

Expert Q&A: AJ Rodrigue

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- Leanne Page: I am so happy to have an expert with us today so that you guys don't have to listen to me all the time. We have the Behavior Mama, and you can find all the links to her Facebook and her website and everything here and on our Facebook group. This is AJ Rodrigue, she is a BCBA and a mom and knows all this stuff. Welcome, thank you for being here.
- AJ Rodrigue: Thank you for having me.
- Leanne Page: Your background, how many kids you have, what you do, that sort of thing.
- AJ Rodrigue: Sure, okay. I'll start with the clinical side. I've done a little bit of everything. I've been in the field for about 10 years, worked in home and schools. Right now I'm based in a clinic, that's my day job. My passion project, as you know, is the Behavior Mama, which is an organization that is geared toward clinicians that are also mothers. We often have a hard time practicing what we preach, and so I created this organization to really empower each other and make sure that we're all working towards the same thing. You know that you're not alone, more importantly.
- AJ Rodrigue: I have two kiddos, a four year old and a three year old, and one on the way. Yes, I am officially crazy. Yeah, that's pretty much me in a nutshell.
- Leanne Page: Welcome. I have a four year old also, so we share the preschool woes.
- AJ Rodrigue: Oh, yes.
- Leanne Page: And all that. And a three year old too, that's a lot. You have your hands full.
- Leanne Page: My first question for you is how do you use ABA as a mom with your own kiddos the most often?
- AJ Rodrigue: Oh goodness. I use ABA all the time with everything, but I would say the biggest area that I use it with my own kiddos is the areas of self-help and teaching independent skills. Part of that is simply because there is one of me, and about to be three of them, so I need them to get it together so I can have my own sanity, quite honestly. I use a lot of things like prompt fading, extinction, reinforcement schedules. My big thing right now that I'm working on is teaching my son a visual schedule because he's about to be out for the summer, and he will be with me at the center, and I don't want him thinking it's gonna be a free for all, I don't want him to lose all the skills he's learned this year, so we'll be teaching him different skills, and have built in I-Pad time, and all that good stuff.

AJ Rodrigue: That's how it's helping a lot with my kids, but in terms of personally, I have a lot of different contingencies in place for eating healthy, doing housework which I hate doing, and just general time management strategies.

Leanne Page: When you say prompt fading, and how you use that with your son or any of your kids, can you explain what that means? What does that look like?

AJ Rodrigue: Sure. The two different main strategies that I'll use are most to least, which is starting with the most intrusive prompt fading to the least intrusive prompt, or least to most, which is the opposite of that starting with the least intrusive prompt, moving to more and more assistance. The way that I typically use prompt fading is with that most to least, so starting with your full physical prompts and kind of fading over time. Mostly, I'd say it's compliance. When I say clean up, he has about three seconds to respond, and then I'm starting with full physical with the first block, moving to partial physical with the second block, and then hopefully fading across trials from there. It's interesting because I'll see there memes that are like, they're not listening to you after the 57th time, and I'm like, I don't have time for that.

Leanne Page: Why would it take you 57 times?

AJ Rodrigue: I don't, I just don't. Of course I'm guilty, I have those days that I say it 57 times and then I'm like, oh yeah you're a behavior analyst, you know better. I'd say that on days that I'm on it, that's how I typically implement it.

Leanne Page: Yeah, and that's how we get them to access the reinforcement, 'cause if you say it 57 times, they're never gonna get reinforced.

AJ Rodrigue: No, no.

Leanne Page: If we hand over help them or show them or tell them the right answer to say back, the right verbal response. Yes, ma'am would be a good one.

AJ Rodrigue: Right?

Leanne Page: I would like to hear every once in a while, then they can be more successful, so that's exactly what we're talking about here. Turning it positive, giving them that positive reinforcement. They're not gonna get it if you don't prompt them to get it, especially not at age three and four.

AJ Rodrigue: No, and I think generally that's just kind of a hard thing for those who are not in the field to understand, is that if they don't do it, then punishment, as opposed to, even if it's a made up situation where you physically prompt them to do it, that still is an opportunity for reinforcement. That seems like such a strange thing for a lot of people, and it's so common for us to do just naturally.

Leanne Page: Yeah, and I like that you jumped into prompt fading. I don't know that I would say that right away, as an answer, but it is what we do because if you help them every single time, the whole time, then they're never gonna do it by themselves. That's how you teach, and that's our ABA word for it is prompt fading. You're helping.

AJ Rodrigue: I think I'm pretty proud of myself, because now I've faded it down to just the mom look, where it's just ... And they know what's happening after that, so it's become the signal for ... Yeah, and so my big thing now is I'll say, "You can do it or I can help you do it," so they know, either way, it's gonna happen.

Leanne Page: It's gonna happen.

AJ Rodrigue: That's been very effective as well.

Leanne Page: Yeah, I would imagine. We're all good at the mom look.

AJ Rodrigue: Oh, yes.

Leanne Page: What is your favorite advice to give to parents that you work with, clients that you have?

AJ Rodrigue: There's a couple, but I say the one I always go back to is that Rome wasn't built in a day. There's a lot of families that I work with and just friends that I work with who will ask me for advice, just different people that ask for a quick and dirty solution on something. What I always say is that Rome wasn't built in a day. ABA as a field, everything that we do, is a marathon, not a sprint. I think in the world of instant gratification, everyone just wants a quick fix for whatever it is, and you have to just remind them that any kind of behavior change doesn't happen right away. That's usually my go-to phrase.

Leanne Page: That's perfect. Shaping is our technical word for what we do so much of, and that means baby steps.

AJ Rodrigue: That's right, yup.

Leanne Page: Rome wasn't built in a day, we're making baby steps, we're making progress in the right direction where I don't have to prompt you every time, I have to prompt every other time and that's okay, we're making progress, we're gonna get there.

AJ Rodrigue: Right, no, totally, and for the parents, too. I think that a lot of times, the behavior change is on the adult. They have to be aware of their own things that they have to change, and so the same goes not only for the child who's behavior they're trying to change but also for themselves. Let's say they lost their temper, or they went back to their old ways or something. Again, Rome wasn't built in a day. You're working on reversing cultural norms and things you're used to doing,

and it takes a lot of consciousness to be aware that, "Oh yeah, I need to stop doing that, I'm supposed to be doing this," or whatever it is that you're committing to.

Leanne Page: Yeah, that's huge. Time out is what most parents go to, or punishment, or taking away privileges and things, and so not doing that anymore, that's not gonna happen immediately. You can't just stop everything, so that's perfect. You'll get there. We're on our way there.

AJ Rodrigue: Right?

Leanne Page: You can slip backwards a little bit, we're still making progress in the right direction, so that's perfect.

AJ Rodrigue: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Leanne Page: Do you have a favorite behavior analytic strategy? Like the Premack principle, or a token economy?

AJ Rodrigue: You took it, you took it out of, yes.

Leanne Page: One of those?

AJ Rodrigue: Premack principle, oh it's my favorite, yes. My kids have pretty much memorized Premack principle because now they'll prompt each other. First clean up, then put on shoes, whatever it is. They'll do it with me as well, which I'll take as a compliment, by the way. We do Premack principle with pretty much everything, but the big thing that has been going on at our house is really just using super potent social praise for positive behaviors. The big thing is being a good listener in our house right now, and so if one of my kiddos is not being a good listener, then I give all of my social praise to the other kiddo, just super overt, over the top social praise, and then the other one will automatically start doing it. It's like, "I'm a good listener, I'm being a good listener." I'm gonna milk that for as long as I can.

Leanne Page: Yeah, it's cheap and ...

AJ Rodrigue: Right? The best.

Leanne Page: That's perfect. Laying it on thick with that praise, if that'll work, that's all we need.

AJ Rodrigue: Right? I think so.

Leanne Page: I think parents get hung up on, we need to reward them and we have to go out for ice cream and we have to buy them new toys and that kind of thing, and that's not [inaudible 00:09:01] reinforcement.

AJ Rodrigue: No. You know, something that I was actually thinking about today is that, is that everyone thinks of positive reinforcement as I need to go buy something, there's something extra I need to do, but sometimes it's just giving them something they already have access to that they've had for free. For example, my kids get to pick, for 30 minutes before bed, they get to pick their favorite whatever Disney movie it is. One day, I was like, "No, they need to earn that." Once a teacher started telling me, "Oh, he's having some trouble keeping his hands to himself," and so I said well, that can't be free anymore, and that's something they're already doing, they just never had a price on it.

Leanne Page: Yeah. It's funny when they realize that too, 'cause my daughter even today was like, I-Pad's not a reward. She was like, "Can I have the I-Pad?" And I was like, "Well, I don't know if you've earned it," 'cause we had had some issues. She was like, "I don't have to earn I-Pad," and I was like oh yeah you do.

AJ Rodrigue: Now you do, sis.

Leanne Page: Are you sure? You have to earn things? It's true, you don't have to buy stuff, you don't have to have an I-Pad, but whatever reward that they like to do, just earn it. It doesn't have to [inaudible 00:10:11].

AJ Rodrigue: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Oh yeah, for sure.

Leanne Page: What are the things that make this hardest for parents? What roadblocks do you see parents facing, and do you have any advice for that?

AJ Rodrigue: Yeah, so I thought about this one from a couple different angles. The first I was thinking about is in my day job, so I'm a behavior analyst at a center, and one of the things that I do there is I do a lot of parent training, I work directly with the kiddos, but right now it's right before the summer time. We have a lot of parents that are trying to figure out what they're going to do when they have off time, after therapy, or they're thinking about, what are they gonna do in August when they go to kindergarten, or whatever the next transition is. I'd say the two biggest things that I see a lot is having realistic schedules and structure for idle time. This is in terms of families that have kiddos on the autism spectrum, is that it's very easy to say, "Okay, they're in therapy then they come home and they can just rewind for a little bit." I think that's important for everyone, but there also comes a point that you have to remember that behavior never turns off. There should be some sort of structure.

AJ Rodrigue: Let's say therapy is from eight to three, and they go home, maybe they rest, maybe they have a snack, and then there should be some sort of structure throughout that time. A lot of parents that I work with kind of let it be a free for all, and this is not a generalization, this is just something I've had a lot of people ask me about recently.

AJ Rodrigue: There was one family I worked with where the kiddo would come home and he would have his mom's phone from 3:45 to 7:00. What was happening is that, at therapy, he started scripting this song ... Scripting is repeating a certain phrase or something over and over and it doesn't serve a social purpose. This kiddo was singing the same song over and over and over and over again, and it became obsessive, all day long, and I didn't know what was going on. Mom told me that what's been happening is he would get home and he would perseverate on her phone from 3:45 to 7:00 pm. That's what, almost four hours of doing one thing, you know? I think just knowing that there has to be structure, there has to be something to do that's not just a free for all.

AJ Rodrigue: The other thing is planning for transitions. They're gonna come, so between pre-K and kindergarten, and then elementary school to junior high, and all that stuff. I think that sometimes you just get caught in the thick of it, and there's certain things that need to be put into place. For example, start a year out. If you know that your goal is for them to go to kindergarten at five, then around four, start looking at places, whether it's private school or another center or something like that. Putting certain things in place so that that transition is so much easier for the kiddo.

AJ Rodrigue: Switching gears to neuro-typical kids, I would say the biggest road blocks that I guess in my circle of friends and people I'm around are knowing what to reinforce and what not to reinforce. I don't know about you, but my sister for example, I love her to death, but she has a two year old, and she reinforces everything. Happy, sad, mad, she reinforces everything. Two is ... The terrible twos are a very real thing, and she reinforces everything. It drives me crazy because ethically, I know I'm not supposed to say anything unless ... But she's my family, and so I have to, I feel like I'm allowed to in that particular case.

AJ Rodrigue: I always use the analogy of being an on and off switch. If they're engaging in the appropriate behavior, you're on, you're like a toy. You're super animated, yes that's what I want, great job, whatever it is. As soon as the inappropriate behavior occurs, the switch turns off, and you completely ignore, pretend like it's not even happening unless it's something dangerous that you need to interfere with. That concept is kinda hard for a lot of people to really understand, and more importantly to implement.

Leanne Page: To do, yeah. I have an 18-month old, and she can put on the drama. You tell her no, we use anything but no. Uh uh, not right now. We use all of the other ways because if you say no, she will lay flat on the floor and scream, face down, and so I just turn away, but listening to her cry, even though I'm a behavior analyst, I know that's not a real cry, I know it's just the sound of the word no, it's still so hard to listen to. It's so hard to not just, oh I'm sorry, let me hold you and comfort you 'cause you're sad.

AJ Rodrigue: Yeah.

Leanne Page: But then knowing when she is sad, when she fell and bumped her head or something, or overly tired, or there's a lot of people around and she's overwhelmed, knowing that cry, yes, I will hold you and comfort you and baby talk you. When I say no and I lay on the floor, no.

AJ Rodrigue: No.

Leanne Page: But it's still hard to listen to.

AJ Rodrigue: It is, and I think what you're saying is so realistic. I was speaking with Katie Nicholson at a conference, and she's fantastic. Something she was saying on the topic of being a mom and a clinician is that there was a moment she was saying, with her own son, or her daughter I think, that was having a meltdown. All of a sudden, she was just like, "Mom," and the behavior analyst in her was like, "Ignore it, ignore it." But the mom in her was like, "Come here." And she gave in, she gave her a hug, and then they talked about it and moved on. I think that what it all comes down to, whatever the roadblock is, you have to do what's best for you in the moment. There's no right or wrong way to parent, there's just good ways to reinforce what you want to see, you know what I mean?

AJ Rodrigue: I think it's, in those moments, you really have to think about what it is you're reinforcing, but also knowing what's realistic for you.

Leanne Page: Yes, and for your child, 'cause my four year old will have some big meltdowns. She doesn't know how to cry without screaming.

AJ Rodrigue: It's just one volume, right?

Leanne Page: Oh yeah.

AJ Rodrigue: It's normal and then super loud, soul piecing loud.

Leanne Page: The behavior analyst in me wants to just completely ignore, but I know that she's not gonna calm down quickly unless she gets a hug. I'll put a time limit on it. I will hold you and hug you for two minutes. If you're still screaming and crying, I'm gonna leave and you can calm yourself down. It's like, finding that balance between the mom who wants to hold and hug, and the behavior analyst who's like no, this is not good, I'm not gonna reinforce the crying. Like you said, figuring out what works for you, and not getting hung up on all these little things. That's what parenting today is all about. Find the positives, reinforce the good, but the bad stuff is still gonna happen, and it's not that we're getting rid of the bad behaviors because kids are kids and this is part of growing up, but what do we do when that happens? We just want to focus on the positive and not freak out when your kiddo starts melting down and my temperature starts rising. If we're using these strategies, hopefully we can keep our temperature down, and keep cool and not freak out about it.

AJ Rodrigue: Right.

Leanne Page: That's perfect, finding that line. Whatever works for you today, and it might be different from what worked yesterday.

AJ Rodrigue: That's right.

Leanne Page: As long as we're focusing on, what do we want them to do instead, and how do we reinforce that after the chaos is over?

AJ Rodrigue: Oh absolutely, and then don't even add the layer of when you're in public, and these things happen. That's a whole ... We could have a whole other segment just on that, right?

Leanne Page: Oh yeah, just get in the car. Whatever you need.

AJ Rodrigue: Right? Here's a lollypop, stop embarrassing me.

Leanne Page: Oh yeah.

AJ Rodrigue: Yeah. Yes.

Leanne Page: So true, and it doesn't help when you're publicly a behavior analyst like you and I both are.

AJ Rodrigue: Oh, I know.

Leanne Page: We know what to do, and so I'm like ... It's easier for me to talk to strangers who don't know my children.

AJ Rodrigue: I know. Well, we're in the South, right, we're in Texas, and there's a lot of cultural norms about how you should raise your kiddos and things like that. The one that I've been using lately that has totally backfired on me is if they get stuck playing with something in a store, then I'm like, "Okay, I'm leaving, bye," and I'll start walking away. Initially, it was, "No," and then they'll go follow me, and it worked like a charm, but now my daughter, who's basically me at three, will just plop herself on the floor. Now I have to go get her and pick her up, and I'm like, "You won the battle, but not the war sis." It's only because we're in public that I have to do this.

Leanne Page: I can't actually leave you here in the aisle, you know I would.

AJ Rodrigue: Right.

Leanne Page: That's kind of frowned upon.

AJ Rodrigue: Right.

Leanne Page: What is the easiest way to use positive reinforcement as a parent? What's the quickest, easiest thing that doesn't take time and effort?

AJ Rodrigue: I'm gonna go back to the on off switch analogy, and what I mean by that is just giving all of your energy to all that good stuff that you were just talking about. The manners, the compliance the first time, whatever it is. Just thinking of yourself as an on off switch. When it happens, "Yeah, that is so good." And then when all the negative stuff happens, completely shutting off, because the thing is that it takes so much effort to be angry. It takes so much effort to do whatever punishment thing it is that you normally do, but if you just ignore it or move on or do whatever for you or your kiddo that is effective with the least amount of attention, it's kind of liberating.

AJ Rodrigue: It is, 'cause honestly, who has time? We're all tired, by the time that you're with your kiddo after work and all that stuff, you're tired. If they're acting like a donkey, yes we love our kiddos but sometimes they're donkeys, and if they're acting like a donkey it takes so much energy to sit and scold and irrationalize about why they shouldn't be doing whatever it is. If you simply just ignore it or physically redirect and then move on, it's so much less energy and it's directly targeting the behaviors that you want to see.

Leanne Page: Yeah, and if you can move on to some good stuff and target positive, even in that same evening, that same moment, that's better for everybody.

AJ Rodrigue: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Leanne Page: During our week one, our very first module was about the definition of positive reinforcement, and more than one parent posted in our private Facebook group that they are in a better mood.

AJ Rodrigue: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Leanne Page: That's not the purpose, that's not our purpose of the lesson, it's just the byproduct, is that it makes us feel better, it makes us happier, it's less stressful. We're just in better moods.

AJ Rodrigue: Well yeah, absolutely, for sure.

Leanne Page: If mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy. We all want mom in a better mood, right?

AJ Rodrigue: Right?

Leanne Page: That's always a good thing.

AJ Rodrigue: Yes, absolutely.

Leanne Page: How technical do you think parent need to get in learning about behavior analysis? You're speaking to parents who want to learn this stuff, which is awesome, and how technical do you think they need to get to do this well?

AJ Rodrigue: I love this question. I feel like it's a loaded question, but I love it, and my gut tells me that they only need to know as much to understand how to change their behavior, even slightly. What I mean by that is, the terminology is important, and knowing how to do things to the T is important, but people want change using the least amount of effort possible, let's be honest. People want quick fixes, a lot of people are tired, and I think as a field we generally lose people when we just shove our terminology down their throats or say, "Oh, that's not how you do that," or whatever it is. I say that it's as a field, and as our job as behavior analysts, is that we win people over with techniques that are easy to do, then give it a name, then increase the response effort saying, "Okay, now let's try it this way."

AJ Rodrigue: In face, Leanne, that's my favorite thing about your page and everything that you do. You make it so easily digestible. You could very easily say, "Okay, escape extinction with DRA and then you're gonna be FCT and blah blah blah," and go into all this stuff but no one's gonna understand what you're talking about. They're not gonna [crosstalk 00:22:37], they're just gonna say, "How can you decrease my kids tantrums? That's all I want to know." Period, end of story. You could say something as simple as, "Alright, we'll ignore it, and only give them a high five when they're quiet." Boom, that's easy. Then you go back and say, "Okay, here's what you actually did." Does that make sense?

AJ Rodrigue: That's kind of how I really got into the field. I worked in home as, at the time it was called ABA therapist, and I learned application, then I learned more about the terminology, and I was like, "Oh, okay, I understand. That thing that I did is called this," and that's what turned me on, but if someone said, "Okay, you need to learn escape extinction," then they tried to show me, that would kind of turn me off a little bit. I think the thing about our field is that the proof is in the pudding, and so we can get people eating the pudding, then ... I'm just saying. Then give them that terminology, and a little bit more of, "Okay, here's the next step, here's the next step." It's generally easier to digest.

Leanne Page: Yeah, that's perfect. We're doing it, and a lot of parents are doing it. You're doing great things and you don't know the ABA word for it, and that's okay, but if you want to know it I'll tell you, I'll share with you that vocabulary.

AJ Rodrigue: Oh absolutely.

Leanne Page: You're right, we don't need all those words. BCBAs need those words, yes.

AJ Rodrigue: Oh yes.

Leanne Page: Moms and dads, we don't need those words, we've got so many words in our heads, got so many words coming at us from these children all day long.

AJ Rodrigue: Right. I think something that's great about the members that you have and the parents that you work with is they want to know these words. It's kind of like, you open Pandora's box, so now they know the phenomenons, they know all this stuff, you see it everywhere, you see the parent that's reinforcing this and this person that's reinforcing this, and all these different phenomenons, it's like you can't close it again. I think that's really cool how you're giving your parents these tools.

Leanne Page: Thank you. I ran into a mom at the YMCA yesterday or today, and she used reinforcement terminology correctly and I was like, "Good job."

AJ Rodrigue: Nice.

Leanne Page: You're doing it. We can get results. ABA gets results, but we don't have to know all the terminology for it at the moment.

AJ Rodrigue: No, in fact just this year, I started writing for Today Parents, and the reason that I did it is because the parenting stuff that was out there ...

Leanne Page: You know, I'm with you on that one.

AJ Rodrigue: I know you are.

Leanne Page: Yeah, I'm with you.

AJ Rodrigue: Ugh, it was just terrible. Some of the stuff, I'm like, "What are you even talking about?" I think that's the thing is that anyone can write a blog, right? Anyone can write a book even, can write an article and say, "This thing works great for kids." The problem is is that a lot of those things are very idiosyncratic things, maybe worked this one time with this particular kid. What I love about our field, what I love about what you do and people like us that try to use this in every day, is that it's based on science. It's based on things that work. It's not just our ideas. Go ask the 60 years of research, and so that was my motivation to want to get involved with Today Parents 'cause I'm like, "You'll have to know, you'll have to know, this is how this works." It's not about ...

AJ Rodrigue: I don't know, I'm trying to think of what the latest fad is. I won't even go down that road 'cause I don't want to offend anybody, but you know. Just trying to break ... Yeah, you know, just trying to break it down to the simplest terminology and get people hooked that way, without even saying words like reinforcement even. Just saying reward. People know what that is.

Leanne Page: Yeah. We don't have to know all these words to use them, like the Premack principle is great but we could just call it first then.

AJ Rodrigue: Right, yeah exactly.

Leanne Page: It's a first then.

AJ Rodrigue: Yeah.

Leanne Page: That's perfect. Do you have any ideas to how you reinforce yourself as a parent? I think that that's lacking a lot, we don't get a lot of feedback, we don't get performance reviews as parents, we don't get a lot of downtime. Have you come up with any good ideas to reinforce yourself?

AJ Rodrigue: I love this question because it's kind of been one of the things I've been thinking about with my platform, with the Behavior Mama, because it takes a lot on the parents to change behaviors, like a lot. You have to change your own behavior. Let's be honest, you're changing your own behavior to change someone else's. On top of all of your day to day stuff, you're working, you're trying to stay healthy, you're trying to raise humans into good people. I think we often forget ourselves and lose ourselves. I think that one of the biggest things is having a time management system.

AJ Rodrigue: For example, I use something called a passion planner, and it's this big old planner and it has pages that are huge and I write big and I'm highly reinforced when I make lists, and then I can cross them off. To me, that's so reinforcing, but not just doing that but doing something that's called batching. I'll batch my time throughout the day, for example. Let's say I'm gonna have all my meetings from this time, and then I'm gonna write a couple of reports from this time, and then I'm gonna do this with my kids from this time, or whatever. When you break things down like that, honestly you're creating these goals for yourself that are achievable, instead of writing down every single thing that you need to do, and then at the end of the day, getting upset like, "Oh man, I didn't finish everything." I think first having a good time management system in place and then secondly, having a reinforcement system in place that is something that you can actually do.

AJ Rodrigue: For example, some positive reinforcers for myself, I love food, so if I did a good job eating healthy on Monday and Tuesday, Wednesday night we get to have our cheat meal. It's a simple thing, but it's having those things in place. I'm pregnant right now, but wine used to be a good one for me. Making time to do things that I really want to do. Me time. And then also negative reinforcers, like not having to do things that I don't really want to do. I think part of it is really just doing a little mini preference assessment. What are the things I really like, what are some things that I don't want to do, and how can I set this up so that I can reinforce myself to get access to these things?

Leanne Page: I think that's super smart.

AJ Rodrigue: It's kind of like what we do with our kids. First you gotta do this, then you gotta do this. Okay, well, set up that same contingency for yourself. I remember when I had my second child, I put a picture of myself when I was looking my best on the refrigerator. I know, I probably won't do that this time.

Leanne Page: Don't do that.

AJ Rodrigue: I did it last time because whenever I walked to the refrigerator, it was my visual prompt to myself to make a good choice when I opened the refrigerator door. It's simple things like that, that as long as you put a rule on your own behavior and then have a really good effective reinforcer, whatever that may be, then you're already winning, just taking the effort to do that.

Leanne Page: Even just taking the effort to make a preference assessment for yourself, which we either have already talked about or we will after this airs, I'm not sure where this falls, but there's [inaudible 00:30:07] in finding reinforcers and so doing that for yourself, I hadn't even thought about that for myself. When I finished my housework and chores for the day, then I'll watch Netflix.

AJ Rodrigue: Yeah, see.

Leanne Page: As my reward. I sit down on the couch, and I turn on some stupid, something that doesn't teach me anything, but that's my break from whatever is going on in the chaos. I have that in place, but I bet there's other things that I could do too. I could be more creative and find something more powerful so I'll get my housework done faster.

AJ Rodrigue: That's true, or conversely, maybe you don't get access to your Netflix if you don't finish something in time.

Leanne Page: Yeah, that's perfect. I like that, and I also like the visual prompt that you threw in there, about having those little lists. My chores for housework are on a list, and they're broken down by every week, and I have that hanging up somewhere. If anyone's ever in my house, just start opening cabinets, because inside every cabinet there's a meal plan in this one, there's a chore chart in this one, [inaudible 00:31:03] to the humidifier was during the winter months. These sorts of things, there's lists everywhere, which every week with our module, there's a to-do list. The members all already know that I like lists because I give them one every week.

AJ Rodrigue: Oh yeah.

Leanne Page: The steps to do this week, and did it work? Are things going well for you, did it work? Yes or no?

AJ Rodrigue: Right.

Leanne Page: I like that, having that visual reminder too that yes, I set these rules up, but am I gonna follow them?

AJ Rodrigue: Yeah, that's a whole nother thing is having at least something powerful enough in place that you'll actually do it. I think that's kind of the whole point of this conversation is just being realistic as a parent on what you can do to change your child's behavior, and also being realistic on what you can do for yourself. I'm sure you've already talked about this, in fact I think I've read this before in one of your blogs about picking your battles, and just really deciding, "Today was a terrible day, do I really care if he picks up his blocks?" Or whatever it is. It's so easy to just forget all of those things or be on one side of the spectrum. Either I put so much pressure on myself to get this done and I feel bad if I don't, like I feel like that's where the clinicians are, you and I. That's where we are that I know better, I didn't do better, so I failed.

Leanne Page: Yes.

AJ Rodrigue: Right?

Leanne Page: I definitely have those feelings.

AJ Rodrigue: 'Cause it is, and I hate to say it like that, but it is.

Leanne Page: That's not fair to parents, any parent even, that's not fair.

AJ Rodrigue: It's not fair, and whether you are a parent of a child with autism, whether you're a parent of a neuro-typical child, whether you're just an overachiever or whatever, you have to cut yourself some slack. Maybe not every single day, but you do have to know when to say, "Alright ..." Or using your tribe, or using your partner, or making sure that you're communicating enough so it's not just one person doing everything all the time.

Leanne Page: Yeah, that's perfect. Do you have any pearls of wisdom you'd like to leave us with? I think my favorite thing that I'm gonna hold on to from this is the on off switch, just remembering, when it's on, lay it on thick, pour it on and make sure your kids know that it's on, and when it's off it's off and it's just whatever. It's not, "I'm mad at you" angry, it's just off.

AJ Rodrigue: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Oh goodness. Pearls of wisdom. I'll let you know.

Leanne Page: Any final thoughts? I don't want to miss any ideas.

AJ Rodrigue: When I get those pearls, I'll let you know. The baby's eating my brain these days.

Leanne Page: You'll have your own parenting community, I'll be coming to you, with your pearls of wisdom. That's what we both say, is that these aren't our ideas, this is

science, that's why we're here. We wish we came up with all this stuff. I wish I invented positive reinforcement.

AJ Rodrigue: Right.

Leanne Page: If we stick with our science and make it work for wherever we're at, that's it, that's how we do it. That's how we survive, right?

AJ Rodrigue: Yeah, absolutely.

Leanne Page: Awesome, thank you so much for sharing with us, and I'll be sharing all your contact information so everyone can follow you and all of your cool stuff that you're working on with the Behavior Mama. She's the one, which is awesome. It's perfect for this community. Thank you so much.

AJ Rodrigue: Thank you Leanne.