

**Ep #98: Don't Take it Personally!
How to Deal with Your Kids' Storms**



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 know I say it every week, but every week it turns out to be 100% true. I am so excited to be with you here today. Today, I want to offer a refresher on the topic of holding space. I want to revisit how to hold space for others, but especially your kids, particularly when your kids are storming. This is something we all need reminding of often. I want to dig in today. You ready?

Now let me ask you a question. What is the absolute most important thing you can do to build connection with your kids? Yes, exactly. Stay regulated through their storming through his, her, or their storms. Stay regulated. Today we're going to talk about the importance of that.

During one of our most recent Hive calls, one of our members recently gave me an ideal example that perfectly illustrates when and how to practice this most important peaceful parenting tool of staying regulated and holding space for our kids.

So during our coaching, the Hive member started out by setting the scene. She said, "Lisa, it was time for my son who's seven to get a haircut, and I give him the haircut at home most of the time." She said, "My son is always super sensitive when I give him a haircut, and I don't understand why." She said, "It's interesting because when my husband gives him the exact same haircut with the exact same tools, he's totally fine. But for some reason, Lisa, when I do it he storms and melts down." Then she said, "I ended up getting triggered, and we crash and burn into a horrible storming experience for both of us. More often than not, we're both in tears."

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So after a most recent haircut, she jumped on a Hive call and asked for coaching. She wanted to know what she can do in that moment when her son starts melting down into a storm. Two, she wanted an explanation for why this happens when she gives her son a haircut, but not her husband. Interesting question, right? I'm sure that you may be able to relate to this. You may be like yeah, that happens in my own. I know that feeling. I'm as confused as she is. Tell me, Lisa. Tell me why does this happen? Okay. Well, I will.

So let's start with the second question she had. Why does my son melt down when I give him the haircut, but not when his father does? This answer might be an eye opener for you as it certainly was with this mom. So we talked about why her son melts down with her and not dad. Her son is homeschooled by her, and they spend a lot of time together. She considers the two of them very connected.

He enjoys spending time with his dad, and they have a great time. They're super silly and they have fun together. But just by the nature of their schedules, they don't get to spend as much time together as mom and son. In fact with Dad, it's very little time usually at the end of the night after he gets home from work.

So I explained to her the most likely your son's storms around you mom because you are his safe place. In this example, mom is the one that her son can go to, to unpack his invisible emotional backpack. This is because she's created that connection with him, and he is her safe place. I want to say this again. It's because she has created that connection with him, and he is her safe place.

For many of us in similar situations, we're quick to take the storms personally because they only seem to happen to us and not with anyone else in the family. But hear me when I tell you this. It is a complement to the

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connection that you've created with your kid or kids, and it is a complement to your parenting.

In this situation, the son is sensitive to the haircut. He doesn't like it. The pulling, the tugging, the sitting still, the being quiet, the cutting of the hair. He does not like to get a haircut. Whenever someone mentions it, that it's hair cut time, he immediately begins to storm.

It's because he has a buildup of the cortisol in his body, his invisible emotional backpack is full with just even anticipating the pulling, the tugging, the sitting still, the being quiet, the cutting of the hair. So when the mom mentions hey, it's time for a haircut, cortisol bursts through his body, his invisible emotional backpack fills up quickly, and he starts to storm.

Now let's have a look at this in the outside world when our kids interact with teachers, strangers, coaches, and maybe even a parent or a very close family member, our kids feel like they have to hold it together all the time. But Mom is this boy's safe place. As I said earlier, it's a compliment to the bond and the connection he has with mom. It might not always feel good in the moment, but this is why our kids do it.

I encourage, beg, plead, invite you to not take it personally. Do not tell yourself Jason's disrespectful to me because he gives me a hard time when I asked him to do X, Y, Z, and he doesn't give anyone else a hard time about it. Do not take it personally. Reframe it as the compliment it is that you have created the safe place for your kid or kids.

I know this from personal experience. I know it. I had a moment recently with my son. He's now 18. I've been practicing peaceful parenting for about 11 years. My son is proof that the tools work that I share with you. So my son, Malcolm, and I recently took a four hour road trip in the car, just the two of us. Initially I thought ugh, four hours in the car together. He's gonna

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put his headphones in and watch Netflix the whole time, and I'm just gonna drive in silence. So I wasn't overly excited about starting the trip.

However, much to my surprise, on this trip we had an open conversation for four whole hours. I'm not kidding you. No phones, no headphones, no interruptions. We just talked nonstop for four hours. In that time, we covered many, many, many topics. One of them, which he initiated was a topic of parent coaching and peaceful parenting.

Now, let me assure you that my son, Malcolm, you've heard me call him this before, he is completely aware that he is a full contact sport. He's completely aware of how strong willed he is and how much he hates being told what to do. During our conversation about peaceful parenting and connection between parents and kids, he said to me, "Mom, you've always been the place where I can unload. I know it. I know it isn't always pretty, but I always know you're my safe place where I can really explore what's going on for me."

Now for me personally, when I was growing up, I never had that. I was always told to take my feelings into my room and don't come out until I was over or had a better attitude. There was no safe place for me to unload any of my feelings to explore, to learn, and to gain regulation and emotional intelligence. So I've had a chance to be on both sides of the coin.

Even for me, sometimes it's hard in the moment to be that safe place. It's hard when our kids are storming about a silly little haircut. I mean, come on son. Just sit in the chair. Let me cut your hair. We'll get it over with, and we'll move on with our lives. That's not always what happens because I am dysregulated from the information and I need to storm. I'm telling you. My son is proof that it's possible and so worth all the effort to change the way you react to your kids when they're storming.

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When Malcolm was really little, I was the parent storming right alongside him. I was the parent taking it personally. I was the parent thinking he was doing something to me because he stormed around me and no one else. What I already knew but was reinforced by Malcolm in the car that day is that I am a safe place. That it is a complement to the connection that the two of us have created. I want that for you, and I want that for your kids. I recognize that sometimes it's hard to be that safe place, but the work is worth it.

I'm not saying that you shouldn't be the punching bag or the permissive parent or be the ones your kids get to hit or swear, right? We all need to set limits for our kids. Limits help kids feel safe and loved. But when they're melting down during a storm, what I do want you to do is work on staying regulated rather than dysregulated and hold space for them while they work through it.

Just like in this case with the mom and the haircut. Her son was melting down, because mom had signaled to him that he is safe with her, and that he can use the time with her to work the cortisol out of his body and unload his invisible emotional backpack.

What her son inherently knows is that mom allows him to be sensitive, uncomfortable, angry, emotional, frustrated. She doesn't make him hide his feelings. She holds space for him. That's what holding space is. She knows that so far in every haircut they've had, he's sensitive, uncomfortable, angry, emotional, frustrated, and she looks at him and says that's okay. I get it.

The psychiatrist Carl Jung teaches us in his work about light and shadow side, our positive and negatives, our strengths and our weaknesses. In his original work, he described the shadow side is the things we don't like about ourselves or the things those closest to us don't like about us. What

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he hypothesized is that we're often so uncomfortable with our shadow side that we project it onto others.

When you're connected with your kid, what you're saying is, you can show me your shadow side, the side that makes you wildly uncomfortable. The fact that you're scared and uptight and anxious about the haircut. You can show me your shadow side, and/or your light side. Your silly laugh, your fun, your smiles, your hugs. You can show me both, and I will love you the exact same. I may not like it. I may want to help you through it. But whether you show me your shadow side or your light side, I will love you the exact same.

This is what I call unconditional parental love. To me, unconditional parental love is when our kids feel completely safe that they can show us their shadow side or their light side. They can be their best and their worst, and they feel the love from us the exact same. As I mentioned, it doesn't mean we like all their behavior. It doesn't mean that we don't want to teach them a new way to show up.

But unconditional parental love means your kids can rest in the assurance that you love them no matter what. Whether they're fighting with their siblings or not, whether they're kicking the back of the seat or not, whether they're getting good grades or not so good grades, whether they're regulated or dysregulated.

I want my son to know that I love him the exact same no matter which side he shows me. I work hard to make sure he knows that. I want that for you and your kids. Because the ability as a child to rest in that, oh that's pure magic.

Okay, so back to my client's situation. She asked me if I think it would be better if she just had someone else cut her son's hair so he wouldn't melt

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down when he gets his haircut. I said well, that's for you to decide. That certainly is one option that you could go with. You could do that. You could get someone else to cut it, but then you'll miss the opportunity to help him work through his big emotions during haircuts because he'll be holding it all down, tamping it all in, and lugging around his invisible emotional backpack until the next opportunity with the mom arises where he can unload it.

So this really isn't about the haircut as much as it's about holding space, and getting comfortable with your kid storming and his big emotions. It's not necessarily that the haircut causes the son's dysregulation or storming.

It's that the haircut triggers the kid into dysregulation probably because of fear and anxiety and stress about the pulling and tugging of the hair and the sitting still and all the stuff that's going on in the haircut. The haircut is the signal to him that now's the ideal time to release all of his big emotions. Even if he wants mom to do the haircut, halfway through he may still get dysregulated.

So we talked about that. The mom said well, if that happens, what do I do? I said well, you can simply ask your son do you need a break? Do you need something from me? Or do you just want to be like this through the whole haircut? It's totally okay if you want to stay upset. I'm okay with that, and I can hold space. But if you need a break, you can let me know that too, and we can take a break.

Sometimes what's going on when our kids are having a tough time, what they really want to know is that we can hold space for them while they go through the storm. We're not trying to get rid of the storm. We're not trying to rush through it. We're just holding space while they work through it. Again, unconditional parental love.

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Now, the trigger that pushed the mom to the edge of her storm was when her son yelled out, "You cut me. You cut me. Ow, you cut me." Although there was no cut. Maybe you can relate to this. The feelings of being accused by your kid for doing something mean or hurtful that you didn't do or maybe you accidentally did often triggers even the most seasoned of peaceful parents.

So the mom asked me, "Okay, Lisa, I get all this, but how do I stay regulated next time when I'm giving him a haircut, and he's storming through it, and then reaches that threshold of accusing me of hurting him during the haircut?" So I asked the mom, what did you do this time? She said, "Well, I set the clippers down, and I told him I had to run to the bathroom real quick, and I'd be right back." She admitted that she didn't really have to go to the bathroom. She just wanted to get away for a second and regulate herself.

She admitted to me that what she really wanted to do was power through the last 30 seconds of the haircut, but she quickly saw her son's need for a break, even at the tail end of the haircut. When he was saying ow, ow, ow. You cut me. You cut me. This is the absolute best thing the mom could do in this situation, understand his need to take a break, hold space for him to take the break.

So she quickly came up with the idea hey, I need to run to the bathroom really quickly. She set the clippers down, and she walked away while reassuring him she's just going to be gone a moment, and she'll be right back. As the parent, this is the greatest tool we have in staying regulated. Because as Tony Robbins says, motion changes emotion. All she needed was a minute to step away, take a moment to take a breath, and remind herself not to take the storming personally, to regulate.

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Remember, step one to holding space for your kids or anybody for that matter, anybody, is to say regulated. You have to stay regulated. If you're not regulated, you can't hold space. Holding space is compassionate listening, and it requires you to be regulated. Because when you're compassionately listening, you're listening with the intention to relieve the other person's suffering. You're not listening to coach or correct or be right or tell them where they're wrong. You're listening to ease your child's suffering.

So when the child said you cut me, you cut me, you cut me, and she knew she didn't, she recognized she needed to ease his suffering. So they took a break. If you're not regulated, it is almost impossible to hold space for the other party.

So step one in holding space is to always make sure you're regulated. If you're not, then get regulated. Take a break. Take some deep breaths. Hit pause for a second. I know I get dysregulated when I get surprised. When there's a ton of information coming at me, I often get dysregulated when it's sprung on me. I often need to take a break.

I teach all my clients saying hey, I need to run to the bathroom really quick is a great way to take a break. Because it's always acceptable to excuse yourself to go to the bathroom. It signals to the other person I'm going to go and come right back. Hold on one minute. Hold please, as we say in our family.

Anything you can do to hit pause to get away for a second, move your body across the room, grab a drink of water, wash your hands, go to the bathroom, grab yourself a minute to get in motion so you can change your emotion so you can get regulated, and then you can hold space for your kid.

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In this example when the mom came back to her son to finish the haircut, she was completely regulated, and she was able to get curious. She could say to him, talk to me. Why do you think I cut you? Where did I cut you? Let's look in the mirror. Do you see any spot? Do you need to take a break? Her son said oh, it felt like in the moment, but now I see you didn't. Go ahead and finish the haircut. They finished the haircut successfully.

I'm curious to see what will happen when the next haircut comes around, but now she's got some real tools to not take it personally when he storms to understand she's the safe place for him, and they're connected. To see it as the complement it is and the work she's putting into peaceful parenting, to remind herself to stay regulated, to hold space for him, and to help him through the storm. Not rush through it. Not deny it. Not try to shove it down, but hold space for him through the storm until he can work through the big emotions on his own.

I love it. Don't do you? I want this for you. I want it for your kids. I want you to develop the skill of holding space. You've got this. I know it. I absolutely know it. I'll hold space for you while you're learning to hold space for your kids. Sound good? 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.