

Ep #168: When Different Coparenting Styles Collide



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host
Lisa Smith

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Welcome to *Real World Peaceful Parenting*, a podcast for parents that are tired of yelling, threatening, and punishing their kids. Join mom and master certified parent coach Lisa Smith as she gives you actionable step-by-step strategies that'll help you transform your household from chaos to cooperation. Let's dive in.

Welcome, welcome, welcome. Welcome to today's episode. Today, in the year of self-regulation, 2024, we're going to dive into the intricacies of coparenting with a focus on one critical aspect. What to do when you're not on the same page about something like caring about your kids' feelings? How many of you are like oh, I need to be here for this today?

I recently had a coaching call with a married couple. Let's call them Sophie and Dan. Sophie and Dan have four little kids all under the age of 10. As we dug into the call, Sophie he told me, "Lisa, I just want him to care about our kids' feelings." Maybe you can relate to this.

Let's say your child asks for something, and your co-parent says no, and your child doesn't accept the answer. He or she keeps begging for what it is they want. Imagine this triggers your co-parent into dysregulation, and he or she storms and yells or raises their voice at your child, which then triggers you. Sound familiar? I know this was a pretty common occurrence in our house when Malcolm was little. I was the one saying no.

This scenario plays on repeat in the home of Dan and Sophie and maybe yours too. As Sophie spoke and laid out the situation, or told me the story, she kept going back to the need for Dan to be kind when he speaks to their kids each and every time, and to display that he cares about his kids' feelings, even in the heat of the moment when he's dysregulated.

Maybe you're relating to Sophie. You're like yeah, I get that. I want that too Lisa. Or maybe you relate to Dan. You're like yeah, when I get dysregulated, all bets are off. I know I can relate to that one. Maybe you recognize you have little tolerance for a child not taking you at your word

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the first time and their attempts to get the cookie or the toy or not go to bed or five more minutes on gaming, that request really triggers you.

If you're like Dan, he said Lisa, "I try to tell my daughter in a nice way to put her shoes on, but she doesn't do it. So I feel I have to raise my voice louder and louder and louder as I repeat myself until she gets it done." Dan admits that in that moment, he just wants her to put her shoes on. When it doesn't happen and it looks like they're getting close to being late for school, he admits that he gets really triggered, really triggered.

Now, no matter which parent you can relate to in this scenario, today's episode is for you. So let's dive in. Dan reported that from his perspective, his way of telling his kids to do something in a, quote, nice way sounds like this. Get your shoes on. Now Dan is not yelling. He's not dysregulated. He's not putting his kids down for not having their shoes on when he told them to. He's just stating, in a very matter of fact tone, get your shoes on now. Dan said, "Lisa, my nice way is simply pointing out that something needs to be done, and it needs to be done now." Maybe you're in this camp.

Now in the other camp is Sophie. From her perspective, simply stating a command, even completely regulated, to her does not sound kind because his tone is not gentle like hers. He doesn't preempt his command with a pet name like sweetie or honey. He does not present it as a question like sweetie, do you mind putting your shoes on right now so we can get to school on time? Maybe you're in camp Sophie.

Here's what happened. As we dove in deeper into all this going on, the thoughts and the beliefs underneath get your shoes on. Sophie revealed to me that her deep seated belief based on her own childhood wounds is that her kids deserve to have their feelings prioritized over everything else all of the time. Let me say that again so you can digest what was really underneath Sophie's, their feelings need to come first.

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When we dove down, which we often do in coaching and it's why it's so incredibly powerful, Sophie was able to see that she had this deep seated belief based on her own child childhood wounds that her kids deserve to have their feelings prioritized over everything else, including getting to school on time.

Then she said, she feels like she can never tap out when she gets dysregulated. Because if she leaves, her kids' feelings will not be protected when their dad steps in, and she can't bear the thought of it.

Now, if you can relate to feeling trapped like this, I'm here to tell you that this is just a lie you tell yourself. I mean this with love. I mean it to be helpful. You're making yourself a martyr, which doesn't serve anybody. If you and your spouse or co-parent parted ways tomorrow, they would most likely get 50% custody of your kids.

They would spend half the week with your co-parent away from you. You would have no say in the way he or she parents your children 50% of the time, and you would by distance be tapped out. So you can tap out when you start to get dysregulated. Please do not tell yourself you don't have a choice.

When you tap out, it is possible that your co-parent may not respond to the circumstances the same way you do. That is true. That is true. He may just say get your shoes on. But your children will survive if their feelings are not made the number one priority in that moment. Let me ask you this. This is what I asked Sophie.

What do you make it mean when your co-parent tells your kids to do something in a way that's different than you would, in a tone of voice that's different than the tone you use? What do you make that mean? As I mentioned, I asked this of Sophie. She said, are you ready for this? "I make it mean he doesn't care about my kids. He doesn't care about his kids. I make it mean that Lisa."

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When she heard her own response, she quickly clarified that she really does know that Dan loves his kids, and he wants the best for him. He wants them to thrive. But her belief was that her children don't feel that from him when he tells them to put their shoes on.

Let me share with you what I told Sophie. I said Sophie, if you are making every parental instruction that comes out of your co-parent's mouth, that comes out of Dan's mouth do mean that he doesn't care about your kids feelings because he isn't using your tone of voice, you're going to have a really hard time staying regulated around that tone. You will continue to suffer through dysregulation, and so will your family.

So let me say that again. If you're making every parental instruction that comes out of your co-parent's mouth to mean something like Sophie, like they don't care about your kids' feelings, or insert whatever you make it mean because they don't use a certain tone, or they don't say it a certain way, you're going to have a very hard time staying regulated when you're around that. That will automatically dysregulate you, and you will suffer and so will your family.

If this is resonating with you, more than likely it might be that you're a people pleaser, like Sophie, and you're married to a non-people pleaser, like Dan. Now you have kids. So your family might look like this.

One parent works really hard to please their children as a part of the parent's people pleasing persona. The other parent is simply not interested in pleasing their children. That parent is more interested in taking care of business and getting things done for the family. Not in a dominant way, but in a very matter of fact way.

The challenge when two people like this co-parent is that the people pleaser equates love with pleasing. So when the non-people pleaser says things like I don't care about their feelings in that moment. I just want them to put their shoes on, which is code for I'm not willing to sign up and be a

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people pleaser. When the parent says I'm not going to use pet names or gentle tones because that's not how I'm wired, it dysregulates the people pleaser and puts the people pleasing parent in fight or flight which is the equivalent of dysregulation.

So the matter of fact parent is not dysregulated. The people pleasing parent actually gets dysregulated from the tone and the lack of pet names and the lack of working hard to please the child. If you find yourself in this battle with your co-parent, I encourage you to just stop saying anything out loud about caring about feelings.

Because the problem with the statement like I don't care or you don't care about their feelings is this. One parent means one thing, the other parent hears another, and the child hears a third. It is a very nebulous statement, also known as a thought, that everyone interprets in their own way based on how they're feeling in that moment, based on the amount of sleep they've had, based on their childhood wounds, based on their day, based on how important it is to be on time. It's very non fact based.

So if I'm a little girl like Dan and Sophie's daughter hearing the statement, not only am I hearing it through my own lens, but I'm interpreting it through my people pleasing parent's lens and the reaction to. I, the child, might accidentally be a people pleaser in training and maybe even an empath. I'm not only listening to what's being said, but I'm reading or absorbing all the feelings in the room.

So I might, on a scale of one to 10, react at about a six based on my own lens. But when I hear the people pleasing mom Sophie's reaction, it now elevates me to a 10. So now everybody's dysregulated and storming alongside each other.

So one of the fixes for this situation, as I shared with Sophie, is to recognize that she doesn't really know what Dan means when he says, "I don't care about their feelings right now." He's making a statement out loud,

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and Sophie's interpreting it through her lens. She has thoughts about the statement, and more than likely it's her thoughts about I don't care about their feelings right now that creates her suffering, meaning she's assigning thoughts to the statement.

Now, on the other side, this is an opportunity for a parent like Dan to discipline himself and not say a statement out loud that he knows triggers his co-parent because she's interpreting it incorrectly. I suggested to Dan that it would be a very good idea to just stop having that conversation in the heat of the moment. It's not productive, I coached Dan.

He was able to see this that oftentimes he's saying it to blow off steam because he's frustrated that his four kids aren't getting their shoes on. He sees that when he says it, he means one thing, but his wife, Sophie, here's something completely different.

Here's what I know. If either parent grew up in a home where nobody cared about his or her feelings, they have to learn how to show they care about their kids' feelings. They probably do care, but they don't know how to be sensitive about feelings in the midst of trying to complete a task. Dan admits 100% this is him.

He says, "I love my kids more than anything, but I'm not sure how to care about their feelings. I haven't learned that yet. I don't know how to show it. Especially in the heat of the moment when I'm focused on tasks, like getting four pairs of shoes on, get everybody in the car, and leave for school on time."

This was a big aha moment for Sophie, she had no idea he didn't know how to show that he cared about his kids feelings, especially when things were getting intense, like getting out the door on time. Honestly, she couldn't know because they weren't talking about this calmly when they were both regulated. They were fighting about it in the heat of the moment.

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In the heat of the moment, he would tell his kids to get their shoes on in a matter of fact tone. Get your shoes on. Sophie would get dysregulated because her thought was there he goes again, not prioritizing their feelings. Then she would confront him while in the heat of the moment while she was dysregulated. Dan would say, “I don't care about their feelings right now. I just want them to put their shoes on, or I just want them to pick up the toys, or just want them to brush their teeth.”

Then Sophie would make it mean that Dan doesn't care about their feelings 24/7 365 days a year. He never cares about his kids' feelings. Then she would see it as her job to step in and rescue them from unloving dad. Oh my gosh, can you see this? Does this happen in your home or something similar? I know. I know. It's what happens in the heat of the moment. So often we're making things mean something else.

I know that it's not likely that your co-parent is a sociopath and is completely heartless and uncaring. So stop telling yourself that they are. Stop having a conversation about a topic that is not productive in the heat of the moment and just hurts everybody. It hurts the family dynamic, and it damages the intimacy between the co-parents. It doesn't net anything useful. So just try to stop.

Now here's where things get interesting. During our call, Dan said out loud that he does care about his kids' feelings very much, and he's learning how to show it. He said, “One of the ways, Lisa, I show it is I work hard to make sure my kids have what they need and are prepared for events and at places on time.”

Now, think about that. Dan's over here working hard to get to places on time and help his kids be prepared by having water and lunches and backpacks and shoes on. In his mind, he's Father of the Year because that's how he's showing his kids he cares about them. During our coaching call, he told Sophie he's probably not ever going to be the dad that shows his kids he cares about their feelings by using pet names or cooing voices

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while making his request to get their shoes on. Can I get an amen if you're in that camp?

Sophie was able to express the damn that it hurts her deeply when in the heat of the moment he says I don't care about our kids feelings. So during our coaching call, Dan did commit to finding a different way to tell Sophie I want to focus on getting the shoes on right now. I'm going to do it in my style, not your style.

Sophie was really able to hear that and able to understand that Dan was never going to have her style because he's not her. He doesn't look through her lens. Frankly, it's not what's important to him. He reiterated that he's trying to show he cares by getting his kids to places on time prepared.

Now, again, we dug a layer deeper because then Sophie was able to see during our coaching call that she's off projecting her own childhood wounds onto the situation. She shared that she often felt like growing up, her mother didn't care about her feelings. Ahe realized that she's projecting that onto Dan and the situation with her kids. Because he's not using pet names and cooing sounds while asking them to put their shoes on.

During our coaching call while Sophie was regulated, she was able to see the Dan isn't in any way like her mother, and that her kids don't need to be rescued from Dan. That it's not her job to prioritize her kids' feelings every moment of every day of every hour of every minute. Nor is it Dan's job. Sometimes the kids just need to get their shoes on so we can get to the next thing.

Then she was able to see that there's plenty of care and concern in her family of six for the kids' feelings by both her and Dan. That it was just her childhood wound rearing its ugly head when Dan would make the statement I don't care about their feelings.

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She stated over and over and over again, in our call, that Dan and her mother are very different people and parent very differently. That she was getting triggered by the statement I don't care about their feelings when things would get stressful. She was making it mean that Dan never cared about his kids' feelings ever, but that isn't true. When it's go time, Dan has a very direct style and approach to getting his kids to put their shoes on.

A couple of weeks later, I had the opportunity to check in with Sophie. She reported that although things were not perfect, they were much, much, much better. She said Dan is doing his part and not lashing out at her out of frustration and telling her that he doesn't care about his kids' feelings in the heat of the moment. She said he's done a great job of just not saying that out loud.

Sophie is doing a much better job at understanding that Dan is parenting in his own style. Although she wishes that he was using pet names and cooing while making the requests, she understands that he does care about his kids' feelings. He shows it in different ways than she does. He shows it by making sure that they're on school on time and well prepared.

She said this really helped me see that he does love his kids very much. He wants them to put their shoes on so they can get to school on time. That's how he shows he cares. For her part, Sophie is also working on cleaning up her childhood wounds so she isn't constantly dragging that baggage into her parenting, which is work worth all of us should be doing and looking at from time to time.

So if today's episode speaks to you, I challenge you to consider where might your childhood wounds be colliding with your co-parent? Where might your childhood wounds be getting in the way of your own parenting? Where might your childhood wounds be causing you to get dysregulated in the heat of the moment?

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Some more things I want you to contemplate are what are your thoughts about the words that come out of your co-parent's mouth? What are you making it mean? What are you projecting into the situation based on your own wounds, your own experiences, your own thoughts, and your own perceptions about how things should go? Great questions, right?

This is the kind of work that we do in The Hive. So if this episode speaks to you, if this is the work that you know you need to be doing right now to take your family to the next level. If you're committed to the year of self-regulation, of figuring out why am I so dysregulated when X, Y, or Z happens, then this is the moment for you to come join us at The Hive. You can find all the details at thehivecoaching.com. If you have any questions at all about it, you can reach out to me on Instagram or send me an email at support@thepeacefulparent.com.

I'm here to support you. What I will tell you is that situations just like this get cleared up and cleaned up and worked on inside The Hive. This is your invitation to come and work on staying regulated even when everybody around you is storming. I know it's possible for you. I believe in you, and I know what you're capable of. So if this speaks to you at all, don't wait another day. Come and join us inside The Hive. Okay, until we meet again, I'm wishing you peaceful parenting.

Thank you so much for listening today. I want to personally invite you to head over to thepeacefulparent.com/welcome and sign up for my free peaceful parenting minicourse. You'll find everything you need to get started on the path to peaceful parenting just waiting for you over there at www.thepeacefulparent.com/welcome. I can't wait for you to get started.

Thanks for listening to *Real World Peaceful Parenting*. If you want more info on how you can transform your parenting, visit thepeacefulparent.com. See you soon.