

Ep #151: Why Adversity is Required for Resiliency



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. Today, I am recording this podcast episode from my hotel room after spending the weekend visiting my son his freshman year in college, and I was able to attend his first basketball game of the season. I can tell you, it's funny how life is sometimes because I wrote this podcast episode, or at least kind of finished up the script on the airplane out to see Malcolm. It turned out that like most of the work I do when I'm doing it for you, I'm also doing it for myself.

Today I want to talk about resiliency. It turned out that Malcolm and I had an incredibly robust and productive conversation about resiliency while I was with him over the weekend. So I just love how as we're living our life, we're up leveling our parenting. As we're parenting, we're teaching ourselves lessons and up leveling our own lives and increasing our own emotional maturity. So let's dig in to today's episode about resiliency.

I'm going to start out by asking you some really important questions about your parenting. The first one is do you worry? Do you worry as a parent? Do you worry about your kids? Do you worry about things like I worry my kid doesn't have any friends or a best friend? I worry my kid will be rejected or bullied by his or her peers, and get depressed or maybe even suicidal?

I worry my kids won't be successful in life. I mean, come on, Lisa, he isn't even motivated to do his homework. I worry my kid won't be able to follow through on things. I mean two weeks after soccer practice, she wants to quit.

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What does all this have in common? Well, I think ultimately, we worry that our kids aren't going to be okay, successful, fit in, self-sufficient. To alleviate our fears, we often try to do everything right as a parent so everything can go right. This is really at the heart of what I want to talk about today. So I really want you to hear this. Many of us, many of us, I know I certainly can fall into this trap. To alleviate our fears as the parent, we often try to do everything right for and with and on the behalf of our children, so that everything will turn out right.

Today, I want to make an argument for why we don't want to continue to do this. That maybe there's a different way to alleviate our fears. So let's dig in. Sometimes the right things, as our brain wants to call them, are focused on getting external validation from others, right? Getting the good grades, being kind to everyone, dressing well, being athletic, being creative, being funny, being a good drawer.

We think that if we can make sure our kid does everything right, they won't experience pain or discomfort during their childhood. They won't have any negative experiences. Way, way, way deep in the back of our brain, we may even believe that if your child doesn't have any negative experiences, you will have done your job as parents.

Let me say that again, way, way, way back in our brain we believe that if our kids don't have any negative experiences, it's a report card for me as a parent. I will have done my job, especially if you had a lot of negative experiences growing up. It's because your parents weren't engaged, involved. They weren't worried about you doing the right thing.

Sometimes our brains think they're doing the right thing is to go in front of our kids and do what I call snowplow, which is where we go in front of them and we try to control their behavior, their attitude, their effort, their words, or their experience to achieve a desired outcome.

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Sometimes the right thing to do, according to our brains, is to try to socially engineer our kid's lives where we're orchestrating our child's environment for maximum popularity and success while minimizing disappointment. This shows up in academics, athletics, and other extracurricular activities and even our kid's social lives.

All the micromanaging that you're doing, all the hyper planning and the snowplowing our brains think allow a smooth path for our kids. We feel good sometimes about this because it pushes our fear and our anxiety down, and it gives us something to do. So we're working super hard to prevent something, a negative experience, a setback, a failure.

But I would argue that sometimes we're working so hard to prevent something that our kids might actually need, might be inevitable, and might happen anyway. Here's the thing. Preventing undesired circumstances from happening to our kids is not possible because life is full of hard things despite our best efforts. As my coach says, life is 50/50. 50% good and 50% challenging or bad. No one escapes it. It's part of the human experience.

Now hear this. Your kids, yes you, your children, no matter what you do in their lifetime are not going to escape tough times, challenges, setbacks, failures, loss friendships, breakups, not getting picked, a bad grade, a speeding ticket, a fender bender, being uncomfortable, losing, feeling left out, et cetera. Your kids during their lifetime are not going to be able to escape this. No one escapes the 50% bad. No one, not you, and your kids won't either. It's part of the human experience.

So today's episode is really, really, really about an invitation to recognize your efforts, yours as the parent, the grandparent, the caregiver, your efforts to snowplow. Today, I want to challenge you to consider showing up for your kids and with your kids and a new way, to move away from the snowplow. I want you to recognize your reasons for snow plowing. I know

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it's coming from a place of love, and that you want the best for your kids. I get that.

Many of us are even going a step beyond that and working hard to give our kids what we didn't have. I certainly fall into that category. I joined that club very early on when I decided to be a parent. But I also know if we're really honest, we often also snowplow because we fear our kids won't make it. They won't fit in. They won't be in the right social groups. They won't get opportunities. They'll make the same mistakes you made. They won't get all the advantages of others. They will fail and fall behind.

Hear this, the fear, anxiety, and scarcity motivates you to try to control the experience and control the effort so the outcome will be positive, desirable, as planned, or on point. I get it. I, myself, tried this for years in earnest. So I know this rhythm and routine.

The problem is, well, there are many problems. But one of them is when things don't turn out as you want them to as the parent, we get triggered. We get angry, sometimes at our kids, sometimes at ourselves, sometimes at the other parties involved like the coach or the teacher or the kid's friend who didn't invite them over. Or the co-parent who didn't, quote, do it like we told them to do it. We get triggered. When we get triggered, it increases our worry and our need for control, and the cycle starts all over again. Yeah.

For our kids, if we snowplow, our kids are robbed of the chance to learn the lesson they're meant to learn because we're going in front of them and controlling the experience. So then they have to learn it again next time at a bigger or deeper level. Yeah? Do you recognize this?

The opportunity to grow, learn, and plan better for next time from the experience is a lost opportunity because of our triggers, our emotions, and our storming as a parent. Whether we're storming internally in our brain with thoughts by beating ourselves up and flogging or externally by projecting all of that anger outward.

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So if you recognize this vicious cycle, I invite you to consider a new way of showing up that supports our child and ourselves in a more healthy and authentic way. It starts with the realization that we shouldn't always automatically try to prevent pain, discomfort, or hardship. Because overcoming hard things in life is what creates resilience.

Resiliency means being able to grow from adversity, but first you have to have a little bit of adversity in order to grow from it and create the resiliency. Resiliency is a critical tool in the emotional intelligence toolbox. It allows us to feel the entire feelings wheel, including the 50% that is uncomfortable and heart.

In the Webster's Dictionary, resiliency is defined as the ability to recover from difficult times number one. The second definition is the ability of a substance, including a human, to spring back into shape, have elasticity. I love the idea of thinking about resiliency as the ability to spring back into shape or elasticity. Think about your kid as they grow into an adult. As an adult, being able to handle anything that comes their way.

Close your eyes for a moment, if you aren't driving. Close them for just a moment with me, and really take a few seconds to visualize each of your kids having elasticity and resiliency, being able to handle any emotion that comes their way, and know that they can bounce back from any experience, situation, or relationship. I mean, imagine that.

I know I definitely want that for Malcolm. I have no doubt that you want that for each and every one of your kids. The ability to bounce back from any experience, situation, or relationship. Yeah? So good, isn't it? All skills require practice to become good at them. Resiliency is no different. If our kids don't even begin to develop the skill of resiliency until they're an adult and have flown the nest, well, that isn't ideal.

I'm sure you can see as you're listening to me right now the benefit of starting to build that skill set right now. Yes? Resiliency means being able to

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grow from adversity. But here's the rub, and many of you aren't going to like this. You have to experience adversity in order to develop resiliency. I know. I know it sucks, doesn't it? It does.

Because so many of us are working so hard for our kids not to experience any of that adversity. But let me say it again because your future adult version of your kid just called me and said hey, Lisa, make sure my parent really hears this.

You have to experience adversity in order to develop resiliency. There has to be a tension or stressor on the substance in the first place for it to be able to spring back or be able to flex its elasticity. We have to make space for our kids to experience it all. The conflict, the failures, the setbacks, the being unprepared, the hard conversations, the mistakes. This is all part of the maturation process.

Now, let me be clear. I am not saying we shouldn't lead, or that we shouldn't support, or we shouldn't correct or guide our children. Remember, we are the peaceful leaders of the household with the fully developed brains and the family values. We are there to set limits, to lead, to support, to guide, and to correct.

But if we're being honest with ourselves, most of us know when we're leading and guiding and when we're snowplowing and trying to control the situation to get a desired outcome. We can feel that difference. Yes? Are you willing to admit that? Because I know I am. After today's episode, I'm more keen than ever to try to bifurcate or sort out the difference between the two, when I'm leading and guiding and when I'm snowplowing and trying to control the situation to get a desired outcome.

The good news is that when you give your kids the tools to navigate negative emotions and negative circumstances when, not if, they happen, your kid's internal belief in themselves grows. Their internal compass gets turned on. Your kids learn to trust themselves.

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Your kids aren't afraid of failure. They aren't afraid to look at and talk about their mistakes. They know they will survive big emotions. Your kids learn to regulate themselves even during the most difficult times. Their emotional intelligence grows. All of this, my friend, builds resiliency. Yeah?

Okay, so here are my tips to getting started on helping your kids become more resilient and elastic so they can bounce back. Number one, begin to recognize when you are snowplowing versus when you are guiding and try to move more and more towards guiding rather than snowplowing. Number two, make a commitment that you're going to let them experience adversity. Be mindful of not always jumping in. Don't always rescue. Don't solve all their problems for them. Avoid pre-solving problems through snowplowing, hyper planning, and trying to control the outcome.

Number three, listen empathetically, which is to listen to ease the suffering, so they can work towards problem solving on their own as they age. Resist the urge to jump in and solve for them. At a minimum, discuss various solutions or choices with them, and let them participate in the decision and in the execution of that solution. So maybe they need to go talk to the coach. They need to talk to the teacher. They need to ask the friend why they didn't get invited to the birthday party instead of you calling the mom to find out why.

Number four, I think, is one of the most important steps in resiliency. It's don't be in a hurry to scoot the hard feelings out the door or scoot them away or try to push them down. Don't try to prevent her head off the hard feelings for your kids. This is definitely one I wish I would have known when Malcolm was really little.

Let your kids be with their hard feelings. The goal is to teach your kids that they can handle all the feelings on the feelings wheel, all have them, even the really hard ones. The goal isn't to never have them experience the feelings of frustration, disappointment, jealousy, being left out, being ignored.

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The goal isn't for them to never experience those. The goal is to teach your kids that they can handle all the feelings in the feelings wheel. I feel like if nothing else if we raised a generation of kids that confidently knew they could handle all the feelings, we'd have a completely different world that would be much more inclusive and peaceful.

Number five, one of the core basic human needs is acceptance. I talked about this a lot in previous podcast episodes. Part of resiliency is knowing that I, as your child, am worthy right now. I am worthy. I can grow and learn.

But your kids need to know that they are fully accepted as they are right now. Big feelings, mistakes, setbacks, failures, rejections, being picked on, being left out, being friendless, doesn't in any way decrease my worthiness or your love for me as your kid. One of the most important things we can do to cultivate resiliency in our children is show them that we have complete confidence in them right now as they are. Right now. That builds resiliency.

Most importantly, number six, to really build resiliency, you need to create an unwavering belief that your kid can handle hard things. Because here's the deal your kid will borrow whatever belief you have about them. That's just how the parent-child relationship goes. They're going to borrow whatever belief you have about them.

So if that's the case, let's create an unwavering belief that they can handle hard things. That they can handle adversity, that they can bounce back, that they're resilient. Because as you have an unwavering belief that they can do this, they will have an unwavering belief about themselves.

Finally, I want you to know that when we help our kids build resiliency, there are many positive outcomes. According to Psychology Today, people with resiliency are more apt to have a positive attitude, have a sense of optimism, have a better ability to regulate their emotions, and see failure as a form of helpful feedback. I don't know about you, but I want all of that for my kid. All of it.

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So I want to invite you to work towards leaving worry, fear, and scarcity behind on it invite you to see the other side. The grass is greener on the other side. When we leave behind worry and fear and give up on trying to control the outcome, when we're brave and let go and guide instead of snowplow, resiliency builds. Yeah? Oh, so good.

As I said at the beginning, this couldn't have come at a better time for me personally. Malcolm and I were able to have a really great conversation this weekend. I mean, we had a lot of great conversations but one in particular. I was able to share that resiliency is the ability to be elastic, to bounce back in the face or with big negative emotions without blowing up your whole world around you.

That we all face adversity. That he's not alone. That he's not unique. That every kid in college is facing adversity in some form or another. Part of the experience of transitioning from a child into an adult is learning to face adversity with resiliency, the ability to bounce back without blowing your world up.

It was such a beautiful, wonderful, amazing conversation, and it was so great to sit with him and communicate that I have an unwavering belief in him that he can handle hard things. Just to see him, his eyes light up and see him take that on. I can just see his brain be like yeah, yeah, I can do that. I can work through this. I can feel these big emotions. I can regulate. Yeah, mom. Yeah. It was so great. I wouldn't change it for the world.

So, again, I want to invite you to really think hard about this. Observe yourself while you're parenting. Invite yourself to give up control and snowplowing. Invite yourself to create an unwavering belief that your kids can handle hard things. Be brave and let go. I want that for you, and I want that for your kids.

Okay, I promise to keep sharing about this important topic and bring you more episodes about adversity and resiliency. I'm going to be digging

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deeper and deeper into this important topic and sharing as much as I can with you all. So be brave and let go. 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 mini-course. 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.