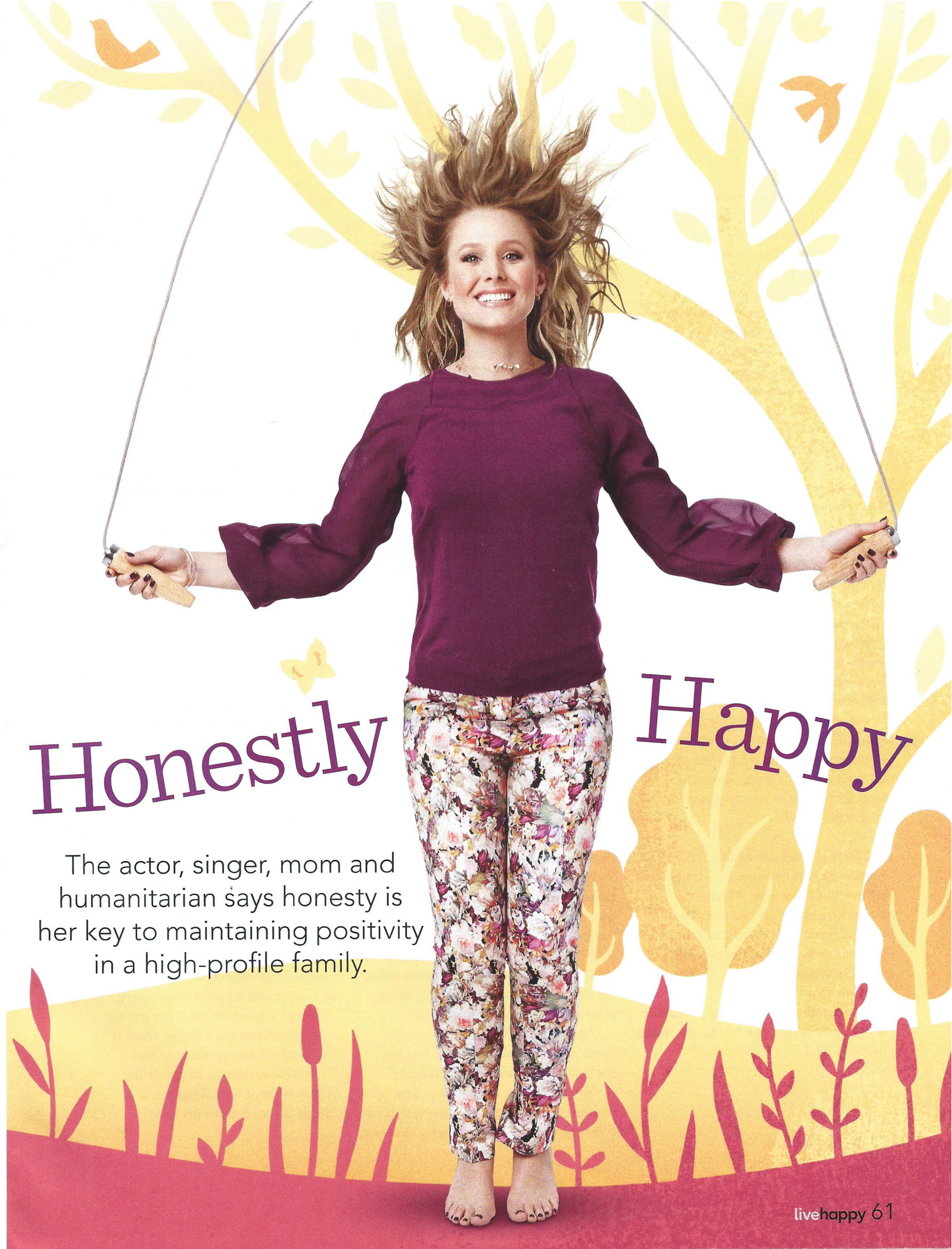




Kristen

Bell is



Honestly

Happy

The actor, singer, mom and humanitarian says honesty is her key to maintaining positivity in a high-profile family.



At 8 years old, Kristen Bell was just like any little girl who played pretend in her bedroom, imagining a world of fairy princesses, monsters, investigators and bad guys. Five years later, an imaginary world of glitz and glamour became a reality for the fresh-faced, diminutive teen with giant-size talent when she landed a dual role in a Detroit theater play. Starring roles in high school productions helped propel her toward an acting career that included stints on Broadway in the early 2000s and guest roles on numerous television shows.

In 2004, Kristen was cast in the title role in the television drama *Veronica Mars*, earning her critical acclaim and a legion of devoted fans.

"I'm very, very lucky to do for a living what I did in my bedroom when I was a little girl. To make wild choices and work with such creative people is so much fun."

Whether she's showing off her singing chops on Broadway, voicing Disney princess Anna in the mega-hit animated feature *Frozen* or starring as the complicated (and slightly corrupt) Jeannie Van Der Hooven in Showtime's adult comedy *House of Lies*, one thing is certain: Kristen is living life on her terms and doing so on the sunny side of the street.

Happiness Is Realistic

"I made a blunt decision for myself to stay positive," she says. "I have insecurities like everyone else; I'm a human female. But every day I make a choice to smile as much as possible while I'm walking the earth. It's as simple as that."

But that doesn't mean she plasters a saccharin sweet grin on her face or fakes positivity 24/7.

"I grew up in a typical suburb with very wholesome Midwestern values and expectations," Kristen says of her childhood in Michigan. "Some of those were to have two kids by age 26, smile every day, know everyone at the hardware store and don't ever say a negative word. But that's just not realistic. It's unrealistic to think that all the frustration and stress of life will evaporate if you're happy."

However, Kristen, at age 35, says happiness is realistic, as long as you have balance in life. And that balance begins with honesty and authenticity.

"I don't believe in sugarcoating things; it's healthier to be honest," she says.

She credits her husband, fellow actor (and writer, director and comedian) Dax Shepard, for introducing her to the concept that honesty truly is the best policy to maintain positivity.

"When I met my husband, I made the decision to be positive," she says. "I learned so much from him because he's more than 11 years sober, and the road to that accomplishment is filled with so much shame and hard work, so many apologies and carnage and rebuilding. The fact that he's so open to sharing those struggles and triumphs helped me become comfortable talking about my own mistakes. And that level of comfort in life is quite freeing."

Her family's open-book policy means there's no glossing over slip-ups or bad moods. And that nothing gets swept under the rug.

"The marker of a good person, I think, is someone who can admit when they're wrong, not worry about being right all the time," Kristen says.

Apologies—when necessary—for those mistakes, also help her feel like she's running a well-oiled machine.

"In my family, if someone snaps at another person, says something to hurt someone's feelings—whether you meant

to or not—you walk up to them and apologize. It's better to say, 'Hey, I'm feeling like our relationship is strained' or 'I'm tired and I shouldn't have spoken to you like that' than to suppress feelings or not take ownership for your actions."

Setting Boundaries Through Honesty

Kristen and Dax are parents to daughters Lincoln, age 3, and Delta, 1½. "I'm so into being a mom. It truly makes me super happy just thinking about my kids, let alone looking into their eyes or hearing their voices," she says.

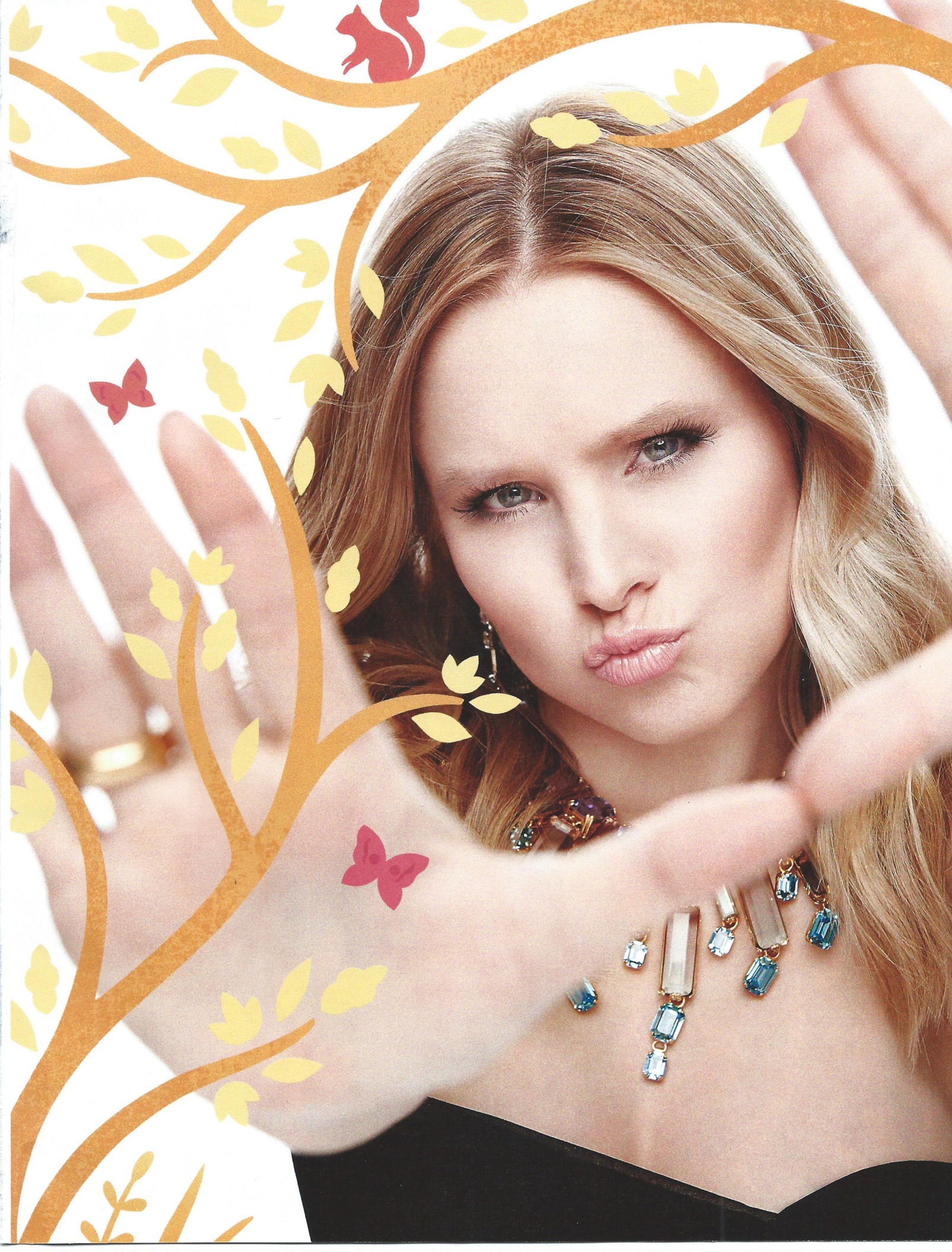
And despite spending more than a decade together, sharing the bustling duties of parenting their daughters and juggling two busy careers with erratic work schedules that often have them in different time zones, Kristen still has a serious case of the butterflies for her hubby. When Dax calls her on the way home from the studio she answers her cell phone with a lovingly genuine "Hi, Sweetheart" that easily rolls off her tongue.

"I wanted to date him so much more than he wanted to date me. Which is strange because I'm a catch," she jokes, recalling when they met.

But motherhood wasn't a forgone conclusion for Kristen. "Having kids is the best decision I almost didn't make."

Kristen says she wasn't sure she wanted to alter the life that she and Dax had created. The pair traveled on creative adventures, worked together and apart and enjoyed date nights. "We had a great life and, not feeling intensely maternal, I didn't know if I wanted to change what we had.

"I have no shame in admitting that it took me a while to get to a 'mom' place, even to my girls



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someday when they're older. They'll know by the way they're treated how happy I am now—and every day since they've been in my life—to have them. But if they have a similar struggle, I want them to know I can identify with going against what society views as the grain of having that stereotypical family. That they can always be honest with me no matter what."

In addition to providing insight into themselves and each other, honesty has helped the couple map out their parenting strategy.

"There's an age limit for everything," Kristen says. "If a swear word comes out, that's OK. I'm OK with telling my girls that there are things adults can do that kids can't. They can't yet drive, vote or cook on the stove. And they can't swear, either. It's an honest way of living that contributes to the positive mood in our house. When you keep things pent up, fake it or sugarcoat everything, you breed anger and perversion and nasty emotions as opposed to just being and living."

That doesn't mean she's crass or her home life is a bacchanal free-for-all. Kristen enjoys the freedom honesty provides her to be genuine with her family while setting boundaries. And she says that is a big happiness booster, especially when she's feeling sleep-deprived or has a to-do list a mile long.

That parenting approach has been the most unexpected aspect of motherhood for Kristen.

"I thought I would be more conservative when I became a mother.

When it came down to it, I decided honesty is the best policy because sure, people want to talk about good things. But they also want to, and need to, talk about the bad. And I want an open dialogue with my kids about everything; failures, sex, scary things and so on, just as much as I want to talk about the happy."

That dialogue includes talking about mishaps and decisions that might deserve second-guessing. Accidents and errors spark conversations about different choices in the future and the reason behind an action.

"My daughter has an air purifier and humidifier in her room for her allergies. And about 20 minutes after tucking her into bed the other night, she came running down the hall excited and barely forming sentences. She finally got out that she moved these things in her room and spilled water," Kristen shares. "Because honest communication is a top priority in our house, her instinct was to tell me, not to hide it or to cry."

That doesn't mean she hands out free passes for unwanted behavior. Or that she doesn't believe in consequences for actions.

"My hope is we're setting the foundation now that will apply when my kids are in high school and beyond. They'll know they can come to us. Yeah, sure, there may be a repercussion like taking away a phone or whatever action would apply at the time. But I think it's important that kids know they can turn to their parents and say, 'Hey, I screwed up' rather than lie about something they've done wrong.

Talking about a failure or mistake creates an opportunity to learn and

grow from it," Kristen says. "And the chance to be a better person down the road."

Honest Introspection

A social media-driven society means life in front of a camera is filled with a lot of watchful eyes, critics and scrutiny. Instead of letting snarky comments on Twitter or in tabloids affect her mood, Kristen has developed a trick to maintaining positivity in a high-profile family.

"I find a lot of strength in digging into why things upset me," she says.

To maintain perspective if she stumbles upon a mean-spirited insult posted online, Kristen looks inward to see if the comment could be an opportunity for self-improvement.

"If someone insults something like my height, eye color or something like that, I know that's more about them than me. And I let it go.

"But if I came home from work upset because I heard someone mumble something snotty about me always being late, my husband would ask me 'Were you late?' I'd probably say, 'Yeah... but...' and launch into an array of perfectly reasonable reasons why I was late. But instead of perseverating on that and letting the comment ruin time with my family or the next week, I'll look at the fact that the problem is not someone saying something about me, but that I was late. I try to redirect a negative exchange, insult, etc., into a lesson of how I can better myself because maybe there's something I need to work on.

"At the end of the day I want to make sure my side of the street is clean. We

talk a lot about how to stay happy in my house and why an insult might affect us. I've learned instead of focusing on the insult, I look at the fact that I wouldn't be offended if I didn't think what was said about me was true."

That perspective has bolstered Kristen's career, spurring her to play diverse characters who sometimes contradict her real life or are a



departure from the typically wholesome characters she's portrayed in the past. One of those contradictions is her current *House of Lies* alter ego, Jeannie Van Der Hooven.

"I'm very lucky because I'm having so much fun in my career. Jeannie is interesting because she's so broken. And I don't have to think what she's choosing is right; I just have to believe what she's choosing is right for her," Kristen explains. "That's how I can play a character with a bad ethical or moral compass."

Although she likes to stay open to new prospects and pursuits, Kristen's not necessarily looking to jump into the role of a goody-two-shoes any time soon.

Kristen plays the wife of her husband's character, officer Jonathan Baker, in *CHiPS*, a big-screen version of the hit TV show. Dax is also a writer and director for the movie set to be released later this year.

"She's a cocky former beauty queen who's kind of a piece of eye candy. That's also been very fun to play because I love doing different things. There are 6 billion characters in the world. Why would I want to play the


same one over and over, even if that person is good?"

She's also not entirely eager for her kids to follow in their parents' entertaining footsteps.

"I have mixed feelings about them becoming actresses. I love what I do, but there is a lot of rejection, and it can be a scary business."

To temper her concerns and provide her girls the strongest and most stable foothold possible on their adult lives, Kristen focuses on nurturing responsibility along with passion.

"I'll support whatever they want to do that makes them happy, from acting to working at a gas station, as long as they can pay bills and be responsible. I don't need them to accomplish anything other than their own self-respect, responsibility and kindness to others."

"We have a sign in our living room that says, 'Work hard and be nice to people.' That's my motto, because my life is way too fun for anything else. There's just no time for negativity." 

LEFT: Dax Shepard and Kristen Bell at the 2015 Vanity Fair Oscar Party in Beverly Hills, California.

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PHOTOGRAPH: THIS PAGE, JON KOPALOFF/FILM MAGIC/GETTY IMAGES



A Balancing Act

Along with honesty, Kristen relies on these tips to maintain a positive personal life.

Surround yourself with happiness. "Our best friends are very happy people, and I look forward to sharing time with them," Kristen says. "I look up to them and how they handle themselves because they're truly happy. That's so nice to be around because some people aren't innately happy."

Use positive words. Kristen looks to inspirational quotes when her positivity wavers or she's feeling unsure. "Imagine being in the brain of the people who said them," she says. One of her favorites is from Eleanor Roosevelt. "I love the saying, 'No one can make you feel inferior without your consent' because there's a lot of responsibility in that. All happiness lies in self-esteem and self-esteem lies in responsibility. I promote responsibility, and I enjoy people who promote it, too."

Make your own traditions. Work commitments that include traveling make it tough for Kristen's family to commit to consistent family dinners or events. So they've started the tradition of eating anything—and everything—together to bond. "We have at least five meals together as a family a week. One may be lunch and two, dinner, but we stick to having some sort of meal together to stay connected and grounded."

Quiet down. To recharge her emotional and mental batteries, Kristen powers down her mind. "Meditation makes me feel more rested than a full night's sleep. I do transcendental meditation a couple times a week and have a mantra that I repeat in a still, calm position. I really enjoy powering down for 20 minutes because it's like shutting off light switches in my brain. I should make more time for it, but meditating even a couple times a week makes a big difference in my stress and happiness levels."



Move around. Kristen and her family are often seen biking around Los Angeles. "We do that for pleasure, fitness and the environment. We love to be out of the car, and luckily, there are a lot of restaurants we can bike to for dinner. You feel a little better about dessert if you moved a bit to get to it!"

Stand by your choices. Self-confidence routinely buoys Kristen's outlook. "The more you love your decisions, the less you need others to love them. My self-esteem can only come from me, not outside sources. Understanding that was my road to finding a peaceful, happy lifestyle."

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