

## 224: Connecting with Your Kids in 5 Minutes (with Brittney Smart)



### Full Episode Transcript

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**Jen Riday**

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## 224: Connecting with Your Kids in 5 Minutes (with Brittney Smart)

You're listening to the Vibrant Happy Women podcast, episode number 224. We're talking about creating more connection with your kids in five minute chunks. Stay tuned.

Hi, I'm Jen Riday. This podcast is for women who want to feel more vibrant, happy, aligned, and alive. You'll gain the emotional, physical, and spiritual tools you need to get your sparkle back and ensure that depression, anxiety, and struggle don't rule your life. Welcome to the Vibrant Happy Women Podcast.

Hey my friends, Jen here, and welcome back to *Vibrant Happy Women*. We are talking about kids, and connection, and boundaries for the next several episodes.

Today I'm talking with Brittney Smart who wrote a book all about Five Minute Time Ins, how to intentionally create connection with your kids. Now, in this episode Brittney mentions one of the most powerful things she noticed was the importance of eye contact. How just taking moments here and there to really look in her kids' eyes was very powerful. And that's because when you look in each other's eyes, oxytocin is released, which is the love and connection hormone. It helps us feel committed and loyal to, and connected to the person in whose eyes we're gazing.

Scientists will take two random people from the street and have them gaze in each other's eyes and then rate their feelings about that other person, their assumptions about that other person. And consistently when people have engaged in eye gazing they rate the other person, who is a complete stranger to them, more positively, as someone who was more of someone they might be a friend with. I find that really fascinating.

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Well, as we approach summer vacation, some of you are just about to slide into it; some of you probably are in the midst of it. This is the perfect time to really connect with our kids, if you have them, or with loved ones. We do a lot of connecting in warmer seasons of our lives. So in this episode I want you to be thinking in the back of your mind about how you might apply this information. And engage in little moments here and there of deeper, really focused eye contact filled connection with your kids, your spouse or other loved ones, and try to make that a part of your life.

Because we want to know our kids at a more intimate level, we want to hear them. We want to be present with them, to have that energetic exchange. We want them to have memories of this connection with us and positive emotions toward us, that's what love and connection are built on. So that's what this episode is going to be all about, I'm really, really excited.

So let's go ahead and dive in and think about love and connection and those five minute moments that we can create.

**Jen:** Hey, everyone, I'm here with Brittney Smart today, who has been married to her soul mate Paul, for 18 years. And she's the mother of five children ages four to 15. She grew up in Washington State, moved to Utah for college and has lived there ever since. She has a degree in English, professional and technical writing and worked as a grant writer before becoming a mom. And now she enjoys working as a freelance writer and editor while raising her kids.

For fun she'll do anything to escape housework, and her idea of a great time is takeout, Netflix and a granulicious bedtime of 9:00pm. I love that, granulicious, I will join you. I love a 9:00pm bedtime. Well, welcome to *Vibrant Happy Women*, Brittney.

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**Brittney:** Thank you, I'm so happy to be here.

**Jen:** So you wrote a book, *The Five Minute Time In*, which I thought was really inspiring, especially as we're talking about parenting and quality time with kids and boundaries throughout the next several weeks on the podcast. So tell us about your book and the experiences in your life that led you to write that.

**Brittney:** Okay. I love talking about my book because it is very near and dear to me, it's about a time in my life that was pretty dark actually, pretty challenging. So as a mom I – let me rewind a little bit, I always wanted to be a mom growing up and that dream was able to come true. And I enjoyed being with my littles, there was a point though when I was pregnant with my fifth, so this was actually five years ago. It took me a long time to publish this book for reasons that I'll describe.

But I just kind of gradually became pretty disengaged from my children. And I say the word 'gradually' because I didn't necessarily – it wasn't on a conscious level that this happened. But I started to pull away from them. I started to not want to be around them. They would approach me wanting to do something and I would encourage them to play with each other. I would go in my room and close the door because I actually did have to be on a moderate bed rest near the end of my pregnancy.

So I kind of got in the habit of just isolating myself, pulling away from my children. And as any mom knows, that does not come without negative effects. I was blinded for a while from those effects because I just, in the state of just darkness, and I don't know how common my level of feeling this way is. I know that motherhood isn't all like hugs and rainbows and joy and smiles.

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I get that there are struggles with every parent in different seasons and at different levels. So this was mine, I was struggling through this and finally I began to notice, like over the course of longer than I care to admit. It was many months that this attitude and emotional state kind of happened for me.

And I began to notice my children, just a significant change in them toward me. They would, sadly they would pull out things from their backpacks and just immediately put them in the recycle bin. Not even asking if I wanted to see them because I had rejected them so many times, they knew I wouldn't care.

Or they would approach me or wherever I happened to be sitting or standing at the time; they would kind of approach that area with like a game or a puzzle in their hands and kind of glance in my direction and just keep walking by. Not even – they just learned that mom doesn't want to do this stuff with me. She doesn't want to be around me. I know, isn't that like heartbreaking? It's heartbreaking to me to remember that that's who I was at that time.

**Jen:** Heartbreaking maybe, but I think everybody can relate. I do have a question, when you say darkness; would you say there was any depression happening there?

**Brittney:** It's hard for me to say, I wondered that myself. Interestingly, even my closest friends didn't know that I was going through this, partly because I probably was in my own version of denial. I was able to turn it on and turn it off.

For example, in social settings or even around friends, even just one-on-one, I acted the part of happy mother, kids are funny, and this is happening

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in our lives. And we would still go to the park and we would still do stuff. So I don't mean to paint a picture that I was in a fetal position unable to cope. I was still going checking all the boxes, but it was like apathetic autopilot, just not a lot of soul.

**Jen:** Which definitely can be depression; it doesn't have to be so severe that you're not functioning. Did your husband notice that you were kind of checked out?

**Brittney:** Yeah, well, I mean he has always been super supportive and he would play with the kids, he would encourage family things in his own way. He would help support me and take over some of my responsibilities where needed. He definitely was my shoulder to cry on, but like I said, I don't know that I fully recognized at the time. What I'm describing to you is all in hindsight, and sometimes that's a lot more clearer. But in the moment I was just like this is just my life, this is just how it is. And so I didn't whine about it a lot, but I did withdraw, if that makes sense.

It's a complicated internal dynamic, but he was supportive and he would say, "Look at these kids, they're healthy, you're doing a great job." And he would support me but he also had his plateful of responsibilities, being the primary breadwinner.

**Jen:** Yeah, five kids.

**Brittney:** Yeah, a bunch of kids, and he's at work most of the day. And so he did all the right things but I did not internalize his support very deeply, if that makes sense.

**Jen:** You were tired, it makes sense. We've all been there. What's impressive is that you started to see it and come out. I think it sounds like

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you saw it fairly quickly. I mean how many years would you say you were kind of in that funky state?

**Brittney:** Well, I wouldn't even say years, I don't know, even I couldn't even give you a beginning date. But it got really bad, like I say, near the end of my first pregnancy and then after. I'm sure there was postpartum, you know, that's a crazy time for everybody, right after giving birth.

But a few months after she was born, my fifth child was when I finally was like, I give the example in my book where it's kind of like I'm looking through this really muddy, dirty window. And then I am learning to wipe away at the grime on that window, and I finally get the outside of the window clean and I'm looking inside and there's a mess to clean up inside the space of the window. So the end of my wiping away of the window to really be clear on, this needs to change, I need to change something, probably six, eight, nine months, something like that to where I really began to change, yeah.

**Jen:** So tell us about that change process, because I think we all have moments, whether it's with kids or something else, where we realize, okay, I have to change this. And sometimes change can feel completely overwhelming. So your book kind of outlines how you went through the process of being more engaged with your kids again and increasing that connection, which is so beautiful. But how did you start, when it probably seemed most overwhelming?

**Brittney:** Yeah. So the start was my to do list, checklist scripture study one day. And I was in the Bible and I found a verse that just, it seems random now but it really struck me and it was talking about though I speak with the tongue of angels and have not charity, I sound like tinkling brass or silver or something like that in Corinthians. And I realized at that moment that my

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entire little pooh bear raincloud, I don't know even if that's even a reference that anyone understands.

**Jen:** Yeah, Eeyore. Eeyore, yeah.

**Brittney:** Yeah, So I don't know, like the thing that would pierce that and disseminate it to allow the sunshine in really and truly on a genuine level was charity. And I was completely lacking charity for my children. And not necessarily humanitarian service oriented charity, but I love them, I took care of their needs, I love them, lip service. They weren't in harm's way with me in a countable way. But I wasn't liking them and I wasn't loving them with my actions.

And so I realized I need to somehow acquire charity. And the way I decided to do that was kind of a reverse build, if I needed charity then I needed love, and if I needed love then I needed to like them. And the way that you learn to like someone is to get to know them. And so that was kind of, I worked my way backwards and I figured out, I don't even know who my kids are, I have spent so little quality time with them, so little attention on who they as individuals are.

And so that's what I decided to change is get to know my children again, and because time is of the essence for all people on this planet, I didn't have a lot of time to, you know, we didn't go on a week long retreat. This needed to be something that was small dosed, super concentrated, super intentional, and then ultimately, consistent. So I set a goal to spend five minutes with each of my children every night before bed for four weeks. And just see where that took me and us in getting to know each other again, so that's what I called the five minute time in.



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**Jen:** I love that, when you said small dosed, super concentrated. I'm thinking of concentrated dishwasher detergent or something that doesn't take up a lot of space, doesn't take up a ton of time. That's brilliant, five minutes before bed. So my immediate thought would be if I set that goal, would go to, am I going to stick with it? So how did you stick with it?

**Brittney:** Yeah. Well, so this is what the book kind of illustrates, I'll take readers through each day, each conversation, and then takeaways from those days. And going back and reading it, because this was almost five years ago, for me, on day two, I'm like, "Oh, do I have to do it?" Even on day two I am just already sick of this idea. But I had set that goal and it was just a commitment to myself. I didn't tell my husband about it. I didn't tell friends about it.

I didn't even tell my children this is what I'm going to do. I just climbed up on to their bunk bed and plopped down on the foot of their bed with them and just kind of hung out.

And the first time, my seven year old at the time, she was reading, and I climbed up into her bed and she's like, "What are you doing mom?" Really just like, "What?" And I'm like, "I just came to hangout for a few minutes and is that okay?" And she threw her book, just totally tossed it aside, she's like, "Yeah, what are we going to talk about?" And I'm like, "Whatever you want, what would you like to talk about?" And she's kind of nervous laughing, giggles came over her, she's like, "I don't know, I don't know. I don't know." Just weird, like with a stranger.

And then there was a long silent pause and she's like, I seriously don't even know. Like her world just shifted just with my climbing up into bed with her for those few minutes, which is a testament to how disengaged I had been, and how little connection we had been having up until that point.

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**Jen:** And you just added it to your evening routine, kind of like brushing your teeth, five minutes every day?

**Brittney:** Yes.

**Jen:** And did it feel like a sacrifice or was it easy enough?

**Brittney:** No, it was hard; it felt like a big sacrifice for me. And I don't think that everyone is the same in this, for some people it would feel very natural and very easy. For some it might – I fall into this category, it was a really big sacrifice because I was in the habit of clocking out, doing my own thing, even before my kids were in their beds. I just had created these habits and routines that needed breaking, and that takes a lot more effort and it feels a lot more uncomfortable at the beginning. So yeah, I went and did it, I set my five minute timer on my watch and just made it part of the routine.

I will say, it did not take long though for, probably within less than a week for that to become the highlight of my kids day. And I didn't know where this whole experiment would go. And at weekend they're saving up things to tell me during our time in, wanting to sit in on each other's time ins.

**Jen:** Do you let them?

**Brittney:** Occasionally, there aren't hard and fast rules. Occasionally, yeah, because I like the connection that the siblings were having with each other with me involved as well, I like that. But I also wanted this to be an individual focused time. So sometimes, yeah, they'd hangout for a minute then I'd gently shoo them out of the door because it was their sibling's turn, back to their own bed. Or feel what that vibe was at that time in to see what to do. I don't know, I was figuring it out as I went.

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So I mean there are some inconsistencies definitely, in the book, and those are all described to you, I think every situation will be different for every family. It really and truly, I'm not just saying this in a cliché way, it was an amazing transformation just from five minutes, from five minutes of a mom's time to sit and look her kids in the eye.

Sometimes those minutes, I will say at the beginning, my nine year old daughter, she would be down in her bed doing a variety of things. She would be drawing sometimes. She would be working on Sudoku or crossword puzzles, or word searches, or homework; I mean just doing what – reading.

And so sometimes I'm like in my head I'm thinking we're not even connecting, this is a fail, this isn't even worth my effort because she doesn't care. And that was a little bit discouraging if I'm being honest, because I was making this huge life change and this huge focus so that we could connect and she didn't seem to care.

But I stuck with it and it definitely changed, and she changed. And even though she didn't appear to be connecting with me like the ways that in my head, you're like, we're going to talk about boys or we're going to talk about friends and all this deep stuff. Even though that wasn't happening each night, it became part of her fundamental day, or the structure of her day, like mom will be there, and I can tell her stuff.

**Jen:** So how did that time with them affect the rest of the day, did you notice changes throughout the rest of your day as well?

**Brittney:** Yes, which is a surprise bonus for me, as I began to get to know them better and learn about different nuances of their personalities and outlooks, and where they were with different friends. And just different

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things, and schoolwork, different things going on in their lives. I found myself thinking about them during the day.

For example, near the beginning of this time in process, my 11 year old son, he's my oldest, and he was telling me about, it just happened to come up in our conversation how this boy in his math class had broken his favorite pencil, and it was green or something. And anyway, the kid was really upset about this and so my son came home and he had a collection of pencils from elementary school. Do mothers across the world have children with collections of pencils from elementary school, because that is the prime prize or whatever, that our elementary school gives?

Anyway, he had a lot of pencils and he chose a green one and he sharpened it and he took it to school the next day to give to this kid. And he's like, "Yeah, we both decided it wasn't as good as his other one, but it was still green so he thought that was pretty cool."

And this had happened like – I don't know – several weeks before my son was telling me about it. And I had no idea, and I just thought that's such a kind thoughtful gesture for an 11 year old kid to be like, "He's really upset about his pencil, I'm going to go home, I'm going to do this nice thing, find him one and take it to him and help him feel better." And I was so touched to learn that my son is kind, that's really – I loved learning that story.

I found myself while I'm preparing dinner or before they get home from school or something, I wonder how that pencil's working out for that kid. Or I wonder how this daughter's test is going or I wonder, like thinking about different specific things. I wonder if this daughter gets to play her favorite game or the one she doesn't necessarily love at recess. Just thinking little passing thoughts of them specifically, and that was a connection. I mean

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we weren't physically together, we weren't giving hugs or anything, but it was still a point of connection during the day.

Also as I became more present in my kids' lives at this time in time, they began to trust me more and I remember there's an example when my daughter couldn't find her – she was nine, she couldn't find her wallet or something, her library card, I don't remember exactly. But she couldn't find something and we were headed out the door to go, I'm going to say just to the library for the sake of the story.

And anyway, she couldn't find it and she was very frustrated. And typically I would have just been like, "Well, don't worry about it, let's just go, we've got to go." And focus on the fact that we're trying to get out the door rather than the fact that she's upset about this.

So I found myself, this was kind of like an out of body experience, like me watching me be this kinder parent. But I found myself saying, "You know what, I hate it when I can't find something, that's a bummer. I wonder though if you'd be okay if you let me just check out your books today. And then when we get home we can all help you look, we can do a whole house hunt," is what we call it sometimes. And she was like, "Yeah, I guess you're right." And the reason that that I think stands out to me in my memory, is because she trusted me, that what I was saying was for her and not for myself.

**Jen:** Yeah, that's great.

**Brittney:** Does that make sense?

**Jen:** Yeah.

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**Brittney:** They could sense the shift from me doing things because I had this clock to keep track of and running a tight ship, and I had to keep schedule. Rather than that it was like let's take a step back, we can solve the immediate problem, which is checking out the books that you want. And then we can all support you in finding your thing. And so it was just a major change in my children.

**Jen:** A win, a big win, yeah.

**Brittney:** Yeah, for them, yeah.

**Jen:** So I would love to hear you say, it might not be true, but I have this hope that you're going to say, "They were way more skilled at getting their chores done the first time I asked. There was way less fighting." Did you notice anything like that? I'm crossing my fingers.

**Brittney:** I would love it if that were the outcome. Then I don't know, I would be happy. I am a happy person and that was not the outcome, I'm sorry.

**Jen:** Yeah, that connection though, I really do think long term it's got to lead to less conflict because you empathized with her on the library situation and it was resolved, it didn't end in drama. It just has to be helpful, I'm sure.

**Brittney:** Yeah, my kids still thought I had bad days, I'm still at this point, I still have a three month old, four month old, I still have an infant, so I'm still up in the night. And I remember there was one time where my infant just – she had a rough night and therefore I had a rough night. And I just, the next day was like I can't even look at life today. My head is pounding, I'm sleep deprived. I got zero sleep.

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Instead of just checking out, closing the door like I had done previously, I found myself, when my kids came up for breakfast or whatever, just saying, “You guys, I had a really rough night, your sister wanted to party all night long. And so I did not want to party, but I hung out with her and so is there any way you guys would let me go take a couple of hours for a nap? Or can you help each other, can you do that?” They were like, “Oh yeah.”

And they were, they were genuinely like, “Let’s help mom.” And they were united in that, the older ones would read books to the younger ones, they went on a scavenger hunt kind of around the block or went on a scooter ride and playing games with each other. And I think they knew I was trusting them with something, I wasn’t blocking them out. And I think that unity as a family and at that better communication, and that underlying thread, always the underlying thread of I see you, I love you, here’s what I need, what do you need?

There’s always that underlying thread of we’re together, we may have a bumpy patch or things might need to be flexible here, we didn’t question their worth, their value.

**Jen:** Exactly, yeah, because when you were meeting daily, meeting their needs for love and connection, then it is easier for them to want to please you in those situations. Yeah, you got your nap, that’s a big win.

**Brittney:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, totally.

**Jen:** Well, I love that. So everyone, if you want to try this experiment of spending five minutes with your kids or your spouse or anyone important in your life, grab Brittney’s book, *The Five Minute Time In*, it is really, really inspiring. I’m going to be trying this. I have 4.5, five ish kids at home right

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now, so this will be interesting. How does it work with a teenager? You have a 15 year old; does that one still want to do it with you?

**Brittney:** Yeah. So after I finished my official four weeks of time in, I didn't actually continue the structure of time in. so I will still go down with my teenager now and check/in and chat briefly before bed. And just kind of, "Hey, goodnight, see you." Or sometimes with the teenager, honestly, our rule has changed and I am a granulicious early bed bedtime woman. So they'll come in to my husband and me and they'll be like, "I'm going to bed, goodnight." They'll come tuck us in sometimes and switch it up.

**Jen:** That's nice.

**Brittney:** So the time in kind of sometimes happens in our bedroom. But it's not as regimented. So I'm able to continue the connection without this structure of the time in. I needed the structured aspect, that four week period to reconnect and then we've been maintaining in other ways. And there's a whole chapter devoted to, at the end of my book, devoted to maintaining connection in creative ways.

There's almost 100 ideas of if this time in thing at bedtime is problematic, or if you don't think that you need that structure of time in, I recommend it. But sometimes it just doesn't work. There are other ways to connect and stay connected. And so that's the phase that I'm in right now. We're still doing nightly check-ins and stuff, but it's not the sit down kumbaya get to know you moment.

**Jen:** Yeah, right.

**Brittney:** We'll snatch those in other times, and that's become more fluid and more of a habit, I guess, just throughout the day for me, yeah.



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**Jen:** And so at the time that this episode airs it will be the beginning of summer vacation for many in the northern hemisphere, or at least in the United States. How do you make sure that quality time is still squeezed in there between all the driving and whatever else we parents do in the summer?

**Brittney:** Yeah. No, yeah. Well, it is tricky because I will say that for me, just being around your kids a lot does not mean like you say, they're feeling that intentional focus that time in produces. So I feel like every summer's a little bit different for me, I have to figure it out in different ways. And even bedtimes are kind of hit and miss in the summer for us as well.

So I will be refiguring, some things that I've noticed in the past that have worked for me to every week kind of have a lunch hour and taking them to lunch, or shopping, or an outing, something that is meaningful to them. So we'll do that, rotate that each week, and they look forward to their special lunch date with mom.

Sometimes, this might sound really weird and I hope it doesn't sound weird, but when I focus on making eye contact with my child, that is a huge point of connection. For example, I have a middle child who I've been feeling lately has been feeling very middle child ish, she's not old and kind of in this limbo. And we were doing something as a family and just in our living room, hanging out. And I had this thought at the moment, like this is an opportunity to make her feel connected.

And someone had told a joke or was telling a story and I just made eye contact with this daughter and we kind of smiled, like a shared smile thing about the story or something. And I just felt I could see it in her eyes like there I am, my mom sees me. And it took nothing; it took literally seconds in that case to reach out to her. But it was recognizing first and then seizing

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those opportunities to one person, just feel like they're seen, that pay off. I don't know, and I think maybe a lot of people do that naturally. That's something that I have to continue to remind myself to do.

**Jen:** Well, yeah, and that makes sense because science shows that the eye gazing releases oxytocin, so of course it's going to be super powerful. Let's just all eye gaze, we all – and with our phones, many of us are looking down, it's really getting important, so I love that, that's beautiful. So if people want to get their hands on your book, Brittney, where do they need to go?

**Brittney:** Currently it's on Amazon is the best place for nationwide, there are some local places around Northern Utah, but I'd say Amazon.

**Jen:** The Five Minute Time In on Amazon, cool. I love what you're doing, Brittney, this is really important work. Thank you for being on the show.

That really inspired me to do a little more connection with my kids. I am very, very good at eye gazing because I've known about the power of oxytocin in the eye gaze. However, I would really like to commit to spending more focused time listening and sitting down with and being squarely present with them, nothing in my hands, no dishes being handled. Just a little more of that really focused listening. I don't know how it will work but I'm just excited to give it a try.

We're talking about connecting with our kids all month long in the Vibrant Happy Women Club. I am coaching people on how to deal with difficult situations with their kids. We are in the thick of parenting in the Vibrant Happy Women Club. If there's a situation you want to improve with your kids, or with your parenting, or you want to just have more fun with your

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kids, definitely join us in the Vibrant Happy Women Club at [jenriday.com/join](http://jenriday.com/join).

Alright, everyone, thank you so much for listening, go have some fun with your kids and make it a vibrant and happy week. Take care.

If you enjoy this podcast, you have to check out the Vibrant Happy Women Club. It's my monthly group coaching program where we take all this material to the next level and to get you the results that will blow your mind. Join me in the Vibrant Happy Women Club at [jenriday.com/join](http://jenriday.com/join).