

Ep #7: Why Do My Kids Storm, Meltdown, Cry, and Fight? (And What to Do About It)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host
Lisa Smith

[Real World Peaceful Parenting](#) with Lisa Smith

Ep #7: Why Do My Kids Storm, Meltdown, Cry, and Fight? (And What to Do About It)

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 to be here with you all today. I wanted to start out by giving a shout out. I know many of you are experiencing severe weather, severe cold weather here in the south in the United States. And I want you to know that my thoughts and prayers are with you for a warm and safe week.

And speaking of storming, today we're going to talk about the anatomy of storming and melting down. And I want to dig into why do your kids melt down, why? It's a question I used to ask myself all the time. What's going on? Why does this keep happening over, and over, and over again? And when will it stop?

Now, as I was preparing for today's episode I realized I haven't really taken a moment to define peaceful parenting. And I want to take a minute here to do that. You see, there are three kinds of parenting. There's dominant, permissive and peaceful parenting. Peaceful parenting is sometimes called conscious or mindful parenting. I prefer the term peaceful parenting. So you'll hear me refer to it always as that.

Dominant parenting is when we as the parents use our power to come over our children to control them, to get them to do exactly what we want them to do. In dominant parenting love can feel conditional to the child based on good behavior because everything is focused on extracting good behavior from your kids and stopping the bad or unacceptable behavior. And unfortunately the message that kids get is that the behavior is more important than the relationship.

[Real World Peaceful Parenting](#) with Lisa Smith

Ep #7: Why Do My Kids Storm, Meltdown, Cry, and Fight? (And What to Do About It)

It's more important that a child stop crying, or stop fighting, or stop whatever they're doing. And many parents don't care how you get there. They just want it to stop. And they'll use whatever control they need to use over the child to get there because that child should not be crying, should not be fighting, should not be screaming, should not be hitting, or whatever they're doing. And I'll do whatever I need to do to make that happen.

The problem with dominant parenting is number one, it doesn't feel good for the parent or the child. Number two, the parent often has to keep escalating the threat and punishment especially with strong willed kids. And most importantly number three, dominant parenting doesn't work to turn on the internal compass and teach our kids right from wrong. It often teaches how to avoid getting caught. And what we really want to do is raise children that have an internal compass that they can use. They really understand right from wrong.

Permissive parenting is when we allow our children to use their power to come over us. The problem with permissive parenting is that it teaches kids to be manipulative. And what kids really, really, really want and need are rules, rules, and boundaries, and limits kindly delivered. But rules help them feel safe and loved. Our kids brains are underdeveloped especially the prefrontal cortex. So they're not capable of managing themselves and making rules for themselves. They might want to do it, they might seem like they can do it but they really aren't capable of it because of the brain development.

And so kids who grow up in permissive homes are often insecure and struggle with boundaries later in life. Kids want and need a combination of love and boundaries. And permissive parenting doesn't allow for that. So, in the middle of the two, in the middle, if you think about dominant on one

Ep #7: Why Do My Kids Storm, Meltdown, Cry, and Fight? (And What to Do About It)

side, one extreme and permissive on the other side at the other extreme, smack down in the middle is peaceful parenting.

And peaceful parenting is when we use our power to come alongside our kids. We're still the peaceful leaders of the household. We're just using our power instead of to come over them, to come alongside them. And when you do that you're building connection with your child. Peaceful parenting is a process that requires acceptance and understanding of basic human needs and feelings. Feelings and needs matter. And peaceful parenting focuses on feelings and needs.

It is natural that both the parent and the child will experience many feelings over the course of their relationship together such as anger and frustration as well as things like warmth and affection during the relationship. We really do run the gamut of emotions while being the child and while parenting. And peaceful parenting doesn't mean that you're going to be peaceful and relaxed all the time. Nor does it mean your child is only ever going to experience positive emotions.

But with peaceful parenting the idea is that emotions by either party are never shut down. Emotions are recognized and valued because you have emotions and at the exact same time your child has his or her emotions. When we bring peaceful parenting into our home I like to encourage parents to think the thought, emotions or feelings are never in conflict. Feelings are something that can never be in conflict, meaning I might have one feeling and my son might have a completely different feeling and no one is wrong. Both feelings can coexist even if they're conflicting.

Now, let me say, many of us were not raised this way. Many of us were raised in a house where frankly our feelings didn't matter, nobody cared. Nobody cared about your feelings about anything. Remember the saying,

Ep #7: Why Do My Kids Storm, Meltdown, Cry, and Fight? (And What to Do About It)

you were to be seen and not heard? That's really code for don't be bringing your feelings all up in here. But here we are in 2021 and we're all working on our feelings more than ever. We're working on self-care, and meditation, and awareness, and talking about our feelings and letting people know how we feel. And so it's natural to bring feelings into our parenting.

And one of the biggest things I learned in my journey into peaceful parenting is this idea that feelings are never in conflict. I'm allowed to ask my 16 year old son to put the dishes away with excitement or with a neutral feeling. And he's allowed to be angry that I asked him to do it and put them away while he's mad. I don't need him to be happy that I asked him to put the dishes away.

Feelings are never in conflict. He gets to have his own feelings and I get to have my own feelings. And they can be conflicting and coexist at the exact same time. This was totally mind blowing for me when I first learned it. As parents I want us all to recognize our feelings and our kids' feelings. I want us to learn to recognize what's going on in the situation and acknowledge the feelings and not ask our kids to shove them down, or push them away or worse yet, try to dominate them into shoving them or push them away. And I also ask you not to judge your kids feelings.

Remember, feelings are never in conflict. Peaceful parenting is created around the acceptance and understanding that there are lots of needs and lots of feelings. And each person is allowed, or entitled, or welcomed to have their own reaction and feelings to the situation. Through connection, children are guided to learn unconditional ways to express their feelings and needs, and to resolve their problems. It's a process of building emotional competency and emotional intelligence.

Ep #7: Why Do My Kids Storm, Meltdown, Cry, and Fight? (And What to Do About It)

Peaceful parenting is about moving away from controlling your child, and instead teaching your child how to learn self-control through a deep understanding of feelings and needs. I feel like I need to say that again. Peaceful parenting is about moving away from controlling your child, and instead teaching your child how to learn self-control, it's a process, it takes time. We have to learn self-control through an understanding of feelings and needs.

If I understand feelings and needs I understand where they come from. I understand how it drives my behavior. Then I can work on self-control over my lifetime. With peaceful parenting, love is unconditional and the relationship is more important than the immediate behavior. This concept drives us to treat our kids with respect and address the behavior as a process problem rather than a character problem.

When we're engaged in peaceful parenting we value the relationship more than the immediate behavior. And this drives us to approach our kids with the mindset of a process problem rather than a character problem.

Let me give you an example. Let's say you have a four year old and milk gets spilled often at the dinner table. And your four year old really, really, really wants a big boy cup like his older siblings. And tonight he spills milk again at the dinner table. So dominant parenting might look like you yell at your child. And you tell him he's clumsy, and he's too rough, and he's a bad boy when he spills the milk. That's talking about a character problem.

Now, with peaceful parenting you might be just as frustrated that there is milk spilled again. I mean, come on, who wants to clean up a spill of any kind in the middle of dinner, especially sticky milk? But let's say he spilled the milk, you calmly without yelling tell your son, "Hey, we need to work on developing your skill of not spilling. So let's make sure if you're going to

Ep #7: Why Do My Kids Storm, Meltdown, Cry, and Fight? (And What to Do About It)

have a big boy cup, you put it in front of your plate rather than beside your plate.” You’re parenting to care about the relationship more than the spilled milk.

So you’re resisting the urge to attack his character and instead you’re explaining how we simply have a process problem. I’ll give you another example. Let’s say your seven year old melts down often during dinner, loudly and without warning. It feels like she melts down all the time, all the time. And as a dominant parent your go to is to call her nasty or bad. “You’re being nasty. You’re being a bad child. I don’t know why you do this all the time. Stop it right now.”

Now, peaceful parenting, again we’re caring more about the relationship than we are the melting down, even though the melting down all the time is hard, and stressful, and you don’t know what to do. But you approach it from the problem or from the standpoint of; I understand it’s a process problem. And she’s having trouble regulating her emotions, rather than calling her names and telling her she’s a bad girl.

Okay, so I love math and I like putting feelings and needs into an equation. So if we were to put feelings and needs into an equation it would look like this. Needs plus feelings equals behavior. Let me say that again. Needs plus feelings equals behavior.

Let me ask you, do you know why your kids do what they do? When your kids are fighting, or your little one is hugging you, or someone is screaming, or slamming doors, or running around, or putting the dishes away when asked, or cooperating, or hanging on you, or calling, “Mom, mom, mom, mom.” Do you know why they’re doing what they do? Let me confess. I had no idea why my kid was doing what he was doing when he was little,

Ep #7: Why Do My Kids Storm, Meltdown, Cry, and Fight? (And What to Do About It)

whether it was melting down, or throwing his arms around me and hugging me as tight as he possibly could.

So you're not alone if you have no idea. And it's an interesting question to really dig into and ask yourself. So here's the news. All kids at all times are just trying to get their needs met. This is true of all humans. All humans at all times are just trying to get their needs met. It's the motivation for everything we do, our needs. Every human spends every minute of their day trying to get their needs met. So, if our needs are met as humans, our feelings are positive and our behavior is then good, or acceptable, or thumbs up, or pleasing.

And when our needs aren't met negative feelings bubble up. And when the feelings cup is full and the feelings start to spill over, bad behavior results like storming, melting down, crying, door slamming, fighting, yelling etc. I call all of that, storming. So let me share the formula again, our new math equation. Needs plus feelings equals behavior. Needs plus feelings equal behavior.

And what I want to dig into now are some of the core basic needs that your kids are trying to get met every single day. And hopefully you're going to have a light bulb moment as I'm talking about the core basic needs. So there are six core basic needs, there is five A's and a C. And I'm going to go through each one of them. The five A's are acceptance, attention, affection, appreciation and autonomy. Let's look at each one of them individually.

So the first one is acceptance, the need for acceptance is strong in humans, especially little ones. Do you see me as I am and still love me? Do I fit into this family? That's acceptance. And I just want to know that I'm accepted. Maybe dad and older brother are athletic and I'm not. Can you

Ep #7: Why Do My Kids Storm, Meltdown, Cry, and Fight? (And What to Do About It)

still accept me? Maybe I'm larger than everyone else. Do you accept me? Maybe I'm loud and clumsy. Maybe I'm shy and introverted. Maybe I melt down quickly and struggle to be happy and joyful. Do you accept me?

Your kids have a deep need to be accepted and to have that communicated, that level of acceptance communicated to them on a minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour, day-by-day basis. I don't care how old they are. Remember, all of this applies whether your kid is two or 22, acceptance. Do you accept me as I am? It's so good.

Alright, the second one is attention. And this, my friends is a big one, B.I.G. capital B.I.G. For many parents our kids' need for attention can be very triggering. For many of us the idea that our kids need s a lot of attention can conjure up judgments like she is so spoiled, he's so needy. It's never enough, he's constantly wanting attention. But here's the deal. Attention is a core basic need. And like any other core basic need, every kid has a different recipe.

Some kids need more attention than others. It's not good or bad it's just who they are and what they need. And when their needs are not being met, feelings bubble up. And when the feelings spill over here comes the behavior, i.e. the storming. So when your family attention might look at your little one saying, "Mummy, look at me, look at me, look at me."

Or maybe your child is playing independently and doing a great job and you get a phone call and suddenly they're climbing all over you. And you're like, "Why is he doing this? Why does he always wait until I get on the phone?" Well, his little brain recognized that you have attention to give out and he just wants some. As a side note, sometimes giving your kids attention is a matter of putting your phone down for five minutes and giving them your undivided attention.

Ep #7: Why Do My Kids Storm, Meltdown, Cry, and Fight? (And What to Do About It)

Or engaging in the car on the way to school to pick up older brother, talking to your little one the entire way there, giving them your undivided attention so their needs get met. It's funny because most kids don't need eight hours of non-stop attention. They need like five minutes every hour. I'm often talking with my clients about this, especially while many of us are online learning or at home all day with our kids during the pandemic.

Sometimes it's a three minute investment every hour in full on undivided attention to your child that is a complete game changer. Because remember, needs plus feelings equal behavior. So if I need a lot of attention and you're constantly helping me in small ways get my needs met then my negative feelings don't bubble over and I don't have to storm.

Also let me share with you, kids don't differentiate negative attention from positive attention, their brains just know they need attention. So if you're making dinner and I'm in the other room trying to get your attention as your child but you're ignoring me, and then I go over and I hit my sibling, or I take a toy out of her hand, or I call her a name, and that gets your attention.

You come in the living room, you set the dinner aside that you're making and come in the living room to give me attention. My brain goes ding, ding, ding, wow, that worked, that's a way to get my needs met. And now I rinse and repeat that. So be aware that your kids can't differentiate negative from positive attention. And often they're just working to get their needs met. So give them attention in a way that is acceptable that works for them and works for you so they don't have to resort to fighting, or yelling, or causing chaos to get your attention.

Okay, number three is appreciation. We all want to be appreciated and your children are no different. Appreciation is recognition and enjoyment of the good qualities of someone. Do you see me and appreciate me? Do I

Ep #7: Why Do My Kids Storm, Meltdown, Cry, and Fight? (And What to Do About It)

know this? Or are you always focused on my bad qualities? Am I always in trouble or irritating you? Are you always short with me or letting me know what I've done wrong? Do you easily praise me and share my successes and good qualities? That's appreciation.

Number four is autonomy. Autonomy is another one that can really trigger us as parents. Strong willed kids often need a lot of autonomy because they are experiential learners. They like to master it for themselves. This is a big need. Autonomy is a big need for many, many, many kids. Let's say you have a two year old that wants to put his shoes on by himself and he's not quite capable of it. He's watching his five year old sister put her shoes on with ease. And as he's trying to put his shoes on he's getting more, and more, and more frustrated.

And you come over and offer to help him and that results in a big giant storm. It's because he's aiming for autonomy, he wants to do it himself. So what you might do is tell him, "Wow, you did a really great job getting your feet in those shoes. You do that so well on your own, oh my goodness, that's so great." Autonomy, make sure you're pointing out where your child has been successful doing it himself, lots of praise. Maybe he put the napkins on the table at dinner tonight, "Oh my goodness, you did such a great job doing that job yourself."

As I've mentioned before, and as many of you know, I have a 16 year old son and autonomy is a big, big, big need for him. He does not like to ask for help for anything, anything. He's taking chemistry this year and his dad is a chemist. And the other day I said to my son, "How's chemistry going?" He's like, "Mom, there's this concept I really don't understand." And I said, "You know, your dad's a chemist, you could ask him." He looked at me and he goes, "Mom, you know that's not how I operate. I don't ask people for help. I don't like to ask for help. I like to do it myself."

Ep #7: Why Do My Kids Storm, Meltdown, Cry, and Fight? (And What to Do About It)

I'm like, "Oh yeah, you like a lot of autonomy." He's like, "Yes, definitely." So autonomy is one that often triggers us as parents. It would be easy for me to get frustrated that my son needs help and he won't ask for it. But I really understand what drives him and I respect his need for autonomy. So I'm often looking for ways to get him the help he needs whilst still allowing him to feel autonomous. Autonomy is a big one and for a lot of parents it can be a frustrating need for our kids but it's a core basic need.

And the last A is affection. Do I feel love in my home? Do I feel love from my parents? Do I know that I am loved? Do I feel loved? Do I experience the affection of love?

And then the C is, this is not going to be any surprise to many of you, is connection. Do I feel seen, heard and valued? I've talked a lot about connection in previous episodes. Our children have a strong drive to feel, that's the operative word here, feel seen, heard and valued. So remember, when our needs aren't met, negative feelings bubble up. And when the feelings cup is full and it spills over, behavior, which I call storming, results, light bulb moment for you?

Let me say it this way, underneath all storming, all storming is unmet feelings and needs. Think about this, when our needs as adults are being met, we're not storming. We're not frustrated. When you get to the airport and the plane leaves on time and everybody's happy, remember when we used to travel?

When you get to the airport and you whizz through security and your plane is leaving on time, and the seat next to you is open and everything's humming along just fine, you're not storming. You're not feeling frustrated, and upset, and wanting to yell at someone, because your needs are being met.

Ep #7: Why Do My Kids Storm, Meltdown, Cry, and Fight? (And What to Do About It)

Now, security takes forever, you're afraid you're going to miss your flight, you get to the gate and it's delayed. I mean all bets are off at that point because your needs are not being met, negative feelings are created. When the cup spills over the storming happens. I think there's no better place in the world to see the example of needs plus feelings equal behavior than the airport.

Again if you're at the airport and you're about to go on your honeymoon and you just had the most amazing wedding the day before. And you can't wait to get to that tropical location, needs are met, feelings are good, the behavior is acceptable.

Maybe you're under the gun to get to an important presentation and you knew you should have booked the morning flight, the early, early, early morning flight but you decided not to. And as a result you're cutting it really close. And then they announce there's going to be a 20 minute delay due to takeoff, needs plus feelings equal behavior. Underneath all storming whether it's you or your kids, are unmet feelings and needs. And our job as parents is to get curious, not furious.

It's to play detective and wonder when the storming comes what do my kids need? Do they need affection? Do they need attention? Do they need appreciation? Do they need autonomy? Do they need connection? What do they need? I like to think about this as scuba diving versus snorkeling. When you're snorkeling you're staying at the surface, you can't go deep because you've got the tube and you need to breathe, and you've got to just keep your face right at the surface of the water. As a parent most of us are snorkeling. We're focusing on the storming.

What I want you to do; what I invite you to do is become a scuba diver. Go underneath the behavior to the feelings and needs. Go down, dive deep

Ep #7: Why Do My Kids Storm, Meltdown, Cry, and Fight? (And What to Do About It)

down and wonder, what are the unmet needs here? What does my child need? Now, please understand, I'm not talking about wants like ice-cream for breakfast or unlimited gaming time, those are wants. I'm talking about core basic needs. And I don't think it's your job to meet every one of your kids' needs, particularly as they start to get older and older. That's not at all what I'm suggesting.

As I said earlier, peaceful parenting is about moving away from controlling your child and instead teaching your child how to learn their own self-control through an understanding of feelings and needs. So if you're talking with them, if you're guiding them, if you're parenting them as a scuba diver around feelings and needs instead of being a snorkeler and always focusing on the behavior. They will learn self-control because they will understand feelings plus needs equals behavior. That teaches self-control and self-regulation.

When we understand as the parents that all kids at all times are trying to get their needs met, our children are guided to learn unconditional ways to express their feelings and needs, acceptable ways to express their feelings and needs and to resolve their problems. It's a process of building emotional intelligence.

Okay, hopefully I've just totally blown your mind because again I didn't know any of this before I learned it. I don't know what I thought, but it certainly wasn't this. And as soon as I learned feelings plus needs equal behavior it was a complete game changer in my parenting, complete game changer. And I want that for you too.

So I want to give you some homework this week. I want to invite you to observe this week, your child's feelings and needs. Go underneath the behavior. Use the same, get curious not furious, hear me in your head

Ep #7: Why Do My Kids Storm, Meltdown, Cry, and Fight? (And What to Do About It)

inviting you to get curious not furious. Ask questions. Resist the urge to snorkel and become a scuba diver.

When your child is storming, wonder what they're feeling right now. Ask yourself, what might my child be feeling? What might he or she be needing? Do they need some attention? Does my teenager need some appreciation? Do they need to know I believe in them? Do they need to know I accept them? Do they need to know I appreciate them? Do they need to know I understand what they're struggling with? Do they need to feel connection? Remember the basic core needs.

Ask yourself, could my child be needing one of those? Do they need attention? Do they need acceptance? Do they need autonomy? Do they need affection? Do they need to feel connected? Start to look and see, look underneath the behavior and really ask yourself what might they be needing? And ask them, start a conversation about it. Help them understand feelings plus needs equal behavior.

Can you take that assignment? Can you commit to doing that, trying it for one week and see what happens? Understanding that needs plus feelings equal behavior is a total game changer, I promise.

Okay, until next time, I'm wishing us all peaceful parenting.

To celebrate the launch of the *Real World Peaceful Parenting* podcast, I'm going to be giving away a \$50 gift card to one of my many Peaceful Parent courses. I'm going to be giving away one gift card to 10 lucky listeners who subscribe, rate, and review the show on Apple podcasts. It doesn't have to be a five-star review, although I sure hope you loved the show. I want your honest feedback so I can create an awesome show that provides tons of value.

[Real World Peaceful Parenting](#) with Lisa Smith

Ep #7: Why Do My Kids Storm, Meltdown, Cry, and Fight? (And What to Do About It)

Visit www.thepeacefulparent.com/podcastlaunch to learn more about the contest and how to enter. That's www.thepeacefulparent.com/podcastlaunch. I'll be announcing the winners on the show in an upcoming episode. So stay tuned.

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.