

Ep #126: What Co-Regulation with Your Kids Looks Like



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host
Lisa Smith

[Real World Peaceful Parenting](#) with 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.

Lisa: Welcome, welcome, welcome. Welcome to today's episode. I know I say it every week, but it's so, so, so true. I am so excited to be with you today. We're gonna dig into some juicy stuff today. But before we do, I want to give a big giant real world peaceful parenting shout out to GotNothingToSay.

NothingToSay recently posted this beautiful, wonderful review, "Lisa Smith teaches the difference between snorkeling and scuba diving as we examine our children's behaviors as well as our own. I leave every lesson feeling more empowered with practical strategies that enable connection and cooperation with my child all the while working peacefully with discipline and respect in the home. I am more centered as a person and a parent since listening to Lisa's podcasts and being a part of the weekly calls. Lisa's the real deal and emphasizes progress not perfection, across all stages of parenting."

GotNothingToSay, thank you, thank you, thank you. I so appreciate you leaving this review for us. If you're listening to this podcast today and you're feeling inclined, I asked you to either share today's episode with someone you think that would really benefit or rate and leave a review.

Because when you do, it isn't for me, it's for other families. When you leave a review, Apple podcast is more likely to share this with other families who need this and other messages to help them the real world peaceful parents. So when you leave a review, you're paying it forward to other children and their families. Those children say thank you.

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

Ep #126: What Co-Regulation with Your Kids Looks Like

Okay, so today I want to talk about real world peaceful parenting at its essence. I want to dive in by sharing this quote with you. You cannot hard work your way into perfect kids, or you cannot hard work your way into good kids. I really want you to think about that as a listener. Because if that's what you're trying to do, we need to adjust goals and expectations slightly.

We're not here to hard work our way into good kids. We're here to change generational cycles, to stay regulated when our kids are dysregulated. We're here to know how to show up when our kids are melting down, or showing their emotional immaturity, or their lack of brain development.

I thought that the best way to really express this is to invite one of our Hive members and one of my friends and one of my most favorite people to join me in today's podcast. We're joined once again by Hannah. So let me start out by saying welcome, Hannah. So glad to have you here.

Hannah: Thank you, Lisa. I always love coming on the podcast. So thank you.

Lisa: Oh, you're so good at this. So just to get us grounded. Hannah is a mother of four small children. They range from under one to six. She's got her hands full. Hannah's a great mom, and found me really by accident, let's say, and really dove in.

I thought what would be really helpful today is for us to go back to the beginning and kind of walk our way through the transformation that Hannah's had, and some of her expectations, thoughts, and goals along the way and how they've shifted and changed and how the shift of expectations has also changed her parenting and how she shows up for and with her children when things aren't going their way.

Ep #126: What Co-Regulation with Your Kids Looks Like

So let's dig in. So Hannah, let's start from the very beginning. Tell us what your parenting was like before peaceful parenting and *Real World Peaceful Parenting* podcast.

Hannah: Okay. I will never forget the moment when I had two small children and one on the way. My eldest is a girl who very quickly took the compliant role in our family. She loves people very much, and she recognized that she felt more happy when she was pleasing people. So parenting her was very fun when she was a little toddler. It was very smooth.

So when our son came along, I thought okay. I have this parenting thing down. Kids are fun. It's not always easy, but it's pretty chill. Then my son came along. I will never forget the moment when I was in the store, and I was checking out to buy some kid's clothes, and suddenly he wanted a toy. I said no, and a meltdown happened. I had seen these in movies. I had seen them kind of in real life and maybe had some thoughts about those parents and those kids. I couldn't believe it was happening to me.

He was on the floor kicking, and he was tugging at my clothes. I was mortified and stressed and overwhelmed. I had the worst thoughts. I got into the car, and I was crying. I called my mom. I knew that something had to change because parenting him was starting to get very difficult and sad. I felt like I was failing. I felt like there was something wrong with him. There was something wrong with us.

I felt like he wasn't showing up in the way that I wanted him to. I wanted him to be compliant. Yes mom, and no mom. I was a little embarrassed about how that looked to other people that I knew. I'm the only one of my siblings with kids. Well, I was the only one of my siblings with kids at the time. So I felt a lot of pressure to look a certain way. This little boy was rocking that. He was rocking my world.

Ep #126: What Co-Regulation with Your Kids Looks Like

So I thought he needed therapy. I had gone to a friend of mine. It's funny now, I went to a friend of mine and said, she's a therapist. I said do you talk to kids? She said no, but anytime a parent comes to me, and they're having a hard time, I send him to the same person. I send them to Lisa Smith.

So I said okay. In my head, I thought Lisa Smith was a child therapist. So I go to your website, and you and I and my husband have our orientation call. Right off the bat, you're like okay, I don't work with kids. I work with parents. You kind of gave me a little bit about what you do. I didn't really see how that was going to help honestly, in the very beginning, because I thought I was doing everything right. My kid was my problem. There was something wrong with him. But we started working. I quickly realized how wrong I was.

Lisa: Well, especially, I'm sure because your brain said my oldest child is compliant. Now we know your oldest daughter tends to lean towards people pleasing. So she does want to make everything fine. Your son is more of a strong willed kid who is more concerned about his feelings than other people's feelings.

Yes. So most people do find this work because there is some storming. There is typically a strong willed kid who is not compliant and easygoing and go with the flow. Yes, Mommy. Most people start this work thinking how do I get my kid under control? How do I hard work my way into a perfect kid?

Hannah: Yes. Yeah. That's really what I wanted, what I thought I wanted.

Lisa: So you quickly figured out that, what would you say that? The problem was, not that there's a problem here, but the evolution needed to be in how you approached that child during his storming and melting down? Can you speak to that?

Ep #126: What Co-Regulation with Your Kids Looks Like

Hannah: Yes, absolutely. I mean, information is power really. As Maya Angelou says, when you know better, you do better. So when you and I started working together, and you taught me brain development, that changed everything for me. I didn't realize how many expectations I had for this small three year old child and how out of whack they were.

So really, the work for me started when my eyes were opened about the reality of what was going on. It wasn't that he was disrespecting me. He wasn't trying to make me upset. He wasn't giving me a hard time. When I realized that he was actually having a hard time, it's like I saw my son the way that I had first seen him. I had lost sight a little bit of who he was.

I had created this vision of him that wasn't true. I created this little child who was trying to make things difficult and trying to make my life hard. Then when I took a step back, I realized it was this person who I had always loved who was having a hard time, and he needed me. So.

Lisa: That's so graphic in the best of ways and so good. I talk about this. Kids are born, and humans are born. We bring them home from the hospital. All they do is storm when they have a need, right? They cry, which is storming. Feed me, hold me. I have gas in my tummy. I have a dirty diaper. We don't take it personally. I'm so fascinated by this.

Nobody calls up their mother and says oh my gosh, my son at 2:00 a.m. disrespected me by crying, or wow, every night at 6:00 he gives me a hard time. We may be exhausted, and we may not want to get up at 2:00 a.m. and do the feeding, but we don't take it personally. We're empathetic. We're understanding.

Then they become verbal. For a lot of us, some switch flips in our brain. Our brain believes because they learn words, and they can string words together in a sentence, that when they storm, they must be doing it

Ep #126: What Co-Regulation with Your Kids Looks Like

deliberately or intentionally. Like you said, giving us a hard time. Being disrespectful, being defiant, being selfish, wanting what they want.

It's just not true. Right? The brain is not fully developed until 25. I love this chart that I saw recently. Reasons for a child's behavior what it seems like on the surface. The child is naughty, disrespectful, manipulative, or a bad child. But what's really happening at the root are things like unmet needs, under stress, needing guidance, current brain development, yearning for co-regulation and current circumstances, right.

I'm tired. I'm hungry. I've been in a car seat too long. I'm at Target, and I see all these toys that I want. My immediate gratification because of low brain development is coming into play. You're putting stuff in the cart, even though it's a broom and milk and toilet paper. You're putting things in the cart, and I want something to put in the cart. I want to be included and fit in, and then you tell me no.

Because of my unmet needs, stress and brain development, I'm going to melt down. The melting down is a cry for co-regulation. Come alongside me and help me regulate and overcome being told no.

Hannah: Yes, absolutely.

Lisa: It sounds like the light bulb went on. You started to figure all this out?

Hannah: Yes, I think yeah. That was the first step was learning about what was going on. Then I started to see the tools of what I needed to do and how I was showing up. That was also another world rocker, I guess you could say. I didn't realize all the thoughts that I was having and how that was affecting my parenting and how I was showing up.

Ep #126: What Co-Regulation with Your Kids Looks Like

Lisa: Yeah. So again, we can't hard work our way to perfect kids. Your little guy is still underdeveloped, strong willed. But now the next time you went to the store and you told him no, what did that start to look like? Or what does it look like now when you're at a store, and you're putting pretzels and toilet paper and a broom and a sweatshirt in the cart? And he wants something in aisle 27B that he can't have. Walk me through what it looks like now?

Hannah: Yeah, absolutely. Well, the expectations drastically shifted. I really feel like I could breathe fresh air for the first time. Because before I thought when we go to the store, we have to go and get things done as quickly as possible. It was all very urgent. Everything felt very urgent, and that there was no room for any flexibility. That's how it felt to me before.

So if something happened where it started to look like we weren't going to get out of the store as quickly as I thought, I started to get very dysregulated. I had this sense of panic that a domino effect was going to happen where it was going to ruin the whole day.

Now, I remember when you told me that it was okay for him to melt down. You really helped me see that. We were talking about, and you said I want you to tell me, Hannah, what's the problem with him crying in the store? What's the real problem? It came out that I was worried about what other people were thinking. I was worried about how I looked, and how my family looked.

When we worked through that, now when I'm at the store, if he starts to melt down, it really doesn't even bother me. I come at it from a place of curiosity because of what I've learned. I realize okay, there's an unmet need here. So what can I do as his mother to help him meet his needs? We're all safe. Everything's okay. We're going to get through it. So I will kind of get down to his eye level, and say I hear you. I hear that you really

Ep #126: What Co-Regulation with Your Kids Looks Like

want those pretzels? Can you tell me about that? He'll be like, "Well, yeah, I never get to pick the snack. It's something else that's going on."

I say okay, and I didn't even know that. I hear you, honey. Today, pretzels aren't on the list, but I hear you. Maybe next time you can help me write the list, or we come up with some type of a solution. He doesn't get what he "wants", but.

Lisa: He gets what he needs.

Hannah: He gets what he needs.

Lisa: Which is connection and understanding and acceptance and presence of you.

Hannah: Yes. Then it's almost shocking how quickly he's like, "Okay, that's fine. That's really what he needed. It's such a simple fix in some ways. So that's what it looks like now at the store with any of my kids now that there's four. I meet the need in that moment. I don't worry about what that looks like to anybody else.

Yeah because sometimes they say things that don't sound nice to other people. They might say, in the first moment of the storming, I hate you, mommy. That seems really jarring. I just look at them, and I say that's okay. I love you enough for the both of us. Then when the inflammation has gone down way later, we could talk about words and stuff, but it's just not that moment, you know?

Lisa: Well, what I'm hearing is, and what I'm loving that others are gonna get to hear through this episode, is you transitioned from urgent crisis red alert to curious, and it really is a transition from my kid is being naughty,

Ep #126: What Co-Regulation with Your Kids Looks Like

disrespectful, manipulative, or bad, right? Those thoughts are going to create an incredible sense of urgency. Must eject out of here.

When we get curious, and our thoughts are hmm, I wonder what's really going on here. Right? We don't need to panic. We understand that there's more than what's at the surface. We scuba dive down to your son might need some attention. He might need some connection. He might need to be heard. The pretzels might be representative of I feel left out or I really want something or I want to know I matter.

When you take that moment to create that connection, he gets what he needs. But then your brain starts to learn oh, this never really was about the pretzels. Right? Nobody needs pretzels. Nobody's gonna die if they don't have pretzels. But it might be he's hungry. He needs some one on one time. He needs to be acknowledged. Maybe he's been talking to you the whole way through the store, and you've been distracted.

Rightfully so looking at the list and putting stuff in the cart and thinking about oh I want to make fajitas for dinner. Do I have salsa or not? You're preoccupied, and he needs a little attention. So it's not about the pretzels. It's about the connection. When we have thoughts that are urgent and panicked, it's almost impossible to connect. I've watched you do the work to fight through that and no longer take that personally, and really understand your kids are just, they're needing help.

The way you deliver the help that I think is so amazing. I want you to talk about this for a moment is you come alongside and co-regulate with them. You're not demanding they regulate because they have in the underdeveloped brain. You're literally coming alongside them, which I think is a new skill for you. I'd love to hear your comments on this or your examples. But you're literally coming alongside them regulated, which we call co-regulated, so that they can then regulate.

Ep #126: What Co-Regulation with Your Kids Looks Like

Hannah: Yes, it is definitely a new skill for me.

Lisa: So let's set the stage Hannah. You're at aisle six. He's just asked you for the pretzels. He's melting down, storming. Think about that first time, and how you didn't co-regulate alongside him. Now think about when it happens with any of your kids now, and people are looking. Take us literally through what it's like to co-regulate alongside your strong willed little boy in the middle of the store.

Hannah: Okay, yes. Well, now I'm very honest with myself and with my children. It's about healing my inner child as well. So it's both of us being healed the same time. I realized that I'm uncomfortable, and I don't try to push that away. I don't try to rush away my negative feelings anymore. Because before I would feel either unsafe or disappointed in myself for getting so angry, and then it would just be very flustered. Then it would just turn into this big thing.

So now, I acknowledge and I say okay, well, I'm feeling really uncomfortable. I really didn't expect my son to melt down right now. I really wanted to get out of the store very quickly, but this is where I'm at. I am determined to show up in a regulated way. I'm honest with myself, and sometimes I do verbalize that, especially now that my eldest is six. She can understand a lot. So sometimes I will literally say wow, I feel uncomfortable right now, but I am committed to showing up in a peaceful way. Then I look at my son.

Then I say, what are you feeling? I give him the space to tell me that, and I give him the time to tell me that. If he doesn't want to talk right away, which sometimes he doesn't, I just kind of let us sit in silence. I, to myself say inwardly, may the love in me rise up and meet the love in you". Or I'll say something to myself like this is what's important. I'm here for my son. This is what showing up looks like.

Ep #126: What Co-Regulation with Your Kids Looks Like

So I'll create that space. I'll listen to what he says. Then I validate what he says. It doesn't mean that I'm going to give in. So let's say it was chocolate bunnies, and I don't buy chocolate bunnies. Let's just say that. It doesn't mean that I'm going to change my mind and suddenly give in. It just means that I'm giving him a space to say what he needs to say.

So he'll say, "Mama, I really wanted those chocolate bunnies. I love chocolate. It's so good and everything." I'll just sit with that and be honest and say I hear you, honey. I love chocolate too. I understand. I hear you. Then there's a pause. I don't say but. There's just a pause. I say today we're not getting chocolate bunnies. Would you like to help me put the next item in the cart? Because I know he loves doing that.

Then he can say yes or no. I don't take it personally either way. If he's still upset, because sometimes he is, he might say no, I don't. Okay, buddy, I hear you. I hear you. You're really upset. You really wanted those chocolate bunnies. It's okay to feel upset. Then another pause.

So it's really about whatever he needs in that moment. It's not spoiling. It's not coddling. It's just me giving a space for compassionate listening for someone who needs to be heard. It doesn't mean I'm going to give up my morals or something. Because sometimes people look at peaceful parenting as permissive parenting. It's not like he wins or anything. It's just that he had a need that needed to be met. I'm going to meet it because I am the peaceful leader in my family.

Lisa: Yes, yes. I hope what the listener is hearing right now is that when you take a minute, Hannah, to regulate yourself. Your words and empathy, wow this is hard. I wasn't expecting this, but I can approach it with love. That is an energy you bring to your child. Listen to me. That is co-regulation.

Ep #126: What Co-Regulation with Your Kids Looks Like

When you come to a situation with I hear you buddy, you really want those chocolate bunnies. I hear you. It isn't I hear you but we got ice cream, or we had waffles for breakfast, and your sugar and that, that, that. It's not that. It's also not okay, you can have them. He's still not getting the chocolate bunnies. It's this I recognize, and I'm validating that you want them.

I can stay calm while you're having this big emotion about wanting something while your impulsivity is kicking in, and your underdeveloped brain and you're secreting cortisol. I'm also recognizing this might be about six other things. This is your moment to storm. When I come alongside you and stay calm, I call it regulated.

When I come alongside you and I stay regulated, it doesn't almost matter the words that come out of my mouth. When I come at you with that regulated energy, come alongside you, your body naturally regulates alongside me, this is what we call co-regulation. Hannah, I think you would agree that you've seen tremendous success in this tool alone. If you brought nothing else into your parenting but co-regulating alongside your children, it was an absolute game changer. Yes?

Hannah: Yes, absolutely. It really fostered a deep connection with each of my children. I mean, this tool is used over and over again, and they get to learn it, and then I get to see them demonstrating it. It's just the gift that keeps on giving. Really, it is.

Lisa: Yes. By the way, co-regulation works with bosses and employees and neighbors and mother-in-law's and partners and the lady at the Southwest ticket counter and the guy at Starbucks. I mean co-regulation is one of the greatest gifts that we can give other human beings and ourselves.

It's funny after all these years, I know when I'm co-regulating with people and I know when I'm not. I mean, I may still not be able to or choose to in

Ep #126: What Co-Regulation with Your Kids Looks Like

the moment because sometimes life gets the best of me, and I get triggered. But I'm aware when I'm not co-regulating in life, and I'm aware of when I am coming alongside someone and regulating with them.

Hannah: Yes, absolutely. I'm very honest about that too sometimes. Another recent thing is when I will just tell them, I really want to be calm right now, and I'm feeling really upset inside, and I need to calm down. So I'm not going to talk in this moment. I say that so often, especially when it's mom, mom, mom. That incessant I think every parent knows that. Every parent has experienced that, mom or dad or whoever the parent in that life is.

But yeah, it's about being honest and telling them right now, this is what I need to stay calm. This might be hard for you. I love you. This is what I'm going to do for myself.

Lisa: Well, the beauty of that is every single time. I want to encourage you to keep doing that, and I want the listener to hear that. Because every time you do that with your children, hey, I'm about to lose it. Let me regroup and then continue on. You're modeling soothing yourself to your higher brain. You're living that out loud. Your kid has a chance to see that, absorb it, see it in action, and then they will absorb it into it.

I have an 18 year old now who will say to me, "Mom, I need a minute to regulate. I'll be right back." He goes in the other room. Then he comes back out. The other day we were in the kitchen. He was storming or getting close to tipping over into the storming. He just put up his finger and said one moment, and he left the room.

I had no doubt what was happening. I didn't need to chase after him. I didn't need to keep yelling, I didn't need to get back here right now. I took

Ep #126: What Co-Regulation with Your Kids Looks Like

10 deep breaths. By the time I got to nine, he was back in the room regulated. We continued on in a calm way.

You're at the other end. You have little kids. I have an adult child, a young man. We've been doing this for 15 years, and I see the value of regulating. I see my son co-regulating with his friends, I see him co-regulating with us. Sometimes he is the co-regulator. He will come to me and help me regulate about something.

So everybody listening, that is also a skill. Just that living out loud in your parenting saying your children, Hannah, hey I'm feeling like I'm at the edge. I need a moment. Then them learning to just give you a moment to pause. Everybody pause. It's like freeze. Then you get regulated, and we unfreeze. You're increasing your family's emotional intelligence every single time you do that.

Hannah: Yeah. It helps normalize the big feelings. You know?

Lisa: Yes.

Hannah: I almost used to think that there was something wrong with me when I needed a moment, or I wasn't regulated all the time. In fact, one of our first calls together where we recorded a podcast episode, and I was interviewing you. I remember I asked how do you keep yourself from losing it? Or how do you keep yourself from being dysregulated?

You were like whoa, whoa, whoa, the goal is not to keep yourself from being dysregulated. The goal is to see it, realize it, and work through it. That just totally changed everything for me. So when I modeled that for my kids, if Carmela or if any of the kids loses it, I kind of see it. I mean, nobody likes losing it, but they don't feel shame afterwards. We can work through it.

Ep #126: What Co-Regulation with Your Kids Looks Like

It's okay. We can get tools for next time. When the storm is over, I tell her yeah, I lose it too sometimes. This is what helps me not to lose it, or this is what helps me when I'm losing it. It brings this whole new level that I didn't have when I was growing up about it's okay. Every rough edge that you have is okay. We're going to work through it together.

Lisa: I love it.

Hannah: You don't have to hide this part of yourself. You don't have to be ashamed of this part of yourself. It's okay. I'm going to help you.

Lisa: I love that. I love that. You said I want to normalize big feelings. I can't help but the coach in me comes out. I think every time you normalize big feelings for yourself. You say to your children, I'm having big feelings right now. I need to take a moment to gather myself. You are showing them that they can have the big feelings, but they don't always have to go over the edge.

As they get older and older and older and their brain develops more and more and more. The only way your kids are going to learn that is through you modeling that, and you're doing that now. You're saying I'm overwhelmed. I'm upset. I'm having big feelings. Give me a second to gather myself. That's just going to lay down neural pathways in their brain where they're going to learn hey coach or teacher or friend or partner, give me a second to gather myself before we progress.

Hannah: Yes.

Lisa: Ah, what a gift you're giving your children Hannah and yourself and your entire family. You're saying I don't expect us to have no emotions. I don't expect us to manage our emotions all the time. But I do want to show

Ep #126: What Co-Regulation with Your Kids Looks Like

you that it is possible to have big feelings and soothe myself to my higher brain without storming all the time.

Hannah: Yes.

Lisa: Then when we do storm, that's okay too. We don't have to hide it or feel shame or feel bad about ourselves. We can just work through the storm and learn from that as well. I really want to emphasize this. The goal of this work is not to do this work so you end up with compliant, always happy, perfect kids. That's not going to happen. It's impossible. We're all here having the human experience.

The goal of peaceful parenting is to develop skills and tools so that when your kids are struggling, when they're storming, when they're having big feelings, when they want the pretzels in aisle six, when they've had a fight with their friends, when they're struggling in school, when they hit a phase of unhappiness, when they're struggling in life. You have the tools to show up and do things like stay calm, dig underneath the behavior to the feelings and needs, come alongside and co-regulate with them, help them develop their emotional intelligence. The goal of this work is to have the tools to show up when you hit what I call speed bumps in the road.

Hannah: Right. If there was one more thing I could impart to the listeners as a fellow peaceful parent and fellow human is to try not to lose sight of your goal, of the goal of connection with your children. Because it might not always look perfect to everybody in your life, but that is not evidence that it's not working or that your family is changing.

Just because a stranger or a family member or somebody else sees a meltdown or sees your child at their lowest point doesn't mean that something hasn't fundamentally changed in you and in your kids and in your family. As long as your goal is always to connect with your children

Ep #126: What Co-Regulation with Your Kids Looks Like

and to get the connection before the cooperation, then this work can seriously be life changing.

Lisa: I love that. I love that, Hannah. Thank you for sharing that. Connection is not a reward for good behavior. Right? We connect before we correct. We connect before we request. Connection is the fabric that binds the relationship together. It's not a reward for good kids or compliant kids or kids that are having good feelings and behaving well in Target. I always use target as the example. I'm sure they appreciate all the shout outs.

Connection is the goal every time, through the good times and the bad times. Connection is the goal when you're speeding down the smooth freeway going 80 miles an hour. It's the goal when you're hitting speed bumps. Connection is the fabric of the relationship, and it's not the reward for good behavior.

I think that's the perfect spot to end. So Hannah, thank you for being here today. Thank you for sharing your story. I know lots of people are benefiting from it. I love having you on the podcast. I know we're all grateful for you being here. So thank you.

Hannah: Thank you, I appreciate it.

Lisa: Okay, listener, I hope today really inspired you. Today's goal was inspiration and proof of what's possible for you and your family. So if you love what you heard, and you want a transformation story just like Hannah's, I want to invite you to join the Hive because that's where it's happening.

So if you want to learn more about the Hive, and join us on our next live coaching call, I want you to go to thehivecoaching.com. You'll get all the

Ep #126: What Co-Regulation with Your Kids Looks Like

deets, as they say, over there and the link to join. I absolutely cannot wait to welcome you. Yes, you. Yeah, I'm talking to you. I absolutely cannot wait to welcome you into that. 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.