

Ep #68: A Different Way to Look at Unconditional Love



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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. Welcome to today's episode. Today, I'm going to share with you one of the most important tools I've ever learned. One that completely changed how I parent, how I show my son unconditional love, and how I show up in the world. Curious? Great. Let's dig in.

Let me ask you, have you ever snapped at your kid, yelled at your kids, or gotten really mad at your kid and not even in the moment understood why? Or does your kid do something over and over and over again that really pushes your buttons? Do you sometimes find yourself disproportionately upset or mad at something your kid does, says, or reacts? Hmm. Interesting, huh? As parents, sometimes we find ourselves really mad, upset, or triggered by our kids behaviors or actions. Sometimes we find their response, their actions or reactions, their lack of actions unacceptable. Yeah?

All right. Well, I refer to the things we don't like or love about our children as their shadow side. Newsflash, we all have a shadow side. Things about ourselves that if we're honest, we don't like. We find that attractive. We want to hide from the world. We all have a shadow side. All of us. Every one of us. We also all have a light side, the best part of ourselves that we really like and that we get positive feedback from in society.

Shadow and light side is also sometimes referred to as strengths and weaknesses or positives and negatives, right. But for today's episode, I'm going to use the word shadow and light, L-I-G-H-T.

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So as I said, we all have light sides, the best part of ourselves. But for today's episode, it's all about the shadow side. The shadow side is a concept first coined by Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung. It describes the aspects of the personality that we choose to reject and repress.

For one reason or another, we all have parts of ourselves that we don't like, or that we think society won't like. So we push these parts down into our unconscious psyche. Our shadow side is often this collection of repressed aspects of our identity that Jung referred to as our shadow side or our shadow self.

Now, if you're one of those people who genuinely or generally loves who they are, you might be wondering whether this is true for you. You might be thinking, "But Lisa, I don't reject myself. I really genuinely love everything about me. I've done the work to accept and love myself as I am." I get that. I get that. Totally. What I'm talking about today doesn't invalidate that in any way.

However, with the shadow side, you're not necessarily aware of those parts of your personality that you reject. This is where it gets really interesting. According to Jung's theory, we distance ourselves psychologically from those behaviors, emotions, and thoughts that we find dangerous or unacceptable. Let me say that again. According to Jung's theory, we distance ourselves psychologically from the behaviors, emotions, and thoughts that we find dangerous or unacceptable within ourselves.

Seeing in others what we won't admit also lies within what Jung calls projection. Oh, so good, right? Let me say that again. Seeing in others what we won't admit we don't like about ourselves is the definition of projection. When I see something in you that I don't like about myself, I project that onto you through anger, through disapproval, through rejection.

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Although our unconscious minds are avoiding our own flaws, they still want to deal with them on a deeper level. So we magnify the flaws in others. Oh my god, that's so good, isn't it? We magnify the flaws in others. I think this is especially true of our children.

Hopefully, you're having a light bulb moment right now. Like you're thinking drop mic Lis, drop mic. I want to say one more time. Although our conscious minds are avoiding our own flaws, our minds still want to deal with them on a deeper level so we magnify the flaws in others. Jung says first we reject, meaning we reject our flaws, and then we project them onto others.

Seeing the shadow within ourselves is extremely difficult. So it's rarely done. But we're really good at seeing undesirable shadow traits in others. Again, hopefully light bulbs are going off all over the place right now. We're really good at seeing the undesirable shadow side in others.

Truth be told, we revel in it. We love calling out unsightly qualities in others. In fact, the entire celebrity gossip industry is built on this fundamental human tendency. I would say the reality TV industry is also built in this. We love to revel in other's shadow sides. We call it out in unsightly qualities in others because we can't look. It's extremely difficult to look at ourselves. But we're really good at seeing the traits we find to be our shadow side in others.

Okay, maybe right now you're thinking, "Wow, Lisa. This is interesting, and I appreciate you sharing this with me. But what the heck does this have to do with parenting?" Well, I will tell you. Sometimes, dare I say many times, our kids show us what we don't like about ourselves, our own shadow side, because we're projecting onto them. They're showing us what we fear, what we can't quite reach or do, what mistakes we've made in our past.

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We project onto them, sometimes very unconsciously. We get triggered, and we get disproportionately upset about it or we get really angry about it. Because not only are they doing something we don't like, but they're tapping into our unconscious shadow side that is so difficult for us to look at. So it's easier to look at it in our kids, but it's painful. We want to look away or get it to stop. It's very uncomfortable for us as parents.

So our shadow side of our kids and of ourselves and other grownups in our lives falls into what I've put into three categories: processing problems, perceived character flaws, and personality differences. So let's start with processing problems.

If we're honest with ourselves, many times we don't like that our children do not have fully developed brains. We're not walking around saying this gee, I wish my kid had a fully developed brain. But what it comes down to is we get frustrated that they have little to no executive function. We get frustrated that they can't remember things like brush your teeth or think of others or stop touching your brother or do your homework or you knew that project was due, why didn't you plot the time out?

Sometimes our kids don't seem to ever make an effort to do their best or apply themselves, especially our teenagers. Kids often do things like leave things where they land, not pick up after themselves. They're not necessarily considerate or thinking a couple steps ahead. As humans with underdeveloped brains, kids are unable to see things the way we see them. Right?

They don't often show gentleness or thoughtfulness or appreciation because they don't have the mental power, the mental capability, the mental capacity to see beyond themselves. They're often incapable of admitting their mistakes because they don't often recognize that they've made one. If we do not understand our shadow side or recognize that these characteristics of our children's shadow side are simply processing

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problems not character flaws, we can easily be triggered and fall down the rabbit hole of accusing them of simply not being good enough.

So what I'm saying here is the inability to remember to brush the teeth, the inability to get the shoes on quickly and get in the car, the inability to plot out the science project to do 20 minutes every day for the next three weeks is a processing problem, not a character problem.

But if we're projecting our own shadow side, our own things we don't like about our personality. Maybe we're always a little bit behind. Maybe we don't get places on time. Maybe we get places on time too early, and our kids struggles with getting somewhere on time. If we don't understand that for our kid that's simply a processing problem based on age, we can easily be triggered and fall down the rabbit hole of accusing them of simply not being enough.

All too often when we get triggered by these outward signs of underdeveloped brain, we react in ways that inadvertently make our children feel bad, feel incapable of doing good, and feel unworthy of love. This leads to the second category, character flaws, or what we perceive to be character flaws of our children. Again, in large part because we're projecting our own shadow sides onto our children.

We as adults have fully developed brains and are often trained throughout our lifetime to believe certain character traits are flawed, unbecoming, or shameful, and they are to be snuffed out of our kids at the first sign of them. Let me say that again. We, as adults with our fully developed brains, are often trained through our family values and our upbringing in society and the circles we run in, we are often trained throughout our lifetime to believe certain character traits are flaws. Or their unbecoming or their shameful. They are to be snuffed out at the first sign in our kids.

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We are conditioned to believe that if we allow our children to continue to present these characteristics, they will most likely ultimately become adults who are things like annoying to others, have little integrity, unlikable, or lack the ability to contribute to the greater good of society. And out of fear and projection, we lash out at our kids for being who they are, and we squash what could actually be their superpower.

Again, many, many, many time this is because our kids touch upon our own shadow side, things we subconsciously or in some instances consciously don't like about ourselves. Or when we were children, we possessed the same characteristics that we were told we're unlikable, like being bossy or dramatic or defiant or loud. You know, I was told all the time when I was a kid, you're too loud Lisa. You're too much. So it'd be very easy for me when my son was loud and big and too much to project on to him that that is an unacceptable characteristic.

The way it comes across sometimes is our kids start to be loud and big and have a lot of energy, and it angers us. It upsets us. We find it intolerable. It's really because we're projecting our own shadow side onto our kids. So characteristics like bossy, dramatic, defiant, demanding, impulsive, stubborn, unfocused, attention seeking are often some of the characteristics of what we consider to be our kids shadow side. They make many of us parents extremely uncomfortable.

You see, you have your own shadow side, and then your kid has their own shadow side. Then you have your thoughts about your kid's shadow side. All of this often triggers us when we see it expressed in our kid's personality. Sometimes it's because we see these parts of ourselves, our own shadow side that we don't like, in our kids. Oh my goodness. Ding, ding, ding, ding. Lightbulb moment right there, right? Right?

The good news is it's never too late for us to unlearn the negative perception we have about these traits in our children. It just takes

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considering some new thoughts. It takes rewiring your brain so you don't see these characteristics as your kids shadow side.

So you might try on some new thoughts like bossy kids are natural leaders with lots of ideas they like to share. Defiant children have strong beliefs and are determined. Demanding children are just kids who know what they want. Dramatic children are just expressive and passionate.

Fearful children are just cautious, careful, and think things through. Fussy children are just children strong preferences and know what they like. Impulsive children are just children who are spontaneous and instinctive. Oppositional children are just children who know what they want and advocate for themselves. Stubborn children are just children who are persistent, determined, and steadfast. I love that.

Talkative children enjoy communicating and just have a lot to say. Tattletale children are children who seek out justice and fairness and respect rules. Unfocused children are just children pay attention to many things at once and notice things that others may not. Attention seeking children are just children who are seeking connection and want to feel seen, heard, and valued.

These characteristics, if nurtured instead of squashed and thought of as shadow side, can become our children's superpower. The world gets changed for the greater good by people who are born with such character so called "flaws". Let me say that again. The world gets changed for the greater good by people with these characteristics.

If you're thinking of any of these as your kids shadow side. If you're really honest with yourself and you're thinking that my child is demanding, my child is full of fear, my child is fussy, my child is stubborn. I want to encourage you to take a minute and ask yourself do I feel that way about myself? Can I take my shadow side and instead see it as my superpower?

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Or can I take my child's shadow side and see it as his or her or their superpower?

My child isn't stubborn. My child's steadfast and determined. My child isn't talkative. My child has a lot to say, and opinions that he wants to share. She isn't demanding. She knows what she wants, and I love that about her. I knew what I wanted as a kid. They aren't bossy. They're natural leaders with a lot of ideas that they like to share. In our family, we can respect and encourage that.

Lastly, the third category we often see as our children's shadow side is personality differences. This category may be the hardest one for us to accept and love in our children. So, for example, if we're very outgoing and social, we may get really triggered when our child doesn't want to participate in conversations, games, parties, or family activities.

What happens sometimes is our light side, which we really love about ourselves, we want our kids to have that same strength, those same light sides. When our child has the opposite, when we're outgoing and they're introverted, this can also trigger us. Really, it's just a personality difference. My light side is conflicting with what I think is your shadow side. Again, this is really good to have an awareness about this.

So another example might be if we're incredibly expressive of our thoughts and feelings. Our brain may want to feel disconnected from our child who does not like to share his thoughts or feelings. We can feel frustrated by this. We can think you know what? I'm so expressive. I love to tell people how I feel and what I think.

When our child doesn't follow along in that same light side pattern, we can then decide that this is their shadow side. Again, this is all happening on a subconscious level. We can feel that their unwillingness to share their thoughts or feelings is their shadow side, and it's going to limit them. It's a

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problem, and we need to figure it out. When really we just have personality differences.

Another example. If you're a strong willed, determined go getter, you may really struggle to connect with your child who's happy go lucky and content with whatever's in front of him or being a minimalist. Your brain might say, "Oh, my goodness. He doesn't have goals. He's not determined. He's not going to make it in life." When really what's going on is you're just different people. You have different light sides.

Another example. If your cup is always half full, you're an optimistic person. You're always looking for the good or the silver lining in any situation. You can be easily triggered by your glass half empty child. You can say things to yourself like why can't he be more optimistic? Why can't she just go with the flow? Why can't she look at the bright side? It may trigger your fears that your child is going to grow up to be grumpy or depressed or unable to function in the world or sarcastic.

Some children and adults alike naturally complain because they're trying to acknowledge that something they're experiencing is contrary to what they think it should be. Some children naturally over dramatize pain because they long for attention and compassion. This could really trigger us. Some children naturally debate everything because they simply have a need to be against whatever is going on. They enjoy the argument. They enjoy the sport of debate. So they're always taking an opposite position.

In any case, when we're getting triggered by any of these things, underdeveloped brains, perceived character flaws, or personality differences, our children are often reflecting back to us our own shadow side, and we don't like it. Our brain doesn't like it. Our brain doesn't want to deal with it. We often get triggered into a state of fear or anger.

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Maybe you were always yelled at or disciplined for having a certain characteristic or personality trait. Maybe when you brought out your shadow side, in any way, you were yelled at or disciplined or expected to tuck it back under and hide it from the world.

Yeah? I know this certainly happens to a lot of us. Maybe we weren't raised in a household where we were encouraged to see the value of our own "weakness". Maybe our shadow sides were constantly being punished or talked down to or told we weren't good enough. Maybe you were conditioned to believe that the person you are is just not enough.

Maybe you're working really hard to protect your children from ever having that feeling. So when they bring out their shadow side, it really upsets you because you want them to know they're enough, but they have this side that they don't like or that society doesn't like or makes their life difficult. It makes you unconsciously project your own fears and anger onto them when they show that shadow side.

This can be really painful in raising children. But I want you to know, there's hope, and there's things we can do about this. Recognition is the biggest piece. Let me also share with you that what your children ultimately want to know is do you accept me the way I am? All of Me, the shadow and the light side? I ask you do you? Can you? Will you?

I define unconditional parental love as showing our kids that we love them the exact same when they're showing us their shadow side as their light side. Now, that doesn't mean you necessarily like the shadow side, right? Maybe they're late all the time or they're argumentative. Or they're introverted, or they talk all the time, or they need a lot of attention. Or they get upset easily, or they're sensitive, or they don't follow directions. I'm not saying that you always like the shadow side. You may want to teach them, coach them, and parent them on how to work with their shadow side.

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But unconditional love is when we're showing our kids we love them the exact same when they're showing us their light side as their shadow side. We are in no way making them feel bad about themselves about having or showing a shadow side. We aren't in any way showing them that we love them more when they're a good girl or good boy, when they're doing things right or only showing their light side.

I want this for you, and I want this for your kids. I want your kids to know that they are love the exact same, the exact same, when they're showing their shadow side as their light side. This may be a completely new concept to you, and one you've never thought of, but I promise you it is an absolute game changer in your parenting and in your connection with your kids.

So if you're ready to turn the page and work on showing your kids unconditional love even when they show you their shadow side, here's some things you can do. Number one, define your children's shadow sides. Call attention in your brain to the specific things that are tripping you up. Because when we know better, we do better.

So be honest with yourself. I don't like when my kid's argumentative. I don't like when my kid talks all day. I don't like when my kid doesn't want to put their shoes on to go to soccer. I don't like that my kids not athletic. I don't like that my kid seems to have trouble keeping friendships. I don't like that my kid can't keep their hands to themselves. I don't like that my daughter goes into FOMO, fear of missing out, when she gets on Instagram and realizes that two of her friends got together. I don't like it. Define your kid's shadow sides in your mind. When we know better, we do better.

Then be mindful and careful not to communicate in any way the idea of don't ever show me your shadow side. Creating a safe place for your kids to show their shadow side is one of the greatest gifts we can give our children.

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Number three, heal the child within yourself. Understand the idea of projection. Understand that when my kid shows me my shadow side, I'm going to want to project onto them. So work to heal the child within yourself. Understand your own shadow side.

Number four, forgive your own mistakes. You are whole. You have a light side and a shadow side. It doesn't do you any good to pretend you don't. Not one bit. Every single human roaming the earth has a light side and a shadow side. It doesn't mean you don't love yourself. It doesn't mean you don't think you're amazing. It doesn't mean you don't have a shadow side. It doesn't mean you only have a shadow side. It's important to understand this is my light side, and this is my shadow side, and having a shadow side is okay. It makes me me.

Number five, accept your own light and shadow sides so you can model self-acceptance and unconditional love for yourself, for your children. Talk about your shadow side. Talk about the idea that we all have light and shadow sides. Normalize it.

Make sure your kids know, “Hey, I have a light side, and I have a shadow side. I love myself. I love all parts of me. I don't always like my shadow side. It gets in the way sometimes, but I acknowledge that I have it. I'm not pretending I don't. It's normal. You have it too. We all have a light side and a shadow side, and I love all of me.” Make sure you're talking about that and modeling that self-acceptance for your children.

Lastly, show your kids that we are all more than our worst moments. That they are completely safe and loved, even when they're showing their shadow side to you. Accepting all sides of our kids teaches and reinforces that they don't have to compete or win our love, our connection, or our protection.

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They learn to feel safe and know that we will not pack up our love or connection even when they show us their shadow side, their flaws, their mistakes, their meltdowns, their emotions like jealousy, resentment and anger. That they are completely safe and loved and loved the exact same when they show us their light side as their shadow side.

Okay, let me end with this. I want to encourage you to expect amazing things from your kids. Not in spite of their shadow sides but precisely because of their shadow sides. Our light and our shadow side makes us whole and unique and makes us us. We don't need to be getting out our shadow side and carrying it around with us all the time. But I want you to know it's there. You have one, and so do your kids. I want you to expect amazing things from your kids, not in spite of the shadow side, but because of it. Because it makes them whole.

Lastly, I want you to ask yourself what is my child trying to teach me? What can I learn here? What am I projecting onto them? What part of my own shadow side is needing some light, some acceptance, some love? What can I do? What thoughts can I think in the moment when my child is showing me his, her, or their shadow side? How can I love them through it just the way they are? Yeah?

Oh, it's work worth doing. I promise you. Do the work. Expect, recognize, and embrace the triggers. Remember here at Real World Peaceful Parenting, we strive for progress over perfection. When you get disproportionately triggered by something, don't run from it. Embrace it.

Ask yourself okay, that wasn't the reaction I expected to have. Let me try to figure out what's really going on here. What am I projecting onto my kid? Where's my shadow side showing up here? Where am I assuming this is their shadow side, and how can I rethink about it? How can I accept their shadow side and make sure that I'm showing unconditional love?

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What I know for sure is that none of us will ever be without a shadow side. There is no graduation from your shadow side, but we can absolutely grow in love and acceptance of our children's light and shadow side and our own light and shadow side. When we embrace all of us, when we understand that each of us has two sides of that coin and together both sides make us who we are in our uniqueness, in our amazingness. And that unconditional love is I love you the exact same when you're showing me your light side as your shadow side.

So good, isn't it? I love it. I hope you love it too. Until we meet again. 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 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.