

## Ep #84: Parenting Challenges 101: How to Stop Worrying



### 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.

Welcome, welcome, welcome. Welcome to today's episode. I am so excited today to welcome back Hannah. Hannah is an amazing human being, a mother of three soon to be four, a super talented person, and a member of The Hive.

Hannah is also our on the ground correspondent. She has kindly agreed to go out every so often and crowdsource questions from you all and bring them back here to a regularly scheduled episode so that we can tackle questions that you have about your parenting and discuss them together. So join me in welcoming Hannah back today. Hannah, so good to have you.

Hannah: Thank you so much, Lisa. It's always something that I look forward to podcast with you and bring information to people.

Lisa: That's awesome. All right. Tell us what we're going to talk about today.

Hannah: Yeah. So the content today, well, we started by asking what is the biggest parenting challenge. We got a lot of really great answers, but the one that we are going to focus on today is, "The constant worrying consumes me some days."

Lisa: Yeah, so this is a parent who's telling us that her, happens to be a her, we know that. Her biggest struggle in parenting is her constant worrying. I get that. I personally call myself a reformed warrior. I grew up in

## Ep #84: Parenting Challenges 101: How to Stop Worrying

a household where my grandmother who was absolutely amazing. I adored her. She was a world class professional warrior. We're talking full on hand wringing hours. Like if you asked me what was my grandmother's hobby, it was worrying. It was her hobby.

It got transferred to me. I grew up worrying. I remember the day I realized that worrying wasn't serving me, and worry and I parted ways. I said goodbye to it. Now, that doesn't mean some days I'm not stressed when my child is sick or hurting. Or the car broke down, and I don't know how much it's gonna cost. I'm thinking about a problem and thinking about the stress the problems gonna cause me or how to solve the problem. But that is different from worrying.

I think it's best Hannah if we start today's podcast by really defining worry. Okay. You and I were talking before we hit record, what even is worry? What exactly is it? You weren't sure. So we turned to one of my favorite sources for mapping out meaningful connection and the language of the human experience, which is Brené Brown's *Atlas of the Heart*, really my life's guide, if you will. Love the book. Love Brené Brown.

In the book on page 11, she describes worry. I really want you to listen to this. Worry is described as a chain, so more than one, a chain of negative thoughts, negative over and over and over again about bad things. We're not worrying about winning the lottery or worrying about losing 50 pounds. So worry is described as a chain of negative thoughts about bad things that might happen in the future. Let me say it one more time, worry is described as a chain of negative thoughts about bad things that might happen in the future.

Hannah: That's a great definition.

## Ep #84: Parenting Challenges 101: How to Stop Worrying

Lisa: It really is. That definition is so loaded, right? Because let's break it down. It's a chain of negative thoughts. So there's got to be over and over and over and over and over and over again about bad things. We're not even trying to manage our thoughts when we worry or see the other side of the coin. By definition, we've gone down the black hole. It's just all the bad thoughts. Our brain can just run amok about bad thoughts. Then about things that might happen in the future. There's no guarantee it's going to happen.

I often think of worry as you're buying boat insurance for your boat, but you don't own the boat yet. I love that metaphor. When I fall into the trap of worrying I think Lisa, you're buying boat insurance, and you don't even own a boat. Why don't we wait until we get the boat? Then within 24 hours of buying the boat, we'll get boat insurance, right? I'm sure that if I buy a boat, the boat salesman is gonna get the insurance before I even drive it off the lot. I don't need boat insurance today for a boat that I don't have yet. That's how I think of worry.

Hannah: Yeah, I love that.

Lisa: Yeah.

Hannah: It's just so easy to fall into.

Lisa: It is, especially about our kids. I think where worry is most prevalent in us is in things we don't control. We can't control our kids. They're other human beings. So we worry when they're little about things like choking on a hot dog or getting hurt on trampoline or slipping while running by the pool. Then as they get older and older and older, the worries change. I can certainly attest to this, my son having recently had his 18th birthday, right.

So I also think that worry is a habit. It's a pattern that your brain runs. This is what I noticed about me many years ago is that I had a pattern of

## Ep #84: Parenting Challenges 101: How to Stop Worrying

worrying. It was almost like, I didn't feel “normal” if I wasn't worrying about something. So I think it's a habit that we run. Our brain, our habit brain does not discern whether a pattern is good for us or not.

So let's say that someone grew up in a household have a lot of mental health issues in an extended family. There's a lot of worry about “is my child going to be okay?” Once you get into the pattern of that, it may be going in the background without you even realizing it. The problem with this is it's an energy drain. It is incredibly draining of one's mental focus and energy to worry all the time. Can you see that?

Hannah: Yeah, I absolutely can personally.

Lisa: Yes.

Hannah: So what do we do, Lisa?

Lisa: Well, let me just say a couple more things. The other problem with worry, and I see this in clients I work with. When you spend a lot of time worrying, you're easily triggered into storming when the thing that might happen in the future happens. Or even some version of it, a mild version of it. Right? You're super triggered, and you're far more likely to storm alongside your kids.

So I want everybody to realize that. You're far more likely. Because you're spending all this energy thinking about this thing, negative thoughts, right? It's a chain of negative thoughts about bad things that might happen in the future. So that's going to drain my energy, and I'm sending my brain into fight or flight, high alert, high alert, high alert.

I'm worried about my kid's grades. I'm worried about my kid's grades. I'm worried about my kid's grades. Your kid brings home a bad grade, and your

## Ep #84: Parenting Challenges 101: How to Stop Worrying

brain is like ah I knew it. I knew it. Then suddenly you're screaming along at your kids or you're storming alongside them or you're demanding compliance because you're triggered because you've already spent all this energy worrying.

The other problem is that worry either put you in the past oh this happened before. I know it's going to happen again. I know it's going to happen again. Or it takes you into the future. Oh my gosh. What's going to happen? My kid's going to be living under a bridge with a shopping cart. Or my two kids are never going to get along. Or my kid is going to hurt somebody. It takes you fully out of the present. Worry takes you into the past or the future and completely clouds being in the present.

One of the most important things your children want is for you to come and be fully present with them. So I think of worry as the antithesis of connection. If you're worrying, you're not connected with someone.

Hannah: Yeah, I can see that.

Lisa: Let's say someone's worried about their job. Oh, I'm worried about. It's really hard to do a good job when you're worried about your job, right? Or let's say you're worried about your relationship with your co-parent. You're worried about it. It's hard to be relaxed and fun and enjoyable when you're worried about the relationship. So it is the antithesis of connection. All right.

Like I mentioned, it takes you out of your higher brain where you're calm, you're creative, you're empathetic. Oh, honey, you got a bad grade on that test. Let's break it down. How much did you study? Did you put in the effort? What can we do differently next time? Right.

## Ep #84: Parenting Challenges 101: How to Stop Worrying

When you're worried, you're more likely to language to your kids. I knew it. I knew it. I knew you didn't study enough. I know you're not taking school seriously. I knew this was going to be a problem. What are you doing? Because that's worry, right?

That's taking you out of process problem. Seeing it as a process problem, and you're more likely to see it as a character problem. You're more likely to get triggered. You're more likely to storm. You're more likely to be stuck in your middle brain. You're more likely to not be interested in what the other person has to say is another big thing affecting the connection. Right?

Again, back to this, this test example. I'm worried that you're not going to do well in algebra this year. I'm worried. I'm worried. Math doesn't seem to be your thing. I never did well in math. You don't really like math. So I'm worried, worried, worried, worried. You bring the first test home, and you got a D or an F on the test, right?

Most likely if I'm worried and I'm reviewing this chain of negative thoughts about a bad thing that might happen, I'm less likely to be like so Hannah, tell me what you think? What went wrong here? What do you think you could have done differently? And really listen to the answer. I'm much more likely to be jumping to conclusions.

Hannah: Yeah. It's almost like you've rehearsed these things in your head for so long. Like you said, it's a chain. This is something that's going on and on. So now your brain has the opportunity to just spit it all out.

Lisa: That's right.

Hannah: Like, it's all ready to go. The script is already there.

## Ep #84: Parenting Challenges 101: How to Stop Worrying

Lisa: That's a great way to describe it. Because I know for me, in my parenting in years past when I have worried, you're right. You're creating a script. I like how you said it. You're also filling in the blanks of your what your kid's going to say. So you're also jumping to the conclusion. I know you didn't study. I absolutely know you didn't study for this test. I know you don't care, which doesn't feel good to the person on the other end.

Hannah: Right. Yeah, just one more thing. It's also kind of unfair because you're assuming what's going to happen. I mean when you were saying that I was thinking of like let's say, for an example, I'm worried that Carmella is gonna fall off the couch, but I don't actually say get off the couch. It's just in my head. Then she falls and I'm like well that's why you don't do that.

It's like I never even gave her the chance to talk about it or talk about it when it was worrying me. Then all of a sudden, you're just assuming that this terrible thing was gonna happen. So it's really not fair to the other person. Just like you said, it's the antithesis of connection. It's not fair to the person you're trying to connect with.

Lisa: That's right. It doesn't really teach Carmela, I'm concerned that you're gonna hurt yourself. So I'd like you to not play on the couch like that. That invites success. Right? That gives her a chance to understand where you're coming from, get off the couch. But if you're holding it in, you're worrying, then you're more likely to get triggered and be like see, I knew you're going to hurt yourself.

I find that my tone—When worry is involved, my tone is rarely neutral or inviting. Right? Then let's talk about the other side of the coin because part of the definition is things that might happen in the future. Let's say the worry doesn't happen. Let's say your child doesn't get a bad grade and



## Ep #84: Parenting Challenges 101: How to Stop Worrying

algebra or gets a decent grade, or Carmella doesn't fall off the couch. Now you've expended all this energy on something that you didn't need to do.

Hannah: Yes.

Lisa: Right. I mean this was also a reason that I decided many, many years ago to give up worry is because I had a childhood of watching my grandmother worry about things. The truth is half of them never even happened. So then you've wasted energy.

You bought boat insurance, and you never actually bought the boat. You might not buy the boat. Gee, 10 years from now I think I'd like to have a boat. Let's get insurance now. Oh, I never got the boat. It's just a waste of resources. Energy, as a parent, is one of your most precious resources that leads to connection. Right? You can speak to this.

Hannah: Absolutely. Yes. I was just thinking. Yeah, energy is not something I have just a ton of extra floating around. Oh, no big deal. I wasted that. We're good for the rest today.

Lisa: Paper towels, you got a lot of those. Energy, not so much.

Hannah: Right.

Lisa: Yes, yes. I love it. I love it. Okay. Now for the real reason that I don't like worry. When we worry, we're modeling worry for our children. My girlfriend and I were just talking about this this weekend. We were talking about growing up with fears.

One of the byproducts of my grandmother's worry is that she transferred the skill of worry to me, but also a lot of fear. I grew up a fearful child of many things adventure, trying new things, going fast uncontrollably, like on

## Ep #84: Parenting Challenges 101: How to Stop Worrying

skis or water skis. It made me a less adventurous, open person. My grandmother loved me tremendously, like really, really, really loved me. But I inherited the worry because she modeled that for me by worrying out loud all the time.

Hannah: Yeah.

Lisa: Tell me about that for you.

Hannah: Yeah, I can totally see it. I mean I can see my own childhood, and then I can see it with my children. Because especially if you have a child who's empathic or highly sensitive, and then you're just constantly voicing this. Then you just see it in their terrified little face. Yeah, that's really rough. I can definitely see how that would happen.

Lisa: Yes, yes.

Hannah: Not something I want to model.

Lisa: Right. Yes. I remember when Malcolm was little, I worked really hard at breaking the cycle of worry. I was very conscientious of it. That was one cycle that was passed down to me from the people that took care of me. That was one cycle, even before I got on to peaceful parenting. That was one cycle that I was determined to break.

I didn't want to raise a kid that couldn't assess risk, and that was fearless and a daredevil and did crazy things. I don't have one of those. But I also didn't want to raise a child that grew up constantly worrying about things, events. Many times we're worrying about things we can't even control.

So for anyone who's relating to this, if you're like whoa, Lisa, you're freaking me out. I feel like you're in my brain. The invitation is to notice this,

[Real World Peaceful Parenting](#) with Lisa Smith

## **Ep #84: Parenting Challenges 101: How to Stop Worrying**

is to acknowledge it. I'm a graduate of the School of Worry. I'm going to return my degree. I'm going to break the cycle. It starts with me, and I can point my family in a new trajectory. I can give up worry. We can get a divorce. We can part ways. However you want to think about it. I can send worry back on its way to find another family, but worry and I are no longer in a relationship together.

I'm doing this for my own preservation. I don't need boat insurance before I own the boat. But also my motivation is to be a cycle breaker. To not model this out loud or subconsciously for my children. I can teach them to assess risk. I can teach them to be aware. I can teach them there are consequences to choices, right? Those are all very useful tools. But I don't need to teach them how to become an expert at creating a chain of negative thoughts about bad things that might happen in the future.

I can break that cycle by being committed to that, by being mindful of it, by recognizing it, and working to create a new pattern in my brain. This is what I did. I spent a couple years every time I found myself worrying I would say to myself worry doesn't serve you. I would say to worry you may go now.

Then I realized that I was conserving energy for when problems really appeared, and I needed to go into problem solving mode or risk assessment mode or decision mode. Then I would free that energy up to focus on those activities. Because the truth is if you're worrying all the time, you're worn out from it.

Hannah: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. That makes a lot of sense. Yeah, I mean one of the things I would always worry about was like I don't like loud noises, especially with all my children. So I would worry that Sophia is going to be in a bad mood today, and she's just gonna be screaming and crying. That would just stress me out. I was just waiting for it. I was waiting

## Ep #84: Parenting Challenges 101: How to Stop Worrying

for the shoe to drop. I was like I know she's just gonna burst into tears at any point.

Then when she did, like you said, I was just so mad and so upset. I had this script ready. I had see, I knew it. I knew I couldn't handle my kids. I knew I couldn't be alone with them. But recently I did kind of a little bit of thought work and talked to myself a little bit.

Then A, she didn't really cry. Then when she did, like you said, I just had this opportunity to be creative and just kind of really figure out what she wanted. I was more connected with her. Then it stopped so quickly, and it was baffling to me that I had been wasting so much time and energy on this very small thing that didn't always even happen.

Lisa: There you go. When you don't worry and it does happen, you're so much more present with her, connected with her, and able to say hey sweetie, what's going on? What do you need?

Hannah: Yeah.

Lisa: Rather than I knew it. I knew it. I knew today was gonna be a bad day. I knew she was going to have—Right? That doesn't feel like connection.

Hannah: No, especially to verbalize it. Yeah. No.

Lisa: Or to jump to the end of the conclusion. I mean let's say that you're worried about that, and she does start making a big loud noise. For all you know, she's got a splinter in your finger.

Hannah: Exactly right.

## Ep #84: Parenting Challenges 101: How to Stop Worrying

Lisa: Or she fell down and bumped her knee and she needs a hug. But because you have that script in your head, one would immediately miss that. That's also part of connection. What happened? Tell me more. What do you need? But we're skipping past that. We're not even asking what do you need because we have that script in our head from the worry where we're jumping straight to the conclusion. Oh, she's giving me a hard time. Why does she have to do this every day? This is so ridiculous. We're off to the races, as they say.

Hannah: That's so true.

Lisa: So just to say this one more time so that you hear this. Worry is the antithesis of connection. So if you want to be connected as you're working down the path of real world peaceful parenting, and you're working to connect with your kids, take an assessment. Do a worry assessment. How worried am I? What do I worry about? How often? Am I willing to let go of worry? Right? Because it's a chain of negative thoughts about bad things that might happen in the future. Worry doesn't help you. It's not like well, if I worry, it won't happen. That's not how it works.

Hannah: True.

Lisa: I thought that for a period of time. I thought worrying was insurance. Well, it is insurance, but it's boat insurance, and you haven't even bought the boat. Once I realized that, and I had that aha-moment I was like oh, that's why it's not a good idea.

Also just the draining of the energy as a parent, right? If you spend all day thinking my daughter is going to be upset. She's going to be loud. She's going to be cranky when I pick her up. Like that's just a lot of energy. Then you pick her up, and she's a delight.

## Ep #84: Parenting Challenges 101: How to Stop Worrying

Hannah: Yeah.

Lisa: It's like whoa, okay. Well, I can't get that energy back.

Hannah: Yes, true.

Lisa: love it. I love it. Hannah, thank you. It was a great question you brought to us today. An absolutely great question. I hope that the person who posted that finds this helpful. I think we actually had a lot of postings about worrying. So we saw the need to bring this topic forward.

If you are, if you can relate to this, if you're the queen or king of worry, and you're like oh man, that hit close to home then I want you to think about being a cycle breaker. I want you to think about changing the trajectory of your family in the department of worry by working on letting go of it. By committing to every time you notice it to not doing it. Yeah. Awesome. Okay, 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.

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