

**Ep #10: Why Failures Are a Gift
with Learning Resource Expert Kristin Venberg**



Full Episode Transcript

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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.

Lisa: Welcome, welcome, welcome everyone, welcome to today's episode. Oh my goodness, I am so excited to bring this topic, this information, this conversation to you today. We have the privilege of having a very special guest today, Kristin Venberg is here. Kristin is someone who is near and dear to my heart because she has a massive influence on my strong-willed full contact sports son.

And in working with Kristin I realize that there is an opportunity to bring you an incredibly robust conversation around failures, failures is a gift, failures for our kids, failures for us, failures as a family and the growth that can come from that. I love the saying, "Conflict is growth trying to happen." So today we're going to say failures are growth trying to happen.

So let me tell you a little bit about Kristin. I'm sure I'm only going to hit the top of the iceberg. But Kristin is the Learning Resource Coordinator at an incredible school called Brophy College Prep. It's located in Phoenix, Arizona. And it is an all boys' Jesuit college preparatory school, which is a very hard word for me to say. So I usually call it Brophy Prep.

Brophy is a school that's been around for a really long time and the expectation when you attend the school is that you're going to go to college. So all forward progress, all movement there is with the intention of preparing these young men for college and also preparing them to be men for others.

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And Kristin is the Learning Resource Coordinator there. She also teaches American history. And her past life includes being a school administrator at a public school in Phoenix, Arizona. And she has a master's of education in educational leadership. And she is in the process of completing a certification in inclusion education and special education. So I mean how excited are you right now listening to this? This woman, this teacher, this person comes with a wealth of knowledge and I cannot wait to dig in and talk about failure.

So, Kristin, welcome, thank you so much for being here.

Kristin: Thank you Lisa for having me. I'm so excited about this conversation today because it's one of my favorite conversations to have with parents and with students. That failure is truly a gift. It is not something that we need to look at as something wrong with us or something bad. It's a great opportunity to grow.

Lisa: In our house we say that you're either winning or you're learning. This is a recent addition in the last five years because when my son was in junior high, I was horrified to figure out that I had been teaching him a fixed mindset instead of a growth mindset, the work of Carol Dweck. And I realized that we literally were teaching our kid that either won or lost. And the shift from winning to learning, just that mindset shift has been transformational in our family. Can you speak to that?

Kristin: Yeah. So actually that is a great – I would love to speak about that because it actually reminds me of something else. In addition to the growth mindset there's another mindset where people look at abundance or scarcity. And our world and everything in it is abundance.

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And so there's so many opportunities that we can have, and I don't want people or our own children to look at something and think that they have to give up something or it's not going to work out for them. Because they go into a scarcity mentality versus having that opportunity to realize it is an opportunity for growth.

So the Chinese have always been very good at coming up with symbols that represent different things. And the Chinese symbol for crisis is a combination of two symbols, danger and opportunity. And it's one of my favorites to go back to because when we are in crisis, when something happens, when we feel that we're failing it should not be that failure mindset.

It should be that opportunity mindset where we can learn from that, learn from the situation and move forward better equipped, with more knowledge, with better ideas. And a plan as to how to do well moving forward so we don't repeat what we did before that didn't end up how we wanted it to end up.

Lisa: I love that, crisis is danger plus opportunity. I feel like that's a future tattoo for somebody right there, maybe my son. Okay, let's talk about how to move forward. So, Kristin as someone who spends the majority of your day with teenage boys, when someone that you work with has made a mistake, what's step one in moving forward after the mistake?

Kristin: I think step one in moving forward is to own it first. A student or any of us needs to understand that actions have consequences. It's a law of nature. Actions equal consequences. Sometimes those consequences are awesome and good, sometimes they are not that. But a student needs to realize if there is failure what is their part in that failure. And failures to me are great lessons.

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The second step is to solve the problem by addressing the problem. What happened? Why did it happen? And you kind of go backwards in time to say, "Okay, we're sitting here today, what got us here?" Why are you failing your class? Is it you don't understand the material? Is it you haven't turned in your homework? Is it you don't score well on tests? Instead of just throwing up your hand saying, "I can't do it." Well, let's figure out how we go to the failing grade.

From there we can address the problem. If it's a homework completion issue we can work on time management. We can work on different ways to structure your day so you get your homework completed. If it's I don't test well, then let's work on some study strategies and skills, and certain, you know, and I'm putting this in the context of a school setting. Then we'll attack that aspect of it. If it's I don't understand, we'll get you a tutor. So that's an easy way to address a failing grade.

Maybe it's I'm having a fight with someone and we're no longer friends. Okay, what happened? Go backwards and you figure out, to solve the problem, you have to address the problem and why you got there. But everything is manageable and teaching your child that it's okay. The best thing about failure is it's a great lesson in critical thinking and understanding connections and helping your child make those connections.

So I'm going to go a little scientific on you here. The human brain evolves over time, really from the back forward. So if you think of the back of your neck and that the back part of your neck, that is your fight or flight part of the brain. That is highly evolved as a baby. It's the reason we're alive as a species because we know in danger situations we can do that fight or flight.

It takes a long time to get that frontal lobe; the front part of your brain is that critical thinking, the executive functioning, the understanding that actions

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have consequences. That really doesn't evolve until someone's around 22 years old. And sadly in boys, males it tends to evolve a little bit slower.

So when I was a principal at a school and I had a student who got in trouble and they're sitting across from my desk and I ask, "What were you thinking when you did whatever got you in trouble?" And they're looking at you with those deer in the headlight eyes because they have no idea what they were thinking. And I can't get mad at them because they truly have no idea why they were thinking that. Their frontal lobe just isn't making those connections.

So when our sons or daughters, and when our children make mistakes we need to help them and process through with them those questions, let's solve it. Let's solve it together. Your child knowing that you are there to walk alongside them, that you aren't, you know, you may be disappointed at them, that absolutely happens from the choice they made. But we're going to get through this together.

And when you can walk alongside your child and help them solve and see those connections it helps that frontal lobe of their brain start firing off synapses and making those connections. That the next time they're in that situation they can go back to muscle memory or brain memory and go, "Wait, okay, this equals this and I need to do this instead."

If we as parents solve the issue for them and the child never has the opportunity to process through and make those connections, we are actually stunting their growth, physically stunting their growth. Their brain is not going to rise to the occasion the next time because we haven't taught it how to make those connections. That's why I'm so excited about failures, because failures allow us the opportunity to really break down what happened and own it, and figure it out and problem solve.

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And problem solving is what gets us through the rest of our life. We will constantly be thrown problems, whenever you're driving on the road, whether you're at work, whether you're a parent. There's always situations that come up and we need to be quick to go, "This equals this, this is what's happening. This is how I'm going to solve it." So if we help our children through that then we aren't helping them in the long run. And as parents all we want is for them to be productive wonderful citizens in the long run.

Lisa: Yes. Yes to everything. And I have tingles right now. I am so excited about everything you said. I don't even know where to go next because I've so many notes on my paper here. Alright, so I really love how you're talking us through when we help our child make those connections we're developing their brain. We're turning them into professional problem solvers. And when we do it for them we're preventing them from becoming professional problem solvers.

Now, let's talk about the other side. If our child makes a mistake and we punish them, which I'm not a fan of because punishments are often; almost always dare I say, coming from a place of fear and anger as the parent. But I also think the problem with punishing particularly strong-willed kids is twofold. One, they get sidetracked on the punishment and the whole original connection you're trying to make gets lost. You've taken away the Xbox for a month, they're so angry about that that the lesson of not turning in your homework, you can't even get to that conversation.

And then the other thing I'd like to hear your thoughts on is when we punish our kids, dominate them, punish them, we're telling them that there's a character problem instead of just a process problem.

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Kristin: Yeah, absolutely. The one thing I was thinking of when you were saying that. I remember talking with a parent because their child was using their iPhone inappropriately. I can't even remember why but I think it was Snapchat or Instagram but regardless, the parent's like, "That's it. I'm taking away the phone, they can't have the phone."

And I said, "I understand that's your initial reaction, but the goal is for your child to use the phone correctly. So if we don't give them the opportunity to use the technology correctly how are we going to teach them? Just yanking it away does absolutely nothing. So let's set parameters of how we use this technology", aka the phone, the iPhone, whatever it was. "And give them a little bit of a leash. Can they meet that parameter of what's appropriate for your family, what you feel is the right way to do it. If they can, make that leash a little bit longer."

But just taking it away does absolutely nothing and does exactly what you say, especially with those strong-willed children. They're going to go straight to the punishment. They're going to see the wrong in that and they're going to forget that they even did something wrong to get the punishment.

Lisa: And then they're going to power struggle over the punishment. And now you're locked in a power struggle and on our part as parents, sometimes that initial reaction, like you're explaining the cell phone, which I so get. Sometimes the punishment doesn't even match the crime. You were caught getting up in the middle of the night, sneaking the iPad and suddenly now you can't have the iPad for six months. I mean, come on, really. That's a punishment that way exceeds the crime.

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But we're just regulated as the parent because we got surprised and we're angry, I told you not to do that. So this is why also when there's a failure I highly recommend a cool down period before you approach the problem.

Kristin: Absolutely. I was just going to say that, the best thing you can do, and I know you and I have talked about this before, I call it the snow globe. If you remember, if you had a snow globe when you were little or you might have one now and you shake it all up the snow is everywhere. That is what I call when you as a parent and I am a parent, I have two grown children, so I've been there. When we got into that head-to-head, okay, you want to match wits. I'll match wits with you. You think you're going to win? And we just go at it. That snow globe just goes crazy and chaos erupts in the house.

And you either have, the kid goes into that fight or flight and either they start crying and run to their room, and you start crying, or they go to that fight and they're the bear and they're attacking you. And then everybody's yelling and nobody wins. So you have to let the snow settle. You've got to get back to a calm place, and that's okay to say. I mean I remember telling my son, "I understand, we're not going to talk about this right now." I need to cool off.

So you pull the attention off of them instead of saying, "You need to. You need to. You need to. I need to as the parent, I need to cool off right now and think about some things. And I hope that you could think about some things and let's regroup later." And that's not let's regroup when your father gets home and we're going to hash this out again.

This is we're going to talk when emotions are not heightened. Because when emotions are heightened they're not listening. You've been flooded

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by emotions and the emotions are leading versus the rational side is leading. So you've got to have that cooling off point.

Lisa: Yes. And I would add to that. Studies show that when the emotions are flooded you're secreting cortisol. And cortisol has been shown to block hearing. And it makes sense because cortisol is there for, you know, there's someone trapped in a burning building and you're not going to over-think it, you're just going to run in and rescue your child, or your grandfather, or the neighbor out of a burning building. So cortisol is meant to block the hearing so that you act rather than think.

Yeah, I liked what you said too, the snow globe makes total sense. And it's also important like you're saying, not to say, "You're in so much trouble, go to your room." Or it's, "Hey, we need a cooling off period. I need to get my emotions regulated." And I feel so strongly that as parents we cannot expect our children to regulate themselves if we're not modeling regulation at home. I work with or I talk to so many people that want me to teach them how to get their kids to regulate while they're dysregulated.

I'm sure you see this too in the school system, when a child gets in trouble, falls behind, maybe the parent gets surprised that all of a sudden their grades are in the tank. And they come rolling in dysregulated.

Kristin: Yes, all the time. And that's a perfect example because we as parents from the day our children are born we are modeling for them. Having the opportunity to model for your children, model certain behaviors and then when they grow up and they utilize those behaviors, and allow you to be part of that process is just probably the best thing about parenting. We give them wings and then we push them out of the nest and we want them to fly. And when we can see our children flying and soaring it's absolutely wonderful.

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And they're going to come back and thank you, and they're going to thank you through their actions when you see that they are being productive, positive members of society and they want to make a difference. And they can process through their failures outside of your home.

I think that's the biggest thing, be excited about failures while your child is still under your roof so you can help teach them the skills to push through it, to give them that grit, to give them that perseverance. To let them know that life is going to throw at them different things and different obstacles, but they can overcome and continue in the right direction.

Lisa: Let me add this in. Sometimes parents will say to me, "I just want my child to be happy." And I will say, "Really? I really want you to question that because if a child spends 18 years living at home and all they ever experience is happiness, that toolbox when they leave the house is going to be so small, it's going to be like a Barbie Doll lunchbox. So teeny because all that's inside is how to cope with happiness."

Now, if you, like you're saying, if you process through the mistake and along the way you acquire grit, and determination, and overcoming failure, and disappointment, and rejection, and suddenly it's going to take six people to carry that toolbox out of the house. And when you're off on your own, you have skills or at least an inkling of the menagerie of skills that are possible to solve problems.

Kristin: Absolutely, that is a perfect way to put it, is you want to give your child the tools to be able to function when they're out of the house. So let them fail, let them make mistakes while you're there to walk alongside them, helping them make those connections, helping them realize their part in whatever the mess may be. And realizing they can push through it. You're going to be there with them to help push them through it. And they

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get those skills, those traits, those habits that are going to make them successful in college and beyond.

Lisa: Yes. You'll appreciate this. My husband is not so open to mistakes. He likes things done well the right way the first time. And we have a son that as you know is 16 and is making his fair share of mistakes. And so every time he does I just tell Dave, "Well, we've just got another tool in the toolbox." And we laugh about or we try to laugh about how big that toolbox is going to be when he leaves home. And I literally close my eyes and I envision of all of my son's friends helping to heave this toolbox into the college dorm.

Kristin: With my father I used to call them great experiences. "Well, dad, it didn't work out but it was a great experience because I learned something from it." And I remember my dad one day saying, "You've got a lot of great experiences." But that's all we called it in our family, they weren't mistakes, they weren't failures, they were great, what a great experience you just went through. And I think if we can look at life as a great experience, the highs, the lows, that we are learning each day as we go forth, it is wonderful.

Lisa: Yes. In *Real World Peaceful Parenting* our motto is progress not perfection. And there's nowhere it's more true than in our childhoods, right?

Kristin: I have a sign in my office that says 'life does not have to be perfect to be wonderful'.

Lisa: There we go. There we go. Alright, something else I want to ask you about while we have you here because I really think you're going to help a lot with this topic. You mentioned addressing the mistake. So I'd like to talk about this for a minute. Let's say you have a strong-willed child and I might

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or might not be speaking from experience here. Who doesn't want to address the mistake, doesn't want to take accountability, struggles to take responsibility for the mistake.

And in my course Peace and Quiet, a crash course for parenting your strong-willed kids. One of the modules addresses that strong-willed kids often struggle with taking accountability and responsibility for their mistake. So talk us through how you as a parent and how you as an advocate for kids and a resource, a learning resource expert, how you think about this and how you help kids take that responsibility, that's part of the connection process.

Kristin: Well, there's two things that come to mind. First is sometimes it's asking it in a different way for them to realize that they are part of – not part of the problem but they had a part in how they got there. So one of the things we do here at school is we have students do a self-reflection academically and emotionally. How was this last week academically? My grades weren't great. Okay, what are some reasons?

If you take out the emotions from it and just kind of ask some simple questions they're able to say, "Well, I didn't do as much as I should have." Okay, let's talk about that. And you can kind of roundabout get to where you want them to be. The other camp and it depends on the child, there are certain children that have to fail a couple times before they realize, yeah, you've told me this time and time again. But they just have to experience it because from the time they're about 12 to 22, parents don't know anything.

And we don't understand their world so they have to process through the world. So as long as you can be there and allow them to – and that's where I get to sometimes a student has to hit a rock bottom or has to hit a real low where it finally means something to them. Because in order to solve the

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problem it has to mean something to you, you have to have an emotional want to do something. You can't push a rope. And we can push our kids. We can pull our kids across the finish line and it does absolutely nothing.

They have to have that intrinsic want to go, "This didn't work out, how can I make it different?" If we as parents can provide them with an environment where taking a risk, or trying something where they know no matter what they do you're still going to support them. You may not always agree with them but you will support them that allows them to play a little with what works and doesn't work. Some kids have to figure it out on their own and it will take them falling down a little more before you come in – before they're able to self-correct.

Now, there may be a kid who can't self-correct and you really do have to sweep in at some point. But most kids knowing that you're there and supporting them at some point will go, "I need help." It may not be to you but most schools have support from teachers, from resource coordinators, to behavioral health counselors. There are people that your son or daughter are going to feel comfortable reaching out to. So I hope regardless outside of the home they have a good support network, it might be a friend or someone else.

But I mean the two camps there, you have to take what they did, reframe it in a different way to ask different questions for them to see where they're in that. Or you've got to let them fail a little bit more before they figure out, yeah, this isn't working for me.

Lisa: I like that. And I want to give a couple tips from the parent's side of how to handle that. In the first category, asking in a different way, I think that a lot of times kids are afraid of getting in trouble. They're going to tell

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you what you want to hear. So as the parent a really good tip to deal with this is to not call it lying. Your kid got surprised, their brain got overloaded.

So what I recommend as a parent is you say to your child, or teenager, or young adult, “I’m not sure that’s the exact answer you want to give me. So I’m going to give you a couple minutes to correct yourself. And I’m going to come back and ask you the same exact question.”

Now, the secret here is when you come back you want to ask it in a non-judgmental, you don’t want to say, “Did you hit your brother?” And they say, “No.” And you know they’re lying because you saw them. You don’t go, “You’re lying. I’m going to come back in a minute. I’m going to ask you again. You better tell me the truth.” That’s not going to work, that’s just going to drive them further into their middle brain. But if you say, “Hey look, maybe I surprised you, you need a minute to gather yourself”, because then you’re also teaching them to gather themselves before they speak.

So then you come back and you ask it the exact same way, “Did you hit your brother?” My experience has been if you follow that method at least 80% of the time they will fess up because you’ve taken the pressure off that you’re looking for a specific answer, right?

Kristin: Yes. And you put it perfectly. You put the words in my mouth, that’s exactly what I was talking about when I work with a student.

Lisa: Yeah, perfect. And then in the second example I agree also with sometimes they have to fail a couple times. And this is because strong-willed kids in particular are experiential learners. I talk about this all the time in my work because I’ve got one, folks. I mean this kid, I tell this story all the time, I think I’ve said it before on one of the podcast episodes.

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My son is taking chemistry as a sophomore at his school. He's struggled a couple of times with understanding the material. And I will say to him, "You know, your dad's a chemist." And he looks at me with this face that I know now. And he says to me, "Mom, you know that I am not going to ask anybody for help. I have to figure things out on my own." And my son wears this badge of honor about figuring things out in life on his own. And our balance is trying to get him to see that sometimes taking help is figuring it out. But he has to – he is an experiential learner.

He has to hit rock bottom before he asks for help. Now, my job is to stay awake at the wheel. So when the call comes for help, the 911, the SOS, I am ready to go. I have taken care of myself. I'm in the right mindset. I'm not emotional. I'm not judgmental, that I can jump right in and help him solve the problem.

But I think yeah, I agree with you a 100%, a lot of these kids are experiential learners. And I just want to encourage you, if you have one of these at home avoid power struggles over begging them to take help because it's offensive to them. And they're just going to meet it with resistance. Save you energy for go time. So if you have an experiential learner be in go time mode when they hit that rock bottom so that you can assist them.

Kristin: Yeah. And another thing that it made me think and I might be going off on a tangent here. But a lot of times if a parent, mom or dad comes in and tries to solve the problem for the child, what your child learns is power or someone of influence can be a substitute for responsibility. And I don't want parents to come in and always solve it for their child because the child learns, well, it can always be solved. Someone else is going to solve it for me. I don't ever have to take that responsibility. And we want our children to be responsible.

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So again thinking, any time you come in, you're not only stunting their growth in their head and in their brain, but you are stunting their socio emotional, how to get along in the world if you're always solving everything for them. I don't want your kid to see mom or dad fixing it equals power solves problems. And then they think power can be a substitute for responsibility.

Lisa: I like that. I like that. And also then it cuts short developing the brainstorming skills. What are all of my options here? Which develops executive function, which they ultimately need, it feeds off of each other. So they ultimately need that to be able to think a couple of steps ahead. And so you're right, when parents are solving problems they just don't develop any problems, or less opportunity in critical thinking, yes.

Kristin: Yeah. And it is, it breaks our heart to see our kids fail, I get it. But you have to step back and go this is learning. I mean you look at Thomas Edison, you look at all these famous people who invented stuff. They failed more times than they succeeded. It was the perseverance that got them through. If we gave up the first time we failed at something we wouldn't be driving. We wouldn't be putting on mascara. I mean the first time we tried random things it usually ended up as a failure.

Lisa: Right, coloring our hair, using our iPhones.

Kristin: Coloring our hair, exactly. So you have to try and try again. And that's the same thing we want in our kids, try and try again. And it's going to end up great.

Lisa: Kristin, you've given us some incredible, incredible nuggets today. I can't want to go back and listen to this and take even more notes. And I have two pages now. And I'm going to offer this to the listeners. Kristin

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gave us an action plan today for how to handle mistakes, how to see failures as a gift. And it fits nicely into the concept that the military uses which is called AAR – After Action Review.

So every time the military all around the world, this is universal in every military in every country, every time the military completes an exercise they sit down and they do an After Action Review. Whether it's an exercise, a training exercise, a wartime event, they roll out a new program they do an After Action Review. And I want you to remember this. I want you to adopt this. This is your homework assignment.

The next time there's a failure, or a mistake, or something didn't quite go in the family with your kids as it was supposed to, bring everybody together when you're regulated. Kristin talked about that, we need to be regulated. We're not going to snow globe. So we're going to let all the snow settle down. And then we're going to come together the right group of people, mom and dad and child, mom and kids.

You have to know your kid, so you come together and you do an After Action Review where you sit down and you say, "What happened? What is the opportunity? Actions have consequences. Let's address the problem." Work with your kid to own the mistake, to take the responsibility. And then part of the After Action Review is how do we move forward from here? This is also what the military does, what did we do right? Where's the room for improvement? And then what are we going to do differently next time? This is a true AAR.

What happened? What's my responsibility in this? How do we move forward, i.e. heal, repair, restitution if there needs to be any. And then what do we do differently next time? These are your three steps of the After Action Review that Kristin so beautifully walked us through. And this is a

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gift, it's a way to reframe failures and mistakes, and the opportunities, and growth, and to helping your kids learn. We've talked about critical thinking, problem-solving skills, making connections between actions and consequences, learning to take responsibility.

There is a whole menagerie of gifts that come from shifting your thinking around failures.

Kristin: And you're building that toolbox. You're building their tools and their ability to go in and fix something. Just like a plumber goes in with certain tools to fix the sink, we are training our children to have certain tools to fix a situation. And it may not happen overnight, little steps in the right direction are huge successes. So I don't want parents to think this is going to change and it's going to be perfect tomorrow. It may not happen that way. But you want to look at that growth. You want to take baby steps.

You want to give actionable steps that they can be successful at. And when they get success, breeds success, breeds success, they're going to feel better, you're going to feel better, everybody wins.

Lisa: Boom. Drop mic. Peace out. Thank you Kristin, this has been incredible. I know I feel rejuvenated and motivated, and I'm not going to say excited about the next failure, but definitely prepared for how to handle it with the action plan, with the AAR and how to shift our thinking. So thank you so much for being here. I so appreciate it.

Kristin: I appreciate you giving me the opportunity. And I'm just so excited that your listeners will be able to know they're not alone in this. We've all been there. And we're going to take little steps as we go through to make a positive change in our home environment, our relationship with our kids. And love for yourself as a mom or a dad, you're doing great things. And

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you're doing great things or you wouldn't be listening to the podcast in the first place. So God bless you, and thank you for having me.

Lisa: Amen. Amen. Alright, thank you. See you next week. And until we meet again 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.

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.