

Ep #144: 2 for 1 Parenting Lessons: Micro-Changes & Undivided Attention



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. Boy, do I have something special for you today. Today, I call it BOGO. Buy one, get one, or two for one special. Two lessons, not one, but two rolled into one episode. Who doesn't love a two for one deal? Right? Oh, my goodness, I'm the queen of two for ones.

I often have parents come to me for coaching with one situation or problem in mind. We end up uncovering deeper roots that reveal a much broader challenge or need or understanding than what they anticipated. Can you imagine this? Then they ultimately leave our conversation with new thoughts and tools not only to address the original concern but to address the more valuable lesson that we're able to uncover through the coaching. This is the two for one. See?

This is also really honestly the value of coaching when you have someone in your life regularly who is neutral and can show up and show you your blind spots. This happens more often than I can tell you. Really it's one of the things that I absolutely love about coaching, both being a coach and getting coached.

So I want to give you an example today of what this might look like. Sound good? Okay. So this is an example from a recent call I had with a mom who's in The Hive who was struggling with her kids needing attention and help with homework after school while she still had a couple of hours of her own work that needed to be done that required her attention.

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She got on The Hive call and asked for coaching on the challenge at hand. Lisa, I need some help figuring all this out, the conflicting needs of my kids and my job at the same time. I often find myself, she said, incredibly dysregulated. My kids are storming because I'm not helping them. I'm storming right alongside them. So I want to take you on this journey of a typical coaching goal that maybe you can relate to and then we'll see what else ended up being underneath it.

So from the kids perspective, in this situation, after school on a typical day, they were being challenged to cope with change, the transition from school to after school to coming home and jumping in to do their homework. You know, change is hard in general. This is a fact. Humans, all humans, struggle with change. We, as human beings, are pulled towards familiarity. So it's just part of the human experience.

Change can just naturally dysregulate our central nervous system. Big changes like death, divorce, new jobs, moving to another state, adding to your family, those are the big changes as adults that dysregulated us. But here's the thing. Little changes to little humans are really, really, really hard for them on a day in and day out basis. I call these micro changes.

They happen for our little kids day to day hour to hour. There's change in routine from school to after school, from the morning being at home to getting in the car and going to school. There's change of environment. There's change of focus. There's change of day. For some littles, little kids, little meaning anybody 18 and under, these micro changes can be tough on kids, particularly strong willed and sensitive kids.

Maybe some of you are having a lightbulb moment right now as I'm talking about this like whoa, wait a minute, Lisa. But it's true. Sometimes. You know what happens is we, as adults, we're like these micro changes are

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nothing. The things that dysregulate me are new job, new boss, moved to a new city. But our kids, some not all, but some struggle hour to hour, day to day in these micro changes. It's 100% true.

To compound the situation and make it worse, we as parents have very high expectations of working our kids towards independence. Right? Especially in things we don't like to do like homework. Sometimes we over index. We push them towards something they're just not ready or developmentally capable of. Then as the parent, because we're ready, we're ready, we're ready. Like I'm ready for you to independently do your homework. They're not there yet. Frustration sets in.

Because what is frustration? Frustration is the gap up between expectation and reality, right? We talk about that all the time here. So it is totally understandable when you are in a situation like having an extra hour of work that you have to do to keep your job and feed your family, you have to show up during this hour, right?

I get my kids home at four o'clock. I need to be on the computer from four to five. I've got a neat little plan in my mind on how this is going to go down. I'm going to pick the kids up, I'm going to bring them home, I'm going to get them all set up at the kitchen counter with their computer and their homework, and they're going to be independent and good to go while I get my last hour of work done. This is your expectation.

Everybody's going to be happy. Everybody's going to get their work done. Me my work, work, you your homework. Then we'll all be like Little House in the Prairie sitting around at the table with our bonnets on cooperating and getting along with no pushback whatsoever. You with me, right?

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The problem here in this scenario is that your kids are experiencing a lot of micro changes. They're demonstrating to you that they are not capable of what you're asking of them. It's not that they don't want to. It's not that they're being stubborn and giving you a hard time or they hate homework. It's that you have an expectation, and they are not capable of meeting it. You want it to be, and I get it. I get it. You want your kids to be independent. You want them to sit at the kitchen counter and do their homework so that you can get your work done. Then we can enjoy the rest of the evening.

Maybe 50% of the time, they are able to meet your expectations. But the other 50% of the time, they're not going to be able to meet the expectation. That gap between expectation and reality is going to cause frustration. If you're not mindful of what's going on while they're having a big messy storm because they can't meet your expectation, you're having a big messy storm because you're pushing them with good intentions faster than they're developmentally capable of, and they're failing. Can you just see it? Can you just see it happen?

They're failing not because it's character flaw, or they're being difficult. They're just not capable five days a week, day in and day out of what you're asking them to do. They just can't get their homework done right at four o'clock on demand at the kitchen table without help from you.

So back to this particular mom. This particular mom, along with school, implemented a new reading tool that was designed to help her dyslexic daughter read on her own. The mom expected this new tool to work right away first try and relieve the mom of her homework duties so that she could take care of other things, including work, while her daughter used the tool completely on her own.

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Now the first couple of days, the new tool was F-U-N for her daughter. So she enjoyed it. It was like a new board game or a new doll. But then the fun kind of subsided. The daughter realized that it was still work. Using the new tool feels more like a needle scratching across a record rather than F-U-N.

Here's the other thing the mom realized. Tool or no tool, at that time of the day, four o'clock, the daughter's focus is shot. Oftentimes when ADHD children come home from school, from holding it together all day, and now they have homework to do, their brain is just not capable at five or seven or nine of immediately transitioning into the homework and quite getting it done. They're just not capable of it.

Now every family has to decide for themselves how they feel about homework. I believe in the value of homework and repeating things over and over and over again to learn competency. But I still wonder with my own son, Malcolm, how much damage was done by forcing the square peg into a round hole every day at four o'clock when his medication had worn off. He was done with learning. He just needed to go outside and play and get some fresh air and get the wiggles out. So I often wonder if I pushed too hard after school for homework. Maybe, maybe not. Hard to say.

But through our coaching call with this mom, she recognized that the issue in this case was not the homework or the dyslexia or the new reading tool or her daughter's needs. No, none of that. The problem, the issue, was the mom's thoughts about the hour of work she still needed to get done.

If you can relate to this situation, I encourage you to ask yourself if you're not on the clock needing to get work done by a certain time in order to keep your paying job, do you have options of finishing out that last hour work at another time in the day that would work better in regards to meeting the

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needs of your family? Could the work be paused in order to give your daughter her full attention for a period of time before engaging in the work?

This mom really pondered this and realized that bringing a five and seven year old home straight from school, rushing into the house, and expecting to get an hour of work done at four o'clock is probably a losing proposition five days a week. When we talked about this, the mom was like oh wow. Duh. Yeah. Now in this scenario, the kids go to after school twice a week and come home three days a week.

When I asked the mom if the kids can go to after school five days a week, she said maybe. Then she admitted her painful thought, the one that she's getting wrapped around, is that if she's home, her kids should be home. If she's at home, her kids should not be in aftercare. Because good moms don't put their kids in aftercare when they're at home. That's her opinion, not mine, by the way.

Many, many, many of you who work from home have the same painful thought. The thing is, you're not at home. You're at work, which happens to be at home. Take that in for a moment. You're working on the clock. You're not at home laying around doing absolutely nothing.

I mean, let's look at this for a minute. You could come home ten days in a row, give your kids homemade cookies, and encourage them to do their homework on their own, and they would do it beautifully. But the one day you need them to be independent and do something on their own so that you're freed up to do something that requires your full focus, it's going to be the one day they're not going to want to work on their own independently, right. I mean, come on. This is Murphy's Law. This is how it goes.

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If you count on things to work smoothly at a time when you really need them to, you are often just setting yourself up for frustration, dysregulation, and storming, likely for you and your kids. This is like moms and dads of young kids who are home all day giving the kids all their attention, right? Playing with them, connecting with them, hanging out, and then your phone rings. The parent thinks oh, I filled my kid's bucket of attention all day. I can take a few minutes to talk to my best friend on the phone.

We all know how that goes. Right? It's not going to happen. There's something about it. Your kid's like energy meter goes oh, you have attention to give somebody else? I want it. I want it. I'll take it. If you won't give it to me calmly, I'll climb all over you while you're talking on the phone and try to demand it from you. Right? This is totally how it goes.

No matter how hard you try to explain to your kids that they've got all your attention all day. Now you just need one hour to get your work done while they work independently. Then they can have your attention back when the hour is over. It's just not going to happen day in and day out predictably. Can you see this? Me too.

So this led our coaching call conversation to the more valuable lesson. Here's part two of your two for one special today. One of the best gifts we can give other human beings is our undivided attention. I heard a conversation on a podcast regarding this and the use of cell phones.

I started thinking about how in 2023 as parents, grandparents, caregivers, we are so busy and overtasked that we are often only giving our kids, at best, half of our attention. Yeah? Whether it's because you have an hour's worth of work or you're making dinner or you're trying to multitask while engaging in a conversation with your kids.

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Or you're calling, texting, and emailing while simply sharing space with your kids or sitting at the dinner table. You might be telling yourself I'm spending time and space with my kids. So that should be enough to help them feel connected, but it's 100% not true.

There are four problems at this practice of dividing our attention when we think we are connecting with our kids. Number one, you're not really connecting with your kids when you're doing something else and phoning it in. Human beings feel seen, heard, and valued when someone else gives us their full attention.

Number two, your kids end up feeling like they really don't matter and that they're not a top priority because you can't stop what you're doing and focus on them. Number three, you're modeling divided attention for your kids. You're modeling that it's okay to be uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh, okie dokie you while they're scrolling Instagram. We don't want that. We don't want that for your kids. We don't want that for your relationship with your kids.

Number four, when you're doing everything at once, you're doing most of the poorly. We can all benefit from taking inventory of the attention we're giving our kids. In this case, what really, really, really counts is quality over quantity.

Recently, my husband took a business trip out of the country, and we live in Arizona. He went to the other side of the world. He would call me every day at 5:00 Arizona time, which was 9 a.m. the next morning where he was.

One of the first nights he called, I was eating dinner. I was crunching on a salad into my air pods when he called, and he was checking out of a hotel and walking to work. He was irritated with me because I was crunching the

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salad in his ear. I was irritated with him because when he asked me how my day was and how the three day challenge was going, and I started to get into the details with my answer I could hear him talking to the hotel attendant, while he was checking out. I finally asked him are you walking now? He said yes.

I said listen, we're both guilty here. If you're going to call and talk to me, you can't be doing nine other things at once. If you're going to call and talk to me, I can't be eating and crunching in your ear. We both have to show up in this relationship 100% with our attention for at least ten minutes a day while you're gone. If you're only going to get ten minutes from me, I want them to be the best ten minutes I can give you have your entire day. I would love for you to commit the same thing to me. He agreed.

The next nine days, we really, really, really made an effort to show up and be all in for this ten minutes we were on the phone. No scrolling Facebook, no talking to people at the hotel, no walking and being distracted, and no crunching on a Trader Joe's apple orchard salad. I could really feel the difference in the connection between the two of us.

We live in a society that values busy, right? Busy people look important. The busy guy who shows up at Starbucks, running around with his hair on fire in a suit with four cell phones looks more successful than the laid back guy with shorts on white tennis shoes and white socks sitting down giving someone his undivided attention. We, as a society, value busy, but who would you rather sit with? I'd much rather spend ten minutes with the guy that's gonna give me his undivided attention. Your kids are no different.

So my challenge to you is that you take an inventory, an honest look at yourself and ask am I giving my kids at least ten minutes of my undivided, full focused attention every day? If not, why not? If not, can I going

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forward? Can I make an effort to spend quality time that's defined as an undivided, full-focused attention with my kid at least once a day?

I want that for you. I want that for your kids. I want that for your relationship. Because if you're phoning it in all the time with your kids, there's less connection, and you're mirroring that for them. You're gonna get that back later in life. Because you're showing them this is how we show up in relationships.

It reminds me that song Cats in the Cradle, you know where the guy sings when you coming home dad? I don't know when, but we'll get together then. You know we'll have a good time then but then never happens. The son grows up. When the dad wants to come visit, he gets the same response because that's what he modeled.

If you raise your kids to accept only pieces of you when they're wanting and needing all of you, even for just ten minutes a day, your undivided full-focused attention then that's what they will return to you down the road. They will expect you to accept the minimal bits and pieces from them and to feel seen, heard, and valued. You know what? You won't. You won't feel seen, heard, and valued. You won't feel connected to them. It will feel crappy just like the song Cats in the Cradle.

Multitasking is a habit and so easy to do without even realizing it. Because again, as a society, we value busy. So I want to throw this challenge out again, take inventory, reflect, look at what you're doing. Do you have ten minutes a day to spend with your kids? Ten minutes of undivided, focused attention. Ten minutes a day where you put everything else down and away, and you just focus on your kids.

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As you know, Malcolm is way at college now five weeks in. I'm going to visit him this weekend. I absolutely cannot wait to see him. So excited y'all. So excited. He's away. When he calls, I can see he makes an effort to be alone, fully focused, not doing six other things. We talk for about ten to 15 minutes. We have a really, really, really good conversation. I have to tell you, it's ten minutes of real connection. I really believe that's because we've invested in this. We've modeled this over the years as a family.

I really have made an effort all the years I've been raising him to not have cell phones at the dinner table, to give each other our full, undivided focused attention for at least ten minutes a day, every day. I can say that I've shown up, and I've done this. I can feel the difference it makes. We both feel connected to each other. I want this for you.

Ten minutes of full focus conversation between Malcolm and I feels like a half a day's worth of undivided attention. What I can tell you is that we both feel like it fills us up and helps us feel really connected to each other even though we're miles apart. I happen to believe it's one of the greatest gifts we can give any human being. I really try to do this in all of my relationships, but especially with my kid.

So there you have it. That's your two for one special today. I hope you benefit from both lessons that I've shared in this episode. What's really happening in the underdeveloped brain of your kid who requires help with the transition, who requires understanding and not over indexing and not expecting more of them than they're capable of.

These micro transitions are tough on some kids, and they aren't able to do them day in and day out on command. Realizing this can be really helpful in helping you not storm alongside your kids and decrease the frustration, which is the gap between expectation and reality.

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The second lesson is taking inventory on the undivided, full-focused attention you're giving your kids. Commit to at least ten minutes a day for each of your kids giving them your full attention. Ten minutes every day, every kid. We should call it the 10/7, right?

So give that a try and let me know how it feels. Jump over to my Instagram page, The Peaceful Parent and leave me a DM. Let me know the difference you feel. Let me know the difference you feel with that ten minutes of undivided full-focused attention. It's a game changer, I promise. Give it a shot. What do you have to lose? 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.