

## Ep #73: Empathize, Not Internalize



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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. I've heard it said that love is not a giving of, it's an entering into. The way we often try to enter into love in a relationship with our children is to empathize with them.

Webster's Dictionary defines empathy as the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another. Let me say that again. Webster's Dictionary defines empathy as the action of understanding, being aware, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and the experience of another.

Vicariously, which is a hard word to say, means we experience or realize through imaginative or sympathetic participation in the experience of another. When I laugh, you experience laughing. When you cry, I experience crying. When you're angry, I feel angry on your behalf. When you're happy, I'm happy with you.

It is a great gift to be able to show empathy, understanding, and sensitivity towards others in their emotions as a means of support and connection. Let me say that again, it is a great gift. It really is. It's an amazing gift to show empathy, understanding, and sensitivity towards others in their emotions as a means of support and connection. It really is.

But there is a caveat or some fine print at the bottom that so often trips many of us up, many of us parents, and it can have a big impact on the relationship with your kids, on the connection that's going to lead to cooperation as well as other relationships. So I wanted to bring it to your

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attention, make you aware of it, give you some food for thought, as they say, drop a nugget, and have you consider it. Let's dig in.

In vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of others, we often take it a step further and mistakenly internalize the circumstances the other person is experiencing and try to weigh them against what we can relate to.

I think many of us learn the skill of internalizing in school. Good teachers encourage their students to internalize the material so they can relate it to their lives. This increases the student's understanding of the subject matter, and helps students to articulate their thoughts about the subject, right? Whether it's history or English, reading Shakespeare, learning about the World Wars, learning about racism, learning about apartheid, learning about movements, learning about science, neuroscience. When we internalize the material, it increases the student's understanding of the subject and helps the student to articulate their thoughts about the subject.

It's a really powerful tool in the learning process to find ways to relate to new subject matter, to internalize. The thing is when we're internalizing the experience of others, we're instantly, and likely unconsciously, judging the circumstance based on our own experience, thoughts, feelings, fears, and biases. We're looking through our own lens.

What happens then is that we project our own feelings onto the other person's experience, and we end up robbing them of the freedom to find, to feel, and to express their own feelings. Unfortunately, at that point, our empathy then becomes all about us instead of them no matter how well-meaning we are.

Where this trips us up as parents is we assume we know our children's thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Either because we lived through similar circumstances with them before or maybe it's because we've had

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the experience ourselves and know how these circumstances turn out. But it always takes our empathy away. So often are good intentions get twisted into being exactly the opposite of support and connection.

Yeah? Have you experienced this? Are you like oh my, Lisa, talk to me? Here's what I know for sure. Presuming our children's thoughts and feelings actually removes us from the present moment. It takes us out of the present moment, which then leaves us unable to hear what our kids are really telling us. Oh, the irony, the irony.

Let me say that again. So often, our good intentions get twisted into being exactly the opposite of support and connection. When we presume we know our children's thoughts and feelings, it actually removes us from the present moment. When we're out of the present moment, we're not able to really hear what our kids are telling us. We're not hearing it because we're presuming we know what they feel, what their thoughts are, what their experience is, so we stop listening.

Yeah? Does this sound familiar? Have you ever had this experience? Either as the child or the parent or in another relationship. Here's the real kicker. When we decide we know someone else's journey, it takes our empathy away because it takes away our ability to listen and show up. Because once our brain has decided what they mean, what they felt, what they experienced, what they need, our brain takes us out of the present moment. Unfortunately, it takes away the beauty of being fully present with our kids.

Kids notice. They notice. They know. They feel intuitively when the attention has shifted from them to you. Maybe you have a parent that made everything about them. Maybe you know exactly what I'm talking about here. Maybe you stop bothering to connect with your own parent because they've consistently shown you that showing up for you means showing off for them. Turning all of your thoughts and feelings and experiences into a

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parade of thoughts and emotions for themselves. Feel familiar? You know this drill.

I'm sure their intentions are likely good. However, "good parents" ask their children how they are and what they need. They truly come with good intentions of being a good parent. But the moment you touch on a nerve, the conversation becomes no longer about you and no longer about supporting you and connecting with you or showing up for you. It becomes a desperate need to prove to you that they know what you're feeling.

Wow, does this ring true for me. 100%. Unfortunately, however, ultimately, all that parent is doing is proving to you how much they really don't understand you or your needs. You end up walking away feeling misunderstood, not heard, alone, not connected.

What I know is our intentions are good. I know we all long to relate and find common ground with our children. We're desperate to let them know that they're okay because we're just like them in some way. We want them to understand we understand. We want to normalize what they're experiencing. But so often in doing this, we're stifling their own voice. Missing their primary need, which is to be seen, heard, and validated. Connection. Connection is when the other person feels seen, heard, and validated.

If you're making it about you or you're telling me you already know what I feel or what I was thinking or what I experienced, how am I going to feel seen, heard, and validated? Yeah. Oh, so good, right?

Okay, so what can we do? How can we practice truly showing up for our kids and staying present in each moment even when it feels like the same moments keep playing on repeat? Oh, believe me. I know that one. How can we truly empathize and not internalize?

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I think the answer is in learning how to be an active listener. Listening doesn't actually require relating at all. At all. Actually, the best listeners do the exact opposite. They remove all that they are personally from the conversation and intently attempt to get to know and understand the other person and where they're coming from. Understand the other person's thoughts, feelings, and experience from a clean or clear mind. Active listening is about opening the heart and mind, trying to learn who the other person is, not how or whether or not that person can relate to and validate us.

What I know today now more than ever is that our children are starving for someone to listen to them, for someone to validate them, for someone to help them feel seen, heard, and valued. Our children are not necessarily looking for someone to relate to them.

Active listening opens our minds to learning. In each moment when we are tempted to internalize and decide what our children are thinking, feeling, and needing, we have the opportunity to ask ourselves what is new about this conversation or circumstance? What is my child trying to share with me or show me or communicate to me or teach me?

Our job is to just listen. Not every moment is meant to be a teachable moment. Not every situation that stirs up needs and emotions needs to be covered with chocolate syrup, whipped cream, Jimmy's, and a cherry on top. It's not our job to fix or correct or guide every single conversation. I like to say there's a right time and a wrong time to parent. Sometimes just hearing your child, active listening without trying to turn it into anything other than what it is, just listening is all he, she, or they need. That's it. I promise.

They want to know that you see them, and you recognize their pain or their struggle or their victory or their failure or their mistake or their uncertainty. They want to know you're not alone. I see you. I hear you. I recognize

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what's going on, and you're not alone. This, parents, is enough. This is empathy. This is connection. It's one of our greatest tools in our parenting.

So I want to challenge you, challenge you to actively listen. I want to challenge you to empathize, not internalize. You can do this. I know it. You've got this. 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](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.