

Liz Wiltsie: Today, I get to welcome my friend, Nic Strack. Nic is a Whole Human Parenting Coach, supporting parents to honor and embrace the fullness of their own and their child's humanity. Their work is based on radical responsibility and exploring one's life through the perspective of the Six C's of Bespoke Parenting framework they created. The foundation of their work is based on this truth: the relationship you have with your Self defines the relationship you have with your child. Nic, I'm so excited you're here.

Nic Strack: Thank you for having me, Liz Wiltsie.

Liz Wiltsie: [laughs]. So Nic, I asked you to come here because I think there's.... Not only are there parents in the workplace, obviously.

Nic Strack: Yup.

Liz Wiltsie: But I think there's so much crossover between the ways that we invisibilize our own needs both as parents and at work.

Nic Strack: Yes.

Liz Wiltsie: And so I'm hoping you can talk to me about your Six C's Framework and how you work it in real life.

Nic Strack: Okay. Yay, yay, yay! All right. So, to everyone who's listening, I'm going to share just the Six C's and I'm going to let y'all know that you can find the accompanying questions with each of the C's on my Instagram. So the six C's are Compass, Conditioning, Context, Competence, Capacity, and Community. And basically, I have that this for me has been a really supportive.... I now visualize it as a pyramid. It's been a really supportive framework to support me in orienting myself to myself.

So like, "Where am I at? What do I have going on in this moment? What are my values? What guides the decisions that I make?" 'Cause of the way that my brain sorts information [laughs]. Like, to sort through different information that I have about my present moment experience with the intention of acknowledging the truth of where I'm at right now, and then also deciding, "Okay given that, what now?" So, it's a tool for self-awareness as well as a helpful way for me to orient myself toward, "Okay, this is where I am, what now? What next?"

Liz Wiltsie: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Help me with what that looks like in practice. What does that look like in a regular interaction with you and your four-year-old child, right?

Nic Strack: Yes.

Liz Wiltsie: Is that right?

Nic Strack: My four-year-old child. Well, currently I think some of the biggest flags for me of when I am starting to get out of alignment with my values will happen when I'm trying to force something to happen, when I feel...there's like a physical experience that I get in my body when I am out of alignment, when I'm trying to coerce my child or manipulate them in some way. All of the things that I get up to that don't ... Basically, that just feel icky in my body. I have cultivated a practice of being able to slow down in those moments and recognize like, "What's actually happening right now?"

A story that I tell sometimes is... so Unicorn is my four-year-old child. Last year, I don't know, they like threw a bowl of cereal on the ground or something. They were having feelings, they threw the cereal on the ground and I was just like, "Clean that up." And I got all like big and scary and like, "Clean that up!" And when they wouldn't I recognize "Whatever is happening in me right now is not actually about what's happening right now." So I paused my interaction with them. I basically stopped talking for a bit so I could give myself a little space to calm down. And then I help them clean up their stuff and I apologize for getting all big and scary. And later when I thought about that interaction, I recognized that there was a degree of my past coming into the present of times when I had felt unheard, unseen, unacknowledged in what I was asking for from somebody else. When they weren't giving me that witnessing or they weren't ... Essentially, when they weren't acknowledging my authority and doing what I asked, I was like, "Well then I'm going to try to control you even harder."

There are like so many different pieces in the C's that, that would touch on, but that's a way for me to be like, "Okay, this is the experience I had and what influenced how I got to that moment." And then not just stopping there, but being like, "Okay, and what if a moment like that happens again? What kinds of different ways of responding do I want to experiment with?" Because getting big and scary is not aligned with my integrity for how I want to show up as a parent.

Liz Wiltsie: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So one of the things I know you talk about a lot is sovereignty. For folks who don't know what that means or have an idea of like, "I think I know what sovereignty is." What does it mean for individuals, and particularly for parents and kids?

Nic Strack: I'm still figuring out how to explain my understanding of sovereignty in words that actually align with what I have. Words are so important to me. So the definition that I use is "self-governing", where I am sovereign, I am self-governing. And I think of sovereignty and responsibility as going together a lot. I am self-governing and I'm responsible for naming my wants and needs and going after having them met, and for attending to my own emotions and my relationships with other people.

As it relates to sovereignty in the parent-child dynamic, I think that a lot of the ways in which mainstream culture has perpetuated a squashing of sovereignty when it comes to children, or a disregard of it, or a bypassing of it, it's in holding children as less than, as

incapable, as little beans that need to be taught exactly how to do things so that they could do it right. As opposed to coming from this perspective of "You are a brilliant, unique human, you came into this world whole and magnificent and innately worthy." And what does it take for me to show up in my own innate worthiness and with regard for my full humanity and also meet yours too? With the added layer of, and you're dependent on me to get your needs met. And I don't necessarily celebrate when you're throwing food at the walls, right? [laughs] Just all of those layers.

Liz Wiltsie: All of these things are true at once.

Nic Strack: Yeah.

Liz Wiltsie: The other thing that you mention that I think has so much application in the workplace as well is the idea of the contempt of control or the contempt of coercion, what that looks like. Can you speak to that a little bit?

Nic Strack: Oh, yes, I can [laughs].

Liz Wiltsie: [laughs]

Nic Strack: A lot of lived experience with it. So I love James-Olivia Chu Hillman's definition of contempt. They defined it as "being a disregard for my and/or the other's power, dignity, humanity, and sovereignty." And so as that relates to the contempt of control. Often what's happening is there's this phrase that parents say, which is, "You're not listening." And I have that, that's not necessarily what's happening, what I have is, "I'm not getting what I want and I'm trying to make it your fault by saying you're not listening." And so there's this element of, when a parent is trying to get what they want and they're not getting it from their kid, sometimes the impulse is to turn to controlling the child to make them give the parent what they want and perhaps not as often acknowledging like, "Me as the parent, I'm not getting a need met right now or I'm not having a want being carried through and what is my plan to take care of myself in the face of not having this thing be done by my child?"

So often I think that ... And again, even in my own self I do this. I'm just like, "Hey, are you willing to ...?" So we use language of, "Are you willing to." I've been moving away from demands in terms of how I communicate with everybody in my life, but it's just like, "Hey, are you willing to put your toys away right now?" And if they have a "no" then being like, "Let's talk about it because these toys will be put away at the end of the day. That's a part of how we do things in our fam, and in the culture of our community." And maybe they don't need to be put away right now just because I want them put away, or if I'm the one who wants them put away right now, maybe I'm the one who takes responsibility for doing that, instead of imposing my timeline on you.

So there's just more space in that to divest from the control of "my timeline, my want, right now." And to be like, "Oh my gosh! You're a human with your own wants and needs, and willingness, and abilities. And "What does it look like for me to meet you in those and take care of myself when you don't do the things I want, but that in the grander scheme of things, don't actually fucking matter."

Like the other day, they wanted to eat this particular snack and I didn't want them to eat it because of the processed sugar that's in it. And they were like, "I'm going to eat it anyways." And I was like, "Okay, I'm just not available to you as a resource to help you open it or eat it." And they were like, "Okay." And they figured out their own way and they ate the thing and I didn't punish them and we just went on with our day. But that was like a first for me. Often it ends up turning into a battle of some sort. Not a battle, but just the like, "Well, no, I don't want you to eat this. No, you don't get to eat this. Okay, no, I'm going to take this thing away." Or like, "If you have this now, then that's going to happen later." All that shit, when it's actually just like, "You know, I pay attention to the food that you eat. I don't think that this is going to be the thing that's going to set you over the edge, and what's going to take place in your body as a result of the processed sugar, so fuck it, okay."

Liz Wiltsie: You do you.

Nic Strack: Yeah, pretty much [laughs].

Liz Wiltsie: [laughs]. I'd use that on some of my friends sometimes because I have a want to be on time. Not everyone has a want to be on time. And I have spent a lot of my life getting just mad ...

Nic Strack: Yeah.

Liz Wiltsie: ... with people who don't want to be on time. There was one moment where I was like, "Okay, I'm leaving this house at this time. If you would like to ride with me, you will also be leaving this house at this time."

Nic Strack: [laughs].

Liz Wiltsie: "If you don't want to ride with me, you don't have to leave the house at this time. That's fine. Totally fine."

Nic Strack: Yes!

Liz Wiltsie: And I just was like, "Cool." And it like [laughs] ... Let it go, right?

Nic Strack: Yes.

Liz Wiltsie: Great. 'Cause, this is mine. Like my thing is not everybody's thing.

Nic Strack: Exactly. It's that responsibility piece.

Liz Wiltsie: Yeah. And so there's the other piece in there where I think a lot about how our legacies of things growing up, how we were treated as children. 'Cause like again, workplace power dynamics, a lot of our feelings about how power dynamics play out come from our childhood experiences. And so I think your work is so revolutionary in so specific ways, right? Because you've got this idea that, "No, if we imagine kids have all the same sovereignty as anybody else, that translates into what those kids look like when they grow up, right?" And even also what you look like as a parent, but like what those kids look like.

Nic Strack: I mean, I'd ask me in 20 years [laughs].

Liz Wiltsie: [laughs]. What's your hope, though, for Unicorn in this model? What do you hope that Unicorn has that maybe other people didn't?

Nic Strack: In my case, a lot of it hinges on what I didn't have that I have a want for them to have if they want it. And I think it comes down to a recognition of their sovereignty, recognizing that they're sovereign, and, whole and complete, and magnificent exactly as they are. And that they'd be able to take care of themselves in the fullness of their humanity. Like in all of the different ways that they'd be who they are, and they're going to make mistakes, and they're going to have painful feelings and they're going to do harm. And just like all of these different things that are definitely going to happen, that they're able to take care of themselves in the face of that and make conscious choices. But not necessarily that they always will, I should ... More specifically it's like, that they have the ability to reflect and take a moment, take a beat before they actually decide to be like, "What am I up to right now?" And then just build their life on the decisions that they make [laughs].

Liz Wiltsie: [laughs]. So Nic, I ask everybody, tell me what you're grappling with, or a thing that you're grappling with.

Nic Strack: Yeah. One of many.

Liz Wiltsie: [laughs].

Nic Strack: What's been up for me most recently is laying out the landscape of the many ways in which I avoid my own responsibility, which I avoid engaging it, and recognizing how deeply ingrained my avoidance is in my daily activities. It's been eye-opening and kind of torturous. Only because I've self-imposed the torture where I'm judging myself so hard for it, which hilariously judging myself is a distraction from my responsibility. It is another way that I avoid. So [laughs] ...

Liz Wiltsie: So many ways to avoid. So many [laughs].

Nic Strack: I'm familiar with many of them [laughs].

Liz Wiltsie: [laughs]. They're my friends. Thank you.

Nic Strack: [laughs].

Liz Wiltsie: Nic, so as I promised you, we would get to a point where either we were gonna talk for days or we were going to be done. So thank you so much for being with me and I very much appreciate it.

Nic Strack: Oh my god, I love this. Thank you.

Nic's currently in the process of building out a community, Nic's Nook where intentional parents and pre-parents can connect with each other and with Nic. The space will include longer form posts from Nic, conversation starters and prompts for reflection, opportunities for community members to create their own posts and more.

For folks who want to join the beta test to co-create the community, you can visit the link in Nic's Instagram bio, or, in this episode as well to apply. Applications are due by 9:00 PM. Pacific on February 19th, 2021.

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