and seen, just start with the first two s's. And our kids need us more right now. And it's harder to deal with higher needs right now. It really is. And so just knowing that and kind of shoring ourselves up for that, that can be really helpful. Because anytime we have an expectation that's higher than what's possible for ourselves or for our child, we're going to live in pretty chronic stress. And you all know this, you know, when people have expectations or you've had expectations or your child has had expectations of themselves, and it's different from what their capacity is, that's just a recipe for toxic stress. So lower your expectations of yourself and your child at this point, and just be together and, and it's fine if you don't want to be together too. It's fine to have those moments where you go. I'm sick of volleyball. My best friend texted me earlier in the week. She was like, I'm trying not to murder anyone. I wrote back and said, how's that going? And she was like, not so well. So reach out to other people. And I guess this is the last thing I'll say about this and any other time, I wanted to speak to you directly parents, you matter too. And I know you work so hard to be the warrior for your child that you matter too. So make sure you find someone who helps you feel safe and seen and soothed and secure that you know that they will show up for you when you need them. And it's really important that you show up for yourself, and that you're not just showing up for your child, but show up for yourself. Reach

out to someone who will show up for you as well. That's really important because we matter too

Debbie: So good. Thank you so much. That's so just helpful right now and very soothing words. You've just soothed all of us, I think. Thank you for that. Wow. Okay, so listeners, I'm going to have a pretty lengthy shownotes page with resources for this and I'll include links to the videos that Tina just mentioned. And, and her different websites where she can be reached on social media. Is there any particular way that you like parents to engage with you? Or what's your favorite spot for people to connect?

Tina: I don't know. I kind of hit all of them. So any which way is good...Facebook or Instagram, or Twitter? Any of them?

Debbie: Awesome. Okay, well, you heard it here, folks. So, Tina, thank you so much for just sharing all of this with us. I'm so grateful that we've gotten to connect and to just share this important work with our community. It's so good. And I just have to ask you now this is the book that had to be written. Is there a book next? What's next?

Tina: Well, I think Dan and I, we just love working with each other so much. It's we when we do podcasts together or whatever, he's always like, Oh, you're so good. I'm like you're so good. Like, we just love working together. And I think that Dan and I will probably write *The Whole Brain Teen* together at some point. There's at least one more book, I think between us, if not a few more. I have a new book, my first solo book coming out September 1 of 2020, called *The Bottom Line for Baby*. And it's a very different book. For me, it's the book, I actually didn't enjoy writing it very much because it's heavy. I had to do so much research reading. But it's the book I needed as a parent. So it takes about 65 of the most controversial topics or things where you as a new parent with an infant have competing advice on, like your mother in law and the internet and your best friend and your doctor have all told you four different things. So it's an alphabetical guide. So you can just flip to say like sleep training or co sleeping or, you know, weaning or whatever it is. And it basically lays out the two competing arguments, main competing arguments, and then there's the section that says, here's what the science says. And then there's a bottom line. So you can quickly flip to that section and look at what is the bottom line. And it'll say something like the science is really clear. You should not ever smoke marijuana if you're nursing, you know. So there's like, really clear science. And then there's other stuff that says, you know, the science is not clear, or it's super conflicting, or there's no science on this. But here are three questions to guide you as you decide what works best for your family. So it's just a resource book. I'm hoping it'll sort of be the companion book that goes after *What to Expect When You're Expecting*, then you get *The Bottom Line for Baby* and it's just a way to help you be grounded in the science as you decide what works best for you and your baby. So I'm excited about that one.

Debbie: Yes. What an incredible resource I, I mean, I have no desire to go back and do all this over but I sure wish I had had that. That's awesome. Well, we'll keep an eye

out for that. And thank you again, so much for everything and for sharing with our community today.

Tina: I'm always happy for the opportunity, it's what makes my work meaningful. So thank you for the chance to do it.

RESOURCES MENTIONED:

- Tina Payne Bryson's website
- *The Power of Showing Up: How Parental Presence Shapes Who Our Kids Become and How Their Brains Become Wired* by Dr. Dan Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson, PhD
- *The Yes Brain: How to Cultivate Courage, Curiosity, and Resilience in Your Child* by Dr. Dan Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson, PhD
- *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind* by Dr. Dan Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson, PhD
- *No-Drama Discipline: The Whole-Brain Way to Calm the Chaos and Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind* by Dr. Dan Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson, PhD
- Tina Payne Bryson on Facebook
- Tina Payne Bryson on Instagram
- Tina Payne Bryson on Twitter
- Dr. Bruce Perry
- Dr. Dan Siegel on Helping Our Kids Develop a "Yes" Brain (Tilt podcast episode)