

Ep #19: Riding the Storm: How to Hold Space for Your Child to Process their Emotions



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host
Lisa Smith

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Welcome to *Real World Peaceful Parenting*, a podcast for parents that are tired of yelling, threatening, and punishing their kids. Join mom and master certified parent coach Lisa Smith as she gives you actionable step-by-step strategies that'll help you transform your household from chaos to cooperation. Let's dive in.

Welcome, welcome, welcome to today's episode. I am so excited to be with you here today. Last week I invited you all to reach out to us with questions or suggestions for future episodes. We welcome those suggestions. So if you want to join in, the best way to reach us is to send us a direct message, also known as a DM, over on Instagram. I'm @the_peaceful_parent. The peaceful parent. Thanks to all of you who took me up on this offer this past week. I love, love, love hearing from you.

Today's episode actually is born from a question I received from a mom named Sammy. Sammy wrote, "Lisa, I just listened to your podcast about respect. It was wonderful. I've been struggling with those thoughts about my five-year-old for a long time." She wrote, "I do have a question for you. What do you do if you respond to your child's call for help in the "right way" without frustration, without judgement, without negativity, and they fight against the help? What if they storm bigger and louder with each attempt to use a tool with them?"

Sammy wrote, "I love the calming corner with the peacemakers, but my daughter hates using it in any way in the moment of the storm. My biggest storm alongside my kids comes when I get down at their level, and I talk calmly and I make suggestions. I offer to listen. I offer to breathe with them, etcetera. They just storm louder." Sammy went on to write, "I begin to think that helping doesn't work anyways. That there's something wrong with me. Or I take their storming personally, and then I don't feel like I'm helping them at all."

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Well Sammy, great question. Thanks for reaching out for support. I really love your question, and there's definitely a lot to unpack here. So let's dig in. I think what's probably happening here is the timing is off a bit Sammy. It feels like there is a rush to finish the storm and make a repair before your daughter is ready. If you can allow for some more space and time for the storm to run its course and then make the connection, everyone will feel that. Yourself and your daughter.

You mentioned that you get down at their level and you talk calmly, and you make suggestions and your offer to breathe with them. That may be a little premature. That is the connection and the repair piece. You may be doing that a little prematurely before the storm has really run its course.

Everything you're doing is correct, but your daughter's not ready to receive it at the point you're offering it. So I want you to wait just a little bit longer. Resist the urge to offer the help until you feel like she's through the storm and ready.

What I want everyone listening to this to know is that the storm is the activity or the action. It is the thing that is happening at the moment. Many of us often rush the storm. Let me remind you that as children and adults, but we're focused here on children. The storm helps us process our emotions and relieve the pressure. It helps us unload the emotional backpack of our children.

As parents, we often try to distract our child from the storm to make ourselves feel better. Instead what I want us to do is validate the feelings and allow the storm to fully run its course. You may not enjoy it, but if you can get comfortable with being uncomfortable and just support the storm, everything will get better. I beg you please don't try to fix it, don't try to rush it, and for the love of goodness don't punish, threaten, or reward it. Just

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allow it. Support it. Witness the storm with full acceptance. Then when it's run its course, then you can connect.

So here's a good question I recommend. Let me ask you. When your kids are storming, are you holding space or fixing? Trying to fix the storm often looks like rushing through it or trying to distract your child or offering bribing or threatening or punishing or offering rewards in an attempt, all well intended, but in an attempt to rush through the storm and make it go away. That's what fixing looks like.

Holding space is when we fully accept the storm and give permission for it to happen. When we witness it with empathy, when there is a validation of feelings, right. Maybe we're not validating the actions of the storm because maybe we don't like them or they're intense or big or could hurt someone. But we're validating the feelings of the storm. Holding space is having patience. Holding space is a willingness to let it happen. A confidence that connection and correction can come later.

Holding space is a beautiful act of respect that you're giving or showing or modeling for your kids by saying, "I know you need to release these emotions, and I realize this is the only way you can do this right now." Let me say that again. When we hold space, we are saying to our children, "I realize that you need to release these emotions, relieve the pressure. I realize that right now this moment, this is the only way you know how. I respect that."

This way of parenting allows our kids to be what they need in that moment with no judgement, no anger, no resistance, and no disapproval. If you try to connect with your kid and/or fix the storm in the middle of the storm, what happens is you reactivate the storm. And oftentimes we upgrade it or

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make it bigger or make it more intense. Our heart is in the right place, but our kids aren't feeling those good intentions.

I like to use a hurricane example. If your child is having a category three storm and you try to interfere with it or you try to connect during the storm or you try to fix it or distract from it, you upgrade the category three storm to a category four.

This is what Sammy is sharing with us that she's experiencing. Then she gets mad. She says because she was trying so hard to make suggestions and offer to listen and offer to breathe and use the peacemakers. The problem is her daughter's not done with the category three storm. So what we want to do is we want to work to hold space for the storm. Once the storm is in full swing, we need to hold space and let the storm run its course.

Can you relate to this? I used to try. I remember. I would try so hard to connect with my son in the middle of the storm. I would try to distract him. I would try to support him. I would try to fix it. I tried all kinds of things. 100% of the time they backfired. Can you relate to this? I would much rather you hold space by just doing nothing. The storm is the activity of the moment. Let it ride out. Let it run its course, much like a hurricane.

If a hurricane makes landfall, there isn't a whole lot we can do about it. We need to just climb in the bathtub with our helmets on and ride it out until it's over. We don't get up in the middle of the storm and go outside and check that our windows are boarded up, right? Or see if the generator made it. We don't go in the kitchen and start cooking food before the electricity goes out.

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Once the storm is upon us, we just need to ride out the storm. After the hurricane, after it's left land and moved back out in the ocean. Then and only then do we start to assess and reconnect and repair. Our kid's storming is no different. No different. Do not try to do post hurricane activities in the middle of the hurricane, right? We're in the bathtub with the helmet on waiting until it's done. Then we move into post hurricane activities of connection and reminding about limits and repairing the damage, right.

So when your kid is in the middle of the storm, don't be afraid of it. Understand this is what needs to happen. I need to just ride out the storm, and then connection can come later.

Another thing that you can think when your child is storming is the more she storms or he storms, the better it is. Because they get it all out. They completely unpack the emotional backpack. I'm hoping right now you're having the lightbulb moment. The realization that it's okay for this to be happening. This is normal. This is the process. We can connect and, if needed, repair afterwards.

When the storm is going on, our job is to just make sure everyone's staying safe and just let the storm run its course. I like to say my job while my kid is storming is to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. I so get that. If the storm is happening at the baseball field or aisle six of Target or while your mother-in-law's visiting or after a long day or while you're out for a walk, it can be really uncomfortable. It's okay. Get comfortable being uncomfortable. Because our kids feel that respect when you give them room to have their storms.

This is the act of unconditional love right here. When we can show them through our actions, "I'm not rushing you. I see you're struggling. You're

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already telling me you're struggling. So I don't want to make it harder or create a situation where you struggle more, right?" When we respect this space and understand their need to have the storm, we're honoring their feelings.

For many of us we feel pressure as parents to make things right, to fix things instantly. We feel the pressure. We feel the judgement. You don't need to do that. Remind yourself that your job is to hold space and not fix. Maybe your brain judges your kid's storming. Maybe you think of it as disrespect or manipulation. He's trying to get his way. Maybe you see it as confrontation. Maybe as Sammy admitted, she's taking her kid's storm personally. Which well done on that realization.

It's really good to understand what's going on for you while your kids are storming. Because when we have these realizations, we can work to get comfortable with being uncomfortable. When we give our kids the space and the time and the acceptance to have the storm, they feel that total acceptance.

They feel, "Mommy/Daddy/Grandparent/Parent/Guardian, I can show you my ugly side. I can show you my struggles. I can storm and unpack my emotional backpack, and you're not rejecting me. You're not getting mad at me. You're not rushing me. You're not calling me names. You're not trying to tell me that I don't really feel that way. And you're not trying to soothe me when I'm not done. You're giving me the space, the time, and the acceptance to have the storm. You're telling me that my feelings are okay. You're showing me the ultimate sign of respect."

And many times, many, many, many times this storm is about way more than what it seems. Way more than the immediate, "I want a toy on aisle six. Or I want a cookie." Or the storm is about so much more than you

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asking your daughter to put her phone away, get off social media. Or you telling your kid it's time to stop gaming. Or you telling your kids it's bedtime. It's often about way, way, way more than what's happening in the moment.

Our kids have an invisible backpack that they put on when they get up first thing in the morning. We all do, but, again, we're talking about our kids. Our kids wake up and they strap on an emotional backpack. They spend the day filling up the backpack with disappointment and hearing no and rejection and feeling powerless and feeling out of control. And feeling like I don't fit in and not feeling appreciated and maybe not having autonomy and not feeling acceptance. They're filling this backpack all day.

Sometimes the backpack starts to bulge. Then there's that one event, that one thing that pushes them over the edge. The no to the cookie. The get off your phone. The it's time to go to bed. It's time to go home. It's time to get out of the pool. That one thing just pushes them into storming. That's the moment they choose to unpack the emotional backpack.

So I want you to realize that the storm is often, often, often about way more than what it seems. That backpack is bulging and has to be emptied for me to go on. I've had my struggles, and now I need to storm to empty the backpack so I can continue as a regulated human being. Makes sense? Mind blown? Are you like, "Wow Lisa. Wow. I've got to rewind that and listen to that again. Yes, please do."

Now, the second part of Sammy's question is addressing the calming corner. Sammy shares with us that she loves the calming corner and the deep breathing, but her daughter doesn't. Many times once our kid is in the peak of the storm, there is nothing they can be offered by us that will help soothe or calm or calm down or regulate our kids.

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Let me say that again please. Many, many, many times once we are in the peak of the storm, there is nothing you can offer your kids that is going to soothe, calm, calm down, or regulate them. There is no teaching, no coaching, no explaining, no offer that will help them regulate once they are at the peak of the storm.

Once the storm is in full swing, humans unload their backpack through storming. Once the storm is in full swing, many, many of our children have to unload their emotions through storming and unpacking the emotional backpack. When we offer our kids a soother, we're reactivating the storm and taking it often to a higher category.

Let me put this in perspective. Have you ever been upset, dysregulated? I mean really, really, really upset. Let's say you're going on a trip. Maybe it's a work trip or maybe it's your goddaughter's baby shower or maybe you're going to a conference. I love me a good conference. You're already cutting it really close. You're really excited about this conference, let's say.

You get to the airport and your flight is cancelled. There's very little information, and it doesn't seem like there's another flight today. So you're going to have to go back home and try again tomorrow, but by the time you get to your destination, the conference which is nonrefundable will be halfway over. And you will have missed the first three speakers, which were the three that you were really dying to see. You start to get really upset.

Your emotional backpack is bulging. You are dysregulated. You're trying not to storm, but the customer service agent that's helping you is not being super friendly or helpful, and nothing is working out for you. She's basically telling you, "Yeah, there's no flight today. There's nothing I can do for you. You're going to have to go home, call customer service, and try again."

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So you're upset, the emotional backpack is full, you're dysregulated, the feelings are building up, and you start storming at the counter. You're trying hard to keep it under control, but man we're at a category three and it's just starting to come out. You can feel it. It's building. It's getting some full steam here. Someone walks over to you and says, "Mam/Sir, please calm down. Please calm down." Right? What are you feeling right now?

I like to say in the history of mankind, no one has ever calmed down by being told to calm down. When that customer service manager walks over and says to you, "Sir/Mam please calm down." We don't go, "Oh okay. Why yes, I will. Yes, yes, I will calm down. Thank you. That was so helpful." We don't do that. Why not? Because we're dysregulated. We're dysregulated. Our kids are the same way. I hope, I hope, I hope, I hope you're having a lightbulb moment right now.

Sometimes the dysregulation, the last straw is the cookie. The cookie is the equivalent of, "Oh my gosh. I'm not going to get to the conference. By the time I get there, the three speakers I want to see are gone. It's going to be halfway through. I'm going to lose tonight on the hotel. I'm going to lose my conference. It's non-refundable. I'm going to lose my payment. I've already made the babysitter. Now I'm going to have to go home and change it."

Yes, we're dysregulated. Someone offering you a soother once the storm is in full speed is not going to be helpful. Once the storm has made landfall, our kids don't have the mental capacity to hear you, to reason with you, to take the help that you are offering. They are too stuck in the storm.

After the storm when they're regulated is then the time to talk about alternative behaviors for next time while reinforcing limits. That is the time to connect and repair. When you give space for the storm to happen, you are saying to your kids, "It's okay to feel your feelings." It's okay.

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Now if that customer service manager walked over to me while I was dysregulated and said, “Hey, what are you feeling right now?” “Oh, what am I feeling? Oh I'm feeling upset and disappointed and angry and frustrated.”

The customer service manager said, “Well just tell me about it. I've got a few minutes. Let's step over here and you tell me about what you're feeling.” That would help regulate me, right? I mean that would be totally helpful. That would help me unpack my emotional backpack. I need to unpack that emotional backpack before I can hear reason, hear the customer service manager about what my alternatives are, take help, figure out plan B, pivot, figure out what I'm going to do. Right?

I need to unpack the emotional backpack before I can start to hear people, take help, and reason. Our kids are no different. After the storm when they're regulated is when you talk about alternative behaviors for next time while reinforcing limits. It's not okay to hit your sister. What can you do differently next time? Instead of throwing yourself down in aisle six of Target, what could we do? I don't like when I'm asking you to get out of the pool and you swim away from me. Right? Later way after the storm when they're regulated, that's when you talk about alternative behaviors for next time.

When we give space for the storm to happen, you are saying to your kids, “It's okay to feel your feelings.” You're teaching your kids how to allow feelings to move through their body and not bottle them up. You're honoring vulnerability and connection of themselves to themselves and their feelings. Yeah?

Okay. So your homework assignment this week is to work on holding space versus fixing when there's a storm, right? Holding space is acceptance,

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empathy, validation of feelings. Maybe not validation of the actions, but validations of the feelings. Patience. A willingness to let the storm run its course knowing that connection and cooperation will come later. So that's number one.

Number two is to give your kids space to run through the storm fully. Understand that they're fully unpacking the emotional backpack. Honor that. Get comfortable with it. Number three, after the storm when they're regulated then you talk about alternative behaviors for next time while reinforcing limits.

Can you commit to that? Can you commit to those three? Holding space, let the storm run its course, unpack the backpack. Then later when they're regulated and you're regulated, talk about alternative behaviors for next time. When you give your kids space to storm fully, you're saying it's okay to feel. You're teaching your kids how to allow feelings to move through their body and not bottle them up. You're showing your kids you value the relationship over the behavior, even during the storm. You're showing your kids respect.

I know this isn't easy. I know. I still struggle sometimes when my son is storming. I get it. It's not easy, but it is so, so, so worth it. I promise. Okay. I hope this helps all of us learn how to hold space for the storm rather than fix it. Until next time I'm wishing you peaceful parenting.

Thank you so much for listening today. I want to personally invite you to head over to thepeacefulparent.com/welcome and sign up for my free peaceful parenting minicourse. You'll find everything you need to get started on the path to peaceful parenting just waiting for you over there at www.thepeacefulparent.com/welcome. I can't wait for you to get started.

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