

**Ep #75: Turning the Tables:
My Journey into Peaceful Parenting**



Full Episode Transcript

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.

Lisa: Welcome, welcome. Welcome. Welcome to today's episode. I don't know if you can hear the delight in my voice, but it is certainly there today. On today's episode, we're going to turn the tables, which is really honestly one of my favorite things to do.

Today, Hannah's back with us. We heard from her a couple weeks ago about the wonderful, beautiful, massive transformation she and her daughter are having when they talk about character problems versus process problems. If you're interested in that episode, we'll link to it in the show notes.

But Hannah and I were talking at the end of recording the podcast about how fun it would be for her to come on and interview me. Hannah is a Hive member. I've had the pleasure of doing some great work with her over the last couple of years. I know she's very curious about the journey into peaceful parenting. So we decided that today we would bring you a special treat. As I mentioned, we'd turn the tables. So I'm going to hand the metaphorical microphone, if you will, over to Hannah, and she's going to interview me. So let's see how this goes. Welcome, Hannah.

Hannah: Thank you so much, Lisa. I am so excited because I love listening to your podcast week after week to see what you'll bring us. Sometimes I would just like to kind of take a peek into your mind about specific questions and about your journey. Because you have come so far and because you have made such a drastic change. I know that there are so many of us parents out there who see what's possible, we see people like

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you, and we want it so badly. But sometimes in some of those moments, it can seem impossible.

So I'm really thinking of all of us parents who see Lisa, who hear the results, and who are thinking okay, how are we going to get from here to there? So I'm wildly excited.

Lisa: Let me start by saying, just to comment on that, I have had my own massive transformation. A lot of times when I'm telling my story, you all will hear me say I am a former dominant parent, which is really hard to talk about to this day. I've been doing parent coaching for about 10 years. It's still hard to admit it. There's a lot of shame and guilt when I think back of how I treated my son, my anger. I was teaching him to be reactive. We were stuck in this pattern of power struggling with each other and trying to control the other person.

I'm real and open with as many people as I can be about my story because I want people to know I've been there. You're not alone. You're not broken. You're not missing a parenting gene. You and I talked about this when we first met. It's that we just don't know a different way, right? So I'm excited to share my story with everybody today.

Hannah: Yes, yes, that's wonderful. So, I mean you just touched on this. One of the many, many things that we love about you, we your listeners, is that you are very authentic and genuine. So my first question is as a self-proclaimed former dominant parent, what was most helpful in the beginning of your journey to soothe yourself into your higher brain to not lose your shiz?

Lisa: Yeah, good. Great question. Great question. I've talked about this before in The Hive. I think the greatest tool or the most helpful thing in the very beginning was self-empathy. It's self-talk inside my brain, right? It

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makes me laugh now to think about it because my empathy in the beginning looked like this. Wow, this is really uncomfortable. Wow, this is really hard. Right?

Malcolm was about five when I started this. His storming, my son storms big and loud. He's a big boy, and he's got big storms when he's really dysregulated to this day. In my mind, I fell into that category of you should respect me. You should do what I say. I am the parent. I was a compliant child. I fell into line over the dominant caregivers in my life. So in my mind, it was my turn for you to fall in line.

Hannah: Yeah.

Lisa: When he wasn't following my manual of falling into line, there was a lot of power struggling and the emotions on his end were big. Big emotions when I was little was not something there was any space for me to express. Right? I was stop crying or I'll give you something to cry about. Knock it off, go to your room. I don't want to hear that. Put that away. Stop it right now. So on one hand, I wanted Malcolm to have this big expression of feelings and storming, but I was just so incredibly uncomfortable in the presence of it.

So honest to goodness, step one was just chanting that in my head. This is uncomfortable. This is hard. But I can do it. I can just stand here for 10 seconds, for 20 seconds, I can hang in. I know I'm not going to die from storming. I know it will end. I know there's a reason he's doing it. I really grabbed on to the idea of getting curious not furious. I really, really, really grabbed on to the idea of all behavior comes from unmet needs. I wonder what he needs.

Before I learned this, Hannah, before it was taught to me in my training, I had no idea that all storming comes from unmet needs. I had no idea. I

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don't know what I thought, but I certainly didn't know that. So I would have this conversation in my head. He's not giving me a hard time. He's having a hard time. Yes, this is difficult, but you can do it. Stay calm. Don't storm alongside him. Drop the rope in the power struggle. These were all the things that were incredibly helpful in me just talking to myself inside my head.

Ironically, the talking to myself kind of took me out of focusing on his storm and brought me over to me and my regulation. I really think that was my greatest tool starting out, and still is to this day, right? So now I have a 17 year old whose storming looks different, but there's still some storming. He loses his shiz, and I still say, wow. I'm scared. I don't know what to do. I hope he's safe. The storming is on a different level. The worries are different. It's still self-talk as a means of empathy.

Hannah: Yeah, wow, I really love that. I mean I shouldn't have been surprised listening to all of your other episodes, but there was a part of me that thought it was going to be about the child. But I mean it's just so true. As you always say, it's like it always starts with you. When you give yourself empathy, then you have the capacity to really dig into what your son needs or needed.

Lisa: It's so true. So often, we think the problem is our children, and it's really us. What I know for sure is that if you want to teach, and you've had this experience. Maybe you can speak to it. If you want to teach regulation, getting in your higher brain, staying calm. You cannot teach it, you can't command it, you can't punish it, you can't threaten, you can't reward. You have to model it for your children.

Hannah: Yes, you're right. Yeah, absolutely. That was a huge ah-ha moment for me when I learned that. It's like what? There's no easier way. Okay, I love that. Okay, so my next question was what was the hardest

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obstacle to overcome in your transition from dominant to peaceful parenting?

Lisa: The hardest transition was believing that it would work. Holding in there, hanging in there long enough to see the fruits of the labor. In the beginning when I was transitioning from command and control into connection and cooperation, there's a phase I would say where the child is confused because we were doing it one way, and now we're doing it a different way.

For a moment in time, it breaks down the trust. Because the kid looks at you like what are you doing? In the beginning, or in the transition, I was uncomfortable and Malcolm was uncomfortable. I had to hold space that it was going to come out the other end the way it was supposed to, with connection and cooperation.

I see it. At this point, I've coached thousands of clients around the world. I see it every single time. This is universal. There's like this freefall in space where you've had a little success, and you're excited about it. Then you push to the next tool, bringing the next tool into the family, and you have a setback. Which is why we say in the real world peaceful parenting, progress not perfection. Many parents will report. It feels, Lisa, like I'm taking a couple steps forward. I get all excited about this and then we take a step back.

That's that freefall space where you have to keep using the tools, and your brain wants to go back to command and compliance. But you're committed to cooperation and connection. So it feels like free falling is the best way I can describe it and it creates doubt in the mind.

Hannah: Yeah.

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Lisa: If you have a dominant co-parent, that's also the moment where they step in up and say either are you sure? Or see, it's not working. Or I knew this wasn't going to work. That makes the freefall more intense. This certainly was true for me. This was totally true. There was a moment when I thought, wow, I don't know. But I reflected on what I knew for sure is what I was doing was not working.

There was this moment in time, and I will never forget it. It was a particular day. We were standing upstairs in Malcolm's bedroom. I was yelling at him for something. I don't even know what get in the bathtub, put your shoes away, clean up your room. I don't know what it was. Unfortunately, it doesn't matter because it happened all the time between us. I was yelling at him. He was yelling back at me. I was yelling at him for yelling at me.

I had this moment where literally I thought if this is where we are now, where are we going to be in 10 or 15 or 20 years? There will not be a real authentic relationship here. I know because I lived that with my own parents. I knew where this was headed. I had already seen this movie. I wanted to create a new movie, which is what motivated me to find a new way to parent in the first place.

That particular day was the crescendo or the breaking point or the ah-ha moment or the rock bottom, however you want to think about it. I'll never forget that day. I can tell you where I was standing. I can tell you what I was wearing. I can tell you what Malcolm is wearing. Like it is emblazoned in my brain.

So fast forward when I'm making the transition and I have this moment of doubt, I'm freefalling, what I reflected upon was that day and how I knew that that parenting wasn't going to get me to my goals. So that's what helped me stay the course. But I think it's that doubt when you're in that transition period.

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Hannah: Yes. I love how you just said that parenting wasn't going to get me to my goals. Because I think it's so important to note for all the people who struggle with dominant parenting that it does “work” in the sense that you can demand compliance. Like you can get the job done. You can get results. If you use fear based parenting, if you use punishments, and if you are punitive, you will get results that are obedience.

But your goal that you realized was that you wanted a relationship with your son. You wanted connection with him. You didn't just want him to shut up and put his shoes on and be this robot or this soldier that you could command because you were smart enough to also see in the future that if you could do this to him, you were kind of breaking his spirit. You're leaving them susceptible to people who can take advantage who won't have his best interests at heart.

So I just I really love the way you phrased that. Because there are many people who do dominant parenting who can say well, my way works. It just comes down to what your definition of works is. What is your goal? What do you want for this person that you are teaching, parenting? So I just really love that because I just think that's beautiful that your goal, it wasn't compliance anymore. It was connection. I just think that's beautiful.

Lisa: Thank you.

Hannah: I love that. That gives me chills. So how do you combat the urge to get dysregulated? Because let's talk about this for just a second. It might be part of the first question/answer. But I mean it's one thing to realize your goals and to see the kind of parent that you want to be, but I mean we all are human.

We all have those moments where it feels, you know you get that feeling in your chest or in your gut. It just you feel that anger, and you feel that

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frustration. I think it's in those moments that it's like yes, you love your kids and you want connection, but dang it, it's hard. What do you do? So how do you, the peaceful parent, combat that urge to get dysregulated?

Lisa: What a fabulous question, Hannah. Here's how I'm going to answer it. Part of peaceful parenting isn't about not getting upset anymore. The goal isn't to never get dysregulated. This makes me want to cry just saying this out loud. I don't want anybody listening to this to think that my goal is that I never get upset or mad or dysregulated or whatever word you want to use.

I don't want your goal or any listener's goal to be never be upset with your kids. We're human beings, and we have our own needs. Just because we become parents doesn't mean our needs go away. That, in my opinion, would be permissive parenting. Letting the child's letting the child use their power to come over us. That's just stuffing all our needs down. Feelings plus needs equal behavior. When we have unmet needs, our own feelings are going to bubble up. Then we're going to have behavior.

Here's what I think is the real secret or the real tool, if you will. Healing doesn't mean you won't get upset anymore. Healing and peaceful parenting is being curious yourself about why you're upset. So what I do is when I get dysregulated, I use it as a beacon to ask myself what's really going on here, Lisa. Before I opened my mouth and I approached my child, I work on what is going on for me. It might be I, myself, am tired. I, myself, have been taking for care of myself.

Recently, my son and I had a conversation because I need more sleep at night. He's at that age where on the weekends, he likes to go out and stay out. His curfew is midnight. So we talked about how we might work this out, how I need to get more sleep. So we came up with a solution where I now fall asleep on the couch, and he wakes me up when he gets home. But if

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he doesn't wake me up, then that is the assumption that he got home past curfew, right?

It might be someone who's getting incredibly dysregulated in the morning when their kid little kid won't put their shoes on for school. That could be a beacon to look inside yourself to say you know what? I'm not getting up early enough. I'm spending too much time dawdling in the morning. I need to be ready earlier.

I need to move the goal of getting out of the house from 7:15 to 7:00 to give us some more wiggle room for challenges and problems. Or I need to connect with my kid in a different way to ask them to get their shoes on. Maybe we need to turn the TV off in the house in the morning because it's distracting all of us. It's taking us too long to get ready.

So I really think, again, the goal is not to never get dysregulated. The goal is to be as curious with yourself when you get dysregulated as you are with your kids, right? Get curious not furious. Like hm, what is really going on here? What is happening for me? Why is this happening?

Hannah: Oh my gosh, I love that. I find this so fascinating that peaceful parenting, I think, in my mind was for so long just all about the kids. But it's really not all about the kids. It's about healing yourself and showing up for your children in the process. That just blows my mind. I mean I think for dominant and permissive parents alike, we so often just forget about what we need or what we want.

Lisa: Yeah, and I would say Hannah, you said a minute ago, peaceful parenting is healing yourself and showing up for your kids. I would say it's also showing up for yourself.

Hannah: Yeah.

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Lisa: To me, real world peaceful parenting is when we're all trying to get our needs met in the family. Right? The mom, the dad, the single parent, the kids, the grandparents raising their kids. Like what does everybody need? How do we try to make sure that all of us are getting our needs met? That is, to me, the essence or at the heart of peaceful parenting. To me, dominant parenting is my needs is the parent get met. They're the top priority. You're here to meet my needs. I tell you to put your shoes on, you say yes sir how fast. My needs are the top priority in the family.

Permissive parenting is the parent martyrs and shoves their needs down, and the kids needs come first and are all that matter. Fine, fine. We'll do it your way. Whatever you want. Let's not rock the boat. Little Joey has big emotions. Let's just do it Joey's way so we don't have a problem. Or you deny yourself your needs. You don't even consider them. There is no self-care. There is no healing your childhood wounds. There's just everything for your children.

That doesn't raise healthy, well adjusted, internal compass turned on kids, either side, and it takes away from the joy of parenting. To me in the middle peaceful parenting is we're all going to talk about our needs. We're going to connect through them. We're going to figure out what each of us needs. We're going to do our best as a family to meet it. That's connection.

Hannah: Yeah. Wow. I hope there's like a million light bulbs going off right now for all of the listeners because that's good. That is so good. So you know, listener, after you just heard that, I just I really hope you take a minute to let that sink in or rewind it or relisten to it and just really hear that about yourself and your needs. And about how important you are in your family, and how taking care of yourself is really taking care of your family. So I just love it.

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Lisa: Well, let me throw this in because it just popped into my brain. When you take care of yourself, when you put yourself on the list, when you talk openly with your children about your own needs and you meet them, you're also modeling that for your kids. You're making it acceptable in the family to care about my needs. You're moving away from words like selfish, and you're moving into words like I take care of myself. I know what I need. I know what my limits are. Your children grow up knowing that about themselves too. They grow up with a clear awareness of what they need.

Hannah: Yes, I love that. That's so great. So great. Okay, awesome. So walk us through how you mend the connection with your son after you lose your shiz or get dysregulated, please.

Lisa: Great question. Love it. Love it. Love it. Love it. I have a four step process. I talk about this often in The Hive. This amazing prayer was introduced to me by my friend Amy. Shout out to Amy. I love you girl. Amy introduced me to the ho'oponopono prayer, which is a Hawaiian prayer. It's really beautiful. You can look it up. I can't remember the exact words to the ho'oponopono prayer.

But when I cause disruption and I storm with Malcolm, I think immediately afterwards about repair and recovery. Step one is I wait until I am regulated before I approach him. Sometimes that's minutes later. Sometimes that's hours later. Occasionally, it's days later. When I approach him, I try to follow these four steps.

I say to him, I'd like to apologize to you. Is now a good time? I'm asking permission. Is now a good time? That alone in interacting with other human beings, asking permission to approach helps the other person feel in control. Remember, strong willed kids, the number one thing they want is to feel in control.

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I'm also asking, essentially, hey, are you regulated? Are you ready to hear this? Right? Because just because this person is younger than me, and I would say smaller than me, but in my case that's not true. Just because this person is my child, my ward, younger than me, doesn't mean I can just impose my apology upon them. So I asked is now a good time? Can we talk about this? Occasionally my son will say I'm not ready. Okay. I hear that. Let me know when you are.

So I'd like to apologize to you. So I'm very clear about what my goal is. My goal is to apologize. I'd like to apologize. Is now a good time? Then I say I am really sorry for X. I'm very specific about what I did wrong. I'm really sorry that I just started yelling out of the blue, let's say.

Then I try to explain without justifying. So I've thought about this ahead of time. I'm really sorry that I started yelling out of the blue. I got caught off guard with the question. I wasn't expecting you to ask this. I am disappointed in the events that happened before that, right? Maybe it's didn't turn in some homework assignments or wasn't where he said he was going to be. When he was younger it might have been we had an agreement that you were going to get off gaming at top of the hour.

Or I'm trying to think of some examples. I'm sorry that I lost my shiz. We talked about you getting out of the pool when I asked you at the pool party in front of all the other parents, and I assumed you were going to follow up on your end of the bargain.

Then step three is to say I will work on not doing it again. I will work on not repeating this mistake. I'm making a commitment out loud. To me, that's very important. I will work on I'm not doing this again. I'm not promising. I'm not guaranteeing. I'm just making a commitment that I'm going to work on it. I recognize all the steps that led to that moment. I'm going to work on them. Then the last part is, I'm very sorry, and I love you very much.

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Those are my four steps. I say what I did wrong. I explain what happened without justifying. I commit to working on it in the future. I say I'm sorry. I love you. Here we are 10 years later. My son actually follows the same four step process now when he's apologizing for something.

Now, a couple of things that I'm not doing here, I want to be clear about this. Number one, I'm not apologizing to get an apology. That is completely—I'm not apologizing and then saying okay, now your turn. I'm not trying to trap him into apologizing back. Okay. I'm also not apologizing and then justifying. Well, I'm sorry that I yelled at you, Hannah, but you made me really mad. I don't but. I don't should. I take responsibility for what I did, and I leave it at that. That's very important.

If I am baiting him into apologizing, and then I'm going to but him, “but here's what you did wrong,” it breaks down the trust. I feel like it's bait and switch. You asked me if you could apologize to me. You bait me into this conversation, and now you want me to tell you what I did wrong. That doesn't feel good to the receiver of the apology. It's not a tit for tat thing.

If my kid chooses to apologize back at that moment or later or never, that's on him. I'm taking responsibility for losing my shiz. I'm apologizing. I'm explaining why it happened without justifying. I'm committing to not doing it again. I'm telling him I'm sorry, and I love you very much. So that's like my equivalent of my ho'oponopono prayer that I've come up with. I follow the same steps every time. I've been doing this since he was five.

I find that it's incredibly effective because really what I'm doing is I'm forgiving myself. I'm learning. I'm identifying what went wrong. I'm moving out of shame and guilt. I'm taking responsibility. I'm closing the loop on what I did so that I can come and be fully present with my kid going forward. I have no expectations from him of what he's going to do.

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Hannah: That is incredibly helpful. Yeah. I actually have never heard that process. So thank you for sharing that. I think that's helpful for, as you said, people and children of all ages. I just think it's so good when you can find a formula that works that you can keep going back to. So I really appreciate that. Thank you.

Lisa: Yeah. I often rehearse it in my head. It's also for me, if I can't answer those four questions then I know I'm not regulated yet. I also know I'm not ready to go and apologize. Sidenote, I use this with my husband and anyone else that you need to apologize to as well. For me, it's a tried and true formula. The consistency of it often helps me stay regulated while apologizing as well.

Hannah: Yes. I love that so much. Awesome. So how do you manage your expectations as someone who tends towards dominance? Like I know before on the podcast, you have talked about the fact that frustration is when expectations don't meet reality. So can you walk us through a little bit of how you go about managing your expectations for your son so that you don't fall into frustration as often?

Lisa: Sure. Yeah, I say that frustration is when there's a gap between expectation and reality, right. The bigger the gap, the bigger the frustration. So if someone expects, their child is going to put their shoes on 100% of the time the first time they ask. Every morning, the child isn't putting the shoes on until the fourth or fifth request, there's going to be frustration. There's a gap between expectation and reality.

What most of us do is we work really hard at trying to change or control the reality, right? So we might yell at our kid. You need to put your shoes on right now when I ask you, right. As I've progressed through this work in my career as a parent coach, I remind myself that it is equally as important to spend time on my expectation as my reality.

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So whenever I get dysregulated about something whether it's in my business or my marriage or my parenting or my friendships or my exercise. Whenever I feel that tingle of frustration, I personally feel frustration right up in my chest. It feels like there's like a kitty cat hairball stuck in my throat. That's my signal. I use my body as my compass. That's my signal the frustration has descended upon me. I have conditioned myself to say okay, what is my reality? My kid is not putting his shoes on in the morning. What is my expectation? I have conditioned myself to equally question my expectation and try to look at the entire picture.

So for example, I expect us to get out the door at 7:00 in the morning. While I'm in the kitchen and I call out in the other room, "Hannah put your shoes on." I expect her to go do it. All right, what's the reality? Well, the reality is the TV's on in the morning. She's sitting in front of the TV.

I learned from Lisa that kids are single taskers not multitaskers. She's totally switched on and engaged with the TV. I'm in the kitchen cleaning up the breakfast dishes, and I give a call out put your shoes on. Okay, my expectation that she is going to hear me, turn off the TV, and go put her shoes on is ridiculous. At six years old, Hannah is not going to be able to successfully do this upon my first command.

So I have a couple of options here. I can either be content with asking or four or five times, right. It is going to take me four or five times to get her up and do it. Or we could come up with a new game plan. TV is off until shoes are put on. Once you come show me that you have your shoes on, then I'll come and turn the TV on for you. So it's about considering the gap and the two sides of the gap. Not only the reality of what's going on, but what is my expectation?

Now with my own son in our relationship, we have been working on peaceful parenting and connection for so long that sometimes, many times,

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we will actually sit down and talk about reality versus expectation. Sometimes he'll share with me I don't think you have a realistic expectation Mom. I don't like what you're expecting. Can we talk about this? We will open up the lines of communication and talk about what am I expecting? What is he expecting?

Sometimes what we find is we have different expectations. Like I expect 100% of homework to be turned in. In my husband's mind, there is no excuse for homework not to be turned in school. My son has a different expectation. Well, I already have an A in the class. I've calculated that I can miss two homework assignments and still have an A, right. So that's his expectation.

So part of it is as he gets older is understanding the different expectations we're operating on. Because if he doesn't turn in two homework assignments, he has no frustration because there's no gap between expectation and reality. If I'm expecting him to turn in 100% of the assignments and he doesn't turn in two, there's a gap. So we spend a fair amount of time talking about what is the expectation.

Hannah: Okay.

Lisa: And what is the reality? Then we work to figure out how to close the gap between the two.

Hannah: Perfect. Yeah, I love that. I think that's extremely helpful. Wonderful. Well, those were the questions that I had for you. I so appreciate you taking this time to allow us to kind of delve into your mind and see things from a new perspective. So thank you so much for giving us that gift.

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Lisa: You're welcome, Hannah. Thank you. You're an incredible interviewer. My mind is already spinning with other things we can do together. This was great. You asked really useful questions. I know the listeners are going to really love this. Thank you. I enjoyed a chance to share my story and the philosophy and how I think about things in my own parenting. So thank you so much.

Hannah: Absolutely. Anytime.

Lisa: I hope you love this as much as Hannah and I did. We both sitting here with big, cheesy wide grin staring at each other as we're recording this on Zoom. I hope you love it as much as we did. I hope you had a ton of ah-ha moment. Again, Hannah, my sincerest thank you. I can tell you put a lot of effort into those questions. You did a great job. So thank you so much for being here with us today. Okay everybody. That's a wrap on turning the tables. 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.