

Ep. #218: Mind Traps: How Your Thoughts Are Sabotaging Your Parenting (And How to Fix It)



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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. As usual, I am so excited to be with you here today. Let me ask you, have you ever had one of those days, you know, where everything seems to be going wrong with your kids? Where your little one is having meltdown after meltdown, or your tween is rolling their eyes at literally everything you say, and you find yourself thinking, what am I doing wrong?

Why can't I handle this better? Or my kids should be listening to me. Well, I want you to pause right now and notice something. Those thoughts you just had, they're creating your reality as a parent. And if you're like most of us, thoughts like this might actually be ruining your parenting. I know, I know that sounds harsh.

I know, but stay with me for a minute because today we're going to dive deep into something that has the power to completely transform your relationship with your kids. The thoughts that run through your mind. Now, I was working with a mom in the Hive recently, let's call her Jessica, and she came to one of our coaching sessions completely exhausted and defeated.

And she said, Lisa, I just don't know what to do anymore. My six year old fights with me on everything, everything, Lisa. Getting dressed in the morning, brushing her teeth, bedtime, every single thing is a battle. And I feel like I'm failing as a mom. When I asked Jessica, first of all, was it really true that her daughter fights her on everything?

She admitted, no, it was really only three or four things a day. When I asked Jessica to share what goes through her mind during these three to four battles a day, she said things like, well, what I really think Lisa is she's so stubborn, just like my ex husband. I also think, why can't she just cooperate like other kids?

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And then I go to, If I don't get this under control now, she's going to be impossible as a teenager. And then I go to, I must be doing something wrong because good moms don't struggle this much. Sound familiar? Now, these thoughts might seem innocent enough. After all, they're just thoughts, right? But here's the thing.

Your thoughts create your emotions. Your emotions drive your actions. And your actions shape your relationship with your kid or kids. Mind blown, right? Let me share a powerful quote that really captures this. Psychologist Dan Baker says, More often than not, fear doesn't emerge as nail biting, cold feet terror.

No, it surfaces instead as anger, perfectionism, pessimism, low anxiety, depression, and feelings of isolation. Fear poisons each moment it touches. Let me read that again. More often than not, fear doesn't emerge as nail biting, cold feet terror. It surfaces instead as anger, perfectionism, pessimism, low level anxiety, depressions, and feelings of isolation.

Dan Baker says it poisons every moment it touches. Now that's fascinating, yeah? So many of our negative thoughts about our kids and our parenting is actually rooted in fear. Fear that we're not doing enough. Fear that our kids will struggle. Fear that we're damaging them. Fear they're not going to turn out okay.

Right? Here's how this works in real life. Let's say a thought flits through your mind. My child should be more cooperative like his cousin. And that thought makes you feel anxious or inadequate. And then those feelings make you more likely to think another negative thought like, well, is it because there's something wrong with him?

Or am I not being strict enough? And before you know it, you're spiraling into, well, I must be too lenient. Other parents don't have this problem, so it must mean I'm failing him. And these thoughts create a story, not facts, but a story in your unconscious about yourself and your child that makes more negative thoughts likely to follow.

And here's where it gets really interesting and why this matters so much in real world peaceful parenting. Our kids are incredibly sensitive to our moods and our energy. That's probably not something I need to tell you. They might not know

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what we're thinking, but they absolutely feel the tension, anxiety, frustration, disappointment, disapproval, rejection, fear that these thoughts create in us.

And what do kids do when they pick up on our anxiety? They get anxious themselves. But they don't have the words to say, Mommy, I'm feeling anxious because I sense you're disappointed in me. Instead, they act out on those feelings through behavior that we then label as misbehavior. It's a vicious cycle.

Our negative thoughts create tension. Our kids respond to that tension with challenging behavior. And that challenging behavior confirms our negative thoughts. No wonder we get stuck, right? But I have good news. Once you, yes you, become aware of this pattern, you can break it. And that's exactly what I'm going to show you how to do today.

So let's start by understanding something important about the human mind. Your mind has one primary job, and that's to keep you safe. Your brain is constantly scanning for danger, and not just physical danger, but emotional dangers like shame, embarrassment, and failure. This is why our minds are actually designed to focus on the negative.

Let me say that again. Your brain was designed to focus on the negative. And this makes perfect sense when our ancestors were living in a world full of physical threats. But in today's parenting landscape, this negativity bias, as it's called, shows up as constant warnings about what might happen in the future if we don't take drastic action right now.

It sounds like, you know, if he doesn't start using the potty soon, he'll never be ready for preschool or how will she ever succeed in college or in life if I have to remind her about her homework every single day, multiple times a day. Or, there I go, I lost my temper again. I'm sure I permanently damaged him forever.

Or, if I don't crack down on this behavior right now, who knows what she'll turn out like as a teenager. Do any of these sound familiar? I know they do for me. When my son Malcolm was little, I remember watching him at the playground one time, refusing to take turns on the slide. In that moment, my mind instantly created a future where Malcolm couldn't maintain friendships, struggled socially, and

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ended up lonely and isolated, all because he didn't want to wait his turn on the slide at age four.

Now, looking back now, I can laugh about it. Malcolm is a social, well adjusted young man with wonderful friendships. But in that moment, My fear based thoughts had me convinced that his normal childhood behavior was a sign of serious problems ahead. And this is what our brains do. They take a current situation and they project it into the future.

almost always creating a negative outcome. One definition of fear is future events appearing real. And I remind myself of this all the time. But thoughts about the future are never real because no one can know what the future holds. But here's what I do know. Fear is what pulls us off the high road of peaceful parenting and onto the low road of reactive parenting.

Fear is what causes us to react rather than pause and respond. Fear is what makes us hard on ourselves and our kids and fear is what makes us anxious and angry. But my friend, it doesn't have to be this way. You, yes you, can retrain your brain to not believe everything you think and to think more constructively.

How, you ask? Well, I'm so glad you asked. I have a simple, easy, three step process that's going to help you not believe everything you think and think more constructively. So let's dig in. Step one is to notice your thoughts. The first step to changing any pattern is becoming aware of it throughout your day, especially during challenging moments with your kids.

Practice pausing and noticing the chatter in your brain. Just become the watcher while you're having the thoughts. And notice how often your interpretation of events is automatically negative. I promise you this is how we're all hardwired until we learn to train our brain to think more constructively.

So your thoughts might be something like, if only I were more organized, mornings wouldn't be so chaotic. I just know he's going to give me a hard time about cleaning his room. I really blew it losing my parenting again. Now these thoughts feel true in the moment, don't they? But they're actually just interpretations.

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They're stories we're telling ourselves about what's happening or what's going to happen. And many of them are just fear trying to protect us. Here's a little exercise I want you to try right now. If you're somewhere you can do this safely. Close your eyes for a moment and imagine a typical challenging situation with your kid.

Maybe it's bedtime resistance or a tantrum in a grocery store or a battle about getting off gaming or putting their phone away for the night. Now try to notice what thoughts automatically come up for you in this situation. What stories does your brain want to tell you? And what future outcomes do you predict?

They're probably not very positive. And here's what I know, just bringing awareness to these thoughts is incredibly powerful. And that is power that sits within you right now. Because once we notice them, we can stop automatically believing them and acting upon them. This is the free will. This is the choice your brain has been given.

This is the art of not believing automatically everything your brain tells you and learning to think more constructively. Yes? Awesome. Step two, it's equally as important. We need to reframe the negative or thoughts that are not constructive. So as you begin to notice each negative thought, hit your mental pause button before jumping straight to a reframe, which sometimes is hard to reframe a thought, especially one you've been thinking over and over and over again.

I found it incredibly helpful to ask myself this simple question, what else might be true here? I found that this powerful question helps me come up with new scenarios, alternative thoughts that my brain is serving me. It helps me shift my perspective. and see the situation in a new light. When we ask what else might be true, we open up a menu of possible interpretations rather than staying stuck in our initial negative thought.

Now, remember, your brain is going to initially go negative because that's how it's hardwired and that's its job. But when we ask what else might be true, We open ourselves up to adding new thoughts onto the list that are maybe slightly less negative than the initial negative thought. And this gives us options or a menu to choose from when creating a more empowering narrative.

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For example, if your thought is, My child is being defiant to manipulate me. Asking what else might be true could lead to alternatives like, My child might be tired and lacking the skills to express that appropriately. My child could be seeking connection, although in not a fun way. and doesn't know how to ask me for it.

My child might be feeling anxious about something that happened that I'm not aware of. From there, you can transform that negative thought. Yes, even if your first interpretation feels true, there is always another more empowering way to see this situation, which is at least as true. Here are some examples.

Instead of If he doesn't use the potty soon, he'll never be ready for preschool. You could think it's not an emergency. Every child develops at their own pace, and he will use the potty one day. He's not gonna go to junior high in diapers. Can use a little humor there to lighten the mood. Instead of how will she ever succeed in college, if I have to remind her every day about her homework, a new thought, what else might be true, might be She's showing me that she doesn't yet have the skills to manage her own homework and I can continue to work with her to Develop those skills while the stakes are low.

Yeah, and here's another one instead of I lost my temper again I'm damaging my child forever. What else might be true is nobody parents perfectly all the time I can repair this moment and that repair actually teaches them important lessons about relationships Instead of, if I don't crack down right now on this behavior, who knows what she'll be like as a teenager, you can say, what else might be true?

Well, my kid's acting like a child because she is a child. And I'm pretty sure this behavior is developmentally normal. And although I don't like it, with consistent, compassionate guidance, She'll learn more appropriate ways to express herself. I mean, after all, I don't behave like I did as an eight year old or nine year old today.

And I don't know many people that do. You always have a choice in how you interpret a situation. You always do. That's your free will. That's part of the human experience. So the question is, will you and can you choose thoughts that make you feel worse or ones that make you feel better? Can you choose the thought that empowers you to be a fully present, calm and regulated parent that your child needs?

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Now, what you're going to notice that over time. As you practice reaching for a more positive thought over and over and over again, your perspective is going to shift, your moods are going to lift, the challenges aren't going to feel as challenging, your patience will increase, you will be more calm and regulated, and you're going to You will feel more trust in yourself and your kid or kids.

From this new perspective, positive actions are more accessible. I promise. Regulation is more on the ready. Pause and respond rather than react starts to become second nature. Because what you're doing is you're rewiring the neuropathways in your brain. Let me give you an example from my own life. When Malcolm was in elementary school, Y'all, let me tell you something.

He struggled with organization. I mean, struggled. This kid's backpack was a disaster. Sometimes he'd forget to turn in homework, he'd lose his water bottle about every other day, and his desk at school was overflowing with garbage wrappers and crumpled papers. Can you relate? And my automatic thoughts were things like, He's so careless.

Why can't he just keep track of things? And then I would think, if he can't manage elementary school, I mean, come on, how will he handle middle school and beyond? And my favorite one was, I must be failing to teach him responsibility. These thoughts made me frustrated and anxious. And if I'm honest, And I look back now, they led me to nag, lecture, try to control, and take over rather than teach him.

And not surprisingly, this approach didn't help Malcolm develop organization skills at all. And in fact, just brought out the defiant, strong willed, resistant kid in him. And when I became aware of these negative thought patterns, I worked on reframing them. Now you see, I'm a really organized person and I feel like I always have been.

But one of my most helpful reframes was organization doesn't come naturally to everyone. This is an area where he needs extra support and guidance. Another reframe was, this is the perfect time for him to struggle with organization. When the stakes are low and I'm here to help. And my third really helpful reframe was, I

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can be patient and consistent in teaching and guiding these skills, even if progress is slow.

And let me tell y'all, it was slow at times. Another powerful technique I use, is to think about successful people I know who, like in this instance, or in this example, aren't particularly organized. And I remind myself that my way is not the only way to be successful in life. I think about the brilliant artists whose studio is chaotic, but who creates magnificent work.

Or I think about the innovative entrepreneur whose desk is a mess, but whose mind is full of groundbreaking ideas. These examples help me remember. That there are many paths to success and being organized exactly the way I am is just one of the many possible approaches. And with these new thoughts, I was able to approach the situation with Malcolm with more patience and creativity.

Instead of seeing his disorganization as a character flaw or a prediction of future failure, I saw it as a skill gap that we could address together. And guess what happened? Over time, with consistent support and teaching, not nagging, conjoining, or demanding, Malcolm has developed better organizational habits.

Today, he's pretty darn organized. But I am absolutely convinced that progress would not have been possible if I had stayed stuck in my negative thought patterns, because those negative thought patterns would have driven my actions of nagging, conjoining, and demanding that he be better organized. Okay, and finally, step number three.

Repeat many times daily. The mind, as I mentioned, is hardwired towards negativity to keep you safe. This is proven. This is fact. This is not thoughts according to Lisa. But the brain is also plastic, which is where the word plasticity comes from. And it changes in response to repeated experience. So practice this thought awareness and reframing all day long.

I'm talking like a ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous amount of times a day. All day, every day. In fact, go a step further. When you wake up in the morning, notice your thoughts. And if you want extra credit, go a step further and actually write them down. I spend about three minutes every morning writing down my thoughts.

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And I notice which ones are negative and are not going to serve me that day, and then I reframe them. If there's a thought that's making you tense, upset, fearful, anxious, reframe it. If your child balks when you're trying to get them out the door, pause and notice your own thoughts. Choose a reframe that sees your kid more positively.

Here's another powerful technique I love around reframing. When you find yourself manufacturing negative scenarios about the future, reprogram your mind by suggesting a happier ending, like, won't it be nice when bedtime goes smoothly tonight? Wouldn't it be nice if I stayed calm and knew just what to do?

And then take a moment to actually imagine that positive scenario playing out. Now I want to be crystal clear about something. Reframing your thoughts doesn't mean ignoring real problems. sticking your head in the sand or putting on rose colored glasses. If your child is struggling with something important, they need your help addressing it.

But approaching challenges from a place of calm confidence rather than fear and frustration will make you a thousand percent more effective, I promise. And remember, you're not going to jump from overwhelmed to joyful with one reframe. It takes time and repetition, but you can shift. From overwhelm to a bit more hope and trust.

And from that new perspective, you'll find yourself taking actions that have a more positive effect on challenging situations. Your child will still act like a child, because they are one. And they're right where they're developmentally capable. But with this three step process of reframing, you're going to start making things better, instead of making them worse more often.

And before you know it, your mind will be a much happier place to hang out and your home will be too. So here's today's homework. I have four simple but powerful assignments for you this week. Number one, practice noticing. Set three alarms on your phone throughout the day to remind you to pause and notice your thoughts.

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It's not going to come natural to you. You're going to have to make an effort to stop what you're doing and observe your thoughts while you're having them. But I want you to set an alarm. and ask yourself to pause and notice your thoughts, especially thoughts about your kids and your parenting. Don't judge what you find, just notice.

Hey, homework exercise number two. Try the what else might be true exercise. The next time you catch yourself having a negative thought about your child's behavior, pause and ask yourself, what else might be true? Write down at least three alternative explanations. For example, if your thought is, he's deliberately trying to push my buttons, Your alternatives, what else might be true, might include he might be overtired, he could be feeling disconnected from me, or he might be struggling somewhere else in his life like with something at school.

This exercise helps create mental flexibility and opens you up to more empowering interpretations. Number three, keep a thought journal for just one day this week. Jot down negative thoughts that come up during challenging moments with your kids. Next to each one, write a possible reframe. You don't have to believe the reframe 100%.

Just try it on and see how it feels. And number four, commit to one new thought. Choose one specific negative thought that comes up frequently for you and commit to consistently reframing it this week. Maybe it's my child is so stubborn. Reframed as, my child has a strong sense of self and knows what they want.

Or perhaps it's, I'm such a failure at this parenting thing. Reframed as, I'm learning and growing as a parent every day. Whichever negative thought you choose, catch yourself when that thought arises in your brain, and deliberately state your reframe. And if you find yourself struggling with these exercises, Or if you're noticing thought patterns that seem really persistent and difficult to change, that's completely normal.

Changing thought patterns takes time, is a lifelong journey, and often requires support. And that's exactly why I created The Hive. I'm not kidding you. This here is one of the main reasons that Hive. It's a supportive community where parents

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just like you, yes you, can get personalized coaching to transform their parenting from the inside out.

In The Hive, we spend a lot of time uncovering negative thoughts that get in the way of staying regulated, showing up as our best selves, and seeing the best in our kids. One of the most powerful aspects of having a coach. Having me specifically as your coach is that I can help you spot your blind spots.

Those negative thought patterns that are so automatic. You don't even recognize them as thoughts. They just feel like the truth and we all have them. I promise you as your coach, I hope you recognize these patterns and understand where they come from and develop new reframes and empowering ways of thinking that lead to.

regulation and more peaceful parenting. So if you're ready to transform, not just your actions, but your thoughts, I mean, think about if one month from now, you'd not only transformed your actions, but your thoughts and beliefs that drive those actions. If you can imagine envision that that is the game changer for your parenting, then I want to invite you to join us in the hive.

Head on over to thehivecoaching.com to learn more and become a part of our community of parents who are committed to growth and connection. Okay, so in closing, remember the thoughts running through your mind are creating your experience as a parent. When you change your thoughts, you change everything.

I mean everything. You change how you feel. You change how you act. And ultimately, you change your relationship with your kids. Your children believe what you believe about them. Peggy O'Mara says, Our outer voice becomes their inner voice. And when you choose to consistently see them in a positive light, as capable, well intentioned, And doing the best they can with the skills they have, you give them an incredible gift.

You create a self fulfilling prophecy of the best kind for them. So this week I challenge you, I challenge you to pay attention to your thoughts. Choose the ones that serve you and your children better. You can do this. I know you can, and I'm happy to be with you every single step of the way. All right.

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All right, and my thought is, you've got this. You can do this. Okay. Until next time, I'm wishing you peaceful parenting. Thanks for listening to Real World Peaceful Parenting. If you want more info on how you can transform your parenting, visit the [peaceful parent.com](http://peacefulparent.com). See you soon.