

Ep #26: What am I Teaching My Kids?



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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 am so excited to be here with you today. I know I say this every week, but today, whoa. I am going to knock your socks right off your feet. I have some information today to share with you that is for sure a game changer in your parenting. So let's dive right in because I cannot wait to get this information to you.

So I want to start today by asking you to fill in this blank. "I want my kid to be more..." what? Just throw out a word. Say it out loud. Just throw it out. What is your wish? I want my child or my kid or my teen or my young adult to be more what? Maybe more calm, maybe more gentle, maybe more assertive, maybe less assertive, maybe quieter, maybe less emotional or dramatic. Maybe more creative, more focused. I want my kid to be more what?

Well, let me ask you. Have you ever thought about how your kids actually learn things? Have you thought about it? It's an interesting question, isn't it? How exactly do our kids learn? That's what I want to talk about today. Chances are it may not be what you think it is. So here's the deal. Our kids do not do what we say or what we tell them to do. They do what we do. This is called modeling, and it's very important that we understand how our kids learn and that we understand that they learn what we model for them.

Our kids are not intuitive or born with knowledge or even born with their family values. They learn them over time. What most of them think is that our kids learn what we say or what we lecture or what we focus on or what we yell at them, but it's not true. What happens is that our kids are really

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good learners. They learn 100% not from what we say, but from what we do. This was a game changer for me when I figured this out.

Let me say it again. All our kids are really good learners, and they learn from what we do not what we say. They don't have the ability to judge or discriminate or decide. Their brains learn from what we model for them over and over and over again.

So as I was preparing for today's episode, I looked up the word modelling in the dictionary. One of the definitions is, "Modelling is a standard or example for imitation." I thought wow, that fits perfectly. Modelling is a standard or example for imitation. According to social learning theory, people learn by watching others. Years and years of research has been done on social learning theory. What scientists have learned over time is that kids learn from watching their parents.

There's this famous experience called the Bobo Doll Experiment. The experiment demonstrated how kids imitate adult behavior. Researchers discovered the children treated the doll the exact same way the adults did. So children who watched the adult become aggressive with the inflatable doll became aggressive in their interactions with the doll. Meanwhile children who watched adults treat the doll kindly imitated the kindness.

Now, you probably don't need a fancy science experiment to see that your kids imitate you all the time. You probably notice it on the regular. I really want you to understand the power you have in teaching your children through modelling.

So let me give you an example. Maybe when you're sweeping the floor, you might notice your little one pretending to sweep right alongside you. Or you might hear your preschooler put her stuffed bear to bed the same way you tuck her in every night. That, my friends, is modeling right there at its

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finest. Our kids are always watching what we're doing, and they're practicing and imitating and mimicking until it becomes natural for them.

If you know my story at all, you know modelling was really at the epicenter of my wake up call. I talk about it all the time. There was this day when I was yelling at my son. He was about four. Honestly, I don't remember what I was yelling at him about because yelling was a pretty regular occurrence in my parenting toolbox.

I was yelling at him, and he was yelling back at me because I had modeled that for him. I was yelling at him for yelling at me. At the same time, I was thinking to myself who taught him this? Where did he learn to be so angry and reactive? A voice came in the room and said, "You, Lisa. You're teaching him this."

It was such a wake up moment for me. I remember it like it was yesterday. I could tell you where I was standing in our house, what I was wearing, and what my son was wearing. Although I didn't have the language in that moment for modeling, I understood that my behavior, my actions, my response to stress is exactly what was teaching my son how to show up. So I was yelling at him when things weren't going well for me, and he was yelling at me when things weren't going well for him. It was such a wakeup call for me.

Again, at that time I didn't understand modelling like I understand it today. I certainly didn't have the word modelling. But I think on a very deep level, in that moment I understood that I needed to start modelling something new for him. That began the journey down my path of peaceful parenting.

So let's talk about some of the areas we model for our kids. I want you to really think about this. We model things for our kids like how we show up in times of stress, which is certainly what I was modeling for my kid many

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years ago. It's still hard to this day to talk about, but it's totally true. I take ownership for the fact that I was modelling yelling and being reactive when things were stressful.

We also model things for our kids like our reaction to our mistakes and our reactions to other people's mistakes. We model for our kids how we handle meltdowns. How we handle stress, how we handle conflict. We also model things for our kids like how we feel about our bodies, how we talk about our bodies, how we treat our bodies.

How we deal with frustration, how we solve problems, how we apologize and repair, how we listen to others, how we respond. How we treat other people, how we ask for help, how we feel about people different from us, people from different cultures, different ethnicities, different sexual preferences. We model for our kids how we feel about people who don't share our beliefs or values. We model for our kids how we feel about work, fun, vacation, spending, or saving money.

I often chuckle when I think about this. Kids are not always listening to us, but I promise you they're always watching and hearing what you say. Let me say that again. Your children are not always listening to you. I get that. But I promise you, they are always watching and hearing what you say to them, to others. They're watching how you handle situations, what comes out of your mouth, how you treat their co parent, how you treat others, and how you treat yourself.

Have you ever heard your kids talk to one another while playing house? If one of your kids is the mommy and you hear her exactly using your words or your tone or your sentences exactly the way you talk, this is modelling. Let me share with you some examples of ways we share one thing to our kids and model something different, and why it's so important to be aware of modeling as a powerful tool in our parenting.

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Okay. Let's say the parent tells the cashier at a restaurant that her 12 year old son is only 11 so she can get a discount at the buffet. Her son learns it's okay to lie sometimes to get what you want. Let's say parents tell their kids to treat everyone with respect, yet they often make critical comments about people behind their backs.

Let's say parents argue frequently with each other, often escalating to name calling and screaming, but they expect their kids to get along with one another. Let's say a parent tells her son to stop putting his fingers in his mouth, but when she's nervous she bites her fingernails. Let's say a mother tells her daughter to be kind to others, but she yells at the store clerk when the store refuses to take back an item she tries to return. I know I've been guilty of that a time or two.

These are examples of how we're modeling one thing but saying another to our kids. Again, our kids are not listening to what we're saying. They're watching and hearing what we're doing. If you're modeling for your children what was modeled for you as a child, this is your opportunity to break the cycle. This is your opportunity to point your family in a new trajectory.

Sometimes just by understanding the power of modeling as a parenting tool can create a complete game changer in your family. You can use modeling for good, not evil. You can use modeling to be consistent at teaching your children exactly what you want them to learn.

Now, I know it's not possible to get it right all the time. Remember, here in the Real World Peaceful Parenting community, our mantra is progress not perfection. Nobody, no one, absolutely no one gets it right all the time, but it's worth working on. I know it's not easy, but it's worth the work. So to help, here are four steps to consider what to model for your kids and how to model.

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Number one, be honest with yourself. Ask yourself, “What am I modeling for my kids?” If you see your kids do or see or react or show up in a way that you don’t like, take a minute to ask yourself, “Am I modeling that in some way for my children?” Be honest with yourself without shame or guilt. Then decide what do you want to model.

I’m a big fan of being intentional with our modeling through our words and our actions. Be intentional. If something is important to you, make sure that you’re modeling it for your children. If relaxing on vacation is really important to you, then model that for your kids. If being calm in times of stress is important then model it for your kids. If you really want your daughter to grow up loving her body no matter how it presents, then model that for her.

If you really want your kids to be inclusive of all cultures and looks and sexual preferences and ethnicities, make sure you’re modeling that for your kids. If you want your kids to value money, make sure you’re modeling that for your kids. If you want your kids to treat others with kindness, make sure you’re kind to people in all situations. This is how we parent our children. They do not listen to what we say. They watch what we do. Number four, practice, practice, practice.

So let me review those again, the four steps to modelling for your kids. Number one, be honest and ask yourself, “What am I modeling?” Make sure you’re conscious about what you’re modeling. Number two, decide what do you want to model? Number three, be intentional with your words and your actions. Number four, practice, practice, practice.

Now if what I’m sharing with you today makes you feel bad, upset, guilty, or creates an awareness that causes an ache in your gut, I want you to take a deep breath. Remember what I said at the beginning of today’s episode. Our kids are good learners. What I know for sure both from my own

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personal experience and having worked with thousands of parents around the world on modeling is that as soon as you start modeling something new for your kids, they will learn it. They are good learners. They're constantly watching what you're doing.

So as you start to model something new for them, that will be their new reaction, response, or way to show up. That's why modeling with intention is so important on the path to peaceful parenting. Be intentional with what you model. Be intentional with your words and actions. Understand the powerful tool you have at your fingertips of modeling for your kids. Then practice, practice, practice. See how this works?

I occasionally post on my Instagram page this quote, "You cannot expect to raise calm and gentle kids if you are not calm and gentle yourself." Right? I love this. I don't know who said it. The author is unknown, but I love it. You cannot expect to raise calm and gentle kids if you are not calm and gentle yourself.

I think I've shared with you all before that we are a very loud high energy family, my husband and I both in different ways. We both have a lot of energy, a lot of intensity, and we're both loud in our own ways. It's no surprise that after modeling this for 16 years, we have a high energy intense loud son ourselves. It's the power of modeling. When you have an understanding of the tool of modeling, it is an absolute game changer in your family.

Okay, now your homework. Simply fill in the blanks. If I want my child to be X, I need to model for them what? If I want my child to be calm, I need to model calm. If I want my child to be assertive, I need to model assertive. If I want my child to be kind, I need to model kindness always. This is how this works.

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So your homework is to figure out what you want your kids to be or have or do, and then check yourself. Are you modeling it for them? Because you are their role model. You are the person that is going to teach them how to be calm, gentle, assertive, determined, focused, relaxed, how to accept mistakes, loving of their body. You are the role model. Not by what you say, not by what you lecture, not by what you demand, but through what you model for them.

It is one of our greatest tools as a parent. I want you to be intentional with your modeling. This is the gift that I share with you today, and I hope it means as much to you and it's as transformative to you and your parenting as it's been for me. I'd love to hear your answers. I'd love to hear what you're intentionally modeling for your kids.

So join me over on Instagram @thepeaceful_parent. Drop me a DM, comment on the post where I ask you what you're modeling for your kids. I'd really, really, really love to hear your answers because I know the power that this tool offers in intentionally teaching our kids what we'd like them to know. All right? 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.