

How To Feel More Connected To Your Spouse And Kids



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Hi there. Welcome to the *Design Your Dream Life* podcast. My name is Natalie Bacon, and I'm an advanced certified mindfulness life coach as well as a wife and mom. If you're here to do the inner work and grow, I can help. Let's get started.

Hello my friends. How are you? It is the end of the first month of 2023. I have to say that I am so delighted about this year and what's to come in part just because I love the number 23. My birthday is May 23rd. I've always loved the number 23. So it feels really expansive and energizing when I think about this entire year being the year of my favorite number. So that is what I am thinking about.

Today I want to talk with you about how to feel more connected to your spouse and to your kids. I actually struggled with what to call this episode, but I think that this title will be the most helpful way for you to use this new tool that I am going to teach you. Before we dive into that, it would mean the world to me if you would share this podcast with one of your friends right now. You can just share the podcast in a text message.

The reason that this is so important and helpful for me is that the more we can share this work, the more people get the benefit of it, the more lives are changed. Podcasts typically grow through word of mouth. So I would so appreciate if you would help me out, help this community out, and we can grow the show together. Thank you so much in advance.

With that, let's dive into how to feel more connected to your spouse and to your kids. This is something that I coach on a lot, maybe one of the most common topics I would say. It's pretty broad. We all want to feel more connected. We don't want to feel negative emotion and fight or disagree or feel disconnected. So it's a very natural, normal human desire to want more connection. So it comes up in so many different ways.

Today, specifically, I want to talk about it in the family unit. Because I think that inside that immediate family unit with your partner or your spouse or

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your kids, you have the most likely chance of feeling disconnected because you're around these people all of the time.

This mindfulness practice, this tool that I'm going to offer to you today, I think you're really going to love it. It is going to be a simple shift that you can make in your daily life starting today that can really help you feel more connected. What it's called is knowing versus wondering. That's what I almost call this podcast, and I've decided that's not a good title. What does that even mean? But I'm going to tell you what it means now that you're already listening.

Knowing sounds like I know. Wondering sounds like I wonder, right? Pretty obvious, but I'm gonna give you some examples on how powerful this is. When we say I know, it feels very righteous and disconnecting and urgent. When we say I wonder and we genuinely mean it, it comes from curiosity, and it increases connection. So I'm gonna go through a bunch of examples here so you can see what I mean. You can start to think about how you can apply this to your life.

Let's say you have a child, and he lies. Your first thought is I know he's lying. I know, right? When you think the thought, I know he's lying, it feels disconnected. It feels urgent. It feels like I need to fix this. Something has gone wrong. I know he's doing something wrong. This shouldn't be happening. There's this immediate disconnection. It's me versus him. When your brain does this, shift into I wonder. I wonder if he lied. If so, I wonder why. I wonder what's going on for him. Why do I lie when I lie?

A lot of times when we are in I know land, we center ourselves. We think that the person is doing something at us instead of seeing that it has nothing to do with us at all. This happens a lot with our kids. We think they're lying because they want to be mean to us. So we make it really intentional on their part, and a lot of times it has more to do with their independence, their authority and agency, them learning how to navigate the world. It's not at us at all.

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When we can get into I wonder and out of I know, we can see this. I like to visualize being on the same team with my family. When I think the thought I know, it puts me against. So instead of positioning yourself against with I know, position yourself next to with I wonder.

Let's say that you have two kids who are disagreeing about something, and your oldest hits your youngest. Instead of I know he hit his brother. I know he knows better. Why is he doing this? But of course, that question is asked from I know, which feels very disconnecting. It has this underlying subtext thought which is something's gone wrong. This shouldn't be happening.

Shift into I wonder. I wonder why he hit his brother. He must have a lot going on for him. Feeling that feeling and that urge and not being able to control it is very scary. I wonder how he feels. I wonder how I can help him regulate. Shifting into I wonder will feel very connecting for everyone in the story.

So of course, you're gonna want to feel connected to the child who was hit. But oftentimes, what I find is that we feel connected to the person who was wronged or harmed, but then we blame the person who did the harming, and we feel disconnected to them. That's not useful either, particularly when we're the parent, right? We want to feel connected to all of our kids and really help them. So we want to go into I wonder.

Now, please don't take this to mean that you don't have boundaries and remove them from each other. Of course, you're going to do all of that. But the mindset that you want to have is I wonder. I wonder what's going on for him. I wonder why he feels so out of control. I wonder how I can support and help him. All of those thoughts are going to lead to much more empowering, connecting answers instead of I know. I know he did this wrong. I know he knows better. I know he's doing this to make his brother mad. I know, I know, I know. It's a very, very disconnecting.

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Here's another example. I know she's not going to eat dinner. This is something that comes up when I am coaching clients with kids who are picky eaters. I know she's not going to eat what I make tonight. There is this sense of it's me and what I cook for dinner against my child.

Instead, if you shift into I wonder, it sounds like I wonder how I could include her in the dinner making process to encourage her to enjoy dinner and to eat more. Or I wonder why she isn't eating. I trust that she understands her body best. I trust her, and I want to support her. I wonder how I can do a better job of that. I wonder has this like softness to it that is slower and leads to much better results.

The thing that I want to point out though is that it's not what we do on default because naturally we default to thinking that we're right and other people are wrong. This is a normal brain behavior. Because our brain is constantly trying to make sense of the world and of other people and other people's actions. So if it has a story about one of your kids or all of your kids or your marriage, anytime that your child or your spouse does something, your brain just kind of categorizes that quickly in the story.

So if your child isn't eating, and you already have the title of the story that my child is a picky eater, your brain quickly just categorizes that as part of oh, she's a picky eater. I already know what's going to happen next. This is the fast, efficient part of the brain that does this. It's useful that we can categorize things so quickly. The problem is when we do it in a way that is very disconnecting, i.e. with our families in our safe suburban homes when slowing down and using that prefrontal cortex, the slower more thoughtful part of the brain would actually be so much more helpful.

So it does take energy to do this. Again, it won't be that default way your brain responds. On default your brain wants to respond with I'm right. That makes you feel safer. To slow down and dismiss that and say huh, I wonder. It's a much slower process. Yet it leads to much better results. Because you will feel connected. You will feel like you're on the same team. It will feel very open.

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Again, I like the visual of thinking about my family and I like sitting next to each other versus me against them. So one is very connecting. The other is very disconnecting. So you'll know if you're doing this right if you genuinely feel open and curious and connected. If not, if you feel all-knowing and righteous and disconnected, and if you're in like that blame space, you're probably still in I know land.

So let's go through a couple more examples. Hopefully, this will be enough for you to start using it in your life. I would love to hear how it is going for you as well. You can email me at theteam@nataliebacon.com. I love hearing from you all as well. In Grow You, you can send me a message in ask a coach or an email as well.

So another example is, I know he left this mess for me to clean up. I don't know about you, but I can relate to this. I think this comes up in a lot of marriages where the other person does something. We immediately think that it is about us. As if Steve literally left dishes in the sink at me. Like he did this to me. He knows I don't like dishes in the sink, and he left them in the sink anyway. How could he do that? I know he left that mess for me to clean up.

That's what my default brain does. Anyone else? Is it just me? Right? So instead if I can get to I wonder. I wonder why he left them in the sink. It probably has nothing to do with me. He is probably not thinking I am going to leave these in the sink because Natalie doesn't like it. No way. He's just doing what he normally does. To him, it's not even something that crosses his mind. This is just the habit that he's in.

So if I can shift into I wonder what's going on in his mind. I wonder why he's in that habit. I wonder how it serves him better. Again, wondering what's going on for someone else and what they're thinking and how they're feeling and what they're doing can help you feel more connected, but it doesn't even mean that you have to agree with the other person or change the way that you're doing it. It's simply to gain more awareness that your way is just one way of many ways.

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Particularly in the family relationship when we have a tendency to think that our way is the best way and the right way, this tool can be so powerful to see that there is no one right way. Even if that means that the house is really messy. It doesn't mean that a clean house or a tidy house is the better right way. It just means it's the way that you prefer. Part of navigating life as a family is seeing how you can come to compromises and how you can work well together on a team.

So it's deciding how you want to think and feel and how you want to show up as a woman, as a wife, as a mom. For me, I feel so much better in my roles when I think I wonder. I wonder what's going on for him. I wonder how different his mind is than mine. I'm so glad it's so different. I'm so glad all of us are so different. Then when I zoom way out, and I gain a broader perspective, I'm so appreciative of our differences. So I have to remind my brain that that is a good thing. Get into I wonder land and stay out of I know land.

The examples that I've given so far have really been when someone does something that we don't like. So, child lies, one child hits another child, child isn't eating enough for dinner, spouse leaves a mess on the floor. These are all things that maybe would create some annoyance for us because of the way that we would think about it. But you can also use this tool just when you want to increase connection, not specifically when they're doing something wrong. You know, "wrong". Wrong in your mind.

So for example, let's say that you want to feel more connected to your kids, and you notice that they like to watch a lot of movies and play a lot of video games. You don't like those things. You are struggling to feel connected to them, and your brain keeps going to I know my kids only like to be in front of screens. So it's so hard for me to connect to them. Right? That thought feels very stuck. It feels like it's the truth, but it's just one interpretation. It's just one thought and one way of looking at your kid's behavior.

So what I like to do here is use the I wonder tool and say maybe that's right, or maybe not. What else might they like to do? I wonder how I can

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sweeten my offer. I wonder what I could learn about them and about their other interests. I wonder what's available to us that I am not even seeing yet. So you're just using the tool of I wonder to get to know your kids more.

I'll never forget. I was coaching someone who had been married for like over 20 years. She sort of felt like she knew her spouse so well. They had different interests. It sort of just felt a little bit stuck, right. They weren't like going out and doing things, nothing was majorly wrong. But she really wanted to increase that connection.

I said that she could use this tool of wondering. Wondering about her spouse in a way that she never had before. Wondering about his future. What does he want for his future? What does he like and dislike or want to do or not do that she doesn't even know about? What could she wonder about that she doesn't yet know? What is going on with him that she could learn more about?

I sort of like to think about people as always growing and evolving and changing. Because of that, even if you've been married for 60 years, there is always more to wonder about. If this is hard to wrap your mind around, just think about this upcoming year. We have no idea what's to come in the rest of this year.

So you could wonder about a person who you've known for a long time, and what they're going to experience for this year. I always think back to the start of the pandemic a few years ago, and how none of us could have known or predicted any of that. How we all had different experiences and reactions to it and different circumstances that happened and just so much that was unknown at that time. So no matter how much we think we know, there is still a completely blank future ahead of us. Because of that, no matter how long we've known someone, we can find space to wonder about them.

I think this is true, not just with our spouses, but with our kids as well. As a mom, it can feel like we know our kids better than they know themselves.

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Yet if we make space in our hearts to really wonder about them, I wonder how they're going to experience this year. I wonder what challenges they're going to have. I wonder what successes they're going to have. I wonder what their top three emotions for this year will be.

We can wonder about them and their journey. I like to think about their lives as a movie. I don't know what the movie is going to show for this next year. So I can wonder about that I can wonder about what kind of mom I want to be in their movie. That puts me into a much more connected, supportive, loving place. Instead of oh, I know where this is going. I know what they're going to do. I know how this is gonna go. I already know. It is quicker, but it is a little bit dismissive.

So when you do this, one thing that I want to mention here that can kind of trips some people up is knowing that when you're really using this tool effectively, I wonder feels really good. It feels curious and connecting and open.

So I was using this tool once with a client for the first time. Her, I think, three year old, three or four year old was having a really hard time during nighttime routine. When she went to I wonder, her brain still made her child's actions mean something about her. That felt bad.

So if you use the I wonder tool and it feels bad, it's probably a sign that you're still a little bit closed off. So you want to open up to wondering truly what it's like for her. Not what it's like for you in relation to her, but genuinely what it's like to be three and navigating bedtime and having these big emotions and not knowing how to articulate her needs and get what she wants and also be independent. It's hard. It's hard for humans at every age.

I think as adults, we tend to forget that about kids because we think oh my gosh, well I would go back to that age and get taken care of. That sounds great. But the truth is when you are that age, that prefrontal brain isn't even developed enough for you to make thoughtful, wise decisions. You have all

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of these emotions, and no coping skills. No way to process them. So it's just as hard to be three, to be 10, to be 30, to be 50, to be 90. It's just a different flavor of hard.

When we shift into I wonder, and we truly wonder about their experience, it feels really open and connecting. Even if you get to a place where you're seeing oh, I actually just have no idea what it's like to be them. That is more grounding and connecting than oh, well I know they have it so easy. Or I wonder and thinking you know what it must be like. Does that make sense? Hopefully that makes sense.

So, the key here is to catch yourself when you are thinking I know, and it's disconnecting you and to shift and to practice managing your mind to shift into I wonder. Use this practice with your family. I promise you. It has helped me so much in my life and my client's lives. Give it a try. Let me know what you think. Take care my friend.

If you loved this podcast I invite you to check out Grow You my mindfulness community for moms where we do the inner work together. Head on over to nataliebacon.com/coaching to learn more.