

Ep #86: Feeling Triggered as a Parent? Do This...



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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. We're going to begin today with me giving you a homework assignment right up front. I want you to take a minute to ask yourself this question. When am I most likely to be triggered while parenting? What are the conditions that trigger me the most? I want you to really observe and pay attention to the patterns or the situations or the conditions when you are most likely to get triggered while parenting.

For many of us parents, it's when we don't get enough sleep, or we get surprised. For me personally, I recognized recently that it's when a big storm is brewing on the horizon, but it never comes. Then I go, whew, okay, dodged that one, and I gain a false sense of security from that.

Then another unexpected storm comes from out of nowhere, right on the heels of the avoided one, and whammies me at a hurricane intensity instead of what could have just been a passing shower. This is when I get incredibly triggered. I've recognized this recently about myself. I'm observing and I'm paying attention to the patterns.

Another one is when I asked for something to be done, and I get confirmation that it's going to happen. Then later I realized that it didn't happen, and that I need to stay on top of it. In my mind, I already checked the box. Like hey, can you put the dishes away? Sure, Mom. I'll take care of that. Then I'm in a rush to get dinner ready, and I realize the dishes have not been put away.

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But in my mind earlier that day when my son said, "Sure, Mom, I'll take care of that." In my mind, it was already done. I get to check it off and forget about it. So then when I get surprised, there's that word again coming up on my trigger. When I get surprised that he still hasn't done it, I get really triggered by this. Surprises and I, no bueno when it comes to my parenting.

Another mom admits it's when her husband gets dysregulated. She has a limiting belief that her husband only agreed to have children just for her. So when parenting gets hard for him, she feels incredibly responsible. She jumps in to rescue him and take his side, even if she doesn't fully agree with it, and then reiterates the husband's argument with vigor to her children. That causes her to feel dysregulated towards and around her daughter.

Again, from doing this work from observing and paying attention to her patterns of when she's most likely to get triggered, this mom realized that when her husband starts storming around her daughter, she thinks she has to jump in and rescue him. Because in her mind, he only agreed to have children for her.

So this feeling to rescue him, even when she doesn't fully agree with it, it triggers her. This is a great example of a limiting thought that is not serving this mom, the husband, the daughter, or the family. And a really good opportunity to recognize the conditions for her where she's being triggered.

Are the conditions that trigger you the most when you're in the car? Ah, that happens to so many of us, right? You're trying to drive, and your kids are fighting in the backseat, and you don't know what to do. You feel powerless to get them to stop or worried that you're gonna get injured.

Maybe the conditions that trigger you the most or after school. All day long, you've been looking forward to your kid coming home, and also to play with

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your other child that's still at home. Your kid comes home grumpy and starving and tired and wants to be left alone.

Maybe you get triggered most when it's time for your kids to get off screens because you're anticipating the meltdown that's going to come. Or when your three year old comes at you with question after question after question, and you feel like you can't even think. Maybe you get really triggered in the mornings when you're still super sleepy and just trying to put one foot in front of the other.

Or maybe it's when you're transitioning from work to home. You've just picked your kids up from daycare, or you walk in the house and the TV's blaring and everybody's on their phone. You're trying to think about what you're going to make for dinner.

So the homework assignment is to really consider what are the conditions, what are the patterns where I noticed that I'm most likely to get triggered? We, as parents, are often so focused and aware of our kids patterns, but we don't often take the time to consider our own. Little do we know how often our triggers and storms ignite our children's triggers and storms, and we end up storming alongside each other. You feel me? Are you like oh girl, that just happened in my house this morning?

When we're regulated and in our higher brain, if we know the conditions that ignite our triggers then we can be aware and prepare ourselves. We can formulate a recovery plan to take extra time to regulate or regulate more often, either before, after, or during a storm.

It can also be a great opportunity for connection if you share these triggers and this information these realization with your child. If your child recognizes these conditions in advance, they can also better be prepared and stay in the higher brain through your storm. Recovery can happen more quickly and easily without they're storming alongside you.

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This is certainly the case in our house. My son knows that I'm most likely to get triggered when surprises come up. So sometimes he'll give me a heads up or tell me, "Hey, Mom, I have something that's going to surprise you. I want to give you a minute to regulate yourself. I love it. It's so great. The other day he came to me and said, "Hey, school's starting in a few days, and I always get really nervous before. So I want to let you know now so you don't get surprised when I'm extra crabby over the next couple of days."

Recognizing the conditions as they're forming, you have the opportunity to ask your child and/or coparent for a little time and space before proceeding with the conversation or plans or question they present it, right? This is certainly true in my case.

You can consider it like a traffic light. This is how I love to think about this. Green is when you are completely regulated content and in your higher brain. Yellow is when you see the storm starting to brew in the distance, and the conditions mounting. Red is when you're smack dab in the middle of the storm, when you're completely dysregulated from a trigger, and it feels like you have little to no control, and your body wants to go into pure fight or flight.

Now here's the thing, you want to learn to batten down the hatches a yellow and not wait until you're all the way in the red. Because when you're in the red, it's way, way, way too late. So one of the things that we talk about all the time in The Hive, my online membership community, which you can learn more about at thehivecoaching.com.

One of the things we talk about all the time is this concept of green, yellow, and red. It's constantly checking in with ourselves as a parent. Am I at green? Am I at yellow? Am I at red? The truth is, sometimes we're yellow without our kids even being involved. Maybe we're tired, or we're hungry, or

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it's been a long day at work, or things haven't gone as planned. So we find ourselves in the yellow. It's good to check in with yourself and know this.

I have one client who if she doesn't eat on the regular, she finds herself in the yellow. She's really starting to notice her patterns. So she'll literally say to her teenage kids, "Hey, I'm super hungry, and I'm in the yellow right now. Let me go grab a quick bite to eat, and I'll come back, and we'll resume this conversation." As she's been modeling this for quite a while green, yellow, and red using this vocabulary, her kids are starting to talk about themselves and their regulation this way as well. Right?

So green is when you're completely regulated, content, and in your higher brain. Yellow is when you see the storm brewing in the distance and the conditions mounting. That's when you want to take action. That's when you want to work on your triggers. You want to work on the conditions. You want to notice the patterns to regulate yourself, right?

That's when I say oh, I'm feeling surprised right now. Let me take a break and regulate myself before we continue. Before I get into the red, which is the eye of the storm, where you're completely dysregulated from the triggers and are in fight or flight. I love it. Don't you? Green, yellow, red.

So here's another example. One mom again in my online community The Hive recently shared that she recognizes morning's present the ripest conditions for her for her triggers. Her six year old daughter tends to start her mornings each day with a bunch of questions. One after the other, just rapid firing these questions at this mom. The mom really struggles to stay regulated.

She shared with us that she has learned through doing this green, yellow, red work, through really observing the patterns of her triggers. She shared that she's learned to ask her daughter for a minute in the morning to get the juices flowing through her brain so she can keep pace with her daughter's

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questions. The daughter quickly learned how cooperating with the mom's request of taking a minute benefits the daughter and most often rewards her with the answers to the question she's looking for. This is the essence of connection.

She is saying to her daughter I see you, and I recognize your need daughter. Before I can help you, I need a minute. I need a minute to get my head straight, and then I can come back and answer all of your questions. She's inviting her daughter to acknowledge her mom's needs as well, and to proactively support her mom and participate in a successful result.

The mom shared that if she just says no to her daughter, not now, her daughter comes at her harder wanting me more attention. But she said, "When I asked her for a minute, and I explain what's going on, it slows her down, which gives me the space I need to collect myself so I can answer questions. Which ultimately gets my daughter what she wants, which is attention and answers to the questions."

I love this, don't you? This is really the backbone of connection because the mom is recognizing her patterns and her triggers. She's articulating them to her daughter. She's explaining her needs and expectations, what's going on for her. I need a minute. My brain doesn't work this fast in the morning. Let me just have a minute to collect myself, and then I'm all yours rather than rejecting or pushing her away, and rather than expecting her daughter to just instinctively know what to do and say. It's so, so, so good. This is connection right here. Right here.

Another mom recently said she realized when she tells her kids we gotta go, they really have no idea that that means the mom is rushed, worried about being late, counting all the consequences for being late, and moving quickly from yellow to red. Her kids are little, and they have no idea the three words "we gotta go" mean all of that they have absolutely no idea.

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Kids do not have the experience of knowing what different tones of voice and body language mean.

We got to go sounds to them the same as okay sweetie. I'm getting ready to go now. Take your time. Whenever you feel ready, and you have everything you need, we can peacefully and joyfully skip out the door while being excited to get where we're going. They don't understand your tone, your facial expression, the decibel in your voice means we're in an all business mode. It takes time to develop the skills.

Even then maybe they're not typically interested in your "all business mode". They haven't read your manual that we got to go means all business, and they really have no interest in reading it either. Reading manuals and following your directions that are laid out in the manual are not F-U-N.

But what I promise you for sure is if you're saying to your kid we got to go, they have no idea that means that it's all business mode, and we need to get out the door as fast as possible. That I'm stressed, and that I'm worried about being late. That I'm counting up all the consequences, and that I'm getting dysregulated myself and on the verge of moving from yellow to red. Right?

Your kids have absolutely no idea. Again, they don't understand tone, facial expression, stress in the voice, that as your decibel goes up, it means we're in all business mode. They don't know it. This mom did a great job of realizing this pattern that she kept running over and over and over again. Hey, we gotta go, and that that pattern triggered her every time she needed to get everyone out the door.

So she decided that since her kids really are little and do not understand the all business mode, she can't keep going to that as a form of communication. She said to me, "Lisa, I realized they don't understand it.

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They don't respond correctly with urgency. All business mode often leads to them storming as I'm rushing them, and I'm yelling at them. I'm starting to get really upset. When I go into an all business mode, it triggers me into storming right alongside them.”

Because she did the homework assignment and looked at what triggers her and what her patterns are, she was able to realize that when she says we got to go, and it was meaning I'm in all business mode. And her kids weren't picking up what she was putting down, it was causing her to go immediately from yellow to red and storm right alongside her kids.

Instead, because she recognize this pattern and these triggers, now she's working on things like getting up a little bit earlier. She told me you have no idea what an extra 15 or 20 minutes is doing for our family in the morning. I'm like yeah, I do know that benefit. She's also working on allowing more time to get out the door. She needed a little bit more wiggle room in the schedule. She's also working on staying calm when she thinks they might be late.

Getting dysregulated, getting triggered, getting into a red zone doesn't help you get there faster as a side note. She's working on connecting with her kids to get cooperation, which feels better, gets a better result, and creates more connection with her kids and is a much better way to communicate than we gotta go. Amazing, right?

So think about this. The parent/child relationship is two way. If you're only focusing on how to change your child's behavior and emotions through their triggers, you're missing half of the equation, which is why I wanted to focus today's episode on us, as the parents, noticing our patterns and our triggers. We're 50% of the relationship here, and we have the fully developed brains. So we really need to spend time looking at what are the patterns we're running, where is the dysregulation caused by the triggers.

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If you want connection and cooperation with your kids, which I know you do or you wouldn't be here, you have to work on staying regulated. You have to work on storming less and less and less. When we work on regulating our emotions, we model that regulation for our kids. In order for them to feel safe and secure, we have to model how to stay regulated in the face of big emotions.

Because if we, as the parents, can't stay regulated, in the face of their big emotions, how are they ever going to pull it off, learn it, or develop it? Right? I mean, really think about that. If we can't, as the parents, who love them more than anybody and have fully developed brains. If we can't stay regulated in the face of their big meltdowns and emotions, how are they ever going to learn how to do it? Who's going to show him the way?

Ah, I think about this all the time for you. All the time. Please hear this, it all starts with recognizing our triggers and our patterns as parents. As a side note, the more regulated you are, the less you'll yell, threaten, and punish your children in a dominant way because you won't be in fight or flight.

So today's homework assignment is to ask yourself when am I most likely triggered? What are the conditions or the stimulus that triggers me the most? Is it in the morning? Is it after school? Is it rapid fire questions? Is it surprises? Is it when you get stressed about being late? Is it Thursdays when you're worn down from the week? Is it on the weekends when your kids get up at the crack of dawn? Is it when your kids won't get off gaming, or you're anticipating telling them it's time to put the iPad away?

Really look at this. Examine it. What are the conditions or the stimulus that triggers me the most in my parenting? Your homework is to observe and pay attention to the pattern of when you're most likely to get triggered. Because here's what I know for sure after 10 years of working with thousands of parents around the world. The more you as the parent work

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on staying regulated with and around your kids, especially while they're storming, the more you model regulation for them.

Because remember, our kids don't do what we say. They do what we model. The more they know their emotions matter, the more safe they feel showing their big emotions around you, the more connection you're both going to feel. When you feel more connection, the more cooperation you're gonna get. It all starts with you. Yes, you. I know you. I'm looking at you.

So step one in staying regulated. Step one, in staying in the green zone. Step one in moving from yellow to green rather than yellow to red is to identify your triggers. Look for the patterns. Look for them. It's like magic. They're just sitting there waiting for you to find them. So please do this homework.

Listen, I'd love to support you in this work as you're finding your triggers. Feel free to DM me as you discover what your triggers are. I'm over on Instagram at the peaceful parent, and I would love to hear from you. Share your triggers with me. Let me know what you're discovering. It's a game changer. I promise you. Sounds good. Yes. 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 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.