

Ep #42: Big Feelings: 3 Steps to Hold Space for Yourself and Your Child



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host
Lisa Smith

[Real World Peaceful Parenting](#) with 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 with you here today. As you might have heard in the last couple of episodes, I had a cold. I know I sounded like I was recording the last couple of podcasts in a tunnel. So thank you for hanging in there with me. Thank you for all the well wishes that you all sent my way, and I'm happy to report that I feel much better, and my voice is back to normal. So thanks again for all the love.

I want to start today by asking you for a favor. If you've been loving this podcast and finding value in it, I want to see if you would be willing to share this podcast with one other parent, grandparent, nanny, coparent, or caregiver. Anyone who you think would benefit from listening week to week.

Just send them a link or send them a text and say, "Hey, check out this podcast. I love it and I thought you might like it." Or you could post it on social media and send someone a DM. You could tell someone about it at the playground or book club or in line for school pickup or whatever works for you.

When you share the podcast with someone, you're providing hope and support. You might even help them feel a little less lonely on the parenting journey as they go. We all need to know we're not alone. We need to know that we're in a community with likeminded parents. So if you could share it

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with one person that you think would benefit from hearing the podcast, I really would appreciate it. I know they would too.

Okay. So let's dig into today's episode. Today's episode is all about feelings. Feelings, feelings, feelings. Are you cringing? Do you want to turn it off? Don't. Hang with me here. Hang with me. I know for some of you just the thought of talking about feelings is wildly uncomfortable, especially when it comes to parenting.

So you know how I love to ask a thought provoking question. So when I say feelings and parenting, what comes up for you? When I talk about big loud feelings, yours or you kids, what comes up? Do you feel uncomfortable? Do you feel like, "Lisa when my kid is having a meltdown with her big feelings, I," what? "I can't stand it. I feel like I'm crawling out of my skin. I don't know what to do. I feel helpless. I don't know how to respond." Is that where you go to?

Or are you kind at the other end where you're like, "I feel like I need to jump in and rescue. I feel frozen. I really am not even sure what I'm supposed to do when these big feelings come up in my two year old, five year old, seven year old, 12 year old, 14 year old, 17 year old, 22 year old." Or do you feel angry? Are you just like, "Really? I can't believe we're doing this again."

Maybe you're in the camp that you get so dysregulated when the big feelings come up that you immediately want to fix, correct, or help. Do you fall into that camp?

Okay. Well regardless of which camp you fall into, let me share the news with you. Our goal is not to rescue our kids from their big feelings. Our goal is to witness, support, and validate their feelings. Validation means you can

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say yes to the feelings while you're saying no to the behavior. You can say yes to the feelings. Validate, witness, and support means getting comfortable with your kid's big feelings. It means understanding that your kid or kids are overwhelmed in that moment.

This is the only way they know how to communicate the request for help. Whether it's they want a cookie and you've said no. They're having big feelings about whether or not to try out for the junior high school play. Whether they have big feelings about picking a topic for the science fair that was already taken and they had their heart set on it.

Whether they have big feelings coming up about a new sibling coming into the house or big feelings coming up about grandparents coming to visit. They're so excited that they can't stand it and they keep storming because why aren't they just here yet? Maybe big emotions are coming up about high school sports tryouts or cheerleading tryouts, right?

Big feelings come up all the time. Our job is not to rescue our kids from their feelings. Our goal is to witness, support, and validate what they're feeling even if at the exact same time we're saying no to the behavior.

“I can see you're very, very, very upset that you can't have the remote control. I can see that. When you get that upset, I want you to not hit your brother. I want you to work on that. I can see that you're incredibly disappointed that the topic you wanted for the science fair project is already taken.”

I saw this post recently. It said, “Kids are supposed to feel big feelings. This is their time to learn. This is their time to experience what it means to be mad, sad, frustrated, disappointed, resentful, upset, disillusioned,

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disappointed. It's our time to guide and support them while they're learning the big feelings."

Yeah? That's one of our jobs. It's in the job description of parenting. What I want to help you with is let's talk about what is helpful and what isn't helpful when big feelings are coming up with our kids.

So what isn't helpful is telling our kids to get over it. "Come on. Just get over it." Or telling them that they shouldn't be feeling something or that they're doing it wrong. "You're not mad. You're not feeling mad right now. Stop it." Or coaching them in the middle of a storm. "I know you're very disappointed, but you shouldn't be. We're going to eat dinner in a few minutes, and you had dessert at lunch today." Right? That is not helpful. Not helpful.

Also not helpful is telling them to stop what they're feeling or telling them what they feel. "You don't feel this way, you really feel this way." Or criticizing them for feeling that. "I can't believe you're doing that. What is wrong with you? You're so dramatic." Or calling him names. "You're such a drama king. You always create problems. You're so soft."

What also isn't helpful is telling them in the heat of the moment you're being disrespectful. "You can't talk to me like that. You're being so disrespectful right now I can't stand it." Or if the feelings have spilled over into a storm, trying to get the storm to stop. "Stop that right now or I'm going to send you to your room."

What's also not helpful is trying to distract them or push the feelings down. "If you stop crying and storming and whining right now, we'll go get a cookie. Or look, look. Come over here and play with the Legos. Come over here." Also not helpful is trying to bribe, reward, or manipulate them into

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ending the storming. That is not helpful. Not at all. Not one bit. None of that. I know you know this. I know you've probably tried that and not had a whole lot of success.

So let's talk about what is helpful. "Okay Lisa. If that isn't going to work, what would work? Help me out here. Spell it out for me." What is helpful is bearing witness to the storm, which is essentially doing nothing with positive energy. What is helpful is supporting them. They are struggling. I am having a hard time. What is helpful is validating that you understand what's going on and it's safe. What's also helpful is accepting that they're storming right now and that it will pass with empathy and understanding.

What's also helpful is knowing that they're not doing anything to you. They're not giving you a hard time. They're having a hard time. So, so, so, so important that we learn this. So important. "I know you're not doing anything to me. I know you're not giving me a hard time. I see you. I know you're struggling right now."

What's really important is letting them know that you know they're struggling and that it's okay. "I get it. I get it. You're frustrated you can't put your shoes on by yourself. You're frustrated you can't have a cookie. You're nervous about tryouts. You're frustrated that the topic you wanted is already taken. You're frustrated. You're sad that your friend isn't speaking to you. You're devastated or surprised and upset that there was a sleepover that you weren't invited to. I see you struggling and it's okay."

What's really helpful is letting them know, letting your kids know with your energy and your acceptance that you love them the exact same when they're storming as when they aren't storming. "I don't love you more when you cut the storm short or avoid the storm or stuff your feelings down. I don't love you more. I love you the exact same. I'm going to show that to

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you with my energy and with my acceptance that it's okay that you're struggling. That I see you and I know it's a struggle and it's okay.”

Now here's what I know. As parents, it's so hard not to take the big feelings, the big emotions, and the storming personally. So, so, so hard. I've been doing this a long time. I've talked to thousands of parents around the world. I've worked with thousands of families. I've been on my own parenting journey for 17 years and at times it's still hard not to take the storming personally. I have my moments. When I work at it, when I remind myself not to take it personally, magic happens.

I want this for you. I want it for every one of you. I want it for you. I want it for the relationship that you have with your kids, and I want it for your kids. I want them to know that you know they're struggling and it's okay. You can do this. Yeah, it takes commitment and work. Sometimes you're going to do it well for long stretches or time and then you're not.

Something's going to surprise you or you're going to be dysregulated or you're going to be distracted or you're going to be tired or you're going to have a lot on your plate or you're going to be stressed. Then you're going to slip back into a moment of taking it personally. It's going to happen. That's okay. Just don't give up. Just recommit to coming back to validating, supporting, accepting, and bearing witness to the storm. Come back to letting them know that you love them the exact same when they're storming as when they aren't.

I cannot tell you the difference this one tool will make in your parenting. In helping you create deep connection with your kid or kids. Because to quote my friend and mentor, she doesn't know we're friends, but we are, Brené Brown. “Connection is the energy that is created when people feel seen,

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heard, and valued.” Let me say that again. “Connection is the energy created when people feel seen, heard, and valued.”

Our kids feel that energy of connection, and they feel that energy of disconnection when they are storming. They feel it. They know whether you're bribing, cajoling, threatening, criticizing, storming alongside them. That's the energy of disconnection. When you're supporting, validating, accepting, bearing witness to the storm with a confidence that it will pass. With a knowing that they're struggling, they feel that energy of connection. Yeah? So good, isn't it? So good.

Okay. So maybe you're thinking right now, “Okay Lisa. I get that. I get it. How do I do this? How do I support, validate, accept? How do I do this thing called bear witness to the storm that you're talking about?” Well, here are the three steps to holding space for your kids while they're having their big emotions that are leading to storming. The steps are not going to surprise you, but let's go over them.

Step number one is to recognize that this is not about you. It's really important that you recognize this. It's important that you say, “Okay I get it. My child is not doing anything to me. He's not giving me a hard time. He's having a hard time.” This is really, really, really important because it will keep you out of judgment. The more you stay away from judging your kids, the less likely you are to get triggered and have a storm yourself. Okay? So step one is recognize this is not about you.

Step two is to notice what is coming up for you. It's important to pay attention to the thoughts and the judgments that are going through your mind that lead to that dysregulation and storming. What is my go to thought or thoughts when my kid has big emotions? He's being disrespectful. She's

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giving me a hard time. This shouldn't be happening. They should just get over it.

It's important to notice right away what's coming up for you. When we know better, we do better. So just noticing what's coming up for you is an absolute game changer. It will help you stay calm and regulated. So recognize it's not about you. Notice what's coming up for your child, step number two.

Step number three is just bear witness. Bear witness to the storm while knowing that it will end. Just let it ride itself out. Some ways to do this are take deep breaths. In for two, out for two. In for two, out for two. By giving your brain an assignment, you'll stay out of judgement, and you'll be able to bear witness to your child's storm with that connecting energy rather than disconnecting energy.

Another way to do it is count to 10. Just in your mind, stand there and count to 10 and breathe. My favorite way to bear witness to a storm is to find a mantra that really works for you. For me, it's the English translation of namaste. "May the love in me rise up and meet the love in you."

I started on the path to peaceful parenting when my son was about four. Now he's going on 17. Whenever there's a storm, when there's big emotions, and I feel uncomfortable, I want to turn away, I want to create an energy of disconnection, I immediately go to chanting the mantra in my head. "May the love in me rise up and meet the love in you. May the love in me rise up and meet the love in you. May the love in me rise up and meet the love in you. May the love in me rise up and meet the love in you."

It's hard to take it personally and it's hard to get dysregulated and go into judgement when you're repeating to yourself over and over and over again,

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“May the love in me rise up and meet the love in you.” Feel free to borrow my mantra. I'm telling you, it's a game changer.

So when your child has big emotions and you're wildly uncomfortable because the big emotions are leading to storming, the three steps to hold the space is to recognize it's not about you. Notice what's coming up for you. Just bear witness to the storm. Create an energy of connection.

Now, I think that because many of us are trying to parent differently than we are parented. In many instances the tough love parenting or the dominant parenting or the way our parents parented us, we're doing it differently. I mean look at you. You're here today listening to this podcast. You have an intention to raise your kids in a different way.

I think what happens sometimes is that we assume because we're working so hard to move away from those old parenting paradigms, our brain makes the assumption that our kids have it easy. We think because we're organizing playdates and soccer practice and helping them with their homework and we're understanding that they have feelings and needs, our brain subconsciously is jumping to the conclusion that we've taken away the struggle for them. They shouldn't be struggling.

We assume that it's not hard being a kid. But it is hard. The brain is developing and growing and constantly learning new things and facing new challenges day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute at any age. As we've talked about in previous podcasts, our kids are just trying to get their needs met.

Big, big, big feelings and storming is a very natural part of childhood. It doesn't mean you're doing anything wrong. It doesn't mean you're not trying hard enough. It doesn't mean something's gone wrong. It doesn't

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mean something's wrong with your kids or you don't love them or you're not a good parent.

Storming from big feelings is a natural part of childhood. It's an expression of needing help. Your child is saying, "I need help. I'm struggling with my big emotions. My emotions have gotten the best of me, and this is how I'm expressing it. So please mom, please dad, please parent, please grandparent understand and come to me with an energy of connection." So good, isn't it?

Okay. So let's recap. What isn't helpful is threatening, bribing, intimidating, cajoling, fixing, hoping, or placating to try to get the big emotions to go away. What is helpful is number one, recognize it's not about you. He's not doing anything to me. He's not giving me a hard time. He's having a hard time.

What is helpful is number two, notice what's coming up for you. "What are my thoughts? What are my judgments? What's going through my mind? When that goes through my mind, does it lead to dysregulation and storming on my part?" What is helpful number three is to pivot and bear witness to your child's storm with a confidence it will end. Let it ride itself out. Set the intention of creating an energy of connection.

What isn't helpful is to judge, decide why they're doing it, make it about you, or give it meaning other than they're struggling. What is helpful is to stay calm, to not storm with them, and to let that storm run its course. Oh I love it. I hope you do too. Three steps of what to do. Good stuff. Good stuff. 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 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.

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.