

Ep #93: Connection is NOT a Reward. Here's Why...



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host
Lisa Smith

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

Ep #93: Connection is NOT a Reward. Here's Why...

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 we're going to talk about connection. Connection is not a reward we give our children when they've done it our way, when they've behaved, when they've been compliant, when they've sacrificed, when they've tamped down the storm, when they've hit their feelings, when they've done what we asked the first time. No, connection is not a reward for our children.

Connection is the tool we use in real world peaceful parenting all the time. It is the offer we extend to our children. It's the commitment we make to our way of parenting, to our way of showing up, and to respect. We all work on connection all the time. What if you were to approach parenting this way?

What if you said to yourself I'm gonna work on connection all the time with my kids. In the good times, in the bad times, when my kids are storming, when my kids are regulated, when they're behaving, when they're not behaving, when we're in public, when we're not in public, when they're doing everything right, and when they're doing everything wrong. Let me ask you how do you think your relationship with your children would be different?

I think you'd get more cooperation. Because what I know is that connection leads to cooperation. Command leads to compliance, but connection is the tool that leads to cooperation with our kids. I think one of the most important things I can help you see and understand and implement is connection is our way of being.

Ep #93: Connection is NOT a Reward. Here's Why...

As parents, we can't use it as some sort of privilege or prize that we take away from our kids when they misbehave and expect our kids to cooperate. It doesn't work like that. Connection is the starting point. The cooperation, the relationship, the respect, it all emanates from the connection as the tool, not the reward. Let me say this again, connection is our way of being. It's our tool as real world peaceful parents. We can't use it as some sort of privilege or prize that we take away from our kids when they misbehave. It won't work. That's not real connection.

I want to encourage you over the next few days to observe yourself and your parenting. Really ask yourself am I using connection as a reward to get what I want from my kids, or do I offer connection all the time? Because what I really want for you is I want you to be able to connect with your kids all the time. Our kids deserve it. It's their right. It makes for better human beings in the long run.

I recently had a conversation with one of the moms in my coaching community, The Hive. Let's call her Beth. Beth said, "Lisa, I tried to connect with my daughter this past weekend, but my connection got rejected. We did things that I thought should make my daughter feel connected. We went kayaking and paddleboarding on the lake, but my daughter literally sat in the kayak and wouldn't cooperate.

"The next day, we went on a hike, and she walked in front of me the whole time making no effort to make conversation. What she wanted from me was she wanted me to take pictures of her. She'll do things with me, but then we don't connect," Beth said.

"She'll give me a little bit, but she won't tell me everything. She tells me we're never going to agree. She orders me to stop trying to therapize her, stop trying to teach her lessons, and stop over parenting her. I obviously can't do that. So I'm at a loss," Beth said. Beth shared with The Hive community on this particular call that she really has made substantial

Ep #93: Connection is NOT a Reward. Here's Why...

progress as a peaceful parent because she didn't blow up but her daughter when the connection felt like it wasn't working.

But internally, Beth was telling herself that she was struggling and not connecting with her daughter, because Beth had a fantasy that when they did this hiking and they did this kayaking that she would be able to talk to her daughter nonstop because that's her form of connection. Now in The Hive, we do a lot of thought work, which is really just observing our own thoughts about things like our parenting, our kids, and the words that come out of our mouths.

What I teach inside The Hive is that our reactions to triggers, getting triggered while parenting, comes from our feelings and all of our feelings come from our thoughts. This is 100% true. Our feelings are generated by our thoughts. Okay, so our reactions are not triggered by circumstances. In Beth's case, the circumstance that she was trying to build connection with her daughter, and her daughter seemed to be rejecting it. Our reactions come from our thoughts about the circumstance because our reactions come from our feelings and our feelings come from our thoughts about the circumstance.

So Beth and I continued to talk until she uncovered and revealed her limiting thought. She said, "Nothing I'm doing is changing my daughter. Nothing I'm doing is changing what she's doing." It was this thought that was dysregulating Beth inside her brain. This thought that she is failing as a mom, and that nothing she is doing in peaceful parenting and on thought work is building connection with her daughter.

Okay, first of all, please hear me. I am here to tell all of you that it is no small feat to stay regulated and in your higher brain when your thoughts about the circumstances of the moment, beg to draw you into your middle brain, trigger you so that you storm alongside your child. So Beth did a great job staying regulated while thinking nothing I'm doing is working.

Ep #93: Connection is NOT a Reward. Here's Why...

I want to encourage all of you who are listening to understand how huge it is for you, for your children, and your relationship with them that you can stay regulated in the eye of the storm. This is huge for every one of you, including Beth. Everything emanates from connection, and all connection emanates from you staying regulated. If your child is dysregulated, storming, and you come alongside and storm alongside them, there's not going to be any connection for either of you.

So let me say that again. So if you hear nothing else, you hear this in today's episode. Everything emanates from connection. Connection emanates from you, the parent, with a fully developed brain staying regulated. So that's job one. Job one, step one is staying regulated when your child is storming.

I want to encourage you, yes you, to celebrate every time, every single time, you fight the urge to take things personally. Instead you stay in your higher brain. No one can expect this to happen each and every time. But each time it does, please, please, please, please, please, I beg you. Celebrate it so your brain gets chemical hit and wants more. Regulation breeds connection, and connection breeds cooperation.

So back to my conversation with Beth, I assured her it sounds like she is connecting with their daughter just fine. Because staying regulated is building connection no matter what activity you're doing or the response you're getting from your child. Connection is not about how you would choose to connect. It's about making the other person feel seen, heard, and valued. In Beth's case, she reported that when she took her daughter hiking connection was going to be the physical activity of hiking, the close proximity with her daughter, having heart to heart conversations about big, deep, and uncomfortable issues they have between them.

When there needs to be parental conversations about big, deep, uncomfortable circumstances, Beth feels the best time and the best place

Ep #93: Connection is NOT a Reward. Here's Why...

to do this is outdoors while doing something physical, some fun activity. This is how Beth likes to connect. We're going to go outside. We're going to do a fun physical activity, and we're going to have a big deep, uncomfortable conversation. This is what Beth sees as connection. It makes Beth feel seen, heard, and valued.

But listen to this. But to Beth's daughter, the daughter feels connected, the daughter feels seen, heard, and valued when her mom takes pictures of her while they're hiking, and they keep the conversation light and fluffy and fun and silly. Can you see this? Her daughter feels connected, not in deep conversation or close proximity to her mom. Her daughter feels connection when her mom takes pictures of her, and I'm gonna guess that the daughter feels connection most when mother and daughter are not having big deep parental conversations about uncomfortable topics.

Now, of course, these conversations are necessary from time to time, but it doesn't lead Beth's daughter to feeling connected to her mom. It could be important to keep separate activities we do with our kids. Separate activities of connecting and enjoying from having separate activities of guiding, coaching, and deep parenting conversations. I think it's important that we as parents limit ourselves to very finite times that we have these big parental conversations, and not make the recurring uncomfortable thing be our go to topic every time we're trying to connect with our kids.

For many of us parents, I know this certainly used to be my case. Partially, it's because how I was raised, but many of us parents want to talk about issues or concerns we have all the time with our kids. But our kids can only take it in small chunks. It doesn't help our kids feel connection. You know, let's be honest. No one wants to hear a never ending prolonged conversation about where they're struggling all the time. Nobody wants their mistakes and flaws and opportunity for improvement to constantly be pointed out, reviewed, and gone over, over, and over again.

Ep #93: Connection is NOT a Reward. Here's Why...

In case you didn't know this, for most children, none of that feels like connection. None of that feels like you see me, you hear me, and you value me. Connection needs to come first. I like to say we always need to connect before correcting.

I really believe the hard part about connecting with our kids is we have so many hopes and dreams for them. We want them to do well. We want them to not make the mistakes we made. We want them to get it right. We want them to learn. We want to prevent them from hurting and making mistakes and bumping their knees and getting it wrong. But the truth is, they're different people from us. They feel connection differently than we do. They're their own person. They're at a different age development. Their brains are wired differently.

I can tell you, my 18 year old son loves to connect. He loves to connect by arguing, debating, and stirring up conflict. It makes him feel seen, heard, and valued. He loves to connect through debating, through having just really intense arguments where each person takes a different side. He and my husband can debate or argue about something for hours. In the end, they both feel connected.

For me, if I listed all the ways there are to connect. I mean, if I'm honest arguing and debating would be the very last on my list, and it might not make the list at all. That is not how I enjoy connecting with people. I didn't even think of it as connection. But I had to accept that this is the way he feels connection. I don't feel it, but he feels it. So I learned to adapt and adjust and participate in it and understand that I'm connecting with them when I do it.

Now you might be under the illusion that it's only connection if you both enjoy connecting, or you both feel seen, heard, and valued, but that's not true. Connection is when the other person feels seen, heard, and valued. Sometimes it happens where we both feel it. Yes. But more often than not,

Ep #93: Connection is NOT a Reward. Here's Why...

I'm connecting with you in a way that makes you feel seen, heard, and valued.

The connection doesn't always have to feel mutual in the same moment or at the same time or in the same way. Relationships thrive when connection is given and received over time, over the span of many different circumstances. When each party in the relationship gets their opportunity to feel seen, heard, and valued throughout the whole span of the relationship. Not necessarily in every moment or every circumstance. Both people in a relationship do not need to feel connected doing the exact same thing.

Here's another example. I have a friend who feels connected when I respond to her text messages right away. I don't feel connection that way. In fact, I don't like responding all the time to people's text messages. I'm not very good at it. But I recognize this is her connection language. So when she texts me, I answer right away.

In contrast, my way of feeling connected is when people I'm trying to get together with can commit and make definitive plans with me about when and where we're going to meet somewhere. So I feel disconnected from people when I asked them what time they want to meet or if they want to meet at all, and the response is maybe I do not feel connected to people who make me wait around just for them to make a decision.

So in this case, my friend and I feel connected in very different ways. That's okay. I respond to her text messages instantaneously, and she feels connection. When I reach out for us to meet up, and she picks a definitive time in place for us to meet. I feel connection. Does this make sense? Can you see this?

So Beth's daughter could very well be thinking that she feels complete connection to her mom when they go hiking, and Beth takes pictures of her, and they goof around and they act silly, and they have shallow

Ep #93: Connection is NOT a Reward. Here's Why...

conversation. Beth is thinking they're not connecting at all because she thinks connection is big, deep conversations. But if Beth's goal is to connect with her daughter then Beth takes pictures and has silly conversation while they're goofing around during hiking, and sets the deep conversation aside for a different time.

I like to remember that our children are their own souls. They've come to earth to have their own experiences in life. We are given a short time to guide them on their journey. But the truth is, it's their journey. Connection is the key to preparing them for the best way forward in that journey.

Connection for a little kid might look like you mom or dad or parent or guardian or nanny or grandparent, you watch me struggle to put my shoes on, but you don't rush to help me, and you don't leave the room to go do something else. The connection may simply be in the watching, even while they struggle or storm. Committing to staying there and seeing it through, watching them, quietly supporting them while they struggle to figure things out for themselves.

We all have our own manuals that define how we feel connection, our connection language, if you will. Connection with our kids or a coparent or mother-in-law might happen by opening your respective manuals and sharing them with each other. When I understand how someone feels connection from me, and I commit to giving it to them in that way, our relationship almost always deepens.

Connection might be sharing with each other the things that make you feel mistreated or sad. Maybe discussing what you need from each other, how it feels to feel totally connected. Tell me about a time when you felt most connected, when you felt seen, heard, and valued from me. It's a great conversation to have with your kids.

Ep #93: Connection is NOT a Reward. Here's Why...

Connection doesn't come from trying to talk our kids into doing things or trying to talk them out of their feelings. Connection comes instead from being patient, and respecting their feelings and needs, and in some cases, their strong instincts. If you think about it, no adult feels respected when someone comes at us and tells us just get over it. It was nothing to be upset about. Stop it right now. So why do we do that to our kids? Our jobs as parents sometimes is to simply get out of the way and allow connection between our kids and other people to naturally take its course.

So again, I encourage you, I ask you, I assign you, I want you to observe yourself. Are you using connection as a reward when you get what you want from your kids? Or do you offer connection all the time? Are you offering connection with the intent of changing your kids and changing their reactions to their own thoughts and feelings? Or are you connecting with them in order to help them feel seen, heard, and valued even when the behavior is good or bad? When they're storming or compliant, when they're cooperating or not cooperating, when they're having a good day or a bad day?

I encourage and implore you please, please, please do not use connection as a means to an end. Use connection as the tool to build your relationship with your children and help them feel seen, heard, and valued by you. Yeah. You can do this. I know you can. I know you've got this. I'm gonna hold space and believe that you can evaluate this and make the necessary shifts so you're using connection all the time with your kids. So that no matter what's going on, they feel seen, heard, and valued. You can do this. I know you can. Okay. Until next time, 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.

Ep #93: Connection is NOT a Reward. Here's Why...

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.