

Ep #139: Go the Distance When Holding the Limits



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With Your Host
Lisa Smith

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Ep #139: Go the Distance When Holding the Limits

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's episode is for all of you out there who might be feeling discouraged in holding limits for your kids. I just want you didn't know that I see you. You are not alone. This is one of the hardest things for me in parenting.

So today, I want to share some insight, and maybe even help you find a new way to think about the value of holding the limit all the way through to the end. I've talked about holding limits in a lot of podcast episodes. It's possible you might be doing everything right. Building connection, setting limits, explaining the consequences if and when your child opts for them. You might be doing everything right in being empathetic, holding space, using the tools I hear you and tell me more. You're even practicing not taking things personally.

But still your kids may not be responding the way you envision they would. Maybe you're putting in all this work and doing all the heavy lifting in your attempts to build connection, and all you get in return is what feels like rejection.

Hear me when I tell you this. In the midst of the storms, it is normal and natural not to feel the connection you have been building when you're setting a limit and holding to it. When your child or spouse or your mother or the stranger next to you in seat 22A is having a meltdown, their body is so filled with cortisol that they are in fight or flight. When they are in fight or flight, there is no connection. It is not possible to connect in that moment. I don't care who you are. It is not possible.

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I love the saying that I kind of think I made up but maybe I didn't, but I say it a lot. In the history of mankind, no one's ever calmed down by being told to calm down. When I'm upset and my husband tells me to calm down, I know he means well, but it is 0.0% helpful. In fact, it does the exact opposite. It winds me up. What I need in that moment is to be left alone.

For your kid or kids, being left alone does not mean that you are running away from them. You don't need to worry that you are abandoning them. Now they might need you to stand there and be present with them just to bear witness to their storm. But in the moment, you are not going to be able to connect with them. It is a ridiculous exercise for anyone to ask anyone else who is storming to calm down. It does not serve you, your child, or your relationship to expect a feeling of connection in the moments during a storm.

Please hear this expect a storm every single time you go to enforce the limit you've established with your kids. Let me say that again. That's way too important not to repeat it. Please, as a parent, expect a storm each and every time you go to enforce the limit that you've established with your kids. Because they're dysregulated. They're not connected. They are never, in the heat of the moment, going to understand, accept, agree with, validate, much less appreciate that you are holding the limit and allowing them to suffer the consequence of their choices.

Now for all of you recovering people pleasers out there, myself included, it is easy to feel discouraged in your journey to building connection when your kids pull out all the stops in the middle of holding a limit and try to make you bend to their will. They may be very well spoken and convincing when they try to negotiate with you or when they call you mean. They might be full of passion when they say I hate you or you don't understand, which leaves you feeling desperate to prove that if nothing else you do understand.

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You see, we recovering people pleasers are often drawn into a no win battle of trying to explain and defend all the reasons in the heat of the moment that we're holding the limit. We use logic, we use love, we use reasoning, we use understanding, we use words, we try to give them what we didn't get in the heat of the moment. Which is, as you may well know, gets us absolutely nowhere. Absolutely nowhere.

One of the main reasons is because all kids are emotionally immature. They blame, project, and deflect all of your reasons back onto you. They reject all of your logic and what may even feel like they're rejecting your love in the heat of the moment.

If you just expect and accept that this will be their response when you're enforcing the limit you laid out, life will be so much easier on you. You will not storm alongside them and get dysregulated because you're expecting them to be emotionally immature when it's the moment to enforce the limit.

I encourage you to ask yourself two questions. What am I making it mean when I go to enforce the limit? What is the lesson I really want my kids to learn here? This is really important, you ask yourself what is the lesson I am attempting to teach?

Now here's what I know. You get to choose what you're going to make their emotionally immature response mean. You get to choose. You can choose to make it mean they really don't hate you, or you can make it mean they do.

You can make it mean they really do think you're mean, and they really don't know you as a person and as a parent who loves them more than life, which I guarantee will lead to nothing but your own suffering and dysregulation. Or you can make it mean they're upset, and they don't want, which is human nature, to feel the consequence.

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You can make it mean they're wrong about you, that they have an underdeveloped brain, that they're emotionally immature. That they're blaming, deflecting, and projecting all of their big emotions like regret and disappointment and frustration and anger onto you. Which, by the way, is the highest compliment you can receive as a parent because it proves that they see you as their safe place where they can unload their emotional backpack and know that you're still going to love them, even when they show you their shadow side.

Choosing to believe the latter option will help you stay regulated in your higher brain and give you the grace to bear witness to their storm with patience and empathy and without taking it personally. That's where the connection comes in. Sometimes doing and saying nothing while staying present to just bear witness is the connection. It is.

I encourage you not to rush into connect prematurely. Because remember, when I am emotionally immature, I am blaming, deflecting, and projecting my emotions onto you. I am externalizing my big emotions. So when someone is in a cycle of emotional immaturity, there is no space to connect. When someone is emotionally mature, they're self-reflecting, they're self-regulating, and they're holding space for other people's emotions.

When your child regulates after the storm, you can look at them and say hey, listen sweetheart. I gave you plenty of time to do what you needed to get done in order to do the thing you wanted to do. We talked about this. I told you what the consequence would be if you didn't follow through.

It is in this moment, later when we're both calm and regulated, where your kid will be able to wrap their brain around the limit you set ahead of time and the consequence. They'll be able to reflect and hold space for other people, you included, when your kid is regulated and emotionally mature, not in the moment of the storm.

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Another thing you could say when the storm continues to linger is hey, when you're ready to talk about this and figure out the best next step, I'm here for you. If and when you're ready, I'm ready. Let me give you an example.

Let's say you and your daughter have an argument. She was supposed to complete four or five chores this morning in order to be able to go out to the mall this afternoon with her friends. Let's say that she didn't get the chores done. She didn't meet the goal. You let her know that she wouldn't be able to go to the mall until all the chores were done. If then, if you choose not to complete all the chores, then you won't be able to go to the mall. Okay.

Let's say she didn't complete the chores. So she's not able to go to the mall. She is mad. Capital, M-A-D because she really wants to go to the mall with her friends. Her pattern when she gets mad is to blame, project, and deflect all of her disappointment back on to you. This is her pattern, and she's not going to the mall. So she's mad.

In this moment I want you to be able to see the bigger picture. See what's going on. In this moment, I want you to step back and recognize how far you've come on your journey to setting limits, to building connection, to holding space for your daughter's disappointments and big emotions. I want you to ask yourself what is the lesson you want your daughter to learn in this moment?

You could bail her out and let her go to the mall. You could make excuses. You could rationalize that well, I know she didn't get it done, but she'll do it next time, or she'll do it later, or she really wants to go. You could bail her out when she makes disappointing choices.

Or you could hold to the limit, and let her learn that there are consequences to her actions, especially when she agrees to something. It's not a surprise.

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You laid out the limit ahead of time. When you're done with these chores then you can go to the mall.

Now here's the thing, I really want you to see this. You have put all the heavy lifting into getting this point. Maybe you sealed your mouth shut all morning. You didn't remind her or nag her or beg her or coerce her into doing the chores. You didn't do the chores for her. You laid out the limit ahead of time. If the chores get done, then you can go to the mall. You made sure she understood, and then you let go and let her have her own experience.

In football terms, it's like you're on the five yard line of teaching her this lesson. We've moved all the way down the field from one end to the other. We're all the way down on the five yard line of teaching or the lesson. What I hurt for are the parents that get the ball all the way down the field, all the way to this point, and then they don't put the ball in the endzone.

They actually cheat the child out of the full lesson by letting them go to the mall anyway, by making excuses, or renegotiating the limits. The child, please, please, please, Mom. I promise I'll do the chores later. Please, please, please, please, please.

Here's the thing. In this example, your daughter already missed the deadline. She chose not to do the chores. She's fully capable of doing them. There was plenty of time. You wrote them down. She missed the deadline. In this instance, she needs to feel the impact of that in order to learn the lesson that choices have consequences.

That by choosing not to do the chores, there is a consequence of no mall time. If she had chosen to do the chores, the consequence would have been she gets to go to the mall. If she doesn't learn at this time then we're going to have to do it all over again on something else.

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So my plea to parents is please, please, please don't fumble the ball on the five yard line. Because like in football, in Candyland, you have to go all the way back to start. Finish it out and get the ball in the endzone. You've done all the heavy lifting now just finish it out.

Now, here's another tool that could be helpful when you're faced with this scenario. We're all faced with this scenario regularly when we set limits with our kids. It feels like their job is to test us, right? You feel that? I feel like my kid tests me all the time.

But here's another tool you can use. I really want you to take this in and hear this. I want you to allow that your daughter or son or children can simply be wrong about you. It's possible they're wrong. When they say you're mean, or you don't understand, just allow them to be wrong about you. We're wrong about people all the time. You do understand. She chose not to get the chores done, and therefore she doesn't get to go to the mall. Just keep telling yourself. She's wrong about me in this instance, and I know it. She doesn't have to know it, but I know it.

The words coming out of your child's mouth when they're dysregulated and upset because you're holding the limit are just their thoughts in the moment. Thoughts are just sentences running through their head that they decide to verbalize to you. You get to decide whether you're going to believe the thoughts or not.

So what you can do is very calmly and confidently tell your daughter that you're holding the limit. That because she chose not to do the chores, she doesn't get to go to the mall. She gets really dysregulated. Then she opens her mouth, and the words come out. Oh my god, you're so mean mom. I can't stand you.

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Then I want you to say yourself, that's just a thought. That's just a thought coming out of her mouth in the heat of the moment. Just the thought, and I'm not going to believe it. You don't even have to respond or comment. Because you're being mean, her statement that you're being mean, has nothing to do with the lessons that actions beget consequences. She's just spewing out words. She's just projecting and blaming and displacing her big emotions onto you with thoughts.

Oh my gosh, I hope you're having a total lightbulb moment right now. This is what immature people do. They project, blame, and deflect. They externalize their big emotions onto other people. Just because of the development of her brain, your daughter is immature. She's upset that she's not getting what she wants. Or she's disappointed because she really wanted to go to the mall, and she didn't really think you would hold the limit. So now she's projecting and externalizing her big emotions.

But if you get caught up in the tangle of the words of being mean, and try to explain or justify or quiet her down, she doesn't get to feel the consequences of her choices. If you just lovingly stand there and look at her and just help her through the storm. I know, sweetheart. I know you're disappointed. Next time when we have this conversation, you'll have a chance to complete the chores, and then you can go to the mall.

I can't tell you the number of parents that get to this point and feel bad and get uncomfortable and cave on the consequence, on the five yard line, and let the daughter go to the mall. Which is then actually worse because then the child learns oh, my big emotions get me what I want. Instead of learning that the doing the chores, the agreement of do the chores, and we go to the mall.

Then what the child learns is I don't have to do the chores. If I throw a big enough storm, meltdown, tantrum, I can get someone to cave and let me

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do what I want. I don't have to follow the rules. I can have a meltdown and blame everything on my parents. Then I get what I want. I know it's hard to hear, but that's what happens when we give in on the five yard line.

Listen, I've got a strong willed full contact sport kid. I know firsthand how hard it is to follow through on that limit. It's hard to stand there. It's hard to watch your kid make a mistake. It's hard to implement the consequences of holding the limits. It's just so much easier to drop them off at the mall, but it's not helpful.

It's hard to hold the limit all the way into the endzone, believe me I get it, but here's what I know with 100% certainty. The more you let them make the mistake and figure out how to manage the consequence, the more emotionally mature they will become. They will learn to take responsibility. They will learn that their decisions and actions have consequences. They will learn to plot things out. They will understand there are consequences.

They will learn to make decisions ahead of time. I don't want to do the chores, but I'm going to do them because I really want to go to the mall. I know that if I make an agreement with my parent, she will follow through on it, or he will follow through on it. So I better follow through on it.

There is so much benefit that can come from letting our kids suffer and feel the impact of their decisions rather than bailing them out, especially at the five yard line. Suffering through and with emotional immaturity will actually help your kids become emotionally mature. The only way to learn to take responsibility for things is if people do not bail us out. That will lead to self-reflection, self-regulation, and the ability to hold space for the situation and the people around me.

As the parent, when you get really grounded in holding the limits, you teach a lesson. You don't even have to entertain middle brain thoughts about your

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own character or worth or ability to understand. You can just see the stormy moment for what it is, a storm. An emotionally immature moment in your child's life and be okay with it.

It's hard to watch our kids make mistakes and suffer emotionally. Especially when we really want them to have or be or get what they wanted. It breaks our heart when their hearts break. But you have to ask yourself, What am I making this mean? What am I ultimately trying to teach?

You have to ask yourself, I've come this far. I've moved the ball all the way down the field. Do I want to fumble the ball on the five yard line? Or do I want to put the ball in the endzone and help my child learn that I'm serious about holding limits, and that there are consequences to their decisions, choices, and actions. That helps them mature emotionally. I want that for you. I want that for your kids. I want that for all of us. Yeah? So good, isn't it? Love it. Okay, until we meet again, 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 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.