

## Ep #117: Triggered? Ask Yourself This Question



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host  
**Lisa Smith**

[Real World Peaceful Parenting](#) with Lisa Smith

## Ep #117: Triggered? Ask Yourself This Question

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 am so excited to share with you one of the greatest game changers I experienced on my own parenting journey. Are you ready? Yeah? Okay. Here it is.

Anytime you get triggered by any circumstance, by any thought, I want you to ask yourself what am I making this mean? Now, you don't necessarily have to do this at the moment. In fact, it will serve you better if you consider or ponder this question later when you're regulated. When you recognize your own thoughts about certain triggers, you can be better prepared to respond the next time it happens with different thoughts, newer thoughts that serve you better, that serve your children better, and that serve your relationship with your child better.

Let me give you some examples. So when your child rolls his or her eyes, what are you making it mean? When your child grunts or says ugh when you ask him or her to do something, what are you making it mean? When you tell your child something and he or she responds with I know, the question to ask yourself is what am I making it mean? When your teenager constantly tells you leave me alone. Go away. I just want to relax. What are you making it mean?

When your little one screams, cries, hits, or storms in any way, the question is what are you making it mean? When your child is not doing something you tell or ask them to, what are you making it mean? When your child will not stop gaming or will not immediately get off their phone, what are you making it mean? When one of your kids brings home a bad grade, what are

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you making it mean? When you catch one of your kids lying to you, the question is what are you making it mean?

When one of your kids says I hate you, what are you making it mean? When a couple of your kids don't laugh at your jokes, what are you making it mean? When your oldest or youngest or any of your kids don't gush over the gift that you just gave them, maybe even the one you were excited to give them, the question you want to ask yourself is what am I making it mean? When your child's answer to every question you ask him or her is I don't know, what are you making it mean? When your child pushes back questions or challenges you, what are you making it mean?

I'm willing to be in more cases than not you're making your child's behavior, mannerism, tone of voice, and words coming out of their mouth mean things like they don't love you. They don't appreciate you. They don't respect you. They're spoiled. They're lazy. Maybe you make it mean they're going to end up living under a bridge with a shopping cart one day, or maybe you make it mean they have poor character or they're flawed or you've ruined them. Maybe you make it mean that they are purposely trying to push your buttons just to get back at you or for sport.

Does any of this sound familiar? Yeah? I hear you. In today's episode, I want to prove to you that when you change your thoughts about your child's behavior and what you make it mean, you will be triggered far less than you have grown accustomed to, and you will build profound connection. Yes, I used that word. Profound connection with your kids when you question what are you making their behaviors, their words, their tone, their actions mean. Sound good? Oh, it's so good. I promise you. Let's dive in.

Consider this. When you marinate in thoughts like my kid is so disrespectful, my kid is so lazy, my kids are ungrateful, my kids are spoiled,

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my kid is difficult. They don't love me. You are going to get triggered 100% of the time. You can take that to Vegas right there.

Here's what happens. When you react to that trigger from a place of fear, hurt, anger, dysregulation, you lose connection with your kids and unwittingly condition them to believe that they are flawed. That they're incapable of doing things right. That they are mean or hurtful, and they grow up to believe and manifest these things.

So I beg you, let's not do that. Let's not take their actions, their tone, their words, their eye rolling, and get triggered by it because of our thoughts, because of what we're making it mean. Then react from a place of fear, hurt, anger, dysregulation, and unwittingly condition them to believe they're flawed. Let's just not do that because then they grow up to believe and manifest these things.

Instead, let's find new thoughts and new meanings for the behaviors that seem to trip you up. Here's what I know with 100% certainty. New thoughts will help you stay regulated and build connection with your kids. So let me give you some very specific examples. You ready?

Okay. So when your tween daughter rolls her eyes at you, you could think something like apparently I asked my child to do something she doesn't want to do, and that's okay. I love that she feels safe and empowered to express her feelings around me. Or you could think that eye roll is a great sign that she heard me and is about to do the things I'm asking. You like it? Me too.

Okay, let's work on this one. When your child grunts or says ugh when you ask him or her to do something, you could think something similar to the eye roll. You could think the ugh just means your child is verbal, and that could be his or her superpower. I'm getting feedback from my child. I'm

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getting feedback. I may not like it, but I'm getting a response. Yeah? Awesome.

Next one. When you tell your child something and he or she retorts with I know, you could make it mean something like you're right mom or dad or grandma. You're right. I don't need to be right, but I know you are. So I'm just saving face by saying I know. Or you could simply make it mean okay, I hear you. I'll do what you say. I just reply this way because it means I hear you and I'm acknowledging you, right? That's such a better thought. I hear you. I'm giving you verbal feedback. I love it.

Okay, next one. Let's say your teenager is constantly telling you just leave me alone. Get out of my room. You can get all worked up about it. You can get triggered and call them disrespectful and come up with a bunch of really negative thoughts in your head. You can do that, and maybe you have in the past. But let's try this one on.

The next time your teenager tells you just leave me alone, or I just want to relax, or get out of my room. You could make it mean that he or she simply needs some alone time to decompress, to regulate, or switch gears. Or maybe they're deep in the middle of thinking about something and they want to finish it.

I know that if your child is an introvert, and they just got home from school or a family gathering or a sporting event of any kind or a social interaction, this alone time is like oxygen to them. The truth is it has nothing to do with you. They just need some space. It might be that their energy is spent on physical growth. So it's very normal and likely that they do often feel physically tired and need a little bit of time to rest.

That's so much a better thought than they're disrespectful or ungrateful, yeah? I mean there's a whole menu there of thoughts to choose from that

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are so much better than thinking the thought your kid is lazy, disrespectful, or ungrateful.

Okay, next one. When your child screams, hits, cries, or storms in any way, what you could think is that they're telling you that they're having a hard time. You could make it mean when they scream, hit, cry, or storm they're having a hard time. They feel a feeling that they don't know how to express with words. You could make it mean they're saying please help me. I don't know how to manage these feelings by myself. Help me regulate. Help me feel safe. Help me understand that this feeling or this circumstance is normal and I'm not alone. Such a better thought, right?

All right, next one. When your child does not do something you asked or told them to do, it is not because they enjoy being defiant. I know we want to tell ourselves this story, but when your child does not do something you told them to do, what do you make it mean?

You could make it mean they have an underdeveloped brain. They haven't figured out tools yet that will help them remember or prioritize your request over the flashy thing in the room that they're currently doing. You could make it mean my kid is easily distracted, and it's a process problem, not a character problem.

I promise you if you stop making it mean my kid doesn't listen to me and instead realize they have an underdeveloped brain, they're easily distracted, and this is a process problem, not a character problem, the relationship between you and your kids will improve by about 4,000%. You see that? Yes? Awesome.

Okay, next example. When your child will not stop gaming, what do you make it mean? There is a real psychological and physiological reason why the brain simply cannot set down the gaming device and walk away, and it's

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because they have little to no executive function to consider any consequences for not stopping the game.

This has nothing to do with you or their character or their lack of self-control. So you could make it mean this is a really difficult thing I'm asking them, and I need to support them through actually putting the game console down and coming to the dinner table.

The truth of the matter is when any of our kids do anything, you get to decide what you're going to make it mean. If you're deciding right now when your kid doesn't get off gaming, which happens in homes all over the world on the regular. If you're deciding it means something like my kid has no self-control, they never listen, they don't follow directions. If you're making it mean something like that, you're going to get triggered over gaming.

Instead, I invite you to think wow, there's little to no executive function here, and I need to support them by helping them get off the gaming and come and do whatever I'm asking them to do. If you make it mean that, again, connection and cooperation will flow.

Here's another one. What do you make it mean when your child brings home a "bad grade". Maybe you make it mean your child's lazy or incapable of learning new things. You have options here. This is what I want you to see. You can ask yourself when you see that bad grade or when they report it to you, what am I going to make this mean? That "bad grade" could be for any number of reasons.

Maybe they got distracted and time ran out. Maybe your child froze up at test time and struggles taking tests. Maybe there's a reading, visual, or developmental reason why they couldn't understand the questions. Maybe your child was tired or hungry or anxious. Maybe they didn't know where to

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look or didn't understand that a test was coming or didn't plan for it or didn't do their homework that particular day. The question is what are you going to make that bad grade mean? What are you going to make it mean?

I want you to think about this as an invitation when our kids have a struggle, a problem, they mess up, it doesn't go like it's supposed to. What are you going to make it mean? Let's do a couple more.

When your child says I hate you, what are you going to make it mean? What you could do is you could hear in the I hate you, I'm so confused. I've been trying to do the right things, but I can't seem to do them, and I hate that. Or I hate this situation. Or I hate how this situation makes me feel. Or I hate that I don't know how to express myself in a way that you can understand. Or I hate that it feels like you cannot hear, understand, and support me when I get scared, confused, surprised, or disappointed.

You get to choose what you're going to make it mean when your child says I hate you, and I encourage you to pick something that helps you stay away from being triggered and dysregulated. What do you make it mean when your child doesn't laugh at your jokes? Here's what you could do. You could simply chuckle at yourself. You know, having a different sense of humor than yours is not a character flaw. Plus many adult jokes require a lot of context that our kids don't have or understand yet.

So if you value laughter and silliness and sense of humor and your child doesn't laugh at your jokes, you could just make it mean you haven't landed on the thing or things that your kid finds funny yet, and you could decide to be committed to keep working on silly, funny things that allow you and him to relate to each other on their level. You get to choose what you're going to make it mean when your kid doesn't laugh at your jokes.



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Another example. What do you make it mean when your child doesn't gush over the gift you gave him or her. This is a good one. What do you make it mean? Do you make it mean he's not appreciative, she's not grateful, she's spoiled. You could, or you could simply make it mean that their interest in the thing changed since the first time you heard them tell you how much they wanted it.

Or you could make it mean that maybe they had a silent expectation they never expressed or never knew how to express to you. You could make it mean they wanted something else instead, something new that just popped up, and they got disappointed or surprised that their expectation wasn't met.

Yeah? I know. If you've never been exposed to this concept of what am I making this mean, it can really scramble your brain, but it is work worth doing. I ask myself this all the time. What am I making this mean? What did I make that mean when he said or did or this happened?

By the way, this also works on partners, coparents, bosses, mothers, mother-in-laws, neighbors whose dogs bark all day, best friends, volunteer jobs. You can take this tool into every aspect of your life. When you find yourself getting dysregulated, you can ask yourself what did I make it mean when a person said or did X? What did I make it mean? What do I want to make it mean?

Let me give you a couple of more examples. What do you make it mean when your child's answer to every question is I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. What you could make it mean is that they really don't know the answer to the question. Or you could make it mean they need a minute or 10 to process the question and come up with an answer.

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Maybe they don't have the language or vocabulary to give you an accurate answer. Maybe they're afraid the truthful answer will hurt your feelings or they'll get in trouble or get triggered, and they're scared to answer the question. Maybe they're unsure.

You get to decide what you're going to make, I don't know what it means, and I want to encourage you to pick something that helps you not be triggered and approach the challenge or the question or the problem as a process problem, not a character problem. See how this works?

Okay, last one. Last example I want to share with you. When your child pushes back or questions or challenges you, what do you make it mean? Here's what I make it mean. I make it mean that my son is a logical thinker. He's self-assured. He's self-confident, has a strong inner compass, and feels safe expressing himself to me.

I also make it mean that I've created a safe environment for him to question or challenge me. When I think this thought or I make his pushback or his challenge mean that we're connected and that he's self-confident and has a strong inner compass, and I've created a safe environment for him to challenge and pushback, I never feel triggered.

I might not like the words that come out of his mouth, and I might need to address the situation, but I don't feel triggered. I'm not dysregulated. I'm not parenting from a place of fear or anger. Can you see this? Do you see how this works?

Now, let's take it a step further. If you really love this and you want to go even deeper, you can even choose thoughts that not only not trigger you but thoughts that actually affirm you and build you up as a parent. I know. Let me say that again. You can even choose thoughts that not only not

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trigger you, but thoughts that actually affirm you and build up your parenting and build you up. Let me give you some examples.

The eye rolling and the ugh could mean I love you most in the world mom because I know I can express my discontent with you, and you're going to love me anyways. Right? Oh my gosh. I've got the biggest smile on my face as I explain this to you. My cheeks are just grinning wide, and I have a big smile on my face.

I mean think about that. What if every time your child rolled their eyes at you, you made it mean I love you most in the world parent because I know that I can express my discontent with you, and you're going to love me anyways. Think about the safety and the security and the way that builds you up and builds up the relationship between you and your kid.

What about this? What if every time you hear I know, you say to yourself yes. The timing of my comment or instruction was spot on. Because when my kid says I know, he or she is really telling me they did not know but now they know, and they're going to follow through. It's one of my favorites. I know it could also mean you're right. You're so wise, and you always know what to say exactly when I need to hear it. Thank you for setting me up for success. You're a rock star and the greatest parent ever.

Here's the thing. You get to decide what you make any of these things mean. The I know, the eye rolling, and the ugh. It is not a fact or a law that eye rolling always means X or Y. You get to decide what you make it mean. I actually do this.

Every time my son Malcom says I know, I literally make it mean that he's saying to me mom, you're right. Thank you for setting me up for success. You're the greatest mom ever. I literally make it mean that every single time he says I know. It works. I don't get triggered. I might then ask great, are

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you going to get it done? Or great, so you're not going to do that again, right?

Or how about this. Every time you feel triggered by your child's behavior, you have the opportunity to heal your own inner child by responding the way you always wished and longed to be responded to by your own parents. We talk about healing those inner childhood wounds all the time on this podcast. What I know is when we do this work, it allows us to show up in a neutral way. To parent and guide and coach our children without being triggered, and it really allows us to connect with them and create deep cooperation.

So when you respond with gentleness, with compassion and understanding as you wish your parent had responded to you when you were rolling your eyes or giving them sass or saying I know. When you do this from your higher brain, you not only connect with your child, but you bring healing to your own inner child as well. Are you picking up what I'm putting down in this episode today?

Here's the bottom line. You get to choose your thoughts. We don't all respond to eye rolling or I know or I hate you the same exact way. So what that means is you get to choose. It's not an auto responder. You get to actually choose your thoughts. You get to choose to believe what you want to believe about your child's behavior. You get to choose thoughts that lead you to believe your child is never going to make it in the world, or you can choose thoughts that lead you to believe your child has super powers that will one day change the world for a much greater good.

Here's the honest to goodness truth. You can choose to feel unloved, unappreciated, and disrespected by your child's lying, eye rolling, I know, telling you they hate you, or not getting off gaming. Part of humanity is this

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ability to choose. You have full dominion over the thoughts and what you make it mean.

So, again, you can choose to feel unloved, unappreciated, and disrespected. Or you can choose to feel loved. You can choose to feel like a rockstar. You can choose to feel like your kid's understand you. You can decide to make their behavior mean they need help and support. With your choices, you have the opportunity to feel deeply connected to all of your children by asking yourself what am I making this mean?

So your homework this week is to choose. Choose consciously. Use your humanity to make good choices that lead to connection and cooperation with your kids. The tool to get you to where you want to go is to ask yourself what am I making this mean? When my child or when my kids do X, what am I making it mean?

Yeah? All right. Let me ask you this as one final question for today. Did this resonate with you? Did the hair on the back of your neck stand up? Were you nodding your head? Or were you thinking man Lisa, girl, you really took us to church today. Maybe you had tears in your eyes because this is the first time you've ever heard this. Or maybe you have a lump in your throat because you're wondering wow, are you in my home Lisa? This is exactly what I needed to hear today.

Or maybe you've known for a while that you need to work on what you make your kid's words and actions mean, but you weren't quite sure how to do it. Maybe you're ready to take all of this to the next level, and you show up here every week because you recognize it's time for real change in your family, and you've come to understand that you're the catalyst. You're the change agent. You're the cycle breaker to make that happen. Yeah? All right.

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Well, if you were yes to any of these and you feel ready now, like right now, to be the cycle breaker, to be the change agent, to be the catalyst in your family then you are in for a real treat. As we head into the second quarter of 2023, I want to extend a personal invitation to you so that I can help you be the catalyst, create the change, and be the cycle breaker that I know you want to be.

Now, remember, 2023 is the year of upleveling our parenting, right? Where small changes can have a big impact on your connection with your kids and the cooperation we experience in our homes. So the invitation right now from me to you is for you to say yes and join my free three-day Uplevel Your Parenting Challenge.

It's 100% F-R-E-E, it's completely online, and it's for you. You can participate from anywhere in the world, anywhere, and I promise you it's a very minimal time commitment. All you need is one hour a day for three days. Let me explain.

The three-day Uplevel Your Parenting Challenge is all about helping you understand where your anger, where your disappointment, where your frustration with your kids comes from. It's also about helping you understand why your kids storm, pushback, misbehave. In the three-day challenge, I will personally help you get a handle on your frustration. I will teach you tips, tools, and ideas that are going to move you from chaos to cooperation in your home right now with one hour a day for three days.

So here's what I need you to do. I need you to go over to [thepeacefulparent.com/challenge](https://thepeacefulparent.com/challenge), and I need you to sign up for the three-day challenge. You'll register for the challenge. After you're registered, you're going to get all the information in your inbox with daily reminders and the challenge workbook.

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During the three-day challenge, I am going to give you tips, tools, and support for moving from chaos to cooperation in your home with deep connection. Each day we're going to take on a different topic. Tuesday, April 11<sup>th</sup>, I'm going to help you understand why your kids storm, and this is not what you think. We're going to dive into this. By the time we're done with day one, you're going to have a very firm grasp on what's really going on in your home.

Thursday, April 13<sup>th</sup> we're going to tackle how do I create connection in my family right now? At the end of day two, you're going to have a firm grasp on the tools that lead to real connection with your kids at any age. Then Saturday, April 15<sup>th</sup>, we're going to dig deep into how do I increase the cooperation with my children right now? Thus feel good about my parenting.

I go live each day of the challenge in the Uplevel Your Parenting three-day challenge popup Facebook group and over on Zoom. So if you don't have Facebook, it's no problem. You can meet me over on Zoom for all of the classes. Don't worry. If you sign up and can't make one, two, or all of the live classes, the recording will be available to you for a limited time, and we'll get you all of the directions on where to find the recording.

You do not want to miss out on this. So either click on the link in the show notes, or go over to [thepeacefulparent.com/challenge](https://thepeacefulparent.com/challenge), and I'll see you inside the group. I absolutely cannot wait to work with you. I cannot wait to help you figure all this out. I cannot wait to take you further down the path of peaceful parenting.

Hey, if you know another parent, grandparent, teacher, nanny, or guardian that you think would benefit from this, feel free to invite them to join us as well. There's a seat for everyone. All right. I hope to see you there. Until we meet again, I'm wishing you peaceful parenting.

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Thanks for listening to *Real World Peaceful Parenting*. If you want more info on how you can transform your parenting, visit [thepeacefulparent.com](http://thepeacefulparent.com). See you soon.