

PARENTING ON CUE

with **Queenie Tan**



POC 140: 'Be good, don't be bad': why this isn't the best thing to say to our children.

Welcome back to the Parenting on Cue Podcast! Today, I'm going to share something that I just recently figured out. So I'm going to give you the scenario, when we are about to drop off our children at school or daycare, or leave them with someone, or walk out of the house, we tend to say something like "okay guys, be good" or "don't be bad." And we say this a lot, and I think we don't really think about this. I mean, I've been struggling with this for the longest time because for a while, when my boys are younger, I used to tell them to be good. But the thing is, what does that actually mean? What does it mean to be good? Like their standard of good and my standard of good is different because everybody defines good behavior differently.

And really, if they're not good, does that really mean that they're bad? That's not exactly what I want them to think as well. So I have been struggling for a long time to figure out what to say, like I mean, it's better to not say anything than to say something really stupid like "be good, don't be bad" because this is really vague. And It's not exactly helpful at all.

So there's a few things... I've done my research and my observation. And there's a few things that I notice people doing. So when I was growing up in church, we used to make these bracelets with WWJD on it. And it means What Would Jesus Do. And it's to remind us to be good. It just reminds us to do good because it assumes that Jesus does good things. So that's how people who go to church would do it. They would remind themselves to do what Jesus would do. If you watch TVs, they might say things like "don't do what I wouldn't do." What the hell does that even mean? How does your child know what you wouldn't do? Do you know what I mean? It's not like they could sit down and analyze everything that you do and don't do. They just copy a lot of what we do.

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So one of the things that I've figured out is that instead of saying "be good, don't be bad" or What Would Jesus Do which totally doesn't sit well with me because it's just one of those things that doesn't quite fit into my environment right now, or "don't do what I wouldn't do."

Aside from these few things, I think that another possibility we can consider is to say "be yourself." In that way, when children have to make decisions... I mean, we don't all make good decisions like when I was younger, I made a whole slew of really bad decisions. But at least, I think it will help them feel a bit less like they have to be somebody else, like WWJD, it makes them feel like they have to be like Jesus. And if they don't, they fall short. If you say don't do what I wouldn't do, it means that they have to be like you. And if you say "don't be bad, be good" then it makes you feel like if they're bad, then it's not acceptable.

But the thing is we do make bad decisions. Our children have to experiment to figure out what is right for them, and what isn't. So I think the best thing to say would be "be yourself." That way, I think, they can learn to... And I mean, a lot of parents will say "wait a minute, be themselves, they will go crazy if I ask them to be themselves. I don't want them to be themselves."

If you catch yourself saying that, then I think there's a lot of work to do because I think that a lot of us are brought up trying to be somebody else. So we have our facades up, we build walls around us so people don't really know who we really are. And when we're with different people, we behave in a way that will carry favor... some people say "kiss ass," carry favor to get approval. A lot of that is very external. It's about external validation. And it's about us always trying to be somebody we're not. And I think that that takes a lot of emotional and mental energy out of us and our children under those circumstances.

But if we can learn to be more authentically us, to show up in a more authentic way, and attract people who also show up in their authentic way, then we won't have to waste so much time trying to be somebody else. And we can spend a lot of that energy checking in with ourselves, to see if something that we're about to do sits well with us.

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And that's definitely something that I want my boys to do, but the hardest part here is for me to have to learn to do that because like a lot of you, I was also brought up in a place that was very very dependent on external validation, external approval. I mean, when I was in school, I even have to ask permission to go to the toilet. And if I went to the toilet too often because I'm nervous, then I would have my toilet privileges taken away from me. And so, there's so much external control for me to learn to show up in a more authentic way was hard. It was really hard. But it's something that I've been working on for the past few years. And I have a really close friend helping me out with that, she's a really good coach. And I'm hoping that if I can learn to show up more authentically, then my children can also learn to show up more authentically. And that, they won't have to live a life where most of it is about external validation, about trying to be what everybody else wants them to be. So from now on, if I have to say anything to my boys when I'm leaving, it would be "be yourself."

Again, this is a really huge concept, of all my years teaching and being a parent, I've only just got really curious about this whole concept of being more authentic and internal validation. I've only recently discovered this about myself. And I so want this for my children and for all of us. So I hope that this is going to be something that you can ponder about, get curious about. And if you found any other way to say it differently, please share it on my podcast show notes, and let's have a look at how all of us are saying it.

Thank you so much for listening. Until next week, remember, happy and confident parents have happy and confident children.