

# Teaching Kids About Thoughts And Feelings



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Natalie Bacon**

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## Teaching Kids About Thoughts And Feelings

Welcome to the *Design Your Dream Life Podcast* where it's all about designing your life on your terms and now your host, Natalie Bacon.

Hey there. Welcome to the podcast. Today this is coming out on September 29<sup>th</sup>. What that means is tomorrow, September 30<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 p.m., I am hosting an information call about the Creator Program. So this is the brand-new program. It's the Creator Program 2.0. All of the details about the price and the different options, there are going to be two, you can find out on this call.

So if you are interested in either working with me just to start your business, there's going to be an affordable get started program that you can enroll in. Then if you already have a business where you're making at least a few thousand dollars a month. You've made about 10K total or a little more, then you may be interested in your high-level mastermind with me. So all of the details are going to be on this information call tomorrow, September 30<sup>th</sup> 1:00 p.m. Eastern. You can register for the call at [nataliebacon.com/business](http://nataliebacon.com/business).

Then what will happen is the next day on October 1<sup>st</sup> the Creator Program will open for enrollment. That will be a lot of fun for those of you who are interested in building and growing your online business. I will say that it's for women. So if you are a woman or you know a woman who wants to start or grow her business, pass along the information to her as well. This will be a really good chance for her to get some help with those business goals.

All right. Today we are talking about something I am so looking forward to teaching you about. That is teaching kids about thoughts and feelings. So even if you don't have kids, listen to this episode because clients and Grow You members are always asking me how to teach others about this work. So a lot of the concepts are going to apply regardless of whether you're talking about kids or whether you're talking about adults.

I will say that you never want to coach someone without permission. So I like teaching you how to teach kids about thoughts and feelings. That's

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very different from teaching you how to coach. So I always coach in my coaching programs, but I never coach without permission.

So as a student of this work, you just want to make sure that you're only teaching kids or anyone else about something that they're genuinely curious about and asking about and that you can help with in a way that isn't what I call coaching without permission. Where someone's upset and you kind of jump in there and say, "Well, this is your thoughts. This is how it goes." That is something you never want to do. It totally decreases connection and does the opposite of what coaching is intended for.

I do understand the desire to teach this work, particularly with our little ones. We can see them having such strong emotions, such big feelings. Having some tools in your toolbelt to be able to help them experience their emotions and understand a little bit about the brain can have a big impact on their lives, just like when we learned this work. It also impacted our lives.

Before you ever teach your child about thoughts and feelings, I always want you to really be clean about why you're teaching them. So a lot of times it's so that we can feel better. This is what you don't want to do. You don't want to teach your children about thoughts and feelings so that you can feel better.

For example, if your kids are fighting and it's been challenging for you to discipline them. You're thinking that if they just understood thoughts and feelings better then it would be easier for you to discipline them, and life would be better. That would be a bad reason to teach them because it presupposes that you think your child's feelings cause your feelings. So they're upset so I'm upset. That is not true. The reason that you are upset is because of your thoughts.

So be clear on why you want to teach them, and this can be an indicator that it's time to do some of your own self-coaching. So when your son is sad, you have 100% agency in deciding how you want to feel. Of course, you might not want to be super happy that he's sad, but you don't have to

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mirror him and also be sad. If he is angry, you don't have to mirror him and also be angry.

When you're disciplining or giving a consequence or enforcing a rule or anything like that, you can view it as a learning opportunity for them and how wonderful it is that you are the one who gets to teach them and help them and enforce consequences with them. You can do that from a place of love and compassion without going into the emotion that they're experiencing.

So first and foremost, you just want to make sure that you're doing it from a place of truly wanting to help them process emotions and understand their brains a little bit, not from a place of this would really make my life easier. I would feel a lot better if they weren't acting this way or feeling this way. That said, when we are talking about teaching thoughts and feelings, the most important takeaway I'll say is knowing that you are leading by example.

So if you are managing your mind and your emotions, that's going to be a greater example than anything you can teach them. That stems from you knowing that your thoughts create your feelings. So when we're talking about thoughts and feelings, the relationship there is that the thoughts create the feelings. You can think anything and feel anything. That all thoughts and all feelings are acceptable and normal, and we don't want to resist them and push them away. Everything that you think, everything that you feel is going to create how you show up in the world.

I also like to point out here that thoughts aren't moral or immoral. So we don't have to have shame for thinking a thought. However, certain thoughts will support the results that you want to create in your life and certain thoughts will not. Other thoughts are going to create a lot of emotional pain and other thoughts won't.

Knowing this for yourself is the most important takeaway because you can lead from example. Part of leading from example is managing your own

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mind and self-coaching, all the work that we do here and in Grow You as well. You also want to keep it age appropriate.

So the way that you're going to teach thoughts and feelings is going to depend heavily on the age of your child. For example, if you take your four-year-old to get a shot, after the shot you might want to talk about how it feels instead of going to get the ice cream to immediately feel better. This isn't to say that there's anything wrong with ice cream in and of itself. I actually love ice cream, but we want to get away from rewarding discomfort with external pleasure.

So typically, Elizabeth is really, really upset. So we feel upset, and we want to make her feel better. So then we run out to Target and get her a toy or the ice cream. What we do there is it's bad to feel upset, and the way that you make it feel better is you go out into the world, and you get some pleasure. Whether that's food or shopping or fill in the blank. Instead, what you want to do is you want to slow it down and check in with your child. So how are you feeling? If she says bad, you might want to share with her that you too feel bad sometimes. That's normal, and that's okay.

Now this will be very different than say if it's your 12-year-old child. So if your 12-year-old child doesn't make the cheerleading squad and you ask her how she's feeling and she replies with, "I don't know or upset or I'm feeling bad." Or something else. At this point, you can have compassion with her and meet her where she's at, telling her it's okay to feel bad and upset. You often feel bad and upset too instead of trying to fix the feelings. That's what we want to get away from is trying to teach our kids that there's something wrong with feeling bad.

Because the truth is when she doesn't make the team, she probably wants to feel a little bit upset. We can teach her appropriate ways to feel feelings versus reacting and acting out. So you might say that it's okay to cry and feel that feeling. What it's not okay to do is throw your bookbag across the room and it ends up hitting your brother or something like that. You can't act that out. Then you can have a consequence for that if that does happen

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or she does do that. Still acknowledging that it's normal to feel the feelings. You can allow the feelings without acting out on them.

I think particularly with kids and really with adults, you want to focus on the feelings first and meet the child where they are with emotions then talk with them about how they feel. So they don't want to sit down for a lesson about thoughts and feelings. Even if they do, it's going to fall on deaf ears. Meaning they're not going to internalize it. Meaning they might listen at best, but they're not going to really understand it until you are teaching them in the moment.

So I like to call this dripping it out over time. So instead of sitting them down and saying your thoughts create your feelings, you can periodically drip lessons into your conversations. So how you're going to do this is you're going to focus on the feelings first. I think there are three important ways for you to do this. One is to label the feeling. Two is to describe the feeling with them and their body. Three is to help them befriend the feeling and allow it. So those three little things there.

So let's take an example. Let's say your child comes home from school a little bit upset about the day. You can ask him what happened. Maybe he says, "I don't like that my teacher gave us homework." You say back, "How are you feeling?" Typically, kids aren't well versed in labeling emotions. So depending on his reply, you'll reply and give suggestions perhaps. So if he does say I'm mad then you can go with that. If he says I don't know, you might say, "Are you angry? Are you mad? Are you frustrated? Are you disappointed?" Try to check in with him so he picks that emotion and then labels it.

Then the second part of that is directing him to his body. Where do you feel that frustration in your body? Is it in your tummy? Is it in your throat? Is it in your neck? Is it in your arms or your shoulders? What we're doing here is we're connecting the mind with the body so you can allow and process the emotion. This is so important.

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We don't want to jump to it's a thought causing this. Because all that does is teach that we want to control our thoughts so that we don't feel negative emotion. That is the opposite of the purpose of thought work. Thought work is about accepting and allowing your thoughts and feelings. Then you can decide to think differently, but you always start from a place of acceptance.

So you're going to level the feeling. You're going to check in with your child about the feeling in the body that they're experiencing so they can really experience it in the body. Again, this conversation will be more or less sophisticated based on whether you're talking to a 3-year-old, 8-year-old, 12-year-old, 18-year-old. It will all be very different language that you'll use depending on their age. Then the last step is to help them befriend and allow the feeling to be there.

I like to do this with talking to the feeling and saying, "What do you need from me? Frustration, it's okay that you're there. It's okay to be frustrated." That's welcoming it. Typically, along the way you can direct them to take a deep breath. This is processing the emotion. Usually, the heightened state of the tantrum or however upset they were will decrease. It will only increase and get worked up again if they continue to think whatever they were thinking. Otherwise, you can process an emotion in just a few minutes.

After the emotion has been processed, that's when you can talk about thoughts. You want to wait until the emotion is processed because kind of the purpose of labeling and describing and befriending these emotions is to really normalize feeling feelings. So it's okay to cry and to feel the emotion. This is part of the human experience.

Again, depending on the age, we might have to say it's not okay to act out on and react. No hitting, no biting, no throwing. If that's the case, there might be a consequence. Going to their room, etcetera. However you want to discipline. Separating out the processing the emotion in your body from reacting is a huge life lesson you can teach your kids just through doing this process with them.

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So once you've labeled, described, kind of talked with them through the emotion and they have calmed down and are in their bodies, then you can talk with them about the thoughts. So you might say something like, "What are you thinking that's causing you to feel frustrated?" That simple question is going to be so much more powerful than, "Okay you know it's the thoughts that create this feeling." Sort of trying to reiterate the lesson that we ourselves as adults on a daily basis have to remind ourselves of.

So we don't ever want to indicate or put across that somehow they're not getting it. Instead, we can just ask the simple question, "What are you thinking that's creating that feeling of frustration?" When they answer, you can support that. You can say I get that you're thinking this. Brains think thoughts like this all the time. Mine does too. What about thinking about it this way and giving an alternative.

Now you don't want to jump to this is the best thing ever if they're thinking the thought, "It's horrible I didn't make the cheerleading squad." But you might jump to a thought like, "It's going to be okay that I didn't make the cheerleading squad. I can learn from this and grow from this. There are other activities that I can try and get better at. It's okay." Right. That might feel a lot better than it's horrible that I didn't make the cheerleading squad.

So you want to find their thought that's causing the feeling with them just through asking them questions. Then at a very appropriate age level and also with love and compassion, offer alternative thoughts that they can try on and see if they feel good to them. If the answer is no, that's okay too. This isn't about forcing our kids to think and feel differently than they do. It's just about providing the space for them to see that there are other options and ways of thinking and feeling if they so choose.

There are a few mistakes that I see over and over as I coach a lot of moms. I'd love to go through some of them with you so you can kind of keep your eye out for them. Don't try to change your child's feelings. So if your child is feeling anger, talk to him about anger. Where is it? What does it feel like? You don't want to tell him you shouldn't feel angry. So we don't want to negate their feelings. We want to help them process them.

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This doesn't mean you're happy your child is upset, but it can mean that you are normalizing positive and negative emotions. So you can allow them to feel comfortable in themselves feeling upset. This is going to serve them for the rest of their lives.

The next mistake is don't try to protect your child from negative emotions and try to rescue them. I see this as a huge problem right now with parents. We're so involved with our kids, and we want to protect our child from any emotional pain. It sounds so lovely. However, the result is we end up with adults going out into the world completely and totally unable to cope with emotions. So kind of by protecting them from negative emotions and rescuing them, you just postpone the lesson to adulthood.

So anytime you can slow it down, help them process their feelings, see what they're thinking that's causing it. Even if the child is upset, if you allow them to be upset, they can learn some great lessons about negative emotion and overcoming challenges. They can do that at age 10 instead of at age 30.

We don't want to reward negative emotions with external pleasures. So the child is feeling upset. We want to try to meet them where they are. Now listen, I know there are going to be exceptions and times where this isn't practical. Child is screaming on the airplane, and you want to hand them an iPad, I am not going to judge you for that at all. No one else will either. Just think about it more broadly.

In general, when a child is upset, it's going to be so much more helpful to check in with them and help them process that emotion instead of teaching them that emotions need to be avoided through external pleasures. Like TV, screen time, food, shopping, whatever it is. We do this as adults. We have a stressful day, and we reach for the wine or the Netflix because we want to naturally avoid pain, which is the discomfort from the day.

Or if it's our children, whatever happened whether it's totally irrational or not, the feelings are so legitimate. So they don't want to feel those feelings either. You don't want to see them feeling those feelings. So the most

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natural thing to do is give them some pleasure. What we want to be careful of is we can get into trouble with that because it creates this cycle that negative feelings aren't okay. We need to seek external pleasure to feel better right away.

Instead, what we can teach them is feel your feelings. It's normal to feel negative emotion. You can do this inner work of processing your feelings and finding the thoughts causing them. That is going to help you grow and get stronger emotionally and mentally. Then, of course, have the external pleasures. Just don't connect them so much to the negative emotions. So there might be certain times of day where they get screen time or ice cream or whatever. That's great. It's just like we do for adults when we plan our pleasures or our indulgences ahead of time versus rewarding it for feeling negative emotion. Then we create that cycle.

The next mistake to avoid is not to aim to teach your children about thought work to make your life better somehow. So, again, this just goes back to what I started the episode with. Just make sure you're clean and clear about why you want to teach them about thought work. So if you think it would be better for them, just ask yourself why. Why would it be better for them?

Typically, in Grow You when I'm coaching moms on this, there is more coaching for the mom to do on themselves before they teach their children about it. I think using the process I described today can actually really help you because you'll meet your child where they are in that emotion and allow them to process it and be with them and allow it. Versus, which is a mistake I separated out separately—the last mistake—trying to fix your kids.

So I don't want you to think that your kids are broken. They are not broken. They are human. It's half mess. It's half amazing. You can have rules and consequences for when your kids make mistakes, but you don't have to hang your emotions on their emotions.

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So if they're upset that they have to give up screentime or go to their room or whatever the case may be, you don't have to get upset about it. That's separating out your thoughts and your feelings. You can see that wow, they're really upset. This is the rule. There's so much learning going on. That's an amazing thing to be able to have in your household at this age versus them learning it, again, when they're 30 or 40 years old.

Again, you don't want to feel amazing that your children are upset, but you can think about it in a very different way than mirroring their emotions and being upset that they're upset. This takes being a little bit more confident in your way of parenting and your own rules and your own consequences while also knowing that you're not perfect and you get it wrong too and that's okay. You can be glad that they're learning this experience right now instead of later.

So we never want to approach kids with thought and feeling work from this position of I need to try to fix them because they're doing it wrong. They're not doing it wrong at all, right. They're just kids learning just like we learned.

So the last thing that I really want to say about this is, again, I think the best way to teach our kids about thoughts and feelings is to be an example of using these tools in your life. So join Grow You and use the self-coaching bonus course and coach yourself every day. Because whenever we judge our kids and think that we know how they should be responding better than they do, we're always wrong. That's a cue for us that we need to do our own thought work.

So the more that you start to think in models, the self-coaching model meaning that your thoughts create your feelings. The more that you do this in your own life, the more natural it's going to be to talk with your kids about thoughts and feelings because it's going to be so obvious to you that they're creating their emotions.

You're going to want to help them through that. Not from a space of thinking that they're doing it wrong or that their circumstances are causing

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their emotions, but from a place of brains are interesting and crazy and messy and amazing. We can learn to understand them and see how having a little bit of awareness and authority over our brains actually helps us live a much more supportive life.

Finally, when you do teach them, do it through their experience meeting them where they are. Remembering to keep it age appropriate. I think your energy coming from a place of love, not from a place of judgment or they're doing it wrong is going to serve you more than remembering any sort of action step that I gave. Coming from this place of we're all learning and we're all growing, and it's not supposed to be perfect will serve you as a mom and your kids as they will pick up on that as well.

So that's what I have for you today. This was a highly requested topic. So use it for your own kids or the people in your life. If you know someone with kids who is an amazing mom, send it to them as well. Because I think this can be some really powerful work as we sort of enter into this amazing period of time and history where we are so much more aware of our thoughts and feelings. I am hopeful that teaching the younger generation about this will really have a profound impact on them individually, but also in the world as a whole. All right my friends. I will see you next week. Take care.

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