

Good Inside - Dr. Becky Kennedy

“So many of us had parents who led with judgment rather than curiosity, criticism instead of understanding, punishment instead of discussion.”

Summary: this deeply powerful parenting book anchors on 10 key principles:



1. **Good Inside:** you and your children are fundamentally good inside. At our core we are compassionate, loving and generous. This is the most important principle.
2. **Two Things are True:** we don't have to choose between two supposedly oppositional realities. Two different realities can both be valid, e.g. we can be firm *and* playful; be enforcer *and* loving.
3. **Know Your Job:** roles & responsibilities are important. Parents have the job of establishing safety through boundaries, validation and empathy. Children have the job of exploring and learning, through experiencing and expressing their emotions.
4. **The Early Years Matter:** the way parents interact with kids in their early years (0-3) forms the blueprint they take with them into the world. We are helping them learn to regulate their emotions.
5. **It's Not Too Late:** to repair and reconnect with your kids; our brains can rewire themselves and change our trajectory.
6. **Resilience > Happiness:** we have to feel *safe* before we can feel *happy*. Regulation first, happiness second.
7. **Behavior is a Window:** a child's behavior is a clue into their feelings, thoughts, urges, sensations, and unmet needs. Resist the temptation to judge a child by their tantrum.
8. **Reduce Shame, Increase Connection:** connecting to our kids is how they learn to regulate their emotions and feel good inside. It is more important to *understand* than to convince.
9. **Tell the Truth:** to talk with our kids about important, vulnerable hard truths requires us to tolerate our own emotions. Kids are often more terrified of being *confused* & *alone* than the truth.
10. **Self-Care:** don't feel guilty for taking time for yourself; self-sacrifice can create resentment and deplete your energy.



Dr. Becky Kennedy

Author bio: Becky Kennedy is a clinical psychologist, bestselling author, and mom of three, named “*The Millennial Parenting Whisperer*” by TIME Magazine, who’s rethinking the way we raise our children.

She specializes in thinking deeply about what’s happening for kids and translating these ideas into simple, actionable strategies for parents to use in their homes. Dr. Becky’s goal is to **empower parents to feel sturdier and more equipped to manage the challenges of parenting**. Her approach has attracted 1.8m Instagram followers, along with a loyal audience which catapulted her to the #1 “Kids & Family” podcast.

Dr. Becky received a BA in Psychology and Human Development, Phi Beta Kappa and summa cum laude, from Duke University and a PhD in Clinical Psychology from Columbia University.

Dr. Kennedy, 40, lives in an apartment on the Upper West Side with her husband and their sons, 10 and 5, and their daughter, 7. Becky and her husband [like making pancakes](#) for their kids on the weekend. They also enjoy watching Patriots football, and playing Rat-A-Tat Cat and Boggle.

2-5-10-20: a distillation exercise aimed to increase clarity via constraint.

- **This book in 2 words:** Reject Behaviorism.
- **This book in 5 words:** Embrace duality; everyone's good inside.
- **This book in 10 words:** Don't judge a child by their tantrums; instead, seek connection.
- **This book in 20 words:** Emotional safety first, happiness second. Children learn resilience via boundaries. Kneel down, validate their emotions, reinforce boundaries, give big hug.

Good Inside is divided into two parts:

1. Parenting Principles
2. Building Connection and Addressing Behaviors

Part 1 is about learning the principles. Part 2 is about applying the principles. I'm going to do this book summary in reverse so you can see some of the principles in action, then we'll cover the 10 principles.



My #1 highest-value takeaway from this book: **don't give your child timeouts**. Though counterintuitive, a timeout tells a dysregulated child that you are NOT there for them. You are shutting them out at the *precise moment* they need you most. Exiling them to their rooms without addressing their underlying emotions teaches them to **repress in isolation** which can lead to unhealthy behavior later in life. Timeouts solve the parents problem (make it stop), but aggravates the child's problem (emotional dysregulation).

Top 3 most effective parenting phrases I learned from this book:

Situation 1: my child wants something that isn't in their best interest.

"I hear you. You're mad because you don't want to wear your jacket outside. Right now, two things are true: you have to wear a jacket if you're going outside . . . and also, you're allowed to be mad at me about it. You don't have to like wearing it." [Principle 2: [Two Things are True](#)]

Situation 2: conflict is escalating, maybe we're at a park, and now I'm getting triggered.

"I do not appreciate that language . . . you must be really upset—maybe about some other things too—to be talking to me like this. I need a moment to calm my body . . . maybe you do too. Let's take five deep breaths together, then let's talk." [Principle 9: [Tell the Truth](#), and 10: [Self-Care](#)]

Situation 3: full meltdown mode, change of environment needed, pulling the ripcord.

“I’m picking you up and carrying you to your room. You’re not in trouble. I’ll sit with you. You’re a good kid having a hard time.” [Principle 6: [Resilience > Happiness](#), and 7: [Behavior is a Window](#)]

Introduction: Where do we begin with Dr. Becky Kennedy!

“What do I recommend? First and foremost, an understanding that behaviors are only the tip of the iceberg, and that below the surface is a child’s entire internal world, just begging to be understood.”

We might adapt the old adage—*‘Don’t judge a book by its cover’*—to capture Dr. Kennedy’s philosophy:

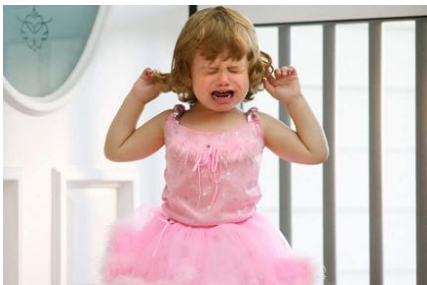
Don’t judge a child by their tantrums.

Many parents—consciously or subconsciously—subscribe to **Behaviorism**. Behaviorism is the theory that human and animal behavior can be explained in terms of conditioning—without appeal to thoughts or feelings. These parents see behavior as the **measure of who our kids are**, rather than using behavior as **a clue to what our kids might need**. Oversimplified, their mental model might be:

If the child is bad, you scold/punish them.

If the child is good, you praise/reward them.

No need to consider the child’s thoughts and emotions. . . they will learn like a dog.



“Differentiating who someone is from what they do is key to creating interventions that preserve your relationship while also leading to impactful change.”

The Good Inside philosophy is basically the opposite of Behaviorism. As Dr. Kennedy says, *“My approach promotes firm boundaries, parental authority, and sturdy leadership, all while maintaining positive relationships, trust, and respect.”* . . . A key piece of the puzzle: understanding.

“Understanding has one goal: connection. And because connecting to our kids is how they learn to regulate their emotions and feel good inside, understanding will come up over and over again as a goal of communication.”



Parents often limit their options with “binary” thinking, e.g. good vs. bad, well-behaved vs. bad-behaved, extrovert vs. introvert, tough love vs. soft love. We create an artificial duality: basically we see the world in black & white, and we consider things tradeoffs that aren’t actually tradeoffs. The good news is, **it is possible to have both:**

“I believe you can be firm AND warm, boundaried AND validating, focused on connection while acting as a sturdy authority.”

Stop thinking in binary terms: children, and life, are more complex than that!

“So many of us had parents who led with judgment rather than curiosity, criticism instead of understanding, punishment instead of discussion.” ← 😞

This is my go-to tactic when our 3 year old daughter throws a tantrum. It works +90% of the time and has brought me immeasurably closer to my daughter. It is crazy effective. Sometimes my wife Kristen coaches me through it when I’m dysregulated. 😊 I use this tactic every day.

Tactic

1

Deep breath, kneel down: The next time your child loses their \$hit, say to yourself “My child is a good kid having a hard time. Their meltdown is not a reflection of who they are, or my parenting. The number one thing I can do for them right now is to 1) kneel or squat to get down on their level, 2) validate their emotion, and 3) give them a hug.”

Here is how an actual tantrum played out yesterday at 5:15pm right before dinner:

Daughter: “Dada, I want [yogurt melties](#).”

Dada: “Davie, it’s dinner time and I’m putting your meal together right now. Yogurt melties are a snack, not dinner food. Maybe we can have some tomorrow.”

Daughter: “But I . . . WANT. . . MELTIES!!!” [begins sobbing] “Why does Shep get to have them?!”

Dada: “Shep is a baby. He eats different things at different times than you. You are a big girl, and you get to have. . . *this yummy dinner!*”

DBT VENTURES

- Daughter: [blood curdling scream → full meltdown mode]
- Dada: [kneeling down right in front of her] “You must be pretty disappointed to not get melties. You might also be feeling a bit jealous that Shep gets melties. Is that right?”
- Daughter: “Yeah.”
- Dada: “I would feel pretty disappointed too if I didn’t get something I wanted. Thanks for sharing how you’re feeling. I’m here for you.” [hug]
- Davie: [long exhale]

Emphasis on getting down on their level. Even though kneeling or squatting isn’t particularly comfortable, it brings us eye-to-eye. Instead of being a 6’1” looming parent, I’m now 35 inches tall and face-to-face.

10 Principles: *Good Inside* is based on 10 Principles. Let’s review each one, along with a few quotes:

Principle

1

Good Inside: You and your children are fundamentally good inside. At your core, you and your kids are compassionate, loving and generous. This is the most important principle. It is the foundation of the other nine principles.



*“All good decisions start with feeling secure in ourselves and in our environment, and nothing feels more secure than being **recognized for the good people we truly are**. So if you remember nothing else from this book, remember that. You are good inside. Your child is good inside.”*

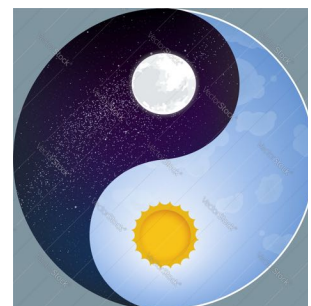
Principle

2

Two Things are True: We don’t have to choose between two supposedly oppositional realities. Two different realities can both be valid, e.g. we can be firm and playful; be enforcer and loving. Dispense with binary thinking and false dichotomies.

*“We don’t have to choose between two supposedly oppositional realities. We can avoid punishment and see improved behavior, **we can parent with a firm set of expectations and still be playful, we can create and enforce boundaries and show our love**, we can take care of ourselves and our children. And similarly, we can do what’s right for our family and our kids can be upset; we can say no and care about our kids’ disappointment.”*

Also applies to marriage: “A research-backed approach to successful marriage developed by psychologists John and Julie Gottman, is accepting that two perspectives are valid.”



Principle

3

Know Your Job: Roles & responsibilities are important. Parents have the job of establishing safety through boundaries, validation and empathy. Children have the job of exploring and learning through experiencing and expressing their emotions.



*“Kids need to learn what they are capable of, what is safe, what their role in the family is, how much autonomy they have, and **what happens when they try new things**. They do this by exploring—testing out boundaries, experimenting with new skills, playing with others—but also by challenging their parents, asking for what they want, and, sometimes, “acting out.”*

*“Boundaries are not what we tell kids not to do; **boundaries are what we tell kids we will do**. Boundaries embody your authority as a parent and don’t require your child to do anything.”*

Principle

4

The Early Years Matter: The way parents interact with kids in their early years (0-3) forms the blueprint they take with them into the world. We are helping them learn to regulate their emotions.

*“Our kids should not dictate our boundaries and **we should not dictate their feelings**.”*

*“In this two-story-house analogy, **the parent is, basically, a staircase**. Their primary function is to start linking a child’s downstairs brain (overwhelming feelings) to their upstairs brain (self-awareness, regulation, planning, decision-making). Knowing your job is fundamental to this goal.”*



Principle

5

It Is Not Too Late: It is never too late to repair and reconnect with your kids; our brains can rewire themselves and change our trajectory. Early is better, but late is okay.



*“We’ve touched on this already, but it bears repeating: our earliest relationships influence **what parts of us feel lovable, what parts we look to shut down, and what parts we feel ashamed of.** In other words, children’s experiences with their parents in their earliest years impact how **they think about themselves**, what they learn to expect of others, what feels safe and good, and what feels threatening and bad.”*

Principle

6

Resilience > Happiness: We have to feel safe before we can feel happy. When a child is dysregulated, they feel emotionally unsafe. Therefore: regulation first, happiness second.

*“We may think we’re asking our kids to end screen time or saying no to a later bedtime, but children don’t take in these specifics; **they take in whether it’s safe**, in any given relationship, to have the desires and feelings that lead to difficult moments.”*



Principle

7

Behavior is a Window: A child’s behavior is a clue into their feelings, thoughts, urges, sensations, and unmet needs. Resist the temptation to judge a child by their tantrum.



*“If we don’t explicitly recognize the feelings underneath our kids’ behaviors and show them that we love them even when they’re acting out, they will **collapse behavior and feelings into one.** They will learn that attachment security depends on disavowing the feelings under the behaviors, leading to longer-term problematic relationship patterns.”*

Principle

8

Reduce Shame, Increase Connection: Connecting with our kids is how they learn to regulate their emotions and feel good inside. It is more important to *understand* them than *convince* them.

As psychologist Richard Schwartz, the creator of IFS, writes, “Children have a developmental tendency to **translate experience into identity**: I am not loved becomes I am unlovable, and a bad thing happened to me becomes I am bad.”

“Understanding and convincing are two diametrically opposed ways of approaching other people, so a powerful first step in any interaction is to **notice which mode you’re in**.”



Principle

9

Tell the Truth: To talk with our kids about important, vulnerable hard truths requires us to tolerate our own emotions. Kids are often more terrified of being confused and alone than the truth itself.



“I often think that parenting is really an exercise in our own development and growth; when we have kids, we are confronted with **so many truths about ourselves**, our childhoods, and our relationships with our families of origin.”

Principle

10

Self-Care: Don’t feel guilty for taking time for yourself; self-sacrifice can create resentment and deplete your energy. To be the best parent (and partner, for that matter), you need to prioritize: activities that recharge you, sufficient sleep, eating healthy, drinking more water than you think you need.

*“Yes, I’ve done lots of things I wish I hadn’t. I’ve behaved in ways I’m not proud of. Those are all things I did. **That’s not who I am.**”*

*This difference doesn’t let me off the hook; this difference leaves me on the hook, because it is the only way I can hold myself accountable to make changes. **I am a good person who has done not-so-good things.** I am still a good person. I am good inside, I have always been good inside, I will remain good inside.”*

