

Ep #108: Why You Shouldn't Try to Fix Your Children's Problems



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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. Today, I want to offer some tools and some ideas that are going to help you in leveling up our parenting. If you'll remember, we've declared, you and I together, 2023 to be the year we level up our parenting. Leveling up by even 1% can make a big, big, big difference in the connection you have with your children and the cooperation.

So today, I want to share with you one of the greatest gifts you can give your kids, and it's not to be so quick to fix all their problems, fight all their battles, or soothe all their heartaches. You might be saying what the what Lisa? Come on. That's my job as a parent. But I really want you to question that. Please, as I work through this episode today, stay open-minded to what I'm presenting.

Now, it is likely one of the hardest things you will ever do as a parent is to witness your child in any kind of pain. It's 100% natural to want to rescue our kids from their suffering. But as I mentioned, today I want to share a different perspective and shed some light and how this may, to some extent, be a disservice to your kids and a roadblock to your connection with them.

So if you're ready, let's dig in. I recently coached a mom who has been practicing peaceful parenting for a while now. She's very familiar with thought work, healing her own inner childhood wounds, and using the peaceful parenting tools of offering support for her daughter when her daughter becomes dysregulated. All of which we work on inside my

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membership called The Hive. if you want to know more about the hive, you can go to thehivecoaching.com where I'll give you a tour of everything going on inside The Hive.

So back to this mom. She shared a recent incident when she struggled to know what to do and say and how to further soothe her daughter during storming. So let me set the scene. This is a single mom. Let's call her Maggie, and she has a seven-year-old daughter, let's call her Ava. They live alone together the two of them and live a relatively quiet and peaceful lifestyle.

During the most recent holidays or just after, Maggie's sister asked Maggie to watch her niece, which is Ava's older cousin for the day. Seven-year-old Ava loves her cousin and enjoys spending time with her, but as you can imagine as an only child, by the end of the day she had had her filth and was starting to get dysregulated.

Now to make things worse, Maggie was cooking dinner for the four of them when Maggie's sister, who's Ava's aunt, came barreling in the door with an armful of presents. As Maggie put it, her sister often enters the room like a tornado. When she blew in the door, she took special care to give her own daughter a lot of attention as she handed her some of the gifts. But according to Maggie, her sister did not take the same care with Ava when she handed Ava her gifts.

As you might guess, this unmet need caused Ava to storm. Though she was handed the presents to open, Maggie said Ava seemed to feel slighted by the lack of attention she received from her aunt, and she felt hurt, disappointed, and virtually unseen. So Maggie explained in our Hive weekly coaching call that she was very proud of herself for staying regulated through Ava's storm. But in the end, Maggie said, she felt disappointed

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because it didn't change anything for Ava. It didn't help her get over the storm faster. In fact, Ava told Maggie it made her feel worse.

Have you been there? Can you relate to this? You're putting all this effort into help your kid overcome their negative feelings, and it actually makes it worse. I mean, come on, Lisa. What do you want me to do? I'm showing up. I'm listening to your podcasts. I'm putting the new tools and thoughts into place. Yet there are still times when my child just doesn't want me to be there helping them. I'm trying so desperately to use this help to build connection.

I get it. It still happens to me at times. Just stay with me here as we dig in a bit deeper. So Maggie reported that when Ava first started storming, Maggie went straight to her and was explaining to her passionately, "Ava, I can see you're upset. Do you want to talk about it? Come on, let's go in the other room and talk about it." Ava was saying no.

So then Maggie started to let her know, with a lot of words, "Okay. I can see you're upset, and I want to give you space. I'll be in the kitchen cooking and talking with your aunt. If you'd like to talk more about what's upsetting you, just come let me know. I can help you solve the problem. Together, we can figure it out. You don't have to feel this way. I can help you. Just come and get me."

Of course, as might happen to you from time to time, seven year old little Ava replied, "Just leave me alone." So reluctantly, Maggie did. She left Ava's bedroom and went back to the kitchen. When it was time to sit down and eat, Ava was so struggling and storming. She started getting really frustrated and angry that she couldn't pick up a noodle with her fork. So she stormed off away from the dinner table.

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Maggie went to Ava and again said, "I can understand you want some space. I can respect that. If you want to talk to me, you can come find me when you're ready. I want you to know that I see you and I recognize you're upset, and I want to help you." Maggie wanted to make sure that Ava knew that she wasn't being ignored. Yet if Ava needed space, Maggie wanted Ava to communicate that so she could give her the space she needed. Maggie said, "Lisa, I felt like I was saying all the right things with the greatest of patience and empathy. Yet Ava still stormed."

Now here's the thing. In this instance, what would have served Maggie, Ava, and the relationship better is if Maggie could have simply taken Ava to another room and sat still with her and held space for Ava while she stormed, maybe with not so many words. Granted, this is really hard to do. But I promise you, it's one of the greatest payoffs we can receive as a parent.

I suggested to Maggie that the next time there is a storm, she holds space by simply asking Ava some questions like what do you think is going on for you? Can you take a guess? What was happening right before you got upset? The goal is to find out this information, not to fix or change the circumstances. Not to tell Ava what she's feeling, but to help Ava recognize, define, and feel her feelings.

Let me say that again. The goal is to find out this information from the kid, at any age, if they can identify it. The goal is not to fix or change the circumstance. But in this case to help Ava recognize, define, and feel her feelings. The more Ava practices answering these questions, the more she will be able to articulate her own thoughts, needs, and connect the dots to her feelings. Also, over time the internal compass will be turned on and the more connection she will feel with her mom.

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It's really important that we, as parents, not try to fix or change the circumstance, or change or control our kids thoughts, feelings, and needs, but to simply bear witness to them and listen with the intention of relieving the suffering, not with the intention to fix. How do we do this? Well, you're not going to like the answer, but it's the truth.

We have to get really comfortable with our child, or our kid, or our kids being miserable, upset, unhappy, dysregulated. Yes, I did just say that. Get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Because this is where the connection happens. Not in removing pain, but by bearing witness to it. I'm here to tell you that it is not your job as a parent, grandparent, guardian, step parent, foster parent. It is not your job to solve or remove all of your kid's negative feelings. More importantly, let me ask you, why would you even want to?

Think about this. Wouldn't it be better to teach our kids that emotional pain is not something we have to run from, avoid, or deny, but that we can sit with it, work through it, and know it will pass. As a parent coach, one of the things I hear from people all the time is, I just want my kids to be happy, Lisa. Maybe even listening to this you feel that way. That's okay. I get it.

But let me ask you to consider this. Do you? Do you really want to raise kids that are happy all the time? Who benefits from a child that has 18 years of happiness? Because let me tell you, when they get out in the real world, as we know, it's not all rainbows and unicorns. There are destined to be things they don't like. Conflict, struggle, disappointment, rejection, unhappiness, death, loss, breakups. They're destined to have neighbors they don't like, coworkers they don't get along with, bosses who don't get them, people who break up with them or leave them or move on.

I like to say childhood is a dry run or dress rehearsal for adulthood. So if you, as the parent, strive to always soothe your child and make it better for

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him, fix their problems, solve their big emotions, then he or she or they will grow up believing that other people will make them feel better rather than knowing they have the gift of working through their own emotions on their own and the gift of holding space for them when negative emotions bubble up.

So I think when we go into a room, and our kids are crying, storming, or working through big negative emotions, our job is just to hold space and bear witness to the pain, which is a learned skill. This is where leveling up this year comes into play. Because I promise you, it's a learned skill. You're not born with it as a parent, but you do have the capacity to learn it. I'll admit. It's hard, and it's uncomfortable and awkward and hard. I get it, but you can level up and learn it.

Let me share with you another story, a vulnerable one, that happened in my own family. That proves my point. This is one of me and my 18 year old son, Malcolm. Now, as you've heard me talk about before, Malcolm has been playing basketball since he was four. It's pretty much his life. Now in his senior year of high school, he's finishing up his high school basketball career and making plans for the next step to play in college.

He has this absolutely awesome and amazing coach that has helped him come a long way and develop. This coach gives him a lot of feedback, him and the entire team. A lot of feedback, both positive and negative. Did I mention a lot?

So a few months ago, Malcolm called me on his way home from school to tell me that his coach kicked him out of practice. Malcolm was worked up. I imagine he was hurt, embarrassed, angry, and maybe even a little stunned. His coach told him to take his shoes off and leave the gym right now, and he'd let him know when he could come back. So Malcolm called me, and I replied to him just come home. I was concerned about him being

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dysregulated while he was driving, and I just wanted him to get home safely before he got more dysregulated.

So when he got home, we sat together, and I listened. I listened to relieve his suffering. Let me tell you, it was H-A-R-D, all caps, underlined, bolded and outlined. I went to open my mouth so many times to say things like oh, honey, it's okay. It's gonna be okay. Your coach was probably just having a bad day. Don't worry about it. You're a great basketball player. But I bit my lip over and over and over again and just listened and held space while he stormed.

He needed space to feel his feelings, to work through his thoughts and figure out for himself what he was going to do about this. You know what happened? The next day Malcolm reached out to his coach and asked if they could meet. The coach said, "There's no need to meet Malcolm. I'm going to send you a list of all the things you did wrong." Malcolm read the list and told his coach he still wanted to meet, look him in the eye, and have a conversation.

When they met the next day, Malcolm owned up to his mistakes, took responsibility for everything that was on the list, primarily not giving enough effort in practice. You know what the coach did? He grabbed Malcolm, pulled them in for a hug, slapped him on the back, and said he was proud of him, kissed him on the forehead, and they both went into practice and got on with their lives.

So now fast forward a couple weeks later, Malcolm and I were rehashing the experience. We were having what I call an after action review. He told me Mom, it was the best thing that ever happened to me. Malcolm said he learned so much. In retrospect, he was grateful it happened. He said now he knows he never wants to be dismissed again by a coach, a teacher, a boss, especially for not giving enough effort.

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So good, right? But here's the thing. Here's the light bulb moment I want you to have. If I had tried to fix that for him on that day, I would have cheated him out of that awareness. It was so hard. I'm admitting to you. So hard to resist telling him oh, honey, he was probably just having a bad day. You're a good player. It was so hard to resist jumping into solutions mode. Here's what you need to do. You need to call them up, and you need to blah, blah, blah, blah blah.

Because I could just feel how much I wanted to make this better for him because he was in pain, and I wanted to stop that pain for him. But if I had done that, I would have robbed him from learning the lesson he needed to learn. I would have robbed him from learning that he has the power to course correct and fix the problems on his own. What greater gift can we give as parents? What greater gift can we give our kids than that? I ask you.

There's a saying that goes something like if you cheat someone out of learning a lesson, then the opportunity has to come around for them again and again and again until they learn it. Would you rather your child learn the hard lessons while you sit with them holding space and listening to relieve their suffering? Or would you rather the world teach them the lesson on their own when they don't have you as a safety net?

So hopefully, you see, it's not always your job to make your kids feel better. Feelings come from our thoughts. We can't control our kids thoughts, nor should we want to. Our job instead is to simply bear witness, hold space, and listen to relieve their suffering.

Now, let me be clear, I'm not saying that we shouldn't offer a point of view, or offer new thoughts to help guide our children, but the timing is everything. While they're storming from a fresh wound, it's not the time. That's the time to hold space.

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Later when they're regulated, we can have an after action review and ask them what was going on for you when your coach dismissed you for the gym? Or what do you think it was that was holding you back from giving your best effort? Or do you even recognize you weren't giving your best effort? What was happening for you when Auntie brought the gifts in and gave cousin all of her attention. But always later, after the acute suffering and the storm has passed.

This is when our kids, and sidenote all human beings, are open to hear, listen, process, and learn. So, again, step one is always to just get comfortable with witnessing our kids discomfort. Stay in your higher brain. Don't judge, don't fix, don't teach. Just listen to relieve the suffering and hold space.

Give him, her, or them a chance to figure out on his own how to manage the situation, the feelings, the thoughts. Let them turn on their internal compass over the years they have at home with you as the safety net. It is the greatest gift we can give our kids. Yeah? Oh so good. I know. I know. We're going to work this year in leveling up our parenting. I'm with you every step of the way. You got this. I know it. 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.