

Ep #161: Awareness: The First Step Toward Self-Regulation as a Parent



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 where we're diving deep into the art of self-regulation in 2024. As a parent coach for the last 15 years, I've seen firsthand the power of modeling self-regulation for our kids. So this year, I'm committed to helping you raise your self-regulation so that you, in turn, can model it for your children. It really is the greatest gift we can give our kids.

I'm here to support you in learning the tools and techniques that make self-regulation a priority in your parenting journey. Today, we're going to take a look at awareness as the beginning of self-regulation. Sounds good?

All right. Now, maybe you're thinking, what exactly does awareness mean in the context of parenting, Lisa? Well, I'm so glad you asked. Awareness is like the compass that guides us towards self-regulation. It's our ability to perceive, feel, and be conscious of the events, thoughts, and emotions that shape our reactions.

Let me say that again because I really want you to get this. It's our ability to perceive, feel, and be conscious of the events, thoughts, and emotions that shape our reactions. Think of it as the first step on the path to understanding and managing our response to our children's behavior or storms.

So why is this awareness so crucial? Well, because it's the key to breaking the cycle of reactive parenting and moving towards a more thoughtful, intentional approach, which I call responding rather than reacting. When we're aware of our triggers, we can pause, reflect, and choose how to

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respond, how we want to respond in a way that aligns with our values and goals as a parent.

Do you see this? When we're aware of our triggers, when we have an awareness, we can move from stimulus reaction to stimulus, pause, respond. I want this for you, and this is my goal in today's episode.

Now, you might be asking yourself how do I cultivate an awareness in the heat of the moment, Lisa? I mean, my lid is so blown. I'm so dysregulated. How do I do that? Well, it starts with asking ourselves honest questions and digging deep into the thoughts and feelings behind our reactions. We've got to dig into the thoughts and feelings behind the reaction.

Here's the thing. Our reactions are rarely about our child's action, behavior, or storming. More often than not, your reaction is a reflection of your own thoughts and beliefs, thoughts and beliefs about you, your kid, your parenting, the situation, what should be happening, what shouldn't be happening. More often than not, your reaction is tied to your own thoughts and beliefs and rarely about your children's actual action, behavior, or storm.

By becoming aware of these thoughts, we can start to dismantle the patterns that keep us stuck in reactive mode. The goal is to move you from stimulus, reaction to stimulus, pause, respond. That's the goal. That's the model of self-regulation that your kids can come along and learn and borrow and then take on themselves. Do you see this?

Okay, so the next time you find yourself on the verge of reacting, you feel it brewing. It's like water boiling in a kettle. You feel it starting to bubble up. What I want you to do, you yes you. I'm talking to you. I want you to take a moment to pause and ask yourself what am I thinking right now? What is going on with me? What beliefs and thoughts and assumptions and patterns are driving my reaction?

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By shining a light on these thoughts, you can begin to claim control over your reactions and move towards a more peaceful, connected relationship with your kids. It begins the process of moving from reacting to pausing and responding. I promise. I mean, it is literally this simple. Not easy to do, but simple to understand. I'm here for you every step of the way. Every step of the way.

As I said earlier, the starting point in the transition from reacting to pause and responding is awareness. It's awareness. Awareness is the compass that guides us. Awareness is our ability to perceive, to feel, and to be conscious of the thoughts that shape our reactions.

So the starting point in the transition to self-regulation, to moving from reacting to pausing and responding, is creating an awareness of the thoughts that are going on in your head when you react. It's taking a reaction and breaking it down. It's asking yourself honest questions. It's probing into how you got there. Most importantly, it's identifying the thoughts you had while encountering this stimulus.

Now, you don't want to beat yourself up. You want to do this in a just curious way. Because if you flog or beat yourself up or get furious with yourself or big emotions like guilt and shame come up, it's going to be hard to dig down and get to the real thoughts. So you want to do this from a place of empathy, compassion, love, and curiosity. That's really important that you start from that point.

Awareness serves as the cornerstone of transitioning from reactive to responsive parenting. Let me say that one more time. Awareness, when you come at it from compassion, empathy, love, and curiosity, awareness will serve as the cornerstone of transitioning from reactive to responsive parenting, also known as self-regulation.

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This work is about peeling back the layers of our reactions and understanding the thoughts that drive them. Let's look at some common thoughts that often trigger reactive parenting. Maybe your thought is you don't respect me. This thought may stem from feeling undervalued or underappreciated leading to a defensive or confrontational reaction.

Maybe your thought is I don't have time for this. I don't need this right now. This thought may stem from feeling overwhelmed by the demands of parenting, multitasking, dealing with the child's challenging behavior, navigating personal stressors or work stressors, all leading to feel unable to handle the situation, which leads to a reactive response rooted in frustration and/or desperation. Of course, when you feel frustrated or desperate, you're going to react rather than respond.

Maybe this trigger is that you feel undervalued. Parents may feel underappreciated when their efforts go unrecognized, or they perceive their contributions insignificant. This sense of being undervalued can trigger feelings of resentment or defensiveness, leading to reactive behaviors in an attempt to assert yourself worth.

Maybe the trigger comes from the thought you're not listening to me or no one listens to me. Feeling unheard or invalidated in communicating with a child can evoke feelings of powerlessness or frustration. This thought of being ignored or dismissed can lead to reactive attempts to regain control and assert your authority.

Maybe you feel unheard in all areas of your life. Similar to feeling undervalued, feeling unheard in certain interactions with a child can trigger responses rooted in a desire to be acknowledged or validated. The sense of being ignored can lead to heightened emotional reactions in an attempt to be heard. I get loud and yell at you because you're not hearing me, and I don't feel valued or heard. So I react in very aggressive, loud demonstrative ways in an attempt to feel hurt.

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Maybe you get triggered into reaction when parenting because you feel insignificant. When parents feel overlooked or marginalized in their role, whether by their children, the co-parent, or others, it can trigger feelings of insignificance or worthlessness. The sense of feeling unimportant can lead to reactive behaviors aimed at asserting one's value or attempting to gain a sense of control. Makes sense, right?

Maybe you're triggered when parenting into reaction because you don't know what to do. You feel like you're at a loss. Everything I try doesn't seem to work, or I don't know how to do this. Feeling overwhelmed or uncertain about how to handle a challenging situation can evoke feelings of helplessness and inadequacy. This sense of being lost or directionless, not knowing what to do can trigger reactive responses driven by fear and/or frustration.

Maybe you get triggered into reactive behavior while parenting because your thought is you make me mad. You make me mad. When a child's behavior triggers intense, emotional reactions in a parent, such as anger or rage, it may stem from a perceived threat to their authority, or to their values or sense of control. This intense emotional response can lead to reactive behaviors aimed at asserting dominance or restoring order.

Maybe your thoughts are you're being manipulated or your kid is manipulating you or the situation. Feeling manipulated or deceived by a child's behavior can evoke feelings of betrayal or mistrust. This perception of manipulation can trigger reactive responses driven by a desire to regain the trust or assert boundaries.

Maybe you're triggered into reactive parenting from the thought I'm failing as a parent. Parents may experience feelings of guilt, shame, or inadequacy when they perceive themselves as falling short of their own or societal expectations. This sense of failure can trigger reactive responses

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driven by a fear of judgment or a need to prove oneself as a competent parent.

Maybe you're triggered into reactive parenting with the thought I can't handle this. Feeling overwhelmed, under qualified, not prepared when facing a challenging situation can evoke feelings of helplessness or despair. The sense of being unable to cope can trigger reactive responses driven by a desire to escape or avoid the situation altogether.

Did one, two, or multiple of these really hit a hotspot for you? I get it. Chances are at least one of these touched all of us in some way. The goal, again, is not to create negative feelings for you by listening to this. It's not to create shame or guilt. The goal is to create an awareness of the pattern. The stimulus comes, I get triggered with my own thoughts, and I react instead of pause and respond.

The awareness is meant to enlighten and provide hope and help break the pattern by understanding what you're thinking when your child has a certain behavior. It's essential to recognize that these thoughts are not truth. They are not the truth. But rather interpretations influenced by our own experiences, including our own childhoods and our emotions.

As you listen to these examples of common triggering thoughts, I really, really, really want you to reflect on your own experiences, and identify your reoccurring patterns or thoughts that resonate with you. Take a moment to consider a recent interaction with your kid or kids, in which you reacted rather than responded.

What thoughts were running through your mind in that moment? Were there any recurring patterns in your reactions? By shining light on these thoughts, you begin to unravel the complex web of emotions and beliefs that influence your parenting style that cause you to react rather than respond.

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This is an exercise worth doing. I promise you, it opens doors and windows. It lets light and air in. It lets you see your patterns. It gets you to question these thoughts. It helps you understand that they're not truths but interpretations. It helps you identify patterns. It begins the process of self-regulation by moving you towards a new way of parenting, by pausing and responding rather than always reacting.

So, again, the question is what thoughts were running through my mind? Can I see patterns that reoccur that create the reaction rather than responding? By taking the time to shine a light on these thoughts that are there whether you recognize them or not, they're there. But by shining a light on them, you begin to unravel the complex web of emotions and beliefs that cause you to react rather than respond.

I work with people every single day on this. What I know with 100% certainty is this process of shining the light, of creating the awareness, of digging in, it puts you on the path to self-regulation. It is so worth doing. This is work worth doing. I promise you. The payback is ginormous.

Without it, it's really difficult to engage in self-regulation. It's really difficult to move from stimulus, react to stimulus, pause, respond. Do you see this? I want this for you, and I know you're capable of it. The awareness is the first step.

Self-awareness is the first step towards real world peaceful parenting. By acknowledging and understanding your own triggers, you move from responding rather than reacting to your kid's behavior. Over time, you model that for them, and then they learn that. They learn to respond to their needs and emotions rather than react. So I want to encourage you to take this opportunity for self-reflection and for exploration, knowing that every insight gained brings you one step closer to self-regulation.

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In closing today, I want you to see self-regulation as a journey not a destination, progress not perfection. Nobody gets it right all the time, but we definitely want to be on the path to self-regulation, on the path of progress. That's what this year is dedicated to. It is the year of self-regulation. Step one is the awareness. The awareness of what are the thoughts causing me to react? How do I change them so that I can pause and respond? So good, isn't it?

I want to also take this moment to just say that I'm incredibly proud of you for doing this work. I want to thank you for having the courage and for joining me on this journey this year towards self-regulation and awareness in your parenting. It is an absolute game changer. The more regulated you are, the more you can model it for your kids, the more they can come alongside you and co-regulate, the more they can learn to regulate on their own. That's what this year is all about.

I know you can do it. My commitment to you is that I will be with you every step of the way in 2024. I'm going to do my part, and I know you're going to do your part. Your family and your children and your connection with them will benefit from this. I know it. Okay, until next time, 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.