

Ep #20: Peace & Quiet: How to Parent Your Strong- Willed Kids



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. We've got a lot to cover today. So I am going to jump right on in here and begin today's episode by asking you a couple questions. What happened the last time you asked your child to put their shoes away or empty the dishwasher or get off gaming? Well, if you have a strong-willed child, my guess is that things might not have gone smooth. There might have been some bumps in the road, or there might have been some storming.

With strong willed kids, the requests, the commands, the telling them what to do no matter how big or small very rarely come without a huge fight. Strong willed kids are often described as difficult or stubborn. They are kids who really like to have some level of control over their lives. They don't think twice about bending or challenging the rules and tend to rebel if they feel like they're not in control of their actions in any way. When things don't happen the way they want them to, they're likely to get angry, meltdown, and have a big, giant storm.

Raise your hand if you can relate to this. Raise your hand if you're like, "Oh yes ma'am. I've got one or maybe even two of those at home." Well, today we're going to talk about three things that I want you to know about strong willed kids. They're going to help you parent in a way that leads to connection and cooperation. Yes, it is possible.

Let me say that again. Today we're going to talk about three things that I want you to know that are really important about strong willed kids that will

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help you parent them in a way that leads to connection and cooperation. You ready? Okay. Let's dig in.

Number one, the first thing that you need to know is that strong-willed kids—people too, but we're talking about kids here—hate being told what to do. No one likes being told what to do, but strong-willed kids find it absolutely unbearable. When they are being told what to do over and over and over again throughout the course of the day, it is like you are taking their oxygen away from them. It is like you are backing them into a corner. Even if you have the best of intentions.

When we tell our strong-willed kids what to do, when we command them, when we give them instruction. When we do not give them a choice, but we're telling them what to do over and over and over again, they find it unbearable. Eventually, and it happens at different times for different kids. Eventually they feel backed into a corner, and they come out fighting. They refuse to cooperate.

You know that feeling? You've had that day? They're being defiant. They melt down. They're being argumentative. They engage in a power struggle, right. It's all because they hate being told what to do.

So let me tell you a solution. As much as possible, give your strong-willed kids a choice. When strong-willed kids are given a choice, they want to cooperate. They want to and they will. Choices help strong-willed kids feel in control. In turn, they're motivated to cooperate. The number one thing that a strong-willed human wants to feel is in control. The number one way to help them feel in control is to give them choices. Your payoff when you give them choices is that they will be motivated to cooperate.

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Now don't give them too many choices. Give them age-appropriate choices, right. But choices. Choices might look like do you want to put your shoes on and then your coat or do you want to put your coat on and then your shoes? Do you want to wear the red shirt or the blue shirt? Do you want to brush your teeth now or in five minutes?

I am not in any way suggesting that you turn into a permissive parent. I'm not in any way suggesting that you say, "Do you want to brush your teeth now or not at all?" If brushing their teeth before bedtime is important to you, I want it to happen for all of you. But rather than telling them to go brush their teeth and experiencing a meltdown or a power struggle, give them a choice. Do you want to brush your teeth now or in five minutes? Choices, choices, choices.

This is a great place to use the 80/20 rule. If you can give your strong-willed kid choices 80% of the time, the 20% of the time that you need to command them to do something, you will get more cooperation.

So choices might look like, "Hey, we're going to cross the busy street. Do you want to hold my hand or hold my pant leg? Don't run into the street." Right? That's the command. "I don't want you to run in the street. Do not ride your bike in the road. Do you want to ride your bike on the sidewalk to the left or the right?" Choices, choices, choices. Choices help strong willed kids feel in control. In turn, they are motivated to cooperate.

Now some of you are going to say, "Okay Lisa. I give my child a choice, let's say, of brushing his teeth now or in five minutes. Five minutes later he doesn't or she doesn't want to brush their teeth. What do I do?" Okay. I hear you. I hear you. Then what you say to them is, "Hey, we agreed to this, you and I. I know you can follow through on this even if you don't want to. So let's follow through and go brush our teeth."

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It may take some time for your child to catch on. It may take some time for you to bring this into your parenting, to create the pattern. But I am telling you after having worked with thousands of parents around the world, choices, choices, choices. Choices help strong-willed kids feel in control. In turn, they are motivated to cooperate. That is a really important thing for parents of strong-willed kids to know.

Okay, number two. For a strong-willed kid, saving face is everything. Once the battle starts, they will not back down. Let me say that again. To a strong-willed kid, saving face is everything. Once you've engaged in the battle, the power struggle, they are not going to back down. This has to do with how they feel and their integrity. They are stubborn and strong-minded. It's hard for them to bend. Because of this, once the power struggle has started, they will not back down.

So the solution is to not power struggle with them. Do not engage in the battle. When we power struggle with our kids, it damages the relationship for both of you. I want you to avoid power struggling. One of the things I tell myself all the time is I don't have to join every argument I'm invited to.

I want you to not take the power struggle personally, especially if they don't listen right away or don't do exactly what you requested immediately. Let the request breathe for a few minutes, like a good cabernet. Make your request and then take a break. Don't enter into the power struggle. Give it a few minutes for it to sink in.

If you tell your four-year-old, "go put your shoes on right now," and they don't jump up and go put their shoes on, it's tempting to engage in a power struggle with them. "Come on. I told you to go get your shoes on right now." You're going into battle and they're not going to back down. Take a minute. Let it breathe. Don't take it personally. If you can, put your shoes on while

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they're waiting to put their shoes on, or you can stand there and count to ten. Give them some space to be successful.

I remember one time I asked Malcolm to put the dishes away. We were sitting in the kitchen. He was on his phone. He was probably in sixth or seventh grade. I said, "Hey, can you put the dishes away?" He looked at me and he said no.

In that moment, I immediately started to power struggle and battle inside my head. I was getting ready to engage in the battle. I thought you know what? Before I do all that, I'm just going to go to the bathroom. I realized I needed to go to the bathroom. So I thought, "You know what. I'm going to go to the bathroom and gather myself. Then I'll come back, and we'll have this 'discussion' about putting the dishes away."

I went in the bathroom, did my business, washed my hands. Got myself ready to stay calm and regulated while I discussed with him why he needed to put the dishes away. Guess what happened? When I came back, he was putting the dishes away. I was like oh my. Since then, I've learned that sometimes he just needs a minute to gather himself and to talk himself into doing what I asked. He needs some breathing space so that he doesn't feel backed into a corner and engage in a battle trying to save face.

So many times I ask him to do something, or I make a request, or I give him a choice, and then I just let it hang in the air for a little bit. I let him absorb it. I give him a chance to be successful because I don't want my request to be about saving face. I want it to be about connection and cooperation. I've learned that strong willed kids really sometimes just need a little bit of time to catch up. Like a good wine, they need some breathing space.

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I don't have to engage or jump into an argument or a power struggle immediately when things don't go my way. I also can just try again or use the do over. "Hey, let me make that request again. Can you please take out the garbage? Can you please finish up gaming and get off and finish up for the night? Can you do this or that? Get ready for bed so we can hit the bedtime of 9:00."

Then I just let it breathe. Because what I know is that to strong willed kids, saving face is everything. Once the battle gets started, they will not back down. So my job as the parent of a strong-willed kid is to avoid getting into the battle, without being a permissive parent. Without being a permissive parent. I still want the dishes put away. I still want to hit the bedtime target. I still want the teeth brushed. I just want to avoid the battle so that they don't feel like they have to save face and engage in not backing down.

Okay. The number three thing I want you to know about strong willed kids is please, please, please, please resist telling your strong-willed kid how they feel. This makes them immediately defensive 100% of the time. Humans do not like to be told how they feel, but strong-willed kids really take the cake on this one. When you tell a strong-willed kid what they're thinking or feeling or why they're behaving the way they are, 100% of the time they immediately get defensive.

Parents of strong-willed kids that have done this before, you know what I'm talking about here. That defensiveness will sometimes take them into the battle that I was speaking about in number two. The saving face. Once the battle starts, they will not back down. Because remember. Strong willed kids hate being told what to do, and they hate being told how they feel. Resist the urge to tell your strong-willed kids how they feel.

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What's the solution? Ask questions. Remember, connection is when the other person feels seen, heard, and valued. So much easier for our kids to feel connected to us when we're asking them how they feel rather than telling them how they feel. We need to keep the defensiveness down when we're engaging with our kids. The number one way to help your strong-willed kid because immediately defensive is to tell them how they feel or what they're thinking.

So instead you want to ask questions. You want to ask them to take a guess. Let's say your strong-willed kid has just had a meltdown or they are refusing to cooperate. You're ready to get in the car and go to dinner, and they're refusing to cooperate. Or they're struggling to get their shoes on and get in the car. Later when everybody's calmed down, ask them, "Hey what was going on for you? What were you feeling? What was happening right before or right when I asked you to stop what you were doing and go get your shoes on."

If they tell you, "I don't know." Tell them, "It's okay. Take a guess. Guesses are free. Take a guess. What do you think you were feeling?" Work with them on connect the dots. Help them understand how they were feeling and get clues from them about how they were feeling. Be curious. You're not there to tell them how they feel. If you tell them how they feel, you will shut the conversation down before it even gets started because they will feel immediately defensive.

So let's review the three things I want you to know. Strong willed kids hate being told what to do. To a strong-willed kid, saving face is everything. Once the battle starts, once the power struggle starts, they will not back down. So avoid the power struggle. Number three, resist telling strong willed kids how they feel because this makes them immediately defensive.

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Strong willed kids simply need a different parenting approach than other children. Maybe as I'm sharing this with you, this fills you with dread because you're thinking you have to completely transform the way you parent. It may take some work. But once you discover the right tools and tactics of parenting your strong-willed kid, you'll be amazed at how quickly the tantrums and meltdowns disappear and are replaced by a fun and loving relationship with your child.

Now if this rings true for you or you like what you're hearing, or you want more. You want to really understand your strong-willed child in a way that leads to connection and massive cooperation, then I want to tell you more about my course Peace and Quiet: A Crash Course for Parenting Your Strong-Willed Kids. Britney said, "Once we started the Peace and Quiet course, we had no meltdowns in our home."

Maybe right now you're saying, "Lisa, tell me more." Well let me tell you about my story with my strong-willed kid, and how I came to understand that I needed to parent him in a different way.

If you look at the picture associated with this podcast, you'll see this glint in my son's eyes. He is a strong-willed kid. I have never met a more strong-willed kid than my son. In fact, in our family we jokingly call him a full contact sport. When he was little, he used to be really difficult, argumentative, and obstinate. I left more public places with him kicking and screaming in one week than most parents do in a child's entire life. It felt like we were constantly engaged in a power struggle.

I used to get so frustrated, mostly because I had no clue what to do. The next thing I knew I'd find myself in a screaming match with my son. I knew it was useless. I knew I wasn't getting anywhere, but I did not know what to do.

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Many nights I'd look down at my sleeping child and say, "Tomorrow I'm going to try so hard not to yell. Tomorrow I'm going to try so hard to be kinder, less stressed, and a more patient mom." But nothing I tried seemed to get through to him. I ended up letting both him and me down again and again and again. The guilt and frustration I felt was almost unbearable.

One day I decided enough was enough. I dove into the subject. I poured over every research paper and every child development paper I could get on strong willed kids. I'd try a few things and I'd fail, and then I'd try again. Then one day I tried a couple new ideas. I was shocked when Malcolm listened. I had finally discovered what made my strong-willed kid, and why he struggled to cooperate. I learned how to end the power struggles and how to motivate him to connect and cooperate.

Let me tell you. Everything changed for us. I had no idea how much easier and less stressful parenting could be when there wasn't a never-ending power struggle. Can I get an amen to that? Who's like, "Oh yes please Lisa. Help me end that never ending power struggle." For once, our family felt connected, and our home was peaceful in a way it hadn't been in years.

My own experience of understanding my strong-willed kid set me on a mission to help families around the world learn how to peacefully parent their strong-willed kids at any age from two to 20. The result of that was Peace and Quiet: A Crash Course for Parenting Your Strong-Willed Kids. This course is specifically designed for parents struggling to raise their strong-willed kids and maintain peace in the home.

Inside this course, I walk you through exactly what to say and do to move away from the reactionary autopilot parenting that isn't working for you, your kids, or your relationship. I teach you my proven step-by-step method for creating maximum cooperation in your home. I lead you towards a

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resolution that will create massive and immediate change for your family. This all happens by putting a minimum time and maximum effort to create a big impact for you, your kids, and your family.

After taking the Peace and Quiet course, one of my clients, ES, said, “The Peace and Quiet class today was so great. So many of the things you said, Lisa, are rolling around in my head. Thank you. I think you are truly the first person we’ve spoken with that really understands strong willed kids.”

Okay. So if you like what I'm talking about, if this resonates with you. If you've got a strong-willed kid, and you want to end the power struggles, end the screaming matches, and end the nights of crying yourself to sleep, I want you to go over to peaceandquietcourse.com. That's www.peaceandquietcourse.com and learn more. We're going to link to the course in the show notes. I want you to go over there and have a look. If it feels right to you, come and join us.

There's so much to learn about how to parent our strong-willed kids that creates massive connection and cooperation in the home. All you need is just a few lessons that help you understand how their brain works. There is a different way to parent the strong-willed kid than the non-strong-willed kid that leads to deep cooperation and understanding, I promise you.

When we parent our strong-willed kids in a way that honors them and respects them and leads to that connection, they grow up to be successful people. Strong willed kids do not give up on things just because they're obstacles. They're incredible adults. They can be difficult to parent if we don't know the tools, but strong-willed children love challenges. They have this tenacity that services them into adulthood. They have the qualities necessary to make them great leaders and great entrepreneurs and strong committed people to causes. They grow up to do great things in the world.

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They just need some extra help and guidance in the early years. They're begging for you to understand how to parent them in a way that really serves them and helps them turn into decisive self-confident adults that you will be proud of.

So, again, if this resonates with you in any way, check out my course. Learn more about strong willed kids. Understand that we parent them in a different way than we parent the non-strong-willed kids so that they can feel in control. So that they don't spend all of their days engaged in power struggles. So that they don't feel defensive all the time when people are telling them what to do or how to behave or what they feel.

Alrighty. I hope this helps you. I hope if nothing else what you heard today is that there is a different way to parent the strong-willed child than you parent the non-strong-willed child. We're going to continue to talk about this over time. I'm going to continue to bring you more and more information about strong willed kids. So until we meet again, I'm wishing you peaceful parenting.

Thanks for listening to *Real World Peaceful Parenting*. If you want more info on how you can transform your parenting, visit thepeacefulparent.com. See you soon.