

The Body Intelligence Summit™

Embodied Parenting in the Age of Disconnection

Mikki Willis, Nadia Salamanca, Susan Stiffelman

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Mark:

Hello and welcome to another session of The Body Intelligence Summit. I'm your host for this session. My name is Mark Metz and I'm here today with three very, very interesting people to talk about parenting and bringing more body intelligence into the art of raising the next generation.

I've got Mikki Willis and Nadia Salamanca together with Susan Stiffelman. Mikki and Nadia are co-founders and currently the people behind Elevate, the Film Foundation Festival and Film. Mikki has produced probably 400 or more productions in his day, and Nadia has got 50 award-winning shorts under her belt, Grammy nominations. It just goes on and on.

Nadia's a graduate of the University of Colorado and studied dance and artistic stuff there, and Mikki has had a real interesting background where not just theatrical features and commercials and that sort of thing, but he was actually there when September 11th happened and was at ground zero for three days, which is where he was gifted the idea and the vision for Elevate, atop of the rubble there, so it's really exciting. They are parents of two kids, two younger people and have had some interesting media exposure about that lately, which I'm sure we'll talk, too, on the call.

Susan Stiffelman is here with us, too, and she is a renowned expert parent coach for many people. She's also the author of *Parenting with Presence*. It's an Eckhart Tolle edition, and *Parenting Without Power Struggles: Raising Joyful, Resilient Kids While Staying Cool, Calm, and Connected*. She's also a licensed family and marriage therapist, credential teacher, and she's also on the Huffington Post's weekly "Parent Coach" as an advice columnist. Not only that, but she plays banjo and is a determined tap dancer and an optimistic gardener, coming from her bio there.

That's enough of the bio stuff. I'm really glad to have you guys all over the call. Let's just go around the circle here and say "hello". Let's start with you, Susan. Let's say "hello" and then we'll talk about kids.

Susan:

Hey, everyone! I'm so glad to be here. I have a son, Ari Anderson. He's 25 and I like him a lot. He's a great kid, a great person, and wonderful to hang out with.

Mark: That's great. Great! Let's hear from Mikki and Nadia and let's introduce your kids, too, while you're at it.

Nadia: Hi! I'm Nadia Salamanca and we have two sons, Azai, who's four and a half, and Zuriel, who is 22 months. It's great to be here.

Mikki: Yes, thank you so much. I'm happy to be here, too. I'm still kind of reeling in receiving information that you play banjo, Susan. We'll have to talk about that one later.

Susan: It's okay. It's a lot to take in, Mikki, but just sit with it for a while.

Mikki: If you learn nothing else on this call, that's enough.

Susan: We'll see how many songs I know.

Mikki: Okay.

Mark: This is great. Just as an aside, I should mention my daughter, who's named Geneva, and she will be turning eight years old in March, so we're all right in the thick of upbringing kids.

First of all, I'd like to just get a little bit of a background story and some of the stuff from some of you about what brings you -- I know, Mikki and Nadia in the filmmaking process have also had some notoriety lately with some YouTube clips, some advice and some parenting things with your kids, so I'd like to talk about what brought you to not just parenting, but to the table as being someone who could discuss it. Let's talk a little bit with Mikki and Nadia about that YouTube phenomenon recently.

Nadia: Go ahead, Mik.

Mikki: Okay. Great! Well, we had a video that unexpectedly went very viral and has been seen more than a hundred million times between all the platforms, YouTube and Facebook and such. It was a simple one-minute video where my son, Azai, our oldest son, wanted to get a Barbie doll and it was me making a declaration to him and to my younger son, who just happened to be present, that they have the freedom to choose their lives and that Daddy would love them no matter what they chose and what they chose to be with their life.

We put that out on Facebook as we do all the time. We've been doing it since the boys were born and this one just hit a nerve and ended up going all over the world. The next thing we know, we were doing talk shows. Ellen was supporting

the video and all kinds of amazing things have opened up as a result of that one little video.

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Now, we find ourselves thrust into this global dialogue about -- really, it's come down to the difference of molding children and nurturing children, which tends to be the foundation of the conversations that we're in.

Of course, my wife and I are focused on nurturing our children as opposed to the old concept of they're blank hard drives and we have to now put all of our programming onto them. It's really about for us creating the most rich and healthy soil and tending to them and giving them the natural attention that's needed to allow them to bloom in the way that they were born to bloom.

Mark: That's great and I love the metaphor of -- it's sort of a reverse metaphor because in this technological world, of course, we're always thinking of programming and making things and controlling things, but raising kids is exactly diametrically opposed to that. It's a garden. It's raising a seedling into a tree.

Mikki: Yeah, that's right.

Mark: Great! Well, the conversation here is about body intelligence. It really sounds like you have such a powerful metaphor. Would you like to chime in on that, Susan?

Susan: Well, I love that this is about body intelligence. I do a lot of interviews and oftentimes, if it's on camera, they'll put underneath my name "Susan Stiffelman, parenting expert", and I cringe when I see that. I understand that shorthand. I understand that it's nice for people to feel that somebody's been around the block a few times, but everything that I teach in my courses and programs is about empowering parents to become experts themselves or use a comparable term.

So how is it that when something's not working with our kids, quite often we're scrambling, we're reading, we're watching videos, we're looking for people like me? That's great if it supplements our own sensibility, but I think body intelligence is one of the quickest and most reliable ways that we have to check in with ourselves. Does your stomach feel tight? Do your shoulders feel tense? Do you just feel a general discomfort in your skin when you approach your child in a particular way?

I would venture to guess, Mikki and Nadia, that when your little boy wanted the Barbie, your body was very congruent, the messages you were getting with the, "Of course, you can have a Barbie" and that we can rely on that as an incredibly useful piece of information to help us steer -- I talk about being the captain of

the ship. I can talk about that in a few minutes, but how do you captain the ship without people telling you exactly what to say and do. It's impossible. Parenting is a work in progress every day, so we have this tremendous source of wisdom if we tap into it.

Mark: Yes. Excellent! In today's world, that's so important especially with kids because - - we'll get into this a little later in the call, but I can bring it up right now. Of course, the big question is do we or don't we allow our kids access to technology and how early do we let them have technology. Of course, some schools of thought are that it's not a good idea at all in the early years.

My daughter is in a Waldorf-based charter school and she's in 2nd Grade and is still more or less screen-free, but I know that there's a wide variety of approaches to that in today's world. Obviously, the wisdom we get from a screen or a computer is different than what we gather from our heart or our intuition.

Mikki: Yes, it's very true and it's a very potent subject. I will chime in by saying that our kids are not screen-free and one of our excuses for that is our livelihood, what we do, we're media makers, and so media and storytelling is a very big part of our family. We had a vision before we had children of what it would be like. We set that intention and that all went out the window in reality.

And so, what we do, it's not a one-size-fits-all thing and that's the one thing that I can say without question, is there's so much advice that comes from so many directions. It was confusing for us when we were new parents. We're now four and a half years into this, but it was very confusing for us because I would read something that would say the answer is blue and Nadia would read something that say the answer used to be blue, but now it's red. We would stop and try to put these things together.

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What we decided to do, which is very much in congruence with what you said, Susan, if I were to sum it up, it's really about tapping into our own intuitive, instinctual ability to listen to what works for our children. And so, what we've been very aware of is monitoring our kids and their behavior.

So far in our four-year-old, who really loves movies, the media experience has been -- for the most part, there have been a few things that he's watched that we've decided, "That's really not good for him," but for the most part, he's very intellectual. He's very emotionally literate and he understands at a level way beyond what I would ever imagine a four-and-a-half-year-old would be at, and a lot of that is because he's actually watching the hero's journey unfold and he's understanding the depth of life and human emotions and all of that.

We watch movies with him and we explain things to him, and sometimes he explains them to us. He's really that advanced sometimes. And so, we have been allowing media into our kids' lives. There are times when maybe it's not responsible, when it's just because we want to sleep or anything like that, but for the most part, we do our best to make sure that it's part of the learning environment and that they're also very balanced and engaged in the real world, in nature, in human to human conversations and all of that. At least that's our take on it and it's working so far.

Mark: Yeah. I think that's really important to keep the parental involvement as you're bringing these things into younger people's lives because if you just let them dive in by themselves and come up with their own conclusions, it's not nearly as beneficial as having a relationship with the parent there, like you said, discussing what's going on, getting their opinion, learning from them about what's going on, and there's definitely a difference, too.

I'm sure you could speak to this, Susan, between storytelling like a movie or a program that's got, like you said, a hero's journey in it versus what they call interactive media, which could be games or even some sort of learning on an iPad type of stuff. Is there some science around the difference there? What can you say about that, Susan?

Susan: Yeah. In fact, I did a course last winter. I do these seven-week courses and I actually devoted one of the seven sessions to a session with a friend of mine, a psychiatrist, Dr. Victoria Dunckley, who wrote a book called *Reset Your Child's Brain*. I included her and wanted to devote that much time to her because it was amazing to read her book and discover that interactive games, which we think are educational, particularly the ones that are up close so they're on a computer screen or an iPad, are actually more harmful than a screen across the room, a television.

I interviewed her again because I'm doing a series on this and she's really -- now, I'm speaking to so many people and there's this idea that for a developing brain, for a child's brain, that level of engagement, that heightened hyperarousal that happens when you're holding a device or you're just a foot or something from a screen and the squirts of dopamine that you get each time you score a point, each time the bell rings can be much more highly addicting and create more meltdowns and tantrums when the device is finally turned off than sitting across the room watching something on a screen.

And then add to that, I love what you said about sitting with your kids and watching the movie with them and engaging and letting them be the launching pad point for important conversations about values and about life lessons. That's my eight cents.

Nadia: Yeah. I'm just going to jump in there. Just going back to tuning in to our own body intelligence to help guide us through this journey of parenting, we allowed Azai to explore an iPad and we noticed that exact things started happening, is that he actually started to have a little bit more meltdowns. And so, Mikki and I really tuned into that and said, "This is probably not okay. We're just going to take this away."

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We're observing this behavior and this is not working, so we're going to remove this from the equation until maybe later on in his life, but it was very clear. I have to say that I'm really grateful that Mikki and I are such present parents and in tune with our children so much that we really notice these things and care and aren't just trying to have him be distracted all the time in order to keep him busy. We just really saw how it affected him, so yeah, we lived through that example.

Susan: But you intuitively figured it out. You didn't need to read it in a book because you were present in your body and you were willing to look at what it was telling you, which is just great.

Mikki: Yes. Verbatim what you've described, Susan, because it literally -- we thought, "Well, let's let him try this," and we've got some educational games and some games that were just fun, boy stuff. He really of course got into it and wanted his iPad every day.

There were a few little upsets when it was time, "Let's put it away. It's time to eat now," and then there were some meltdowns. You never know the first two or three meltdowns if it's just the mood he's in or what's going on, but then after six or seven of those, that's when we just said, "Something's not right here." At first, we didn't notice, but we know that it's actually affecting him in a negative way and that this wasn't a good idea. "Let's undo this," and then we did and then the problem went away.

Susan: Wow! That's great.

Mark: Yeah. I agree with what you're saying there. It's harder to have that kind of parental copilot when they are immersed in the screen right near their face. It's much different.

Another interesting statistic I read recently -- and I'm sure some of you can chime in on this -- has something to do with our eyesight and the development of our eyeballs. They say in China, I believe the percentage of kids with myopia has gone from 15% or 20% to nearly 90% now, so many, many, many more

young people need glasses earlier and a lot of people are attributing it to a lot of early screen use or close-up screen use.

Of course, I cringe when I see people with kids in a stroller and the kid is two years old and they're just completely engrossed with the screen that's six inches away from their face. I don't know if that's a good idea. We've got to use our body intelligence to dance with this evolving world that's rapidly building around us, so it's really what we're here to talk about.

What are some practical ideas or things you could help us with, Susan, or just all of the listeners on the call here for just like baseline practices to keep body intelligence into your parenting?

Susan: You know, my work is built on a really simple idea and I use my hands, so I'm going to just describe it. If your right hand is you and the left hand is the child, then if you're holding your two hands in front of you, which I always do when I'm on these interviews and even if no one's seeing me, the right hand above the left is you as the calm, confident captain of the ship, and when you're in that place, you can parent.

You're not desperate. You're not needy. You're willing for your kids to be unhappy. In fact, you recognize that a frustrated child, which is what you'll get when you say "It's time to turn things off" many times is actually discovering that he or she has within them the resilience to cope with life when it doesn't go their way, which is a vitally important life skill.

When the hands go side by side and no one is in charge, I call that the two lawyers, and that's where you're pushing against your child, trying to talk the child into something, convince a child. He's pushing back and nobody's in charge. This is where you have negotiations and battles of will and power struggles. I often say whoever is the most committed to their position and the least exhausted is likely to prevail. That's usually the thought process and then things can deteriorate even further.

Now, if your right hand or the parent hand is below the left hand, that's what I call the dictator because the child is calling the shots, threatening, having meltdowns, stomping feet, throwing things.

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You feel desperate and out of control. Maybe you're really worried about what people think of you if you're out in public. And because you're feeling so out of control, you attempt to get in control, which is not what parenting is about. You bribe, you threaten, you intimidate just like a dictator. I call that the dictator because a dictator has no genuine power. They rule by fear and intimidation. They wipe out your bank account and they throw you in jail.

And so, this conversation we're having is so important because it boils down to parenting. Are you willing to hold a place in the presence of your child, which Nadia and Mikki clearly did? They checked in with themselves. They observed their child. The iPad games were not a match for their boy and they were willing to sail through the storm.

So I think the first piece of advice is to really look within and look at what might be getting in the way. Do you need your child to like you? Are you afraid of his anger? There are a lot of pieces that play into this, but what's essential for kids is that they have a grownup in the room and oftentimes, that means you're going to have to be willing to be very unpopular or endure their sadness or upset.

Mark: Yeah. What you said about sadness and allowing them to go through their emotions reminds me of something. I think it might have been a different call I was on with you, Susan, or something, but there's a point where we're talking about how hard it is as a parent to allow them to be sad or to let them.

Sometimes they just really need to cry and some kids nowadays are sort of conditioned that crying is not okay. Talk a little bit about that of how we can just really allow our kids to explore the range of emotions and how that's healthy.

Susan: Yes, it is. I discovered there's something called dry eye syndrome, which is when kids have become so hardened that they don't have access to their tears, and we know that tears release a lot of stress hormones and flush the system of toxins, but I'd love to hear from Mikki and Nadia about what it's like to live through it. You guys are in the thick of it.

Mark: Yeah, please.

Mikki: Well, it is interesting. I want to say it just reminded me, Susan, of that call you gave me at one point. I released a video and you said, "I really love that video of you and Azai in the car." This was a couple of years ago now, and then your advice was, "But just be careful of..." because there's a point when I was saying to him, "But it's okay, buddy," and I was letting him know everything is okay and I'm trying to pacify him. You were saying, "Just be careful that you don't rob him of experiencing his own sadness" or whatever, right? I was making it better for him, so you reminded me of a phone call that I never forgot.

This is more of a question really back to you, Susan, and that is, we've always been very open and letting our boys know the importance of expressing themselves and crying and all of that, and then there's this borderline where it gets into whiny manipulation that it's always a tough one to navigate. I've always done my best not to say, "Stop crying," but there are times now when I do find

myself just saying like, "Enough!" I'm just curious on how do we handle those moments when you just get that now the whining is just happening because he's not getting what he's wanting.

For whatever reason, it's time to now -- for me to have a phone call or something else to take place so that I can actually hear my phone call or whatever, I find myself just saying, "Stop! That's enough! Stop!" I don't want to do that. I really don't want to do that because there's a part of my body that says anytime I'm stopping him from expressing himself, it doesn't feel right.

Susan: Sometimes kids will persist like that. Well, there are a few possibilities. One is that he's not smelling your clarity quite yet and that's often the case for parents because we're not always clear, and also because sometimes if he knocks on the door five times, it doesn't open, but if he knocks six times, it does. So if there's a possibility that, "Oh my gosh, fine, here's the iPad. I just need to make the phone call," then you have a very smart son if he keeps whining, so there's that piece.

And then the other is -- I do these online classes and one of the elements that I teach that's really, really powerful that works very quickly to help shift things is to get the child to really feel understood.

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If you were Azai and I'm looking to make comments to you that you're going to say "yes" to or nod your sad little head like, "Sweetheart, you're really hoping this time Daddy might change his mind and it doesn't seem fair that you're not getting to do this," blah, blah, blah, "And you were so hoping that I would," blah, blah, blah, it doesn't really matter what you're saying, but it's like, "Oh, you really do get it. Okay, I can back off now." Sometimes that's what's needed.

Mikki: Yeah. Well, in that moment of knowing when to be the captain -- I love that metaphor that you used, Susan, learning what it takes to be the captain of the ship, and sometimes the captain of the ship isn't there to make things better. The captain is just to keep things on course.

Susan: Yeah.

Nadia: I find what has worked with our kids, too, is the listening, is the reflecting back, kind of what you were saying, Susan, reflecting back where they are and maybe what they're wanting in the moment. "I really hear you. I understand you would like this," and just have that reflection back so they do know that they're being heard really. Sometimes that works and sometimes it doesn't. Again, it's checking in to our own body intelligence, taking a breath, being present in the moment.

It's challenging for parents. When we have busy lives, we have things to do, I always feel that the frustration comes when it's at a time where it's hard to take that time or we perceive it's hard to take that time, but if we can remember in that moment to just take a moment and take a pause and maybe take a few more seconds to try that tool, then it may be more likely to dissolve that power struggle in that moment.

Susan: And one of the things I've noticed is that if there's a persistence where you just -- because I think what you said is really important, Nadia, that you don't really have time in that moment, and I don't think parents -- just because you become a parent, it doesn't mean you change species. You just don't want to be dealing with it right now.

So I think sometimes what I look at with chronic frustration, which I'm not hearing you describe, but many parents will probably relate to this, which is that you have a kid who can never accept "no". There's always a pushback. There's always a dramatic event or scene or meltdown, and I'm always looking underneath the external manifestation of behavior to see what is the message this behavior is trying to deliver and to address it at its roots.

A child who can never accept "no", who's always having an issue, I talk about them as having a low-grade fever of frustration that they walk around with. And in those cases, quite often this is a child who just needs to have a good cry now and then. Magically, it mitigates this other stuff that's showing up in the ordinary moments of life that aren't really that big a deal, but they're having these big pushbacks around.

Nadia: Yeah. I noticed that with Azai a lot actually when he was younger. Whenever I would notice that was happening, I would just hold the space for him to just cry, just let it out. Sometimes it would be like 30 minutes and it's hard for a parent to just sit there and you want to make it better or you want to solve the problem, but just to have the awareness like, "He just needs to get this out."

Susan: Exactly.

Nadia: It's like this build-up that happens and they just need to get it out. After he did that, he was just so much better, but a lot of parents don't have that awareness or that education, and so they just try to stop it with force or they think that they're just being a brat or whatever it is. Yeah, that has really helped us in our parenting, too, to look for that underlying reason of why this behavior is happening and allowing them to just let it out.

Susan: Yes. Great!

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Mikki: Well, we have father and son moments like that, too. Again, we're not experts in this. We're just doing our best to apply what we've learned on our path and we've chosen a path of awakening, which is an ongoing process. There's nowhere to really get it except for just to continue this unfolding of becoming more and more aware of our environment and aware of our world and aware of human behavior, aware of most importantly ourselves, what's really going on in this body of mind.

The more I understand that, the better father I could be. Otherwise, if I don't understand really how to drive the ship, then I'm just going to pass on what was handed down or what I've been under the assumption of, and I found that that's one of the greatest Achilles' heels in fatherhood from a lot of conversations that I've had. I've done a lot of speaking in conferences and interviews around fatherhood, and listening to other fathers, I find that there's this danger in -- well, our whole world faces a danger in labels, right? It's a thing that keeps us at war, conservatives and liberals, us and them, that kind of segregation, of naming a group or yourself or anything, then suddenly now we're distinguishing someone else.

What I found in this label of father is that there's a collective agreement that isn't necessarily accurate for what fatherhood is. It's just collective agreement, but it doesn't fully coincide with what my intuition tells me fatherhood is, the old fatherhood, which is the, "I'm the provider. I'm not the emotional one. The mother gives all of that. I'm the authority." All of this stuff is just the norm, but it's not very natural. I think we get very confused between the difference of what's natural and what's normal.

So for me, it's a constant awakening of what's natural for me and let me step out of what's normal. I find myself falling into the normal programming sometimes and my kids' instant feedback loop lets me know immediately when it's working and when it's not. That's been for me the best way to grow into a relationship with my boys.

Sorry, I'm having a little technical issue here. I don't know whose phone that might be, or I got a flock of wild birds flying over. Hello?

Mark: I think we just got some birds in the background or something. They wanted to chime in the conversation here.

Susan: Mikki, I just love hearing you say that because you're really creating a part of this conversation, helping fathers recognize that there's an openness. To me, that's so much about what struck a nerve for the video that went viral for you around, "What kind of a father would let their little boy buy a Barbie doll?" I just thought that was so great.

Mikki: Thank you. Yeah, it's been amazing. I'm interested, Susan, too, to know how this fits into the metaphor, which I also love that you've mentioned about having the upper hand and being aware of that positioning because there was a moment that I can say that Azai and I had a real breakthrough.

I had reached a point where I was just being really frustrated for a while. I was trying to get him to get his pajamas on and go to bed and all of this, and there was a night that all of it was happening. It was just kind of like, "Stand still. Hold still. Let me help you. Put your sweater in. No, wrong hole. Put your feet up," that whole thing of just trying to get the pajamas on him.

I had this thought to myself. I thought, "God, I just want to cry right now," and then I thought to myself, "What if I did?" I sat down on the bed and I just let it out. He looked at me and I said, "You know, buddy, Daddy's learning, too, and sometimes I really need your help. I get frustrated and I don't always know the best thing to do in these moments. I would love to work these things out with you so I can know what's working for you and what's not working for you so we can both enjoy our time together more," and I was crying as I said this. I said, "Sometimes I need to be helped."

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There was a real beautiful thing that happened that was tangible for me because it put us in this -- I don't want to say equality because I understand I'm the parent and there's a role for me to hold there, but it opened up this understanding of our humanity. I could see my son actually go, "Oh! Okay. I'm not the only one making mistakes and trying to do things that are making people angry. You don't have it all figured out." There's something in that equality of him seeing Daddy that actually gave him -- I could see empathy for me now.

So now, when I look at him ever since I said, "Daddy really needs you right now. I need your help right now," he hears that and he knows what that means. So I'm curious on how that lands, Susan, in all of this.

Susan: Well, what you did is you -- I don't know that it's so much about the words as it is about the feeling, which again we're talking about body intelligence. That's why parents will often say, "Well, just tell me what I should say under these circumstances," and I'm never going to do that. You're barking up the wrong tree. Check in with yourself. Check in with your body. Check in with your heart, and in that moment, Mikki, you were congruent.

What I would steer people away from doing is making the child responsible. I've had parents come in my office and I say, "Well, why are you here?" "Oh, I'm here because my kids drive me crazy." And often, the kids ought to play because I

don't want them to feel that they have that much power over you or that you're not stable enough or steady enough to withstand the rocky, bumpy road.

On the other side of it, I think it's so valuable that your son sees you as a fellow journeyer on the path and that on a soul level, you are pretty much in the same boat. You've just been around on the planet a bit longer. And so, reconciling those two things is a very interesting dance.

I'm still having amazing conversations with my son, Ari, who's 25 now about things that happened when he was younger where I just say, "Please forgive me. This is what I knew and I was trying to find my way," and it's just magnificent really what I think he learned from that about acceptance, self-acceptance, forgiveness, and compassion.

Mark: Yeah. I just love that whole story because it illustrates a body to body way of making the same point that sometimes I try to tell my daughter. I was going to bring this up because she'll have encounters with other people or other adults maybe who'll do something that doesn't think is right or something. I've told her, "You've got to understand everybody is trying to do the best they can. Sometimes the best they can is not that great."

And there've been times when I've lost it with her or just basically have done something I'm not very proud of and I'll explain that to her. "Look, I try to do the best I can and sometimes my best is just not that great. We're all here to continually strive to do better," and I love how you handled that in the moment with your son there, Mikki, because that's completely just illustrating it. "I'm doing the best I can and right now, this is the best I can do." That must have really been a powerful moment of connection where he's like, "Oh, I get it."

Mikki: Yeah, it was. Thank you.

Mark: Yeah. Well, one of the topics of the Body Intelligence Summit on a grand scale is smaller body, bigger body, and what goes on inside our bodies and our families' bodies and how that relates to this rapidly evolving, rapidly growing global body, humanity itself. There are so many pieces of it that it's the microcosm and the macrocosm, and what's going to happen in the world into the next generation starts right now in our homes with our little kids. That's a subject that fires me up. I'll just put it that way.

Susan: I'm doing a series soon on Parenting in the Digital Age. I've been having these conversations with such interesting people and one of the things that I like about what you're doing, Mark, is this overlap of staying in your body and staying present, and then this preponderance of digital screens. You can have it on your wristwatch now. You can get your text messages and your emails and you joke

about how the next thing will be the implant. Some of the people that I've spoken with are such a cool -- there's stuff about it on my website, but people are really exploring the implications of this. I love the word one woman used who's part of an internet addiction program in Washington State.

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She said, "We're trying to help people develop sustainable practices and habits with their devices." I just like that phrasing in terms of us taking in with ourselves around whether it's tech time and screen time with our kids or these moments when we have to decide do I say "yes" or do I withstand the storm? What's sustainable is this thing that follows you around all the time, which is your body. You have this great wisdom that you carry around to check in with.

Mikki:

Yeah. I love this subject so much because as Nadia and I were returning a rental car today, we started to say, "What do we want to say in this phone call?" She expressed what was up for her. For me, it was about the state of our role because fatherhood shifted a lot for me in the past few months. Anyone who follows my posts that I do on Facebook knows that I've been posting some very controversial posts and activating these dialogues with thousands of people for us to really delve into what's really happening in our world, what's happening as a human collective, as a human organism, what's really going on because for a number of years, I've been deeply immersed in spiritual communities and I found that there's a real addiction to the whole "follow your bliss", which is really an incredible teaching, but there's a real addiction to always wanting to be comfortable and always wanting to feel good.

The truth of the matter is we create media for global issues to really make a difference in the world. That's what Elevate does, and we get to see a lot of what's going on in the world, stuff that we don't always see on the mainstream media. I'm aware that I can get my children everything that they need, but if our world is in peril by the time they become adults or young adults or whatever, there's that that has to go in tandem. My commitment, our commitment, my wife and I, is not to raise little robots, but to raise awakened and aware children that have their inner guidance system so that they don't become just another worker in a sweatshop, and I don't mean to be negative and a conspiracy theorist, but there are things like that that are happening in our world that we have to be aware of because no matter what we give our children, if they're suppressed by our governments and our social systems, that's not what we had our children for.

We didn't have them to bring them into that type of a system, so there is a real focus that I have now as a father on waking up to the maximum myself, finding a way to stay positive within that, to see what's going on, to be part of the rebuilding and the collaboration of the rebuilding of new systems that work for everyone, to stand up for equality, to stand up for whatever it is that will take

our world closer to be in a world that I envision my children to have the privilege of experiencing. There's also that bit of responsibility that we all have as parents right now. I didn't plan on this in my life. I didn't know that this was the world that I was going to be inheriting and that we would be facing all of the challenges that we're facing right now economically and environmentally and everything, and at the same time, holding a gratitude that we actually get to be part of this awakening.

We get to be part of this journey that has us all stepping into greater awareness of really who and what are we, what are our children and how can we create an environment that allows all of us to flourish in our future and allow our children - the world that we leave our children, what does that look like? What is our vision of that and what are we doing to push in that direction? For me, it has become my main focus as a parent.

Mark: Yeah. I can chime in there. There's really nothing that makes you more committed to the future and creating a better world for the next generation than having a kid. There's something about becoming a parent really that gets you down to the real mission in life, and that's a thing, too.

[0:45:04]

As my daughter matures -- she's still in the young age of being in la-la-land, being a child, but at a certain point, she's going to be old enough to be asking me questions about some of the problems in the world and going to be aware of what's really going on. At that point, I'm committed to being like -- yes, it's not a perfect world, but I want her to be able to look up at me as someone who has committed my life to making it better and making a better world.

I think that's part of the mission when you have a child. It's not for everybody, I agree, but yeah, it starts at home and bringing kids up in environments that are less dysfunctional than what our parents had maybe or whatever it may be. Every one of us that brings new life in this world is responsible for a big piece of evolution and it's a real gift to get to shepherd the next generation alone.

Well, this has been a really fabulous call. We've got a couple of minutes left, so chime in with some closing remarks. Go ahead, Mikki.

Mikki: I was just going to add a little addendum to what I said by saying I don't expect every parent to be an activist out in the world and creating media and all of that. At the very base, what my wife and I decided is to never lie to our children, to never perpetuate some of the stories or tell them that sometimes it's okay to lie.

This would be controversial what I'm about to say, but we didn't even tell our children that Santa Claus is real. They still believe in it. They still love it. My son knows it's fictional. He's aware of that. We don't ever want to teach them that

sometimes it's okay for your whole family to lie to you, so that's one of the core parts really having them grasp what's real and what's not real, which is so important for us right now at this stage of our evolution.

Nadia: Yeah. I also wanted to just add that also for us, what's important -- and this again goes back to really getting in tune with body intelligence, is nurturing their intuition and supporting their own intuition and their own inner guidance because that's going to be the most powerful guidance system for them through life no matter what is going on in the world.

If they're getting all this information from all these sources, it's very good to research and to find what's true for you, but if we can teach them to really hone in and understand that inner guidance, that will be a really, really powerful tool in their life that I think will allow them to move through anything really, so we're very much nurturing that in both of our boys and in ourselves on a daily basis.

Susan: I love that because so many times when you parent, in a way that puts you in a position of always pretending at least that you know what's right. You rob your kids of the chance to check in with themselves and develop that habit. In my second book, *Parenting with Presence*, I actually talked about Gavin De Becker who wrote a book called *The Gift of Fear* and a subsequent book for parents called *Protecting the Gift*. He talks over and over about interviewing somebody who had something awful happen, a mugging or whatever, and how they're like, "You know, a little voice told me I should cross the street" or "I had a bad feeling about that guy, but I went ahead because I didn't want to judge," and how we don't listen to that intelligence inside of us, all those signals, the sweaty palms, the gurgling stomach, the discomfort in our skin.

I wrote about that in my book and then I took it a little further and said this is what we want to be doing, just as you said, Nadia, with our kids. The child says, "I don't know if I should invite Julia over or just leave it to me and Mary." Check in with yourself, sweetheart, what feels right to you as opposed to always seeing that as an opportunity to teach or to give your opinion, so it's developing their own body intelligence.

Mark: I love it. I think that's a really great point to leave on here. That's creating an atmosphere of nurturing body intelligence in the next generation in our own homes. It's one of the most powerful things we can do and it's not the most visible. It's the invisible part of evolution. It's the part that happens at home at bedtime, at jammy time. It's not public.

Really fabulous! Gosh! This is a great talk. I think we could go for another hour, but we really are running out of time.

[0:50:02]

I just want to let Susan chime in real quick with some words about some of the programs she has, and if maybe Nadia would like to say anything real quick about some of the work they're doing or where people can find you guys. Let's get all your websites in there. Let's do a quick little round robin of self-promotion and public awareness here.

Susan: Okay. Well, my website is susanstiffelman.com and I've written books. I have a weekly column on the Huffington Post that people can find, and I think the thing I'm most excited about right now like over-the-moon excited is a series I'm doing on Parenting in the Digital Age, which will air in the latter part of February, mid to late February. It has Alanis Morissette, Dan Siegel, and a lot of psychiatrists I've mentioned. I've referred to some of them, so people can find out all about that on susanstiffelman.com. I have a membership program now for monthly support and calls and seven-week classes that I do a couple of times a year, so I hope people will find me or find me on Facebook or get the newsletter or whatever strikes you, whatever your body wisdom tells you as the right stuff for you.

Mark: That's great. Thanks, Susan. Mikki and Nadia, tell us a little bit about best ways for people to find you.

Mikki: Go ahead, honey.

Nadia: Well, elevate.us is our website, but we also have a Facebook page, which we put a lot of the things that we are doing. Right now, we are finishing up a very, very powerful film called "Be Brave" that is four and a half years in the making and that's going to be coming out this year. That's definitely one of the things that we're bringing out to the world. Also, we are going to be creating more content and having these kinds of conversations with wonderful people like Susan Stiffelman and other people around parenting. We have a YouTube channel we're going to be building called Elevate Family, so that's going to be hopefully going up this year as well. Anything else, Mikki?

Mikki: Yeah. Just for me, I'm constantly active on Facebook, [facebook/mikkiwillis](https://www.facebook.com/mikkiwillis) and that's where pretty much everything that we have going on ends up first. I would love to be seeing you on there.

Mark: Great! Well, thank you everybody, Mikki, Nadia, Susan!

Susan: Thank you, Mark.

Mark: It's been delightful. I'm really glad we pulled this together. It's been an inspiring talk and I'm really glad to have you guys part of the Body Intelligence Summit.

Mikki: Same here. Thank you, Mark. Thank you, Susan.

Nadia: Thank you, lots of good information.

Mark: Good, good, good! Well, until we chat again. Let's keep those kids smiling and let them cry when they need to.

Mikki: Thanks guys!

Mark: All right. Bye-bye. Thanks a lot.

[0:53:11] End of Audio

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