

# Balance365 Episode 69 Transcript

Annie: Welcome to Balance 365 life radio, a podcast that delivers honest conversations about food, fitness, weight and wellness. I'm your host Annie Brees along with Jennifer Campbell and Lauren Koski. We are personal trainers, nutritionists and founders of Balance365. Together we coach thousands of women each day and are on a mission to help them feel healthy, happy, and confident in their bodies on their own terms. Join us here every week as we discuss hot topics pertaining to our physical, mental and emotional wellbeing with amazing guests. Enjoy.

We live in a culture where parents are expected to be with or entertain their kids all the time, but we also have other responsibilities inside the house that need taking care of too, and as a result, our kiddos' outdoor playtime often gets cut short, but today's guest has solutions. She understands the importance of outdoor play for kids and wait for it, she encourages unsupervised outdoor time. Yeah, you heard me right.

Alanna Robinson is an early childhood educator and parenting coach for parents of toddlers and preschoolers. She helps parents understand why their children are misbehaving and what to do about it without yelling, shaming, or using timeouts. On today's episode, Alanna, Jen, Lauren and I discuss why your kids need to play outside without you and how to begin implementing that today so your kids can play outside and you can tackle your to do list inside or you can always just relax too.

But before we dive in, it's important to note that we have a diverse audience, and even though we don't have immediate solutions for everyone, we want to acknowledge that inequalities do exist and people with different socioeconomic and racial backgrounds may have a different experience with outdoor play. But as always, we don't want anyone to feel left out of this conversation. And if you want to discuss any of these topics further, we invite you to join our free private Facebook group. Healthy Habits Happy Moms. Enjoy.

Lauren and Jen, welcome to the show. We have a special guest. Lauren, are you so excited?

Lauren: I am so pumped. I'm so excited to learn all the things.

Annie: I know. Jen, I know you're excited cause this was a guest you found and you brought and you were like, "She needs to be on the show."

Jen: Yeah, I'm part of Allana's, I'm in her parenting posse Facebook group. Actually,

Allana, I found out about your Facebook group in our Facebook group.

Allana: Oh yeah?

Jen: You were, or did someone just recommend your Facebook group to me in our Facebook group to me in our Facebook group. So group to group. So I joined yours and you have said some things that have been so profound and have changed the way I parent and discipline, which is amazing.

Allana: That makes me so happy.

Jen: And even though you specialize in one to six year olds, I have, well, I've been in your group for quite a while, but my boys are transitioning out of those ages. So I have a five, seven and nine year old. I find your advice still works for my seven and nine year old. And so you just scale it to their level and yeah, it works. It's amazing. And it's taken so much stress out of parenting, right? Especially with discipline because you're always like, "Is this enough? Did he learn his lesson?"

Annie: So in other words, welcome to the show, Allana. How are you?

Allana: Thank you so much for having me. I'm great.

Annie: Good.

Allana: Making me so extremely happy because you never know if what you're putting out into the world is actually landing with people and it's just, it makes me so happy to hear when it does.

Jen: I don't, I just read along. So I would say I'm a lurker in your group. I've posted once, but I read. And so it's actually a good reminder for me that in even our Facebook group, I'm sure there's tons of lurkers, so nothing you say is ever

really wasted. And so I read whatever you write. So whatever you're doing in that group, I'm a step behind.

Annie: And then she comes to me and she's like, "Hey, you need to check her out." And then I went to your website and listen to one of your podcasts. And it was about why your kids need to play outside without you. And I was like, "Freedom!" It was amazing.

Jen: That was a huge moment for me and you're so open about your own parenting practices and you're not just telling people, "Hey, here's what to do." You're like, "Here's what what you should do. And I'm doing it. And this is what happens in our day to day life." And can I say the comment that blew my mind? It was just from a couple of weeks ago. Can I say that? Am I allowed? You told everybody, someone asked when they can let their toddler play in their backyard unattended. And then all these women were giving advice, right. And it was this huge thing and all of a sudden you swooped in and you said your youngest or you start them out one and a half years old playing independently outside by themselves at one and a half. And your son has been walking down the street to the park from four years old.

Allana: Yup.

Jen: On his own. And I was like, "Wow." And you said the world is safer today than it's ever been. There's this perception that it's more dangerous and we actually have more things in place to keep our kids safe even though it's safer. But that's killing us as parents. And actually what it's leading to is a lot more indoor time and screen time for kids because it's actually not realistic or sustainable to expect parents to be playing or even supervising their kids 24 seven and so kids aren't even getting the minimum amount of movement that they should be just because it's actually become impossible for families to provide that.

Allana: It's an impossible standard. There's also a study that was done not that long ago about the difference in the amount of time working mothers today spend with their children versus stay at home mothers that spent with their children in the 1950s. Working mothers today spend more time on average with their children than stay at home mothers did in the 1950s so this concept that we have to constantly be in their face, we have to constantly be engaged with them. We have to constantly be enriching them.

Jen: Right.

Allana: Putting this impossible, impossible load on us. And you know where that came from? It came from another study. There was a woman named Marian Diamond who was in the 1960s, she was doing research on rats and how big their brains got when they played versus rats who weren't given the opportunity to play.

Allana: And she was a woman scientist in the 1960s and she was playing with rats. So she got ridiculed socially by her male colleagues for being the girl who plays with rats. And in order to try and make her study, her papers more serious, have a bit more aplomb, she removed the word play and she changed it to enrichment. And nobody knows this woman. Nobody has ever heard of these studies before, but they have just trickled through our societal psyche to the point where we believe that we always have to be engaged with our kids or they're going to be stupid.

And what that study should have said is the more time the children play, the smarter they get, the bigger their brains get. And that tiny little change in the way that we communicated that idea has had such a prolific impact on North American society. And now we're at the point where it's breaking us to meet those expectations. And we're so terrified that if we don't, that our kids are going to be stupid. And it's, yeah. So this fear that everybody has, and it's a deep seated subconscious fear that we have to be with them all the time or they're going to be taken or stupid. And it's just, it's not sustainable. You can't do it.

Jen: Can I just, I'll just add another fear. That they're going to get hurt and someone's going to call child and family services on me and my kids are gonna get taken away because I wasn't there when they fell off their bike, broke an arm. Like, you know, it's just, I'm afraid of what my neighbours are gonna think of me. Not so much anymore because my kids are a bit older. But when my kids were younger, it was, we lived near a park, I wouldn't dare have sent, you know, in my head I'm like, "I'm sure they'll be fine."

My Dad used to do some very questionable, like, I mean over the line questionable things. So you know I'd always have my dad be like telling me "It's fine!" Just, but you know, you, you actually worry about your neighbors. And actually I've been on social media for several years now and shared a lot of our family during that time. I think I started after my third was born and I have had

many people message me and threatened they're going to call family services on me, like awful telling me I'm an awful mother. Like, if I'm trying to share like our mom life moments, you know, like, there's accidents-

Allana: That hasn't happened to me yet quite frankly, because as you said, I'm very open about what I allow my kids to do. And there's more studies. There was this study that was done in 2016 about, it's actually called No Child Left Alone. And it was a study that was done by a small group of researchers and they basically asked a large, large group of people, they gave them scenarios in which a child was left alone and every single scenario was exactly the same except for the reason why the child was left alone.

So they varied the reason, like, you know, mom went to go see her lover versus, you know, mom had an emergency at work and couldn't find a babysitter. And what they found was that people assessed a higher risk to the child based on what they morally felt the reason was for leaving the child, even though all the factors were exactly the same.

And so what that means is that people don't just think things are dangerous and therefore, and moral, they think things are immoral and therefore dangerous. So, and when I say to people like "I let my five year old walk to the park," they're like, "Aren't you afraid CPS is going to get called on you? Aren't you afraid that somebody?" And I'm not because I know my neighbors.

And that is how we combat that, because it's a lot easier to judge somebody on their morality when you don't know them, when you can't put a face to them, when you've never spoken to them. So, and it's awkward, super awkward. But when we moved here when my son was a year and a half old. And so he was just starting outdoor play and he was, he's tiny for his age, like he looks much younger than he is.

And so I actually took his hand and we went around and we walked up and down our street and we knocked on everybody's door and we introduced ourselves. And I said, you know, "My name's Allana. This is my son Logan. You might see Logan around, he likes to play outside by himself. I'm okay with that." And people were kind of like, "Okay." And it was, it was awkward as hell. And you know, we have a bit more in depth conversations with our immediate neighbours who can actually see into our yard.

But so no, nobody ever, I gave my phone number to everybody and said, "Hey, if you ever see him doing something questionable that you're not sure it's safe or appropriate, please send me a text message. Like I am always, I will deal with it." And what that people call CAS because they see a child doing something that they're not sure is totally on the up and up and they don't have a touch point.

They don't have anybody to go to other than the police. So if you go to your neighbors and you say, "Hey, this is who I am, this is my child, this is my phone number, please call me if you know you ever need anything," it removes that ability to have such a quick moral judgment on you because they seen your face. They've spoken to you, they've had a conversation with you and that I think because we don't know our neighbors, in this day and age we move around a lot more.

We live in much larger communities. Houses are much closer together. We don't, we don't know our neighbors the way that our parents did or grandparents did. So it takes a conscious effort on our part if we're going to be sending our kids out into the world by themselves that we know we've scoped out the world for them, right?

Jen: Yeah. Go ahead, Allana.

Allana: Oh, I was just going to say it like, he has, he's walked to the park before and I've had neighbors text me and be like, "Hey, so your kids at the park by himself?" And I'm like, "Yup." And they're like, "Oh, you're okay with that?" "Yup. Thanks for letting me know though." And they're like, "Okay, great." And that was the end of it. And they know him, he knows his boundaries, like, and there's a certain amount of teaching to this. You don't just send your kid out the door and be like, "Off you go." There's a lot of very conscious teaching that has to happen in, right.

Annie: Allana, I would love to get into, like, how do you actually implement it in a little bit? Because I know like you can't just take a kid that, like, hasn't had any unsupervised play and be like, "Okay, see ya. Have fun." But I want to back up because you have quite a bit of information about, like, the benefits. Like why does this matter to the kids and why does this matter to parents?

Allana: Well, because the outdoors is basically, like, nature's occupational therapy, right? Like the rate of children in occupational therapy has soared since

the 1990s and it's because the kids aren't getting outside. When you go outside, first of all, the environment is perfectly sensorially balanced. It's made for us. It's not too loud. It's not too quiet. Depending on where you live is not too hot or too cold. But you can adjust it, you know, generally it's not too bright. There's, you know, very subtle sounds that help you orient yourself in space. Like just the sounds of birds tweeting and leaves rustling helps your brain figure out where you are in space. It has, there's so many sensory experiences, mud, grass, air, everything is a sensory.

The heat from the sun even is a sensory experience that helps your brain integrate the input that it gets both indoors and out. It's not controlled and there's things that you have to adapt for which you wouldn't have to adapt for inside because everything is so controlled inside. So our kids aren't getting that stimulus that hopefully we got that our parents definitely got outdoors and the result is that there's a lot of kids in schools right now who have vestibular problems and it's affecting their ability to read. It's affecting their ability to sit down and concentrate.

Spinning, spinning has been shown, if you spin for five minutes, it's been shown to increase your attention span for two hours. They've removed every single merry go round. Every single spinning toy. Kids aren't allowed to spin on swings anymore because it's "dangerous." They've shortened the height of swing sets. If you look at pictures of swing sets from like the 1960s, the set itself is super, super tall and the chains are super, super long, which means they got a lot larger range of motion.

When everything got scaled down and we got super safety conscious. We literally scaled down the swing sets. The chains are much shorter. They're not getting as large a range of motion. They're not getting as much stimulation. So it's vital not just to, you know, their ability to entertain themselves. It's vital to their long term learning. If you don't have a body that can integrate all the information that you're getting, then it's going to crop up down the road in lots of different ways.

Jen: Wow. You know what? We moved from Vancouver, a huge city in Canada to a very small city, in the interior British Columbia, 90,000 people. And then within that community we live in like this tiny little suburb that backs on to, like a provincial park. So just hiking trails and stuff. My children's life has changed. Being so close to nature and having other children on the block, like our doorbell

is ringing constantly. These kids are outside all the time, way more than when we lived in Vancouver.

When we were in Vancouver I felt like I had to facilitate everything because you're in this big city you like, it's just, yeah, it was, there was just, it was very, and it was very stressful and I don't even think I realized how stressed I was until I wasn't living there anymore. And I have so much more freedom. I, you know, we even live close enough to the school that, like, boys can walk to school and walk home. And then just my free time has gone way up. Like as far as, and the load of parenting has gone way down for me living in this neighborhood and in this smaller city and I just can't believe how the quality of our life has improved. It's crazy.

Allana: Totally. And like I have a lot of parents were like, "Listen, I don't have an outdoor space for my kids. Like we live in an apartment building and I can't let them go downstairs and play in even in the public green space by themselves because there's, you know, 60 back balconies that face onto it and somebody is going to take issue with it" and I always say "Some is better than none."

Jen: Yes.

Allana: Taking your kids to a park and take them to a park where there's no equipment. Right. Don't take them to a park where there's all these plastic climbers and stuff. Take them to a park where there's no equipment, provincial park, national park somewhere that it's more of a natural space and let them play there rather than let them climb the trees, let them walk on the logs, let them go, you know, dig in the ravines and the ditches. That's much more high quality play than the kind of contrived play that happens on swing sets and stuff like that.

Jen: Yeah, they, when my kids were young, we lived in New Zealand and they are extremely progressive as far as play there. And this is kind of when all this started coming to me, because I had never heard this kind of talk in Canada and they talked a lot about the benefits of decreasing supervision and increasing risk on playgrounds because for example, our school, our playground no longer meets safety codes anymore. And so our school is paying \$100,000 this spring that we all had to fundraise for to put in a new, new safe playground. And I'm kind of sitting back while everyone's very excited, great, but I'm sitting back going like, this is a hundred grand on a new safe structure that-

Allana: Is going to do them a disservice.

Jen: Right? And so -

Allana: Yeah, I know the feeling. My son's play, my son's school, he's in junior kindergarten here in Ontario and they don't even have a playground. They don't have any, like they have a fenced in yard and there's a play structure for the kids who are in grade four and up. But anybody under that isn't allowed to use it. And we're moving schools next year. And his first question was, is there going to be something that I can climb on

Jen: Right.

Allana: Yeah, dude, that's like one of my top priorities.

Jen: Yeah. I see just as many kids in the field next to the school. It's all fenced and stuff than I do on the playgrounds. Right. So it's and then tell me this, I don't know if this evidence based or not, but I often wonder what happens on playgrounds when the kids are bored and there's no risk anymore. Like do they turn? Like is that why they're turning on each other at recess?

Allana: When there's nothing to do, you're going to create something to do. And so the nice thing like, and people will often say to me like, "How do your kids play outside for hours on end? There's nothing in your backyard." And there isn't. We literally have a yard and a shed and, but there are things in my backyard. We have lots of loose parts. We have, when my husband built that shed, he took all the off cuts and just kind of sanded down the edges generally so that he wasn't getting any splinters. And so there's, there's a ton of lumber back there.

There is sticks, there's mud, there's a sand pit, we have a water table that kind of turns into a pond during the summer because nobody cleans it out. It gets very disgusting but so they have all that stuff out there and they'll take like, you know, an action figure or a car or something, one little thing and they'll build this whole playscape off of it just because toys are built with a very specific purpose in mind and kids know that they're supposed to use them that way, right?

You're supposed to use a tool the way the tool is supposed to be used. We're very, very clear about that with young children. So when you give them a toy and it's only able to be used one way, they're going to get bored with it really, really quickly. And then when there's nothing to do, they're going to start disturbing.

Jen: Bleeping the child psychologist.

Allana: I always have an explicit warning on my own podcast because when I get passionate I run my mouth. But yeah. So, but if you don't give them those things that are closed ended to begin with, if you give them open ended stuff and you expect them to create their own world, they'll do it and it will be so immersive for them that they won't have time to make, you know, trouble. They're going to be so engaged in it.

And that's the other thing is toys generally can only be used by one or two people versus open ended materials. "Okay, you want to come play with me? Great. Go grab a stick. Right?" So that's, it's a lot easier for children to join play when there isn't set materials for them to use, when everything's very open ended because they can modify what they're doing to include more people very easily.

And to come back to kind of what you were saying about the play structure, that's another problem, right? There's usually limits on how many kids can be on the play structure, especially in school environments where they're like, you know, there can only be five kids on the play structure at a time that just hamstring them.

It cuts them off at the knees and when there's children, you know, want to come in, they can't. So keeping things and it's just really, the science across the board just says "Back off! Back off and they'll figure it out. That's what their brains are designed to do."

Jen: Right. And that's really what builds a resilient person. Right? They can figure it out in a moment. Right. The other thing that had been talked about in New Zealand I remember is as playgrounds were becoming more safe, they were not just less risky as in, "Ooh, am I going to fall? Or it was also, they were less physically risky in that it didn't require as much strength to go over these different spots in the park. So the upper body strength in children is coming down big time because they are taking out monkey bars. They're taking, you know, they're taking out all these upper body things."

Allana: Exactly. Because you've got children in occupational therapy to build that up because they're not naturally getting it, they're not weight bearing. I have so many clients who their child is in kindergarten and first of all they're asking these kindergarten kids to read and write when that's not developmentally appropriate, but they also can't physically do it because they don't have the strength in their muscles to do it. Like fine motor skills starting in your shoulder and they work their way down.

Jen: Right. Right.

Allana: If you don't use your gross motor skills. You can't use your fine motor skills when you need to. So yeah. And the other thing about reducing risk is that they're reducing small injuries, but the injuries that do happen are much larger. Children are breaking bones more frequently. They're, you know, having huge concussions when they do, because their vestibular system is so underdeveloped, they don't know the limits of their body. And so when they go to try and do something new, they can't tell if they can actually do it or not.

Jen: Right. Because they've had no lower level risk that warns them

Allana: They weren't able to build up to it.

Jen: Amen. Yeah.

Allana: We've reduced, you know, cuts, scrapes, minor stitches and we've turned that into breaks and concussions and it's, ask any occupational therapist and they'll tell you that a lot of these things are very easily solved just by sending them outside to play.

Jen: Right. That's so interesting to just reframing it, right? These things are good. Like this is good for your kids to make these mistakes, have these small falls. None of them are life threatening, but they're teaching them about their environment and saving them from future. An analogy to that, actually, I posted a insta story a year ago with my oldest son on a little mini quad at his grandparents' farm and he was doing donuts and it was all dusty and I got so many from women that were like, "I would never let my child do that." And he had an accident that summer. He bumped into the side of his uncle's truck and he flew and hit his chest on the handlebars and it really hurt him and it really scared him.

I mean, he's wearing a helmet and we've got that safety stuff. And I was like, "Good."

I could see the donuts were getting a little out of control. I could see that kid needed some kind of little bump to remind him that he is on a machine and it happened and it was good. And he is much more safe now. And I guess, I guess what, and also my dad's a farmer, so I grew up in, you know, "dangerous" environment of, like, just roaming around a farm and yeah.

And it's like, I see now how good that is, but you know, and I moved to the city and I think of all these city kids getting licenses at 16 and like, you know, we're a little, when you grew up on a farm, you're just driving, you drive, right? Like you drive when your dad's lap or you, you're helping, you know, you're way too young. You're 12 years old and you're helping move trucks from one field to another. And then I think of all these city kids getting their licenses and it's like that's crazy that they have no driving experience. And you know what I mean? So it's like-

Allana: I was reading something the other day about how it's taking longer. Like when I turned 16 almost all my friends got their license on the first try. And apparently there's some statistics now coming out that it's taking teenagers longer to learn to drive because they're having to develop vestibular and proprioceptive skills that they didn't as a child. And so they're not able to judge where their car is in space.

Jen: Oh gosh, that's so interesting.

Allana: So yeah, it's, this isn't just about mom getting some breathing time of being able to clean the kitchen without anybody crawling up their back and about the kids being able to entertain themselves. These skills that they develop, that looks like they're doing absolutely nothing are so important. And they will follow them for the rest of their lives. And it's just, it frustrates me so much.

Jen: Lauren had a question, I think.

Allana: Oh yeah, Lauren, did you have something?

Lauren: Yes. Can I, can I? Hello?

Annie: Hi. Welcome to the show.

Lauren: Hi, I'm over here. I'm trying to get a word in next to Jen.

Annie: Good luck.

Jen: Classic little little sister moment.

Lauren: So I love all of this. Can I ask some practical questions selfishly that hopefully will benefit all of our listeners? I have a five year old and a one year old and I'm wondering like, okay, my one and a half year old obviously is probably going to have different boundaries than a five year old, but the five year old, I mean, I let her play outside sometimes, but I'm usually watching her through like the window and whatever. Like so what are, how do I introduce this concept to both of them in age appropriate ways?

Allana: So the five year old, as you said, it's going to have a much longer leash than the one and a half year old. If you have fenced space, it's, that's easiest because it's easiest for us to back off. But generally what I do with little kids is I start by being outside with them but not being engaged with them. So like blowing snow in the driveway. They can't participate in that, but they can be outside while we're doing it, weeding the garden, they might join in but they're going to get bored and they're going to go do something else. Doing things that need to be done anyways, but, and that we're around, but we're not focused on them. We're focused on something else. So that's like step one is generally just getting them used to the idea that you're not going to be watching them all the time.

And then step two of that is starting that way and then being like, okay, I'm going to go in and go to the bathroom. I'm going to go in and make dinner. And just gradually lengthening the amount of time that you go in at the end of your play time so that they're not going from "I'm inside and supervised, to I'm outside and not supervised."

There's a buildup to that and it's amazing how, like, children are very intuitive. So if we have concerns, if we're scared of them doing something, they're going to pick up on that very quickly. Their limbic system is very connected to ours and our inter brain is going to go, "You're not safe!" And so they're not going to feel safe. So it's a workup for us too, right? We need to feel confident and comfortable leaving our kids alone. So those are steps one and two generally for me is just being outside, not engaged with them but being outside with them.

And then at the end of that starting to introduce, I can go inside and you don't have to come with me. And once you kind of work up to a good chunk of time, then you can start sending them out by themselves and lengthening that amount of time so that you're like, "Okay, well, you go out and I'll meet you there. Like I'm just going to go and put this in the oven and then I'll be outside."

And starting to get them used to going outside without you following behind them. And then you can go out again, do something else, not be engaged with them, but be around and then go back inside. So you're kind of working it from either end rather than just sending them out on their own. And that's generally a nice good workup for kids. They don't feel scared because they know you're coming, you know that you're not having to like peek through the window to keep an eye on them either because they can sense that too. Windows don't block limbic resonance.

Lauren: Do you have tips if your yard is not fenced in, like, do you give them ahead of time, like, boundaries?

Allana: Absolutely. So my favorite tool for this is go to Home Depot or Lowe's and grab some of that neon paint that they mark gas lines with when you call and be like, "Hey, I'm going to dig in my yard." And then somebody comes by and like Mark's all your gas lines so you don't hit a gas line when you dig.

Go and get that and spray your property line. And I do that every spring with my two, because I have a two and a half year old. And so last year he was a year and a half and he wants to play in the front yard with his big brother, but there's no barrier in the front. So he was getting really angry because my big can let himself in and out of the backyard and the little one can't and he'd be so mad when my big one would leave him in the backyard.

So I did. I went and I got the orange paint and I sprayed, just a line right down our ditch and down either side of our front yard. It doesn't look great, but when you mow the grass goes away and he, and I was like, "Listen, you cannot cross the orange line without mummy or daddy." And we walked the orange line and I showed him, "Yes, no, you cannot go on this other side." And it did. We had to work up to it

Again, starting with me being outside with them and keeping an eye on them, but not engaged with them, reminding him that he can't cross that line and just very

gradually backing away from him and letting him have more ownership over that. Now we can go just about anywhere. Like we have a cottage with a waterfront that we go to in the summer and now I can like walk up and like spray that line along the waterfront and I'm like, you can't cross the dark line-

Jen: Take it to your hotel.

Annie: The restaurant.

Jen: The restaurant play here, don't worry, you can mow it out.

Allana: I've done it with orange electric. Try and pick a color and stick to it because kids tend to get that, like, color association. But I've done it with orange electrical tape, like, we were at, actually just this last week, my big one was hospitalized and we were in this waiting room, like, it was like an examination room with the door didn't close. It was kind of like just a triage kind of space. And my little one was kept trying to escape and I busted out my roll of orange electrical tape and put on a hard line on the doorway and I was like, you can't cross the orange line. And he was like, "Okay."

Jen: That's so awesome.

Annie: it is.

Allana: At this point that he's like, "No, we don't cross orange lines," causes problems when they're like, "Here you can go!" Like where were we? We were at Wonderland or something like that last summer and there was, like, a line on the ground to mark where you can't cross to go before you go on a ride. And they were like "Come!" and he was like, "Uh uh, we don't cross orange lines."

Annie: So I have a feisty two and a half year old and I'm picturing this like it, like I'm, this is not that I don't believe you, but I mean-

Allana: It's not an overnight thing.

Annie: Yeah. I'm picturing me, like, getting out, like, rope or a spray can and like her just laughing in my face like, "Yeah, okay, mom. Right."

Allana: Right. Well and they do. But that's the thing where you have to very consistently redirect them back to the other side. And-

Annie: What have you used as appropriate consequences? Like do you say, like, "Sorry, we can't play outside then if you-"

Allana: Yeah, well if you can't, so I often say like "If I can't trust you to stay on this side of the orange line, then we're going to have to go inside. Or if I can't trust you to go stay on this side of the orange line, we're going to have to go in the backyard that's fenced" and, or "if I can't trust you to be playing up" like often when I was starting to do this with him, I would be washing my car because my husband's a car nut and so it makes him very happy when I wash my car frequently.

So I was like, all right, this makes him happy. This makes me happy. We're going to wash the car while the kids play in the front yard. And like, I mean it's nice when you have an older child who gets to be the tattler, but it was like, "Mom, Owie's going into the road" and I would bring him back. "If you can't stay on this side of the orange line, then you're going to have to come and sit in the car." And he was like, "Uh un." And I was like, "Yeah." And it doesn't take very many times of, like, "Hey," as long as you tell them what is going to happen before it happens. Like you can't spring it on them and be like, "Nope, if can't stay on this side of the orange line I'm going to strap you into your car seat." And then they're like, "Well, I didn't know that was what was on the line."

Jen: That's actually, this is another huge takeaway I've gotten from your group is the whole concept of natural consequences, like, life changing. We could do a whole other podcast on it and I'm sure people can find more about it on your podcast. But I, it's just like brought my chill level into a normal range around my kids. And, you know, even, it was in your group, it was something about, it was just like this, right? So it's like you lay out the boundary, you tell them what the consequence is and it's a natural consequence. So it's so it's not like disciplining anymore, right?

Allana: Exactly.

Annie: It's about getting them to connect to the consequences of their actions.

Allana: and kids can tell when we're pulling a power trip, right? Timeouts all that stuff. They know when we're like, "No, I'm just doing this because I can." And so, like, things with, "Okay, if you can't stay on this side of the orange line," the best logical consequence for that would be, "Okay, well then you need to go into the

gated area." Like that's, he doesn't want that because he knows his big brother's not in the gated area. He knows that, you know, he wants to be in the front with us. And so that creates a consciousness in him that he's like, "Okay, I need to think critically about this. I'm not going to," and they will test.

Kids are scientists. They use the scientific method with much more accuracy than any adult. And they will have a theory and they will test every variable possible, which is why I say, like, try and keep the color consistent because like my son, we were at my mom's once and she didn't have any orange paint, so I busted out some pink. Pink apparently doesn't have the same staying power. It is not an orange line.

Jen: Oh my kids would do that.

Allana: Because right. Anytime you introduce a variable, they have to test it. They have to, they're so inquisitive. They are scientific little minds. So, and that's where you have extinction bursts where they're like, "Okay, this was the limit before and now it's, there's a new limit. How hard do I have to push until we go back to the old limit?" So staying consistent really is the key to the whole but yeah, keeping, I've lost my train of thought now.

Jen: You're amazing. Like you, it's like you're in a child's brain and the way you explain things is so fantastic. I can't wait to send everybody to your podcast and you just, and then suddenly my anxiety in parenting is just gone when I listen to you because I know I'm doing the right thing and it will work out. Right. You sometimes feel like you're just trying whatever, just try it, see what works. But I just have this, like, reassurance from you that it's just consistency.

Allana: it's so much easier to let go when you know what's going on under the hood and you know how their brains work. And that's, like, my whole philosophy is if you can understand how your child's brain works, then you can work with it instead of against it. And so many of the conventional parenting wisdom is working against their brain.

Annie: Right? Right.

Jen: Yeah.

Allana: Dominant. It's trying to exert dominance.

Jen: Then you get struggles and they feel, yeah, it's-

Allana: They feel controlled and nobody likes to feel controlled. You push back and they feel like they're being manipulated and treated like subhuman. So when we just treat our kids like we would not how we would treat an adult, but when we are give them that kind of respect, it's amazing how quickly they come onside. It really is.

Annie: And I think from like a parenting perspective, hearing you as an expert in this field, pun intended, it's almost permission giving to say like, "It's fine. Go inside, go to the bathroom, put a frozen pizza in the oven. I mean that's what I would do. Like make a phone call, whatever. There'll be okay. And they need it. It's not just for you." It's, like, it just helps me like do this guilt-free.

Allana: Totally. And like I've had clients with 11 year olds who will still make their 11 year old come in from the backyard when they need to go pee. Like when you go to the bathroom.

Jen: Like that thread in the group before you came in and laid it down with everybody. I was like, "Who are these people?" Like how long are you gonna be like basically-

Allana: And the funny thing. It's like my babysitter, my main babysitter is 11 years old. And when I tell people that they're like, "What?" They're like, "But you don't her alone with them." And I'm like, "Oh yes I do. She can." My 11 year old babysitter can feed my children dinner, bath them and get them in bed and an hour and a half flat. I can't do that.

Jen: That's the other thing is that eventually we're working up or my son turns 10 this summer and we've kind of given him the, when you are 10 we will start leaving you a home alone. Like if I'm popping out for groceries or whatever. And it's this thing he's looking forward to and that's kind of the law here. Just so everybody knows. I know the law's different in different areas. But that is, we are law abiding citizens anyways. And so if you can't leave your child, like it has to start happening at some point, right? On a gradual basis. You can't be micromanaging your kid. And then he turns 10 or 11 or 12 and then you go, "Okay, we're leaving you alone."

Allana: We don't give children any ability to experience minor risk and then they turn 18 and we're like, "Go out and innovate."

Jen: Yeah. Go live alone.

Annie: This sounds like-

Allana: And they're like, "I've never done this in my entire life. You can't start with, like, throwing them out the door.

Jen: And then they struggle. Right. And mental health issues in freshmen university students are just skyrocketing.

Allana: Of course, living with their parents for longer and longer because they just don't have-

Jen: They're not self sufficient.

Allana: Yeah, you don't know how to cope without somebody micromanaging you and telling you what to do all the time. And then when people are like, "Make good decisions," you're like, "I don't know what that means." Because you have no.

Jen: Yeah.

Allana: Litmus test for it. So it's, it really is, you know, when people say early childhood is so important, it is the foundation for your child's entire life. And if you can't start trusting them when they're four with little tiny responsibilities, how are you going to trust them when they're 16, 17-

Jen: Right. Yeah. The other thing I learned from you Allana that I wanted to say was about this bored thing. Cause I think that's the next thing, right? So, okay, your kids are playing alone, but they come back and they're like, "I am bored." I learned this from you in your group. You said it is not your job to entertain your child. And I, so that's just what I say to them. Now they come to me and say they're bored. I'm saying "That's not my job to find something for you to do. Like you, go find something to do."

Allana: You are not a clown. You are not the family cruise director.

Jen: Right. Sometimes I'll say, "Here's your options. You know, you can get out the coloring stuff. You can go out and jump on the trampoline" or I'll give some options to "Go get your bikes, go down to your friend's house, see if he wants to play." But I tell them all the time that "I am not here to entertain you. That is not my job." And that's been such a revolutionary thing for me too, because I, you know, you feel the pressure around that.

Allana: Well, exactly. And that comes again to that pressure of they need to be enriched 24 seven if we want them to be smart. And that the only person that's available to enrich them is me so I have to be constantly engaged with my child and it's just not true. In fact, it's damaging.

Jen: Right, right.

Lauren: So I have my one and a half year old, like, he'll go play by himself, like, no big deal. But my five year old has always been, she wants to play with somebody. Do you have any tips for like training that'd be like you can, like, she'll go play for a little bit but it's, it's just she's completely different than my one and a half year old and she seems to only want to play with me.

Jen: Or what about an only child? Like people that have one child?

Allana: Only children I find are actually the best at entertaining themselves because they have no expectation. Like, even my older son is super good. He's really good at playing by himself because he had to, he had nobody to play with. My younger one is not so good at playing by himself because he's always had big brother being his cruise director.

I actually find only children are usually very good at playing by themselves. It's not usually such an issue with them. There are children who are just, they're extroverted. They take energy from being around other people. Whereas introverts, that's expending energy, right? So it's a difference in what we find stressful. And so for kids then that's typically how I find kids who are extroverts is when they're like, they always want to be with someone. I'm like, "That's because that refills their tank. That's actually calming.

Jen: Interesting.

Allana: Versus children who are spending energy. So for them it's actually more calming to have people around and to be engaged with people. And these are

the people who when they're in their 20s want to live in those houses with like 40 other people and they're like, "This is fun." And you're like, "No, that's stress. Stress."

Jen: Annie, sorry. Annie's been waiting. She's got a question.

Annie: No, no, no, no.

Jen: She'll try to shut us down, I know it.

Annie: I'm giggling because I am an only child and like-

Jen: Oh right.

Annie: But also, but I'm also an extrovert, so I grew up in a house where, and this might've just been a reflection of my mother and father who both worked full time. And I know that they were just tired when they came home from work, but I always got to have friends over. But I grew up, this supports kind of what you're saying. I grew up in a neighborhood where my, you know, I had three or four best friends within a block of, and we would just skip through the yard to get to, cut through yard backyards to go to the other person's house. And it was like, you just come home when the street lights turned on. That was like our guide and I was, you know, that was probably fifth or sixth grade, but that was there, you know, get on your bikes and you just go, you, you, and, and as long as you're home, by the time the street lights come on, like, we're good.

Jen: I'm at the point where I'm like, when my kids are hungry, they'll come home. Like I trust. I've come to trust it. And because you're building this relationship, right, you give them more boundaries and more boundaries and then you as a parent, you trust. You know, it's always a little, once you give them a little more, then it's another trust thing. But then, you know, I've built, like, in our neighborhood with my three kids, we just, there's a lot of trust there with my kids now. And maybe I do, maybe I have my kids have more free reign than some of my neighbors, but I have trust there and I know my kids will get hungry eventually and they will come home and we just, it just works.

Allana: Totally. And even like people will say to me like, how can you let your five year old go down the street? Aren't you scared he's gonna get hurt and not be able to tell you or you know that somebody's going to snatch him? First of all, my

child is usually low jacked with a GPS. So we do live in 2018, these devices exist.

Jen: Oh, you actually have a gps on your son?

Annie: I actually have a gps on my son. It's the size of about a quarter or a looney.

Jen: What do you wear? Can you tell us about that? Where you put it, how you?

Allana: Yeah, so it's just I have, you know, those, tags that they put on merchandise in stores so that when you walk out, if you don't pay for it, it'll beep and flash and all that stuff. So those have a pin that need to be removed with a magnet. Right. So I have just a little fabric pouch. GPS goes in the pouch and it gets pinned to his, he's usually wearing cargo shorts. So we put it inside the cargo pocket and we pin it in there so he can't lose it. Nobody can take it off of him unless they removed his pants. And-

Jen: And that's connected to your phone?

Allana: It's connected to my phone. It doesn't track him. It just tells me where he is, where the gps is in that moment when I go to look at it. So I can tell if he's, and it's accurate to about 20 meters, so I can tell if he's in the general area that I expect him to be in. It also has the ability to send an SOS. So he just pushes on it and it'll alert my phone that he needs help so then I can go find him.

Jen: What brand is this? Could you share that with our-

Allana: Yeah, it's called a Ping gps.

Jen: Wow. I am getting three.

Allana: It is awesome. I love it. There are about 80 bucks and then they cost about five bucks a month US to run. But you can't get a cell phone plan-

Jen: Look at Lauren writing. Taking notes.

Lauren: Ping GPS.

Jen: Lauren lives on a beautiful acreage with a huge, that's why she was asking about the fencing and stuff for kids. She always posts on Instagram these beautiful pictures of her back-

Lauren: Snow covered.

Jen: Yeah, it's November, but it's gorgeous. So, these would be very handy for you, hey, for your-

Allana: Yeah.

Jen: Country kids.

Allana: It also takes off a little bit of that, you know, CAS call pressure-

Jen: What if?

Allana: Everybody's so scared that somebody is going to go, "You don't know where your kid is" and you're going to go, "You're right. I don't." Whereas if somebody comes to me and says, "You don't know where your kid is," I can go "Actually, he's within 20 meters of-

Jen: Right, right.

Allana: The whole like, and even, I was talking about this on my personal Facebook page where I was sharing that No Child Left Alone Study with just with my friends cause somebody had asked about it and my aunt was actually like, well, like she was the perfect example of where you're not judging something based on the actual risk factors. She was "Never be too careful and the world is a dangerous place." And I was like, but it's not based on the statistics, based on the information we have, it's not.

Jen: Right.

Allana: We were talking about it because as you said, you know, we always give them those incrementally larger responsibilities. My five year old has wanted to walk to the bus by himself in the morning for school, for months now. And the other day he said to me, "Mommy, please, can I have the responsibility to walk to the bus all by myself?" Well, I can see his bus stop from my front window. It's literally two doors down. Our neighbors all know him. My neighbor who lives

beside me is on maternity leave so she's watching him out the front door. She's always texting in the morning like "Good morning," I'm being watched.

So I know she's watching him too and she's one house closer to him and I was like, I really had no reason to say no to him other than people who don't know you might think you're too stupid because you're too young. That's not a good enough reason for me. So I let them walk to the bus by himself and one of my neighbors took offence and called the bus company and was like, "I don't think this is okay." And they called me and I was like, "That's their problem."

Jen: Right? Totally. Good for you girl. Look at you go.

Allana: He's, you say, and it's again, we're, I'm pretty sure the directives we get next year are going to be rewritten because their directive saying that children need to be supervised at the bus stop. I'm like, that literally means they need to be watched. And I was watching him. It doesn't say they need chaperones. So we need to start kind of advocating on the competence of our children too because so many people are so quick to say, "Well, they're five, they're stupid" and no, like you know what your child is capable of and even what they're incapable of and nobody knows your kid like you do.

So if you genuinely don't feel like your child can handle walking to the park by themselves because they don't have the awareness of people around them. They're not able to walk on the side of the road. Like I didn't just send my five year old to the park, we walked to the park together for many, many times, almost the entire summer. You know, I would send him to the park and I would stand at the end of the driveway and watch him walk to the park and then I would follow him with his brother. And we would do the same in reverse and like, again, you work up to it so you have to know your child's competency level before you, you try and give them a responsibility, right?

Annie: I find it really inspiring and encouraging to listen to you Allana. Like just own your choices even with some pushback from spectators or neighbors or family because I would have, I think that that's something that I get a little nervous about too is, like, my kids, my two oldest run the neighborhood and I really don't, like, I trust them. They've haven't violated my trust. Knock on wood, I have no reason to second guess them that they're going to come home and they're going to be where they are and, but I am always like, what do other people think? Do other people, like, know that like they're okay and that we've

had these talks and like there's just this fear of judgment or fear of like getting criticized and then they-

Jen: They think you're a bad mom.

Allana: Or that I'm just lazy.

Jen: It comes down to that in so many situations of decisions we're making and Annie and Lauren and I talk about this around nutrition all the time, right? So it's like you're scared. Do they think I'm a bad mom? Like it's just this constant thing.

Allana: And it's that moral judgment again, right? Like do they think that I'm being, that they're doing this because I'm lazy? Does that make them think that they're at a greater risk than they actually are?

Annie: I just want to sit on my couch sometimes, and like, don't move.

Jen: I do. The thing is, and this, I mean you see it too, like, if you want to take your kids to a park and sit on your phone, I'm like, do it. And I see these posts on Facebook. They're like the mom who just sat on her phone or her kids had to play by themselves and the child was shouting, "Mom, watch me." And the mom didn't look up. I'm like, the child will live, like-

Allana: Our parents didn't do that for us.

Jen: No. And sometimes it's all the mom has in her day to just be chilled out. Like I had three kids in four years and we lived overseas. So no family and in New Zealand, a lovely thing about New Zealand too is that all their playgrounds are gated. So, and you can't get out. So I could literally go in and just sit and just Facebook or read or whatever, just ignore them. And that was the only time I had and I'm all the power to ya, girl if that's what I'm on. If I see a mom with-

Allana: On her phone and I got in it last summer with the mom, cause I do the exact same thing. I bring my laptop generally and I will tether to my phone and like work at the park so that my oldest, my youngest kid run around and ours has a fence but it's not a closed off fence. So I mean if they want to, they can escape. I've walked the perimeter with the many times we've talked about what the boundaries are.

If my little one, I've showed him there is a gate, it's open, but that means it's a doorway and you need to stay inside the park or we're going to have to go home and he wants to play. And every once in a while I'll just shout out like "Cubs, where are you?" because we call them the bears and they'll go, "Here, here!" And I'll go, "Great!"

And I don't even look up as long as I can hear them I know that they're close. And this woman was like, "Excuse me, do you know what your son is doing?" And I looked up and he was climbing and I was like "On the play structure?" And she was like, "Yes." And I was like, "We're at a park." That's what he's supposed to be doing. And she's like, "But you didn't know that you had to look." And I was like, "That's generally how sighted people determine information. Yes." She was so angry because I didn't have my eyes glued to his butt the whole time.

Jen: Oh this busy bodyness is just killing us.

Annie: Yeah.

Allana: Kids don't need us to be in their face 24 seven. They need the space to play. And in fact, if you're playing with your kid and you're not into it, it removes all benefit of play for them. Both, all the people who are playing something need to be in a place state in order for the play to be beneficial. One person or group that isn't enjoying the play removes all the benefits of play for every single person in that group. So if your kid is forcing you to play trucks with them and you're like, "Oh my God, when is it nap time, I don't want to be here." They're not actually getting the benefit of you playing with them.

Jen: Yeah, that's so interesting.

Allana: So it's better to find something that you actually enjoy doing with your child and do that so that you're both in a play state, it's a frame of mind. It's not an action.

Jen: Brene Brown has in her parenting book *The Gift of Imperfect Parenting*. They sat down as a family and made a list of things that fill everybody's cups and found the common ones and then that's what they focus their family time around now. And I thought, I thought it was such a good idea, right? Like it's mind. So Brenay Brown said it's mind numbing to play board games for herself and so she's just done. She's not doing it anymore. I was like, "Wow, it's so nice to hear

someone like you give me permission to not do these things that I don't like doing with my kids. And I don't, I don't do things I don't like with my kids anymore either."

Allana: Like I swim with my kids. That's what I enjoy doing. So we go swimming once or twice a week and we get in our mommy and kid time and that's great. Other than that, I'm like, "Please go do something else." And they're like-

Jen: Raise yourselves.

Allana: "How are you running a business at home? Mostly by yourself. Two little boys at home." And I mean, my oldest is in JK but he only goes three days a week. And I'm like, because they play by themselves. They go, I feed them breakfast, then I'm like, "Okay, play time." And they go and play in the basement and I'd go work and then they come up when they get hungry and I feed them and the little one goes down for a nap and the big one goes downstairs and play some more and it just gives you so much more freedom. It's actually better for their brain.

Jen: And you're happier as a parent, right, having some time. And I guess before we wrap this up, I want to, you know, I just, I guess it's to, it's nice to let parents know that there is detrimental effects to your child by over supervising them, right? So just saying like there's measurable detrimental effects to these kids.

Allana: Children who are closely supervised during their play will hamstring their own play. They won't allow themselves to go into a full play state because they're anticipating being interrupted or corrected.

Jen: Oh interesting.

Allana: So if you are constantly supervising your child's play, they probably aren't getting the benefit of their own play either. Even if you're not playing with them because they're anticipating having you go, "You can't do that. Don't use that that way. That's a firetruck, not a helicopter." And they're not allowing themselves to go into that fully immersed play state where all those benefits of play, all the problem solving and executive functioning skills and all that really get used in that play state. They keep their play very, very surface level when they're being supervised closely.

Lauren: That's interesting because I find myself, I can't not correct when they're in view. So I put them out of view. I'm like, "Go in the playroom and play because when you are doing this, I cannot help myself but say stop it."

Jen: It's like when I bake with my kids. I, like, can't handle cooking or baking with my kids because I, I just am like, "Don't do that. That's wrong. You're going to break it!"

Allana: My mom's a pastry chef and God bless her, she can and I'm like, "Okay, that is your thing, Nana." She is totally into the whole cooking thing. And you know he got all these little, like, real knives and stuff, but they're small so that he can handle them. And the other day we were making, just chopping up potatoes for like roasted potatoes for dinner and he was like making these, like, really, like, random sized chunks. And I was like, "Okay, you're too,"

Jen: You're like twitchy about it.

Allana: One inch cubes, not two, you're holding a knife and you're doing well. You're not killing yourself.

Annie: Oh, that's awesome. So a lot of this is, I mean, it's not just about retraining kids to do this. It could be about retraining yourself too, or both or both depending on what you're kind of used to and what your goals are. And, but either way, I mean, just to summarize, this is good for both sides. Both parties, both parents, caregivers and kids when they have unsupervised specifically outside, but unsupervised play. So-

Allana: Absolutely. And so many parents, so many moms express that guilt to me cause they're like, "I feel bad making the play by themselves. I feel bad that I'm not engaged with them. I feel super guilty." And it's like, "This isn't about you. This is about them." And it's, yes, it benefits you as well and that's nice, but this really is about them. This is for them. And it takes that guilt away. You don't have to feel bad for making your kids play by themselves. It's good for them.

Jen: I want to just kind of leave us with this vision. I'm going to tell you something that really struck me when my kids were younger and was an eye opener moment for me actually. And I was watching, I was in a hard place with motherhood, right? Like these three kids under five, oh my gosh, under four actually.

And I was watching The Good Shepherd and it's an old movie that takes place in the fifties. It has Matt Damon and Angelina Jolie and there's this scene where Matt Damon, he's coming home at the end of the day and all, and he's walking up to the house. It was a well researched scene and this is not even what the scene was about. It's just something that I noticed. The moms were all grouped together chatting in one person's front yard and they were all smoking as they would be in the 50s and kids were running everywhere.

And I like had this pain in my chest when I saw it because it reminded me of how lonely I was and how parenting must've been so differently back then. Different back then. And not just that, I think moms are more lonely now. It's that kids are more lonely now in a way too, right. Because we are very isolated inside the homes and yeah, I just quite, I really quite crave are return to that and I feel like we've kind of found it in our new neighborhood and like it's just easier and simpler and yeah.

Allana: I think, I think once we realize that what children do naturally is, there's generally a reason behind it. We don't tend to trust kids in what they're doing. We want to, we think we know better, but children know what they need and they'll do what they need. And once you can start to trust your kids that way and realize that what they're doing, whether it's a behavior, even if it's a maladaptive behavior, even if it's like what they're playing, if it makes no sense to you, children are doing things for a reason. There is never a child that is doing something just because they feel like it. Like there's never not a reason behind something that a child does.

And so when you can trust that and trust that your child is doing what they need, it's so freeing for us. And it does allow us to go back to that, you know, children are allowed to be rambunctious. They're allowed to get hurt, they're allowed to be unsupervised. And you know, people keep thinking, "Oh well, you know, lots of, you know, the good old days didn't exist." Well, no, but we can bring them back in a modern way that is safe and comfortable for everybody. It doesn't have to be the way it was in the fifties for it to be beneficial.

Jen: Right. We have tape and our GPSes.

Allana: Exactly. That was a hard thing for me because I was like, I have a Bluetooth tracker on every, on my keys and my wallet. Even on my car. I have

everything tracked. So not being able to have that connection to my kid was really freaky for me. But we have the technology, let's use it.

Annie: Cool. Awesome. Allana, where can they find your group if they want to join?

Allana: My group is called The Parenting Posse with Allana Robinson and it can, if you want to go directly there, it's [facebook.com/groups/parentingposse](https://www.facebook.com/groups/parentingposse). Yeah, and my Facebook page is Uncommon Sense Parenting. So because everything that I teach make sense once you think about it, but it's not common sense.

Annie: Perfect. Well, thank you so much. This is great. I think, I know our audience is going to really enjoy this conversation, so thank you so much for time today.

Jen: Thank you so much for all the help you've given me too, you've really changed the way I parented and I so appreciate it.

Allana: That makes me so happy. I can't even tell you.

Annie: Yay. Alright, well thank you. Good chat.

Jen: Bye.

Allana: Bye.

Lauren: Bye.

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