

# Ep #128: Is Fear of Conflict Getting in the Way of Peacefully Setting Limits with Your Kids?



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With Your Host  
**Lisa Smith**

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

## Ep #128: Is Fear of Conflict Getting in the Way of Peacefully Setting Limits with Your Kids?

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, we're gonna dig in deep and cover a topic that's near and dear to my heart, and one that I feel like I'm an expert on and not in the best of ways. So let me ask you, what is your biggest obstacle that gets in the way of peacefully setting limits and enforcing them with your kids? What's your biggest obstacle? Or what's one of your biggest obstacles?

I recently gave a workshop to my Hive members on peacefully setting limits and enforcing them. I started it by asking the members what is your biggest obstacle that gets in the way of setting limits and then enforcing them? There was an overwhelming answer. I wonder if you have any idea what it is? What would you have answered that day? What did you answer today?

Now, before we dig into the answer, let me clarify. By limits I mean we're peacefully setting limits or rules or policies or boundaries that you, as the parent, put into place ahead of time while regulated in order to resolve a processing problem your child is having, a specific processing problem. Like some examples would be a limit around being late for curfew, not turning in your homework repeatedly, downloading an app when we agreed you wouldn't. Maybe taking money when we've said that's not allowed. Not ending your gaming at agreed upon time.

We can set limits around these things, consequences, limits, ahead of time while we're regulated. To be clear, we're not talking about punishments or threatening here. We're talking about peacefully setting limits. If you need

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more definition and clarity around the mechanics of setting and enforcing the limits, I want you to go check out episode 124. That's where I go deep into what limits are and aren't, how to define them, and how to set them.

Okay. So back to today's episode in this recent workshop for my Hive members, the biggest obstacle that gets in your way to setting and enforcing limits was, drumroll please, fear of conflict. Fear of conflict. Was that your answer too? Are you surprised that this was the overwhelming answer? Maybe not. If you're not, I get it. Believe me. I wasn't surprised either. Years ago, that would have been my answer too.

If you're a member of The Hive or would like to become one, once you join you too would have full access to the recording of this workshop. It was absolutely amazing how we dug deep into what holds us back, what really holds us back from setting and enforcing limits. I can tell you, the testimonials that have come in from that workshop have changed families around the world.

Today I want to touch on just one piece of what we uncovered in that workshop. One of the greatest difficulties many, many, many parents have all over the world in setting and holding limits for their kids is fear of conflict. Let me tell you where there are setting limits, rules, boundaries limits, there is conflict guaranteed. Absolutely.

One of the reasons it comes up in parenting is because many of us parents who are now adults were raised to be people pleasers. By that I mean we learned, in our house of origin, we learned to avoid conflict at all cost. Maybe because conflict felt like rejection. As a people pleaser, the goal is to receive approval and praise from others all the time. I call myself a recovering people pleaser. So I walked this walk for many, many, many years.

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I grew up believing the conflict meant you were packing up all your love and taking it away from me. Conflict meant it would be my fault. There would be disapproval. Cruel things would be said. More than likely my character would be attacked. If that isn't all painful enough, at the end of the conflict, someone would be mad at me. I would have to make amends. Relationships could be destroyed. It would be my job to soothe or fix the hurt feelings of the other party because I was led to believe that I was responsible for the conflict, and that the responsibility of the conflict and other people's feelings were heaped onto me.

So for me, and maybe you can relate to this, conflict felt heavy and dense. Conflict felt like pain, emotional, and sometimes even physical. Conflict felt unsafe. Even in some situations, it felt like death could be imminent. Does this sound familiar? Did I just describe your childhood or parts of it? Well, if so, welcome to the people pleaser club.

For most of us who were made to feel responsible for other people's feelings, developing our people pleasing muscle was a survival skill. I am not being dramatic at all. Being able to stay ahead of the conflict, being able to read the room, learning to manage people's feelings ahead of time, avoid the conflict, head it off at all cost was the tool that we developed as a survival skill. This is especially true if you grew up in a dominant home.

After years of work, overcoming my people pleasing, I now consider myself a recovering people pleaser and in remission. I've learned that conflict is actually growth trying to happen. Wow. Mind blown. Let me say that again. Conflict is growth trying to happen. Conflict is not rejection. It is not an open invitation to attack the other party's character. Conflict is growth trying to happen.

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I know I just blew some people's minds. I get it. I'll never forget where I was sitting, what I was wearing, the day of the week, the circumstances in the room when someone said this to me. Conflict is growth trying to happen. I was in my early 40s when I heard this, and it literally blew my mind. I had to take a break. I was almost hyperventilating at the idea that conflict wasn't rejection or a sign of my mistakes. That it was actually growth trying to happen.

What I've come to learn through my own work and working with thousands of parents around the world is 100% true. In healthy relationships with peaceful parenting, conflict is growth trying to happen. I mean, think about this. If everyone in the world got along at all times with no conflict, no discomfort, no pushback, no boundaries, no need to set boundaries or limits, no challenges, there will be no need for growth. Frankly, there would be no growth. Wow, mind blown, again, right.

I get it. People pleasers, as a means of survival, rely on thoughts, approval and acceptance of others to determine their self-worth. We're conditioned to be a good girl or a good boy. Someone who works hard to keep the peace and doesn't rock the boat. Sometimes we develop the skills to feel safe and as a survival tool, and then we grow up.

What happens is when we feel conflict with or from another person, we get instantly dysregulated. We feel rejected. We feel bad. We feel wrong. Sometimes we feel a need to bend to the will of the other person in order to avoid the conflict and avoid the perceived threat of being unlovable. The conflict can feel intolerable, incredibly uncomfortable because we don't know how to deal with it. We don't know how to see it as growth trying to happen, how to rest in it, and feel safe while it's going on.

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Does this resonate with you? If it does, then I'm going to guess like many of my Hive members, you may also struggle with not only setting but enforcing the limits, especially with your kids. Because setting and enforcing limits creates conflict. Even when you know as a parent that the limit is the right thing to do or what is best for your kids.

I might even go so far as to say for some of you, setting the limit isn't really the problem. Especially if you're able to set the limit while you're regulated and in your higher brain. I mean that is the easy part or the doable part. I mean we know that kids should follow rules. We know they need guidelines to follow and consequences when the rules aren't followed. That makes for healthy adults.

Ah, but here's where the real challenge comes. If we're honest as people pleasers or recovering people pleasers, the real challenge comes in the moment of enforcing the limit in the heat of the moment. You with me? Yes, I know. The challenge comes when we enforce the limit and our kids get mad. I'm talking M-A-D, mad, and they push back. When they don't like the enforcement of the consequence of the limit, even though they agreed to it ahead of time. I mean they signed the contract.

The challenge comes when we enforce the limit and they storm big. Big storm, Category Five. When they're dysregulated, when they say angry and mean things, when they shout back at you that your limit is stupid or unfair, when they want to power struggle over the limit, when they want to argue and battle. The challenge comes when they try to renegotiate the limit in the heat of the moment. They call you names. They fight and argue relentlessly. If they're good at arguing, I mean, come on, forget about it as they say right.

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I mean we ended up feeling whipped around like a rag doll over this task of enforcing the limit because there's conflict. As people pleasers we don't like conflict. It just feels like a take two, a replay of our childhood. It harkens back all the big emotions. The conflict, the fear, the unknown, the heaviness, the pain, the unsafe feeling, the aftermath of the conflict, et cetera.

Oh my, oh my, oh my. This is where the struggle lies for many parents. It's enforcing the limit. Not in the enforcing of the limit but in the conflict that occurs. If you're anything like I used to be, we lacked confidence in the handling of the conflict. We lacked the confidence. Are you having a light bulb moment right now? Let me say it again. This is where the struggle lies for many parents, especially people pleasers. They lack confidence in handling the conflict.

Listen, where there's limits and boundaries and rules and consequences, there is the potential for conflict. It's inevitable. It's part of the dance. It's part of the process. We set limits, and our kids push back. They challenge. They get mad. They have big emotions. They argue. They power struggle. They get dysregulated. It is that conflict that trips us up. Believe me, I so get this.

I want to offer you the number one secret to being able to muck through the conflict as a people pleaser or recovering people pleaser when we're trying to enforce the limits with our kids. Yeah? Okay. The number one secret to setting effective limits with your kids is to present and enforce the limit peacefully with calm authority and confidence.

Because what happens is when you lack confidence, it perpetuates anxiety as the parent. As the peaceful leader of the household, you show up with low confidence, anxiety, over-flexibility, which leads to over-explaining your

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reasons, desperately seeking understanding, validation, and approval from your kids while you're setting the limits. I mean, picture that for a moment. Right? Picture that.

Because you don't like conflict, because you see it as one of the worst things we could experience, because it brings back these wounds, because no one modeled for you that conflict is growth trying to happen. It's a natural part of setting the limits with our kids. The lack of confidence perpetuates anxiety, over flexibility, which leads to over explaining our reasons for our limits, which leads to desperately seeking understanding, validation, and approval for markets. This, real world peaceful parent, is a lack of calm authority.

Can you see this? We lack calm authority and confidence when enforcing the limits. Ironically, when you present and enforce the limits with calm authority and confidence, ironically your kids accept them easier and push back less.

Now I'm not saying there's no pushback, or no big emotions, or no storming or no power struggle. But when you come to it as a real world peaceful parent, and you enforce the limit peacefully with calm authority and confidence, ironically your kids find it easier to accept. So let's talk about some of the reasons that right now you might lack confidence and calm authority or have less than you would like.

There are four reasons. Number one, you may fear conflict because way, way, way in the back of your brain, you believe conflict leads to rejection instead of believing the conflict is just growth trying to happen. This is true for a lot of us. A lot of us really fear conflict. So the idea of enforcing a limit, especially if in the past our kids have given us a hard time around setting a limit. They've stormed. They've pushed back. They've argued.



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We get ready to enforce the limit, and fear jumps on the bus. For some of you, fear is actually driving the bus. So it makes it almost impossible to set a limit and enforce it. Because you fear conflict, and you anticipate it's coming as you enforce this limit with your kid.

Reason number two, you may believe that you are a bad person, i.e. not a good girl or good boy, if you engage in conflict let alone instigate it. I mean come on, Lisa. So you have learned in your life to avoid conflict at all cost. This is the underbelly of a lot of permissive parenting. If we always agree and get along, growth cannot happen.

Now this next statement, if you fall into category number two, is going to blow your mind, but listen to me. Conflict can be peaceful. It can be. It doesn't have to be confrontation. It can be peaceful and conflict does promote growth. I know. I know that scrambles your brain. Believe me, I get it.

Reason number three, conflict may feel like someone doesn't validate your worth because they don't agree with the limit you're setting. It makes you feel unheard and misunderstood. The pushback you get from your kids, your brain uses it as evidence that that's just another person that doesn't hear you or respect the law you're trying to lay down, and that feels unlovable.

People pleasers believe that they need to earn love and earn approval from others. They often feel a need to justify their reasons to earn the love. So when the kid pushes back on the enforcement of the boundary or the limit, it scrambles the brain. We get dysregulated because we feel unheard or not respected. People pleasing can make us overly flexible.

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When we get into this mode, what happens is we tell ourselves, our opinion doesn't really count. So we're constantly shape shifting to fit in with other people to avoid the conflict, which is going to make us feel unheard. When you were growing up, this may have been a survival skill.

Being overly flexible, going with the flow, anticipating where the conflict was going to happen, and heading it off by being agreeable or changing your mind. It became your superpower to read the room and give others what they wanted. That superpower may have been what kept you safe in volatile environments. I so get it.

However, because of this, you might struggle to establish strong convictions of your own. So now as a parent, you work hard not to enforce the limit, but to convince your kids that your limit is the right way. You look for their approval or their validation while you're setting the limit that they're pushing back up against. It creates this just loop of everybody feeling unheard. Resolution never coming.

Because while we're setting the limit, we're looking for approval or understanding or validation from our kids. They're never going to give it to us. That's the backbone of setting limits. If you agreed with me and understood and followed it, I wouldn't have to set the limit in the first place. You see? While I'm dysregulated, and I have an underdeveloped brain, and I know I'm in trouble, I'm not going to validate the limit you're setting. It's just not going to happen. So the solution is to get more convicted and let go of the people pleasing and see the conflict as growth trying to happen.

The last reason you might be avoiding enforcing the limit is you're afraid of being wrong. You grew up in an environment where being wrong was the absolute worst thing that could happen. Absolutely worst thing. It feels like death to you. So when you set a limit, maybe you've got one of those kids

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that's a really good arguer. Like can really wrap your argument around and make you doubt yourself. Then you're afraid you're going to be wrong and lose credibility. So you avoid setting a limit for fear of being wrong.

The solution here is to work yourself out of this fear. Practice making mistakes. Sometimes we change our opinion. We get more information. Parenting our kids is a dynamic relationship. There's new information. Things are changing. They're growing. They're maturing. They're evolving. What was a limit set for my kid at five is different than eight is different nine is different at 14 and 18. Sometimes new information shows up in setting the limit that causes us to revisit the limit, and adjust it, reset it.

Don't be afraid of making mistakes. It's a very large part of the human experience. Believe me, I know. I make them all the time. So you might fall into one, two, three, or, frankly, all four of these categories. I bring them up because these categories are the roadblocks that are eroding your confidence. These are the categories that play into having you fear enforcing the limit.

So what can you do about it? How can you grow in your confidence, in your parenting, and in setting limits and forcing them? Well, let me ask you this. Admittedly, this is a weird question at this point in the podcast. I get it. You might feel like when I ask this that we just took a crazy turn off the freeway, but hang with me for a minute.

Here's the question to help build your confidence. Where in your life do you feel the most confident? Think about this for a minute. Where? We all have something. What's yours? Are you confident in the kitchen cooking? Are you confident in meal planning? Are you confident in prepping meals? Are you confident in yoga or meditation? Are you confident in your faith or your

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religion? Are you confident that you're a fast reader or a great cheerleader or a jewelry maker?

Are you great with numbers and super confident in your ability to balance your checkbook? Are you confident in your ability to throw things away and get a room organized? Where do you feel the most confident? Go there. Think about doing that activity right now.

Think about when you're doing that activity, whether it's jewelry making, balancing a checkbook, or organizing room, how do you show up? What is your breath like? What is your stance like? What is your mindset like? How do you come into the room? How do you talk to people in the room that you're interacting with? How do you perform the activity?

One of the things that you can notice if you become the watcher of your brain while doing the activity is you notice a calm authority and a confidence come over your being. You have a sense of confidence about your expertise. Can you see your whole body and mind change when you're thinking about doing the thing you're an expert at? Do you see it? Do you feel it? Awesome.

Okay, here's what you can do. You can practice bringing that same calm authority to your parenting. Right now you can decide I can be a calm parent. You can practice bringing that calm authority to your setting limits and enforcing the limits for your kids.

Here's what happens. When you have calm authority, it breeds confidence. When you have confidence, it breeds calm authority. On the backbone of it is this thought, setting limits and peacefully enforcing them is in the best interest of my kids. You've got to hear this and say this to yourself about 100 times a day. If you fear conflict, and you're a people pleaser, you have

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to say to yourself setting limits and peacefully enforcing them is in the best interest of my kids.

Here's what I know for sure. With not an ounce of doubt in my entire being. When we set limits and peacefully enforce them with a calm authority, we create an environment for our kids that is predictable and safe and trusting. When home is unpredictable to our kids who have an underdeveloped brain, they become rigid and controlling because they're trying to manage their environment to safety.

Limits build trust, confidence, and resiliency in our children. Permissive or unconfident parenting does not allow our kids to feel safe. It does not. They do not feel safe. They get anxious about having to figure everything out on their own. They don't know what's expected of them. They don't feel safe, and they don't trust the people around them. Setting limits and peacefully enforcing them creates well-adjusted kids.

Now you've also got to understand this. Kids are gonna push back. They're gonna. Adults push back on limits. They're going to push back. That doesn't mean anything about you or your kid or your parenting or the conflict. It's how they're hardwired. But they're also going to feel safe, know what's expected of them, and trust you when you set limits and peacefully enforce them. I want that for you. I want that for your kids.

Now, I understand, believe me, I understand that recognizing, labeling, working on, and overcoming people pleasing can be hard work. But let me tell you something, it is work worth doing. Healing these wounds, cleaning up the work, doing the self-healing, so that you aren't fearful of conflict so that you can peacefully set limits and enforce them. Ah, I truly believe there's no better gift you give your kids. There's no better gift.

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Because when you're setting limits and peacefully enforcing them, you're connected to your kid even while he or she or they are pushing back. You're building trust and resiliency and confidence. Confidence breeds calm authority. Calm authority breeds confidence.

Side note, confidence emanating from you breeds in your children a feeling of safety and security. She's got me. I'm safe. I can push back. I know the rules. I may not like them. I may have had a process problem in following them, but I trust her. This feels like a safe and secure place. Modeling confidence and calm authority, while enforcing limits, breeds self-confidence in your kids and creates well-adjusted adults.

When you learn to overcome the fear of conflict and see conflict is growth trying to happen, it enhances all the relationships in your life. It is a rising tide that lifts all boats. Setting limits with your kids from a place of calm authority and confidence and not people pleasing will take you away from lacking the ability to enforce the limit when it's time.

It will take you away from trying to justify the limit in the heat of the moment. Will take you away from trying to get your kids to agree with or understand the limit you are enforcing, which never works. Will take you away from trying to validate the limit by getting your kids to see your side.

Setting limits with your kids from a place of calm authority and confidence is the antithesis of people pleasing, and will allow you, as the parent, to stay regulated while enforcing the limit. It will allow you to avoid bending or being manipulated by your kid's counter argument, will prevent you from giving in to negotiating a new limit while setting the current limit. That can be done later.

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Setting limits with your kids from a place of calm authority and confidence will allow you to hold space for your kid's big, negative, loud emotions and words coming out of their mouth. Will allow you to have compassion for yourself, for how hard this is, and how wildly uncomfortable you are in the moment. Will allow you to remember the conflict is growth trying to happen, and this is my job as a parent to set limits and peacefully enforce them. It will allow you to not take personally your kids' resistance to enforcing the limit.

Setting limits with your kids from a place of calm authority and confidence will allow you to realize that your people pleasing ways have no business being here in the room while I'm setting this limit, will allow you to realize that your kid's job is to push back on the limit. It doesn't mean that he, she, or they are rejecting me. It will allow you to realize the conflict is part of an emotionally mature authentic relationship and all is well. Let me say that again. Conflict is part of an emotionally mature authentic relationship, and all is well.

I leave you with this conflict is growth trying to happen. "Good" well rounded, interesting, emotionally mature people engage in peaceful conflict all the time. I did not know this until I was in my 40s, and it blew my mind to learn this. I want you to know this. I want you to learn this. I want you to model this for your kids. Well-rounded, interesting, emotionally mature people engage in peaceful conflict all the time.

When we set limits for our kids and peacefully enforce them, our kids feel loved. They know what is expected, and they feel safe. Newsflash, your children are looking to you to guide them, to parent them, including setting limits because they have an underdeveloped brain. I say this all the time, but there's a reason why kids don't live on their own. They need help with you being the executive function, setting limits and enforcing them

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peacefully while their brain is continuing to develop, which happens at around the age of 25, by the way, when the brain is fully developed.

So they need you to add setting limits and peacefully enforcing them as part of your job description. This is the job of a real world peaceful parent. Setting limits and peacefully enforcing them are key components in the real world peaceful parenting job description. Setting limits and enforcing them with anyone, let alone our kids, is hard enough without getting our people pleasing ways tangled up in the conflict.

What I know from personal experience in working with thousands of clients around the world on this is that when we clear out the people pleasing, we allow growth to happen through the conflict. Ah, so good, isn't it? Ah, I needed to hear this today. I hope it's resonating for you. I hope you're like wow, Lisa, this has been your best episode yet. Thank you so much. So good, right?

Okay. In next week's episode, I'm going to share with you a new way of thinking about setting the limits that will help tamp down the quest for approval, validation, or understanding from our kids while enforcing the limit. So stay tuned for that. If today's episode spoke to you at all, you are not going to want to miss next week's episode.

I want to make one request today. If you know a parent who is a people pleaser, please share today's episode with them. They will thank you, and you will be paying it forward. I appreciate it as well as a recovering people pleaser who has come a long way in how I see conflict, how I think about it, and how I approach setting limits and peacefully enforcing them with my own kid. All right, 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](http://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](http://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](http://thepeacefulparent.com). See you soon.