

## Ep #77: Less Fixing, More Understanding



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**Lisa Smith**

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## Ep #77: Less Fixing, More Understanding

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 want to inspire you to stop being a fixer. Say what Lisa? Stop fixing. Come on. Come on. Okay, hear me out. Oftentimes when our kids are storming, dysregulated, upset, distressed, or having big emotions and big reactions, we, as parents, go into automatic fix it mode. You know we tell them what to do, we tell them what they're feeling, we tell them what's going on. We tell them to stop it. We tell them they don't really need to do that. We tell them to cut it out, go to your room. We go into automatic fix it mode.

We do this for a few reasons. The most obvious reason is we love our kids, right? I know. I know you love your kids. How do I know? Because you wouldn't be here today listening to this episode, you wouldn't be investing your time in real world peaceful parenting if you didn't absolutely 100% unequivocally love your kids. I know you love them. I know you want the absolute best for them.

Sometimes we can clearly see what's best. I get that. Like don't run around the pool, you'll slip and fall. Don't run with scissors. Don't pick your nose in public or go to the bathroom before we get on the airplane. Those are times when being a fix it parent is totally on point and understandable.

But today, I'm not really talking about these solutions and suggestions. Today I'm talking about the fixing that goes on around the storming. You know the make the storm stop right now. This is the number one topic, question, concern, and issue that parents asked me about over and over and over again.

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If you're like me and you have a strong willed child, the storms can be big and intense. Big emotions. Big. Sometimes they come out of nowhere. Sometimes they're multiple times an hour. Sometimes they're so gigantic we don't know what to do. Sometimes they're over and over and over again. Sometimes the storms come at the drop of a hat. Lisa, everything was fine. Then all of a sudden he or she just started storming out of nowhere.

So the number one question I get asked is when my kid is middle of a storm, how do I make it stop? How do I fix it? The answer is you don't. Yep, that's right. You don't. Don't be a storm fixer.

Let me ask you a couple questions. When you're a kid or kids storm at any age, how do you feel? Chances are you feel dysregulated yourself unless you've been doing this work for a while. Maybe you feel like you're crawling out of your skin. Maybe you go into fight or flight. Maybe you feel unsafe. Maybe you feel stuck like you're walking in quicksand or you zone out or you're so numb, you don't even know how to feel. I hear you. I used to feel that way too. Many, many, many of those feelings I just named I had them. Sometimes all of them at the same time.

I want you to ask yourself what am I thinking when my kids storms? What am I thinking? Chances are you're thinking I need to make this stop now. Maybe because you're thinking he's being disrespectful or she's being difficult or she should not be doing this. Right? I get it. I used to have those thoughts too.

My go to thought was my son is so disrespectful. It was my go to thought. I thought I needed to be a fixer. I needed to make the storm go away instantly. Either with threatening or punishing or cajoling or bribing or dominating go to your room. Stop that right now. This is ridiculous. Why are you doing this? I had all those techniques to try to make the storming stop. I feel you and I totally understand. I've been there.

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But what I really want you to ask yourself is what is really going on for him, her, or them when they're storming. What is really going on? What is really going on for me when they're storming. Let's talk about that for a minute.

Most of us are trying to stop the storming instantly. We wanted to stop and go away because we're uncomfortable. We're uncomfortable with the storming. Our brains do not like when our kids storm. We do not like to see our kids distressed, unhappy, melting down. We don't like when all that energy and big emotions are coming at us.

Our brains actually go into fight or flight many times when our kids are storming. Our fight or flight response creates an urgency to make this stop. Make this stop, make this go away right now. We are uncomfortable with big emotions, and we want it to stop, right? Can you admit this? Can you see this? Can you see this pattern?

Next time your kids are storming sit with what's going on for you. My guess is that you go into a sense of fight or flight. That creates an urgency, a dysregulation that says I need to make this stop right now as though it were a fire or a car accident I'm about to witness or something really unsafe. I want this to stop right now.

If that's you, it used to be me so I get it. If that's you, the primary driver behind all of that fight or flight, that sense of fight or flight, is that we are uncomfortable with our kids' big emotions. So we try to fix. One of the ways we wanted to stop is we try to fix whatever caused the storm.

Now this approach may actually be doing more harm than you think, for you, for your kids, and for your relationship. That's why today I want to talk to you about moving away from being a storm fixer. Here's why it might be doing harm. Your child's behavior, the storming, is their best attempt to get their needs met with the tools they have. Or said another way, underneath

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every storming behavior is an unmet need. I just want that to sink in for a minute.

Here's what I know. When we feel our feelings as humans and are not afraid of them, growth is possible. Recently while I was huffing and puffing on a peloton ride, Emma Lovewell said sitting in your discomfort during a physical activity is where the growth is. It's the spot where you make progress. You build muscle, you get in better shape, you lose weight, you reach your fitness goals.

When she said it, I thought the same can be true in our parenting. When we learn to sit in our discomfort, growth happens. Emotional growth can happen. Our emotional intelligence can develop, and a deeper connection can happen with our children. Just like sitting in your own discomfort when your kids are unhappy, upset, storming and have big emotions, sitting in that discomfort for you, modeling it for them and teaching them how to sit in the discomfort is where the growth is for you, your kids, and the connection between the two of you.

So today's request is for you to not be quick to fix the storming. Because as I just said, I want to say this again so you can hear it. Your child storming is their best attempt to get their needs met with the tools they have. Or said another way, underneath every storm is an unmet need. So if you, as the parent, are quick to fix my storming, I never get a chance to uncover what's going on for me, and neither do you as the guide. We don't get to that place where we get curious about what just happened.

If you as the parent are quick to fix my storming, I don't get a chance to get comfortable with my big feelings. So my growth is limited. You're stunting my emotional growth. If you're quick to fix my big feelings, I don't understand that you're comfortable with big feelings. So then I don't learn to be comfortable with big feelings.

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If you're quick to fix the storming, I don't get to process through the storm and work the cortisol out of my body, which is critical to returning to regulation. So I don't get a chance to move that cortisol out and return back to a regulated state. So the next storm is probably right around the corner.

If you're quick to fix the storming, I don't get to learn how to return to regulation and develop this all important skill that leads to my own emotional intelligence. If you're quick to fix my big feelings, you may accidentally, as the parent, be reactivating the storm so it starts all over again. Not fun, useful or a good idea.

I imagine we've all been there, right. Where we accidentally reactivate the storm because we're trying to fix the big feelings, right? You tell your kid go to your room. Go to your room. I'm not punishing. Go to your room until you feel better. As you're pushing them or nudging them or getting them to go to their room, the storm reignites at an even higher intensity and happens all over again. You're thinking, what happened? What's going on?

That used to be me on the regular. If you're quick to fix big feelings, I don't get the message that big feelings are okay. I don't learn as your child that it's safe to feel mad, sad, disappointed, upset, frustrated. I don't learn to handle life's disappointments and move past my reactive anger. You see, as a kid, I need a safe place to do that.

When I'm always being shut down, distracted, when you're always trying to fix or stop my storming, as a kid, I learned that you're not a safe place for me to scuba dive down to my feelings and needs. As a result, I learn to hide my big emotions from the world. I learn to stuff them down like a beach ball being held underwater. The problem is just like a beach ball, when you let go of the ball, it comes to the surface with more velocity.

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So when I stuff down or hide my big feelings and it's time for them to surface, they come up with more velocity, more intensity, and more volume. Then I'm just learning to get stuck in my reactive anger.

If you're quick to always fix my big feelings, the other problem is they don't feel accepted. I get the message that when I show you my shadow side, my big ugly storming and big emotions, you can't handle it or you react in a way that makes me feel disconnected or bad or wrong. Wow. That's tough to hear, right? I know, but it's the truth. I know that you don't want this for your kids and your relationship with them. I know as a parent you love your kids, and you want to feel connected with them. You want them to grow into emotionally intelligent humans. I know. I know.

So the next time your kids storm, and I'm sure ones coming right around the corner because we all storm, here are four things I want you to do. Number one, I want you to be aware of what you're thinking while your kid or kids are storming. Tap into your thoughts. What's going on for me? What am I thinking? It's really important that you identify what you're thinking while your kids are storming.

Number two, tell yourself this will not last forever. I can weather the storm. As a side note, most storms typically last about 90 seconds if we don't reactivate them. Most of us can do almost anything for 90 seconds. Number three, tell yourself, repeat over and over and over to yourself inside your head there's nothing to fix. Just let me hold space for him, her, them while they work through the storm. I can hold space for my child for 90 seconds.

Number four, know that you can talk later about the storm. What led up to it, what we might do next time, what we could do to prevent the storm. An after action review can happen later when you're both regulated. As a sidenote, the middle of the storm is the exact wrong time, wrong time to talk



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to your kids about how to prevent the next storm because I'm not through this storm yet. I haven't come back to regulation.

For those of you that have tried to correct, parent, guide, fix in the middle of the storm, what usually happens is it just reactivates the storm. Or I feel shut down as the child or not heard or not connected to you. It doesn't motivate me to figure out what went wrong.

Inside my membership called The Hive. Inside my membership community we talk a lot about storms because it's an issue for many of us parents in this current age. I want to give you a couple examples of parents who before they started working with me would have identified as fixers. I want to walk you through an example so you can see how holding space rather than fixing creates a lot of awareness and deep connection between the child and the parent.

So let's call this mom Stephanie. Stephanie said, "I had a small victory tonight. I'm a long suffering fixer who historically has tried to soothe, correct, distract and rush a storm. Tonight my daughter started to storm when she became overwhelmed by her math homework. I fought the urge to tell her you can do it, honey. Come on, just do it. I fought the urge to tell her to pick up the paper she threw on the floor. I fought the urge to bribe her with computer time. I fought the urge to yell just do your homework already.

"Instead, I took a breath and sat quietly with her as she processed her feelings. It only took about three minutes. Then she came up with their own solution. Can I do half now and a half after dinner, she asked. I agreed, and she got the first half done. Bonus is that a little while later, she decided to do the other half also before dinner because she realized on her own that she would miss out on some computer time if she waited. I'm so glad I've given up fixing. And instead working on holding space with her during the storm."



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Isn't that great? I just love that. I love that. I love this mom's ability to step back and resist the urge to fix. As a side note, what her daughter's also learning is how to solve her own problems from that space the mom created by just sitting with her. Rather than telling her come on, you can do this. You're smart. You've got it. I have no doubt that for most of us, our "fixing" is always coming from a good place. Always. But it isn't always helpful. It isn't always getting the job done of raising our emotional intelligence and creating connection with our kids.

Let's look at another example. Nancy reported that she had another rough morning with their 10 year old daughter. This last week mornings have involved a lot of dawdling and a lot of storming. Nancy said, "I kept my cool, but I really had to keep nudging her along. On the walk to school, she was literally dragging her feet. We were already late. I got my other two kids to school and then waited for her. She kept storming, telling me loudly that school was stupid and she hated school as she was stomping her feet.

"I wanted to jump in and tell her you don't hate school. You love school. School is your favorite place. I wanted to tell her knock it off. Let's get going. We're going to be late. I wanted to fix it for her. Lisa, I desperately wanted the storming to end. But I heard your voice inside my head, and I decided to just hold space for her to finish the storm.

"After the storm ended, I asked her a few things about school. I asked her a few questions. Lo and behold she told me that she was storming because she was sad. School's ending next week. I had this sudden epiphany that all these difficult mornings were stemming from my daughter being super sad that school's going to be over. You see school is her absolute favorite thing. She loves everything about it. She loves learning. She loves her teacher. She loves seeing her friends. She loves going to school. What I didn't realize is that she was sad that it was coming to an end.

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“I'm happy I figured it out. I'm pleased that I didn't rush through to fix the storming so that she could explain to me what was really going on for her and we could talk about it, and I could provide her some empathy. Then we talked about ways she can continue to play school over the summer so she can enjoy learning.”

In this example, Nancy did a really great job of just acknowledging how sad her daughter is. She didn't try to fix or change her daughter's thoughts or feelings. She just acknowledged that her daughter was sad the school year is coming to an end and that she hears her.

As humans, our number one need is to feel seen, heard, and understood. In both of these examples, the parents did a great job of moving away from a pattern of fixing and moving into just holding space and acknowledging what's going on. One thing I know for sure is that parenting is an art not a science. It's an art to figure out when to hold space and when to fix.

When we tell our kids how they feel, we teach them to override their internal compass, which can create resistance and lead to them relying on others down the road who may not have their best interests in mind. When you as the parent learn to get comfortable, holding space, letting these big emotions come forward and not rushing to fix.

When you get comfortable holding space in the face of your kids big feelings, you're modeling that for them. You are showing your kids I accept you just as much as when you're storming as when you're on your “best behavior”. You're modeling. You're showing your kids I accept all sides of you. We're showing them that they too can be with their own big feelings, and they can learn to be with other people's big feelings. This alone, teaching our kids this alone makes the world a better place.

I love the saying from Iris Chang. “When your child is upset, hold your child, hold your tongue, hold space for their big emotions.” Yeah. So can you join

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me in taking the pledge I promise to move away from being a storm fixer and instead hold space for myself and my child during their big storms. Ah, well done you. Well done. I love it. So proud of you. So proud of you that you're joining me and moving away from being a storm fixer and moving into holding space. All right, 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.