

Ep #172: How to Listen to Your Children So It Makes a Difference



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. I am so excited that you're joining me today. I'm here each week to share simple, effective tools that help you create a deep connection with your kids. And as we know, because we talk about it often, once we have a connection with our kids, the cooperation follows.

In today's episode we're going to dive into one of the most powerful tools for creating that deep connection with your children. This tool also works, by the way, on your spouse, your co-parent, your co-worker, your friends, your mother-in-law, and the neighbor whose dog barks all the time. It's a tool that can truly transform your family dynamics overnight. And the best part is it's surprisingly easy to implement. So let's dive in.

As we jump in, I want to share a brief story with you. Just the other day, Malcolm called me about something that he was frustrated over at school. He's in his first year of college. And he's really navigating uncharted territory for himself. So he called to vent about something that he was frustrated with, that to me was an easy fix. And I found myself tempted, oh, so tempted to jump in, cut him off and jump right in with the quick advice. It's so tempting. You feel me?

But then I remembered today's episode as I was in the middle of writing today's script, and I chose to listen instead. And it was amazing to just observe how much my listening allowed him to open up and allowed us to connect through his frustration and I want that for you with your kids as often as possible.

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So the inspiration for today's content really comes from a podcast episode that I listened to, a conversation between Oprah and the late renowned peace activist and Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh. As I listened to their conversation I was reminded of one of the most profound parenting tools that we can use, which is the power of deep listening. They weren't even talking about parenting, but this is what I took away from it. The profound, amazing power of deep listening, compassionate, deep listening.

In this conversation, Oprah asked Thich Nhat Hanh about the value of deep listening. And he shared a simple yet transformative practice. He described compassionate listening as the kind of listening that can help a human relieve the suffering. He described it as the kind of listening that can help relieve the suffering of the other person. A form of compassionate listening where you as the listener, your only goal is to help the other person empty their heart.

So the goal of today's episode is to really give you a tool to empty your kid's heart, to be the safe place where he, she or they can explore their thoughts and experiences. Where they can try out words, communicate feelings, and explore ideas. Where they can talk about mistakes and pain and big, uncomfortable feelings and misunderstandings and offenses and confusion with the goal just to empty their heart.

I want you to think for a moment as the parent. What would it be like for you to know that you are the person who helps your kid or kids empty their heart? It'd be amazing at any age, whether they're two or 22 or anywhere in between. Again, Thich Nhat Hanh described it, this compassionate listening as the kind of listening that can help relieve the suffering of the other person. A form of compassionate listening, where you as the listener, your entire upfront goal is to help the talker empty their heart.

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Now here's the rub. You still listen compassionately, even if what they're saying is full of wrongs or bitterness or misconceptions or lies or mis-facts or misunderstandings. In all of that, your initial role is to listen with compassion and without interruption. Because here's what's true, by allowing someone, especially your kid or kids to express their feelings freely, you give them a chance to suffer less and begin to heal.

By allowing your kid to express their feelings, their words, their thoughts freely, you give them an incredible opportunity to suffer less, begin to heal, and listen more. This resonates so deeply within me I can't tell you. As I've often said to you, all humans, especially our kids, just want to be heard. They want to feel understood by the people closest to them, most importantly their parents.

Now, on our part as the listener, here's what I know. Deep listening is a skill that requires practice and commitment. It requires that we set aside our ego, our opinions, our leadership, our judgment, our knowingness. We have to set all of that aside and commit to truly hearing what the other person is saying. This kind of listening involves suspending our own needs for the moment, our own wants, our own desires, to correct or guide or fix and focus instead on relieving the suffering of the talker.

When you deeply listen to your kids, you are giving them a safe place to express themselves, their thoughts, their emotions. For instance, your teenager might need to vent about his or her coach, even if they're wrong. Your younger child might need to tell you how upset they are with their siblings, even if they're wrong. Your kid might need to tell you about how little they think of themselves, even if it's painful to listen.

Our job as compassionate listeners is instead of jumping in with advice and corrections, is to allow them to ease their suffering by sharing what's on their mind openly. And I know, I totally get how hard this is, especially if

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you're a recovering people pleaser or a current people pleaser or a fixer or a talker or an idea person. It's hard, I get it, but it really is the underbelly of connection.

So here's what I have to ask you. How is your listening, your compassionate listening? I want you to take a moment and reflect on your own listening. Become the watcher of yourself as you're listening. How often do you pause and truly listen to your kids, how often? What grade would you give yourself on this? Or are you quick to fix because you think it's your role or you're uncomfortable with your kids' big emotions and you want to help them button this up and put a bow on it and get out of pain or get out of uncomfortable big emotions? I get it, I really do.

This compassionate listening with my own son is work I do on the regular. But here's the real important question and I want you to really consider this for a moment. What might change for you, what might change in your relationship with your kid or kids if you committed and practiced deep listening more often? Even though you may know what your child is going to say or you might have an argument in your head prepared, I want you to commit to taking a step back.

Because here's the truth. When you skip over the listening, you rob your child of the opportunity to feel heard and valued and you rob them of the opportunity to empty their heart. I feel like I need to say that again. Even though you have the answer, you know the solution, you've got the idea. You know what they're going to say. You have your argument prepared.

I want to encourage you to take a step back and just compassionately listen, because here's what I know for sure. When any of us skip over the listening part of the process, we rob our child of the opportunity to feel heard and valued and we rob them of the opportunity to empty their heart. By practicing compassionate listening, you foster a sense, a true, honest to

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goodness connection and trust with your child. Practicing compassionate listening is the recipe for connection and trust.

Now, your kids may not always agree with you and you might not always agree with them. But if it always starts with compassionate listening, then it ensures that at a minimum, you're their safe place and they feel seen, heard and understood and they have someone that helps them empty their heart. So let's take a gut check. How is your practice of deep listening to your kids? Can you improve it? I know I'm a work in progress and there's always room for me to do better.

So today's episode is an invitation for you to join me in committing to compassionate listening with our kids and those around us, those that we care about, those in meaningful relationships. Now, it's easy to listen compassionately when all is going well. But I also want you to work on compassionate listening when you're stressed or distracted or don't like what's coming out of your kid's mouth. That's the real moment to keep practicing compassionate listening.

It's about creating a space for them to express themselves, a safe place where they feel heard. This begs the question, did you have someone who compassionately listened to you when you were a kid? If the answer is yes, I want you to think back to how that made you feel, probably heard and safe. And if the answer is no, I relate to that, I really do, I get it. And I want you to think for a minute because I sure have pondered this, how things might be different if you'd had a safe place, if you'd had a compassionate listener who was there to ease your heart, if you felt seen, heard and valued.

So whether you are a yes or a no, this is a gift right now based on today's episode that you can decide to give your children. And it is one of the most beautiful gifts I think we can give our kids. Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us that

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by allowing someone to speak their truth without interruption, it's the beginning of transformation and healing. Later, you can revisit perceptions, mistakes, corrections, plans, etc. Later, you can always discuss necessary adjustments.

But by practicing compassionate listening, you have the opportunity to go beyond behaviors and reach down to the feelings and needs beneath them. And this is where true connection, and thus cooperation begins. Are you with me? Are you ready to do better? I love Maya Angelou's saying, "When we know better, we do better."

So my goal today was to bring you a sense of knowing better, a check in, a refresh, a commitment to compassionate listening. I want you to embark on this journey with me. I want you to visualize my hand extended out to you, ready to grasp it and help you improve your skills of compassionate listening. Let's commit to nurturing a generation of kids who feel deeply heard and understood. Let's commit to nurturing a generation of kids that have a safe place at home to empty their hearts.

Just imagine the world we could create together if everyone felt seen, heard and valued. So good. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Thank you for doing this work. Your kids thank you for being that safe place, for compassionately listening to them even when it's difficult. They thank you for that. They feel that connection. They feel that extension that you're offering to them. What I know for sure is that compassionate listening starts in the home and it can make a world of difference.

Until next time, I'm wishing you peaceful parenting and compassionate listening.

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

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peaceful parenting mini course. 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. 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.