

Ep #110: The 3 Step Process to Move from Reactive Parenting to Responsive Parenting



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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. I am so excited to be with you today and to deliver what I hope will be an incredible episode that really stops you in your tracks and gets you thinking. Today's episode is delivered in the spirit and the theme of 2023 being the year we uplevel our parenting, right? Small changes can have a big impact. Today is one of the best ways that I know to uplevel your parenting. That's to move from reactive parenting to responsive parenting.

What I want to talk to you about today is how to move away from thoughts that trigger you into reactivity. Instead, move towards the thoughts that help you be responsive to your kids. I work with many parents who have gotten to a point in their journey, to a point in their path in peaceful parenting, where they can at least recognize the moments of frustration that are tripping them up, leaving them feeling stuck in the only reaction they know anger and dysregulation as they storm right alongside your kids.

Do you have your hand raised? Is this you? This might be you. You might be at the point where you're recognizing okay. I am dysregulated. I am frustrated. I am storming alongside my kid, but I don't know what to do about it. I'm not even sure I can do anything about it.

Well, today's dedicated to you. So turn up the volume, stay focused, and hang with me here. Recently, I had a parent tell me that she can hear herself in the moments of frustration with her kids raising her voice, using foul language, putting her kids down, accusing them of character flaws, and

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shaming them for their mistakes. Oh, I have so much empathy for this parent.

She said, “Lisa, I can feel the disconnection I'm creating in these moments. When the storm is over, I feel ashamed and remorseful for my reaction, for showing up in a reactive way.” I so value her awareness and her vulnerability and her honesty. I'm just going to ask you, can you relate? Can you relate to some or all of this? Believe me, I get it. This still happens to me sometimes. I lose it, I lose my shiz, and I storm. I've been practicing peaceful parenting for the better part of 14 years.

I can say that because of the work I've done, because of the journey I've been on, these remorseful moments of frustration and reaction happen far less frequently with far less guilt for me. I want that for you too. Yeah? Let's dive in.

In these moments, the circumstances, the kids fighting, the poor grades, the endless begging for screening and gaming, your kids overloaded emotional backpacks. These things may very well not decrease. They may not go away, depending on what stage your kids are at no matter how masterful you become at peaceful parenting.

I know this is not what you want to hear. We're not here to peaceful parent our way, to peaceful parent our kids into proper or good or acceptable or proud behavior. We are here to help our kids get regulated, but your kids are still gonna storm. Why? Because they have an underdeveloped brain.

But there is hope and good news. That is though the circumstances may not change, I am 100% confident that your responsiveness rather than reaction to them can change. Do you know why I'm so confident for you on your behalf? Why believe in you so much? Because I've experienced it

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myself, the change from reactive to responsive, and I've personally witnessed the change in thousands of families that I've worked with.

I have confidence in the tools that I have to offer you. I have confidence that if you practice these tools, I know without doubt that you will be able to transition from reacting to your kids with anger and dysregulation to responding to them with patience, understanding, recognition of their underdeveloped brain, and best of all connection. I know it can happen for you with your kids. Yes, you. With the tools I teach you, you can absolutely move away from fear and surprise and taking everything so personally that it triggers you into reactive rather than responsive.

The first step, as many of you have already mastered, is simply hearing and observing your own reaction to your kids. Let me say, this is a monumental first step. This awareness, this first step, is big. I want to salute you and celebrate you and say well done. If you're not there yet, it's okay. You're gonna get there.

If you're already at the point where you're recognizing and feeling uncomfortable with your own reactions, and you're wanting to make change, I applaud you and say yay you. You are on your way. Okay, Lisa, I get it. I am aware that I'm not doing it well. I am aware that I'm storming. I'm aware that I am being reactive rather than responsive.

But now what? How do I stay regulated in the midst of the storm? What do I do in the moment to stay regulated, to stay in or get in my higher brain, Lisa? How do I use that to build connection when my kids are stuck in their middle brain and storming? I hear you. I hear you. I'm here. We're going to dig into this.

The first tool that I want to encourage you to practice might surprise you, but it's the pause. Practice the pause. The pause is so important on the

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path to peaceful parenting. Let me explain. Many of us as parents get the message or we believe or we're led to believe that we have to have all the answers and ideal responses to our kids comments, questions, and actions at our fingertips at the front of our brain instantaneously. Even if we're engrossed in something else or doing something else or preoccupied with something else.

I am here to tell you that is 100% not true. Not true. Not at all. What I know is that no human can have all the answers and do everything perfectly all the time. Sometimes, frankly, we need a hot minute to gather ourselves. We need a hot minute to transition from one thing to another. We need a hot minute to dial in on what our kids are saying, to pay attention, to focus. We need a hot minute to get from our middle brain to our higher brain.

Sometimes we need to think of the answer and the response we want to give. Sometimes there's an entire menu that feels like we're at Cheesecake Factory of the response we want to give, of the options. We need to sort through them all and try to pick the best one instead of mindlessly and habitually reacting from a knee jerk surprise, anger, fear, disappointment, and dominant parenting that we grew up with.

So I am here to give you permission and to tell you that it is 100% okay to take a pause. It's okay to say to our kids something like can I have a minute? I don't know how to respond. Let me think about that. Give me a couple minutes to get back to you. Let me figure it out in the next five minutes or 10 minutes or just let me get back to you.

Many of us grew up in households where we were parented in such a reactive way. There was always an instantaneous reaction to everything we did. When I first became a parent and my son Malcolm was about two, three, four years old, I always felt like there was a very small window of

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time that I had to teach a lesson in the moment. If I didn't react fast enough, the window was going to close never to be opened again.

If I'm honest with you, I believed that if I didn't snag the opportunity to make a point while in the heat of the moment, while he was storming and while I was storming. If I didn't snag that opportunity, I would lose the opportunity to teach Malcolm whatever I thought was of paramount importance in the moment. Do you feel like this? Are you like yeah, Lisa, that's what I believe as well. Maybe I was afraid that I'd forget exactly what I felt I needed to say.

So I would blurt it out before I lost the thought and before I squandered the opportunity to parent him in what felt like the most opportune time. I felt a need a drive and insistence to parent him right in that moment because the window was going to close. This is 100% how I showed up, behaved, and parented. With it came this incredible urgency and panic and just dysregulation.

One day I realized that this was causing a ginormous problem in our family, in my parenting, and in our relationship. I realized I was constantly overreacting, I was yelling, I was saying things that were unkind. I was also teaching my child to react instead of respond because that is what I was modeling for him. It did not feel good before, during, or after.

What I know now is that we have to teach, convince, brainwash ourselves that it is okay, capital O, capital K, capital A capital Y. Okay. In fact, it is safe. It is a good parenting practice to, drumroll please, take a pause until we're regulated. Let me say that again. We have to teach ourselves and make it a habit that it is okay, that it is safe, and that is a good parenting practice to take a pause until we're regulated and then proceed.

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For a lot of us, this really challenges our brain, our habit brain, our beliefs, our thoughts because it's not how we grew up. It isn't how we define parenting. It isn't what was modeled for us. The way I like to language this as I did in a previous podcast and the way I remind myself is that there is a right time and a wrong time to parent your kids.

There is actually a wrong time to parent your kids. The wrong time is when you are dysregulated when you are reactive rather than responsive. Let me say that again because it's super important. There is a right time and a wrong time to parent your kids. The wrong time to parent your kids is when you are dysregulated and reactive. Who knew? I certainly didn't before I learned it. I had no idea, but now I do and now you do too. As the late, great Maya Angelou says, when we know better, we do better.

So let's talk about the three steps to bring this all together. The three steps to help you move away from being reactive, and move towards being responsive when your kids are storming. Step one is to develop the habit of checking in with yourself. Talk to yourself inside your brain as you're being the watcher of your parent. Ask yourself things like am I regulated? Am I responsive or reactive?

If you're not regulated, hit the brakes, pause, stop. Sometimes mid-word or mid-sentence. Do not pass go. Do not continue. Unless, of course, your kid is running down the street with an oncoming car or running down the stairs with scissors. But outside of that, if you are not regulated, step one is to pause. Pause, pause, pause.

What I had to realize was that as the peaceful leader of the household, there is nothing we can't discuss. There is nothing I can't bring up later or return to. But my job as the peaceful leader of the household is to make sure that I'm doing it when I'm regulated, when I'm responsive rather than reactive. When I do that, not only is it good for the relationship, but I'm also

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modeling that for my child. I'm modeling the pause. I'm modeling waiting until I'm responsive before I bring something up, until I'm regulated before I address an issue.

Then when I am regulated, we can discuss the sibling fighting, the storm, the spilled milk, the missed curfew, not getting off gaming when I asked you to. But if I am dysregulated, that is 100% of the time the wrong time to broach the subject. The secret is to give yourself permission as the parent to wait until you're both regulated and then proceed to parent your kid.

To put it bluntly, you have to learn a little discipline to ferme la bouche, to shut your mouth. That emotional outlet, that immediate gratification, you have to discipline yourself to say I'm not going to do that. I'm going to turn to the pause. You have to expect more of yourself. If you want your kids to do it, you have to model it for them. You have to hit mute. You have to seal your mouth shut. You have to not give in to the impulsivity of parenting at the wrong time when you're reactive rather than responsive.

Reactive parenting comes from the middle brain, your emotional center. Responsive parenting happens in the higher brain. The secret to moving from your middle brain to your higher brain is the pause. The pause allows you to not jump in and react. The pause allows you to respond. Sidenote, this works in other relationships too, like partner, coparent, mother-in-law, boss, employee, neighbor, et cetera. The pause is the tool. The pause is the solution.

Okay, step one is the pause. Step two is to identify your thoughts right before you lose it. If you are being reactive, what I want you to do is try to hear or identify or recall the thought you have just before you lose it. So in the moment when your kids are yelling and hitting each other and calling out mom, mom, mom. He's hitting me. She won't give me the remote. He won't stop hitting me.

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In that moment right before you become reactive and go marching in to the living room to storm right alongside your kids, notice, hear, recall, pay attention, observe the thought you're having in that moment. This is the big aha moment. This is where the big conversion lies from reactive to responsive.

Right before we become reactive, we have a thought. Whatever thought you uncover know this, your feelings did not come from out of the blue. Your feelings do not come from circumstances of your kids yelling and hitting each other and begging you to make the other one stop. Feelings come from thoughts and actions come from feelings. Let me say that again in a different way.

Thoughts create feelings and feelings create actions. When your kids start fighting, you have a thought that triggers an emotion, typically something like fear, anger, surprise, disappointment, frustration. Sometimes the thought triggers an emotion that comes from a deep wound from your own childhood. When your sibling used to beat you or hit you or fight with you, and your parents never did anything about it. So you have a thought that creates an emotion. From that combination of thought and emotion, you react. Let me say that again, from the combination of the thought plus emotion, you react.

This is the thought work I teach and coach parents through. This is the work that we do inside my membership community through coaching and examples and teaching, this thought work. I encourage you to learn to manage your thoughts.

Here's the thing. You don't have to control your thoughts, but you also don't have to believe them. So if your kids are often fighting, it's because right now they live in a reactive household. This is how they've learned to react to conflict. The reality is they don't know how to manage conflict in a

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responsive rather than reactive way yet. So of course they're going to fight. Of course, they're going to be reactive.

One of the things that often triggers us as a parent is a lot of the time, we believe every thought that comes to our conscious mind. This is uber critical to understand in every aspect of your life, but especially when you're parenting. We have thoughts like they're giving me a hard time. They're doing it again. She's so disrespectful. He hates his brother. We believe these thoughts. We believe them, and they create emotions that push us into reactivity.

If you want to move into being responsive, you need new thoughts that create new emotions. It's pretty simple. It's not always easy to implement, but it's a pretty simple thing concept to understand. That leads us to step three.

Step three is to notice your thoughts and question them. This is really important. It is one of the best ways I know to work on your triggers, work on your reactivity is to notice your thoughts and question them. When you uncover the thought that keeps tripping you up like my kid is so disrespectful. They never get along. He gives me a hard time. She's so difficult.

When you uncover that thought that is tripping you up, I want you to ask yourself these three questions. Is the thought serving me? Is it serving my child? Is it serving our relationship? If the answer to all three of those isn't yes, then get rid of it. Because thoughts are not facts. They're not true. They're just random thoughts.

For instance, one thought that habitually trips me up personally all the time is that my son is lazy. When he doesn't do something I ask, this is my go to reactive thought. He's lazy. He's lazy. When I take a pause and I recognize

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that I'm thinking my son is lazy, I can see all the evidence that this thought, first of all, is not true. Second of all, it's not serving me to think my kid's lazy. It's not serving my kid in how I approach him, and how I think of him, and how he speak to him. It's certainly not serving our relationship to create connection. Again, it's not even true. My kid is not lazy.

Does he put the dishes away every time I ask him the first time? Oh, heck no he doesn't. He absolutely doesn't, but he's also not lazy. So I literally tell myself, Lisa, we are not going to marinate in this thought. It is not useful. It is not true. It does not build connection with Malcolm. I don't want to label him as lazy. I certainly don't want him to adopt this thought or believe it about himself.

So I literally put the thought in the trashcan in my mind. Again, does he put the clothes away every time I ask or take the garbage out exactly when I ask? No. I like to be real and honest with you guys. He does not. Sometimes he doesn't even do it the third time I ask. But that does not mean that he's lazy, and I do not want to label him this way.

So along with practicing the pause, I encourage you to notice your thoughts, question them, and don't believe everything you think. This is an absolute game changer and is the three step process if you want to move from being reactive to responsive. Random thoughts come into our brain all the time. You may not know this, but humans, all humans, have about 50,000 thoughts a day, every single day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

If I did the math correctly, depending on how much you sleep, that's about 3,000 thoughts a waking hour. 3,000. You heard me correctly, 3,000. You can't even process 3,000 thoughts an hour. So there are a ton of thoughts floating around way, way, way in the back of your mind that you're not even

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completely conscious of. What happens is sometimes those thoughts float or work their way to the front of your conscious mind.

So at any moment, like when your kids are fighting, your brain gets a thought that it grabs on to that's been laying dormant in the back of your unconscious brain. Your brain grabs that thought and your conscious part of your brain grips onto it. Most of the time, they're just random thoughts. So if you're going to grab a random thought floating around in your brain, grab thoughts that serve you, grab thoughts that serve your kids, grab thoughts that serve the relationship. Get rid of or don't grab on to or let go of thoughts that trigger you into being a reactive parent.

Work over and over and over again the thoughts that are going to allow you to be a responsive parent. Like he's not giving you a hard time, he's having a hard time. He has an underdeveloped brain. Nobody listens to me all the time the first time. I can try again. It is not helpful to think my kid or kids are lazy, disrespectful, not interested. Whatever those adjectives are that are negative, those thoughts are not going to allow you to be responsive. They are going to trigger you into reactive parenting.

Doing this three step process, making a commitment, disciplining yourself, and working towards being a responsive rather than reactive parent is the absolute best way we can serve our kids, 100% without a doubt. If you change nothing else in your parenting, nothing else but this, you level up in no other way this year other than to use this three step process to move from reactive into responsive. It is an absolute game changer in everything in your parenting.

You will feel better. You will model it for your kids. You will feel more connected to them. You will get more cooperation from them. They will have higher self-worth. They will turn into responsive rather than reactive adults. This is the secret sauce.

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So your homework is to learn this three step process. Your homework is to identify and reject the thoughts that trigger you into reactivity. Instead grab on to and work the thoughts that help you be a responsive parent. Yeah? You can do it. I know you can. I believe in you. I hold space that you can get there. Now, if you'd like a little bit more work in getting there, you'd like to do it deeper, you'd like support and coaching. You'd like me to hold your hand step by step. You'd like to get there faster. Well, I have the answer for that too.

Because this is the work we do inside my membership community called The Hive. I would absolutely love for you to be a part of it. There is a seat waiting for you. There is a seat inside The Hive with your name. Yes, you. You. There is a seat waiting for you. I cannot wait to welcome you in.

Let me end with this. While we are regulated, we work to uncover our thoughts that are not serving us. We consider new thoughts that help us get or stay regulated and ultimately build connection with our children. That, my friends, is the work we do inside The Hive. I want you to come join us. So please consider this my personal invitation to you. What I want you to do is go to thehivecoaching.com. Let me say that again. www.thehivecoaching.com. You'll find all the details there and the link to come and join us.

We have three calls a week. So that is three times a week you can come live to do this work. You can get started as early as next week in doing the work of rejecting the thoughts that trigger you into reactivity, identifying and grabbing on to the ones that help you become a responsive parent, and begin increasing the connection and cooperation with your kids. So the question is are you going to take me up on my invitation? I sure hope so. Again, I can't wait to work with you. Okay, until we meet again, I'm wishing you peaceful parenting.

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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.