

## Ep #38: The After-School Meltdown Is Real



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host  
**Lisa Smith**

[Real World Peaceful Parenting](#) with Lisa Smith

## Ep #38: The After-School Meltdown Is Real

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. Welcome to today's episode. Thank you so much for joining me today. I am so excited to be here with you. I want to begin today's episode with a question. Do you wonder why your kid or kids are so well behaved at school or daycare then once he, she, or they see you or they get in the car all hell breaks loose? Do you wonder why things go well all morning at soccer, and then five minutes in the car on the way home your kid at any age is melting down? Yeah, I hear you.

My goal today is to help you with the after school meltdowns. I hope today's episode gives you a different perspective and deepens your understanding on what is really going on. If your kid has these after school meltdowns at any age, you know exactly what I'm talking about. Maybe you just got goosebumps on your arms or you're thinking, "OMG, this is just what I needed to hear today. My prayers are answered." Yeah? Yeah. I hear you, and I'm so excited to bring you this episode today.

The after school or the after game or the after sleepover or the after playdate meltdown is real at any age. I want to validate that for you. I want you to know you're not alone. Nothing has gone wrong. Nothing. Ironically the after school meltdown is a compliment to you. Yes, you as the parent. You see, you are the safe place for your child when he, she, or they feel comfortable unraveling or unpacking their emotions that they couldn't express throughout the day.

Let me say that again. You are the safe place for your child. You are the place where he feels comfortable unpacking or unraveling all the emotions

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that he couldn't express throughout the day. I know you might be thinking right now, "Are you crazy Lisa? It doesn't feel that way." Here's the news. Our kids hold it together all day at school. Then they need to let it out. They need to unpack their emotional backpack after school as I call it.

If this is happening in your home, here's the good news. It's a compliment. It means you are the safe place where your kid can unpack the backpack. You are the comfortable environment where they can take all the stuff, the feelings, the unprocessed feelings, the rough scenarios and situations, and they can unpack them. Listen, I know firsthand. I promise you. I know this is hard.

Sometimes it can feel like you're your kid's punching bag. Our mind goes to these places like he's being difficult. She's being disrespectful. He's taking it out on me. She's being a brat. Yeah? It's so difficult not to take this personally when it happens. It's easy to get triggered and start storming right alongside our kids.

My goal today is to give you a different perspective on the after school meltdown and really deepen your understanding of what is going on so that you don't take it personally. You don't have to get triggered. You don't have to storm alongside them. Did you just get goosebumps? Are you like, "Oh Lisa, I needed this so bad. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you." Well, you're welcome.

All right. Let's keep going. Here's the deal. What our kids need as parents is they need us to show up regulated with empathy after school and help them unpack their day. Let me say that again. Our kids need us as the adult with the fully developed brain to show up regulated with empathy so that we can help them unpack that backpack.

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I remember like it was yesterday getting my world rocked the first few weeks after full day kindergarten. My sweet little five year old boy who at the time was so excited to go to big boy school would go into the school smiling and happy. After school, that little boy would get into the car and turn into a flailing blubbing angry dictator who answered every question by yelling at me. You feel me?

If I'm honest with you, I back then took it so personally. I got so triggered. I would storm right alongside him. It was all because I didn't know what was going on. I didn't understand. I had big expectations that a smiling content happy boy was going to jump in the car after school and lovingly tell me all about his day in his indoor voice. Ugh. I shudder just thinking about it. About how much unnecessary storming I did alongside him all because I didn't understand what was going on and I took it so, so, so personally.

Now listen. Fast forward 12 years, there's still storming after school by my 17 year old. Believe me. It didn't go away. The difference is that now I know better, and you do too. That's what today's episode is all about. To quote the late great Maya Angelou, "When we know better, we do better." So today's episode is the invitation to begin the process of knowing better. Yeah?

Okay. Let's dig a layer deeper here, and let me breakdown for what's really going on. Let me explain it. When our kids get up in the morning, they put on an invisible backpack. All humans do, by the way. You do too. All of us. We strap on this invisible emotional backpack, but we're talking about our kids here.

So visualize, imagine, remember that everyone of your kids when they wake up in the morning, the first thing they do is strap on this invisible emotional backpack. All day they're filling it up with unprocessed emotions. As the day goes on, the backpack fills and starts to bulge.

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The school day is the perfect environment to bulge the backpack with unprocessed emotions, especially for strong willed kids. I mean come on. First off, it's a long day. Right? If your child's school day is typical beginning at eight and stopping at three. They're getting up at 6:30 or 7:00 a.m. to get ready for school, that's a long day.

If you really think about it, your kids have no control over your day. There's no coffee break. There's no going out for a long lunch. There's no zoning out for a little bit on the internet or having an extra long conversation at the watercooler or lingering behind at a meeting or putting your head down and powering through the work. Or doing the work you really like first and saving the work you don't like for later. Or deciding what tasks you're going to do every day. That's now how it works for our kids.

During this very long day, they have absolutely no control over their day. Remember. The number one thing strong willed kids want to feel in control. So for the strong willed kid, school is incredibly challenging for them even if they love school, right? Who knows what happened in the morning at home before the drop off? Certainly there was the beginning of filling the emotional backpack before we even got in the car.

At school, think about this. People are telling your kid exactly what to do every minute at any age. Sit down, stand up, move, don't move, don't fidget, pay attention, raise your hand, don't talk, talk, eat, stop eating, stop playing. Emotions come up all day for our kids. All day. Things like expectations, fear, rejection, disappointment.

"My clothes are too tight. My clothes are scratchy. The button bothers me. I'm hot. I'm cold. I'm thirsty. I don't like how I look. I'm self-conscious about my body. I'm hungry. I'm concerned about my friend. Yesterday she was talking to me and today she's not. I don't feel like I have any friends. I'm experiencing FOMO, the fear of missing out. I just found out there was a

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sleepover this weekend and I wasn't invited. Or there's a birthday party this weekend and I'm super nervous. I don't understand the content that's being taught. I can't focus. No one listens to me. I'm not allowed to talk. I have so much to say. I don't fit in."

Oh my goodness. Can you just picture this bulging invisible emotional backpack? Ugh, I sure can. It brings tears to my eyes to think about all our littles ones go through all day at school at any age. Any age. Often when they get home from school and that backpack is bulging, they need to empty it. They need to let go of all the emotions that they were holding onto throughout the day.

Although it can be hard for us parents, please know it indicates you and your home are the safe place. Even now my 17 year old comes home some days and needs to unpack his backpack, his emotional backpack. His days are long, and he's expected to sit still, which is his least favorite thing in the whole world to do, and pay attention, which is really hard for kids with ADHD.

When he gets home, he's tired and he's hungry. He's been sitting in an uncomfortable chair all day at a desk that's way too small for his frame. There isn't much time for him to socialize or speak up, and he's got a lot to say. During the school day, he's often not sure what is expected of him. Sometimes he's disappointed in his performance. On top of it, he doesn't love every subject that he studies. Sometimes he's lost or bored or behind. Often, he's frustrated with the amount of homework he has or how he did at basketball practice.

He blows in the door and let me tell you I can feel the storm brewing. I can visualize the bulging invisible emotional backpack, and the after school meltdown is real. Can you just feel it? Can you see it? Are you blown away right now? Are you thinking, "Wow, I am so glad Lisa that I know this." If

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you're like me, you're going, "Wow, I had no idea." Yeah? Let me share a story with you.

Veronica is a mom with an eight year old strong willed daughter. Veronica and I were talking recently in one of our one on one sessions. She said that she was excited to pick Sasha, her daughter, up from school. She couldn't wait to hear all about her day. She was telling me that on this particular day when she picked Sasha up from school, Sasha was really crabby. Veronica said how was your day. Veronica said she couldn't wait to hear the answer because she knew they were doing something really fun in her class that day. That morning, Sasha was really excited to get to school.

So after school, Sasha gets in the car. Veronica says, "How was your day?" Sasha immediately started screaming at her and plugged up her ears. Veronica said she was thinking, "Oh my god child. You're being such a brat. I can't believe this." Veronica said she started getting really worked up and taking it personally. Then she heard my voice in her head encouraging her to get curious, not furious and to not take it personally.

So she decided to dive for a few minutes in total silence all the while encouraging herself not to take her daughter's behavior personally. She said she shifted her thoughts and her energy. She got really curious, and she said, "Hey Sasha, you seem frustrated. What are you feeling? What's going on?"

After a few what felt like very long seconds, Sasha burst into tears and started crying. She reported through her blubbering tears that they didn't get to do their fun project today because a few of the kids weren't listening and following the teacher's instructions. The teacher got really angry and decided they weren't going to do the fun project, and they would just have to wait until next week.

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Can you imagine this little eight year old girl's disappointment and frustration? How bulging that invisible emotional backpack must be? She was so excited about this project and so looking forward to it. Through no actions of her own because other kids weren't listening and following the teacher's instructions, the project that she was really excited about got shelved. They have to wait all the way until next week.

So Veronica, the mom, said she had this just amazing epiphany. She brought empathy and understanding to the situation and responded, "Oh honey. I'm so sorry. Tell me all about it." Veronica said she just made herself listen. She said she was biting her lip and had her fist in her mouth not to respond. She just wanted her daughter to talk. She wanted Sasha to get it all out. So Veronica resisted the urge to talk, to fix, to placate or make better.

During the entire rest of the drive home, she just let her daughter unpack her invisible emotional backpack. When they pulled in the driveway, Veronica said she could feel Sasha returning to her normal regulated self.

So good, right? I want that for each and every one of you. I really want it for your kids. I want you to really understand what is going on here, so you don't take it personally. Remember, I said earlier our kids need us to show up regulated with empathy and help them unpack their day. Help them unpack the invisible emotional backpack that's bulging. You know I always love to give you action steps. So here are the five steps I use on the regular and teach my clients to help their kids unpack the invisible emotional backpack at any age.

Step number one is probably not going to surprise you because I've said it about seven times so far. What is it? What's step number one? Any guess? Yep, you guessed it right. Step number one is do not take the meltdown



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personally. I beg you. Do not take it personally. Taking it personally is the beginning of falling down the blackhole to storm alongside your kids.

So we have to work on not taking the after school meltdown personally. If we don't take it personally, we won't get triggered. If we don't get triggered, we won't get dysregulated. If we don't get dysregulated, we won't storm. So the gateway to not storming while your kid is having the after school meltdown, the gateway is step one, which is do not take it personally. Check? Check.

Step two is to manage your own expectations of how your kids will present. This was a big one for me. I used to get so disappointed when my son wasn't excited to tell me about his day. Calm, smiley, ready to see me. When his eyes didn't light up. I basically expected him to be regulated every day when he got in the car.

Now it makes me laugh just to think about it because many days throughout his academic career, many, his invisible emotional backpack is bulging. He needs help unpacking it. Step two is that I manage my own expectations. I'm open to the bulging backpack. I understand what's going on. I understand where he's coming from, and I can manage my own expectations.

Step number three is an important one. Step number three is to be at your best self if at all possible when you pick up your kids after school. Be off your phone. Don't be triggered. Don't be rushed. Manage your expectations. Don't take it personally. Drop the expectations. Be open to the hot mess that's going to get in your car on the drive home at the bus stop after soccer. Be at your best, which is really being regulated with empathy so that you don't get triggered and take it personally.

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Number four is be awake at the wheel so you can connect, connect, connect in your kiddo's unique way by tuning in to what they need. Be the detective. Maybe your kid needs questions about the day. Maybe they need your undivided attention for five minutes. Maybe they need to ramble in the car and sort out their issues. Maybe they need your help scuba diving down to the feelings and needs. Or maybe they just need some quiet time on the drive home. Just some complete silence in the car. Almost like a five minute meditation where you're driving home without you peppering them with a bunch of questions.

My son was the kid that when he was really little, he needed that quiet time. In the beginning, I would pepper him with questions, and it would cause him to storm. Through being the detective, through figuring out his unique way, I learned that in the beginning of his academic career he needed that quiet time to just unpack his backpack. Now he needs something completely different as he's older.

So I really want to say be the detective. Figure out your kiddo's unique way after school of processing the meltdown. Then be consistent. Be consistent. That's step number five. Be consistent. Support with the routine so they know what's expected. The goal for us as parents is to learn to support the release of these feelings and emotions after school. To help them empty the bulging invisible emotional backpack.

My son calls me pretty much every day on his way home from school to externalize his thoughts. He needs to just talk and get his thoughts out. He needs to talk and ramble and sometimes storm which is yell. Not at me, but he just needs to yell. I've figured out that he just needs me to be present. He needs me to be silent. He needs me to be a great listener, right? That's me being at my best for him and that's me connecting with him every day after school. He needs to talk and ramble and storm, and he needs me to be present and silent and a great listener.

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He doesn't need me to take it personally. He doesn't need me to solve his problems. He doesn't need me to run my agenda. If he brings up something and I think there's a better way to do it, that is not the time. He does not need me to coach him in that moment. Again, what he's looking for is he's looking for me to be present, silent, and a great listener while he talks and rambles and sometimes storms to unpack his invisible emotional backpack. I've noticed that this process helps him unpack his backpack.

If I notice something that needs to be addressed or something that I want to help him with or something that I want to give him information about or I want to coach him, I do it later in the evening. I don't do it while he's having his after school meltdown because I truly want him to be able to unpack the emotional backpack after school.

If you hear nothing else today, please know that your kids are not having after school meltdowns because they want to give you a hard time. They're having after school meltdowns because they're having a hard time. Because the backpack is bulging, and you're the safe place for them to express their big overwhelming feelings, which unpacks the emotional backpack.

Good? Yeah. I think so. So glad I got to share this with you today. I'm so glad that you showed up here today to know better so that you can do better. Well done. I want to conclude today's episode by giving a real world peaceful parenting shoutout to Glennifer01.

Glennifer wrote, "I've listened to maybe 4-5 episodes of Lisa's podcast, and for the first time in almost 8 years, I feel like I'm finally starting to understand my strong willed daughter. I've been reaching out for help since she was born, and I've never heard tips as straightforward and concise as this. Lisa explains things in easy to understand language and then gives you a step by step plan on what to do next. Plus, the episodes are short

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and easy to listen to again so the wisdom soaks in more. Seriously- so good! I'm very grateful to Lisa for communicating in a way that makes so much sense to me."

I love that. Thank you Glennifer01 so much. I really appreciate you. I appreciate all of you who take the time to rate and review the podcast. I'm grateful because when you rate or review this podcast, you're paying it forward to other families. "What," you ask. "How Lisa? Come on." Well, let me explain. When you leave a review on a podcast platform, that service is much more likely to recommend *Real World Peaceful Parenting* when other parents are looking for a parenting resource.

When you take your time, which I very much appreciate and respect. When you take your time to rate and review, you're paying it forward to other families. You're paying it forward to children who really need their parents to hear this information. So from the bottom of my heart, thank you for helping to change the world one family at a time. I love you. Okay. Until next time, I'm wishing you peaceful parenting.

Thank you so much for listening today. I want to personally invite you to head over to [thepeacefulparent.com/welcome](http://thepeacefulparent.com/welcome) and sign up for my free 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](http://www.thepeacefulparent.com/welcome). I can't wait for you to get started.

Thanks for listening to *Real World Peaceful Parenting*. If you want more info on how you can transform your parenting, visit [thepeacefulparent.com](http://thepeacefulparent.com). See you soon.