

Ep #101: How to Use Elf on the Shelf to Create Connection with Your Kids



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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. Now, I want to put in a warning or caveat right away as you're listening to this. Today I'm going to talk about an idea that you may not want your kids to hear about. So if you have little ears with you, I encourage you to hit pause and listen to this episode when you're away from all the children. I don't want to spoil any surprises or any information or any secrets. Okay, ready? Awesome. Let's dig in.

Let me say first of all, thank you for joining me today. I want to tell you that today's episode is a rerecord of an episode from last year at this time. I think it's important that we touch on this topic one more time this year before we move on. Again, just a warning, I don't want to have any spoilers or ruin anything for your family around the holidays. So please make sure little ears are not listening to this podcast. I don't want to bust up any stories or secrets that your kids might have about the holidays.

I thought it was important that we revisit this topic as we start at the beginning of December and the holiday season. I mean it's coming quickly, and here's the thing. I really, really, really want you to consider moving away from bribery, rewards, and fear based parenting around the holidays. I think I make a pretty good case for it here in today's podcast.

So join me into listening to maybe a new perspective, maybe a fresh perspective, maybe a different way to think about something like Elf on the Shelf. All right, let's dig in.

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Here's one thing that I don't really love, and you may not even realize you're doing it. It's fear based parenting during the holidays. I remember the first time I realized this was going on. One day waiting for Malcolm at basketball practice, a mom was telling me that she really loved December. She really loved it with her younger kids. She said it was so much easier to parent in December.

I was like what? I was puzzled. How could this be? As generally there's so much going on over the holidays. There's extra pressure and tension and frayed nerves. Kids tend to meltdown or storm even more over the holidays. So I asked her tell me more.

She said, "Oh you see Lisa, we've got an elf on the shelf. The kids know that Santa won't bring them any presents at all if the elf sees them misbehaving." Oh no I thought. Oh no. So I took a deep breath and I walked away.

You see I don't like these parenting games or tools or tactics. I don't like when parents use fear based parenting around the holidays to control their kid's behavior. What we're saying is if you behave son/daughter/kids, you get rewarded with gifts and things. What we're also saying is if you're having a hard time or you're storming, which is really code for expressing your feelings from unmet needs, then you're threatened to have your gifts or things taken away or withheld from you.

Let me say that again. When we engage in fear based parenting around the holidays, what we are saying to our children is if you behave, if you do what I tell you, if you act as I expect you to act, if you obey my commands then you get rewarded with gifts and things. If you don't "behave" because you're having a hard time, because you're storming, you're threatened to have your gifts and things taken away or withheld from you.

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Ah. Maybe you're having a big ah-ha moment right now. Maybe you're thinking, "Oh wow Lisa. I didn't even know I was doing that." It's okay. Remember, when we know better, we do better. So let me give you an example.

People buy the elf on a shelf. They get it out of the box, and they put it on the shelf. Then they tell their kids that the elf is watching them to see if they're behaving. Then they tell their kids, "If you don't behave, the elf will tell Santa who then crosses presents off the list of things he was going to bring you." Sometimes there's even the threat of no presents. That, my friends, is fear based parenting. It makes your kids feel insecure and stressed.

Now I've seen the elf on a shelf used in a fun way where the elf gets up into antics in the house, and each morning the kids have to search out the elf and find out the mischief that he's been up to. I love that. I think the pictures and the creativity and the connection that you can experience with your kids when you're doing it in a fun way is absolutely amazing.

Using the elf on the shelf as a surveillance, using it in fear based parenting to get your kids to behave, I don't love that. I definitely don't love using it as surveillance. Because I ask you. Would you like if your boss installed a security camera in your office to watch you all the time? If you didn't behave the way he or she wanted you to, your pay would get slashed. Nope, I don't think so. So why do we do this to our kids?

Sure you can try to justify and say it's just a bit of fun. But what does it feel like to the child? Does it feel nice to know that your every move is being watched? That if you mess up, no presents are going to come your way? Yeah, I don't think that feels nice or fun.

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Here's the other thing parents. Okay, now I'm on a soapbox, I know. But hear me out for a moment. Even if the elf could see the child and judge their behavior, the elf would only see the outward behavior of the child. It would never see what was really going on for them down underneath the behavior because the elf isn't scuba diving down to the feelings and needs.

So if the elf sees the kid act out and sees them having a storm of emotion, and the elf emails Santa or elf-mails Santa to tell him to cross presents off the list. The thing is the elf has no idea what's going on for the child, right. The elf doesn't understand scuba diving down like we talked about in episode after episode here. To scuba dive down to the unmet feelings and needs. So the elf is just judging the storming on the surface.

The elf has no idea about the child's feelings and needs, which is why I encourage parents that I work with to get curious not furious. Don't snorkel. Don't focus on the behavior at the top. Scuba dive down to the unmet feelings and needs. Figure out when a child acts up or misbehaves, what's really going on for them, right? This is our job as parents is to scuba dive down to the feelings and needs.

December can often bring on extra stress, extra excitement, extra intensity, extra anxiety. All the elf is doing is watching the behavior. He doesn't have a chance to understand the storm of emotions going on. So when your child acts up, what's really going on for them? Are they tired? Are they hungry?

Did they have a tough day at school when they did get picked for the team? Or they got picked last. Or they didn't get on the team they want. Did your child have to spend recess on their own? Is your child anxious about the pending holiday and all the talk about a wish list and what they want? Is your child worried they won't get what they ask for?

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The elf can't ask these questions. It just sees what it sees and then it punishes by taking things away in a punitive way, in a fear based way. You as the parent can see what's really going on for your child. You can scuba dive down to the feelings and needs. When you do, you open the door to the real world of understanding and connection. Those kind of feelings feel a whole lot cozier than judgements and threats.

Getting curious not furious feels a whole lot better than judging and threatening and using fear based parenting. Maybe it feels like it works well to use elf on the shelf, and it feels like you need this during the stressful time. But come on real world peaceful parenting. I need you to know that threats and punishments are not the answer. Fear based parenting is not the answer. We don't want our kids to think that they're not worthy of gifts unless they comply with our requests and demands.

What I know for sure is that often these tactics just backfire as they decrease our kid's confidence and increase the stress and anxiety they're feeling, which ironically just leads to more and more storming. Building connection works a whole lot better and is much more sustainable.

Maybe you've already bought an elf on the shelf. Can you have the elf get up to mischief and laugh about the behavior together? How can you use the elf to connect with your kids? To connect with them, to be interested in the mischief that the elf gets up to each day. You know, elf with empty chocolate wrappers and a plate with biscuit crumbs.

Or your elf hanging from the Christmas tree tied upside down or your elf with muddy prints or snow prints made of sugar. Or you elf playing on the gaming equipment or your elf in the dollhouse or in the doll bed. Your elf wearing an item of your children's clothing like a sock or a shoe. That's a fun idea that leads to connection.

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Here's another great idea. Another way to use your elf to lead to connection with your kids. Share a letter from the elf saying the great things that he or she has noticed about your kid over the last year. Share a letter from the elf about a time the elf noticed your kids being kind of showing determination or putting in the effort.

Another great way to increase the connection with your kid is a letter from the elf that the elf has written to Santa about why it's enjoyed being in your home. What's magically about your home? Why does your elf love living in your home?

Yeah? That sounds amazing. You get to choose. You, yes you, get to choose to make the holidays a time of connection and cooperation or a time of compliance and fear based parenting. What I know is that connection leads to cooperation.

So I want to encourage you to pay attention and to avoid saying things to your kids like, "Santa's watching. You'd better be good or Santa won't come. You better be nice because you know naughty kids don't get gifts." My least favorite of all, "That's it. I'm calling Santa." Which is all fear based parenting and leads to a decrease in our kids confidence and an increase in stress and anxiety.

So pay attention. When you hear yourself saying these things, work to correct it. Move away from fear based parenting during the holidays. You've got this. I know you do. 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

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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.