

**Ep #9: Are You Building Bridges with Your Strong-Willed Child or Burning Them? with Susan Hyatt**



**Full Episode Transcript**

With Your Host  
**Lisa Smith**

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## **Ep #9: Are You Building Bridges with Your Strong-Willed Child or Burning Them? with Susan Hyatt**

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.

Lisa: Welcome. Welcome. Welcome everybody. Welcome to today's podcast. Today's episode of *Real World Peaceful Parenting*. I was up at the crack of dawn this morning. I washed my hair. I am just so excited because we have a very special, very special guest. I've got to get a Kleenex because I'm probably going to tear up here. We've got a very special guest today. Today I welcome my friend, my mentor, my sister Susan Hyatt. Susan is an example of what is possible in the world. Susan, I can't say thank you enough for being here.

Susan: Oh my gosh. You're going to make me cry.

Lisa: Well, I have to.

Susan: Thank you for having me here. I'm so delighted to be on this podcast.

Lisa: It's so exciting. Susan is my first guest, and this is not by accident. I have had Susan's guest appearance planned for a really long time in my mind. It's because...Well, there's many reasons. Susan has a long list of accomplishments. She has a very popular TED Talk, which I highly recommend. She's been on national TV and magazines. I want to tell you about Susan through my eyes. Susan is a woman through women. I think that's like the highest accomplishment. She champions all things for women and girls. Men too, but women and girls. She's truly a woman for women.

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She has been, as I mentioned, a mentor of mine for a long time. She's also the mom of a couple strong-willed kids. Full contact sport kind. She's a great mom. It's not because of their accomplishments. Because as y'all know, I don't measure parenting by accomplishments, right. Our kids are responsible for their accomplishments. Susan's a great mom because she accepts her kids. She works on helping them find their feelings and needs. She shows up for them.

She's been on her own journey in her parenting along the way. I've had the pleasure of sort of having a backseat, if you will, to some of it as we've travelled around the world and shared stories. We both have boys that I think we both call full contact sport. So Susan's also on the forefront of teaching women and girls to love themselves. I sit here today telling y'all that I love myself fully. It's really due to a lot of the work that I did with Susan. If you want to know how to love yourself, you get on her email list. That's all I've got to say.

So let's continue. Susan's the author of a book, a best selling book *Bare*. It's a seven week program to transform your body, get more energy, feel amazing, and become the bravest, most unstoppable version of yourself. Her book's inspired thousands of women to stop shrinking their bodies and start expanding their lives. Susan has a companion book for young girls called *Bold* coming out in the near future. I for one, God I can't wait for the book to hit the stands. I'm already thinking about all the conversations I can have with mothers of daughters around that book. So we'll certainly be staying tuned for that.

As I mentioned, Susan's had a hand in many of my big audacious goals that I've reached for myself in my life. This podcast is no exception. So she believed in me well before I believed in myself. We sat in a tearoom in Killarney, Ireland a few years ago and brainstormed around this podcast.

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She looked me in the eye, and she said with 100% conviction, “Lisa, you can do this.” I knew in that moment it would happen for me. It took a little longer for me than I thought. Susan, thank you and welcome.

Susan: Oh for God’s sake. Now I’m going to cry. Oh my God. You had me at a woman for women. I’m like I feel so seen. I actually was just thinking about that. Like I’m putting together a new speaker’s page and trying to come up with topics for corporate. I was like I just want to talk to the women. Like your female leadership deserves better. I am. I’ve always been a girl’s girl. Like give me my sisters. There’s enough help in the world for our boys. Although both our boys have needed all the help they could get from us for sure. Thank you for seeing me.

Lisa: You should put that on your page. A woman for women.

Susan: I’m going to. I’m going to.

Lisa: All yours. All yours. So one of the things you talk about a lot is how girl’s confidence drops between the ages of eight and 14. I think you even have a statistic, which was alarming. That it drops 30% during those years. Can you shed some light on that for us?

Susan: Yeah, sure. It is an alarming statistic. When you think about—This is compared to their male counterparts. So it drops 30% below the average male. A lot of the research indicates that this is because of messaging from family of origin, culture at large. That includes teachers and members of authority, coaches. It’s not because parents, teachers, and coaches are sitting around thinking like, “How can we make our girls feel awful about themselves?”

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It's because the patriarchy is in the air that we breathe. It's in everything. It's in the systems that we have. So primarily for girls, the measurement of success has always been around beauty and weight. So diet culture starts really young and permeates everything that we do. So girls are constantly given the message that what they should be concerned with is measuring how they stack up beauty wise and size wise. That, of course, causes their confidence to suffer. They are much less likely to ask questions, raise their hands, go for leadership positions. They're spending their precious capacity on dieting and figuring out how they can shrink themselves literally.

Lisa: Yeah. I had a front row seat to that for my childhood. Spent a lot of years unravelling all that what I now call nonsense that was going on.

Susan: Yeah. I mean the average age a girl starts dieting is eight years old. That's primarily the reason why I decided to write *Bold*. Because I thought well, if we can get in front of this. I surely love working with women like you, but what if we could get in front of it and reach girls at that age when they're starting to compare their thighs to their best friend. If they're on the swim team, scared to put their bathing suit on. All those things. If we can reach them sooner and say, "Hey, guess what. What your coach is telling you about how much you should weigh is nonsense." As you said.

Lisa: Yes. It makes me think of the work I often talk with parents about, which is our voice becomes their inner voice. So it requires us to be mindful of what we're focusing on. So often we spend so much of our time as parents focusing on what our kids are not doing right or should stop doing. Stop doing that. Get your shoes on. Put your clothes away. Unpack your backpack. I asked you to put the dishes away. We also need to focus on what they should be doing. Realize that we become their inner voice.

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Susan: It's so true. So when you think about their confidence, girl's confidence plummeting 30%, it's because of that. Because they start to absorb. I know I did. I didn't question my older sister. I didn't question people in authority who were like, "Woo, boy. You sure packed it on over Christmas break." I didn't question why they were saying it or if it was relevant to me. I just absorbed it and started saying it to myself. That's what girls are doing.

Lisa: Yeah. I can relate to that because my family of origin who I know meant well, there was constant talk about how my physical body presented itself. It was never measured up. It never crossed the finish line. I had an incredible light me and an energy and a being. I was smart and I had all these other talents. But all of our conversation narrowed back to how my body was presenting itself and how it wasn't measuring up. For many years, no matter how successful I was it all came back to have I accomplished the right body weight yet? Does the scale what it's supposed to say? Does it look like it's supposed to look? Yeah.

Susan: Yeah. I mean, when you think about how smart we are and how talented we are and how gifted we all are at so many different things. It's a moving shell game. So how you're supposed to look, the appeal a woman is supposed to have, and the standard of beauty is an ever shifting shell game. So it's an unattainable thing. So they can't come for your intellect and they can't come from what's real. So let's go for something made up as the standard of beauty.

Lisa: Yeah. All right. Pivoting off that, let's talk about acceptance. So I talk a lot about the core need of acceptance. I've created a math formula because I love me some math. My formula is feelings plus needs equal behavior. So if our needs are met, our feelings are good, we have good or acceptable behavior. If we have unmet needs, that creates a lot of feelings.

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When they bubble over, there's unacceptable bad behavior. I don't think any kids have bad behavior, but I know a lot of people like to focus on bad behavior. I work with parents to become scuba divers. Scuba down to the feelings and needs rather than snorkeling at the top with the behavior.

Susan: That's good.

Lisa: We're creating a generation of scuba divers. So one of the core basic needs of humans is acceptance. Do I fit in? Do you accept me as I am? The need for acceptance is strong in humans, particularly littles and teenagers and young adults. Do you see me as I am and still love me? Do I fit into this family? If my body is larger than everybody else's, do I feel as accepted as everybody else in the family?

If I present differently. Maybe I like to dress up and wear dresses. Maybe I am a girl who only likes to wear pants. Maybe I don't want to wear blue jeans. Maybe dad and brother are athletic and I'm not. Do you accept me? Maybe I'm loud and clumsy. That was certainly my story. Maybe I'm shy and introverted. Maybe I melt down quickly and struggle to find joy. Do you accept me?

So I feel like an area where our work really intersects Susan. I feel like you are the queen of acceptance. I wanted to just talk about how that showed up for you as a parent. How that shows up in your work, and what your truths are on acceptance.

Susan: Everything you just said was so beautiful. Yeah, I mean I would agree. I think that when my children—primarily Ryan who you mentioned who's now 22. But I mean when he was young and full of feelings and unmet needs, as you would put it, and was getting kicked out of parochial school basically. Sister Carlene had me on speed dial. It really was about



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this kid who was differently wired, full of energy, couldn't sit still, bored. His needs were not being met because he was bored out of his mind in this classroom. It was not the right structure for him.

It really was a journey of accepting that this is not a kid that is going to sit politely in class with his hands folded and be delighted during story time. Like accepting this kid that, like you said, would meltdown, would just have a different way of being than me. I was an A student who thrived in a classroom setting. So could I learn as a mother to accept a child who was the opposite of how I was growing up.

It was not until...I love that saying let go or be dragged. I was getting drug all over the place. It was not until I surrendered and started to ask different questions of myself and started to let go, as you're describing, snorkeling, and started to really consider what does this kid need to thrive versus how can I get this kid to comply?

Lisa: Yes because that's dominant parenting. I'm going to control you. I'm going to use my power to come over you, and I'm going to control you to get the outcome I want.

Susan: Boy oh boy did that not work.

Lisa: Yeah. That does not work with strong willed kids. Because the number one thing they need to feel is in control. The number one way they feel in control is to give them choices. Dominant parenting is the antithesis of choices. You will do this. You will go to class tomorrow and you will sit at the desk. You will put your hands up on the desk and smile or else.

Susan: Yep. I tried that. Failed miserably with that.



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Lisa: What I teach, what I coach, what I espouse is peaceful parenting. Which is where we use our power. We're still the peaceful leaders of the household. This is what I saw you model for so many years, the peaceful leader of the household. We use our power to come along side our child. So I don't know what this looks like because I wasn't this kid but let me accept you as you are. Together let's figure out what works. I think that's really what I watched you do with Ryan, right?

Susan: Totally. I mean it was the only way to survive, quite frankly. For either one of us to survive. I had to relearn that over and over and over again. Because as they get older, the stakes get higher. I noticed I would revert back to trying to be a dominant parent when I thought like well okay. Now we're talking about graduating from high school. Like fill in the blank of whatever.

Every single time I had to relearn saying things like, "You know what? If you don't want to graduate, that is absolutely your choice." Every time I would do that, he would then make a better choice. He would do things like a whole year's worth of English in a weekend so that he could get the credits he needed to graduate. I have so many crazy stories. Now, as a result, he's going to college and selling real estate. I don't know if you know this Lisa. He is enrolled in my life coach training university.

Lisa: I saw that. I saw that and I did a double take.

Susan: He's like in class on Zoom participating with me teaching. This was a kid who would put his forehead on the kitchen table, so he didn't have to look at me. Now he's like, "My mom is the bomb. Look at my mom." It's a real testament to what you're teaching, which is let go or be dragged. You'd better learn how to peacefully lead, or you are not getting out of this well.

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Lisa: I imagine he feels incredibly accepted at 22 by himself because that's what was modeled in the home. We may not like what you're doing. So to be clear, I'm going to put some words in your mouth here. Susan's not espousing permissive parenting, which we talked about in a previous episode. Which is where we allow the child to use their power to come over us. It's we're the leaders and we're coming alongside them. You accepted his style, his quirks, his behavior, his inability to traditionally learn in a way that now, I'm guessing, has him accepting himself. And his circle of people is a body of work of acceptance as well.

Susan: Yes absolutely. I would say he also feels very free to do it differently. When he decided to change schools and change majors and all these things, I was just very much like okay. Here's some things that I think you should consider, but ultimately, it's your choice. I was having to coach Scott, my husband. Like listen. All of this is forward movement. You have to keep your eye on is this positive forward movement. Even if it doesn't look like this linear path that we took where we started college here and we graduated college here.

So like I said, at every age there's a different way to embody this. So we actually didn't think it was a good idea for him to try to sell residential real estate, which is a very difficult industry that I was in before. But he wanted to do it while he was also going to school. You know what? He's killing it. Scott was like, "Oh he's not going to finish school or he's going to be too busy." That hasn't proven to be the case.

Lisa: I love that.

Susan: I know. It's really fascinating to watch people thrive when you just let them be who they are.

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Lisa: I want to talk about this too Susan because Susan also has a daughter who is a much more traditional, let's say, child.

Susan: Yeah.

Lisa: Traditional learner. Completely different personality. She's found acceptance in your family as well by being a more traditional learner. I'm sure she feels as accepted for her style as Ryan. Can you speak to that?

Susan: Yeah. So Cora is also very strong willed. However, she's an academic. So she loves the school setting, and she really shines academically. So I always as a parent just wanted to feed whatever gave them energy and whatever they were interested in. I didn't really care what it was. So she's a musician and an artist and a writer. But she's also very interested in learning languages and all sorts of things.

I will say what she does. Even though she's a traditional learner and she got scholarships. Any parent would feel very proud of those academic accolades and accomplishments, but she wants to get an MFA. She has a double major in German and English and writes poetry. It drives her father crazy. He's like, "How's she gonna make any money?" I'm like she's already making money. People are paying her for her poetry.

It's sort of, again, even though she is a traditional learner, she still wants to do all kinds of stuff with her degree and for a living. I mean she and her father argue about politics and economics and world affairs and I love it. But she definitely feels accepted that she can express her views that are very different than his, and he still loves her unconditionally.

Lisa: Yeah. And accepted that she can find her own way in the world, right.

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Susan: Yeah, absolutely.

Lisa: She's not going to state school majoring in accounting. Which there's nothing wrong with if that's your passion.

Susan: Not at all if that's your passion. Right.

Lisa: She's blazing her own trail. That comes from acceptance of how I present who I am. So what advice would you have for parents? Considering you're a champion of all women and children and acceptance as we are. What advice would you have for someone who's had a lightbulb moment and is like, "Okay, how do I pivot towards accepting my kids as they present?"

Susan: I would say first you have to question what you believe they should be doing. You really have to question whether or not you're imposing what you think is the right path or your values that may or may not be right for them. To really think about am I...Something I think consistently, and I started thinking about this when they were kids. Am I building a bridge or burning a bridge here? It's so much of my early on behavior when I was trying to control my children, it was like slowly burning this bridge. What you want to make sure you're doing is always building this bridge to communication.

I mean when they were in middle and high school, they didn't...It wasn't like they were sitting in my lap and feeding me cherries and they thought I was the best. They were moody teenagers just like all of them. I was consistently like how can I strengthen this? How can I build this bridge? How can I, as a mom, just celebrate who they are instead of who I thought they should be?

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Who I thought my children should be was so basic compared to the amazing human beings that they are. I would have missed that. If I had successfully controlled them, they would be like Target instead of Saks Fifth Avenue. Like the boxes we try to put these kids in are so boring. Let them. Let them explore and be who they are.

Lisa: I love that. Celebrate who they are, not who I wanted them to be. I talk all the time about letting go of being attached to the outcome. You can have goals for your kids. Of course. We do. We want great things for our children. Being attached to the outcome is so painful. Malcolm is 16, and I can just see how being attached to the outcome at this point. The white knuckling and the pain that that would cause. Because things take right turns and left turns. Mistakes happen. They get new ideas popped into their head.

Having said all of that, I can see with my son the foundation that I've laid by caring for so many years about his feelings and needs. The way we connect is around feelings and needs and not behavior. Now, sometimes we have to talk about behavior. Because he's 16. Remember those days? You feel for me?

Susan: Oh I do. I remember the truck in the ditch. I have more stories.

Lisa: Oh yeah. We've had a couple things happen recently that, you know. But it all comes back to scuba diving down to what drove that behavior? What were the feelings and needs? What were the feelings and needs? So I just love that Susan. I love to celebrate who they are. Because, like you said, you're delighted the destination this is pulling into.

Susan: It's like let yourself be fascinated about the human beings they're becoming.

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Lisa: Yes.

Susan: I look at Scott all the time and I'm like remember when. Like Cora, we thought she was going to be this girly girl—which there's nothing wrong with that—but this girly girl cheerleader. She couldn't be the furthest thing from that. It's just like let yourself be amazed at how they express themselves.

Lisa: Yes. I have a story I can share like that. So when I was younger, I was very social. Very extroverted. I couldn't get out of the house on a Friday/Saturday night fast enough. I mean if I had to stay in for some reason, my FOMO kicked in big time. I remember like in high school at one point I had a fever. I hid it from my family because I was not going to stay home on a Friday night.

Susan: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Lisa: You know? My son has not...He's 16. He has a car. He very rarely goes out. He's a homebody. He's a little bit like my husband. He's introverted. My husband and I have been worried. He's not getting out. He's not making any friends. So my son and I had a conversation about it recently.

He told me, "You know Mom, I'm just not really excited about some of the things the kids are doing. I want to avoid temptations. I would just rather stay home and game online and be with my friends." He said, "I like my house. I don't need to go out." It was such a shift for me. Because I was so convinced that he was missing out on things and that something was going wrong here. With just this small shift I was like oh. Do you need me to bring you brownies and fresh water?

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Susan: JOMO. Joy of missing out.

Lisa: I feel like I won the lottery here, you know. Yes. The joy of missing out instead of the FOMO. Again, I'm open to who he is. I don't want to push him out the door if that's not what his heart desires.

Susan: No, friend, because let me tell you something. You remember the stories about me having a tracker on Ryan's car because he was the kid stirring up all of the stuff your kid's trying to stay away from. So it's like let him enjoy being a homebody.

Lisa: Yes. Yes, yes. Because when you were talking about Cora being a cheerleader. Because Cora's amazing. She's going to change the world. I'm so glad you didn't force her into cheerleading.

Susan: I mean let me tell you. I have flashbacks of remembering when they would have these talent contests in elementary school, like fourth, fifth, sixth grade. The stuff she would come up to do instead of like being in the group dance. It's just funny to be now that I know her as a 20 year old that she was always going to do her own thing.

Lisa: Yeah, that's beautiful. I mean I really do believe, and this is getting a little woo-woo maybe. I really do believe that our children are their own souls. They come to earth to have their own experience. We're blessed to guide their soul for X amount of years. They're not ours to own. They're not our property. They're not our trophy. They pick us to come and have this experience, but they're their own souls.

Susan: Yeah, they really are. You never know what their journey is. Because we're only on it for a small amount of time. I mean hopefully a long time, but we're only, you know. When they leave the house, I mean I



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joke about it. I was like Ryan's never coming back. He's over here everyday Lisa. Soaking up my color printer ink and stealing my stamps and my energy drinks. But he has his own apartment.

Lisa: And dropping his dog off for you to babysit, right.

Susan: Right. Dropping his dog off to babysit. We never know what they're supposed to experience. It may be very contrary to our plans.

Lisa: Amen. Amen. Okay. Susan, that's great. Tell me. I want to ask you. Give us a couple of takeaways of positive habits we can bring in the home to boost our kid's self-esteem.

Susan: Okay. Number one, you've got to learn to like yourself. Our kids learn so much from observing us. So if you are tearing your own self down through the words that you speak and the way that you treat yourself, your children absorb that and think that that's how life is or how one should treat oneself. So especially moms. The number one thing is get right with yourself. Learn how to talk to your own self like you are a beloved child. That is hands down.

Lisa: I couldn't agree more. I say all the time our kids don't learn through what we say. They learn through what we do. Modeling is the most powerful tool we have as a parent. We're modeling all the time. Kids don't have a filter right from wrong. They just learn in this family, we handle stress by yelling or by punishing or by taking a break until we're regulated. They don't have a filter of that's right or wrong. They just say, "This is what the Hyatt family does." So I love that. Yeah, get right with yourself. Treat yourself like a beloved child.

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Susan: That's probably my number one tip. Then my number two tip is along those lines. Move yourself. Sweat. If you want to be in the right frame of mind to consistently parent peacefully, we are creatures that are designed to move. We store emotions in our bodies. If we aren't regularly moving to release that, that's going to make us sluggish and slow and sick. I can tell you that I was a non-exerciser. The thing that got me to move was realizing that Ryan's energy was so big that if I was going to go toe-to-toe, I better bring it. The only way I was going to have enough energy to keep up was to take care of myself in that way.

Lisa: I love that. I love that. I talk all the time. Motion changes emotion. Self-regulation, which again we have to model regulation for our kids before they learn it. It's movement creates regulation. So I love that. I love that. I also really loved you said build the bridge. Don't tear the bridge down. Such a great metaphor.

Susan: Are you building or burning it? Listen. I still have moments where I'm like oh I just took a torch to that bridge. I better do some repair work here.

Lisa: Yes. I love that you said that. Thank you for saying that because people, yeah. The *Real World Peaceful Parenting* community, our hashtag is progress, not perfection. Nobody's a perfect parent. Nobody gets it right. I don't care how enlightened. I don't care how many followers. I don't care how much. It's all about we're all going to lose our shiz once in a while. All of us. I mean that's why there's no cameras here at the peaceful parent.

Susan: There's no documentary happening.

Lisa: Right. There will be no reality show here. Although, I think the Hyatt Riot reality show would have been fun. We're all going to lose it. So then

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it's repair and recovery. Repair and recovery. Yeah, I burnt that bridge down. Let me go build it back up. All bridges can be rebuilt.

Susan: Yeah, yeah.

Lisa: Beautiful. Beautiful. Susan, thank you so, so, so much. This was amazing. I know everybody listening is like, "Wow. What just happened there?"

Susan: Who is this lady? And who is this Ryan? No, thank you so much for having me. Never did I ever think I would be invited on a podcast to talk about parenting "success". So I'm honored to be here.

Lisa: You're an amazing parent. So thank you. And an amazing leader. I really do love you. So thanks for taking the time. I'm honored that you're my first guest.

Susan: I'm honored. Thank you.

Lisa: All right everybody. I hope you loved that as much as I did. Again, Susan Hyatt. Susan tell us where we can find you in case people want to grab a copy of bold or watch your TED Talk or learn more about you.

Susan: Sure. My hub is shyatt.com. From that URL, you can find the books, the TEDx, the social media, the podcast, all those things.

Lisa: Yeah. Please visit shyatt.com. When you get there, be ready. Because it is like a joyride. There's a lot going on over there. There's something for everybody. You're going to love it. So enjoy that. All right everybody. It was fantastic being with you today. Until we meet again, I'm wishing us all peaceful parenting.

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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 that I can create an awesome show that provides tons of value.

Visit [www.thepeacefulparent.com/podcastlaunch](http://www.thepeacefulparent.com/podcastlaunch) to learn more about the contest and how to enter. That's [www.thepeacefulparent.com/podcastlaunch](http://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](http://thepeacefulparent.com). See you soon.