

Ep #77 How I learned to help my ADHD child, with Eric Bjorklund

This is Episode 77. Let's begin.

Smarter Parenting welcomes you to our podcast series, The Parenting Coach for ADHD. Here to heal and elevate lives is your Parenting Coach, Siope Kinikini.

Siope Kinikini: Hey everybody, I hope everybody is doing great. I'm super excited to be here, and we're going to be talking about [Effective Praise](#). I'm here with Eric Bjorklund, the Chief Executive Officer of the Utah Youth Village. The Utah Youth Village, as you know, sponsors Smarter Parenting. Here is the most amazing fact, is that Eric actually is the creator of Smarter Parenting. Eric, thank you for being here.

Eric Bjorklund: No, thank you. It's a treat.

Siope Kinikini: I want to know more about this idea of bringing these skills online.

Eric Bjorklund: My idea was that we would take the Teaching-Family Model to the world. [The Teaching-Family Model is such a wonderful repository of information and skills on how to help kids succeed, and blossom, and thrive](#). Running an agency that helps take care of some of the kids with the most troubles in the state. We have kids who come to us from group homes and treatment foster homes. Utah Youth Village has changed the lives of thousands of children using the Teaching-Family Model.

Eric Bjorklund: So I thought, "Well, wouldn't it be nice to share this with parents of the whole world?" And I also had an experience using the Teaching-Family Model in my own home. As a matter of fact, I've used it a lot. In that setting, I thought to myself, "Well, if I was able to learn it as a dad because I'm a lawyer by trade, I'm not a social worker, and I'm not really skilled in all that stuff if you can make a lawyer be a better dad, well heck, you could make almost anybody be a better dad, right?"

Eric Bjorklund: So the idea was, "Let's share this with the world. Let's share this with parents, and let's see what happens." I mean, you had over \$20 million of research sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health to the University of Kansas back in the late 1960s that created the Teaching-Family Model. It's been tweaked, and worked on ever since, and improved, and it's just a wonderful roadmap to parenting.

Siope Kinikini: So tell me, how many children do you have?

Eric Bjorklund: I've got five.

Siope Kinikini: Five children, okay. How old were they when you started implementing these skills?

Eric Bjorklund: Okay, my oldest was 11. My second son was eight. ADHD. Then my other kids kind of go down from there. My daughter would've been six to seven-ish. My other son would've been around two. And then our tail, the youngest, wasn't here yet.

Siope Kinikini: Oh, okay. So you were a young father.

Eric Bjorklund: I was a young father.

Siope Kinikini: Young children.

Eric Bjorklund: Yup.

Siope Kinikini: And behavioral issues, and you were learning.

Eric Bjorklund: I was, yeah, so anxious to figure this out, and I was in pain.

Siope Kinikini: Okay. Tell me about that.

Eric Bjorklund: I was in pain because our second son would not sit still, ever. He was constantly in motion. He was always moving. And he was loud. And he was screaming. And he was teasing his little sister. And he was in trouble. I mean, when we would sit in our front room as a family and try and have some sort of, "Let's get together and talk, and have some sort of time together," I remember one time actually counting him doing somersaults in the chair he was in. Around 40 somersaults in the 15-minutes that we were sitting in there because he couldn't sit still. It was just impossible for him. He couldn't focus, he was just like. And I didn't know what to do.

Eric Bjorklund: Now, since then, and I would go to the training of the Teaching-Family Model here at Utah Youth Village, that we would do for new family teachers. That's our word for house parents in a group home. So it was like, "Whoa, this is great." But before that, when I was a lawyer, I would go to the library and I'd pick up any book I could on parenting, and there weren't very many parenting resources around. And what there was was pretty, "You will do this, and you will punish them, and they will learn because you will punish them." You know that kind of thing.

Siope Kinikini: Right.

Eric Bjorklund: [What the Teaching-Family Model teaches us is all of us as parents need to learn ways of nurturing our children, and helping them learn the skills that help them succeed and thrive.](#) Then, find them doing those things well and nurturing them. That's one half of what we need to do as parents to help out kids.

Eric Bjorklund: The other half of what we need to do as parents is to hold them accountable for their behaviors and help them learn that there are boundaries in life.

Siope Kinikini: Right.

Eric Bjorklund: And to the extent, we can help them learn that in a way that doesn't hurt our relationship with them, and they can learn that when they're young, wow, what a blessing. Because if they never learn that, the world will teach that to them brutally. I mean, if they don't learn that there are boundaries, then what happens in their marriages? What happens in their jobs? What happens in school? Those things aren't pretty.

Eric Bjorklund: So as a parent, we kind of have both of those kinds of things that we need to be emphasizing, nurturing, and then how to hold accountable in a way where you preserve your relationship. Where they don't hate you.

Siope Kinikini: Right, right, right.

Eric Bjorklund: Where they still like you. I think some of us as parents are natural discipliners. And some of us are natural kind of praisers and reinforcers. And some of us don't do much of either, and some of us do both. Well, I wasn't a bother.

Siope Kinikini: Okay, so which one were you? The discipliner?

Eric Bjorklund: I was a disciplinarian, and I knew how to do that. Or at least I thought I did. At least that's what I was reading that I should be doing. Okay? Then I got into the Teaching-Family Model, and I went to the pre-service workshop, and I was like, "Well, this makes some sense, but I'm still not sure about it."

Eric Bjorklund: But I was so frustrated with this son that I finally went into Tom and said, "Tom, help me fix this boy. He's a bad boy. He's really a bad boy. He's just like, ah, I don't know what to do." This was before I worked for the Village when he was even younger, and I was still just in my full-time law practice. I remember commuting home, trying to figure out ways I could punish him where he would really get it. You know, that punishment would be so bad that he won't ever do that again. He'll stop running around. And he'll be quiet. And then he'll be respectful to his little sister.

Siope Kinikini: Yeah, he'll do what he needs to do. Right.

Eric Bjorklund: And he won't yell so much. Oh boy.

Eric Bjorklund: So I was deep into the notion that I could punish him into being a good boy. Even as you hear me say that sentence, think about that. That is just so ridiculous.

Siope Kinikini: It's awful.

Eric Bjorklund: I will teach you to be a good kid by punishing you, and consecrating you so many negative times that you'll figure out how to be good by me teaching you how bad you are.

Siope Kinikini: Right.

Eric Bjorklund: Oh, as I say that, it just hurts. But I believed it. Back then I thought, "I will be a good parent by pointing out to him all the things he's doing wrong." That's where I was, deep into that focus, when into Tom White. Tom listened to me talk, he went, "What's the problem with your son?" "Well, he won't stop. And he yells. And he's loud. And he's always in motion."

Eric Bjorklund: Now, he's now 40 years old, and he's still in motion.

Siope Kinikini: He's still in motion? He hasn't changed?

Eric Bjorklund: Yeah, he rarely sits still. He's almost always doing something until he hits the pillow at night, and then he's out.

Eric Bjorklund: Well, let's get back to that, then. Tom listened, and then Tom said, "Well, okay, to begin with, here's what I want you to do. I want you to praise him four times as many times as you are negative with him. So I want you to think about your interactions with him, and figure out how many negative interactions you have, where you're saying don't do this or stop, or you just earned timeout for 10 years." Or all the things I was into back then. "Figure out that, and then you've got to praise him four times that much."

Siope Kinikini: Wow, okay.

Eric Bjorklund: I was like, "Tom, are you listening? I'm fine. I'm a functional dad. I have a Doctorate degree. I graduated towards the top of my class. I mean, it's him. He's the kid, he's the one messed up." He listened patiently, and then he said, "Well, I still want you to do this. Go home and do it. Four times as many praises as negative." I thought, "Okay."

Eric Bjorklund: I remember walking out of the office saying, "Crap, I just hired this national expert. I had announcements in the newspaper and even on one of the TV stations about what a big deal this was for Utah Youth Village to get this national expert to come here."

Siope Kinikini: Right.

Eric Bjorklund: "And now he's told me what I need to do based on the Teaching-Family Model. This sucks."

Siope Kinikini: You did not like it.

Eric Bjorklund: I did not like it.

Siope Kinikini: Did you believe him, though?

Eric Bjorklund: Well, I thought, "Okay, I'll try it."

Siope Kinikini: Okay.

Eric Bjorklund: So I went home and I tried for two days, and then I went back to Tom, I said, "Tom, this is ridiculous. He does not deserve any praise. He is a bad boy. And this feels phony. When I'm praising him, it just feels phony. It's like I'm making it up almost. Because he doesn't deserve any praise."

Eric Bjorklund: Tom sat and listened, he was very patient, and I was going on and on about, "He's just a bad boy. Why do I want to praise him? Because he just doesn't deserve any praise." I truly felt that way. And I couldn't understand that you could praise someone when they also needed discipline of some sort. That didn't make sense to me back then. It was either you were perfect and you got praise. And he had the unfortunate role of following his older brother, who was perfect.

Siope Kinikini: Oh, okay.

Eric Bjorklund: Okay? So he got praise because he did everything right, that kind of thing. Anyway, when Tom and I were talking, Tom finally leaned back and he said, "Eric, how good are you at praising people?" I remember being quiet for a while and kind of dropping my eyes down a way, and feeling awful in my gut, like, "Damn, he just nailed me. I'm not that good." And he didn't mean to be critical, but it cut me to the core. It was like, "I'm not that good at praising."

Eric Bjorklund: He said, "Well, let's practice this." So guess what we did? [We Role-played.](#)

Siope Kinikini: You Role-played it.

Eric Bjorklund: We Role-played.

Siope Kinikini: Yes.

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Eric Bjorklund: And guess how comfortable with that I was? I'm the CEO, and here's this guy I just hired, and he's playing like he's my dad. And he's showing me how to praise, and then I'm practicing praising him. [We Role-played a little bit.](#) Then he said, "Okay, Eric, you've got to do this. Not only do you have to do this, you have to report back to me every day."

Siope Kinikini: That's fantastic.

Eric Bjorklund: "So I want you to come back to me with your ratio of positive to negatives." I was like, "Crap, what have I gotten myself into?" So I went home resolved, I was going to praise. And he pointed out, he said, "It might feel like you need a microscope to find something. It's okay to say, 'Spencer, you didn't scream in the last 15-seconds. That is great. Way to go.'"

Eric Bjorklund: Then he also talked to me about, "Make sure as you're talking to him, you're talking to him about what you want him to do instead of what you don't want him to do. Because telling someone what you don't want them to do doesn't work." And it took me a while to figure that out. But the focus here was finding what he was doing right and praising it, and then telling him what you want him to do.

Eric Bjorklund: So I went home and started doing it. Each day, it got a little easier. And there were times when I'd take a pen, I would be making marks on the palm of my hand as a way to remember

Siope Kinikini: Just to keep track. That's great.

Eric Bjorklund: Because I had to go back and report to this national expert I had just hired, I had to keep some credibility, like, "Yeah, I believe in the Teaching-Family Model, wink, wink." You know?

Eric Bjorklund: So it was very interesting. After a week, it was much easier. Then after two weeks, it was way easier. Then I was stunned that after doing this for three weeks, I thought this kid was great. Almost everything that had irritated about him, I now loved in him. I loved how energetic he was. I loved how fun he was. I loved his voice. I loved the way he had energy. I loved how kind he could be. I started seeing things in him that I hadn't seen before. I loved how sensitive he was to others. I hadn't realized that. All I had focused on is him teasing his sister, and being loud, and screaming. Now, I was loving that he was so full of energy and so fun. It was crazy.

Siope Kinikini: Yeah.

Eric Bjorklund: Now, let's go back. Before I started this, my relationship with him was such that he wouldn't let me hug him. He didn't want any touch from me at all. He loved me, but he did not like me. And I believe there are probably some parents, in the sound of my voice, who know that

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they have children in the same place. The child loves them as a parent, but doesn't like them. And to be frank, I loved him as a parent, but I didn't like him. He was awful.

Eric Bjorklund: What was so interesting to me is that after three weeks, I loved him, and I liked him, both. From this process of learning what the Teaching-Family Model teaches, which is you have to praise, you have to have at least four times as many positive interactions as you have negative interactions. You just absolutely have to for the sake of your relationship.

Siope Kinikini: Yup.

Eric Bjorklund: And our relationship had changed completely. In three weeks, I loved him, I hugged him. He hugged me back. It was that dramatic of a shift. As a matter of fact, I remember being in our kitchen and living room area, our living room is right next to our kitchen, and our oldest son was doing his homework at the table, and my wife was over by the sink, and Spencer walked by our oldest son, put his hand on his shoulder, and said, "Russ, you're so good at doing homework. I love the way you did homework."

Siope Kinikini: Wow, so he picked it up.

Eric Bjorklund: Boom, there was a praise statement, right there. He found something Russ was doing right, and just praised him, and said it out loud. I remember looking at my wife, and she looking at me with both, "Ah, ah!"

Siope Kinikini: It's a miracle.

Eric Bjorklund: It was like the clouds parted and the angels started singing kind of thing.

Siope Kinikini: Absolutely.

Eric Bjorklund: What was so interesting about this is I feared praising at first, because I feared that Spencer and his older brother Russ, and my wife would be going, "What are you up to? What are you doing? Are you just manipulating us with these positive statements?" I was like, "Oh, they're going to see through this, they're just going to think I'm doing some parenting thing."

Siope Kinikini: Right.

Eric Bjorklund: That wasn't true at all. They absolutely loved it. They just loved it. My wife could not have been happier. It was like she had a new husband. And all of a sudden I was positive, and I was way more positive with everybody. Now am I always positive? No. And do I get grumpy? Yes. I mean, I'm not perfect, but I will tell you that had I stayed on that same track with that particular boy, I would guess he would be an alcoholic now. He might be in prison. He

might be dead. He might be into drugs. I don't know. I mean, I could see me driving him away, and having no relationship with him. At eight years old, you still have some control, you know?

Siope Kinikini: Yeah.

Eric Bjorklund: But by the time these kids are getting to 12 or 13, you're out of the control business and you're now in the influence business.

Siope Kinikini: Absolutely.

Eric Bjorklund: If you haven't managed to create a good relationship, you need to figure out how to get into the influence business. Otherwise, the more you become a punishing, disciplinarian parent only, the more you lose all influence.

Siope Kinikini: Yes.

Eric Bjorklund: And then you start driving them other directions. So grateful. I mean, I am so grateful that Tom challenged me the way he did, that he said the things he did when he did that caused me to decide, "I'll give this a shot. I'll try it." Even when I thought it was phony, even when I thought, "This is stupid." Even in that first week, I just toughed through it. I just toughed through it, and I kept saying, "They're going to think I'm up to something."

Siope Kinikini: They're going to say, "What are you doing? Who are you?"

Eric Bjorklund: What are you doing? Who are you? What's this manipulating? It took me a while to realize, "Hey, they're loving this." So the same kid. He stays active, and he goes off does really well in life. He's got two Master's degrees now.

Siope Kinikini: Wow.

Eric Bjorklund: He's incredibly successful in his business. He's now 40 with four children of his own, an incredibly good father, and amazingly positive.

Siope Kinikini: Wonderful.

Eric Bjorklund: And he doesn't even remember anything about this.

Siope Kinikini: Okay.

Eric Bjorklund: I think that's so cool. When I talk with him about it, "Do you remember when I changed?" He doesn't remember any of it. At eight years old? No. He thinks I've always been positive and a loving good dad, and he's always liked me. Which wasn't true, there was a time when he didn't like me.

Siope Kinikini: Okay.

Eric Bjorklund: I want to talk about that concept of like a little bit, because when I think about loving someone, especially someone who is difficult to love. I translate that into like, and I think to myself, "There are people in the world who are difficult to like, and if you've got a child with ADHD, often they're difficult to love, at least at certain points in their life."

Eric Bjorklund: What I found was the only way you can maintain a good relationship with them is to learn to love them, which means you have to learn to like them. And the only way you can learn to like them is to find what's good in them. And do it a lot. You've got to do it over, and over, and over, and over. And when you do, you will like them. They will feel it. You will have a relationship, and you will have an influence. They will want to please you.

Eric Bjorklund: [The Teaching-Family Model, as much as anything, teaches parents how to act so that they will have a good relationship with their children, sweet enough, good enough, reinforcing enough to the child, that the child will modify their behaviors.](#)

Siope Kinikini: Behaviors to maintain.

Eric Bjorklund: To maintain that relationship.

Siope Kinikini: Absolutely.

Eric Bjorklund: And they will do it in such a way that if you use the whole Teaching-Family Model, they will become superlative members of society in spite of their issues. By that I mean, I don't think the Teaching-Family Model cures depression. Or cures or anxiety. Or eating disorders. Or ADHD. What I think it does is it teaches people to learn to function in the world in spite of those issues.

Siope Kinikini: Yes.

Eric Bjorklund: And how to work and successfully thrive in life in spite of those issues. What parent of an ADHD child doesn't worry about, "What's going to happen to this kid? Where are they going to go?" If you can raise them using this Teaching-Family Model format, they will thrive. They will do great in spite of whatever issue they've got. I think that's the marvelous thing about the whole Teaching-Family Models. You help children thrive, and grow up, and it gives you a roadmap as a parent of, "Well, what do I do? How do I keep my relationship? How can I keep influence? How can we make it so that it's worth it for the kid to want to change whatever's going on in their life for the relationship?"

Siope Kinikini: Right.

Eric Bjorklund: The other thing that is so important is that it not only is important in the family, the skills that the Teaching-Family Model teaches, but those same skills are huge in the workplace. The primary skill that we teach all of our kids in the Teaching-Family Model is the skill of Following Instructions.

Siope Kinikini: Right.

Eric Bjorklund: The skill of eye contact or getting attention, what's appropriate in their culture. The second thing is saying, "Okay pleasantly." The third thing, doing the task, and the fourth thing, come back and report.

Siope Kinikini: Coming back and reporting.

Eric Bjorklund: That's, "I'm done," you know? Doing that kind of thing and teaching that skill is not only huge in terms of getting along in a family. As a matter of fact, if you look at families that are really, really functional, they largely Follow Instructions between each other. There's a skirmish here and there, but by and large, everybody Follows Instructions. And the instructions aren't just from the parents to the kids, they're from the kids back to the parents, they're between the parents, "Get this," or, "When you come back from work, do that, and do that." The instructions go back and forth in a family, hundreds of instructions a day.

Eric Bjorklund: Then the families who learn how to give those reasonably, and how to implement them reasonably, and follow them, receive them, those families are pretty functional. And families who can't do that, those are families.

Siope Kinikini: Struggle, power struggle.

Eric Bjorklund: Oh yeah.

Siope Kinikini: Fighting.

Eric Bjorklund: And those parents are in pain because their kids aren't buying into whatever. What's cool is the Teaching-Family Model gives the parent a path out of pain. It gives that parent a path to feeling like there is hope. Like things are going to work out, like, "My child may love me. And even as an adult they may love me, and I'll be able to still hold them accountable, and they'll not hate me for it." All of those kinds of components are built into the Teaching-Family Model in a wonderful way.

Siope Kinikini: That's wonderful.

Eric Bjorklund: Anyway, I will tell you one further thing, which is Following Instructions, super important in every work. We had the president of the largest medical organization in the Intermountain West visit one of our group homes 10, 12 years ago, and he was talking to the

boys there in the group homes. What's a group home? It's a place where the state takes custody away from parents of a group of boys who are so dysfunctional that they won't function in foster care. That they'll blow out of one foster home after another. So they move into a group home where there's a lot more structure. Teaching-Family Model group homes have live-in parents, house parents, who we call Family Teachers, liked I mentioned before.

Eric Bjorklund: So you had eight boys sitting there listening to this CEO of a \$6 billion company. And I ask him, I said, "Tell me, what's the most important skill that you expect from your vice presidents?" He said, "Well, I need them to do what I ask them to do, and report back to me on it. That's probably the most important skill." I remember smiling this ear to ear big smile and going, "Boys, what's that skill called?" And the boys said, "That's Following Instructions."

Eric Bjorklund: "What are the four steps of Following Instructions?" "Well, eye contact, say okay, do the task, report back." Then I said, "Does that sound like what you were talking, Bill?" His name's Bill. And he goes, "Yeah, that's exactly it. My vice presidents can hear what needs to happen, then pleasantly go do it, and not argue a lot about it. And then get it done. And then come back, tell me where they're at on this, what are they doing, what's going on."

Eric Bjorklund: I mean, Following Instructions, this isn't a skill designed to make someone a robotron.

Siope Kinikini: Right.

Eric Bjorklund: You know, "I will Follow Instructions." It's really a skill that is important everywhere. In every place where humans work together, it's a basic skill. Now, there's the other skill of Disagreeing Appropriately.

Siope Kinikini: Right, right.

Eric Bjorklund: Sometimes you don't want to Follow Instructions. And you'll get to that skill sometime in teaching our folks. But that's kind of my story.

Siope Kinikini: I can hear in my mind people who will have questions about your story. So in your implementation of Effective Praise with your son, he continued to do the 48 cartwheels or somersaults in the chair. Did it address the behavior? Did your Effective Praise address those behavioral issues?

Eric Bjorklund: Yes.

Siope Kinikini: Okay.

Eric Bjorklund: It addressed the behavioral issues because I caught him when he was sitting still.

Siope Kinikini: Okay, great.

Eric Bjorklund: When he was eating, he was sitting still. I'd say, "Wow, Spencer, look how still you are. This is so great. You're so still, and you're quiet." And he'd turn to me with a mouthful. But I mean, I caught him sitting. So I had to figure out what I wanted him to do.

Siope Kinikini: Yes.

Eric Bjorklund: "Okay, I want you, first off, to be still when it's appropriate to be still. I need you to be quiet when it's appropriate to be quiet. I need you to be nice to your sister." I would even prompt him on what being nice to his sister looked like, and then I would catch him doing it. We kind of Role-played that a little bit, and then when he would do it, I would catch him doing it, and tell him, "Great job."

Eric Bjorklund: [There weren't a lot of big rewards. Most of it was me just catching him and saying, "Good job," and then hugging him.](#) I mean, he's eight years old.

Siope Kinikini: Right.

Eric Bjorklund: He liked to be tickled, and he liked to wrestle. And so when he did things that were good, we tickled, we wrestled.

Siope Kinikini: Yes.

Eric Bjorklund: I think he was really enjoying the fact that I was all of a sudden this dad who was more playful and positive with him, as opposed to the, "You will do what I say or I will," that kind of thing.

Siope Kinikini: Do what I say when I say it. Yeah. Right. No, that's fantastic.

Eric Bjorklund: [So yes, it affected the behaviors because I caught him doing things right. At first, I actually did praise him for being quiet for 15-seconds when he was quiet.](#)

Siope Kinikini: So even 15-seconds deserves the praise?

Eric Bjorklund: Yeah, I kind of had to make things up almost, that's how it felt. But then I started realizing, "No, you just need to be better at finding what he does right because he's doing tons of things right."

Siope Kinikini: Right.

Eric Bjorklund: No kid, no matter how bad they are, is only doing bad things.

Siope Kinikini: I agree.

Eric Bjorklund: And I did not believe that. But from this experience, I started going, "Wait a minute, every kid is doing things right, you just need to find them, and then you need to open your mouth." That was the second really hard thing for me.

Siope Kinikini: Is actually praising him?

Eric Bjorklund: Saying it.

Siope Kinikini: Saying it.

Eric Bjorklund: Because there was this pride inside, like, "If I praise him for this, I'm kind of admitting he's not all bad." I'm confident there are parents out there who, as I'm saying this, are going, "Yeah, that's right. I can't praise him because if I praise him he'll think he can get away with murder. He'll think he can go do everything." That's what I feared, that, "The only way I'm going to hold him in check is to punish him."

Siope Kinikini: And focus on those negative behaviors.

Eric Bjorklund: On the Negative Consequences. This was so liberating because I realized, "Whoa."

Siope Kinikini: There's another way.

Eric Bjorklund: Yeah. Now, there are times he needs a consequence, and the Teaching-Family Model taught me how to do that.

Siope Kinikini: Right.

Eric Bjorklund: The other thing I really liked is when I gave consequences, my veins weren't bulging out anymore.

Siope Kinikini: Yeah, you weren't stressed out.

Eric Bjorklund: Yeah, and consequences didn't involve me having to become the bad consequence.

Siope Kinikini: Right.

Eric Bjorklund: Before this, when I was punishing him, I was getting angry and emotional. So I was thinking of punishments, but I was also totally changing my internal emotions into anger

and rage, and then he was seeing my veins pop out. This was such a huge, "Aha" moment to realize, "Oh, I can give him consequences without also punishing myself by having to go into anger, because anger isn't something I enjoy."

Eric Bjorklund: Almost inevitably, when I went into the anger punishment mode, 10 minutes later I felt awful. I felt like, "Man, you're such a jerk. You're such an awful parent. Why are you so angry? Why are you this?" This was so wonderful to shift out of that. And the Teaching-Family Model gave me a way of becoming a parent who could hold him accountable without me being the consequence, and also praise him and guide him towards what I wanted.

Eric Bjorklund: Fairly soon, I started to realize that the consequences that I was giving, the [Effective Negative Consequences](#) were almost always a springboard towards teaching. The punishment really doesn't have anything to do with it. The punishment is missing the boat. That if you can do Effective Negative Consequences effectively, that can help check the child's behavior, but it won't really change them.

Siope Kinikini: It won't change them.

Eric Bjorklund: What changes is teaching, and then positive rewards, and positive praise, and reinforcing that. That's like the one-two punch, is to teach, find him doing what you've taught him to do, even if it's a small part of it. That's the other thing that Tom taught me. You don't have to praise him only when he does everything right. Initially, I thought, "I can't praise him until he becomes his brother." I didn't say that consciously in my mind, but later on, I thought, "That was my attitude. I can't praise this kid until he's actually kind of perfect," which is such a joke. Who's perfect at eight years old?

Siope Kinikini: Yeah, nobody.

Eric Bjorklund: Then Tom was teaching me approximations. If he's just starting to sort of do it, praise it. And then teach, instead of thinking, "Oh, you didn't get that perfect, consequence, you're grounded, kiddo. You're this, you're that, whatever. I'm taking this away." That totally changed my attitude, and it completely changed his behavior.

Siope Kinikini: Oh good.

Eric Bjorklund: So it wasn't just that my attitude changed that made him, three weeks later, a better kid. But actually, in three weeks, he was much less noisy, I think. And even if he was as noisy, I liked it. It's kind of one of these things where.

Siope Kinikini: It's kind of like you were both benefiting from it.

Eric Bjorklund: And it's one of those things where it was all his fault, and yet when I changed, things got better. You know how in life, that really sucks?

Siope Kinikini: Absolutely.

Eric Bjorklund: Where this is all their fault, I know it is. And then if I make a change, an internal change, all of a sudden things get a lot better. So I think he was not as noisy, he definitely was much kinder to his sister. I mean, that really did shift.

Siope Kinikini: That's great.

Eric Bjorklund: That was really good.

Siope Kinikini: That is great.

Eric Bjorklund: Yeah, and he started to look after her more, as a protector.

Siope Kinikini: How wonderful.

Eric Bjorklund: In some ways, it gave him a different place in the family than what he was feeling before. I think. But knowing what's really going on in someone's mind, I don't think any of us are any good at that. I know that a lot of times I don't know what's going on in my mind, and I have total access, you know? And he wouldn't remember, because he doesn't even remember me making this big change, which was so dramatic for me.

Siope Kinikini: Right.

Eric Bjorklund: My wife, though, she was super happy that she got a new husband.

Siope Kinikini: Okay.

Eric Bjorklund: Yeah, that was a big deal.

Siope Kinikini: So in the practicing of praise, you started with your son, but then you just branched out to everybody.

Eric Bjorklund: Yes.

Siope Kinikini: Then pretty soon, your son picked it up and he started doing it.

Eric Bjorklund: He is good at it.

Siope Kinikini: He is really good at it?

Eric Bjorklund: He is really good at it.

Siope Kinikini: Oh, that's great.

Eric Bjorklund: Well, the person our family who may be the best is my oldest son, because he was observing this process.

Siope Kinikini: Okay, and he picked it up?

Eric Bjorklund: He picked it up big time. And children pick up what parents do, and they replicate it. Probably the most efficient replication process we have is kids growing up with parents.

Siope Kinikini: Right, right.

Eric Bjorklund: And how many of us, as kids, interacting with parents, have gone, "Crap, that was my dad talking." When we were saying something to our parents, "That was my mom. What am I? Am I becoming my mom? My dad?" Well yeah, you are. We all are, to some extent. We replicate. It's so interesting when we do something like the Teaching-Family Model, it has a cascading effect. One child is the focus, but it benefits all of the other kids.

Siope Kinikini: Right. So it's one of those things I've mentioned in previous podcasts that you change even a small fraction of the system, the whole system changes.

Eric Bjorklund: Huge.

Siope Kinikini: So if you're able to make those changes, everything changes.

Eric Bjorklund: That's right. Let me point out before I made this change, the older son and I were a tag team on criticizing this boy.

Siope Kinikini: Oh, wow.

Eric Bjorklund: So he was picking up from me that that's a responsible thing to do, is to be critical.

Siope Kinikini: He just picked it up?

Eric Bjorklund: He was like, "If that's what dad does, then that's what should be happening." Then when I made this shift, he shifted dramatically.

Siope Kinikini: Wow.

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Eric Bjorklund: He became incredibly positive. I'll tell you, even now, he's 43, and there are times when we as a family will be together, and maybe I'll start talking negatively about someone, in some context, thinking this is funny, and Russ will just chime up and say, "You know, maybe we don't need to talk that way about him."

Siope Kinikini: Wow.

Eric Bjorklund: It's like, "Oh geez, okay. You're right."

Siope Kinikini: That's great.

Eric Bjorklund: So I mean, yeah, there is this absolute cascading effect where the other kids pick up on it.

Siope Kinikini: That's wonderful.

Eric Bjorklund: I think all of my kids are really good parents, and that mostly has to do with their mother, who is naturally good at this. I think, in taking some credit, gratefully I turned around, and at least didn't alienate half of them. So I love them, they love me, I like all of them, they all like me, most of the time.

Siope Kinikini: Good! So in the long term, relationships are still strong?

Eric Bjorklund: Wonderful.

Siope Kinikini: They're wonderful relationships?

Eric Bjorklund: They're wonderful. And not only do we love each other, we like each other.

Siope Kinikini: Well, I notice you all do activities together, all the time.

Eric Bjorklund: Yes.

Siope Kinikini: And you're involved in each other's lives. So I mean, it's kind of amazing to see families do this in the long term, like years later, there's still this really strong bond. That's great. And I think all parents are looking for that. They all want strong relationships.

Siope Kinikini: There are so many good nuggets in this podcast. This is one that I definitely am going to go back and listen to multiple times, and I recommend that to those who are watching it and listening to this podcast, go back and listen. We've covered a lot of things, the Teaching-Family Model, we've talked about nurture, and this idea of holding children accountable, how they work together. Very powerful.

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Siope Kinikini: And actually, I've never expressed it that way, but that's exactly what it does, it teaches children how to be accountable, but it also nurtures their relationship. You can approach issues with those two things in mind, and not damage relationships.

Eric Bjorklund: That's super important.

Siope Kinikini: Yup. The other part is just learning to adjust and be uncomfortable using these skills.

Eric Bjorklund: Yes, yes.

Siope Kinikini: It is okay, very natural to be uncomfortable.

Eric Bjorklund: For any parent that's listening to us, remember me going in two days later to Tom and saying, "This sucks. This is phony. I'm just phony. This isn't working." And him saying, "No, keep going."

Siope Kinikini: Right

Eric Bjorklund: And if you tough it out it really works.

Siope Kinikini: Yes

Eric Bjorklund: The Teaching-Family Model really works

Siope Kinikini: It really is trusting this process.

Eric Bjorklund: Yes, trust the process.

Siope Kinikini: It's been laid out for a long time, it's worked for hundreds, thousands of people, and it works.

Eric Bjorklund: Let me kind of add a little to that. In that three week time period, I did praising hundreds of times, with just him.

Siope Kinikini: With just him.

Eric Bjorklund: I also tried to do it with the other kids. It took three weeks for me to make that change. There were times when I thought, "Well, this is way too much work." You know?

Siope Kinikini: Yeah.

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Eric Bjorklund: "If I praise him 10 times, I should be done, and he should be different now, right?" Tom was the one who was saying, "In the Teaching-Family Model, you learn to work it. Work the process, realize that what you're going to be doing may take several hundred times. This might take, over the course of three weeks, it may take three months. It's a treatment interaction, or modality, that focuses on the long haul, on doing things systematically, tenaciously, over the long haul, rather than expecting big changes."

Eric Bjorklund: Before I made this change with my own attitude with Spencer, I was trying to figure out nuclear consequences. "I need a nuclear consequence, something so painful he will never do that again." Whoa. That is the worst thing in the world. Nuclear consequences only damage your relationship.

Siope Kinikini: Right.

Eric Bjorklund: And do almost nothing else but damage your relationships. But I didn't realize that at the time. So it's the small, incremental consequences, and small incremental praises, repeatedly, over long periods of time. [One of the most common components of parenting with a child who has challenges is raw time.](#)

Siope Kinikini: Yes.

Eric Bjorklund: As a parent, you have to commit.

Siope Kinikini: To the time.

Eric Bjorklund: To the time. This is going to take time, and I need to be tenacious, and consistent, and patient, and patient, and patient, and patient. And not expecting that I'm going to get a whole different kid in a week or even a whole different self in a week. For me, it took three weeks to make the beginning of that change.

Siope Kinikini: Yeah. That's a really important concept for a lot of parents, especially now that we live in what they call a microwave society. We just get things so quickly. We expect change to happen pretty instantaneously. I mean, everything is instant. And it's not. If you want something to last, and you want something that will continually grow, you have to invest the time. And kids deserve it, your kids deserve it, so invest the time.

Eric Bjorklund: Well, it pays off for you as a parent.

Siope Kinikini: It does pay off for you as a parent.

Eric Bjorklund: Because later in life, your kids like you.

Siope Kinikini: That's true!

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Eric Bjorklund: That's a big deal!

Siope Kinikini: That is a big deal.

Eric Bjorklund: It's like, "Oh, well that's cool."

Siope Kinikini: Right?

Eric Bjorklund: The kids want to do things with you. They want to go on vacation. They invite you. My sons do a brothers' trip every year, and we go off and go camping. And they invite me every year. Well, that's pretty dang cool!

Siope Kinikini: Well, because they like you.

Eric Bjorklund: That's great! And I don't think they just tolerate me. I think they think I'm fun to have there.

Siope Kinikini: Right, right.

Eric Bjorklund: At least for an old guy.

Siope Kinikini: Yeah, no, that's fantastic. There are so many good pieces in this podcast that I highly recommend you go back and listen to this podcast over because you'll learn something new as you listen that you can apply. So jump back and listen to this podcast again and again. You can find the skill of Effective Praise on the Smarter Parenting website. [And sign-up for a free 15-minute coaching session.](#)

Eric Bjorklund: And that is so important. In the same way, Tom Waite sat down with me, because I thought I knew how to parent I was going to discipline my kids, and he had a whole different view, and I could not see it. I was so thick and deep in the forest I couldn't see it. So call Siope.

Siope Kinikini: Call me up. I appreciate those who have called. This last week has been kind of nuts with people who have listened to the podcast, found us that way, and then have called in for the 15-minute session.

Eric Bjorklund: I love it. That's what we want. We want to change lives.

Siope Kinikini: Yeah, absolutely. And we want to know what's happening, and we want to help guide you along that process. Yesterday, I did receive a request for it, and they were shocked that it was me. So if you are calling in, I will be the one to call you back. So call me, because I am interested in what's happening. You can sign up for that on the Smarter Parenting website.

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Siope Kinikini: I am super grateful that Eric is here. Eric, actually, none of this would be here, this podcast, the Smarter Parenting website, the video skills, none of it would've even existed without Eric's passion for helping people around the world. So we owe him a debt of gratitude.

Eric Bjorklund: Yeah.

Siope Kinikini: Thank you so much.

Eric Bjorklund: Thank you, Siope.

Siope Kinikini: Yup. That's it from us, and I will see you next week.

Eric Bjorklund: Take care.

PODCASTS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

[Ep #11: What is the Teaching-Family Model](#)

[Ep #48: What it takes to change behavior](#)

[Ep #50: Changing behavior through praise](#)

[Ep #58: The Teaching-Family Model is relationship focused](#)

[Ep #59: The ADHD Smarter Parenting Coaching Process](#)

[Ep #60: Moving from consequences to rewards](#)

[Ep #69: 4 ways to increase your relationship and fix behaviors](#)

[Ep #71: Changing the brain through Role-playing](#)

RESOURCES

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