

Ep #129: How to Enforce Limits with Calm, Confidence, and a Peaceful Authority!



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host
Lisa Smith

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Welcome to *Real World Peaceful Parenting*, a podcast for parents that are tired of yelling, threatening, and punishing their kids. Join mom and master certified parent coach Lisa Smith as she gives you actionable step-by-step strategies that'll help you transform your household from chaos to cooperation. Let's dive in.

Welcome, welcome, welcome. Welcome to today's episode. I am so excited to be with you today, and quite pleased to bring this topic to you today. In last week's episode, Episode 128, we dug deep into setting limits, peacefully setting limits if you will, with our kids, and enforcing the limits when we have to or need to. I know this is really hard. I struggle with this myself as a recovering people pleaser.

If I'm totally honest with you, enforcing limits with my kid is probably my absolutely least favorite thing I do in parenting. I would give myself really, in total honesty, a B minus, maybe a C plus in doing it, but I do it because I have a deep understanding of how important it is for his brain development.

So what I want to talk about today is an alternative way to think about and to go about peacefully enforcing limits with our kids for all of you people pleasers out there. So this episode is dedicated to all the people pleaser parents and recovering people pleasing parents. I get you, I understand you, and I'm here to help.

Now I know it can be really difficult to peacefully set a limit and then enforce it when parenting, especially with your strong willed kid who is constantly pushing back and trying to get you to change your mind, begging you, demanding, or melting down. Like when they really want to toy in aisle six in Target or they really want to play more Fortnite, and you're enforcing the limit of it's time to get off the gaming.

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Or they really want to stay the night over at someone's house, and they're calling you at 10 o'clock at night. You've agreed the ones they go out for the evening, they will come home. Or when they want to watch one more show, and you know that it's time to go to bed because they need rest. It's really difficult to enforce the limit at that point, let alone those of us people pleasing or recovering people pleasing parents who birthed strong willed kids.

Now, let's talk about this for a minute. The truth is that it's probably not hard to set the limit when you're calm, logical, in your higher brain, right? I mean, you know your kids need to get off gaming. You know they need to go to bed. You know it's probably not a good idea to have a sleepover and stay up all night. At that moment, our logical part of our brain knows limits are important. Setting limits helps our kids' brains develop. Limits help our kids feel loved and safe and know what's expected of them. None of us are intentionally trying to permissibly parent. I get it.

But here's the other truth. I remember before learning the peaceful parenting tools that I share with you here each week that I was often incredibly, and I mean incredibly as all caps, bolded, and underlined, incredibly dysregulated anytime I anticipated enforcing a limit or was actually enforcing a limit with my son.

The problem with this is this only escalated the conflict between us and made things much, much, much, much, much worse. Because when I was trying to enforce a limit from a dysregulated brain, I was not a parent who is exuding and modeling calm authority and confidence like I talked about in episode 128. I wasn't. Just thinking back on it now makes me cringe. The hot mess I was trying to enforce the limit that I had set as a recovering people pleaser with my strong willed kid who was pushing back big time on enforcing the limit.

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Can you relate to this? Do you feel like I'm describing you and your kids? Are you like oh, Lisa, I so get that. I'm right there. That happened this morning. It happened yesterday. It happens all the time. Well, you're not alone. You are not alone. You are not broken. Nothing's gone wrong. We just need to rewire your brain and show you a new way to think about the value of enforcing the limit and how to enforce the limit with calm authority and confidence.

Now the reason I wasn't able to model calm authority and confidence, if I totally honest with you, is because I wanted Malcolm's approval of the limit while I was enforcing it, which makes me chuckle now as I say it out loud. I wanted him to approve of the limit I was enforcing. If he couldn't approve of it, at least understand it. So I would spend all this time trying to justify, validate.

I wanted his permission to forge ahead because I was a people pleaser. Now, most of this was happening on subconscious level. I wasn't fully aware of it, but I felt it in my body. I remember, when I was trying to enforce a limit, sometimes I felt like my heart was going to pound out of my chest or I wanted to flee. Sometimes I felt like I was going to die.

At the time, I thought all of that physical sensations in my body was happening because I was so angry at whatever he did or didn't do. But now, as a parent coach, I see that what was really going on is that I was a people pleaser. I was terrified of the conflict that was coming from enforcing the limit. Because in my mind, I needed my son to approve of me forcing the limit. If he didn't, subconsciously I saw the conflict as rejection. Today, I see it for what it is. It's me enforcing a limit because that's my job as a parent. I can do it as a calm authority with confidence.

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Now, I still hate conflict, and like to avoid it if I can. But again, I see my job description as setting the limit and enforcing it with my son in a peaceful way because limits help him feel loved, know what is expected, and feel safe. Enforcing the limit in a calm way with competence and authority creates trust between the two of us. Do you see that?

The other difference today is that I really work hard to see conflict as growth trying to happen. This allows me to stay regulated, for the most part, while setting and enforcing the limit. Now here's what's changed. As I'm enforcing the limit with my strong willed kid who likes to push back, I no longer expect Malcolm to validate that it's time to enforce the limit. I don't expect him to approve of it. I don't expect him to agree with it in the heat of the moment because he's dysregulated. I don't expect him to understand it. I don't expect him to like it.

Instead, I expect him to have big feelings. Big, big, big negative feelings either because he was wrong or he got caught or he knew this was going to happen but he did it anyway. Or he's mad at himself. I give him lots of space to have his big negative feelings. I expect him to push back because that's his job. One of his jobs.

I expect him to storm. I expect him to not like that I am enforcing the limit in that moment. I expect him to try to argue his way out of it. Maybe even renegotiate the limit in the moment. This helps me a ton that I expect all these things to happen when I go to enforce the limit.

Let me say this again because I really want you to take this in. The difference between my old way of parenting and this new way of parenting is that I see conflict as growth trying to happen. I stay regulated, for the most part, as best as I can when I'm enforcing the limit. I no longer expect

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my son to validate the enforcing of the limit, approve of it, agree with it, understand it, or like it.

Instead, I expect him to have his big negative feelings. I expect him to push back, storm, not like it, tried to argue his way out of it. Maybe even renegotiate the limit in the heat of the moment. The difference is I'm now prepared. I stay in the calm authority with confidence while enforcing the limit.

Now hear this. Authority has nothing to do with you having control over your kids and everything to do with you having control of yourself. I feel like I need to say that again. Authority has nothing to do with you having control over your kids. Nothing. Authority has everything to do with you having control over yourself.

That is exactly what I'm trying to show you today is how to gain authority when you're enforcing a limit. How to gain control over yourself when you're enforcing a limit with your kid as a people pleaser with a strong willed kid who is going to storm, push back, not like it, and try to argue. The secret is for you to gain authority over yourself.

Okay. Maybe you get this. Maybe you're like hey, Lisa, man, I get it, and I like it. I totally see what you're saying. Thank you for sharing your transformation. Honestly, I'd like to be just like you. I want to have that calm authority and confidence as I parent, as I move away from my people pleasing tendencies while enforcing limits with my strong willed kid. Can you help me with this?

Why yes, I can. I'm so glad you asked because I can. I'm going to help you by sharing with you an aha-moment I had in which I saw how to approach

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this. Now, it's a somewhat strange way to show you the lesson or the tool, but if you stick with me to the end, I think it will make sense. So let's dig in.

Here's how I think about enforcing peaceful limits with my son that allows me to get my people pleasing tendencies out of the way and stay regulated when it's time. I think about getting my driver's license. You're probably like, what? What in the world does driver's license have to do with me staying calm while enforcing a limit with my kid? Okay, I know. I get it. It's kind of wacky, but bear with me here.

When we go into a driver's license agency in our state or country, the agency is setting a limit with us. I really want you to see this. The limit they set is they outline a bunch of rules, and we agree to follow them. While you're taking the driver's license test, you're making sure you understand the limits by quizzing you on if then. If you follow the limits, this is what's happens. If you choose not to follow the limits, these are the consequences that we will enforce with you. Right?

The driver's license agency is not punishing us. They are not threatening us. Rather, they're telling us the limits up front. We agree to follow them. Then we sign a contract, which is our driver's license. So when you think about getting your driver's license, it is exactly what I encourage you to do when I encourage you to set limits with your kids and then peacefully enforce them. Right?

Let me give you an example. The driver's license agency tells you that you can go this speed in this neighborhood. Okay. So in Arizona where I live, we can go 65 on the freeway, and we need to either go 35 on neighborhood streets or 45 depending on what's going on in the neighborhood. Depending on how crowded it is, how wide the streets are, how many pedestrians are around, etcetera, etcetera. Is there a school

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nearby? They set limits ahead of time. They post the limits with speed signs, right? You following me?

So what happens is the driver's license agency is telling you, you can go this speed, X speed. If you go over, Y will be the consequence. If you choose to go over the speed limit then this is what will happen. Now think about this. This is setting a limit.

You are free to choose to either follow the limit of X speed, or you can choose to go over the speed limit. If you get caught, a fine will be the consequence. So there is a limit, and you get to choose whether you're going to follow it or not. If you choose not to follow it, then you potentially could receive a consequence. You with me?

Okay, so let's say one day I am driving in a 45 mile per hour speed zone, and I am going 60 miles per hour. In that moment, I know the limit. Not only did I learn the limit when I got the contract, i.e. driver's license, but the limits are posted for me all around town. Now my car even tells me the limit.

I know the limit, but this particular day I'm going 60 miles an hour. So I'm choosing to go 15 miles per hour over the limit. I fly past a police officer, and boom, I hear flashing lights telling me to pull over. So I've been caught. I've been caught not following the limit.

Let's be honest here. I pretty much know before he even gets out of the police car and walks up to my car. I know what I did wrong. I know that I'm most likely to get a ticket. I knew the limit. I knew I was exceeding the limit. It was not a mystery to me. Right? Think about this because the driver's license agency clearly sets a limit ahead of time, there's no mystery here. The police officer is not walking up to my car to punish me. He is walking

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up to my car to enforce the limit that was preset by the driver's license agency.

Now I might try to push back. I might try to get really upset. I might even storm and cry and have an outburst of big emotions. I might try to get him to change his mind. I might even try to renegotiate the limit by asking him to just give me a warning. I'm no different than your strong willed kid who's pushing back when you go to enforce the limit. Here's the aha-moment.

The police officer's job is to stay regulated, and not take my pushback and my emotions personally as he enforces the limit with calm authority and confidence. He isn't asking my permission to give me a ticket. He isn't trying to punish me, which is to harm.

He is enforcing the limit, which is his job in the moment. He's not looking for my approval. He isn't working to get me to agree or validate that he should give me a ticket. The limit was set when I got the license. His job in this moment is to enforce the limit with calm authority, which isn't to have control over me but to have control over himself.

As for me, yeah, I might be angry and upset because I don't want a ticket. I don't want to receive the enforcement of the limit. I might have big emotions. I might even become emotionally immature in that moment, and try to blame, deflect, or project onto the police officer and externalize my big uncomfortable emotions. Even though I know I'm speeding, I could still be pissed off in the moment and dysregulated. I could want to argue with the officer.

But if he's a calm authority with confidence, he's not having it. Because the limit was set well ahead of time. When I was issued the driver's license, I signed a contract with the state of Arizona that I wouldn't go over 45. If I

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chose to, then I would be at risk for having the consequence enforced of getting a ticket.

The state of Arizona and the police officer in that moment don't have to care that I don't like it. I'm perfectly allowed to not like the ticket. I'm perfectly allowed to grumble and be pissed and angry and have big emotions. The police officer is not seeking my approval. He's not asking my permission to write him a ticket. He's not trying to get me to see his point of view. Because chances are, he's not a people pleaser.

He's not checking in with me the next day to see if it's okay that he did his job and enforced the limit. He's also not making enforcing the limit mean anything about him. He probably goes home at the end of the day feeling good about himself. His neighbors like him. He's a good guy. His kids like him. He sees his job as enforcing the limit that I agreed to when I got the license. He isn't taking it personally. He isn't getting dysregulated when it's his job to enforce the limit.

Can you see this? This is how I think when I'm trying to peacefully enforce a limit with my son. Now I'm not trying to be a dominant jerky police officer. I'm not trying to be unreasonable. I'm not trying to be a permissive parent. I'm trying to peacefully enforce the limit with my son that we have set ahead of time and giving him full space to not like it and push back because he's strong willed.

Peacefully enforcing limits can be hard for people pleasers. But hopefully as I shared this analogy or example with you, or this story, it helps. I often use this analogy with my one on one clients because it helps them visualize kind of that middle of the road, being a calm authority with confidence while enforcing the limits with your kids, especially your strong willed kids who are going to push back.

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One of the things that I often say to my son is that part of my job is to protect him from other people and part of my job is to protect him from himself. One of the ways that we do that with our kids is by setting limits because they have an underdeveloped brain. I mean, think about this. There is a reason kids do not move out and live on their own successfully. There is a reason it's illegal. It's because they don't have a fully developed brain with executive function.

Birds leave the nest at six weeks because at six weeks, birds have a fully developed bird brain. Children do not move out until at least 18 except in very rare situations. It's because the brain is not fully developed. So when we peacefully set and enforce limits with our kids, we're helping them to connect all the dots. We're not doing it to punish or harm. We're doing it to help develop their brain.

Peacefully setting limits and peacefully enforcing them allow the dots to connect. It helps our kids learn and hardwire the prefrontal cortex in the right way. The prefrontal cortex is gonna get hardwired regardless. What we're doing is we're trying to hardwire it in the right direction instead of the wrong direction. Just like the police officer is enforcing a limit so I can learn, i.e. hardwire my brain, to slow down.

60 miles an hour is too fast in a 45. It's a 45 miles per hour speed limit because it's a neighborhood, and people are out walking and biking. There's a potential that I could hurt someone going 60 miles an hour in a 45. The speed limit wasn't set by the police officer in the heat of the moment. He doesn't drive down the road and go, you know, today I think the speed will be 45. That would be dominant policing. I wouldn't know what the limit was. So I wouldn't be able to choose to follow it.

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The speed limit is set by experts who study what the speed limit should be in that neighborhood. They set limits based on facts, information, experience, community values. Just like you set limits as the peaceful leader of your household when you're calm and regulated. You set limits based on facts, information, experience, and family values. You do that ahead of time and communicate that to your kids.

Just like the driver's license agency communicates that ahead of time with me and then posts it by having speed limit signs all over town. Then when it's time to enforce the limit, the police officer's job isn't to question the limit or change it or ask me if I approve. In the heat of the moment, the police officer's job is to enforce the limit that I've already agreed to. The enforcing of the limit and the limit itself doesn't dysregulate him. He doesn't change the limit. He doesn't argue with me about the limit. The limit was set ahead of time.

In that moment, it is his or her job to peacefully enforce the limit with a calm authority and a confidence. He or she doesn't have to be a dominant officer or jerky or yell at me all the while they're enforcing the limit. They can actually be calm, regulated, and connected to me while they're enforcing the limit. Just like you can be calm, regulated, and connected to your kids while you're enforcing the limits you've set with them.

Do you see this? This is exactly how I want you to proceed when it's time to enforce the limit with your kids. Because this will allow you to stay connected to them and with them and be the peaceful leader of the household at the same time, even while they're having big emotions, pushing back, arguing with you trying to get you to renegotiate. You can stay connected with them and be the peaceful leader of your household with calm authority and confidence, even while they're pushing back.

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Mind blown. Yes? I hope so. I love this analogy. I use it all the time. It really helps me visualize how to peacefully enforce the limit with calm authority and confidence, and see this as my job as a parent. See that this is conflict as growth trying to happen. This is the parent I strive to be.

Now I'm going to be totally honest with you. I only get this right probably about 75% of the time, which is why I give myself a B minus or a C plus. I too just like you. I am a work in progress. Enforcing limits with conflict is definitely not my strong suit or superpower. Because I birthed a strong willed kid, anytime I go to enforce the limit, there's going to be conflict.

I say progress, not perfection. I approach the conflict with calm authority. I can take control over myself, and a confidence because I know how to do this. I don't let my people pleasing skills try to enter the room and take over where I'm trying to validate and get approval and just get them to understand. I try to be the kind connected police officer who's going to peacefully enforce the limit that my kid agree to previously.

I have so much compassion and empathy for the people pleasers out there. I know personally it can be really difficult to peacefully enforce limits. It can be difficult to set them and then really difficult to hold them. Especially when your strong willed kid is pushing back or melting down or begging you to change their mind.

But here's what I'm going to tell you. Having a strategy and an approach is a total game changer. I want this for you, and I want this for your kids. I want you to be able to peacefully enforce the limits with calm authority and confidence. I want this for you. I want it for your kids.

Because when we enforce limits we've set, our kids feel loved. They know what's expected of them, and they feel safe. So let that be your motivation

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to find a strategy and approach. Feel free to use mine. Take these mantras I've presented today and say them to yourself when you're going to enforce the limit. Expect your kids to push back.

Visualize yourself being the calm authority that stays connected to your kids while you're enforcing the limits by not looking for their approval, their validation, their permission. I promise you this is a total game changer.

Now next week, we're going to wrap up what I'm calling this mini-series on setting limits with our kids with an episode about why your kids do push back when you go to enforce the limit and what the heck you should do about it. I'm going to give you all the details next week on why they push back and exactly what to do about it. So if you're a people pleaser, if you struggle to enforce limits, and if you have a strong willed kid that pushes back when you go to enforce a limit, you are not going to want to miss next week's episode.

Now in the meantime, I want to give you some homework. Between this week and next week. I want you to work on being the confident and calm authority parent while you are enforcing the limits, the peaceful limits, with your kids. Work on that. I'd love to hear how it's going for you. You can jump over to my Instagram, The Peaceful Parent and slide into my DM and let me know how it's going for you. I would love to hear from you.

Then next week, we'll talk about why do your kids push back when you go to enforce the limit? It's going to be a total game changer. So work this week on your homework, and I'll see you next week. Until then, I'm wishing you peaceful parenting.

Thank you so much for listening today. I want to personally invite you to head over to thepeacefulparent.com/welcome and sign up for my free

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peaceful parenting minicourse. You'll find everything you need to get started on the path to peaceful parenting just waiting for you over there at www.thepeacefulparent.com/welcome. I can't wait for you to get started.

Thanks for listening to *Real World Peaceful Parenting*. If you want more info on how you can transform your parenting, visit thepeacefulparent.com. See you soon.