

Ep #111: Why Sometimes Our Own Parents Need Boundaries



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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 really excited to talk with you today about this topic, which is near and dear to my heart. Many of you are parenting in a very different way than the way you were parented. When you're in your own home with just your immediate family, it feels absolutely amazing. What may also be going on at the same time is you may have extended family, whether it's your parents or your in-laws, who do not agree with the way you're parenting, and feel completely invited to weigh in.

This topic comes up a lot inside my membership community called The Hive. We're often coaching and discussing and working on ways to set boundaries with our extended family when they don't agree with our parenting. I thought this would be an outstanding topic to bring today to the podcast. So if this is something you struggle with or something that orbits around you, today's episode is for you. So let's dig in.

Now, as you may have heard me say many, many, many times in previous episodes, and in my coaching, and in my classes, children learn what is modeled for them by their parents. They don't do what we say. They do what we do. Children's behavior, beliefs, and value systems are most strongly influenced by the same sex parent until the age of 10. And/or the parent who does most of the heavy lifting in the home.

This is true of us and of our children, certainly, but it's also true of us with our own parents. We did and still do what our parents modeled for us, including parenting itself. Unless you're working hard to be a cycle breaker,

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which could be why you're here listening to this podcast. You might be here because you recognize that you do not want to parent your children the same way you were parented. This is exactly how I ended up on my own personal journey to peaceful parenting.

My parents could have been gold medalists in many things, but I'm here to tell you parenting was not one of them. I can remember the exact moment when I realized I was parenting my then five year old son the same way my parents parented me. If I'm honest, I was mortified. More than mortified. I was disgusted. I was ashamed. I was concerned for the wellbeing of my son.

At the time, I felt so powerless to do it differently, to change, to be the parent I wanted to be. Having this realization that you want to parent your child or children differently is a remarkable first step. I applaud you for seeking help. I applaud you for coming here week after week, and spending the time to be open to being introduced to new concepts, for seeking help.

What I know is that taking baby steps will change your parenting practices, and ultimately build the connection with your kids that you so deeply long for. Use me as proof that it's possible. I am an example of what is possible in changing our parenting. What I want you to know is that you are not powerless. I teach the tools and everything you need right where you are to make the changes you so desperately want to make.

In today's episode, I want to acknowledge one of the major roadblocks many of us have on our journey to peaceful parenting. That is our relationship with our own living fully involved well-meaning yet dominant parents. I can hear your groan all the way from here. Many of you are really going to identify with this and say thank you, Lisa. Thank you. Thank you for addressing this issue.

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Now here's how it goes. Your parents may have a ton of evidence that you turned out to be a remarkable human being, a remarkable adult, a remarkable member of society, incredibly successful, a great partner, a great daughter. They see you being a great parent. This is their evidence that you turned out to be remarkable.

So in their minds, they absolutely, absolutely cannot understand why you would want to parent anyway other than how they parented or see any need to raise your children any differently than they raised you. Although it's true that you are a remarkable human, you may at the same time feel a complete lack of connection and authentic connection with your own parents. You may have a different story about the pain and the suffering you experienced in your childhood, the loneliness, the lack of acceptance, the lack of connection. You know in your heart of hearts that it can be done, dare I say differently and better.

But your parents, they don't get that. They don't see it. Because sitting in front of them is living proof of the remarkable human they raised. They're not at all interested or willing to look inside themselves and have an honest conversation about the pain that their dominant parenting caused you.

Now, here's what I know. I know that you want your kids to grow up to be remarkable human beings. You also want your kids to feel seen, heard, and valued. You want them to feel safe to come to you with their problems, their questions, their hurts, their big emotions, even after they become adults. This may not be something you are currently experiencing with your parents.

The real problem underneath all of this, the real challenge is that our dominant parents don't often see any value in the connection we're longing for with them or the connection we're working towards with our own kids. It often creates great conflict when they see us doing things differently than

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they did. They often assign adjectives to it. Permissive parenting, letting them get away, spoiled, giving them whatever they want. Yes. Can you relate to this?

Now, here's the real kicker. The real, real, real kicker is that we often, as the parent of our children, and the child of our parents. We often still feel a great need to keep the peace with our parents and comply with their demands. Because remember, they're dominant parents, even in their older age, even when we disagree with them, and we feel trapped. The trap that we feel is between being their child, the child of dominant parents, and being our own child's peaceful parents. Does this resonate with you? I get it, believe me. I get it.

Now, here's what I'm going to do today. I'm going to give you a tool that will help you build the connection you want with your children without severing the connection you have or long to have with your parents. I want you to know that it is possible to be both the parent of your kids and the adult child of your parents that you want to be. The tool is, drumroll please, boundaries, boundaries, boundaries.

So often our parents think their opinion is invited, warranted, and wanted. So often we're simply too afraid to tell them otherwise because that's not how we grew up. That's not the dynamic we had in our family growing up. So although it might be the dynamic you have with your children, it feels wildly uncomfortable to tell them that their opinion is not invited.

It was so ingrained in us as children that we never question, talk back, disagree with or “disrespect” our parents in any way. That even now as adults we have a difficult time voicing our thoughts, our plans, our style, and our convictions to them. Can I get an amen on that one? Even when we see that this is not how we want our relationship with our own children to be when they become adults.

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Even though we know there is a better way, so many of us are just not willing, comfortable with conflict. We're not willing to risk the conflict with our parents. So we just keep doing what we've always done. Comply, avoid, placate, and continue to enable our parents to just keep dominating us, and in some instances, dominating their grandchildren.

I think this is one of the hardest things in the world. When the child evolves into an adult with their own life and their own opinions, and the parent thinks that the role of dominating their child is the same as it was when they were raising them. The child, which is you, evolves and the parent, which is your parents, do not.

This is what I called the product of parents trying to keep their children on a leash. When you are growing up, chances are whenever you step out of the line, or in this case too far from your parents thoughts, beliefs, and comfort zone, they want to yank the leash back and demand compliance.

Now maybe as a child, you got the message. You learned. You were rewarded, not to resist, or yank back, right. You were a good kid. You did what you were told. Maybe you weren't strong willed, and maybe you went along with it. Maybe you grew up being a people pleaser, probably thinking the whole time that you just couldn't wait to escape, and get out on your own so you could start making your own decisions.

I know that certainly was my train of thought as a teenager and young adult. Maybe now since you've been out of the house, you thought you finally had the control you always longed for. Then you have kids, and your parents come back into the picture in the grandparent parent-child role, and you find yourself wildly triggered and dysregulated. Because the reality is they're working hard to keep you on that leash, to get you to comply with everything they say, to get you to do it their way, the dominant parenting way.

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Or at least listening to how they did it. Because remember, they have proof that you turned out to be remarkable. When they were parenting, the idea of caring about feelings and needs made them a permissive parent, and they weren't going to have it. So the cycle you're trapped in now is power struggling over your thoughts on how to parent and their thoughts on how you should parent. It just creates a whole big mess.

Now, here's the news. No one's told your parents yet that the leash is no longer around your neck. They can't just yank it back to get you to do what they want you to do, even when they mean well. They may love you more than anything in the world. They may love their grandchildren more than anything in the world.

In their mind, that love justifies putting that leash back on and telling you constantly how to parent, constantly giving you a report card, constantly telling you what you're doing wrong, constantly catastrophizing that if you stay on this path and do it this way, all these awful things are going to happen. Like your kids are going to be spoiled. They're going to be in jail. They're not going to be able to follow rules. They're going to be disrespectful. That's the leash they're trying to use to yank you into their parenting style.

This, my friend, is where boundaries come in. Boundaries. Now that you are an adult and have the freedom to make your own decisions, this is your chance to practice putting boundaries in place. Boundaries on how your parents show up as judge and jury of your parenting and your kids. You get to set them. My recommendation always to my clients is to start out small doable boundaries. Baby steps if you will.

Maybe the boundary between discussing your parenting with your parents is off limits. It's a topic that just we don't go there mom and dad. If you do, I'm going to push us into another topic, like the weather or what you're

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doing this weekend or where you have your next vacation planned. The boundary is just discussing my parenting and my kids are off limits.

Or maybe you give limited access to your parents with your kids. Or maybe you do all the visiting with your parents at their house where they're comfortable, and they're less distracted. They have more of their things around them. So they're less focused on your parenting because they don't know what to do with themselves in your house.

Maybe instead of having them in your house where they're uncomfortable and bored and don't have anything better to do then take in every little detail of how you're ruining your kids, maybe you visit them at their house. Or maybe you mean a neutral location. Like you meet for dinner, or you go to the park, or you do things in a big extended family.

Maybe your boundary is that you don't allow your parents to be alone with your kids because you don't like how your parents talk to them. You don't like how they attack their character. You get to decide what baby steps you're going to put in along the way to setting boundaries with your parents.

I think one of the best ones is just deciding that I'm not going to discuss my parenting and my kids with my parents. That is the topic that is off limits. When your mom tells you you're failing as a parent because your son won't even greet her or want to spend time with her, what will your response be? Think it through. Think about it ahead of time. Practice it.

It could be something like I don't know, Mom, why he responds to you that way. He's friendly and outgoing with people who are not critical of him. Maybe he doesn't know what to say when you criticize him. Maybe your parents are upset because your kids won't come out of the room and spend time with them when they come over. Your answer could be hey, it's okay.

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I'm kind of glad because then I get to have you to myself. We get to have adult conversations together. So it's okay with me.

How are you Mom? What's new with you Dad? You completely turn the attention into a new conversation that's focused on you and them, instead of letting them berate your kids and complain about what your kids are not doing and how in their day it would have been demanded that they come and spend time with them.

If you take these approaches, then you and your parents can focus on your own relationship, which is probably what your parents are longing for most anyway. There are actually grandparents who want to have cordial relationships with their grandchildren, simply because it reflects the relationship they have with their own child.

Now, if you grew up in this kind of household, it's fair to say you may not have grown up learning good boundaries because of how dominant your parent was and because of this leash they had on you. So it may feel wildly uncomfortable to you, even taking baby steps, to set boundaries with your parents. It is not easy to set boundaries with people who were dominant over us during the formative years. This is often a byproduct of being the child of a dominant parent. We become people pleasers. Let's just keep the peace until I can get away from them and do my own thing.

But here's what you need to know. Boundaries are never ever, ever, ever for the other person. Boundaries define how you're going to engage, how you're going to show up when the other person does x. It's never about trying to change or control someone, especially our parents. What boundaries are about are taking control of our own thoughts and actions when certain circumstances arise.

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Hear me when I say this. The chances of you changing or controlling your parents are slim to none. That, my friend, is probably not news to you. You've already tried that. That did not work. I'm sure. Let me say this again. Boundaries are never for the other person.

Boundaries define how we are going to behave, how we are going to show up when the other person does something we don't like, when they say something we don't like. It's important that you know boundaries are never about trying to change or control the other person. They're about taking control of our own thoughts and actions when certain circumstances arise.

So when my mother starts telling me how I'm parenting my son incorrectly or in a permissive way, my boundary is I change the subject. We've talked about this before. Our minds and our parents' minds seek evidence to support our beliefs.

Your parents seek evidence to support their belief that their way of parenting is, was, and will always be the best way to parent. They will find evidence 100% of the time. The evidence is you are a remarkable human being. You turned out well. Parents often give themselves credit for how we turned out. That is their evidence that their way is the right way.

Also, as you likely know, it is very difficult to admit to humans, let alone our own children, when we're wrong or when we didn't do it the right way or when we have something to learn. The older our parents get, in many, many, many instances, the more difficult it is to change, to understand there might be a new, different way to parent.

So I encourage you to save your energy. Instead of trying to change your parents, put your energy into changing your own thoughts and beliefs instead of trying to convince your parents or prove to your dominant parent that they should change their thoughts and beliefs.

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When we try to change other people's behavior, which is a form of control, it very, very, very rarely works. It very rarely works in trying to convince our older dominant parents that our way of parenting is better. They may have lived a lifetime of dominating and being dominant. Typically the older they get, the less interest older people have in making changes as to what they know and what provides them comfort and security.

So this is on you. You get to decide. Am I going to continue to try to convince and control them? Or am I going to work on my own thoughts and my own actions by understanding and managing my thoughts and putting boundaries in place? This is your time to shine. This is your chance to step up and be the change agent. Be the cycle breaker for generations of children and parents that will come after you by defining your boundaries.

What will you do or say when your parent tries to dominate you or control you or your kids or give you a report card on your parenting or catastrophize how your kids are going to turn out. How negative, how poorly, how catastrophic, this is going to be because you're doing X or Y.

Now, I really want you to hear this. It is totally possible to have boundaries with your parents and still be very respectful to them. It's an and, not an or. Once you practice and get good at setting boundaries, they won't even likely know you're doing it. As I mentioned earlier, I recommend you start with baby steps, with small changes, with easy things in the beginning. Because what you have to do is build up your boundary setting muscle.

You can even practice and roleplay with your spouse or co parent or your best friend or someone at work. We practice this often inside The Hive. Practice saying the words you want to come out of your mouth when your mom or dad says blah, blah, blah, or this and that, or XYZ. Practice exactly what you want to come out of your mouth.

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Then the next time your mom comes into the picture, you will know exactly what to do. You'll have confidence in yourself. You won't get dysregulated, or you're less likely to get dysregulated and go into your middle brain and get triggered and start storming.

Let me be honest with you, it's going to be uncomfortable in the beginning, as most things are that we're new to, because you've never done this before. You've been playing your parent's compliance game for a long time, or you've been holding it in or shoving it down. Let me tell you, it's going to feel uncomfortable to your parent too because suddenly you're changing the rules.

Sometimes your parent might get mad at you or be snippy or get triggered and storm themselves. So go ahead and expect it. Go ahead. Practice. Work through the model of your boundaries. You don't need your parents to approve of how you're doing it. Because remember, their feelings come from their thoughts. Not anything you do or say. You cannot control their thoughts, but you can manage your own.

Remember, the ultimate goal right now is that you're connecting with your own kids. By moving from reactive to responsive, by getting comfortable with being uncomfortable, by scuba diving down to the feelings and needs when they're storming, by not demanding they have certain feelings, by not demanding to get over it.

You're changing the trajectory of your family. You're being a cycle breaker by connecting with your kids, by making sure they feel seen, heard, and valued. You can love and respect and honor your parents and change your thoughts and beliefs and set boundaries and be connected to your kids. I promise you, it's 100% possible. It starts with you defining your boundaries. Baby steps. Remember, baby steps. Start small.

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When your mom jumps into criticizing your parenting, or how little your kid's eating, or why your kid won't sit still at the table, don't power struggle. Change the topic of the conversation. How'd your golf game mom? When's the last time you played tennis? Wow, your hair looks nice. Roleplay, practice, baby steps in setting boundaries.

You don't have to announce it. I am now going to set boundaries with you. You don't have to do that. You don't. They don't even have to know what you're doing. You're just setting up rules and guidelines. When they bring up topic XYZ, you will do ABC instead of doing PDQ.

By the way, you're also modeling that for your children to come full circle, which is where we started this entire episode. If you remember I said kids don't do what we say, they do what we do. So as you set boundaries with your parents around and in front of your children in a calm, connected way, you're modeling that for your kids. Amazing, right? You've got this, and I'm totally here for you.

If at the same time, you want to learn how to model a different behavior. If your kids are still storming and you're struggling to decode the storming, I have answers. I want to share them with you in my upcoming free masterclass where I will teach you exactly why your kids storm and exactly what to do about it to create connection and cooperation. You might be going what the what, Lisa? Wait a minute. You're going to teach me why my kids storm and how to use the storm to create connection and cooperation? Yep, that's what I'm doing.

On Tuesday, February 28th, I'm teaching this masterclass. It's 100% F-R-E-E. I've got a seat saved for you. Yes, you. Yes, I do. I am going to teach you why your kids storm and how to use that storm to create connection and cooperation. All I need you to do right now is go to thepeacefulparent.com/workshop to sign up. I have a seat for you and

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anybody else you want to bring along. Your co-parent, your best friend, your accountability partner, your workout partner, your nanny, your neighbor, or your parents. We have lots of parents and grandparents in The Hive together.

So in this class on Tuesday, February 28th, I'm going to teach you this and more. All I need you to do right now is go to www.thepeacefulparent.com/workshop. I'll see you inside the class. Boundaries, my friend, boundaries. You've got this, I know it. Until we meet again. I'm wishing you peaceful parenting.

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.