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LDS MISSION PODCAST

Episode 142 - Be Kind to Your Toddler Brain

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Hey, what's up everyone, it's Jennie Dildine, the LDS mission coach and you are listening to the LDS mission Podcast, episode number 140. To be kind to your toddler brain. I'm Jenny, the LDS mission coach. And whether you're preparing to serve a mission, currently serving a returned missionary or a missionary mama like me, I created this podcast just for you. Are you searching for epic confidence? Ready to love yourself and to learn the how of doing hard things? Then let's go. I will help you step powerfully into your potential and never question your purpose. Again. It's time to embrace yourself. Embrace your mission, embrace your life, and embrace what's next.



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Hey, everybody, welcome to the podcast. Thanks for hanging out with me today. Thanks for showing up and be a part of my world. I just love that we get to get together every week and talk about all of these things that help missionaries and all stages and families and mission leaders and all of that fun stuff. It's really such an honor to be doing this work, because it matters, right? It matters, the experience that our kids have on their missions. And I you know, sometimes I'll have stuff on my Instagram that's like, well, missions are supposed to be hard. And I do not disagree, they are going to be hard. But I think we can alleviate some of the like, real suffering, sort of that happens on the mission. Because the suffering comes from where we sort of add a whole bunch of meaning to stuff that doesn't have to have meaning. I'm going to do a podcast about that here in a couple of weeks. But right, we have this place where things are hard, because we feel sad, we have thoughts that create sadness, we have thoughts that create insecurity, we have thoughts that create loneliness, all of that. So that's hard. But then what I tend to see have happened with missionaries particulars, they think they shouldn't have experiences like that. And they think they shouldn't feel the way that we they do. And so I'm glad that we're here, and that we have this space in this community where we can talk about these things. And so I really do just appreciate you showing up and listening and sharing with your friends and rating the podcast and reviewing, reviewing the podcast and also reaching out, don't ever hesitate to reach out if you need something I love kind of interacting with you and hearing your stories I have realized recently how important it is to hear people's story. And how connecting it can be to share stories.



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So yeah, I'm just excited to be here today to talk about our toddler brain. And you know, I have mentioned this, I think probably last time and the time before about how I have a lot of names for our toddler brain. There's like our lower brain, our primitive brain, our caveman brain. But one of the things that I like to call my lower brain, and that you might find useful is toddler brain. And we're going to talk about some of the reasons why that it can be good to use that term your toddler brain, I feel like it introduces a lot of acceptance and compassion. Okay, so before we dive into that, let's talk about how we have two parts of our brains, right we have our higher brain that's in charge of reasoning and planning. And it can think about the future. This is where our imagination is, when we have our lower brain that's in charge of keeping us safe and protected and small and conserving energy and avoiding pain and seeking pleasure. Every animal on the planet has a lower brain and the human species is the only species on the planet that has this higher brain. Now sometimes we get into the trap of thinking that our lower brain is bad or wrong, or is a problem. I talked about that a few podcasts ago. But it's my belief that really, both of these two parts of our brain work beautifully together to create our human experience and both are necessary for The plan, our plan is like our Heavenly Father's plan, right? We need both.



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And so if all of the animals of the planet had higher brains, they'd be walking around with Apple watches and podcasts and planners, but, you know, phones and planners, but they wouldn't they don't, they just have these lower brains. But as humans, we get to think about our thinking, and create and imagine, and future, think and analyze and all the those fun things that we get to do. So let's talk about if we are getting ready to go on a mission, what our higher brain, right? Well, sometimes it'll come up with thoughts like this, it'll be like, I have a plan. I know how to make things happen. I'm capable of figuring things out. I'll know what to do. This is what's best for me, this is what I want, right? But you will know that your lower brain or your tolerably brain is coming online, because it'll sound a little bit more whiny and scared, right? And it'll sound like this. If you're thinking about your upcoming mission, this is never gonna work. I don't think I know enough, I might not be able to handle this. I'm scared. I don't want to right, think about even getting ready to do like some homework that you've been putting off for a while. I don't want to that sounds boring, right. That's what it sounds like in my head is that toddler brain does tend to be a little bit more whiny and a little bit more scared.



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Now, again, it's okay that we have both of these things, we actually need that contrast to like, try some stuff and then tweak our plans, and then try some more stuff and tweak our plans compare, go inside for answers. And then adjust like that is part of the growth and transformation process of being on this earth. Right. So the example I want to use is we recently went to Disneyland, it's been a few months ago now actually, actually was in the fall that we went to Disneyland. And when I was younger, I did not like roller coaster rides, probably actually, probably almost until I was 12 that I did not like to go on it any fast are scary rides. And I would say even now I'd kind of stay away from the really intense stuff. But I love the rides at Disneyland, even the fast roller coasters because they have a theme and you know, no, like huge drops or anything crazy minus Tower of Terror or Guardians of the Galaxy. But anyway, when we took my daughter's my daughter's to Disneyland, plus a few of her cousins, there were some rides that both of my daughters were they'd been on before they knew they

wanted to go on them again. They were roller coasters that they'd been on, which might have at one time been really intense for them. But now they've done it enough. And they know what that experience was like. And it was interesting and fascinating for me to watch them try to talk to their cousins that were there. And I watched sort of this toddler brain and wise brain thing play out, right? So there's, in their cousins, they were like, I don't know, this feels really scary. I don't know, if I want to, I might not be able to handle it. This is never gonna work. Right. And sometimes the parents or even my girls, were being the wise brain. And they were saying things like, it's okay, you are capable of figuring this out, you'll know what to do, you're going to have a good time. So it was interesting to watch sort of this like interaction between my nieces, their toddler brain and how their, their cousins and the rest of their family and their parents. Were sort of being that wise brain for them, right?

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Sometimes we can even feel this sort of it can sometimes feel a little bit like a tug of war, where it feels like I have a plan. No, this is never gonna work or I know how to make things happen. And then like the next minute, we're thinking, maybe I'm not even capable of figuring this out or I don't know enough, right or I can totally I know what to do and then it feels like No, I'm just aerator I don't want to, on sometimes it can feel really like a back and forth. And I think all of this can be really good and useful and helpful. And if we can sort of embrace that sort of discomfort of like, oh, I might feel this way, but I'm willing to give it a try. It's all beautiful and wonderful and good. Like that toddler brain is there for a purpose, and it is there to protect us. And for my nieces in that moment. It was as if like, their brain really thought there could be potential danger, right? We've talked about how that lower brain can't really differentiate between potential physical pain and potential emotional pain, right. So there was a lot of fear, probably, that they were feeling and like, uncertainty kind of coming up. Well, this is all again, beautiful, wonderful, good. One of them went on the roller coaster and loved it. One of them went on the roller coaster was like, I don't think I want to do that anymore. And all of it's great. Except for until we decide to get mad at our toddler brain. And this is what I see as really problematic is when we start to get mad at our brain for just trying to protect us.

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No, I also saw this play out a little bit. And I've seen this playing at play out with my own daughter, as my older daughter is trying to get her to go on certain rides that she hasn't gone on before, is they have the conversation and the toddler brain that happens where it's like, I'm too scared. I don't know if I can do this. And then her sister says to her, no, you totally can you can figure this out. But then the problem comes in is when my younger daughter then says to herself, I can't believe how silly I am. It's dumb to be this afraid. There must be something wrong with me. I can't believe how ridiculous I am. Right? So all of it is beautiful, and fine. And wonderful, until we get mad at the toddler. And that's all those judgment thoughts that I just shared with you. Okay? Those thoughts tend to keep us spiraling. And in a place where we can't actually like move forward, we can't actually effectively make a decision about what we want to do or not to. Because we're just stuck in all of this. It turns into shame a lot of times, or it turns into guilt or it turns into, like, insecurity about just who we are with these thoughts. I can't believe how silly I am. It's dumb to be this afraid. There must be something wrong with me. Right? I'm being so ridiculous. But the reason I love this idea of thinking of it like a toddler brain is I want you to think about what you would do in that situation with your own niece or nephew. And if you don't have a niece or nephew, maybe you have a younger brother or sister. Or maybe you have your own child that's like a toddler aged or maybe you have a sibling, that's a toddler age. And picture you being there and you watching this interaction of here's our like

toddlers saying I'm scared. I don't know if I can do this. I don't know if I can go on this roller coaster. And then our wise brains saying, I bet you can I bet we can work this out. It's gonna be okay. And then picture you coming in and then saying, Listen, this is dumb. You shouldn't be thinking this way. I can't believe how ridiculous you are. It's dumb to be this afraid. Look how silly you are. Now when we picture ourselves, saying that to a toddler. It makes no sense that we would do that. Right. But coincidentally, this is what we often do to ourselves. When our toddler brain comes online, and we get in this little back and forth. We get so upset and angry. And like picture I mean, I want you to actually pictures like a young, maybe three year old somewhere between three and five years old, coming and tugging on your shirt and like your toddler brain is genuinely scared and picture them tugging on your shirt and being like listen I'm really scared. I don't know what it's gonna be like on the mission. I don't know what my companions are going to be like, I don't know what my mission president is going to be like. And what would we do with that toddler, and with those thoughts, we totally would not flip out at them, we would be kind, we would probably, like scoop that toddler up and sit them on our lap. And we would tell them, It's okay. It makes sense that you're scared, of course, you're scared, we would be kind to that toddler. And that my friends is what we can do for ourselves is we can be that kind, loving person, a safe place for our toddler brain.



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Sometimes I think of that toddler, like, running around with a marker. I think I got in trouble a few times, for writing on the wall when I was younger. But picture like a toddler running all over your house, which is basically the inside of your mind and picture like a white, like white space in your mind. And this toddler is worried it wants to tell you some stuff. He wants to be like, Hey, I'm worried about this. And hey, what about this? And hey, what did you think about this, and hey, I'm actually afraid that it might go down like this. And it starts writing in black marker all over the inside of those walls. And what we tend to do is we tend to, like get frustrated, we tend to like chase the toddler, we tend to like freak out and be like, Hey, you should stop doing that. Right? This is what we do to ourselves. When instead we can just go over and we can sit down with the toddler can have like a little chat. We can sit them on our laps, and we can be like, listen, it's okay, I know you're worried about this stuff. I know you think it's important for me to know all this stuff. And we can take the marker out of our hands out of its hands. And we can just say listen, I got you What's this about? I do this with myself. Sometimes when I find myself, like in a little bit of like a freakout or a little bit of like a like in fear or in insecurity or whatever. I've gotten to a mostly pretty good place where I'm not like what's wrong with you? Why are you thinking about this this way? I do picture that like young toddler brain. Right? That that young toddler and I'm just like, listen, Little Jenny, what's going on. And I just in my mind, like scoop a little toddler onto my lap, and treat it with kindness. Okay.



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So what I've noticed is that this little toddler brain will make itself known and really have a lot to say, right before I do something big or something new, or something that pushes me out of my comfort zone. And I noticed that it happens regularly. So you might notice this too. Maybe if you're getting ready to teach a lesson in a new language, or you're maybe going on a date, your first date, after you get home from the mission. Maybe you're applying to a new school to a graduate program or to nursing school. Really anything that is expansive and like you're human, that lower brain feels a little intimidated by you might notice that this toddler, this whiny brain, this afraid brain will come online. When that happens know that it's okay. And it's totally normal. Your toddler brain is afraid. And that doesn't mean that you have to actually like submit to the fears. You can be sort of the quote unquote

adult, the kind of adult the safe place for this toddler to have its little tantrum and freak out. Okay, it makes so much sense actually. Some of these fears, like studies have shown that some of these, like toddler brain, like primitive brain fears, actually were developed in our childhood. And so it makes sense that that our brain if something feels big or scary to that toddler part of your brain that it might like, Come out to tell you what it's thinking. So it's okay. It all makes sense. But let's try to think of that part of our brain not as bad, not as a problem, not as a pest not as annoying, not as something that's going to prevent you from achieving what you want to achieve. Let's be kind To the toddler part of your brain. Have you ever seen kids who are either afraid to sort of speak their mind in public or they're afraid to say what's on their mind, it's sort of like you get this sense that they're, these kids feel like they're walking on eggshells a little bit like, oh, I don't know, if it's okay, if I say this. Maybe they're, maybe you see kids like this, in like middle school age, like they're afraid they're going to be judged or ridiculed. Or maybe there'll be seen as silly. And so that's not what we want for ourselves. And for our little toddler brain, we want to create a safe space for that toddler to write on the walls for that toddler to freak out a little bit for a little bit of a tantrum. And we just want to scoop it up with kindness, scoop up that toddler, love it, give it a warm embrace. Be like, listen, I know, you're afraid. And it's okay. Like, listen, I've got you, like, we can do this together. So I want to just give you a couple steps. And then we'll wrap up.



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But let me remind you of one thing really quickly, too, is, I think another powerful thing we can do is we can create a safe space for other people's toddler brain. So maybe you're on the mission, and you have your district leader that's like freaking out and afraid that they're not meeting our goals. And they're kind of really worried about the future, whatever, I think we can be a safe place for, for other people to have their little meltdowns and freak outs as well. We're like, oh, my gosh, makes so much sense that you feel that way. Of course, of course, you're worried about this, of course you're afraid. Or if your companion is really worried about the lesson that they're going to teach or the presentation, they're supposed to give it a zone conference or something you can be like, of course, like, of course, it makes sense that you are worried about this, and it's okay, like, Listen, I've got you. I'm here. And we don't need to change it. We don't need to fix it. There's nothing wrong. Like, I'm just here to support you and love you. This is a safe place. Okay?



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All right, a couple of steps. First step is always awareness. Notice when your toddler in your brain is having a tantrum, when it's having a little bit of a freakout. You don't even need to succumb to it, you can kind of get outside of it a little bit. You're like, Oh, I see what's going on here. And this is what I do. Now, if there's something new or big that I'm about to do, I just expect it. I expect the toddler to come out and share its opinion and all of its ideas about what it's worried about. And I'm like, oh, here we are, again. Yep, I was sort of planning on that. And then number two, show that part of your brain that you are a safe place where by talking back, you can kind of do this, use your higher brain to sort of self talk and be encouraging with kind words like listen, I've got you this is gonna be okay, we're gonna do this together. I know you're worried, but I bet we can figure this out. And we can sort of in our mind's eye and in our brain sort of partner, heart and mind with that lower toddler part of us that just really is worried sometimes and afraid. And it's totally okay, that they are and they can either go on the roller coaster, or they don't have to. But whatever happens, we can be kind and loving and

compassionate to that part of your brain. So if you notice your brain having a freakout, just picture a toddler, like, don't be mad. Just be kind, scoop that toddler up, and give it some kindness and love. All right. Okay, I hope all of you have the most amazing week and we'll talk to you next time.



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Serving a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints can present a unique set of challenges, and many of those challenges you might not even see coming. So you're gonna want a unique set of solutions. It's easier than you think to overcome worry and anxiety, serve the successful mission you've always dreamed up and navigate your post mission experience with confidence. That is why I created some amazing free goodies that I'm sharing in my show notes. Maybe you'll want to grab the free training for preparing missionaries, my video course for RMS or maybe you and I should hop on a free strategy call. If you're ready to take your preparedness to serve or your preparedness to come home to the next level. Then go grab one of those freebies. And in the meantime, no matter which part of the mission experience you are involved in. Just know that Jenny, the LDS mission coach is thinking about you every single day