

Ep. #241: Raising Kids Who Trust Their Bodies: The Power of Hunger Cues



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 absolutely thrilled. To be with you here today, and I wanna start with something that might surprise you. One of the most powerful gifts I believe you can give your kids isn't a perfect diet, the healthiest food, or even teaching them to love vegetables.

I know you might be saying What, Lisa? Seriously hear me out? It's something much simpler and more profound and it's helping your kids. Trust their own body's hunger and fullness cues. You know, when Malcolm was little, I made a commitment that might seem radical to some people. I decided that his relationship with food and hunger would be completely different from mine.

I was determined not to pass down the food struggles, the diet mentality, or the disconnection from hunger cues that I inherited. And here's what's beautiful about this topic. It connects directly to everything we talk about in real world peaceful parenting. When we honor our kids' internal wisdom about hunger, you know what we're doing.

We're teaching 'em to trust themselves. We're showing 'em that their bodies signals matter. We're building the foundation for self-regulation that extends far beyond food. So with that in mind, today. I'm bringing you a conversation with my friend and colleague, Jane Pilger, who specializes in helping people heal their relationship with food and hunger.

Jane reached out to talk to me because she was doing a series on hunger, and when I heard it, I told her, girl, I could talk about this for days, because the truth is your relationship with hunger begins in your childhood. And that my friend is exactly what we're diving into today. How the messages we give our kids about food and eating from an early age shapes their relationship with food and hunger for life, and how we can break generational cycles to raise kids who trust their bodies.

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Now this conversation is going to challenge some of the ways you might be thinking about mealtime food rules. And what it really means to nourish our kids. And if you're someone who struggles with your own relationship with food or hunger, this episode is especially great because understanding where these patterns started is the first step in healing them.

So let's dive in. Today we're continuing the conversation about hunger with a parenting expert to explore the truth that your relationship with hunger begins in childhood. Whether you are a parent navigating your child's relationship with food and hunger, or you are a person who is curious about how your own relationship with hunger and with food began in your childhood.

There is going to be something powerful for you today in this episode. So let's dive in. Welcome to Binge Eating. Breakthrough the podcast to help you stop feeling out of control around food and build trust with your body. If you've tried everything but still feel stuck, you are not alone. I've been there too.

I'm Jane Pilger and I'm here to help you see binge eating in a new way so you can finally break free. Each week you'll get the tools and insights to create peace with food and your body. Your breakthrough starts now. Hello everyone. I am so excited to bring you a conversation today in our continuing discussion on.

Hunger. We are in the midst of a series about hunger. Lots of different topics about your relationship with hunger, and today I am bringing you a conversation with Lisa Smith, the peaceful parent. And Lisa is a friend, she is a colleague. What is so amazing is we've been talking for a while about. Doing a podcast together because we have a lot of similar philosophies.

She coaches around parenting. I coach around food, but there is a really common thread through a lot of our work and we knew we wanted to have this conversation. And recently I told her about this series that I'm putting together on hunger. And she was like, I could talk about this for days. Because the truth is your relationship with hunger begins in childhood.

I'm really excited about this conversation. Lisa, thank you so much for joining us. Uh, tell us a little bit about why you're so passionate about this topic. Thanks, Jane.

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I am thrilled to be here. Uh, again, Lisa Smith, the Peaceful parent. I've been a parent coach for about 17 years. I have a son who's about to turn 21.

Wow. And I am passionate about the topic of hunger because I look at the difference in how my son looks at hunger. How I looked at hunger growing up and I had such a love-hate relationship with hunger that was passed down to me from my own family. And when I found out that I was going to be a parent, two things I kid you not that I committed to.

I might not have had the language back then, but one was. Unconditional love when he was doing his best and his worst. Mm-hmm. And two, was not wiring his brain for hunger, rather than letting him use his own cues in his body to tell him when he was hungry and when he was full. Mm-hmm. And I have. Practice that diligently over 21 years.

Wow, that's amazing. So tell me a little bit about your, like the difference contrast the difference for me, what your relationship with hunger was like and, and starting in childhood, and then being able to see what you did with your son and kind of what was different there. Yeah. I grew up in a family, oh my gosh, so chaotic and such low emotional intelligence.

I say that respectfully, if that can be said respectfully, but food was often used as a manipulator. Mm. There was, you know, this contrast of people telling me when I was hungry, when it was time to eat, putting food on my plate, insisting I cleaned my plate because there was, you know, some kid in Africa whose life was gonna be better if I ate all my Greek beans.

Yes. Right. And then, you know, I remember things like if I took a second helping again, I had an underdeveloped brain. 'cause the prefrontal cortex is not fully developed till the age of 25. So I would take a second serving of, you know, let's say mashed potatoes, not understanding proportion and thighs and relativity to the hunger of your stomach.

You know, I grew up with, um, uh, in a Lithuanian household. And man, our food was good. Mm-hmm. So I would take a second serving of something. And you

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know, because I had moved it from the serving bowl to my plate, I was obligated to finish it whether I was full or not. And then, so this is the other side of the coin.

I had a large body as a kid and so I, at the same time that was being told, you must eat, it's time to eat, clean your plate. I was also being berated for the size of my body. I was put on a diet as early as eight or nine. So there was all these conflicting messages. Yes. Right. And then on top of it, the third rung of the stool, if you will.

So clean plate, but then on a diet. And then the third rung was we used food to celebrate all the time. We used it to soothe. We used it to celebrate. We used it as punishment. You know, you couldn't have dessert if you didn't eat green beans. I wanted dessert. Right. So there was all this and none of that was about.

My left inner ghrelin. Right. It was because it was deemed five 15 and the food was ready. Suddenly it was time to sit down and eat dinner, even if I had a snack at four o'clock. Mm-hmm. No one took that into account. Mm-hmm. So that's how I grew up. Okay. Fast forward, you know, I, I have my son Malcolm. I have done a lot of work on my body, my thoughts about my body, really tuning into hunger cues, healing a lot of wounds.

So I decided that Malcolm's entire assignment was gonna be even hungry and stop wind full as much healthy food as possible, right? Uh, but also, you know, growing up the kids, pretty much only vegetable was cucumbers. He ate chicken nuggets for breakfast and he started his childhood in a large body as well.

And there was never a discussion ever. About the size of his body, not once and as it often happens, when he got into puberty, you know, he went up, he's now a 6 5, 200 pound healthy athlete that takes good care of his body, eats fairly well, but the thing my kid does that's so amazing, Jane. It shouldn't be that amazing in America in 2025.

But I kid you not, this kid eats when he is hungry and he stops when he is full, sometimes mid bite. Mm mm-hmm. We were just talking yesterday, we went to on this amazing trip a few years ago and we went to this incredible pizza place in London and I mean, the pizza was incredible and he stopped mid bite when he'd reached full.

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So tell me as a parent, so we might have a couple of different people, different people listening to this, we're gonna have some people who have kids and they wanna know, what do I do? What do I, what do I, what do I do? What don't I do? So we definitely wanna cover that. Then we also are gonna have people who are listening who maybe like me, don't have kids, but can see, oh yeah, my relationship with hunger really started in childhood also.

So I really wanna address both of those. So no matter where you are listening to this. So let's talk first to the pers, the people who are listening, who are parents, and they really wanna know what are the things that are really helpful to do when it comes to. My child and food. What are the things that are maybe not helpful, at least in your experience?

Good things come to mind. One is food has no morality. Mm-hmm. Right, and, and I think that's probably something you can speak about to all of us adults. Yep. Right. One of crossing the chasm. I would say yes. One of the principles of crossing the chasm of having a healthy relationship with food and hunger is to realize that there is no, you know, if you sustain on a diet of kale and chicken breast, you're not morally better.

The food is not morally better than someone who enjoys a sandwich every day for lunch. So, you know, not using certain foods to entice other, the eating of other foods Hmm. Is really an important concept. Yes. I'm gonna stay away from body image 'cause that's not the point of today's conversation, so I'll stay with food.

Yeah. So number one, there's no morality in food. A McDonald's milkshake is not, does not make you a bad person Over a green juice at Nectar. And then the other thing I would say is really understanding the, the brain and the fact that the prefrontal cortex is not developed till 25. So we are born knowing when we're hungry and when we're full, right?

The newborn knows when to cry to nurse and when to stop and fall asleep. I would love for every parent to really grasp that. And then not work to have their kids unlearn that. Yes. Right. Yes. So what are the things that parents do, maybe even unintentionally, with the best of intentions? What are the things that parents do that lead to their child unlearning those natural hunger and fullness cues?

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I think the answer is the same for us adults. Mm-hmm. I come into the parenting role dysregulated. Yep. Out of my own experience with hunger. Right. Maybe it's a fear of hunger or maybe it's a fear of not getting a good base as a, as a kid, I, I didn't learn to eat healthy, so now I struggle as an adult.

Mm-hmm. Right. It is very common. When you have a two or 3-year-old, there's many foods you can put on that high share tray that they will eat and you think, oh, I'm winning it. Getting them to eat kale and avocado and you know, green juice. And then the taste buds begin to develop around four or five, and they start to reject foods.

Hmm. And it's easy as a parent to get dysregulated by this. And then you're addressing meals out of fear or anger. Again, true for us as well, right? Yes. Yes. Addressing food out of fear and anger and dysregulation rather than we eat when we're hungry and we stop when we're full. Another example might be you are over invested in dinnertime.

Mm, right? Either I've made this food and I want us to sit together and eat, or it's the first time all day I get to relax and I love to cook, so I've prepared this meal. Y you know, the funny thing is, is like the average 7-year-old dinner is like nine bites. Mm, nine bites. So expecting them to sit down for 45 minutes at the table, right, and have this adult-like meal, and then we're bargaining, eat four more bites of green beans.

You can't have dessert if you don't clean your plate. Right? Again, I think a lot of this is. Limiting beliefs we're bringing from our own relationship with hunger. Yeah. Yeah. I remember you telling me a story about what you did with your son. When it would be dinnertime, it would be five 30. This is the time that we eat dinner, but he wouldn't necessarily be hungry.

How did, how did you navigate that? He often was not hungry at dinnertime because he has played basketball since second grade, and there was often practice to go to. Either before dinner or right after dinner. So there was often meals being fed earlier in the day, like right after school. You know, there'd be an entire burrito eaten at from Chipotle at three 30.

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So of course at five 30 he's not gonna be hungry. Yeah. So our rule in our family was the dinner table is for fellowship, not eating. Mm. So you come to the table to have fellowship with us and 20 minutes was the limit. If you want to eat during the fellowship, you are welcome to however much you want to eat, and if you don't want to eat, then you just come and be with us.

Now the caveat is you couldn't not eat dinner to then, you know, make a giant bowl of Captain Crunch cereal 10 minutes later. Yeah, because you know, cereal's just, I mean, there is no moral issue, but like you do need to eat some protein and carbs and veggies and not just. Cardboard in a bowl. So dinner would be set aside so that if you were hungry later, you know, I was not running a, a diner.

I was not a short order cook. I wasn't gonna jump up from the dinner table to go make a second meal, but there was no requirement to eat because the clock struck a certain time. Mm, mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah. So now let's talk to the person who. Maybe doesn't have kids and isn't worried about what they're doing with their kids or any messages they're sending to their kids, but is thinking, yeah, I actually can see my own relationship.

So in this series, the last week was the first, the first episode of this series, and the. The topic is what is your relationship with hunger? So if you haven't checked that out, you can go back to that episode. We'll link it in the show notes, and it really is an exploration about your own relationship with hunger.

And what I love about bringing this episode in second is to really get curious about where did your relationship with hunger. Start? Mm-hmm. How does it make sense that if you have right now, if your relationship with hunger is based on fear, for example, I used to have a lot of fear. I would either be afraid I would get too hungry because if I got too hungry, then I was, I was afraid I would end up bingeing.

But then I also just didn't like the feeling of being hungry, so then I would think, well, I can't really handle, not only am I afraid of it, but I don't like it. It's uncomfortable. So I would, I would preet, I would have snacks with me all of the time, and I would end up eating just in case. And I didn't really even realize that I did that.

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It was actually, I was in intensive outpatient therapy and we had to. Log our food and send it to the dietician and you wrote it down for the week and you submitted it and they would give it back almost like a teacher with, with your grade. Like it was literally they, the dietician would write in a different color ink on your food log with comments or you know, like, good job or whatever.

And I remember one of the comments that she put on my thing was. It seems like you're, you're doing a lot to avoid being hungry. It was like, well, I have a meeting and I don't wanna get too hungry. So I ate this, I ate this so that I wouldn't get too hungry. I ate this and, and I really wasn't even allowing myself to get hungry.

But then I, once I realized, oh. Okay, I Hunger isn't something to be afraid of. I swung to the other extreme and then I was pushing hunger, like, oh, I don't need to eat. This will just go away. Look, I can wait until, uh, whatever time to even eat my first meal. Look how many hours I can go without eating. Oh, look, I am, whatever the things I was thinking, and I literally went.

To the other extreme. And so it was really interesting for me to kind of look back and see, yeah, see all of that. I can so relate to that, Jane. And you know, one of the reasons that I'm able to feel so solid as a parent and a parent coach about hunger is because I had to do my own healing. Yeah. And like you, I would pre.

I was fearful of hunger. Yeah. I don't think I had ever experienced hunger, but I was afraid of this thing called hunger, even though I didn't know what it was. Mm-hmm. And I remember someone said to me, uh, hunger is not an emergency. And I was like, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Wait a minute. It was like a needle across the record.

What? And you know, you have these moments in your life where people make these statements. And it's like the shutter clicking on a camera. Right. And that was one for me because here's what I did. I, I was, I was like you, I would pre eat, but in addition to that, I listened to other people. Yes. So, so let's you know, because of how I was raised, people were always telling me things like, you're hungry, eat, clean your plate.

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This is a good food. This is a bad food. Now you should diet. As a diet. You should only eat cucumber and boiled chicken. Or now even though you're on a diet, now we're gonna go out and celebrate. You know, have a burger and french fries, but it's okay to celebrate even though I put you on a diet last week because now I wanna celebrate.

Yes. Right. So then I grew up as someone that always wanted, or that always needed others to tell me, now it's time to eat. Now you're hungry. I remember when I first started dating my husband, I actually was in relatively healthy, good shape. I had a pretty good relationship with my body, but he was always telling me like.

Let's, let's go for burgers, let's go for pizza, let's go. Or we'd get to a restaurant and he'd say, let's have an appetizer. And I'd say, okay. And it wasn't that it was wrong of him to say it, it was that I never checked in with myself and ever once said like, okay, fried, fried mozzarella sticks sound amazing, but how hungry are you?

And are you gonna order an entree? And how much capacity do you think you have? You know, and, and. Do you wanna leave your so stuffed you can't move? Or do you wanna, you know, so I had to learn to tune in inward Yes. Instead of outward, and then I could teach. Other people this? Yes, absolutely, and, and look at every diet we've been on.

Every diet that is out there, especially the older ones, but even some of them now, they would tell you, not only would they tell you what to eat, but they would tell you when to eat at this time. Eat this this many hours. They ate later. Eat this, stop eating at this time. Only eat between these windows. And so there's so much of that external telling us what to do that now.

I mean, I just can't tell you how many people come to me with the, I don't trust myself, like, and as much as if, if they have a memory of eating, you know, kind of that natural relationship with food when they were much younger. It's so far away that it just feels like it's, it's not even. It's not even possible, but I want every human to know it is.

It is a skill. You were born with, a trait you were born with, and you absolutely can retrain it. Yes. Now, if we're stuck in fear and we don't, and we even just believing

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I don't trust myself, that right there, you're really closing. You're closing the door to the opportunity, to the possibility that you could one day with time, with consistency, with tuning in, you could develop that trust.

But it's like, nope, based on my past, based on my history, based on everything I know, I just don't like period, end of story. And if that is what you take with you, that is what you'll create. But yes, and, and I would say it to support you, Jane. You know I'm in love with confirmation bias. Yeah. Not in a good way, but like I study it.

I'm a quite a student. I feel like I have a PhD in confirmation bias. So to your point, if you continue to confirm, I don't, in the present, yes. I don't trust myself. Yes. Right? Yes. Then you don't trust yourself and there's no opportunity. Right. Right. It's like you put into Google, I don't trust myself. And all Google shows you is a search of why you shouldn't trust yourself, right?

Yes. And And I would just slip in. If you are a parent listening to this, and this is resonating with you. Please be mindful that if you are going to constantly tell your children what they like, what they don't like, when they're hungry, when they're full, when they have to eat, you're teaching them to override their inner voice.

They will grow up not to trust their cues. Yes, they, they will because, and, and then they will be dependent on a diet, a partner, a plan, someone else. To tell them when it's time to eat, whether they're hungry, whether they're not. I mean, I spent 40 years not knowing at least 40 if I was hungry or not, did I wanna eat?

If someone said, let's go to lunch, I'll meet you at so and such and such for lunch, I showed up and ate a meal. You know, now I'm the person. I'm meeting someone this afternoon and she said, are you okay with the late lunch? I said, yes. When I get there, I will decide if I'm hungry or not, and if I'm not, I, I won't eat and I won't be nervous about it.

I won't be stressed. I don't care what her thoughts are. I serve myself and I, I, my, my hunger is an inside job. Hmm. That's a great saying. My hunger is an inside job. So good. Alright, let's leave our listeners with two things. I wanna leave our

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parent listeners with something that they can start doing today with their kids, uh, around their kind of tuning in internally to their own hunger.

And then we can also leave our non-parent listeners with something that they can really think about today and start working on today with their your own relationship. So let's start with our, our parent listeners. One thing I like to encourage parents to do is talk about the voice in the tummy. Hmm.

Right. So, so the parent can talk about this out loud. If you're sitting at dinner or, or having a meal, you can say, my tummy is very hungry, or my tummy is full. And you can model that for your kids. 'cause kids don't do what we say, they do what we model. You can invite your kid at any age. To also find their tummy voice.

And it's really metaphorical of, it's not the head voice or the taste bud voice or the, I'm stressed and I want to eat. It's literally the stomach of wanting food when it's hungry and stopping when it's full. Hmm. So as a parent, you could say, you know, let's say your kid takes two bites of something and says, I'm full.

And then as a parent you can say, you know, is that your tummy voice? Telling you you're full. Uh, really getting that kid to connect with just what's happening in the gut versus the brain, the mouth, the taste buds, the soother. If all parents did, is that one thing amazing because then it encourages also the parent to recognize that it's not.

My head saying, Jane, you should eat four more bites of green beans. Yes. It's your stomach. Yes. Having the loudest voice in the room. Yes. I love that. So good. So good. Yeah. All right. Now for those people who are listening that are really getting curious about their own relationship with Hunger one, listen to last week's episode if you haven't already.

There's some really good reflection questions there for you to just start really noticing and paying attention. What is my relationship with hunger anyway, and specifically to what we're talking about today? I invite you to just get curious about how does my relationship with hunger today, how might it have reflections of what happened?

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My childhood. Now, this isn't to blame, this isn't to say, oh, now it can never change. This is, you know, it's all my mom's fault. Or they shouldn't have told me these terrible things at the table or whatever. No, no, no. But it's to bring in that awareness, that curiosity of, oh, it makes sense that I have this fear, or it makes sense that.

I cleaned my plate because of the messages that I was given, but now that I am an adult, I have the ability that I didn't have then because just as Lisa was talking about the formation of the brain, it is, we have very different brains now as adults than we did as a kid. Now we do bring everything with us that came from childhood, but as soon as we are aware of it, we now can make a different choice.

Yes. So before we didn't, we didn't even know we, we didn't have a choice. We just did whatever we were told, what was shown to us. That's what we did. That's what we knew. Now we can see it and we can say, would I choose that again? Would I choose this relationship with hunger? If the answer is no, you now get to recreate your own knowing that as a human, you have that innate ability to tune in.

To really listen and allow your body to guide your choices. Now, this doesn't happen overnight. This is a process, but it is absolutely possible for you no matter what you've done, no matter how long it's been, no matter what your food history is, it is. Possible. I also wanna make one note, uh, a couple of episodes from now in this series.

One of the episodes I have coming is, why eat when you're hungry? Stop When you're full? Doesn't always work. Mm-hmm. So, I know Lisa's talked about this a lot and, and it sounds like, oh yeah, eat when you're hungry. Stop when you're full. This is what I taught my son. He has such a great relationship with food.

Yes, ant. There's a lot more to it. So if you're listening to this and you're like, yeah, I've tried that whole, eat when you're hungry, stop when you're full thing and it didn't work for me. Be sure to tune into that episode because you, there may be some additional factors there that you might resonate with and, and we'll have some real key things that you can, you can work on there.

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All right. This has been amazing. Lisa. Thank you so much for being here. I am sure there are plenty of people who are gonna wanna learn more about the work that you do. Um, tell us where, uh, people can find you. Love to. Thank you, Jane. It's been a pleasure to be here. And you can find me @thepeacefulparent.com.

And once you land on that website, there is a free mini course that you can get signed up for. Which we'll talk about how to stay calm and regulated, something we all could use a refresher on or encouragement or help with. And it would be my honor for you to sign up and join me over there @thepeacefulparent.com.

Amazing. Thank you so much, Lisa. This was a great conversation. I know it's gonna have a lot of people really reflecting on. Their relationship with hunger, their childhood, how they relate, and for our parents, things that they can really start doing today to help their children have these relationships with hunger, where it really is their body that is guiding their choices rather than anything or anyone else.

And what I mean, what a gift. What a gift. Any parent can give their their child to do that. So thank you. Thanks, Jane. I wanted to just say thanks for putting this series together as a fan of your podcast. Mm-hmm. You know, really delivering this series on hunger is so beneficial and I'm, I'm just, I'm thrilled that it's out there and I can't wait to listen to every episode.

It's such a powerful, such a powerful conversation and a complicated one for so many people, so I'm really excited to do it. Right. Thank you Y'all. See everybody next week. If you like what you're hearing, you will love my new book, the Binge Eating Breakthrough, why Food Isn't The Problem, and What Really is Discover Why Willpower Isn't the Answer.

Why Restricting certain foods often backfires. And why? Understanding your brain and body is the key to lasting change. Learn to shift from shame and self-blame to curiosity and compassion. Get it today @janepilger.com slash book. What a powerful conversation about something that affects every single family, our relationship with food and hunger.

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And here's what I want you to remember from today, your child is born knowing when they're hungry and when they're full. It is not something you need to teach them. It's something you need to protect and honor. This connects so beautifully to peaceful parenting. 'cause when we honor our kids' internal wisdom about hunger, we're teaching them to trust themselves and build the foundation for self-regulation that extends far beyond food.

Now if you're thinking, wow, this makes sense, but I need help creating peaceful mealtimes and honoring my kids' autonomy around food. Then I wanna invite you to join us in the hive. In the hive. I will help you and teach you how to handle food challenges without power struggles, and heal your own food relationship so you can model food freedom for your kids with personalized strategies created just for your family.

So if this speaks to you, I want you to run, not walk, but run to the hive [coaching.com](https://www.coaching.com). To join our community of parents who are breaking generational cycles and raising kids who trust their bodies. Remember, your child's hunger is an inside job. Your job isn't to control it, but to honor it. Yeah. Yeah.

Okay. Until next time, I'm wishing you. Peaceful parenting.

Thanks for listening to Real World Peaceful Parenting. If you want more info on how you can transform your parenting, visit the [peaceful parent.com](https://www.peacefulparent.com). See you soon.