

Ep #23: 3 Reasons to Normalize Apologizing



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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 absolutely love being with you each week. I'm so proud of you for investing this time in your parenting, your kids, and your family. Well done to you I say. Well done. Whether this is your first episode listening or whether you've been listening all along, I want you to take a moment to really feel good about the time that you're investing in learning a new way to connection and create cooperation with your kids. So pat yourself on the back because I certainly am.

If you have a suggestion for a future podcast or a question you'd like to ask me, feel free to reach out to us. The best way to reach us is over on Instagram. You can find me @the_peaceful_parent. The peaceful parent. I can't wait to hear from you.

Now if you've been listening for a while, you know that I try to bring tips, ideas, and support that helps you create deep connection and cooperation with your kids. So I want to start today by asking you a couple questions. Have you ever lost your shiz with your kids? Have you stormed alongside them? Have you said something you regret? Have you behaved in a way that you wish you hadn't? Told your kid you'd pick up poster board on your lunch hour and forgot? Have you ever promised you'd wash a uniform and got distracted and forgot about it?

Well guess what. You are normal. No parent, none, not one is getting it right all the time. No one. Not me, not you, not your neighbor, not the parents you admire, no one. The secret sauce of peaceful parenting is how

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you react and act after you've made a mistake. How you repair and recover.

This was a big struggle for me when my son was little and as he started to get older. Prior to having a child, I used to pride myself on not saying I was sorry to anyone. It's a bit embarrassing to admit even now. My face is red hot even as I share this with you. For much of my life, I thought apologizing was a sign that I'd lost or something had gone terribly wrong. Apologizing was not something I knew how to do. I hadn't spent a lot of time thinking about it, and I really had no tools in this area.

Growing up, no one modeled healthy apologizing for me ever. I didn't see people taking responsibility for their mistakes. I grew up in a home where no one said, "Hey, I shouldn't have done that. I'm sorry. I'll try to do better next time." I heard things like, "You made me so mad that I did this." I heard blame, justification, and no commitment to do better.

So when I became a parent, I had no idea of when or how to apologize. I didn't know that connection is when the other people feel seen, heard, and valued even when something's gone wrong. So at some point I realized in my parenting journey that I needed to figure out this whole apology thing.

So after studying the works of many people, but specifically Brené Brown. Y'all know how much I love me some Brené Brown. She's a mentor of mine, and definitely someone I feel like is on my board of directors. After studying the works of Brené Brown and Harriet Lerner who has written some amazing books and articles about apology and anger. I started to get better and better at it. Now I consider myself pretty darn good at the whole apologizing thing.

I learned that apologizing for a mistake didn't have anything to do with my value as a person or a parent. Let me say that again because I really want

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you to hear this. I learned that apologizing for a mistake had nothing, nothing, to do with my value as a person or a parent. I learned that mistakes don't have to lead to judgement or shame for me or my son. I learned that conflict is growth trying to happen.

Oh my goodness, right? Did your head just about explode when I said that? Let me say it again. I learned that conflict is growth trying to happen. I learned that if I want my son to take responsibility for his mistakes, he needs to feel safe, safe to make mistakes. For him to learn this, I had to model that I felt safe to make mistakes and talk about them out loud. I had to model taking responsibility for my mistakes. I had to show him that I felt safe in making mistakes.

Good stuff, yeah? I mean think about this for a moment. I learned that if I want my son to take responsibility for his mistakes, he needs a safe environment to do it in. Whoo. I want you to be good at this. I want your kids to have a safe environment to make their mistakes as well.

So let me share with you three reasons to apologize to your kids on the regular. All right? Reason number one, I want you to think about normalizing making mistakes in your home. Let your kids know that you aren't perfect, and that you know you're not perfect. When we make mistakes normal and natural and part of the human experience, we let them know that everyone makes mistakes. Everyone. Big mistakes, little mistakes. Let them know that you know you make mistakes a lot. Big, little, easy, painful. Mistakes from forgetting, mistakes from not listening, etcetera.

This was a turning point in my parenting. I remember the day like it was yesterday. My son was really hard on himself. At the same time, he struggled to take responsibility for his actions. I remember thinking this

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might be because he doesn't see us making mistakes. I really chewed on this for a while.

Then on one particular day, I announced to him that I make about a hundred mistakes a day. His eyes were like half dollars. "Really mom?" I was like yeah buddy. Yes. I make tons of mistakes all day every day. I could just feel him take a big giant exhale like, "Oh, okay. This is normal."

Then I started calling out my mistakes to him out loud. I started pointing them out when I made them. I did this as though it were a normal thing with ease. I did this with all kinds of expressions and emotions and tones. Yep, I made a mistake again. Oh gosh, I shouldn't have done that. Oh wow. I can't believe that happened. Guess I made another mistake.

I saw him listening and watching and feeling almost a sense of relief that I made mistakes and that mistakes were normal, and that his mistakes were normal too. We started normalizing mistakes in our home. What I learned again and again and again is that kids don't learn from what we say. They learn from what we model. So it's really important for them to see you making mistakes and taking responsibility from it and making mistakes a normal thing in your family.

Okay. Reason number two that I want you to make mistakes and apologizing normal in your family is because when we make mistakes, we can also model taking responsibility for wrongdoings, for storming, for meltdowns, and mistakes. So often clients tell me, "Lisa, my kid, my daughter, my son, my kids won't take responsibility for their actions." Yeah. Kids don't know how to do this unless you're modeling it for them.

I promise you if you aren't taking responsibility for your actions, neither are they. I want you to model taking responsibility for your mistakes, for your meltdowns, for your storms without shame and judgement. I cannot

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emphasize this enough. I want you to model taking responsibility for your mistakes, your wrongdoings, your mistakes, and your storms without shame or judgement.

Now, this can be a bit challenging if you were shamed or judged for the mistakes you made when you were little. This is work worth doing. As part of the apology, I want you to say to your kids, "I take responsibility for my actions, specifically when I lost my shiz and yelled at you today. I take responsibility for forgetting the poster board. I take responsibility for telling you I would do X when I did Y."

But while you're taking this responsibility, I want you to be sure not to call yourself names. So, for example, here's what I don't want you to say. "I forgot the poster board today. I'm so forgetful." Right? That's you judging yourself in front of your kids. We don't want to do that. We also don't want to say, "I forgot the poster board. I'm a hot mess." Instead I want you to say, "Hey, I'm really sorry. I got busy today. I forgot to write it down. That's my mistake. I forgot to write it down. So I completely forgot to get the poster board."

Here's another example. I don't want you to say, "Whoops, I forgot the chicken at the grocery store. I'm so stupid. Or I can't believe I just spilled that. I'm an idiot." When you model this for your kids, you're modeling shame and judgement around the mistake. We don't want to be doing this. Instead you might say, "Ah, I spilled that milk because I wasn't paying attention. Or, again, I forgot the chicken because I didn't write it down on the grocery list. I thought I would remember it, and my brain was all over the place. So it slipped my mind."

Make sure that you're modeling taking responsibility without shame and judgment. This is so important. You aren't putting yourself down, right? You aren't shaming or judging yourself or your abilities or your character as part

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of the apology. You're owning it and moving forward and not making it mean something about your character or your worth.

I cannot emphasize enough how important this is to model responsibility and owning it in front of your children without attacking your character. Because then they'll learn how to own it and take responsibility without shaming, judging, or attacking their character. Big lightbulb moment here, right? Okay.

The third reason that I want you to practice owning your mistakes and apologizing to your kids is because we have to show them exactly what an apology looks, sounds, and feels like in order for them to know how to do it. Many, many, many of us don't know how to apologize. So we're not modeling that for our kids. Yet we're expecting them to apologize when something goes wrong.

So let me share with you what an apology in our house looks like. It's really a four step process. Step one is I say I'm sorry for X, and that's it. I don't add on any "but you did this" or "because you did this, I did this". Don't justify or explain. Don't lecture. Don't use too many words. You simply say, "Hey son, I'm sorry that I lost my cool today when you wouldn't leave the playground." That's it. You don't say, "Hey, I'm sorry I lost my cool because I told you six times, and you weren't listening to me. Because you didn't leave, I couldn't take anymore." No, none of that. It's simply, "Hey, I'm sorry I lost my cool at the playground today." Period.

Step number two is you want to take responsibility for your actions, right? "I yelled at you. I take responsibility for losing my cool and yelling at you." Again, while we're doing this, we don't want to call ourself names. Right? We don't want to say, "I take responsibility for yelling at you. I just can't keep it together. Or I'm a hot mess. Or I do this when I feel like I can't hold

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it together. Or I'm an idiot." You don't want to call yourself names. You just want to take responsibility. "I yelled at you, and I shouldn't have."

Step number three, "I will do my best to work on this. I will do my best to not do it again." You're not promising, you're not guaranteeing, but you are committing to working on this. Don't make any promises that you can't be sure you're going to follow through on. This will hurt your credibility. So I just want you to say, "I'll do my best to work on it. Next time we're at the park, I'll work on not losing it."

Then step number four is I want you to expect nothing in return. Nothing. You're not waiting for them to apologize. You're not waiting for forgiveness. The circle is complete. Don't stand there waiting for them to apologize back to you. Don't expect or request that your kid apologize back. We're not apologizing to get one in return. We're not giving a gift to expect one in return. We're just apologizing to our kid so they know that we know we made a mistake. We're modeling taking responsibility, and we're modeling apologizing to them with no expectation.

Later we can talk about next time. Later we can talk about where we went off track. Later we can talk about what we can do differently, right? The third time we ask them to leave the park, how we can get their attention, and what you can do differently next time. For now, you're just apologizing to them.

So the apology might look like, "Hey daughter, I'm sorry for losing my cool at the park today. I take responsibility that I lost my cool, and I will work on not doing that again. I love you very much." That's it. It's that simple. It doesn't need to be more than that. It doesn't need to come with any guarantees. We're not waiting for them to apologize. We're not having shame or guilt. We're completing the circle and moving on with our life.

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Then maybe later, a couple hours later, the next day you talk about, “Hey, yesterday I asked you six times to leave the park, and I wasn’t getting any cooperation from you. Is there a better way when I’m ready to leave, is there a better way we can work together so that you understand that it’s time to leave the park?” We don’t add it in to the conversation.

I want us all to make apologizing normal and natural. It’s okay to be vulnerable and let your guard down with your kids. It’s okay to not be perfect. It’s okay to show them, in fact it’s important to show them that you have struggles and weaknesses. By doing this, you’re normalizing mistakes, taking accountability for your actions, and apologizing with ease.

I ask some parents how they feel about normalizing apologizing, and this is what they said. One mom said, “I love making this normal for both me and my little one.” Another mom said, “I 100% agree with this. It makes a huge difference. I’ve been modeling this as much as possible for my boys. Suddenly I’m seeing them apologizing to each other much more than ever before.”

One mom said, “I’ve always apologized to my children when I’ve messed up. Now that they’re grown up, they tell me that it’s helped them to realize that we all make mistakes, and they don’t have to be perfect.” Oh my goodness. Let me read that again. One mom said to me, “I’ve always apologized to my children when I’ve messed up. Now that they’re grown up, they tell me that it’s helped them to realize that we all make mistakes, and they don’t have to be perfect.” I want that for you, and I want that for your kids.

So let’s recap. Going forward, I want you to think about normalizing mistakes. I want you to model taking responsibility for your mistakes without shame and judgement, and I want you to show your kids what an apology looks like. I’m sorry for X. I take responsibility for my actions. I will

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do my best to work on this, not let it happen again, and expect nothing in return. The circle is complete.

This is so important. It's okay to sometimes lose your cool. We're all human. We're going to do it. We're going to lose our cool once in a while. We're going to forget something. We're going to fall down in a commitment we make. We're human. But how you repair and recover is where the connection can lie. Modeling normalizing mistakes and how to apologize is teaching our kids a life skill. I want that for you, and I want that for them. So give this a whirl, and then hop over to Instagram and let me know how it's going. 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.