

Lee: This is Episode Number 198 of Stay Happily Married: The Pitfalls of Protective Parenting.

Announcer: Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your sources for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

Lee: I'm Lee Rosen, and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. So many parents today are over-protective. I'm not sure how it happened, or what went on, but it used to be that we let kids get bumps and scrapes and broken hearts, and that was all just a part of childhood. But now, for whatever reason, we're all protecting our children from everything that could ever go wrong. This over-parenting might be hurting our kids more than it's helping them, and it might be hurting our marriages.

Edie Raether, a Change Strategist, is an international keynote speaker, a relationship and parenting coach, and she's also the best-selling author of "Sex for the Soul" and "Stop Bullying Now". She's been focusing on the child's role in the family unit, and that's become her passion, so much so that she developed a character building program for children called "I Believe I Can Fly."

As a behavioral psychology expert, Edie has been a psychotherapist, a hypnotherapist, and a marriage and family counselor for 30 years. She's addressed all relationship, behavioral, health and healing issues. I'm pretty excited that we've got her on the show. Welcome to the show, Edie. I am so glad you could join us.

Edie: Well, I'm glad to be with you today. I think it's an important topic, and I appreciate the opportunity to share it with the world.

Lee: Well, this over-protective parenting thing, I think it's everywhere we turn, and I have some issues with it. But I will say that it seems kind of efficient to raise your children by teaching them how not to make the same mistakes you made. It seems like maybe, that's a good idea. What's the problem?

Edie: Two wrongs never make a right, and we can't over-compensate. But, what we're really dealing with is that I think a lot of times--I'm a lot older than you are--parents are trying to give to their kids what they didn't get. And that is two wrongs trying to make a right. As a psychotherapist, I have seen a lot of very successful people, back when I had my practice in Wisconsin. Doctors would have put themselves through medical school, and taken the hard road and worked while they were in college, and their kids are useless!

I mean, they are dependent, they are on welfare, and it's just because they've been given everything and they weren't given what makes people great. I wrote a book called "Winners Think What Champions Do," and one of the things they have in common was the joy in the process of overcoming and becoming more than they ever thought they could be. When you just hand stuff to people, you're not teaching them the realities of life. You're not teaching them what it's like to earn what they have. And that's the only thing that works.

Lee: How does this whole over-protective parenting thing get started in the first place? Where is that coming from?

Eddie: You know what? It's bigger than it looks. I was just doing another interview--I wrote a book on bullying--and it's a societal thing. It's so much bigger than bullying; it's beyond that. It's beyond the over-indulgent parent. It's a way of thinking in our society today. We have programmed people to be dependent. Everybody wants something for nothing, and it really goes to the school systems back then.

We had a system where we just gave kids grades. We wanted everybody to feel good; they didn't have to earn it. We just wanted them to feel good. I'm for kids feeling good, but part of what really builds self-esteem is that you have earned it. We left that out. We missed the point. We missed the point. But it is systemic, it is a societal issue. It really is. It's in our systems; our legal system. It's in our school system. I think it's a real challenge.

Lee: When do you think this all started? Is this a new thing? Or has this been around for a while?

Eddie: It's a generational thing. It's the "me" generation. It's narcissism. It's "me first." It started, as I said, when our legal system made a shift; our school system; our welfare system. The systems in our society started this, and it's basically those people that grew up when those values were prevalent are now the parents who believe that this is the way to be. It's also parents who are trying to vicariously live their unfulfilled lives through their children.

If you wanted to be a football star, but you were only 5' 2" and you couldn't make the team, but you've got a big boy as a son, I think there are too many parents that are trying to push their children into things that were their dreams, not their children's. We owe it to our children to facilitate and to help them explore their inner genius, and nurture it, rather than to try to vicariously live through them.

Lee: I think everybody wants the best for their kids. And when they're doing this, obviously they have the best of intentions. But what is the fall-out, or the impact that you see this having on these children?

Eddie: They become dependent. They become dependent. And dependency leads to depression. It's not a healthy state. They don't get it. They don't know how to get a job. As a speaker for the business world, employers are going crazy. They don't know what motivates them. They come to work thinking they should start at \$150,000, but they're not willing to work. They're not willing to put in an extra minute. It's a real issue. It's a whole attitude.

Lee: Yeah, not a good situation.

Eddie: Dependency is never a healthy situation. It is never a healthy state of being.

Lee: Now, there was something that you had written that I read that gave me the impression that over-protective parenting impacts differently when you have more than one child in the family. Do you see that? Does having multiple kids change the impact of all of this?

Eddie: Say that again. Does the impact if you have multiple children change...?

Lee: Yes, if you have two kids instead of one, or three kids, do you see over-protective parenting impacting the kids differently?

Eddie: Well, it can. I think what happens is parents will tend to protect one child. And what we can often create in a family system is a divided camp. In general, I've seen a lot of fathers very, very hard on their first-born son, to a point of not being a good situation. And then, mothers will become very protective of the scapegoat in the family. So, then everything gets torn apart because there's a system that isn't fair, and there's an unequal balance. Everything is polarized, and so it can affect the whole family system, because there really is a lack of consistency.

Then, you have siblings fighting with each other. Because everybody strives for harmony and justice and fairness. That's an innate quality. When it isn't there, we fight for it. That's what wars are about; we fight for it. And so, you can have a family that does become very dysfunctional. Now, are you familiar with the term that I use? This is my term and I love it. It's over-indulgent negligence, and that's what we're really talking about. By being over-indulgent in your children, you are actually being negligent, because you are not teaching them a dang thing. And that's part of parenting; it's being a coach, a cheerleader, a teacher. Not just handing out--you're not a welfare system, you know what I mean?

Lee: Right No, that makes a lot of sense. You're basically connecting the dots, that this parenting is going to cause all sorts of trouble for these kids, in the job market, and in every aspect of their life. What's going to happen to these kids as they grow up and they become parents? What kind of parents are they becoming?

Eddie: In writing the book "Bullying", that's exactly what I explained to people. Bullying is not an incident. What we're talking about today is not instances. It's a systemic problem, and it's generational, and it will get handed down. We have to address it now, and hopefully people that are listening will address it and change their parenting styles, where people start taking ownership. We teach our kids cause and consequence.

What we have to do is...kids don't have problem-solving skills. That's one of the reasons they commit suicide today more than ever before. That's the number one cause of death in certain age groups. We need to give children the opportunity to assess, to evaluate, to make decisions, to develop problem-solving skills. That's part of fostering independence, too. But will they be good parents? No, it's getting passed down.

I was just speaking with the Las Vegas School District last week, and one of the things that everyone talks about in doing the programs on bullying, for example, is that they have a bigger problem with the parents than they do with the kids. If the parents would get out of the way, there would be a chance that we could work better with the kids. That's what teachers and bus drivers are saying. So, if these children are learning this, they're learning not to be good parents. We need good role models, and I don't think they're getting it right now.

I just want to say, this "me" generation thing, this entitlement, it's very disturbing to me. I was just speaking in Texas last month, and it was interesting that somebody gave an example of getting on an elevator--you know how you say "Would you press number six for me?" or floor 11, and people just hit the button--he said that twice in one week two different people said, "You can press your own button," or "You can press it when I get off." It's almost instinctual to just say "OK" and you just press it. But there is a lack of contribution; we're not teaching our kids to give back. It's reciprocal.

Lee: Wow.

Edie: So, we just give, but we don't give our kids the opportunity to experience the joy of giving back, and being a contributing member of society. That's an innate need, to contribute. And we're not allowing that opportunity. And that's going to be a serious challenge.

Lee: Now let me ask you, when you look at couples that are parenting in this way, is it usually one parent more than the other, or is this a team approach to parenting? What are you seeing?

Edie: There's no one way. There are thirty shades of gray on that. There are couples that are united in their pathology, there's no question about it. And then, there are other couples that are very, very divided, and it often leads to a divorce. A lot of divorces are over differences in child-rearing.

Lee: Yeah, I agree.

Edie: Yeah. And that's why blended families are so difficult. Because you're mixing two different systems. You've got to think "systems". The family is a system.

Lee: OK. Well, let's flip this upside down. Let's say you're listening to this, and you decide, "You know, I don't need to be engaging in this kind of parenting anymore. I want to change it with my family and my kids." How do you do that? Once you're in this system, how do you turn it around and get back on track?

Edie: You know what? The first thing that came to mind is get out of their way sometimes. Yes, be there. Certainly, have an open system of communication where they feel comfortable coming to you. But, I remember when my son was about 18 months old. He used to get up and get himself breakfast, because he got up before I did. As you know,

I don't get up early. And my theory has always been--my bachelor's happens to be in occupational therapy, which fosters independence. Here's the theory. When a child can pick up the knife, they are ready to butter their own bread. Get out of their way.

Let them explore and experience their power and mastery and control in their environment. Give them that opportunity. If you step in when they are capable of taking that next step, you are sabotaging their belief in themselves. You are sabotaging their self-esteem. You are sabotaging their potential success in life. And I slowed down so that everybody listening gets it, because I see that happening all the time. It's an atrocity. And parents need to be accountable. And they need to have kids be accountable. It is about cause and consequence.

Let kids have choices that are appropriate for their age, and let them experience the natural consequences. If you didn't work hard, you don't get the reward. It goes back. I think, the book "The Little Red Hen" should be a classic. You don't plant the corn, and you don't nurture it, and you don't foster it, honey, you don't eat the bread. That was my mother's favorite fairy tale for me. That is what families, parents and society have to get back to. They must.

Lee: Right. OK, Edie, but here's where the rubber meets the road for me. Let's say, you've been doing this over-indulgent, negligent parenting, all of that. And now, you've got teenagers, and you want to reverse course. But they're dependent. They're not people that have been trained to butter their own bread. How do you fix it in mid-stream here, where you've already got a history with these kids?

Lee: I want to say, "It's too late", but that feels kind of defeatist, so I will answer it another way. In a sense, you have to catch it early. I actually developed a complete character building program for children for three to nine. Kids have to get the right message at the right time for right thinking. But I hear what you're saying. After the fact, you've messed up, you didn't know this stuff, God forgives, I forgive, we all forgive, let's move on.

What do you do? The other adage is "It's never too late." I would just say, I'd be very open and say, "You know I feel like I messed up with you guys a bit. I have given you too much, and we're going to change things." And I would introduce the change. I wouldn't just change. I would let them know what's going on. Just like if you're a manager at a corporate structure, you talk about the change and then you change. Now, is there going to be resistance to change? Heck yes! It's like taking candy from a baby. They like the old system better.

But I think slowly and surely, if you make them more accountable, and you give them understanding, and you understand their resistance but you do not bend to it, and you remain very consistent--and I think it's asking a lot of questions. Everyone needs to be asked questions. There is that internal justice system. If they answer the question, then you're allies, and it breaks down the polarity and the resistance. "Do you really think that it's fair for you to be doing this, this, and this, when we had this understanding?"

The other thing I would do--and I talk to teachers about this--is have a one page contract. Parents should have it, too where you have very clear expected behaviors and values, and you work it together, and they sign it. Then, when they violate it, it takes away from "you against me," and that oppositional positioning, and it allows you to say, "Hey, wait a minute, you broke our agreement, this is not OK. And if I break it, it's not OK, either."

There are consequences to this, and there should be consequences spelled out ahead of time. There again, they have a choice. If they want to come home late, that's just fine. You come home, but for every five minutes you are late, you're going to lose a Saturday night out. Now, if they're having so much fun and they want to come home a half-hour late, and lose six Saturday nights out, that's their choice. But they experience the consequences.

Now, if you say it and you don't do it, then you're a liar, and you have absolutely no credibility. The very worst thing you can do as a parent is say you're going to do something and not be true to your word, because your word then means nothing. You lose all power and credibility in any relationship.

Lee: Right. Right. You've got a powerful message, Edie. I really appreciate you taking the time to share it with us here on Stay Happily Married. Thank you so much.

A: Thank you so much for having me. Hopefully, our paths will cross again. You take care. Have a wonderful day.

Lee: Edie, thank you so much for talking with us and for being on the show today. To find out more about Edie Raether, you can visit her website at raether, it's R-A-E-T-H-E-R dot com. Raether.com. Or you can call at 704-658-8997. Edie has more information about child entitlement, and about bullying, on her site at stopbullyingwithedie--that'e E-D-I-E--stopbullyingwithedie.com

Thank you so much for joining us this week. I hope that you will join us again next week. We always love hearing from you. If you have feedback about this episode or any of our shows, please call our comment line at 919-256-3083, or email us at comments@stayhappilymarried.com. I'm Lee Rosen. Until next time, stay happily married.

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