

Ep #74: It's a Process Problem, Not a Character Problem



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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 am so excited to be with you here today. My son just finished up his junior year of high school. I have a rising senior who's going to turn 18 soon. I'm just spending a ton of time taking it all in. Just oh my goodness, I can't believe it. Where did the time go? The saying the days are long and the years are short has never felt more true than it does right now.

So, ah, we're heading into summer here in the U.S. School's out and it's just—The beginning of summer always represents so much hope and excitement for me. I'm so excited about it. I hope you are too.

Today I want to really dig into a concept that we've been talking about a lot here, I've been talking a lot here on the podcast. It's really dissecting or understanding or conceptualizing the difference between a process problem and a character problem. My own coach turned me on to this. I don't know that there's a concept I've ever loved more, It's been an absolute game changer for me in how I parent, in how I feel about myself, in how I approach relationships, in how I approach my business. I mean it has been an absolute game changer.

We talk about it a lot in my membership community called The Hive, which if you want to know more about that, we'll link in the show notes to that or you can jump over to thehivecoaching.com to learn more about it. But we talk a ton about parenting being a process problem, not a character problem.

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So I thought I would come here today and share on a deeper level this concept with you, give you some food for thought, and give you some action items on how to transition to thinking about your struggles as a process problem not a character problem. Sound good? All right. Let's dig in.

You may have heard it said before by me or someone else, but the human brain is not fully developed until the age of 25. Yes, 25. That means most of the things that trigger us as parents are our kids processing problems not their character problem because they have an underdeveloped prefrontal cortex until the age of 25.

So everything I'm talking about today applies to your two year old, your five year old, your seven year old, your nine year old, your 12 year old, your 15 year old, your 18 year old, and like your 22 year old because the prefrontal cortex is not fully developed until the age of 25. Which, for me, explains a lot about the difference between kids and adults.

Because the prefrontal cortex allows us to see consequences. It allows us to predict the outcome of our actions. It allows us to think things through. It allows us to plan and be creative and assess risk, and all those things that often differentiate a child from an adult.

So what this means for you is that your child probably doesn't do things well, like manage time, plan ahead, remember to take the food out of his room, think of others instead of himself, budget his money, tell you ahead of time that he needs poster board for school project. All of this, all of these things are due to his lack of physical brain development, not a lack of values or desire to be a good person. Yeah? We've talked about this before.

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Today, I want to add another twist into the conversation around process problems and character problems. Today I want to talk about us, the parents, and how parenting is really a process problem not a character problem. In some cases, we adults may have experienced some kind of trauma during our childhood development years that might impede our brain development in certain areas. Or in some cases, maybe our aging parents, your children's grandparents, may be at a stage in life where their brain is deteriorating.

These are some rare occurrences, but nonetheless they're happening. So this makes learning new concepts, like peaceful parenting, that much more of a challenge to grasp, understand, accept, much less put into practice successfully. Right? Those are the exceptions.

But in most cases of parents who come to me for coaching, I find that many of us simply learned what we know about parenting from our own childhoods, and from our parents who might have leaned towards being dominant parents. Who were more concerned about our 100% compliance and respect than they were about our emotional connection to them.

Now, what I do know is that most of what we know about parenting we did learn from our parents in the sense of it was modeled for us during a very impressionable time as our brain was growing and forming strong neural pathways. We learned from parents that many of us as kids and then as adults do not feel emotionally connected to. Right? Many, many, many of us. We love our parents. We know they love us. We know they did the best they could, but we do not necessarily feel emotionally connected to them.

We know that we want our relationship with our own children to be different, more emotionally connected. I know this to be true or you wouldn't be here investing your time listening to this podcast every week. What I know is that you want to connect with your kids. You want them to

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feel seen, heard, and valued. Absolutely you want them to respect you, just in a cooperative way, not a compliant way. Right?

Okay, maybe you're saying yes, yes, yes, Lisa. I agree, but how do I do that? Well first, let me say this. Please, please, please hear me. Your journey to getting on the path to peaceful parenting is a process problem not a character problem.

In fact, let me say that again because this is really, really, really important for you to hear. Your journey to getting on the path to peaceful parenting is a process problem not a character problem. You are not a bad parent. You're not. You are not broken. You're not missing the "parenting gene". I see you. I promise you it's just a process problem.

Before I found peaceful parenting, I felt broken. I felt like a bad mom. When I looked around, everyone else seemed to be doing it right. I couldn't figure it out. So my brain made that mean that I was flawed and doomed to be a bad parent and read into that, that I thought I was a parent of bad character.

If I'm totally honest, that hurt. It created a lot of shame and guilt for me. This idea that I was of bad parenting character. Because of the shame and the guilt and the thoughts of being bad parenting character, there was a lot of storming on my part every time something went wrong and every time Malcolm stormed. Which was a lot, oh my.

To this day it's still hard to talk about, but it's 100% true. I like to be honest with you about this because I want you to know that I can relate. That if you feel broken or flawed or of bad parenting character, I felt that way too. I did. I want you to have hope.

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Now let's dig into this. Why does this happen? Well, our brains believe certain things are true. Our brains believe certain things have always been and will always be true. Let me give you some examples. Like our brains believe children should do as they're told without any pushback, compliant, or question.

Or maybe you believe that your children should eat the food placed in front of them without scrunching their noses and making gagging noises. Maybe you believe children should sit quietly at the dinner table until everyone's done. Maybe you believe children should be ready when their parents are ready to go or always get good grades in school. Or maybe you feel like your children should always say please and thank you. Very compliant children.

This may be because the ski tracks in our brains, also known as our neural pathways, are worn and packed down by thoughts that we are good parents if and only if we raise our children to be compliant, to please by any means. Then we get triggered. We yell and storm with and at our children. Maybe we threaten. We threaten to take away things they love.

It's not because we're bad people or of bad character. It's because we have these beliefs in our brains that were modeled for us when we were kids. We, maybe ourselves and our coparents, are struggling to process new thoughts about how to create that connection, about how to be a mom or dad who parents more peacefully than our parents did. Yeah?

This happens a lot. When I work with clients, one-on-one, in groups, in my membership, through my courses, this is one of the first things that we work to do is to understand the neural pathways in our brain. Is to understand that we have thoughts about how we were parented, about compliance rather than connection.

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One of the first things that we do is to understand that it's not a character problem, it's a process problem. We just need to get on to some new concepts, tools, thoughts, and ideas. Like creating connection so the cooperation will follow instead of demanding compliance. Again, it's not a character problem. It's a process problem.

So let me get you to think about this. Think about what an amazing gift it would be to your kids and to the world at large if they could learn that our flaws, our shadow side, our storming, are not because we have a character problem, but a process problem. There's no need to judge, fix, condemn, or change us or our kids. We are simply people with process problems who are trying to work it out.

So we have an opportunity to teach our children that. That even as grownups with fully developed brains that we too experienced process problems. Let me ask you this. What would your children learn from you after the next storm, after you have your next storm alongside them, if you were to explain to them, "Hey, I reacted before I had time to process the situation. It's a process problem. Now that I understand this, I'll look into doing better next time."

Do you think they will learn forgiveness? Do you think they will learn compassion? Do you think they will learn respect? Most importantly, do you think they will feel connection?

Well, I do. I do. I know it to be true. I know that if you approach your parenting as a process problem not a character problem, it takes a lot of pressure off the situation. If you're able to communicate that to your kids, we have process problems not character problems. We have the opportunity to teach them forgiveness, compassion, respect, and create real connection.

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Now, here's the doozy that I'm going to challenge you to. Do you think you could look at your coparent differently next time he, she, or they storms at you or your children or shuts down? Hm, I know this one can be difficult. But, again, what if you thought about them as a process problem not a character problem?

If you could see the coparent, see them triggered by a process problem, not a character problem, do you think you would have more compassion, patience, and ability to hold space for them? Imagine if you could sit in the discomfort of their storm while they process. They would probably feel your love and support and feel connection with you.

Now, I don't have a crystal ball. I can't make any guarantees or promises. But I have seen the change happen for thousands of families around the world when we start thinking about our parenting as a process problem rather than a character problem. I'm flawed. I can't figure this out. No matter what I do, nothing changes. I can't get this right. That is language that is implying or telling you that you have a character problem. I know you don't.

You just have a process problem. Meaning you just need new tools, support, coaching, and ideas so you can learn new processes to impact you, your parenting, your family, and your relationship with your kids. I want you to create a deep connection with your kids so the cooperation will follow.

To take it one step further. Can you imagine what kind of person your child will turn out to be as an adult when he or she comes to you after you storm and says, "That's okay mom or dad or parent or grandparent. I know this is just a process problem. I know you love me. I know I'm safe. I know you're trying to do better. I'm not taking it personally. You're teaching me how to learn new things that are hard. You're teaching me patience. You're

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teaching me how to hold space for people I care about. Thank you for this. I feel your love, and I love you back.”

Imagine that. Close your eyes and imagine your adult child saying that to you. Imagine your adult child in the future having a deep understanding of the difference between a process problem and a character problem. Ah, so good and so possible.

Here's what I want you to hear. It's never too late. It doesn't matter how old your children are. Even if they already have children of their own. It's never too late for you to see the world full of process problems rather than character problems. It's never too late to teach, communicate, and model that for your children, your grandchildren, your children at any age.

Process problems can be fixed by teaching and talking and modeling and holding space for your children, for your coparent, for you. You got this. I know you do. Process problem not character problem. If I can do it, I know you can too.

I know personally the massive transformation this concept has had in my life, in how I think about myself, in how I think about my relationships, in how I approach my mistakes, in how I think about my child's mistakes, and my coparents mistakes, and all of my relationships, in how I approach my business, in how I approach my clients.

Talk to your kids about it. Teach them, model them, talk to your coparent about this. Even if you're not together anymore, talk about it. Think about it. Process problem versus character problems. You got this. I know you do. Oh, so good. Okay, until we meet again. I'm wishing you peaceful parenting.

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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.