

Ep #90 Dealing with frustrating situations: Part two

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This is episode 90. 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, Siopé Kinikini.

Hey, everybody. How you doing? I hope everybody's doing great. I'm glad you're joining me. Thank you for joining me today. And I'm super excited to continue this conversation about Observe and Describe.

[This is the second part to the podcast number 88](#), where we talk about [Observe and Describe](#). So if you haven't listened to that one, jump back and take a listen to it because in there, I talk about how this skill was effective for a mother and her son to keep them from doing what we call the dance. Where he would disengage, she would react, he would disengage, he would react and they just kind of this tango back and forth. So, in a episode 88, we talk about that. We talk about how this skill of Observe and Describe saved me and my relationship with a former supervisor from really kind of going at it because he had his way of doing things and I had my way of doing things. And just by using the simple skill of observing a behavior and describing the behavior, we were able to communicate well. Again, this is part two of that.

One thing I do want to say is before we begin all of that, I want to just extend some gratitude out there to you and let you know my full intentions for this podcast. And that's to continue this conversation of why Observe and Describe as a skill is going to be super helpful. For those of you who are joining us for the first time, Observe and Describe is a simple skill, and it's one of the basic skills that we use here on Smarter Parenting. And it's actually exactly what it's titled, Observe and Describe. You're going to observe a behavior that you're seeing and you're going to describe it without any type of judgment. We're going to get deep into that.

There are some housekeeping things I wanted to go over. I wanted to let you know that there is now a [Smarter Parenting Instagram account for this podcast](#). And so if you follow it, you'll be able to get some updates on future podcast episodes and some special information related to this podcast. And you'll be able to learn some additional things on how this is created. What happens behind the scenes. And so we'll get to know each other a little bit better, which is fantastic. In addition to some things that you can only see visually because we're listening to a podcast, which is great, but there are some things that I'm describing that would be better as a

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visual. So jump over there to Instagram, and you can find this Smarter Parenting ADHD podcast account and follow it. All right? And leave questions there if you'd like, I'd be more than happy to answer those.

[I have heard from a few of you who have taken my suggestion to heart, and I'm glad that you have, and my suggestion was to start each day not looking at your phone, first thing in the morning, and that is to give you some time to really process and to think, and to set some goals for the day and setting your intention.](#) Thanks for reaching out and letting me know it is a game-changer. If you haven't done that, I highly suggest that you do it because it's fantastic, and it's a great way for you to take charge of exactly what's happening in your life. So I made this suggestion a couple of podcasts ago, and I'm making it again for those of you who are out there. And this is in relation to what we're going to talk about today.

For me, when I wake up in the morning, what I do is I don't check my phone. And then I list things that I'm grateful for the day. And I try to keep them varied and different every morning. And then I set some intentions for the day. These are the things that I want to get done. And then I will prep and do what I need to do. Then I will check my phone. The reason that I do this is because I want to be sure that I am controlling the aspects and the outlook for the rest of my day, rather than having my phone tell me what my focus should be on for the day. This is super helpful for children who struggle with ADHD and for parents who struggle with ADHD, largely because we only have a certain set of abilities and skills that we can manage throughout the day to function and get everything done.

So I'm going to talk to you about decision fatigue. Decision fatigue is exactly the way it sounds. It's what it is. You are tired because you've made decisions. Now, as I mentioned before, throughout the day you only have a certain amount of energy throughout the day to make decisions. And when you wake up in the morning, you have a lot of reserves. It's almost like you're starting off with a full tank of gas and you can decide how you're going to move forward during the day. But as you start to make decisions throughout the day, right, throughout the day, you start to deplete some of that energy. And when you start depleting that energy, it becomes more and more difficult to continue on.

It's why near the end of the day for a lot of children, especially children with ADHD, they have burnout at the end of school. Okay? They've had decisions they've had to make throughout the day and by the end of the day, they're just tired. And so they become moody. They become upset. They become angry. They are defiant. Now, this happens to adults too. This is not only for children. Don't think I'm only talking about the children, but adults have this too. I have this too. As an adult with ADHD and I struggle, I know that I'm more productive in the morning because I have those reserves and I'm ready to go, and that's why taking that extra time in the morning is super important for me because I can really focus in on what I need to do.

Now, one of the things that you as a parent need to keep in mind is that with decision fatigue, and with decisions in general, all decisions are the same difficulty. I'm going to repeat that. All

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decisions are the same difficulty. For a child with ADHD, when they're making a decision about what to wear, that's the same amount of energy it's going to take for them to make a decision that is, "What am I going to eat today?" Or, you know, "What am I going to take for lunch?" Or, "Who am I going to sit by?" Or whatever it may be throughout the day. All decisions that we make throughout the day have equal value. And we tend to think, "No, this is an easy thing for me to do, and I can make a decision about that and it's not a big deal."

But I want you to ask yourself this question. I want you to ask yourself when you want to go out to dinner, say with a spouse or with a girlfriend or boyfriend, or whatever it may be, it always tends to be this problem of figuring out exactly what you want. I know I'm not alone. My wife and I will be talking about, "Wow, let's go have a really nice dinner," and then we'll spend the next hour trying to figure out exactly where to go. That's part of decision fatigue. It's because throughout the day we have made all these decisions and because decisions are of equal value, even though they seem small, we're tired by the end of the day. And we throw out one idea and then it's like, "Nah," then we throw out another idea and, "Nah." We even tried this jar where we stuck in the names of restaurants that we wanted to go to, and even doing that and trying to make a decision from that was exhausting, exhausting. So as adults, we struggle with decision fatigue and we continually struggle with it as we get throughout our day.

Children with ADHD have the exact same issue. Only the decisions that they have to make throughout the day are even more strenuous for them to decide because they are also dealing either with inattentiveness, hyperactivity or both. So, you know, wow, that really makes it difficult. It makes it really, really difficult for them. And it also makes it difficult for them to function near the end of the day. You're going to find a lot more behaviors, acting out behaviors, because of it.

Now, because of decision fatigue, that's why I love Observe and Describe because you can do this skill of Observe and Describe regardless of this decision fatigue that you'll be struggling with. You can observe your child and then describe what they're doing to allow your child to take a breath, take stock in what's happening in the moment, and also allow you some time to take a breath and take stock in what's happening at the moment. It's a very, very powerful skill to let you take that breath. It's almost like a speed bump to keep you from just going down the hill at whatever speed it may be where you start to lose control. So it allows you to step back, observe, live in the moment, and then make some decisions from there.

My suggestion for parents in using Observe and Describe is to really make it a fundamental part of your interaction with your child throughout the day. This is something that you're going to want to do. With them throughout the day, because what it does is it allows you both to take a breath and to take some stock in what's happening at the moment, without having you making a ton of decisions.

Just make this an automatic part of your interaction with your child. When you see your child, even when they're doing something well, you're going to observe and you're going to describe it.

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When you see your child struggling with something, you're going to look at them and Observe and Describe it and then move on from there. Just make it a natural part of your interaction with your child. Make it something that makes them aware of what's happening in the moment. And that'll break up some of that.

Now, for decision fatigue specifically, one of the recommendations that I've been making for a lot of parents who've been calling in saying, "Yeah, my child is acting out at night. We can't get our sleep routine in. They are fussy. And it's very, very difficult," I recommend that parents ease as much of the decision making process throughout the day beforehand. I want them to take care of smaller decisions. So if that means that you have to set out the clothes they're going to wear for the next day the night before, it's better to do that because that's one less decision that they have to make.

I love to follow interesting people, and I remember reading the biography of Steve Jobs, one of the founders of Apple. He's famous for wearing the same outfit every day. And the same thing with Mark Zuckerberg over at Facebook, they tend to wear the exact same clothing, right? There's not a lot of variation for Steve Jobs. It's a black turtle neck with some jeans, very comfortable attire. And in describing that, for him the idea is that's just one more decision I don't want to make, because he understood that decision fatigue is real. He understood that when you are consistently making decisions, large or small, it does expend energy. And when you're dealing with a child who struggles with ADHD, you want to make it as easy as possible so they can use those reserves in other ways.

For the parents that I've talked to, and we've worked through some of the Observe and Describe and how to do that, I've also had them prep and plan ahead of time what they need to do in order to alleviate some of this decision fatigue that children have. So setting out their clothes early. Having a menu beforehand with food that's already prepared. Snacks that are already in their bags. Just really preparing well for the next day so when decisions have to be made, they're not expending a ton of energy, either from the parent or from the child. Very, very important. This helps everybody remain in a calm state and it helps everybody stay uber-focused on things that they need to focus on, which may be correcting a child's behavior, a negative behavior.

Now, we've talked about Observe and Describe as a way to take a speed bump and slow things down and actually live in the moment. This is such a powerful thing for children who struggle with ADHD, because when you allow your child to live in the moment and have them redirect their focus to the exact moment of everything, that's happening with them, they're going to be able to engage and interact in the moment a lot better than if they are thinking too far ahead or thinking beyond what is happening with the parent.

I wanted to give you an example of a parent that I'm working with right now. We are still using Observe and Describe. It's the very first skill that we are using. But we're also compounding the

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skill by having mom prepare everything so decision fatigue is less burdensome for both her and her child.

So, she had called up and she said, "We just really struggle communication. Whenever I communicate with him, he just flies off the handle. He's hard to talk to, he ignores." And so in discussing these things, I said, "Okay, there are a lot of skills that we can do, but what we're going to focus on is something that will be easy for you to do and take some of the decision making skill out of it so you have enough energy to expend on focusing on what needs to be done."

We could have gone around and focused on [Effective Communication](#) to address this issue. Or we could have focused on consequences, we could have focused on. There's a lot of different skills we could do to address the behavior of the child. However, I chose to go to Observe and Describe. First off, because it's a basic skill, and one of the skills that we use in pretty much every other skill that we use on Smarter Parenting. Second, because it's one of those skills that parents can implement right away. The third reason that we chose this skill is because what we're doing right now is setting up a dialogue for mom to follow where there's less of decision fatigue involved on her part. It's easier for her to remember the two steps of Observe and Describe than it is to remember seven steps of another skill, another skill like Effective Communication or the five things that make [Consequences Effective](#). That's just too much at this point.

So we're working at the level of where she can deal with it emotionally, which is let's just focus on Observe and Describe. I [Role-played](#) it with her. We practiced it. We went through it and I said, "Okay, throughout the day, you are going to have these moments where you're making these decisions," because she's a single mom and she worked, so she's making decisions all day and she's tired at the end of the day. And I said, "Okay, so you're going to come home and you're going to be tired, and all you're going to focus on is Observe and Describe. You're going to observe your child, describe what they're doing. Say hello. That's it. I want you to think about anything else. We're just going to focus on that one skill."

Now, she was hesitant because she's like, "I want to correct the behaviors. I want to fix this. I want to do blah, blah, blah." And I'm like, "I understand you want to do that, but you have the energy? Do you honestly have the energy to follow it all the way through? Because if you don't, it's not worth it. It's not worth it to go halfway and then quit."

She had to take stock of that. I am a firm believer in parents being consistent, and being consistent means knowing your limit. And when we started discussing this, it became apparent, very quickly, that we needed just start at this level, where we're just focusing on Observe and Describe. That's it, just focus on this level.

So, she agreed to do it. She agreed to do it, which I thought was fantastic. We Role-played it during our discussion and practiced it with each other, and very, very simple. She would just see

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her son when she got home. She would observe whatever he was doing, and then describe it, and then share something, talk to him or whatever. And then every interaction after that, she would just Observe and Describe. So she would just Observe and Describe.

[She started to do this and I received an email later saying that even just doing this simple skill, this one skill of Observe and Describe, actually changed the dynamic of their relationship.](#)

Because, as she reported, he felt like she was paying attention to him. Isn't that interesting? That he picked up that she was watching and paying attention to what he was doing? And he felt validated by that. He felt like she was interested in him and engaged in what he was doing. She never thought of that before.

Personally, I didn't think that that would be the response from him either, but it's interesting to see what children pick up. And for him, he found a connection through this skill of Observe and Describe. Because she would come in and automatically, without having to think too much about a million other things, she would just look at him, observe, describe what he's doing, and then communicate with him. That was it. And yet it meant the world to him. It meant to him that he was important in her life and that she was paying attention to what he was doing. Absolutely, absolutely game-changer for their relationship.

So we started off with Observe and Describe, and then now we're going to add on an additional skill. We'll probably move to [Effective Praise](#), which will help build the relationship even more and get him to follow through with expectations that she has for him, but also build their feelings of mutual respect and love towards each other.

It's a game-changing skill, Observe and Describe. Don't discount how powerful it is. A lot of people, who initially learn it, think, "Wow, this is just too easy." And yet it's through the simple things that we can see the greatest changes.

When we think about building something that is miraculous and something that is opulent and beautiful, we tend to look at the whole thing and imagine big pictures. And yet when we break everything down to smaller components, we'll find that to build something, a building, a beautiful building, it takes one brick at a time. Observe and Describe may seem simple, but it does require, still, some effort on parents' part, and it requires you to be able to do that consistently over and over and over again. There are so many wonderful things happening out there with the skills that we're teaching, but particularly with Observe and Describe.

And it's one that you, as a listener, can do right away. You can see your child doing something you're going to Observe and Describe, both negative and positive behaviors that you see, they both deserve to be observed and described, without judgment. You're going to observe your child. "Hey, I observed that you were playing well with your brother because you shared your Lego." Right? So you observed, and then you described what you saw. Very specific details, but there's no judgment in that. You want to absolutely stay away from any of the judgment that may be there. Super, super powerful skill.

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I wanted to go back with decision fatigue really quickly, and just say that it was a game-changer for this mom because of the decision fatigue that she consistently felt. I don't blame her. Parents who are under a lot of stress right now because of everything that's happening in the world. And when it's constantly, constantly demanding in work and at home to get things done, decision fatigue is absolutely real. If you, as a parent, can take some of the decisions that you need to make throughout the day and pre-make them and prepare for the next day, you're going to find yourself a lot more productive and a lot more effective.

I'm going to go back to the example of my wife and I trying to decide of where to go for dinner. What we do now is we decide what we're going to do for dinner in the morning. Yeah, isn't that crazy? So this morning I dropped my wife off at work because we have a daughter who needs to use the car. And in our discussion, I just asked her, "Okay, what are we going to do for dinner?" And because we have reserves and because we just woke up and we have the energy, it was easy to make a decision. We made a very quick decision and that's it. We're going to stick with that. The decision is made. So now it's not us later on sitting around going, "What are we going to do? What are we going to do? What are we going to? Nah, I don't want to do that. I don't want to do that. I don't want to do that." Because we don't want to waste our energy. We do not want to waste our energy. And I know you don't either. I know you don't either.

So take the decision fatigue out of your life by using Observe and Describe every time you interact with your child. Just make it a habit of something that you're just consistently going to do. Prepare for the day as much as you can and make decisions beforehand. When you wake up in the morning, give gratitude, plan your day, don't let the world dictate what needs to happen with your life. You dictate what needs to happen, and then make the world conform to that. By doing these things, you're going to teach your child better skills on how to focus and how to get things accomplished and how to get things done. And it's a game-changer for children who struggle with ADHD, absolutely game changer. You'll find your kids are going to use Observe and Describe with you too. You will, you'll absolutely find it.

So that's it for me. Again, just want to express my gratitude to you. Thank you for listening. And you can jump over to Instagram and join that account. I also have a [Facebook coaching page](#) now, which is great. So jump over to Facebook and check that out.

[Sign up for coaching on the Smarter Parenting website, and let's get you some very focused interventions to help you and your children.](#) I'm here for you and I'm grateful that I can share this from the Teaching-Family Model through Smarter Parenting to you on this podcast.

There are so many great things that are coming up in this podcast. Some very, very great insights and things that I'm so excited to share with you guys.

So, it only takes a couple of minutes to leave a comment or leave a like on Apple iTunes as a review. I ask that you do that please. It means a world to me if you're able to do that. So please

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do that if you can and share this with family and friends or anyone that you feel may benefit. So have a great day and I will talk to you again later. All right, bye.

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[Ep #47: Mastering Observe and Describe](#)

[Ep #23: Setting daily intentions](#)

RESOURCES

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