

**Ep #30: Walk Back into the Classroom with
Confidence with Aimee Buckley**



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 to today's episode. I know I say this every week folks. I know. Today I am really, really, really excited to bring you this episode. I am joined by a very special guest today. Aimee Buckley is here. I've had the pleasure of having a few conversations with Aimee about education and learning and how parents can support their kids.

We thought that now would be the perfect time to bring you some insight on how to get prepared for the upcoming school year. I know those of us that live on this side of the world are preparing to go back to school, and those of you living on that side of the world are already in the middle of school. So it seemed like an absolutely perfect time to have this robust conversation about parenting and learning. So, again, I'm joined today by Aimee Buckley. Aimee, welcome. I'm so thrilled to have you here.

Aimee: Thank you so much for inviting me, Lisa. I'm excited to talk about this topic because it's near and dear to my heart with children heading back to school. I'm heading back myself on August 9th. So I know that there's a lot of emotion around that for teachers, parents, and kids. Both excitement and apprehension at what this year is going to bring us with the last two years being so different from what we have normally experienced.

Lisa: Yes. My son and I, actually today is my son's birthday. So let me just give a little shoutout to Malcolm. He's 17 today, which is really hard for me to believe. It's just hard for me to even get it out of my mouth that I have a 17 year old. He'll be a junior this fall when he goes back to school. We've

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been having conversations a lot lately about what was. Then prior to the pandemic, what school was like.

He even mentioned that he's even having trouble remembering what it was like. Then there was this period of time where every day was uncertain and different and challenging. Then we've been talking about what it's going to be like to go back to "normal" whatever that is. Really trying to think about how is school going to be different.

So I want to jump into that. First, why don't you give us some background Aimee about how you came to be the founder of Study Help, and a little bit about your background so that we can understand where you're coming from.

Aimee: Sure. So I've been a public school teacher for 25 years. There's always been a need I've felt to really help students and their families to be as successful as possible. It's something I've been thinking about for quite a while. Then when schools were shut down, I knew that kids were going to need even more than what we could provide them in the classroom just due to the limited scope of what we can actually do.

So we launched this platform where we connect real credentialed teachers with families who need extra help. What is really lovely about it is that those students get 50 minutes of uninterrupted one to one time with a credentialed teacher who doesn't just know the material but knows it well enough to teach it to a variety of students with different needs and different backgrounds.

So it really is a deep dive immersion into the content. But also the ability to create that relationship with the student so that they feel comfortable and competent to ask the questions that they need that they might be

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apprehensive to do in the classroom because they don't want to sound stupid or they're just generally shy and embarrassed to raise their hand. So it's just a way to really help students gain the skill sets and the depth and breadth of content to really be successful in the classroom, and hopefully in life.

Because that's really the goal of school, right? It's not the grade on the report card but developing citizens who are productive and contributing to the economy and our society.

Lisa: I love that. I love that. I love matching up the students with the credentialed teacher for that one on one time. Because I know one of the characteristics of strong willed kids is they like to look like they know what they're doing all the time. So the idea of asking questions, putting themselves out there and risking embarrassment, it can be tough for kids. It can be really tough, particularly in the pre-teen and teenage years.

So having a resource that the student can go to to deepen their learning, to ask all the questions they don't understand. I remember being in school and sometimes being so lost that I didn't even know what to ask. So this is where having that resource can really help. So tell Aimee, how do we catch up after a year of remote learning? What are your tips and advice there?

Aimee: So the first thing I would say is the most important part is to try and reduce the anxiety around catching up. That everyone is in the same boat. We know as teachers that certain subjects already come with their own anxiety. We know that there is technically something that is math anxiety. It's not a matter of can you learn it or not. It's that there's so much anxiety around learning it that there's this block, a mental block.

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So we need to make sure that we don't build that wall by placing our own anxieties on our children, but also help them lower that wall and understand that they can learn it. It's okay if they don't understand it in the beginning. And find a different method to introduce that material to them.

So I actually specialize in special education. People always say to me, "Oh, you must be so patient." The truth is that I'm not a patient person at all. What I do is I don't give up. So if I try and teach a topic to a student and I can tell that they are not grasping what I'm saying, then I come at it from another angle. If that doesn't work, then I come at it from another angle and another angle and another angle until I can get through that wall of, "I don't understand. I'm so overwhelmed."

Because as adults we know that when you're super frustrated and anxious, it's really hard to take in information. The more relaxed our brains are, the easier it is to absorb. So I'd say that's the first step.

The second step is creating an environment where it is conducive to learning because we have so many distractions right now. That does not mean sitting at a desk or a table working on your homework. In my own classroom I have multiple places that students can sit to work because really, we want them to be able to focus on what they're doing. So even right now while I'm talking to you, I'm sitting on one of those big exercise balls. I'm not in a chair.

So creating a space where they can focus. And that means that if they need to fidget and move around and have happy feet, that does not mean that they are not working. So it's really important for us as adults to not look at that and say, "Oh you need to settle down. Cut it out. Stop fidgeting and focus on your work." Because they might be really focusing. By interrupting

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their thoughts in that moment, we have really set the process back for them.

Lisa: Yeah, I couldn't agree more. My son, he's a fidgeter. Got a little ADHD. When he was in first grade, he could not sit still to save his life. Fortunately, I mean so fortunately for us, he had the most amazing first grade teacher ever, Ms. Crowdie.

She put this big giant piece of Velcro up underneath his desk that only he knew was there so he could run his hand back and forth all day on this piece of Velcro. He got that tactile feedback from the nubbiness of the Velcro. She would let him push his chair back and kneel down at the desk and swing his legs back and forth. This allowed him to learn because his body needed to be in motion. She didn't in any way take that personally or may it mean anything. She put him in an area of the classroom that that wasn't going to disturb other kids.

Really understood to your point, creating a conducive learning environment. I think that's so important. Even at home when they're doing homework. Again, my frame of reference on this topic is my own kid. We have a basketball court in our backyard. Often, he's studying while shooting baskets. He's got flashcards, and I'm quizzing him on the flashcards while he's shooting free throws.

Aimee: Right.

Lisa: It creates the most amazing learning environment because his body is engaged, and then his mind can learn.

Aimee: And the blood is flowing.

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Lisa: Yes, yes. He's not working so hard to hold it all together in this way.

Aimee: Exactly. That is the perfect way to describe it. They don't need to hold it all together. They just need to focus on what they're doing in terms of the math or the spelling or the science. If that means that they're shooting baskets or bouncing crazy on a yoga ball or what have you then that's what they need to do. We should let them do it. That is not in any way inhibiting their learning. It's actually propelling it. So it's important for us as adults. I think when we were younger, we were told that, "Oh, you have to sit still in class." I think that was a terrible thing to do to children, and to teach us as adults.

Lisa: Yeah. I can't sit still very well. I mean when I worked in my corporate America job, every year at my review my boss would say, "Gosh you're fidgety in meetings." I would be like yeah. I'm not the girl that can just sit there. My brain works in a way that I'm often doodling or fidgeting or scribbling while I'm thinking. So I don't know why we expect humans with underdeveloped brains to sit still and at full attention.

Aimee: Yeah. The last tip I would give you is that as a parent, if you're working with your child on their homework and they start to get to that level where they are losing it and you start to lose it, that's the time to call in reinforcements. Because it's not helping them, it's not helping you, it's not helping your relationship. It's going to create these memories that spelling is hard, or math is hard, or, in high school, algebra is hard.

You can go to a tutoring platform like my own and find someone who knows what they're doing, or maybe you have grandma that's really good at that. My sister-in-law will call me often when it gets to the point. She'll send me a picture of my sweet niece who is like the gentlest, kindest, sweetest little girl. She is an amazing kid.

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She sent me this picture of her with just like her hair crazy and the red and the tears. It was so unlike her. She's like, "She's not understanding addition when they take out a number and you're not looking for the answer. You're looking for what goes in the sentence." I was like, "Okay. Let's take it back. It's time for you to stop working with her on this. Give her a breather. Do something fun. Then let's have a facetime call, and I will show her."

What I did was I made a happy face, but it was missing the eyes. So I talked to her. I said, "Okay, well what's on this that's missing?" She's like, "Oh, the eyes." I was like yeah. That's all we're doing. We're just looking for what's missing in the sentence. You know that two plus five is seven. If we take the five out, it's just like taking the eyes off the happy face. We just want to put in what's missing.

So by reframing it, she was able to understand what's going on. It didn't become this new mystery concept. It was something that she already knew. More like being a detective than learning something brand new.

Lisa: I like it. I like it a lot. Let's talk about this Aimee. Because the other thing that's going to happen when kids go back in the classroom and they come home from school at the end of the day is there's going to be a lot of after school meltdowns, right? This is a lot of the work that I work with parents on, and a lot of the content that I help parents work through.

A lot of times those after school meltdowns are real because the emotional backpack gets filled up all day. They're holding it together. So what I want parents to hear is that's okay. It doesn't mean anything's gone wrong. It doesn't mean your child can't handle school. It just means that they need to come home to their safe place and have that storm and meltdown so they can progress through the rest of the afternoon and evening. I just want

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parents to hear that that's okay and that's normal. Don't be afraid or disappointed or angry at your kids. It's that they've held it together all day.

Aimee: They have. They have.

Lisa: I talk about this all the time. School is a place you're not in control. People are telling you, "Sit down. Stop talking. Talk. Raise your hand. Don't raise your hand. Go to the bathroom. You can't go to the bathroom. Eat lunch. Stop eating lunch." They just need to come home and kind of let that all out. What is your experience on that?

Aimee: As adults, we plan for that. Don't we? I know going back in two weeks when I head back on August 9th that the first two weeks are going to be insane. All new kids learning all new things. A lot of parents who I fully understand are under a lot of stress with what's happening. I know that that's going to fall for me as a teacher. So I am already planning this is what I'm going to do when the day ends to manage my emotions and the stress of my day. Children have only been on the planet for a few years, right? They don't have this experience. They don't know to plan ahead.

I would definitely as a parent plan for that downtime at the end of the day where they can just bleh, right? Just let all that emotional baggage, that stress go. Do something that for them is a really good release and know that if they do cry or have a meltdown that they need to get it out. That that is important because that's going to make it easier for them if they're not trying to hold all that energy in.

School is hard. For children, we have to remember that so much of everyday is new. It's constantly a barrage of newness. New experiences. New information. We, as adults, don't do that. If you think about starting a

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new job. When you start a new job, the first couple weeks you feel like an idiot right? You're like I don't even know where the bathroom is.

So we need to let them have that time. So right after school is not the time to jump into homework. It is not the time to do something that is very stressful and emotional. That's the time to go out and shoot the hoops or to play on their swing set. Or as a teenager facetime and hang out with their friends or whatever they're going to do to give them that opportunity to reset.

Lisa: Yeah, totally. That is something I had to learn because when my son started to reach a point where there was a fair amount of homework, in my mind, just come from school and get it done, right? Then you have the whole evening free. Also my son's been someone who's always played sports. So there's always been practices and whatnot. I had to learn the right study environment for him. It certainly wasn't coming home from school and immediately doing his homework.

As a kid who worked really hard to hold it together all day at school, he needed to come home and just decompress a little bit. Unpack his emotional backpack, have some food, do something non-study related, and then come back to the homework later.

I love Aimee when you said for kids, every day is new. Because it's so true. I mean they're learning so much about navigating life. Conflict management, time management, getting from A to B. I mean they're learning a ton without even school. Then throw school onto it, right?

Aimee: Right. Exactly.

Lisa: They're drinking from a firehose basically for 18 years.

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Aimee: Right. If we think about for those of us who have traveled abroad and you're in another country. Everything that you're experiencing that day is new, but that obviously is fun because you're like, "Woohoo. I'm on this vacation." They're not on vacation. Every single day is this avalanche of newness. I know we know this for babies where they have that witching hour in the evening where they just have that meltdown almost every night. We need to understand that as kids get older, it's still so new.

With teenagers when they're having meltdowns in my classroom, which definitely happens, I always remember that I've had 40 some odd years to learn how to manage my emotions. They haven't.

Lisa: Yes.

Aimee: So they don't have any tricks and tips up their sleeve. It's up to us to teach them that skillset. To work with them and find what helps them manage their own emotions. Even with their own calendars. I mean once you get to high school, you start managing that on your own. Until then pretty much mom and dad and teachers told you everything.

Lisa: Yeah. As we know now, the prefrontal cortex isn't fully developed until the age of 25. So many times I think that we have very high expectations of our children. Their brain developmentally is just not there. I mean we're training it. We're preparing it. We're developing it, but it is not there. So you're right. Managing time, managing emotions, managing stress. Forward looking, "Okay. I have a paper due next Thursday. I should be working on it every night for 20 minutes." Sometimes this is hard for the brain of kids.

Aimee: Yes.

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Lisa: Okay. Let's recap Aimee. The advice that you're giving us, which I love, is reduce our anxiety as our kids go back to school. Which I think is a really important point. The best word that comes to mind all the time is we live in a topsy-turvy world right now.

Aimee: Yes.

Lisa: There's normal anxiety from life, and then there's anxiety of what's going on in the world. Then you might be layering anxiety on top of that about your kids going back to school depending on how you feel about everything in the world. So one of Aimee's biggest pieces of advice in my takeaway from today is make sure I'm reducing my anxiety and encouraging my child to reduce their anxiety as well as we head back into the classroom. Your second piece of advice was make the environment conducive to learning.

Aimee: Yes, absolutely.

Lisa: I think what you're telling us is not just a physical environment, but the attitude and the emotional environment around learning as well. Right?

Aimee: Right. Definitely important.

Lisa: Then number three was just thinking about what I heard as an after school strategy.

Aimee: Yes.

Lisa: Know your kid. Meltdowns are gonna happen. They're okay. There's a lot going on for them. Every day is a new day. Be patient, be understanding. Work to create, again, a conducive environment after

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school. If your child needs a break before learning, if they need some downtime. Really create an environment and I would guess also a routine around learning. But create one that works not only for the parent but the student as well.

Aimee: Yes, the student is very important.

Lisa: Yeah. Perfect. Awesome. Anything else you want to share with us as I recapped here?

Aimee: I think that you've really grasped what we've talked about today. I think that these are a lot of strategies to start off with. So even though it's something we can talk about in 20 minutes, it takes a long time to implement.

Lisa: Definitely. I think this is the perfect time to have this conversation. I'm so glad that we have an opportunity to connect Aimee. Because as people are starting to get closer and closer with the start of school, I know your start date is right around the corner. It is a good idea to start thinking about back to school strategy now and prepare yourself and have some conversations with your kids about what is back to school going to be like.

Because I think kids have more concerns and anxiety about this. It's good to have lots of open conversations in the family. What is this going to be like? What is it going to look like? What is it going to feel like for all of us? For the school, for the teachers, for the students, and for the parents, yes?

Aimee: Right. It's definitely going to be different than it was last year or the year before or the year before that.

Lisa: Yes.

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Aimee: So I know some students and I know for myself we will all be in masks all day. So from 8:30 to 3:30. That's going to be a long haul. So preparing ourselves for that situation, which I know a lot of people think, "Oh, well this is just a mild inconvenience." In the scheme of teaching, it does make it really challenging. When you can't see a student's face, you don't always know what emotion they're feeling. It's harder to hear them. So you have to ask them to repeat themselves a lot. The students might not hear me as clearly. Even though I'm going to try my best I will have a mask over my face.

So there's things that we have to mentally prepare for because if we walk in the first day and we're not anticipating that it's going to be hard, I think that's a big mistake.

Lisa: I agree. I agree. I think we also shouldn't underestimate the energy drain. It will be taxing to have to speak louder all day, to have to speak clearer, to have the mask on, to navigate that world for our children. I think that's a great reminder. At the beginning of the school year, empathy and patience could be our best tools as parents. With our children, with the school, with our teachers, right.

Aimee: Yes, thank you for putting that in there.

Lisa: A lot of empathy and understanding because it's hard for all of us. Doable and exciting to be back in the classroom.

Aimee: Oh yes, definitely.

Lisa: Right? I mean definitely exciting. One thing that we learned in our family in 2020/2021 is that remote learning is not my son's jam. I know some kids did great. Some kids did fine. Some kids did not do well. We fell

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into that did not do well category. My son definitely needs to be back in the classroom, and we're excited for him to go. Empathy and understanding for all of us will go a long way right now.

Aimee: Right.

Lisa: So to all the teachers out there that are going to go back into the classroom and wear a mask and teach our kids and have the attitude that you have Aimee. On behalf of Real World Peaceful Parenting, I say thank you. A huge shoutout and lots of love to all the teachers.

Aimee: Big shoutout to all the teachers.

Lisa: Yeah. Big shoutout. Big shout out. Great job the teachers do. Okay. So if someone wants to find you and work with Study Help, where can they go to do that Aimee?

Aimee: So if you go to study.help, that's all you have to put it in your Google search. It will pull up our website. On our website there is a red button that you can push to have a consultation with me. What will happen is you and I will meet, and we will discuss our child. What their strengths are is always the first thing I ask. What are the challenges, and what are their interests? Because if I know what their strengths are and what their interests are, I can really address the challenges from the best possible angle.

That is the information that when I connect with the teacher that I think would be the best fit for them is the information that I give them. So that they can go in day one with these tools to help the student be as successful as possible.

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I would say even for the students who online learning wasn't their jam, this isn't online learning like what you experienced in the classroom. Because it is one to one. If you think about your kids facetimeing their friends, it's much more like that because it's one to one. So you can't really get lost in the shuffle of the screen because you're really interacting one to one with the teacher. It is a relationship that gets built. So it's more of a conversation and guiding the child than it is teaching when we think of traditionally in the classroom.

Lisa: I love it. I love it. Your website is wonderful. I've had a chance to visit and have a look around. You've got a lot of great resources on there. So I want to encourage everybody to go to [study.help](#). As Aimee said, hit that red button. We'll link to the website in the show notes. Aimee, you are so passionate about helping children. We are fortunate to have you. Your students, I'm sure they just love you and benefit.

Thank you for all you're doing to help matchup learners with teachers. It's a beautiful service, and we benefit from your desire to help. It's been really fun talking with you today. I really enjoyed it. Thanks for the tips on how to walk back into the classroom with confidence and ease. Super helpful. I know everybody listening has enjoyed it.

Aimee: Thank you for having me. I love your podcast. It's wonderful.

Lisa: Aw thank you. Yay. So there you have it. The three strategies we're going to work on. Reduce anxiety, create a conducive learning environment, and after school strategy. Until we meet again, I'm wishing you peaceful parenting. Take care everyone.

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

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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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