

**Ep #36: Grandparenting Strong-Willed Kids:
An Interview with Gail Sundell**



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.

Lisa: Welcome, welcome, welcome. Welcome to today's episode. Oof we are in for a treat today. I am so excited. I always get really, really, really excited when I have the opportunity to interview someone, and today is no different. I woke up at 5:00 this morning ready to go because today I get to talk with and introduce you all to Gail Sundell. Gail is an artist, a beautiful, wonderful, amazing artist. She's a lay minister. She is a mother to two amazing adult children, and a grandmother to three strong willed kids.

Gail is part of my Hive membership, Gail and her daughter. Gail is a beautiful example, beautiful example. I mean it chokes me up to even think about the beautiful example she is of a grandparent supporting their strong-willed grandchildren and a mother supporting her daughter as she navigates parenting strong-willed kids.

Gail and her daughter learn alongside each other. They support each other. I wanted all of us to be able to hear a conversation of what it's like for a mother to support her adult daughter and her grandchildren in their strong-willedness as they find their journey to peaceful parenting. So welcome Gail. I'm so happy to have you here today.

Gail: I'm so pleased to be here. Thank you.

Lisa: Wonderful, yeah. Gail is just, ugh. I just love you. So let's start out, ease our way into this conversation with let me ask you. How did you find me and this work? Tell us the story of how we arrived at this place?

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Gail: About two, two and a half years ago I was perusing Facebook, and I saw the peaceful parenting advertisement. I can't even remember how it was presented, but it was *The Angry Parent* and an offer to download the book *The Angry Parent*. So I did, and I read it. At that time, of course, it was all new. All the vocabulary, all the verbiage that is a daily in our vernacular now. I mean we use all these terms and everything. It resonated with me, but I didn't act on it.

The reason why I wanted to download it and look at it is because my daughter has three strong willed children. I didn't know the terminology at that point, but I just knew things weren't going well. I didn't remember screaming at my children. My children don't remember that I screamed a lot, but my poor daughter was dealing with her children that way. I just felt so bad for her. I just couldn't understand why. So I thought maybe this would help.

I downloaded it for her. I'm not sure if she got around to reading it or not, but the screaming continued. It was finally in February of this year that I saw, again...Oh, I guess I kept getting those emails from you after I downloaded it. So it was resonating. It was just in my mind, my subconscious. I decided well, you know what? I just spent \$260 on horse feed. I also am an avid equestrian and have two horses. How can I not spend \$150 on the peaceful parenting program when I'm willing to spend that much on my horses? I mean these children are so much more important than those horses.

It was so worth it. Amanda, I did it for her. So I hoped that she would be the one that would be listening to it and gaining from it. She did as much as she could, but working full time with three children, it's hard to get the time and the Zooms were when she was at work. She was able to listen to the recordings. Anyways. After we finished that, progress was so evident that

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we decided to join the Hive then. It just was so worth it. We appreciate so much the benefits of the peaceful parenting view of life and parenting.

Lisa: Wonderful. Well, you both had a really nice transformation. Take us back Gail. Let's start here. Let's talk about the before and after. So what was it like watching your daughter struggle as a parent and watch not only the struggle but the lack of connection or the less than connection? I shouldn't say lack of, but the struggle even to create the connection between this daughter that you love so much and are close to and her children. As a grandparent, what is it like to stand on the sidelines and watch that?

Gail: Oh it just hurt. It hurt my heart because I knew that wasn't her. She is such a sweet natured person, but it was like she was protecting herself. She was dysregulated. Now I know that word. She was hurting. I realized she has, well, I don't remember when it was the lightbulb went on, but I realized my daughter is dysregulated just like her children are. She is lashing out because she is dysregulated.

Now I believe that your work is as much self-regulation as it is parenting schools. It's all about us. I can only change myself. She is learning—it's a journey—but she has learned to regulate herself. She realizes it now though. She can see that. She said, "This wasn't their issue. This was my issue." Oh my gosh. This morning she said, "I just want you to know how grateful I am to not be angry all the time."

She didn't realize she was angry all the time. She was just screaming in self-defense because they wouldn't listen to her. She was just trying to get their attention. She wasn't trying to be mean. She didn't understand. She's beginning to understand now that it's up to her, and she's doing a

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wonderful job. Almost every day she has a new story of success. It's just wonderful.

Lisa: Yeah. I see this so often. Certainly this is a part of my story. Like your daughter, I was angry all the time. At first, I didn't recognize it. Angry and frustrated because I wanted it to go one way and it was going a different way. The more I tried, the louder I yelled, the more angry I got, the more we moved away from the result I was looking for. So, of course, that's going to create frustration within someone.

I see parents all the time parenting from a place of anger and frustration, and our kids deserve better. That's the bottom line. When I can help someone enjoy parenting and drop the anger and work on themselves, I just think we're making the world a better place one family at a time. Because the only way our kids are going to learn regulation is if it's modeled in the home.

Gail: Yes.

Lisa: That's what your family is working on, right. Staying regulated in the face of three strong willed determined not always cooperative, not always complain to young children.

Gail: Yes. If I might, this may be a diversion path, but we requested a visit from our oldest grandson, six years old, last week for five days. He came and visited. It was a rollercoaster ride. I mean we had ups and then we had some deep downs. We went and got him on Wednesday, and Saturday my husband had just about enough. He wears hearing aids. So loud noises physically hurt his ears. Our grandson is very boisterous and dramatic.

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When our grandson just very loudly, I asked him to do something. “No.” He said, “What’s he going to be like when he’s 13 if you can’t control him now?” He just left the room. I just about started crying because this is a journey, but the conflicts, the challenges are great. It worried me and worried me and worried me.

The next morning I woke up and we had a little conversation about some other things. Then he said, “How’d you sleep?” Because he couldn’t sleep all night thinking about these other things. I said, “I couldn’t sleep at all because I was worried about Bryden all night because of what you said.” I mean it made me worry. I was fearful. He said, “You know what? I realized that spanking is just a shortcut. It gets results immediately, but the collateral damage is great, I mean bad.” A lot of collateral damage. These are my words, but this is his message.

He said, “I realize that in politics, the world, war. War is a shortcut to getting what you want. You just shoot them and then they’re gone, and you don’t have the problem anymore.” Well that’s not what we want. We want to be nonviolent parents and grandparents. He said, “I realize it’s a journey. You keep trying.” He said. He was being supportive. He realized that yes, it’s painful. It’s challenging. He gave me such a gift to say, “I understand what you’re doing. It hurts me too badly. I can’t do this, but I can support you in what you’re trying to do for our grandchildren.”

Oh my goodness. That was just so moving. I realized he’s so astute. He grandparents differently than me, but he realizes the value in diving deeper and connecting. It’s just that he doesn’t have the skills to do that yet. Neither do I. We’re all working on it.

Lisa: Well, I think that’s a beautiful story. It’s a beautiful example of the teamwork. It’s one of the things that impresses me the most Gail about

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your entire family is you all have locked arms together. Your husband, dad, you, the mom, your daughter, and your grandchildren are all locked together in a circle figuring out how to get maximum connection and cooperation with these three strong willed kids in 2021. I think every adult child in the world would love to have this support.

I talk to grandparents all the time who want to provide this support. This is the level of support that extended family can provide to parents of strong willed kids. It's so much more effective than telling them what to do or judging them or doling out dominant parenting advice, right. It's the realization that there's a new way to parent.

Nobody wants to listen to a six year old boy meltdown, scream, cry. Loud volume is loud volume. It's great that your husband can say, "That hurts my ears, but I understand why you're doing it. I'm going to support you from afar." That is a level of support that your grandchildren will benefit from. It's a beautiful family circle. Your grandchildren are going to be better for it.

So what I'd love to dig into is talk to us about how you support your daughter, and advice you have for other grandparents that want to do it like this. That see the benefit but don't know how yet.

Gail: Maybe by asking questions rather than telling, "You should do this, or you should do that. Have you ever thought about it? I've been listening to this program, and I've gained an insight. Would you like to hear what I've learned?" I'm a younger child. So I always had the big sister that was my guide. So I have an easy time not being the dominant one and telling everybody what to do. So that's just my nature. If you're the oldest one and used to being right all the time, it might be a little bit more difficult. I'm not always right all the time. I'm always doubtful, but just suggestions I guess. Not be domineering I guess.

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Lisa: Not being domineering. I think also I've observed that you are really in tune with what your daughter needs for support and then what your grandkids need for support. Sometimes that's different things.

Gail: Yeah. That's true.

Lisa: Right?

Gail: Sometimes it just can't be done. I mean but you try it again or you do over. I love your do over idea. I had to use that a couple times when grandson one was here. He said, "That's all right. We all make mistakes."

Lisa: Aw so sweet.

Gail: They have taught him that. I also have an adopted daughter here in time. It's a long story, bittersweet story. She has a seven year old, four year old, and two year old. So they're very similar to our other grandchildren. They call me Grandma Gail and think I'm one of their grandparents. They are different from the other grandchildren and take different parenting skills. I don't feel like I have shared as much with my adopted daughter because I can't be quite as not forceful or domineering over.

Lisa: Opinionated.

Gail: Opinionated, yeah. Thank you. She has a mother and a stepmother and mother-in-law. She has a lot of mothers, but we have such wonderful conversations. I'm sure she's open to it, but the relationship is just a bit different. I'm encouraging her too. I'm sharing it with everybody. The self-help that makes people more aware is just so valuable, let alone how we're improving our children and grandchildren wise. So valuable. I do appreciate that so much.

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Lisa: Well, thank you. Yes. The other thing I want to ask you about Gail, you mentioned it earlier. Let's talk about this. So your grandchildren come over to your house with their parents or by themselves or collectively they come and stay with you. You mentioned earlier as a grandparent, there's value in staying regulated, right? Being another role model.

I think probably if I had to guess, this is something you've really worked on and seen a lot of growth. Is staying regulated when your grandchildren are dysregulated and/or their mom is dysregulated. You as a strong influence in their lives, you working on yourself staying regulated when they're dysregulated.

I think this is something that I want grandparents to hear and parents and adopted parents and foster parents and aunts and uncles. The opportunity to influence children by staying regulated when they're dysregulated. I think you can see the value in that at this point, yes?

Gail: Oh definitely. Yes. It's not only with the children. It's interpersonal. It's in our marriages and the workplace. It's just so wonderful to be aware that connection and relationship is essential to make this world run. If we mentor that to our children and grandchildren, they'll see it and internalize it. It will become a part of them.

Lisa: Yes. I think the beauty of a grandparent or an aunt or a bonus mom or dad or like you described an adopted grandparent staying regulated. As a child, "This is someone that I look up to. When they show me regulation, it's just another beautiful relationship and another influence on my life. Another person staying regulated when I'm dysregulated as a child, when I'm storming." It deepens the lesson. It's another example. I look up to this person and they're staying regulated. You just can't beat it. I want everybody to practice regulation around kids, you know.

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I know even for me, my son is getting ready to start a new high school. The opportunity for dysregulation is there. There's excitement. There's worry. There's stress. There's the unknown of the new. Am I going to like it? Is it going to work out? There's the decision of leaving the old high school to switch. There's the missed friends. That school is starting before the new school, right. So then there's FOMO, fear of missing out kicking in. There's all these emotions swirling around.

Every morning I wake up and I say to myself, "Regulation Lisa. You've got to be the model of regulation in the storm." I really set my intention right now more than ever to make sure that I'm staying as regulated as I possibly can while he's on the roller coaster ride of emotions. I see the influence that this is having. When I see my intention and I'm the regulated person, I see that intense energy in our house just going down a level or two. So I'm reminded of the value.

When I think about you being a beautiful example to your grandchildren of staying regulated when they're storming, I think what a gift. What a gift you're giving them. It far exceeds any monetary thing you can buy them. It, to me, is a real expression of love. I can stay regulated grandchild or child when you're struggling. I can be the oak tree in the rooms.

Gail: I was totally aware of that in the last five days with our grandchildren, and totally failed several times, many times. I was so glad to have the tools that you've given us to do a do over and to say, "I'm sorry you feel that way. I'm sure glad I have enough love for the both of us because I can see how upset you are."

There's so many tools that you need that I was so grateful to have while caring for him the last week. I used the namaste quite a bit just to regulate myself, so my feelings weren't hurt, and so I wasn't fighting back. I was just

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realizing, “Oh boy. He’s dysregulated. There's something going on. I'm not sure.” They're not at the point yet where they really verbalize. They only have one word feelings right now. I keep guessing and asking them to guess, but they don't really respond yet. It's a journey.

Lisa: Yeah. You know Gail as we're talking about this, I'm even thinking about your grandson. As much as he loves grandma and grandpa, and I'm sure he was so excited to come stay with you for a week and thrilled. There's still, for a six year old little guy, there's still fear of the unknown and nervousness and change in the routine. Maybe missing mom and dad and missing brother and sister. So even though it's exciting and he wants to go stay with grandma and grandpa, at his age he's dealing with a lot of big emotions.

What you gave him is the beautiful gift of, “Okay, I see you. I see you're struggling.” You resisted the urge to take it personally. “How dare he? This is so exciting for him. Why is he behaving like this? Does he know how good he has it? I'm working so hard over here to make this a special week for him.” You know you really resisted the urge to take it personally. You return to the tool of regulation over and over and over again.

Of course now in retrospect, any of us could hear your story and think, “Of course a six year old is going to be dysregulated leaving his home for a week and going to visit someone else. Of course that's going to happen.” You just gave him space to work through that while you were all together and gave yourself space to work through it. I love it. I think it's just a beautiful example of what's possible.

When we're with our grandchildren, if they become dysregulated the first five minutes they're at your house, it doesn't mean we have to have that set the tone. We can have a do over and regulate and start again fresh at any

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moment. So for those listening if you hear nothing else out of today's episode. Whether we're parents or nannies or grandparents or aunts and uncles, there's always the chance to have a do over. There's always the chance to start again. I ask all of us no matter what age of the kids we're interacting with, raising, loving, don't take it personally.

So Gail, I think I'm going to put some words in your mouth as we wrap up here. I think what you're saying is if you're a grandparent, if you're an aunt and uncle, if you're an adopted grandparent and this work speaks to you, jump in, dig in, learn, apply. Because the connection that happens when you're on the path to peaceful parenting is amazing, yeah?

Gail: Yes, yes. Very well said. Thank you.

Lisa: Beautiful. Well thank you for sharing your story and your family with us today. Again, you're just a beautiful role model to grandparents, to parents of adult children that have strong-willed kids. I really wanted everybody to just have a chance to meet you and hear an example of what's possible. I think that that's just... So what I wanted people to hear today is it's never too late to jump in the path of peaceful parenting. If you have kids in your family and you want to learn more, I invite you to come and join our community. I invite you to learn the tools.

Gail: I think that's what I wanted to add was the weekly coaching has been so helpful. Because I can't remember the words or the phrases or the terminology, but being reminded every week and hearing your advice to the other parents has been so helpful. I love what you said that reading about it is learning it but being coached is putting it into practice. See I don't even know what you said, but it was something like that.

Lisa: Yes. Reading is passive learning and coaching is transformation.

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Gail: Yes, yes, yes. So thanks for being there. I love it. I look forward to both sessions every week.

Lisa: Yay, that makes me so happy Gail. That makes me so happy. Well, thank you again. I know on behalf of everybody listening, thank you for being here. Thank you for doing this. It means a lot to me. Gail did a great job. She was a little nervous at the beginning, but you did a great job. You shared your story. We got the message across. I know lots of people listening to this are benefiting from hearing about your experience and the support you provide to your daughter and at the same time your grandchildren. So I just adore you, Gail. I'm so grateful that you were here today.

Gail: Well thank you for giving me this opportunity.

Lisa: Beautiful. Okay there you have it. There's Gail's story. If this resonates with you and you think, "You know what? I want a story like that. I want to be on Lisa's podcast." Then jump over to thepeacefulparent.com and join us. Okay. Until next time, 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.