

## [Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / Bad Moms with Emily Oster

I'm Barry Weiss, this is Honestly, and today I am so excited to be joined by my wife, Nelly Bows.

Say hi now.

Hi.

She is here with me today to talk about the totally uncontroversial, not polarizing at all, very simple, straightforward subject of parenting, which the one time that we've tackled before on this show ignited something in our listeners like I've never seen before. I learned very quickly that nowhere is the internet more alive and more vicious than in matters of how you should raise your kids and judging you on whether or not you're raising them the right way.

Yeah.

On that note, I actually think I'm going to sit this one out, Bear.

Call me back when you want to talk about something like, I don't know, trans athletes or institutional racism.

Yeah, you're not getting out of it now.

Okay.

As listeners may know, if you've been following along, we recently had a baby.

Say hi, Tiny Weiss.

And when we were pregnant.

When I was pregnant, I deserve a little valour here.

Yeah, you actually deserve 100% of the valour.

When Nelly was pregnant last year, everyone we knew said we had to read this one book called Expecting Better by an economist named Emily Oster.

And my wife, being the A-plus student that she is, devoured it in a few days.

I became obsessed with the Oster mentality.

Emily Oster's book brought me so much calm, like no, a cup of coffee is not going to cause our baby to get ADHD in the womb.

And she spelled out in really concrete ways how pregnancy medical care in America is so deeply broken.

Basically, it's a long list of outdated rules that when you look at them under a microscope, they actually make very little sense.

Any question I had in pregnancy, I googled it and added two words.

Emily Oster.

Emily has been used to getting heat for her views on, let's say, drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

In moderation, or co-sleeping with your baby, also thinks it's fine.

And then came COVID.

And Emily went swinging.

She argued very early on in the pandemic based on data for less draconian and more nuanced COVID policies.

She wrote pieces with headlines like, schools aren't super spreaders and your unvaccinated kid is like a vaccinated grandma.

And she did this in the pages of The Atlantic when those words in that space were considered to be something like heresy.

## [Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / Bad Moms with Emily Oster

Let's just say her early on wisdom that school closures were bad and toddlers shouldn't be masked made her quite a few enemies.

And she's apparently a little bit of a masochist because she recently called for a so-called pandemic amnesty, arguing that we should at this point forgive those who were wrong and move on.

And that earned her even more backlash this time from the people who celebrated her throughout the pandemic.

It's basically like when I asked Bear to open the door for our dogs in the morning, but then I also get annoyed that she made it cold by opening the door.

Emily Oster can't seem to get anything right.

So on today's show, why a Harvard educated economist at Brown decided to become a parenting guru.

How Emily popularized this new thing called data driven parenting.

And how she used that same framework to become a leading expert on pandemic policies.

But why she's ready to call it quits on the COVID debates.

And the unwinnable position of actually following the science.

It's going to be super fun and not at all contentious.

Stay with us.

We'll be right back.

I run a company called the free press.

So you know that I believe that freedom of speech is a fundamental human right and no American should fear exercising it.

Yet only one in three of us believe that we can fully exercise our free speech rights in 2023.

That's where fire comes in fire.

The foundation for individual rights and expression is stepping up to protect your freedom of expression.

No matter where you're from or what you believe.

After more than two decades spent advancing the rights of students and faculty on college campuses.

The foundation for individual rights and expression or fire is expanding its mission beyond the campus.

Now fire stands ready to defend all Americans right to free speech in our courtrooms in our campuses and in our culture.

No matter how loud the calls for censorship are fire will always be the principle nonpartisan nonprofit defender of your rights and America's culture of free expression because fire knows that free speech makes free people.

Join the fight for free speech today at [www.thefire.org](http://www.thefire.org).

Emily Oster.

Welcome to honestly.

Thank you so much for having me.

I'm thrilled to be here and I'm so excited that Nellie is here too.

I am too.

So Emily you were talking to two parents at month four of a non-sleep trained baby.

So you as you can imagine we're doing amazing.

You know our house is clean.

It's well organized.

Our sex life is completely normal.

We've been on some incredible date nights.

Try it out some of the hottest new restaurants and clubs in LA.

No.

I mean I'm feeling a little bit like that title of Jen Seniors great book from a few years back about parenting all joy and no fun or rather all joy and a little bit of fun these days and what has comforted me is that the data seems to speak to my experience.

Research shows that parents are in general less happy than non-parents.

One study that we came across a few days ago concludes and I could not believe this that the effect of having a new baby on a person's happiness in the first year is and this is a quote worse than divorce worse than unemployment and even worse than the death of a partner.

Now we can quibble over the way happiness is measured and there's of course a difference between happiness and other outcomes like life satisfaction or meaning.

But let's just say that this past long holiday weekend Nellie and I laid in bed and looked at each other and actually calculated how many hours it would be until our babysitter came back at 8 a.m. on Monday morning and yet here we are not just talking to you but privately talking about when we're maybe going to have more kids and maybe more than one of them.

So the first question is a simple one.

Why do we do this to ourselves?

Why do we have kids at all?

I think there's a few ways to answer that so one is I think the most traditional way which would be it's a biological feeling, need, desire that almost our species has to have because otherwise there would be no more people so it's really kind of got to be there so some of it is maybe you're just in the throes of your gorilla brain or I don't know penguin brain or whatever it is.

That's how I genuinely feel like I don't know why but I'm waiting until I can get pregnant again like an insane person.

Let me say one thing on that which I think is interesting because it relates to a question a lot of people ask which is like well what's the right number of kids and when they ask me that they're often looking for an answer that's based on data is there an optimal number of kids and the answer is sort of no in the sense that there isn't much evidence that having more kids or fewer kids is better for like making your kid successful or whatever is the sort of set of things people are asking about it's usually about about success in those ways and you know likewise there's no real evidence that having just one kid makes them socially awkward or kind of a weirdo which is the other question people ask but then they say well how do I know what's the right number of kids.

I think the answer is almost certainly that it's something you feel right like you're telling me like I have a four month old even though I haven't slept at all I definitely want another and I you know I really resonate with that when we had our first it was really hard the first year was definitely the hardest year of my marriage but I knew that we wanted

another one pretty much as soon as my son arrived even though he was a much easier baby I was like oh hey we're done like we're like not like I have no interest in having a third and I still don't have any interest in having a third and so I think some of this is just this feeling of you know I kind of have a feeling about what's the right number.

Now a second part of your question is well given that it's so hard you know why would we do it again or why would we do it at all and I think that's because the highs are so tremendously high and so when you look back on them there's like these psychological theories about like the peak end rule you remember like the highest point and the last point more than the average and so when you sort of think back on the last day you remember like the best thing not all of them all of the poop you know you remember the moment that that they smiled or they made like a funny noise or a funny face or you were just sitting there or you know even with older kids you know you don't remember the 19 tantrums you do remember the one moment in which they said you know mommy I love you you're my favorite parent and you know that's that's that's the high and I think that's why that's why we come back.

There are people listening to this show who are going to choose to not have kids for reasons that were unfathomable two generations ago I'm thinking the arguments of I can't procreate because of the climate apocalypse and fertility rates are dropping not just in the US but around the globe you've shifted your entire career to understanding parenting and children what is your biggest pitch for why we should have kids in the first place.

So I will say I don't think I would pitch someone on having kids if they didn't want to I think we actually spent a lot of time pitching people on having kids for not very good reasons like it's what you're supposed to do or I want grandkids or something else I mean having kids while I think it is amazing and for me it has been you know life changing on every dimension and is the greatest thing that I do I don't actually think it's for everyone and so you know it is an example of a time like all the times during pregnancy where I think you really have to figure out like what is going to work for you and even if we come back to something like the marital satisfaction so we see in the data quite big dips in marital satisfaction in the first year of birth and they recover around the time you have grandkids so that's something to look for but they recover a lot like they recover a lot after the first year but what I will say is those declines are much smaller if you have planned to have children so they're much smaller if you are doing this on purpose meaning that like in some sense if you don't want to do this and then you and then you do it or by accident or because you feel compelled that's yet another way in which this is going to be challenging so you may still.

That explains a lot because for us it was an accident.

Too many tequila's.

Okay well Emily I have to be honest like Nellie unlike me from the time like you know she was so chill on her first date was like how many children do you want like she has been wanting kids for a really long time and has been reading books and literature about parenting for much longer than I have.

Okay that makes me sound insane it's not I it was the second date.

I think it's important to be clear on your priorities early on in your dating relationship.

It was the second the third was the you all obviously anyway I first sort of came across

your work when Nellie was pregnant and we were getting just as you know like an enormous amount of conflicting advice from people right the doctors say no smoke turkey no deli meat no sushi but my sisters who had already had kids said it was totally fine you know Nellie insisted on taking fistfuls of vitamins every day that I was like absolutely certain did nothing and in the meantime she was like pounding the coffee and I'm like that's the one thing I'm sure is a no-no and then finally on the recommendation of pretty much every mom friend that we knew we got your book and we read your book and it was a godsend but what struck me when I was reading it is like you're not a pediatrician you're not a psychologist you're not even a doula for God's sakes so tell me about how it is an economist with a very fancy title at a very fancy university end up writing a book about pregnancy what drew you to this subject.

So my professional training is in data analysis I mean I'm an economist I'm trained in economic theory and so on but my my work my my kind of love the stuff that I do at professionally is about data how do we understand data how do we use data to answer policy questions and and just I like I really love it I have loved data since I was a little kid it's just like you sound you sound like you're a really really fun kid.

I was really popular in middle school that's like I mean it was my peak.

So I really love data and I was working in my economics thing doing the sort of standard publication kind of stuff that that economists do and then I got pregnant and I sort of had the experience I think many women have when they get pregnant which is that they get very engaged with their pregnancy very it becomes very consuming and the particular way that I kind of became consumed with this is in bringing those data pieces into kind of the decision making and so actually a lot of expecting better you sort of hear me talk about like this is how we approached it and that is true so much of the work for expecting better was done like in the service of my own pregnancy and the questions that I had and I sort of talked some about going back and forth with Jesse about what kind of prenatal testing were we going to do and how were we going to have an epidural or was I going to have an epidural and those are conversations that we had during pregnancy and that I was you know trying to figure things out and then I turned that into a book proposal and that's it.

The pregnancy Bible for my parents generation was what to expect when you're expecting which no one reads anymore obviously I did but no one else does but when I see a friend digging into Brie at a party I know the words I'm about to hear Emily Oster says it's okay. Every generation of parents gets its own pregnancy book what was it about yours that resonated with the millennial parents?

So I think that I hit a good moment which people like data so I think there has been an increasing you know interest in using data for personal decision making and I sort of was at the start of some of that wave and I think it has become a much bigger part of how a lot of people in our sort of social spaces are kind of interacting with the with the world but I also think there is something about this experience of being told how to do this that was not how many of the people that I knew were hoping to interact with pregnancy. You know we're having pregnancy we're having kids older and so you're kind of people have gone through like okay I achieved this I got into college I had gotten to graduate school I did this and I worked hard and I got to this thing and like at every stage I have

had ownership of this process and I have been able to do it and you like I've been in charge and then you arrive at this experience this medical experience kind of the most sustained experience many of us had with the medical system up to that point and you arrive and they give you this list of things like not to do and then you is like goodbye here's your list and there's none of this ownership and control and I think part of what resonates about the book is the idea of sort of taking that control and rather than this book being something where I just say well I told you sushi like trust me I'm an expert sushi is fine the book is much more about well why like why do I say that and when what is the evidence say and I think that's where almost not being a doctor was somewhat helpful because there is no moral authority there is nothing you know you as an economist you can't write a book and say you know sushi is fine trust me I have a Ph.D. in economics from Harvard okay like when is that covered is that in macro is that in econometrics like when did you learn about that and so I really I think I needed to go into like what I'm an expert at is data and now I'm going to show you I'm going to show you the data I'm going to explain it and I think that was I think that was resonant.

I think for people who haven't read the book one sort of rule of thumb is that a lot of the conclusions in it are counterintuitive to the conventional wisdom in American maternal menace it right you say it's okay to have half a glass of wine a day during pregnancy maybe a glass and that kind of goes directly against CDC and AAP guidelines you write about how breastfeeding is not overrated but doesn't carry quite as many health benefits as official guidance suggests meanwhile the AAP is telling moms to breastfeed not for a few months for two years because of continued benefits I think if Nellie goes to two years she's going to lose her mind so Emily why is there such a discrepancy between the official guidelines of the most sort of like esteemed medical organizations public health organizations in the country and your findings like explain that gap to me because you're great at data but presumably they are too so what's going on there there really sort of two things going on there.

The point is I actually think in many of these cases there is a tremendous over interpretation of flawed studies and this is a place where the training that I have the sort of expertise that I have is in fact really right in this space so actually a lot of my research is about the flaws and observational studies and how many of the things that we see in data are correlations and not causal and I think that point while it's easy to say well it's just you know everybody knows about correlation versus causality I actually think that the problems associated with a lot of the kinds of data that are used are much bigger than many of these organizations have acknowledged.

So there are cases in which they are drawing conclusions that I think are just not right because they are not skeptical enough of the data so in the case of alcohol you know there are studies which will show you know differences in outcomes for children whose mothers drink or not at lower levels but in a lot of those cases there are also enormous differences in the other behaviors people are engaging in so for example you know do they use crack cocaine on a regular basis would be like an example of a difference or there are studies in which the methods are really different.

So I spent a lot of time in the book prioritizing cases in which we have randomized trials which are kind of the gold standard or if we don't have those prioritizing studies that use better



kind of empirical techniques to deal with these biases these other differences across parents.

Then you have also some studies where we'd say well we interviewed a bunch of people when their kids were 10 years old and we asked them about their behavior during pregnancy and we link that to what we see in their kids.

Well that's not as good as interviewing them during pregnancy because it's going to be difficult for people to remember the details of you know substances they consumed or behaviors they engaged in a decade ago.

So a lot of this I think comes down to which kind of evidence do you prioritize and how aggressively do you rank evidence and I think that I tend to be strict and almost unapologetic about saying this study is just not good enough to even be considered.

So rather than saying well we'll give it a little bit less weight to say no this study is just not good we are not going to give it any weight and I think that that is we're often a lot of these differences end up arising.

I think the second issue is that in many of these official recommendations there is an approach that is overly cautious would be one way to put it.

So to give the example of the AAP sort of two-year breastfeeding guidelines there's actually nothing that they cite that would suggest that breastfeeding for two years is better than breastfeeding for six months or nine months there's just nothing in their data that actually supports that but what they say is well you know we don't know that it's not better and so let's just default to that because we know maybe a little bit of is good so probably more is better and I think that those in many cases those ignore some of the other things in the background like some women may not want to breastfeed for two years would be an example and we see that over and over again that these guidelines are designed to prioritize any small suggestion of benefit for a child against even a sort of infinitely large cost for the parent and that leads to a set of conclusions that I think is different than some of what I come up with.

Speaking of alcohol you've gotten a lot of pushback for that point and really everyone gets triggered around the idea that very light drinking is okay during pregnancy.

You said it doesn't appear to have any impact on a baby's cognitive development and you've called the quote no alcohol guidelines during pregnancy just another shame battle in the mommy wars so what do you mean by that?

So the first part of that is thinking about what does the data say and so when we think about alcohol in pregnancy it's very clear that drinking a lot in pregnancy binge drinking even a small number of times can be quite dangerous and can cause developmental delays and other consequences for infants.

That is distinct potentially from occasional drinking light drinking in pregnancy say you know up to a glass a day and later trimesters drinking at that level is much more common in places outside the US in many European countries in particular and so when I looked at that data I really wanted to identify data which was drawn from situations in which people were drinking at those lower levels and in which they were followed and the data is large scale and comprehensive and there's actually a lot of evidence like that and when you look at that evidence it doesn't suggest that there are significant or any negative impacts of drinking at that level on these cognitive outcomes and so that's what I talk about in

the book.

In the US in particular there is a tremendous amount of shame around drinking in pregnancy and it really is often stated and I think this is what I meant when I say shame game it is often stated as well what's wrong with you why can't you just give this up for nine months for your baby like why are you choosing so much choosing yourself over your baby and that comes up time and again in pregnancy it comes up time and again as a parent this idea that unless you are that it's almost a good thing if you suffer because even if it had no benefit for your baby the suffering is how you prove that you're a good parent and I think that's in a lot of these conversations.

Okay let's talk a little bit more deeply about data driven parenting which is not a phrase that I heard about before I encountered you.

After you write this book expecting better you go on to write crib sheet which is about parenting from birth to preschool and then the family firm I love that title about the early school years.

Before I encountered your work my impression of parenting advice is that it was highly subjective that it followed trends that it followed fads and it was often kind of like mushy and condescending and it seemed to just like vary radically from decade to decade and then you come along and you popularize this idea of data driven parenting.

Why do you think this is the gold standard and why is this the best way to decide how you parent?

So one thing is that perhaps this reveals something deeper about myself than about this question but I'm not sure what the other options are this is how I make decisions that I'm happy with.

Right the other option would be like your mom tells you this is what I did and you either do exactly what she did or rebel 100% against it.

Or you do what sort of feels good and you kind of follow your emotions your heart.

Or your friends or you kind of just like don't think about it too much and do what your friends are like I can think of a lot of other ways to make decisions in this realm.

All right well you guys sound like you're much more centered and normal than I am but all right let's let's but I but I think okay so what I will say is I think that part of what do people find appealing about this approach is that it forces you to confront your choices and think about them deliberately and so I spent a lot of time on the idea of like deliberate choices in the family firm but I think it's also really there in in crib sheet because if I you know crib sheet these sort of early parenting choices in almost every chapter of that book the answer to like what is the data say you should do is like it doesn't actually matter that much like what does the data say about the optimal potty training age doesn't really matter it'll be faster if you wait longer if you do it earlier they won't poop in their diaper for as long you know again most of these decisions are actually the data tells you a little bit but it's not going to be decisive but approaching this as saying I'm going to use this evidence to make this choice forces you to say I'm going to make a choice I'm going to think about it and make a deliberate choice about what I'm going to do and for many people that process whether it is backed by data or not just the process of making a deliberate decision is one that gives you confidence in your decision part of the issue for many people with the with the I'm going to do what my friends did



is you start doing something and then someone else says well I can't believe you would do that like I would never do that you know that's a like a terrible thing to do and then you sort of second guess yourself all the time and I think that the the approach of doing this deliberately whether you use data or not is a way to have confidence to not second guess yourself all the time because that's what's really most challenging parts of parenting is is when you just are like constantly confused about what to do and and crib sheet was written after my second kid was born and I feel like the most important distinction between my first kid and the second kid is I never knew what to do with the first kid like we never knew what to do ever we were always just doing random things and with the second kid we were like ready we're like okay we know we're going to have to do this and this and this and like let's just like get it on the calendar and we're gonna be prepared we're gonna be scheduled and it made everything quite a bit easier and we didn't argue as much just on the family firm I love how you have parents sort of think of what they want their week to look like what do you want your week nights to be rather than just stumbling into schedules kind of like how do you want your Monday through Friday to look and then structure your kids lives around that like do you want to be at an ice skating rink every night well then if you don't don't sign them up for for competitive ice skating and it was just such a refreshing idea of like actually prioritize what you guys want as a family and go from there rather than prioritizing the whims of a kid yeah we're prioritizing I mean I think in that case there's a big tendency to try to prioritize you know what you think you should be doing and so when I talk about like the family firm and kind of like using business business tools to make decisions for your family everyone was like oh are you just telling me like I can use spreadsheets to get more activities in and like optimize my kid and you know and in fact I think in some sense the impact the the sort of point of the book is you should do less like you should recognize that many of these things you're doing are probably not serving to make you happier and you know if they are serving to make your kid happier that's one thing but if everybody hates being at the ice rink until 10 o'clock at night and everyone is exhausted you shouldn't keep doing ice hockey just because someone said like ice hockey is a good idea.

One thing that I'm struck by Emily when I was thinking about this conversation is just how radically what's considered normal or good in the realm of parenting but specifically mothering has changed just over the course of like the lifespan of my grandma to me right.

My grandma's generation I don't even know what the shot's called anymore but they were all given this shot after birth to make sure that their milk wouldn't come in because breastfeeding was seen as disgusting and undignified and low class and gross right and then my mom's generation comes in and they were told not only was breastfeeding better but like they can do it all they're gonna have the high-powered job they're gonna breastfeed the kid they're gonna like I don't know how this generation of mothers didn't lose their mind right and I think that the way people are told to parent or the way they think they ought to parent says a lot about the political or cultural moment that they're in and I'm curious we're obviously in the midst of ours but how you think our generation of parenting will be remembered and how do you hope to sort of influence the direction of how it's remembered? My sense is that what people remember is the helicoptering that a feature that is distinct

from either your grandmother's generation or our childhood is the kind of intensity, the intensity of scaffolding that we are often giving our kids and the intensity of sort of structure and almost lack of autonomy not exactly but you know I think of the example of walking home from school so I walked home from school in kindergarten I mean there were other kids there but it was like a mile there were streets and you know that was like a regular thing that people did.

I think you get arrested for that now.

Yeah I mean you know certainly if I had told my kids school in kindergarten they're gonna walk home by themselves even though it is only two blocks and there is a crossing guard at the only street there is no way they would have said that was okay they just would have said like I'm sorry that's not okay and I think that's a really big distinction I think it extends both from the sort of physical freedom into kind of like what are we expecting for our kids you know are we expecting them to be adults in sort of in various ways or are we sort of scaffolding some of their development in a way that is different from previous generations

and that you know shows up sometimes in people that I teach in college you know not always but certainly I mean you get the parents emailing you yeah where does the helicopter impulse that to absolutely typifies let's just call it like the upper middle class coastal lead where is it coming from I think you there's many presumably many places that you trace this and all of these things have a hurting aspect and economics that sort of wants people do a little bit everybody does it you know there was this point in the 90s where there was kind of this panic about child kidnapping and I think that actually had a huge impact on some of these like physical controls walking home from school kind of safety issues even though the numbers there are of course like vanishing these smaller kids at much higher risk from cars if they're walking home then from kidnapping and then I think the other thing is the rewards to success have become much greater so if you think about the shape of a function there's a there's a kind of shape of a function called convex where like it's very steep at one end and the sort of the rewards to success are convex in the sense that like if you are really really really successful the reward is many many many times greater financially than than sort of being a middling success person and so I think there's this some of this like well if I just push my kid a little bit more like they could be Jeff Bezos and like like the rewards to being Jeff Bezos I mean they could be on Mars like think about the next generation Jeff Bezos is gonna be like living on Jupiter with an amazing Jupiter house and like what if what if I did if I don't do RSM with my kid Russian school of math like I might get the Jupiter house and our daughter rolled over and I was like she's an Olympian that's it that's it when I think about sort of the different generations of parenting I'm just struck by how quickly what is conventional wisdom quickly becomes not just not conventional wisdom but like actively dangerous right like our grandma smoked when they were pregnant or at least my mom's mom did which obviously is like one of the riskiest things you could do I mean our parents put us to sleep on our stomachs now we're told if we do that our baby will die in the middle of the night right and if you look at like just like different gear you know the rock and play a few years ago was considered the best thing ever for colicky babies now it's a death trap given how fast all of these guidelines I don't even know what to call them seem to change how do you

maintain epistemic humility like how do you account for that in your work so I think there's two important points there so so one is a simple answer which is you know I update them the work that I'm doing over time so expecting better came out in almost 10 years ago now and in 2013 it's been updated a bunch of times and so some of that updating is new studies although actually not that much of it as it turns out because of the second answer which is that some of what we update some of what changes is because we have learned something new so smoking is an example where we used to think it was not bad and then we learned that it was bad back sleeping is another place where actually the evidence evolved over time there are some reasons people put kids to sleep on their stomach which is they sleep better it turns out you know we learned over time that that was a significant risk factor for SIDS and we have now quite a lot of good evidence for that early allergen exposure is another example where the guidelines changed because we got much better evidence suggesting that in fact you know you want to give your kids peanuts and other allergens early so they don't develop allergies so in some of those cases there are clear large scale pieces of evidence that have changed what we do then there are other cases in which we're sort of warning people about something but the actual numbers are vanishingly small and so it's a little tricky then to sort of think about how to talk about those changes and also to communicate them to parents because you really in some ways you'd like to communicate to people look back sleeping is actually really important in terms of of SIDS prevention risk when babies are very small you know using the rock and play it is true that there were a small number of four or five deaths of of babies in the rock and play but that that is a really tiny tiny tiny number and there are some sort of specific circumstances and so we could do better with parents on these risks to titrate them a little bit without doing that parents I think get very overwhelmed with the just a number of things you're telling them not to do particularly when it you know particularly in cases of sleep for example where babies like just won't sleep sometimes and the question is which of the things you told me not to do should I do because I can't do the thing you said and I have to do something else.

The other night it was New Year's Eve it was raining in LA which is like you know when it rains in LA the entire city shuts down but like we were going to get our asses 45 minutes away to Pasadena to go to our friend's dinner party and we like wrangle this was her out we wrangled with the baby because we're like we're going to be cool moms we're going to be normal but anyway the baby fell asleep in the in the in her stroller car seat car seat car seat I'm sorry car seat and like Nelly was extremely worried that somehow her chin would go into her chest and she would like die in the car seat.

I could not relax all of New Year's I checked on that baby 10 times through the night yeah I was very scared about that but I I did Google car seat infant death and there were some results so yeah but it is an example of a time when I think if you dug into that you know you would find that that is almost exclusively in very very small babies who are left unattended for very long periods and not in you know robust for four month old babies not saying that this is an unreasonable fear based on the the internet but I think we could help people navigate their fears with a little more data about which ones are more important than others.

As much as I love relying on you it does alarm me that I trust you an individual mom without

a medical degree more than I trust many if not all of our public health institutions but I really do and so I wonder is there something to these big public health institutions like the CDC being kind of anti-family or or overly protective to the point where they they make it miserable to be a mom at all and like I think there's something about your advice that I find so freeing and makes it so being a mom is not this miserable arduous thing it's like okay there's some things that you need to pay attention to and there's some things that are okay it's a little like breastfeeding right with breastfeeding and alcohol I have had wine and I'm breastfeeding and if you look at some of the public health recommendations it's like you should have no wine all through the time you're breastfeeding so basically you're telling me like I can't drink for like you know the six years that I want to breastfeed and I'm kidding but seriously it makes it so onerous it's like well gosh should I just use formula because after six months this is gonna get kind of old I don't know I guess my question is just like is there something anti-family about these public health institutions or are they just being thoughtless I don't think it's either anti-family or thoughtlessness I actually interpret it very much as an as a lack of desire to give any nuance or uncertainty to recommendations so I think when public health agencies make these recommendations they want their recommendations to be simple they want them to be do this don't do that they don't want to say a small amount of alcohol does go into the breast milk but actually in concentrations that are so low that unless you were totally hammered the amount of alcohol that your child would get through breastfeeding is very very limited so like extremely limited and so it is okay to drink sometimes when you're breastfeeding they don't want to say that because that's long and I think in many of these cases there's just a reluctance to say anything that smacks of uncertainty or or kind of you make your own choice and I don't think it's because they hate parents but I think that the sort of desire to share a specific certain concrete recommendation motivates much of this messaging.

After the break how Emily became a hero but also a villain during COVID stay with us. Freedom of speech is a fundamental human right and no American should fear exercising it but only one in three Americans believe they can fully exercise their free speech rights in 2022 that's why fire the foundation for individual rights and expression is stepping up to protect your freedom of expression no matter where you're from or what you believe after more than two decades spent advancing the rights of students and faculty on college campuses the foundation for individual rights and expression or fire is expanding its mission beyond the campus now fire stands ready to defend the free speech rights of all Americans in our courtrooms on our campuses and in our culture.

No matter how loud the calls for censorship are fire will always be the principled nonpartisan nonprofit defender of your rights and of America's culture of free expression because fire knows that free speech makes free people join the fight for free speech today at [www.thefire.org](http://www.thefire.org) If you're a small business owner, one of your resolutions for Q1 may be not to get sued for an HR violation at your company.

Thankfully, there's Bambi, an HR platform built for small businesses so you can automate the most important HR practices and get your own dedicated HR manager without making a separate hire.

First, Bambi's HR Autopilot automates your core policies, workplace training, and employee feedback.

## [Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / Bad Moms with Emily Oster

Then, your dedicated manager will help you navigate the more complex parts of HR and guide you to compliance.

They're available by phone, email, or real-time chat.

An in-house HR manager can cost up to \$80,000 a year, sometimes more.

But with Bambi, your dedicated US-based HR manager starts at just \$99 a month.

They're experienced in supporting small businesses and understand the legal nuances in all 50 states.

The best part is that there's no hidden fees and you can cancel at any time.

You run your business.

Let Bambi run your HR.

Go to Bambi.com and type in Honestly under podcast when you sign up.

That's B-A-M-B-E-E dot com and type in Honestly.

Let's talk about the dread topic of COVID, which I promise to try and make as painless as possible.

For better or for worse, and Emily, you'll tell me which one.

From the very beginning of the pandemic, you were sounding the alarm about how the policies that the United States government was pursuing would hurt parents and especially kids.

Back in May, 2020, you wrote the just stay home message will backfire and you basically called for what you were just speaking to, which is more nuanced, less extreme, less black and white pandemic policies.

In that article, you compared the country's pandemic messaging to the safe sleep messaging that parents have gotten, which you've also been really critical of.

Talk to me about how America's pandemic guidelines were in a way an extension.

As you saw it of our paternalistic parenting guidelines that you're trying to push against in your work.

I think there is a strong parallel and there's a parallel in the paternalistic nature, but there's also a parallel in this space of wanting to tell people, don't do why.

There were times in which it felt like the expectation was that everyone was a robot.

You could tell people a message and they would do it.

If you said a different message the next day, they would do that because that's the way that computers work.

If you said, wear a mask today and then the next day you said, actually, we don't think you need to wear it and then the next day you change to say wear it again, the robot would just go back and forth on and off with the messaging.

Instead, people are not robots and their response is dependent to some extent on what you've said before.

In many of these cases and masking is in some sense like one very extreme example, but there are many other examples.

We change the messaging that we were giving people so many times, but in every moment it was delivered with certainty.

If early on we had been more or at any point the messaging had more humility to say, here is why we're saying this now and here is why we expect it to change.

A really good example someone gave to me late in the pandemic that I've repeated a number of times, they said, when you are reporting on a fire, the fire marshal gets up in the

middle of a wildfire.

Every day they give a briefing and every day they say, here is where the fire is today.

Here is where we expect that it may go tomorrow and here is kind of the range of our uncertainty and I will come back here tomorrow and I will tell you an update on this.

There is a need to communicate uncertainty there.

He doesn't say, here's where the fire is today.

There's where I'm sure it's going to be tomorrow and then come back the next day and say, actually I wasn't right about that, but people expect to hear uncertainty.

I think we didn't expect to hear uncertainty and we didn't hear uncertainty, but then when you change the recommendations, it's difficult for people to parse that.

It's difficult for them to understand why you changed the recommendations and if we had communicated more uncertainty up front, it would have been easier to change the things we were saying because people would have understood, well, we're still learning more over time.

And many of the debates that got most contentious, most challenging were, I think, because people felt like, well, you told me this one thing and then I didn't believe it and then I turned out to be right.

And the answer is, well, when you said the first thing, it came with uncertainty, but that's not how it was delivered.

And I think that typifies many of the problems, not all of them, but some of the problems that we had.

As the pandemic went on, you continued to stake out this position as being pretty critical of official public health guidance, especially around kids.

You wrote about how parents can't wait around forever for bureaucracy to get its act together and schools and daycares should reopen.

You wrote, quote, schools are not super spreaders.

And then in March, 2021, when the most vulnerable Americans were finally able to get vaccinated, you wrote, your unvaccinated kid is like a vaccinated grandma, which argued in short that parents should have a normal summer with their kids, even though they're unvaccinated, like send them to camp, take them on vacation, go and enjoy and have a nice summer.

And people, I mean, you don't need me to tell you this, but people lost their minds.

They called it insensitive and misleading, even dangerous and ableist.

One science journalist wrote, quote, telling parents they can take their children anywhere this summer assumes a privilege that leaves out children with disabilities and Black and Latinx children.

How did you understand the response to that article and why so many people were angry about it?

When I wrote that article, I was trying to help parents understand complicated probabilities.

And I realized that that's not what was in the headline.

But I think at that point in the pandemic, we had started to pretty aggressively vaccinate older, more vulnerable people.

There was the expectation that vaccinations by August would be kind of, or by July was Biden's thing, that sort of everyone would have access to vaccines.

And another thing to point out is at that time, people generally thought that vaccines would actually be extremely protective against any infection.



So that that was in a period, which is sort of not in any more with our more nuanced understanding, but where it seemed like my vaccinated parents would be protected even if my kids had COVID. So that the sort of spread of COVID across families was going to be not a sort of central issue.

So then we were looking to a summer in which what the expectation was that everyone who would want it to get vaccinated, who was in a high risk group, who was not a kid, was going to have had access to a vaccine, which would be extremely protective against getting COVID at all.

And the only unvaccinated people would be these kids.

And yet, many parents felt like, well, my kid is still at high risk.

And I wanted to have, find a way to explain the differences in age risk.

The most significant comorbidity for COVID, the most important thing about who is getting seriously ill or dying from COVID is age.

It is the most important comorbidity, just like vastly more important than anything else else.

And the result of that is if you look at the risk of serious illness or death for kids versus older people, even with the enormous reduction in the risk of serious illness with vaccines for older Americans, it was still higher than for kids.

And in fact, when we got better data later, if anything, the sort of statement that I made there was too light in the sense that your unvaccinated kid is actually not only substantially lower risk than a vaccinated grandparent, but substantially lower risk than the vaccinated adult.

And so it's just like kids are not getting seriously ill from this.

Why was it so hard for people to understand that kids are relatively safe from this?

And the obsession with masking toddlers and social distancing and making kindergartners sit separately at lunch, we know for a fact that anxiety and depression is a major risk for kids and adolescents.

And yet we didn't take that into account at all with all of this.

It became a sort of monofocus on this one virus, even though all of the science which was available at the very, really from the get-go on this said that kids are much less vulnerable.

Yeah.

I'm not sure.

I mean, I think that there were many times in the pandemic when I was astonished at our deep prioritization of children, so many places where bars and restaurants and adult activities were open and schools were closed.

And for me, that was the low in the sense that I could see a world in which you said, we have to shut everything down.

It wasn't where I was particularly later in the pandemic, but I can see a coherent and a consistent view, which is everything should be closed except absolutely essential services. And we're going to close restaurants and bars and everything else, and we're going to close schools.

And I can see a world in which you said everything is open.

But the world in which you are saying only these higher risk activities are open and

this sort of essential, crucial thing for serving children, the lowest risk group, they are closed.

I mean, that felt to me like just absolutely backward, just the absolute most backward thing. And whichever side of this you're on, whether you think everything should be closed or you thought everything should be open, it can't possibly be that you thought that the right approach was to have bars open and schools closed.

I mean, that feels like something which we all should have been willing to agree on.

It radicalized me on school choice.

I'm thinking about George Bush and the vouchers, and I'm like, maybe that was a good idea. I became so anti-teachers union during that period.

And it really radicalized me on the public school system when I was seeing that.

So what I think is interesting about the role of the unions in this, and this is a place where we probably won't agree, but that is part of honestly, I think it's absolutely right that in the fall, I think that they played some role in keeping schools closed.

I mean, that's pretty obvious.

In the winter, like once Biden came in, Randy Weingarten, who had not been a large supporter of school openings in the fall, actually made a huge difference in the spring in getting schools to open.

And I see your face, Nellie, and I can see that you don't trust that, but there were a lot of unions at that point, a lot of teachers who were very reluctant to return.

And having Randy turn around and say, schools should be open, I think was important.

Now I wish he had said that in September of 2020, I told her I wish he had said that in September of 2020, but I do think that there was a role for her in particular in that spring push.

So I'm not totally disagreeing with you, but I think that there's more nuance to that position than some people think.

In the summer of 2021, the New York Times ran a story about you, and the headline was this, she fought to reopen schools becoming a hero and a villain.

Similar story in Vox, here was the headline, how Emily Oster became one of the most respected and reviled voices of the pandemic.

For some people, you were the North Star, for others, you were their worst nightmare.

So for that crowd, and don't worry, we're going to get to the way the right turned on you, but for the crowd that believed that your arguments in favor of opening schools was villainous, how do you understand their position?

What is the most generous read?

You can offer for the, I don't want to say the left, but for a number of people on the left or parts of the left that thought your argument was misguided, dangerous, or immoral.

So I'm actually quite sympathetic to many of those views.

I think a first thing to note is I think a lot of people were very afraid of COVID and have been very afraid of COVID for a long time.

If you think back to March of 2020, it was really scary, and we didn't know what was going on, and for many people, that fear maintained, and it maintained through that whole year.

I mean, it maintains now.

There are people, you can see on Twitter, people who are saying, I'm terrified, my kid's back at school, but not everyone is wearing a mask, and I'm terrified that he's going to get COVID, and I'm concerned about long COVID, and I'm concerned about these other sequel eye, and you can say, well, the data doesn't really suggest a lot of long COVID or any long COVID in kids, but that's different from saying people shouldn't be afraid because fear like that, anxiety like that is not difficult to address in some cases. There are also people who have significant immune compromise where perhaps they would be at higher risk of COVID.

So I think there were a large set of people who genuinely felt like this sort of reopening of schools was going to lead to large spikes, and for whom seeing data that that was not the case was not helpful, and I think that's the piece where I sort of learned a lot over the pandemic, and I tend to be of the position that if only we could have data, it would help convince people.

So I spent much of that pandemic school year collecting data on COVID in schools, so when I wrote that, schools aren't super spreader's piece.

That was kind of came out of this school dashboard we built that was like the largest dashboard about schools and COVID because the government was not doing that, and we had all these data, and we could see in our data that there was not a lot of spread in schools, and I had was perhaps a naive feeling at the time that if I show people this, if they can see this, it's going to make them feel less afraid, it's going to make them feel more confident, and then for some people it didn't, and I think that that fear is a big piece of what has led people to both continue to want to isolate, what led them to continue to isolate, and then what led them to think it was irresponsible to consider reopening. The thing that made you villainous to a lot of people is that you were saying these things in the quote sort of acceptable liberal crowd, but these things were totally normal and common place to be saying in the conservative red state world.

You were just saying them in the wrong room.

How do you think about that divide?

One of the most interesting aspects of the politics on this, particularly around kids, is the alignment between Europe and like Nebraska.

In a sense, you would sort of explain to people like these schools in Europe have been open for the whole time, and they've been taking a very different approach to this, and sort of normally in rooms where people would say like Sweden is the pinnacle, to then have Sweden be the kind of worst possible thing was a confusing, you know, a con-

Bash is Swedes.  
Was it confusing?

It was a confusing aspect of this, but I do think, yeah, it became very aligned, particularly school reopening, it became very aligned on the left-right axis, and I actually think we know exactly why that happened, which is that I think we were moving in a direction where everyone was actually trying to get behind school reopening.

And then in summer of 2020, Trump said, you know, you should reopen schools and do nothing. And I think that really, you know, he wasn't necessarily wrong that schools should be reopened, but it really polarized the discussion.

And so really the most important determinant of whether your school was open in the school

year 2020-2021 was whether you were aligned with Trump, and that's true at the state level, it's true at the district level within a state, it was just a really, really important determinant. And I think that that's very unfortunate because that should not have been a political decision, and you know, he shouldn't have said that perhaps, but also we should have been in a better position to actually evaluate that decision with evidence rather than making it on some political lines, which is never the right way to make choices about kids. Yeah.

And if the president's saying an accurate thing makes people all of a sudden just balk and do the opposite inaccurate thing, that's like a really irrational way to live.

I agree.

I mean, I think that what should have been happening at that point, which was a time in which reasonable people disagreed about what would happen when we reopen schools. And you know, this was, that was a moment in summer of 2020 when people who were aligned in liking kids and thinking kids were important had different opinions about what would happen. That was the time in which we say, okay, we don't agree, and let's get evidence to inform what will happen.

And instead, we just didn't get evidence or some of us got evidence, but there was no kind of official push to get evidence.

Emily, you wrote this piece a few months ago that I'm sure you recall called Let's Declare a Pandemic Amnesty, and you essentially argued the following, let's stop rehashing the past, let's stop trying to eke out an apology from the people that got it wrong, let's just forgive them and move on.

And some saw this piece as a cop out, including a lot of people, especially moms, I know, who generally adore you, who saw you as sort of like the heroin, carrying the torch for opening the schools.

All of a sudden we're like, why is she putting the torch down?

She needs to get apologies from the people that screwed over our kids.

And we deserve personally apologies for being called callous or grandma killers.

And more to the point, they felt amnesty was not only doing it to service to them, but was also letting policymakers off the hook for the real injustices that they caused to millions of people, mostly children.

What do you say to that group of people and that line of criticism?

So I think it might be useful to explain a little bit why I wrote that piece.

So what motivated me to write that piece?

So this is at a time in which there was a lot of data coming out about test scores in schools.

There's a lot of data coming out, particularly from the thing called the nation's report card about sort of the decline in test scores, the sort of historic decline in test scores. And there became a debate in some circles, particularly on the left, about whether that decline in fact was related to remote learning.

Now I had done a fair amount of work before this using state test scores from 2021, looking at a bunch of other data.

It was very clear that remote learning was not good for students' test scores.

Saying that, the sort of frequency with which people were talking about that had caused

a fair amount of unproductive defensiveness in the set of people who had been less enthusiastic about school reopening.

And we had started to get into a place where instead of talking about how we can move kids forward from where they were, we were spending all of our time talking about whose fault it was that they had done so poorly up until now.

And I had a number of conversations with people say at the Washington Post about whether it was in fact school, were school closures 12% or 6% or were they 80% and was it really the fault of school closures and it's the pandemic, not school closures.

And at that point, I firmly believe that school closures caused the test score declines.

I think it's very obvious from the data.

But even more than that, I believe that we are losing time for kids to catch up.

We are losing time to fix this generational hole for kids.

And if we spend the next two years, every time test scores come out, if we re-up the debate about whose fault it was, we are not going to be re-upping the debate about who is doing a good job recovering.

Well, this is a group of people who also don't even believe that test scores mean anything.

They don't want to measure any of the learning loss.

Learning loss is fake, right?

Not all of them.

So yes, there are a set of people who do not think that test scores are important.

But there is a much, much larger set of people closer to the center who I think both believe test scores are important and are potentially influenced by these debates in terms of where they put their focus.

And right now, when we look at already what is happening, so let's take Mississippi and Georgia.

So in Mississippi and Georgia, they both lost about 6% proficiency in ELA over the first pandemic school year, but sort of between spring 2019 and spring 2021.

In spring 2022, Mississippi was back to where they were before the pandemic.

And Georgia was just exactly the where they were in 2021.

They didn't really recover much at all.

So why is that?

What is going on there?

If we can figure out what Mississippi is doing and what some of the other successful states are doing and what some of the unsuccessful states are not doing, that is an opportunity to make Georgia do what Mississippi is doing or make Massachusetts do what Mississippi is doing.

That is really, really important.

And I felt like that was getting lost.

OK, so then I wrote the piece was intended to speak to that, to say, look, let's try to move forward.

There were a lot of things, like a lot of things that we weren't sure about before, and we need to put some of those things aside.

What I took from some of the reaction, other than that I am the worst, which definitely came out, and I also learned, and I want to tell you, I feel embarrassed in not having

known this before.

But I did not know there was a thing called being ratioed because I am not that good at social media.

So somebody at some point on Twitter was like, it's so weird.

You've come to the right place.

Somebody was like, this is the most ratioed tweet I've ever seen, and she's so brave that she didn't take the tweet down.

I was like, I didn't know what really, really ratioed was.

I just stopped looking because it seemed mean.

Well, he's like, how do you believe a tweet?

I don't know.

Well, we here have never been ratioed.

No, I imagine you're on the unreached.

I don't know what's the opposite of being ratioed.

Was it hard for you when you got that kind of backlash?

It was confusing.

In the sense that I had actually expected backlash from the left.

So I had expected the same backlash that I typically get.

And I did get a lot of that, actually, but it was just drowned out by the other piece of backlash.

What I do here and what I have sort of reflected on after this is this feeling of sort of two different things.

One is, I want an apology.

And I think that's a very understandable view.

I don't think you're going to get that apology, and so you may have to try to move forward without it, but I hear that view.

I think the other piece people had, which I'm actually quite a bit more sympathetic to, is, well, we're still doing this.

Some of these things are still happening.

Philly is masking kids again in schools because of RSV.

And we need to continue to sort of have our foot on the gas because otherwise it will happen again.

And if people admitted they were wrong, then it would be less likely to happen again.

I'm more sympathetic to that view.

For me, how I feel about it is you're telling me that the people who made bad decisions are still in power, first of all, and also not even acknowledging that they made bad decisions.

Not even like admitting any wrong, doing any apology, any acknowledgement of other consequences.

And we're supposed to not question them being in power and we're supposed to just move along.

And I'm like, OK, they don't have to apologize, but then at least resign or be ousted or whatever.

How is anything going to be better when the next pandemic comes, which of course it will?

How have we learned anything when we didn't learn anything?

Yeah.



I mean, I hear that view.

I guess I'm almost trying to take what I think is a sort of more positive, and I mean positive not versus negative, but versus normative stance in the sense that I think in order to try to fix some of these problems, particularly the stuff that's come up around kids, I think we need to work together.

The people who are in charge of that now, you could say, I wish it was a different set of people, but we don't have a decade.

We have two years, three years to try to fix these problems, and we got to fix them with the people that we have to fix them now.

And I want to push in that direction of sort of trying to fix this, even if I think these are people who said I was a villain and gave me many fake awards about how I'm the worst.

And I would also like to be apologized to, but I would like second graders to be able to read more than I would like an apology.

Nellie wants an apology, but okay.

Emily, just apologize to Nellie right now.

I'm really sorry, Nellie.

That's it.

Okay, we're going to declare a Nellie-Emily amnesty and then a lightning round with Emily Oster.

We'll be right back.

Today's episode is brought to you by BetterHelp Therapy Online.

If one of your New Year's resolutions is to have fewer mental breakdowns, check out BetterHelp, an online platform that connects you to over 22,000 licensed professional therapists. I think that therapy is a godsend, and I think the more people that I've accessed to it, the better.

So start your year right by checking out BetterHelp.

BetterHelp has matched millions of people with professionally licensed and vetted therapists online.

It's convenient, it's accessible, and it's affordable.

Wherever you are, you can get the help you need.

No waiting rooms, no traffic, and no endless searching online for the right therapist.

Honestly, subscribers can get 10% off their first month on BetterHelp.

Just visit [betterhelp.com slash honestly](https://www.betterhelp.com/honestly).

That's B-E-T-T-E-R-H-E-L-P dot com slash honestly for 10% off your first month.

Now back to the show.

Okay, I am going to apologize to you for the fact that a lot of these are deeply self-interested and desperate questions.

They're completely self-interested.

This is just actually what I want to ask you.

Starting with, I'm getting really tired of breastfeeding.

It's been four months.

Does breastfeeding make the baby healthier?

In the short run, in the first few weeks, there are some gastrointestinal benefits.

The long run health benefits that you may have heard about are dramatically overstated.

## [Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / Bad Moms with Emily Oster

You have already breastfed through the most valuable portion of breastfeeding.

Emily Oster, should we sleep train our four month old daughter?

I am a big proponent of sleep training.

People often ask, is it going to damage my kid?

Is it going to make them hate me forever?

It is not going to do those things.

We have good data to suggest that it is safe and that it improves sleep for kids and also for their parents.

So I think if it is something that seems appealing to you, you should certainly go ahead and do it.

I think that it's very important that you both agree that it is a good idea because sleep training can be quite hard and that you have a very concrete plan for exactly what you're trying to achieve and you have written it down in advance.

So I will write down on a piece of paper, Nelly leaves the house.

I stay and hear the baby cry.

That's a good plan.

I just want you to know that our friend's mom, who we saw over the weekend, literally said to me, you cannot sleep train her.

If you do that, you'll be paying for therapy bills for your whole life and scared the bejesus out of me.

That's all.

Well, that's not supported by data.

Okay.

Let's talk about screens.

My beautiful wife, who you're looking at, Emily, is an absolute screen Nazi.

If she sees the baby even glance at a television or look at my phone, she absolutely freaks out and she's pretty chill I should add in other realms.

What do you think about this?

The way that I like to explain this to people is that screens are a potentially useful part of your parenting, but you should think about them as substituting out for other things.

So there's nothing inherently wrong with your kid when they're older and are interested in screens, watching a little bit of Coco Melon.

And if they're watching Coco Melon for nine hours a day instead of doing anything else, that is problematic.

But Emily, I'm saying if we have a child four month old in a living room sitting on my lap and the TV's on, it's fine if they see some TV.

No, it's not.

Okay.

Moving on to the next question.

You both are wrong.

I'm the doctor now.

What is an okay age to start screens?

If you had to say, when will it not like change their brains in horrible ways?

She's literally saying it will not change their brains in horrible ways.

Things are not going to change your child's brain in horrible ways at any age. They are unlikely to be able to learn anything from TV until the age of about three. By the time they're three, they can learn things from TV, both good and bad. But there is nothing that would say it is going to damage your baby to watch a little bit of TV at any age, including the current age. But it doesn't mean you have to have your kid watch TV. Our wonderful producer Candace just wrote, will Clara learn Spanish if I let her watch Coco Melon in Spanish? How old is Clara? She's three and a half. Oh, yes. You can definitely learn some Spanish from Coco Melon. It'll be annoying Spanish. Emily, let's talk more about screens. Do your kids have smartphones? And if not, when will you allow them to have phones? So I have an 11-year-old and a seven-year-old. My daughter has a phone that she has for emergencies, so she is not allowed to use it to talk to people, but she hasn't in case she needs to call us. And it is an active debate when she will get a smartphone. My guess is probably next year. Will you let her on social media? Absolutely not. I think that the evidence on the impacts of social media on adolescents is quite concerning, and I will not have my child on social media as long as I can control them. Spanking, harmful or good old-fashioned discipline? Spanking is harmful. It is associated with negative emotional consequences later on. It is also not associated with improvements in behavior. There are other approaches to discipline, which are better supported by evidence and also do not involve hitting people. Pacifiers, yay, nay, yes. Pacifiers are very good if your child will take one, particularly when they are little, and there are concerns raised about nipple confusion, which are simply not supported in the data. So if your baby will take a pacifier, that will be great for you. Baby-led weaning, which is a thing I both keep hearing about and have recently started to see in action, it is when babies are given whole pieces of food to kind of chew on at their own leisure, at their own pace, they throw them around. It's really chaos. It also maybe helps them develop their jaws. Baby-led weaning, yay or nay. So when people talk about baby-led weaning, they are typically referring to introducing foods in a more sort of organic way rather than starting with mushy, pureed foods.

There are many good ways to start solid food.

There's no particular reason to want to do either of these things.

Some of the things people will tell you, lower obesity rates or better sense of enjoying food, those are really not supported in the data.

So if this is a, I enjoyed baby-led weaning because it was very served my laziness well because we just gave my kids whatever we had on the table, but there is, so that is a reason to do it, but there's no data reason that you have to do it or shouldn't do it.

Potty training a baby, yes, you heard that right.

Is this factor fiction?

Because we work with an incredible woman who says she has potty trained her newborn basically since he was 10 days old.

And Bialik has also done this apparently that you watch the cute facial cues and hold them over a toilet.

Is this a thing?

Is this real?

It is real in the sense that people do try it.

We don't have much evidence on its efficacy and it's also quite difficult to find a childcare provider who is interested in engaging with your elimination communication plan.

So that's something I would factor in.

I keep getting advertised these weird insta-mom influencer accounts that claim to be gentle parents.

Is gentle parenting real and what is it?

Gentle parenting is not super well defined, but it sort of refers to a kind of constellation of things in which you acknowledge your children's feelings.

It tends to sort of go for like no timeouts.

I like many of the lessons of gentle parenting.

I think that many people find it difficult to fully follow through because sometimes you need to leave the house and negotiating about shoes for infinite time is not really possible.

And so when I sort of talk about this, I often tell people like read about the gentle parenting, read about some other things and kind of put together a consistent plan for your discipline and encouragement that works for you.

And there's a lot of good stuff in there, but most discipline and motivation for your children is best if you can be consistent and it may be difficult for you to be fully consistent with the kind of precepts of gentle parenting unless you never plan to go out.

Weirdest question a parent has asked you.

I get so many questions and I think most of them are not weird.

I think the thing about early parenting is, you know, I'd point to something that would be like the crazy questions I had, you know, early on, like, are Mittens going to make my kid not use their hands, which was like my, that was like my personal fear.

It was like my mother told me, if you wear, you have your daughter wear Mittens as a baby, she'll never learn to use her hands.

I mean, they're ridiculous.

And so I get questions that are in that space, but the thing is that like, that's not weird

## [Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / Bad Moms with Emily Oster

because when you're a new parent, like, it's like everything is, you know, everything is normal.

Emily, what is the number one data backed, research backed way to raise resilient kids? Buy to stable house.

I mean, that's the thing that comes out most consistently.

And even if we look at data on something like who's resilient to bullying, so there's studies which are literally about not who gets bullied, but who is resilient to bullying.

And the, the factors that come out are, do you feel, you know, safe and supported at home?

One thing that you do or have done with your kids that is not backed by science or data.

Many of the things that I do are not backed by science or data as your kids get bigger.

There are, there are a lot of things that come up where it's, there's just no, like, there's no evidence until you're sort of just like flying blind.

You know, I put a lot of aquafor on my kids all the time because I believe that it affects that it like improves your skin.

Like my house is just full of aquafor and I think like there's pretty limited evidence that like coating your body and aquafor at night is like improves things, but I really think it does and I really kind of, like, if you have a cot or any kind of dry skin or something itches or you just feel a little weird, just put a little aquafor on it.

Emily Austin, you need, you need a corporate sponsorship for Mako 4.

This one doesn't apply to us per se, but I hear this a lot.

Why do moms do more parenting than dads?

One thing that happens when you have a baby is that if somebody has given birth, they are naturally more engaged with the physical activity of babying at the beginning.

I think in many couples, what happens is that that gets reinforced over time.

And because, you know, I'm with the baby more, I have a little bit of a better handle on the baby in the moment and then it ends up that I'm still doing more and then you try to come in, but really you're not that good at it.

And for whatever reason, particularly in, you know, that applies to us.

And you know, so that gets reinforced.

The other thing is in heterosexual couples, just more common that the sort of somebody, if somebody needs to step back from the workforce, it becomes the mom and then, you know, that reinforces these kind of dynamics.

I mean, it's interesting because I think there is a question of why does that not happen to the same extent in same-sex couples because it doesn't.

In the data that's much more equal and I don't know how much of that is sort of differences in the professional dynamics and how much of it is just like differences in expectations or something else.

Interesting question.

Okay, last question for me.

When do weekends become fun again?

Once you can go out and do stuff that your kid enjoys.

So, you know, like edging in on a year, I think the thing that really makes the weekend more enjoyable is that you feel like we got to be like had an experience that was fun

for our kid.

It is unfortunately somewhat more time after that before you don't think like, oh my gosh, I'm so happy to be back in my office Monday morning.

Maybe you don't have that feeling, but like I had that feeling for like a pretty long time.

And actually even after Christmas break, even though my kids are big, like yesterday when I was back in my office, I was like, oh my God, this is amazing, I love it so much.

Emily, last question.

What is the next controversial topic that you're taking on?

What is the next hot topic that you plan to tackle in your writing?

So I don't usually plan my controversies.

I just step right in them.

You're not even aware that they're happening, it sounds like.

Most of what I am doing going forward is in this sort of parent data space and so a lot of that is unpacking studies and sometimes that leads to different pieces of controversy.

So we'll see, but I don't have any big controversy plans at the moment.

Listener, you heard it here first.

Emily Oster says, cocaine is great for three-year-olds.

Emily Oster and Nelly Bolts.

Thank you so much for joining us today on Honestly.

Thanks for having me.

That was awesome.

Thank you guys.

Thank you to Emily Oster and to the Free Press' own Nelly Bolts for joining us today.

And thanks to you all for listening.

If you like what you heard, or maybe you think we got it all wrong, that sleep training our daughter or other kids is going to ruin their ability to have secure attachment for life, share it with your friends and family and use it to have a debate of your own about how we should raise our kids and whether or not to have kids at all.

And if you want to support Honestly, there is one way to do that.

You do it by supporting our new company, the Free Press, where we bring you honest, dogged, and fearlessly independent journalism.

You can do that by going to [thefptheft.com](http://thefptheft.com) and becoming a paid subscriber today.

See you next time.

This is Brian Dean Wright, former CIA operations officer.

By now, you've probably heard of my podcast, The President's Daily Brief.

We travel around the world talking about the most pressing news of the day.

And the goal is to take complicated issues, both here and abroad, and make them really simple to understand.

We also talk about solutions to the problems that we discuss, just like the actual brief delivered to the president each day in the Oval Office.

So download and subscribe to The President's Daily Brief, available on all major podcast platforms starting at 6 a.m. Eastern Monday through Friday.

It'd be a pleasure if you joined us.