PR-P 004: Bedtime Routine Modelling

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That was a stressful time. I was pregnant, my thesis was due pretty much when Beth was due to be born, and of course the thing with pregnancy is you can't be sure that that due date is when things are actually going to happen. So it was quite stressful working towards a deadline that could well move forward unexpectedly. Zander seemed to sense that I was quite stressed at that time. And it was during that period when Zander decided to well… between (when Zander was 6 months) and that time which was when Zander was about one and a half or so, he'd been very easy to get to sleep, so we'd do our bedtime routine, and then put him in his cot and he'd fall asleep by himself and stay asleep all of the night most of the time. But during that period he suddenly started just absolutely screaming blue murder if we put him in his cot and so that routine suddenly stopped working and we needed a much more hands on approach. We ended up transitioning to a bed around that time, which in hindsight was a bit early, but the cot just wasn't working at the time. So it meant the bedtime routine went from a very hands off, and I had a lot of time for my PhD, to a very hands on and I was lying there with Zander, and doing a version of the gradual withdrawal approach… which I don't think I've told you about yet, but I will soon… but it wasn't really working because Zander didn't want me to move very far from him at all, and I was lying there getting more and more stressed about the PhD I needed to be doing, and Zander was feeling my stress and not falling asleep, so it was a very rough period then. The relevance of this is I think it was really modelling that helped us get back on track. The first time I got Zander to sleep through the night, which was around 6 months, I think modelling was a big part of it. So when we started having issues again later I fell back on the modelling system again, and that is what this podcast is going to be about, is modelling and how you can use it, and when it will work, and that sort of thing.

So if you want any of the references or any of the notes from this episode, you can go to www.practicalresearchparenting.com/model, so it is /model for this episode. To give you an outline, I'm going to have a look at how I've used modelling, I'll be

looking at modelling principles based on the research, and just briefly, I will touch on other applications of modelling, because there are many. So, at that point that I was talking about, when Zander was about a year and half, though, we went with the hands on approach for quite a while before I had the time to really implement this, so it wasn't until just after Beth was born that I implemented this. I created a Good Sleeping Zander book, and that book had photos of Zander in every point of the routine and it basically outlined clearly, our expectations of Zander, so it went through the routine, what he can expect there, then it went through, importantly, where I would be when he was falling asleep in his bed, so it showed him in his bed, and me out in the lounge room, which is not very far at all from his bed, we've got a small place here. So it showed that I wouldn't be in his room, but I would be close by. It also went through what he should do if he wakes up, so if he wakes up and it's dark, then he can grab a drink of water, turn on his Seahorse, and go back to sleep, but if he wakes up and it's light, then he can come in and say good morning to Mummy and Daddy, but that has since changed, we now get him to look at his clock and he can get up when his clock says 7. That works much better with the changing light situation during the day, which was waking him up early. Using that Good Sleeping Zander book was effective, it wasn't immediate, so it certainly wasn't that night when it just played out as per the book, and it wasn't even the next week. I remember thinking it was frustrating because I felt we'd make progress one night, and then the next night we'd go backwards again. At that stage Zander was sleeping in our bed a lot of the time, and it certainly wasn't a consistent decrease in the amount of time he spent in our bed, but if I looked at it every 7-10 days I did notice massive improvements from the previous 10 days. So looking at it day to day, it looked like we were going forwards and back, but certainly looking week to week there was definite improvement. I think it was within a couple of weeks or so that he was routinely sleeping through the night in his bed. Definitely by 3 weeks he was doing that, but well before that he was settling in his bed fairly easily and not coming into our bed very often at all.

OK, so that was one way we used modelling, was Zander's good sleeping book, that was when he was about 2 years old. When Zander was 6 months old we used the Dream Baby Guide recommendations, that's a book by an Australian author, and it worked really well for us, and I'll go through all of those strategies in a subsequent

podcast, and if you're eager to see them you can go straight to the Dream Baby Guide review on my webpage at http://practicalresearchparenting.com/DBG, but I think the modelling was an important element of that. So, how we did the bedtime routine modelling was we, at that stage Zander was 6 months, very small, in arms, so he'd usually be carried by Tim, my Husband, or sometimes my Mum, and they'd basically follow me around while I put a teddy down for a sleep. I'd do the whole routine for the teddy, then I'd go and take the teddy into bed, and tuck him in, and do the patting and the singing that I did in bed (by which I mean Zander's cot), then we'd all walk out of the room and close the door, and listen at the door, and an interesting recommendation from the Dream Baby Guide was that we then made the crying sound, and made it sound like teddy was crying, and then we'd walk in, and I'd pat him again. Initially I thought that was odd, because I thought we were modelling that they should cry once they're in their bed, but actually that strategy seemed to work really well for Zander, that's not to say it will work for every baby, but with Zander, it was at that point, when we went in to the crying teddy, and we were patting the teddy, without picking him up, just patting him, that Zander seemed to really empathise with teddy, and he'd start crying at that point too, but of course he was in someone's arms, so they would comfort him, and each subsequent time that teddy cried and we went in, Zander would cry less and less and fuss less and less, and I think that was a really important part of it, because I think he seemed to actually get that that was what Mum and Dad would do and it's actually a safe environment, and that he doesn't need to be scared. Interestingly, that is how it worked with Zander, but it didn't really work that way with Beth, and the modelling didn't really work with Beth either. With Zander we implemented the strategies from the Dream Baby Guide, including this modelling thing for the three days prior and the night we implemented this, he slept through the night, and it was just amazing, he went down for the first time without crying and then slept through the night, and I thought, "wow, this is magic". With Beth, hasn't really worked that way, so they are all different, so I'm not sure what it is, perhaps just differences in the baby, but Zander did seem to really empathise with Teddy, whereas Beth has seemed not to care that much about what teddy is up to. So I presume that this modelling of what we do when Teddy cries is actually providing

familiarity to that scenario, which to Zander, initially, was quite a scary scenario, and by repeating it a few times and showing that we are calm about it, and he's getting comforted throughout, I think it must have just been providing comfort and familiarity around that situation that would have otherwise been scary for him.

OK, so let's get onto the actual science of modelling. So modelling is known to be very important, and it has largely been researched through the lens of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which was developed quite a while ago, I can't remember, maybe it was 60s or 80s, a long time ago, but it has been studied a lot since and there was an updated version around 2011. So it is certainly one of those theories that has hung in there, as you'd know, theories that don't hold water tend to be got rid of fairly quickly through testing, but this Social Cognitive Theory has hung around. So basically there are 4 principles to making modelling effective based on this theory, and I am going to go through each one in turn and how that would actually play out using it for bedtime routine modelling.

So first of all, the child needs to be paying attention to the modelling, which makes sense. So things you need to consider are things like attention span, so to accommodate for the attention span you might need to do a shorter version, especially with babies. The younger the baby, the shorter the version needs to be that you are modelling. I think attention span might have been an issue with Beth. Zander has always had a really good attention span, very long attention span, but Beth less so (I think). That could be a reason why it worked for Zander and not Beth. You can also use a favoured toy, so one that they will be interested in watching, but preferably one that they don't feel they have to play with all the time, or won't get disturbed if they can't play with it. Also limiting distractions, that is another thing that may have changed, because of course when I was doing this with Beth, Zander was running around, who is a gorgeous little distraction that she loves to watch. Another thing is you can be expressive throughout the routine, just be a little bit more expressive than usual, to try to keep their attention, but the idea is that you are doing the routine to the teddy, not to the baby, so the majority of the eye contact, and that sort of thing, should actually be with the teddy during the modelling.

The second thing to do is that the baby or child needs to remember the demonstration or message, so obviously there are memory capacity issues. So I looked into what sort

of things babies can remember, and even as young as 6 months, babies can remember things that happened the previous day. They see this, for example, by modelling how to play with a certain toy, and then they will notice that the babies who had it modelled the day before will play in the same way with the toy the subsequent day, so babies as young as 6 months do seem to remember, but the younger the baby, the more repetition they need. So for example, I'm pretty sure this was with 6 month olds, they found that they would more often than not, replicate it, if they had seen it six times the day before, but not if they had seen it three times the day before, yeah, that was with 6 month olds. Also, younger babies can't shift context, so for example, Zander's book, wouldn't have worked with a 6 month old because they can't shift the context from the book to reality. You also couldn't necessarily model the routine at your house and then expect them to go down at your parent's place or visa versa. So, in terms of context shifts, 6 month olds were found not to be able to shift context at all, so if they saw something modelled in one context, they wouldn't repeat it in a different context, even though they would in the same context. 12 month olds were just as likely as not to replicate in a new context, so that was touch and go, and probably depends on the baby. With 18 month olds, it was most likely that they would replicate, even in a different context. So from about 18 months, extrapolating here, but you could probably start using books and that sort of thing from about 18 months, providing that your child is interested enough in books to keep the attention span long enough to be interested in that book.

The third thing is that they need to be able to do the task. Given that we are talking about falling asleep here, we know that they can do that, but if you are modelling something that is more complex, obviously the ability to physically carry out that task is important to being able to replicate the modelling. With sleeping you can make this easier by just looking after their comfort needs, dry nappy, warm bed, all that sort of thing.

The fourth thing is they need to want to do the activity that you are modelling. Obviously, with sleep that is sometimes a bit difficult, but you can work towards this by, for example, having them go to sleep at the same time each night, so that would

set their body clock such that they are ready to sleep when you are trying to get them to sleep. You could use the faded bedtime approach, for example, to try to get that happening and we talked about that last time, so if you missed that, go back to the last episode (www.practicalresearchparenting.com/sleeptraining).

Now let's move on to other applications of modelling, and there really are as many as you can think of. I have heard of people using these book strategies to wean babies off milk for example, they're also really useful for just role playing how to use toys, also role playing social scenarios, especially with kids of toddler age (and beyond) like Zander. Role playing social scenarios can be really helpful. I have noticed that Zander almost automatically seems to work through these things with his toys. Often when he is upset, he will tell me that Batman is crying, for example, so it evidently is quite a natural step for him to try to work through what he is feeling using his toys, to almost try to distance himself, perhaps, but still learn from it. Robert Fulgham, and I'm not sure if I am saying that right, says "don't worry that your children never listen to you, worry that they are always watching you". So, of course those examples I just gave are times when you are intentionally trying to model things, but of course you are unintentionally modelling things all the time, so this is just a really good reason to watch how you act, and it's a good motivator to get rid of some of those bad habits, I know people try to curb their swearing, when they become parents, some people do, and that sort of thing, and certainly, children will imitate. It is the same with playing with toys for example, if you are playing roughly with the toys, then they are going to model that, and possibly in real life. It is interesting because it means that if you live and you react and you behave in the way you want to, and you are the person you want to be, then that is great, because that is one of the best tools you can really have for teaching children, because this modelling is something that is happening all the time. So a good motivator to make sure your habits are good ones as well. OK, so that is it for this time, I think it was quite a short session this time, but I guess that is not a problem. Next time we will be talking about teaching emotional regulation, which is certainly a big thing throughout the toddler years (and beyond), and also for getting to sleep because that is a form of emotional regulation, settling to sleep.

So this podcast comes with a number of free resources. You can access them on my website at www.practicalresearchparenting.com/model. So on that page you will find a video of me doing the sleep routine with Beth, if you want to check that out, and

you can also sign up to my newsletter for editable versions of the Zander sleep book, so if you want to make your own sleep book, for example, you can just throw in your own photos and you are ready to go. Or you could even try it with Zander's photos, some kids identify well enough with watching other kids do things. You can access all of that on my website. Thank you very much for listening! OK, Bye.