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With Your Host Lisa Smith

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 every week it's true. I'm excited to be here with you. Today, I'm joined by a special guest who you all know. Hannah is joining us again today. Hannah is a Hive member, an amazing mother, an incredible human, and someone who's really committed to peaceful parenting, transformation for herself, breaking generational cycles, and pointing her family in a new trajectory.

With that in mind, Hannah and I were talking in The Hive about last week's episode, episode 140, which is the beautiful episode. I've gotten incredible feedback on it. It was the conversation that I had with Corinne Crabtree about parenting for body positivity.

I asked Hannah to join me today so we could have a follow up conversation on body positivity. As a parent who's in the middle of that, changing her own paradigms, helping her children, putting her best foot forward, Hannah had some questions.

She was kind enough to agree to bring them here where we could have this conversation and this coaching opportunity with you so you could have a listen in and get some of your questions that you might have as a result of episode 140 answered today. So Hannah, thank you so much from the bottom of my heart for joining, for participating, and for being a guest today on the podcast.

Hannah: Thank you so much, Lisa. I am so excited about today's episode. Last week when you had the podcast with Corinne Crabtree, it really spoke to me on a deep, personal level. I think that it's so helpful for parents who are trying to parent a new way and just have so much stigma and wounds. I'm so excited to learn how to continue growing and developing and changing the next generation. So I cannot wait to dig in.

Lisa: Awesome. Okay, let's start here. The message that I really wanted people to hear, the main message coming out of that episode, was the concept that how you feel about your body is not innate or inherited. It is learned. Hating your body is learned. Loving your body at any size is learned. It's more often than not learned from our family of origin. So tell me how that landed on you when you heard that.

Hannah: I think it is absolutely true. I really appreciated how both you and Corinne mentioned that the parents are just trying to do their best with what they know. But the diet culture has been so enmeshed in everything that we do that well intentioned parents have been creating this wound, which is just perpetuating.

So I think it's absolutely true for anyone with any body image issues that it was learned. Because I think we can all point to the time when we remember loving our bodies. As a mother of four, my kids at this stage love their bodies. Even the ones that might be a little bit larger or look a little different, they just have this deep confidence and love and joy surrounding their image. It's a real shame to see that slowly go away because of people's words, no matter how well intentioned.

Lisa: Yes. As I was listening to episode 140 myself a couple of days ago, I was struck by the example Corinne gave of her niece who was super chubby when she was born. She had the same joy as a non-chubby kid would have. I mean kids have joy. So it really speaks to the concept that

how we feel about our body is learned. Hating the way you look is a learned behavior. We can unlearn it. So let's dive into your questions.

Hannah: Yes, that goes perfectly with my very first question, which is what is the best way to model body positivity if we, as the parents, are still working through our own wounds? Like let's say we're still in the very beginning of the journey. How can we model body positivity if we're still sort of unsure of what that looks like?

Hannah: I love this question. Let's try this on, Hannah. What if body positivity isn't the goal? What if it's body neutrality? Right? Because positivity may not work in the sense of we're calling attention to the body. We want to call attention to the human, to the soul, to the characteristics.

So I really think what we have to do, as parents, the goal is to neutralize the body no matter what size it is. It's neutralize the body. So I have as many people in The Hive, this is interesting to me. We have Hive members whose kids are at the low end of the chart of weight and height, and they're as worried about their kids' bodies as the parents whose kids are at the high end.

Hannah: Yes.

Lisa: The parents whose kids are at the low end are focusing on that body and needs to get bigger, eat more, eat the right things, take Pediasure. Then the kids with the bought the parents of the kids with the bodies at the high end, eat less, eat less.

You can want to instill good nutrition and good habits in your child. It's an and, not an or. Sometimes I worry that body positivity is sending a message to parents of feeling shame for wanting to focus on good nutrition and good habits. That's what I kind of worry about with body positivity. I would rather

we talk about the body is neutral. The body is neutral at any size. As a parent, I can want to instill good nutrition, good habits, good eating in my child, regardless of the size they are.

Hannah: I love that. Okay.

Lisa: Yeah. So to answer your question, as the parent we have to work on feeling neutral about all bodies, including our own. I know that's a tall order for some of us. I was there. I get it. But that's the work to do, and then model for our children. One of the ways we do it is to really make sure that we're not commenting out loud on anybody's body. Anybody.

Ours, our children's, actors, people on the street, people at church, our friends. If the body changes, we're not commenting on that. So someone like Adele or Rebel Wilson who have lost a big amount of weight and are now in a smaller body. We don't, in some way, elevate or value them more because they're now doing something in a smaller body. We just don't comment on bodies.

Hannah: Okay. Okay. What if someone that's close to us, a loved one, has worked hard to lose weight, and they lose weight, and they're excited. They come to us saying like I've lost 20 pounds. I feel so great, and they're hyping it up. How would we kind of react to that? Do we?

Lisa: I think we can talk about how excited they are that they met their goal.

Hannah: Okay.

Lisa: How fun it is to put discipline in place and meet a goal, just like we would celebrate someone who maybe never ran before ran their first marathon. We would be so proud of them. Oh, my gosh, look at you. You did it. Right? We might celebrate how they're healthier. Because we do

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know that when there is less weight on a body, joints are less stressed, organs work better, circulatory system works better. So we could celebrate that they're on a quest to be more healthy.

We don't have to deny the facts here. We don't have to deny the facts. But we don't have to signal that they're worth more because they weigh less.

Hannah: I love it.

Lisa: Yeah, I do too. That is thin privilege, right? That you're worth more because you weigh less. It is an extension of fat phobia.

Hannah: Yes.

Lisa: I'm certainly not claiming to be an expert on thin privilege or fat phobia, but I have some experience with it. I know that oftentimes the over celebration of getting thinner then sends a message to our children subtly or overtly that thin people are valued more. This could be a challenge in a family.

Let's say a family has four kids. Let's say one kid has a bigger body than the other three kids. We want to be very mindful that the bigger body doesn't get the message that the smaller siblings, not smaller in age but smaller bodied, are loved more or valued more than the big body child.

Hannah: Okay, perfect. I love that. That kind of leads really well into the next thing I was going to ask where there was a time in the podcast when both you and Corinne talked about the fact that children, even at very young ages, can begin to have fear because of what they perceive around them of oh that body's not safe because it's bigger. Maybe they see that their body's a little bigger than they already started to have fear. You know,

like I need to change this. Corinne says that they have easily misconceived ways of controlling that.

So I would love to talk about that for a little bit about what do you do if your child is already there? So what if you do if your child has already gotten messages from, like you said, subliminally or overtly that big bodies aren't okay, and they're scared about having a big body themselves? What do we do with that child?

Lisa: Yeah, I love this question. I love this question. I mean, I don't love it that exists in the world, but I love that you're asking it. Yeah, I think we do two things. I think that, number one, I think we acknowledge the fear. We talk about there are people in the world that have different opinions. We have Republicans and Democrats. We have religious people and non-religious people.

So the people that believe even if we love them, that big bodies are not okay, that is their opinion. We teach our children that is a thought not a fact. It is not a fact. We teach them that is not a fact. Some people subscribe to that philosophy. In our family, we don't.

I think we teach our children, the second thing we teach them, Hannah, is that we are all, and this is the truth, so much more than our bodies. We are made up of a lot of different things. We are made up of character and values and strengths and personalities and talents and body. The best way I think we illustrate that is you have fingernails, but I don't call your fingernails. So one might have fat on their body. But just because there's fat on your body doesn't mean that you have to be called a fat person or identify that way.

I think the real message is you are so much more than how you present physically. You are so much more than when you step on a scale. I think our greatest examples of this are people like Lizzo.

Hannah: Hunter McGrady.

Lisa: Hunter McGrady. Ashley Graham. There are people out there that show us that they believe, to the core of who they are, there's so much more than their body than the number on the scale. I have so much more to give the world.

So I think as a family, you focus on that. That's a part of body neutrality. I am more than my fingernails. I'm not identified by just my fingernails, or the fact that I have hair or don't have hair. We're so much more than our bodies.

Let me say this. You can have that goal and still want your child to be a healthy human being. So if you feel like your child has bad eating habits, eats too much sugar, eats past full, eats when they're stressed, doesn't eat enough vegetables. You can say to your child you're so much more than your body, than what the number on the scale says, and, at the same time, still have this goal of a parent of wanting to teach your child how to be more healthy. Those are not in opposition of each other. It's an and, not an or.

Hannah: Yes because that's a part of them. Just like they need to go to school and learn. Just like you want to take care of your hair. It's that you want to take care of the parts that make up who you are, but it doesn't mean that just because one part isn't at the level you want it to be that there's something wrong with you as a person or you're worth any less.

Lisa: Exactly. If you see your child doesn't have healthy habits, whether they're on the low end of the scale or the high end of the weight scale, what

you really want to do is not parent from fear. I can't say this enough, and you want to check in with yourself. You don't want to parent from fear. I think what happens a lot of times is this is an area where we bring our own wounds to the table.

The wound might be I had a large body as a child, and I know what happened to me. So I fear my child is going to have my experience. So I am going to prevent them from having the experience by helicoptering in this area. Or I never had this problem. I don't want my kid to have this problem. So I'm going to helicopter in this area, which is parenting from a place of fear.

Hannah: Right. You talk about, you mentioned this in a podcast recently how you encourage your clients to borrow your hope for them, which I just think is so beautiful. So it sounds like when we as the parents are feeling fear, we can check in with ourselves and borrow the hope that our children are going to get healthy or be healthy adults.

Lisa: It's going to work out. That's the phrase I would say. Yes. I think if you as the parent have a choice, an awareness, am I going to parent from fear or hope? Listen people, always pick hope. I mean, that could be its own podcast.

But I was parented, I had a large body as a child. I was parented from fear. My son had a large body, and I parented from an inner knowing, beyond hope, an inner knowing that it would all work out. He is in a much better place at 19 years old on his body image than I ever was. It took me 30 years to unravel the damage done from those people that parented from fear.

Because as a kid, I took the fear in the parenting style as unacceptance, lack of acceptance, rejection. There was something wrong with me. It was

unsafe to be in my body. I had so much to unwind, it wasn't even about the body.

I could parade thousands if not millions of similar stories of people that are parented from that fear, from the fat phobia, and the societal diet culture and being put on a diet, being weighed regularly, being told that it's unsafe to be in the body. People in your inner circle making comments about the body at will in front of you, to you, while you're eating. It imprints on the brain.

Then you have to go in and remove that imprinting and recreate it. Peggy O'Mara says our outer voice becomes our child's inner voice, and there is nowhere this is more true than how we language bodies to our children.

Hannah: Yes, so true. So true.

Lisa: I want to say this, Hannah. So often it's not that we're sitting our kids down and saying Hannah, now listen to me. It's the judgments and comments we're making about our body, their body, other people's bodies in everyday conversation. Another way is what Corinne said. It's like if a kid knows that their mother refuses to be in pictures, that's another subtle message we get. Or you go on vacation, and your family has to beg you to be in one picture in the course of a seven day vacation. It's this begging and controlling. Kids take messages from that.

Hannah: Right. I have another question that leads perfectly into that, which is because it is so rampant everywhere. What do we do as the parents when we are eating a meal with our kids, and we're with close friends or family. They start saying things about themselves, about other people at the tables, or even about our own kids got our fat phobic or are unhealthy statements about body image? What is our job in that moment as the parent?

Lisa: Well, that's a good question. I think it's honestly to shut the conversation down in a neutral way. It's either, depending on your style and who it is at the table and how much of a recovering people pleaser you are, active people pleaser. It's things like redirecting the conversation away. Or maybe a more direct way is to say we don't talk about bodies. We're a body neutral family. We don't have conversations about bodies.

Another thing you could say is I don't talk about my children in front of them in a negative way. I really think that if we want to change the dialogue, we have to stand up for our children. We have to have the courage to do it. Step one is we have to resist the urge to join in the conversation and defend our children. It's not defending. We're not having a debate. So I think number one is to resist the urge. Number two is to not engage in the power struggle or debate. Number three is to just politely and lovingly shut the conversation down.

Hannah: Okay. Yeah, that's good. I love that. Thank you. There's something else I want to talk about that was so fascinating to me, and I never thought of it this way. So I would really love to hear your comments. When you mentioned in last week's podcast how it's confusing for kids when on the one hand they hear we need to eat healthy as a family. We're going to eat more chicken and vegetables. Then they're like let's go to McDonald's and have a shake and a Happy Meal.

So I kind of want to find the middle ground here because I am a parent who loves treats, and I am on my own weight journey, but I do like to indulge in food that has more fat or more carbs sometimes. I like to enjoy pasta and pizzas and so on. So my question is how can we have occasional meals of you know fattier foods without the shame, guilt, or confusion? How can we enjoy a meal like that without sending a mixed message to our child?

Lisa: Yeah, good question. It happens a lot. It's like you need to eat healthy. You need to be on a diet. Oh, you got all A's. Let's go get a blizzard. Okay, so it's a little bit of a complex answer, but let's break it down.

First of all, I think the ultimate way of being in the world is, and I learned this from Corinne so I'm going to give her full credit for this, is no food is off limits. I think part of diet culture is this idea that there are good foods and bad foods. When we're a good girl, it's because we're eating good foods. Then what happens is, something happens, either good or bad. I've got all A's, let's go get a blizzard. Or my friend and I are in a fight, let's go get a blizzard.

Okay, so the first thing we want to do is neutralized foods. Again, we're back to this whole idea of neutralizing, right. We want to neutralize all foods. There's not good and bad foods. I'll confess. It took me a while. I was really entrenched in diet culture, really. It took me a really long time to get with this program.

But now, no food is off limits. What I think we want to do with our kids is really focus on eating when you're hungry, and stopping when you're full of any food. You could overeat chicken and broccoli. On the flip side, we've seen people lose weight by eating McDonald's every day, or Chick-fi- A or Subway.

So it's really instead of depending on a diet or a parent to tell you what to eat and what not to eat, what we ultimately want to help our children do is turn on the internal compass. Which is you don't tell me when I'm hungry, and you don't tell me when I'm full. You don't tell me when I've had enough.

When I ask for a second serving of mashed potatoes, I don't get pushback from it because you think mashed potatoes are bad food. When I ask for a second serving of mashed potatoes, you say to me let's check in with our

body. I know mashed potatoes taste amazing, but are you really hungry? Because if you're not now, we could put them aside. The next time you're hungry, you could have them.

That is teaching me to eat when I'm hungry and stop when I'm full even if it's the world's most amazing food. I love bagels. They honestly have to be my favorite food in the whole world. I now can eat half a bagel and say okay, I'm full, and I can wrap the other half up and have it later. When I was steeped in diet culture, I would have eaten the entire bagel because this is my window to eat a bad food. I've got to hurry up and get it in. So there was a lot of overeating of favorite foods.

So let me answer your question. What I would recommend is that we enjoy fat foods or pizza or Chick-fil-A or burgers or burritos simply we go out and have them because we want to, not because they're attached to some accomplishment. Food is not a reward. We're not dogs, as Corinne would say. We don't need treats because we sat or laid down or rolled over.

We can go get a blizzard because we've planned for it. We feel like it, and we want to enjoy it. It makes a good memory with our family. I feel like I'm going to pick the kids up after school today, and we're going to go get a blizzard at Dairy Queen. We get the blizzard, and we eat it because we're hungry. We stop when we're full. Then the rest of the time we try to eat healthy. But the real message is to teach our kids an internal compass of eat when you're hungry and stop when you're full.

Hannah: Okay. I love that.

Lisa: How does that feel? Tell me what you think about that?

Hannah: That feels amazing. I mean, I wonder how many people have had that same experience. Just when you're talking I'm just flooded with

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memories of like oh, your report card was so great. We're going to go get pizza together. Or I came home, and I was devastated one time in seventh grade. Like my best friend went to the movies with someone else. My mom's like oh, honey, let's make a chocolate pie. Like it's funny because I never would have connected those dots before. I just thought that's normal. That's what you do. When you're sad, you eat food. So re-learning.

Lisa: Well, let's talk about that for a minute. Because let's use the example of my friend went to the movies with someone else and didn't invite me. So you go home, you tell your parent that. Your parent says let's make a chocolate pie.

The message you're getting. First of all, it's not safe to feel negative feelings. We're not going to spend any time naming them. We're not going to sit with them. Instead, we're going to divert or push down our feelings, numb out with sweets. So then what happens at seven, eight, nine, ten, 11, 15, 18, 25 is when we feel uncomfortable, when we feel negative emotions, the solution is to numb out with sugar. Then that becomes the habit brains go to anytime negative feelings come up.

So when you come home from school and say Susie went to the movies with Jennifer and didn't even ask me, a much better strategy would be for the parent to say wow, what's that like for you? What are you feeling? Well, I'm feeling left out. I'm feeling fear of missing out. I'm feeling jealousy. I'm confused. I'm feeling sad. I wanted to be asked.

So then we learn how to sit with our feelings and the uncomfortableness of it. The parent provides a safe place to sit with those feelings, empathy, understanding, compassionate listening. Now, if two hours later, the mom walks into the living room and says Hannah, what do you say we make a chocolate pie tonight? That is a much better way to go because we're not connecting it to sugar solves my emotional discomfort. But later, we're just

doing an activity together where we spend time in the kitchen connecting and making the chocolate pie.

Hannah: Yes, I love that. That feels so much better.

Lisa: Doesn't it? It's so much better. You're not getting the message that chocolate pies and sugar are the solution to numb out. Then you numb out with the sugar. Then the next day your parent is saying your body's too large. You need to eat healthy. It's very confusing. I mean. It's confusing to adults. Imagine how confusing it is to a human with an underdeveloped brain.

Hannah: Yes.

Lisa: Right? So then I get in the habit of numbing out my big emotions, my discomfort with sugar, and my body gets large. Then you're mad at me that I have a large body. But who taught me the tool of numbing out with sugar? You did.

Hannah: So true. That is so true.

Lisa: So if you're going to teach your kids to numb out with food, don't get mad at them when they use the tool. If you're numbing out with food because remember, kids don't do what we say. They do what we do. So also if you're numbing out with food, then they think oh, in this family, this is how we solve the problem. We numb out with food. I know I had chicken and broccoli planned for dinner, but I had a crappy day at work. Scrap that, and let's go get pizzas.

Or you got all A's on your report card. Let's celebrate with pizza. Now, you can still go for pizza if you get all A's, but let's talk about it as we're going to

go and be in fellowship and community and make a memory of the evening even while you're eating pizza. Let's not have pizza be the treat for A's.

Let's have the fact that we're going to go out and celebrate together your success and your effort, growth mindset versus fixed. Let's go out and celebrate your effort, not the result. Then the pizza just happens to be the thing that's put on the table. We're not focusing on the pizza. Because making pizza have good or bad food.

Hannah: Yes. Oh my gosh, I can see it so clearly now.

Lisa: Good. Yeah, I think everybody else is benefiting from this too. It's the practical side of the conversation. It's okay, how do we do this? How do I do this day to day? It's really about neutralizing food. Okay, it's really about neutralizing food. There are no good or bad foods. We don't use food to numb out or celebrate.

Even if your family likes to get together and have big potlucks. We're focusing on making the memories and the fellowship and the being together. The food is just kind of the centerpiece around it. So we're neutralizing foods. We're neutralizing bodies. We're being aware of the judgments that we externalize about bodies.

Hannah: Yes, yes. I think the very last component of that, for me, is also shutting down the conversation in a way that you said is gentle and helpful instead of like if they say something like oh I've noticed that I'm a little bit larger, or they say something that's they're totally just saying it neutrally. You're not saying oh, don't say that, or you're not making it a scary weird topic.

Like recently my daughter actually I'd say I don't like fat people. Inwardly I started having all these thoughts. But after I took a deep breath and

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paused, I said why do you think that is, or what do you mean? Or can you explain that? We had an honest conversation that was much more fruitful because I didn't jump down her throat because she just said a random thought.

Lisa: Yes. Yes, that's beautiful. Along with that, like we talked about, it's helping ourselves and our children realize we're more than the body composition. Our body is made up of muscle and fat and organs. That's the physical presentation of it and tissue. We're more than that, all of us. Really I think having that be the theme.

Corinne and I talked about all of us have things we don't like about our body, whether it's your hair, or your eyebrows, or your legs, or your stomach, or the amount of fat on your body. I think it's valuable to acknowledge that. We don't want to be that, but don't say that. Or when you get skinny, you'll lose the weight. You'll get it off. Okay, again, that's signaling that you'll reach the goal of being thin. When that happens, your life will be perfect.

Hannah: You're not okay yet.

Lisa: Yeah. Or better. So it's like okay, I see that you don't like. Yeah, I hear you. We can work on eating healthier, if you'd like, and you're so much more than what the scale says. You're your intelligence, you're your skills, you're your kindness.

So the other thing I want to mention because someone asked a question about this yesterday in The Hive. We also want to be mindful Hannah of ourselves and other people, especially our family of origin and the people in our inner circle, not always complimenting only our physical appearance. I think girls more than boys, but both genders, all genders. Sometimes the

focus is comments like oh, you look so pretty, or your hair looks cute, or you look pretty in that dress.

If we're not balancing that out with other compliments about intelligence and skills then I, as the child because I have an underdeveloped brain, I start to think that attention is going to come through my physicality. So then I want to focus on that. I want to wear pretty dresses. I want to get attention from people on my physical appearance.

So the other thing I would encourage parents to do is an inventory, again that word, an inventory of am I complimenting the whole being? If I want to tell my daughter she looks pretty in a dress, I want to make sure I'm also telling her that I like when she shares, or I like how she looks after her little brother.

I love today when you went over and helped your brother up when he fell down. I love your intelligence. I love your questions. I love your eyes. Let's make sure we're complementing the whole human so that I don't unconsciously internalize I get the majority of the attention and feel good chemical hits in my brain from my physicality.

Hannah: Right. I love that. That's a game changer right there.

Lisa: I think so. I made sure when Malcolm was growing up, that we, and even now, that we are complimenting his whole being. Not just his performance on the basketball court or his physicality, but he's a very inquisitive person. He's a very good communicator. I tell him all the time. You're a very good listener. You're a very good communicator. You put effort in.

I really focus, and I've done this really since the beginning because of my own experience. I always made sure, to this day, that I really do think am I

complimenting the whole person? I love your soul. I compliment his spirituality. I compliment his kindness. I compliment his boundaries. When he pushes back and says no to me, I complement that because I want him to be his own person.

So he showed a talent early on in athleticism, and I made sure that we didn't just focus on that as his whole identity. This is the thing. We could do a whole other podcast on this, but we need to make sure that our children are like 3D. There is an entire identity, maybe in areas. Characteristics, spirituality, let's call it kindness, a friendship, contribution to the world, talents.

If we focus on one area, whether it's body or performance. Maybe you have a kid that's really smart, gets great grades, and you focus on that all the time, or you have an athlete. You don't want their identity to only be in one area. Because if that identity changes, if I no longer want to be an athlete, or I'm not the best anymore, or I see this all the time in sports, or I had a small body, and it gets bigger, or the body changes, or I don't like the body. You want your kids to have an identity like in 360 degrees. Like a 3D identity, not just a one department.

Hannah: Yes, absolutely. So good.

Lisa: Well, anything else Hannah, or did we cover it?

Hannah: No, we covered it and then some, and I cannot thank you enough for this invaluable conversation.

Lisa: Awesome. Well, thank you for coming and asking the questions and sharing. I know that there are tons of families thanking you right now. I think that last episode and this are a good one two punch and a great sort of

series, if you will, on peaceful parenting with the body, with learning how to neutralize the body. I think it's a conversation.

I mean, really I'd love to start a whole separate podcast and talk about this every week. Because, as you can tell, I'm incredibly passionate about it from my own experience and from having worked with thousands of families around the world. I know that well intentioned parents sometimes put their children on a path that is unproductive and painful.

So it's my pleasure to bring awareness to this important topic. So again, Hannah, thank you for being here. Okay, everybody, that's a wrap. More to come, I promise, down the road because obviously I'm very passionate about this topic. 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.

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