

# Ep. #219: After-School Meltdown 2.0: How to Keep Your Cool



## 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. I am so excited to be with you here today. A mom named Kelly reached out to me last week with a question that I'm guessing is going to resonate with many of you. She said, Lisa, my eight year old melted down after we got home from work and school. I was already stressed and I ended up yelling and I'm tired of it and I'm frustrated and I want to know how do I stop doing this?

You've had that question, I assume, maybe more than once. Well, here's the thing. While Kelly's question is about her eight year old, I want you to know that everything we're going to talk about today can be applied to any kid at any age, from toddlers to teenagers to young adults. The fundamentals remain the same.

Even if the specific words and the examples you might use change. And as I dive into today's episode, I want to say this, you're not alone. Seriously. And after school meltdown from a tired, overwhelmed kid, when you're already running on fumes from a long day, that My real world peaceful parent is a perfect storm.

It's hard. And the fact that you're asking how to stop yelling means you care deeply about your child. So here's what I said to Kelly. And here's what I'm saying to you. I know it's hard. And the fact that you're asking how to stop yelling means you care deeply about your child and how you show up as a parent.

And that already speaks volumes. This situation reminds me of my own son, Malcolm, when he was about nine, I'd picked him up from school after a particularly demanding day at work. I was exhausted. My mind was still stuck on an unresolved issue with the client. And all I wanted was a peaceful, quiet transition home.

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But the moment we walked through the door, he threw his backpack across the room and started complaining about everything, his teacher, his lunch, his math homework. The kid who sat next to him. It was like a tsunami of negativity. And if I'm being honest with you, which I always try to be, I lost it. I raised my voice and said something like, Can we just have one day without the drama?

Is it too much to ask? The moment these words left my mouth, I saw his face fall, and I instantly regretted it. What I didn't understand then, but I do now, is that he wasn't doing this to me. He wasn't aiming to make my day harder. He wasn't trying to be difficult. So what was he doing, you ask? He was discharging all the stress and pressure that he'd been holding in all day.

School was like his pressure cooker. And I was a safe person, the one that he trusted enough to unpack the pressure and let all those feelings out. I call it an awkward parenting compliment. So let's untangle what's happening in these after school meltdowns. And maybe it's not after school. Maybe it's a bedtime.

Maybe it's after soccer. Maybe it's after a play date. Maybe it's on the weekend. You see, your kid's meltdown isn't just about what happens that day. Or in that moment, it's more likely to release a built up emotional tension from the day and sometimes even deeper unmet needs kids, especially at eight years old, 10 years old, 12 years old, even in high school, they're holding it together all day, following rules, handling social stuff, dealing with sensory overload.

And when they get home, it's like the lid comes off the pressure cooker. You're the safe place. They can unload all that tension onto, and this is especially true if they're strong willed your reaction, the yelling that comes from a place of stress and overwhelm. Maybe you're already depleted from your own day, stress, busy life job.

You don't care for job that demands a lot that you do care for that you're passionate about, but asks a lot of you. And when you're running on empty, your nervous system is primed for fight or flight, primed I tell you. And when the meltdown hits, your body and mind perceive it as a threat, and you react automatically to protect yourself, even though logically, you might know your child isn't really a danger.

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So there's nothing, quote, wrong with you for yelling. Your nervous system is doing exactly what it's designed to do under stress. But the key is learning how to interrupt that automatic reaction and shift into a calmer, more connected response. So I want you to think about the situation like a volcano.

Yelling is the eruption. But before that happens, There's usually a buildup in the middle chamber. The signs are there. If you tune into him, like tight jaw, faster breathing, heart rate, clench fists, internal self talk. Like I can't deal with this right now. Catastrophizing thinking into the future about all the things that are going to go wrong.

And what I want you to hear is that when you feel these signs building, it's your cue to pause. And reset your nervous system before the eruption happens. What you don't want to do is continue to rush ahead into the situation. You want to use the cue to pause and reset your nervous system. When you feel that surge of tension, your job isn't to fix your child.

Or stop the meltdown, but rather the number one priority is to calm your nervous system. First, how I'm glad you asked. You can breathe, take four slow, deep breaths. This is scientifically proven while you're breathing out. Your vagus nerve tells your body that you're safe. Breath work really, really, really works.

Inhale for three, exhale for four. You can also ground yourself by placing your hand on your chest or belly and remind yourself either inside your brain Or even better out loud, I'm okay. My child is not trying to hurt me. I am safe. And you can step away if needed. If you feel like you're about to yell, it's okay to step away for a moment and say, I need a minute to calm down.

And then we'll figure this out together. Now the breath work, the grounding yourself in the step away works. Individually and in some combination together because it shifts your brain out of fight or flight and back into the rational, calm part of your brain. This has been scientifically studied and proven.

So let me say it again. Breathing, grounding, and stepping away alone or in some combination works because it shifts your brain out of fight or flight and back into rational, calm part of your brain. So then you can get curious. Not furious about

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your child's behavior. After and only after you've calmed yourself, can you shift your focus into what's going on beneath the surface for your kid or kids.

Behavior is communication. Every behavior communicates a need. So when your eight year old melts down after school, they're not trying to be bad. They're trying to communicate to you something like, I'm overwhelmed. I don't know how to handle this. I need help figuring out what's going on. And if you can stay with the curiosity instead of reaching for control by saying things like, it seems like you're feeling upset about something.

What's going on? What happened for you right before you started yelling? It's been a hard long day, huh? I'm here and you're safe. The goal is to help your kid or kids feel seen and heard. The more they feel emotionally safe, the fewer meltdowns. They're gonna have over time. And then you can repair after the yelling.

If you do yell, because we all do from time to time, because we're human, repair is the key. Not shame, repair. Kids are incredibly resilient if they know you're willing to own your mistakes. So you can apologize without shame or blame. Hey, I'm sorry I yelled earlier. I was feeling overwhelmed and I reacted, but that wasn't your fault.

I take responsibility for it. Then you can model self regulation. Next time, I'm going to try to take some deep breaths first, and I'm working on learning how to stay calm. And then you can reconnect through physical touch, hand on the shoulder, a smile, eye contact, a hug, holding hands. rubbing their back, patting their head, or you can spend a few minutes playing with them or talking about how you love them all of this leads to rebuilding emotional safety and this teaches your child that it's okay to make mistakes that they don't have to be perfect to be loved and that their feelings are not dangerous to themselves or you and then lastly you can make a plan for next time to prevent these moments from spiraling You can create an after school buffer For you and your kid or kids.

This is what Malcolm and I ended up doing and followed through on for years. You can create a 10 to 15 minute transition period. When you get home, no homework, no demands, just a calm, low stimulation time, like a snack or listening

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to some music, some calming, soothing music or waterfall noises. You can preemptively meet basic needs, hunger and fatigue, amplify meltdowns.

I used to bring a snack and a bottle of cold water in the car every day for Malcolm and he would chew on it and take it in on the drive home while we listened to some calming, soothing music. And if you're walking in the door already stressed and you know this, you can let your kid know, Hey, I'm struggling or I've had a tough day today.

Let's sit down for a minute together before we talk about anything else. So now let's talk about why these steps work. When you take care of your own emotional needs first. You create the calm your child needs to borrow in their stormy moments. Let me say that again. When you take care of your own emotional state first, you create the calm your child needs to borrow in their stormy moments and your child's meltdown stops feeling like an attack.

And it becomes a signal that they need connection and safety. And when you can stay regulated, your child learns how to stay regulated to through modeling. Now, let me be totally honest with you. This takes practice. Yes. None of us get it right the first time and none of us are perfect all the time. And frankly, you don't have to be perfect.

Just catching yourself once or twice and choosing a different response. Is the definition of breaking the cycle and honestly, that's enough. That's totally enough. Yeah. I mean, does that feel like a giant relief? You don't have to be perfect and it takes practice and everyone loses their shiz once in a while.

Okay. Now I want to share something interesting that happened in my coaching session with Kelly after I shared these strategies with her, she responded with, okay, I hear you and I know I should apologize. But I'm still mad and my thoughts are, I don't want to let my son get away with the meltdown and the threat in the backpack.

So what do I do about that, Lisa? Ah, yes, Kelly. That's so real. And I appreciate you sharing it with me. And let's be honest, you know you should apologize. But if you're like Kelly, you're still feeling that heat in your chest. And honestly, you're

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kind of mad at your kid and you don't want to send the message that his meltdown was okay, or that it's okay to act the way he acted.

This is a common tension between parent and child, especially a strong willed child. And honestly, it's understandable. You're not a robot. You love your kid, but you often have your own emotions as a response to their meltdowns, their defiance, their no, their eye rolling, their slamming doors, their fighting with their siblings.

They're disobeying you. Anger is a part of the human emotional range. And the fact that you're still holding on to it tells me that some part of you feels like you were wronged. And that feeling's valid too. So to be helpful, let's pause and zone out a moment. When your kid or kids meltdown, it's really easy to see it as defiance or disrespect.

Yeah? Like, they're just pushing your buttons to get away with something. They're being difficult on purpose. They're giving you a hard time. They're being disrespectful. But what I know after doing this almost 20 years and working with thousands of families around the world. What I know is that most of the time it's not really about that.

Kids don't want to melt down. It never feels good. They're not plotting to push you over the edge. The truth is meltdowns happen when we feel emotionally overwhelmed and lack the skills to manage it. And because your kids have an underdeveloped brain until the age of 25, they are often and quickly emotionally overwhelmed and lack the skills to manage it.

Now, here's where I want you to have the lightbulb moment. You can, as a peaceful parent, empathize with the struggle without excusing the behavior. And you can hold the boundary while still repairing the connection. I know, maybe I just blew your mind, but it's a hundred percent true. And let's talk about it.

Let's dig into this a little bit, because the truth is, is that peaceful parenting is not about letting your child get away with quote, bad behavior. It's not, I promise. What it is about, and I need you to hear this loud and clear, what it is about 100 percent is about teaching your kids how to handle emotions differently next time.

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And that starts with you modeling it. There's no other way for them to learn it. No way. So let's talk about the four steps and how to do this. Because this. Is a game changer. I promise. All right, step one is you're gonna get curious about your anger. Now this might be the first time anyone's ever said this to you and you might be like what Lisa?

I'm curious about my kids anger. But wait a minute. You're telling me to get curious about my own anger. Yes. Yes. I am Here's what I know if you're still holding on to anger. It's because something underneath the surface got touched So ask yourself What exactly am I angry about? Can I articulate it in a sentence or two?

Is it the way he spoke to me? Is it that he didn't listen? Is it that it feels out of control and disrespectful? What fear or belief might be hiding behind the anger? What's the quiet voice way in the back of your brain? Maybe it's something like, if I don't stop this now, he's going to think it's okay to treat people this way.

If I let him off the hook, he's never going to learn to respect. Maybe the voice says I'm failing as a parent because I didn't keep it together. Anger is protective. It's often covering up feelings of helplessness, fear, or even shame. So when you identify what it's protecting, even just asking the question, even just getting curious, the anger will begin to soften.

So that's step one, getting curious about your anger. Step two is where you want to separate the behavior from the emotion. It helps to remember that your child's meltdown Wasn't moral failing. It was a stress response. That's not the same as saying it's okay to scream and throw things, but it's important to separate the emotional overwhelm from the behavior itself.

So you might shift from thinking and saying you were so rude and that's unacceptable to you were really upset earlier and it's okay to feel upset. But it's not okay to yell at me. This teaches your kid that their feelings are valid. There are boundaries on behavior. You're not angry at them, but you are addressing the way they express the anger or the big emotions or the upset.



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So step number two is working on separating the behavior from the emotion. Step three, you're really going to like it's apologizing without letting go of the boundary. That's a good one, right? Well, let me tell you, this is the sweet spot. When you can model accountability without giving the message that their meltdown was no big deal, then you own your part without over explaining.

I'm sorry I yelled earlier, it's not okay. And you're not going into a lot of blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And you're not apologizing to justify. You're saying, I'm sorry I yelled, and it wasn't okay. And then you state the boundary with calm authority. It's okay to feel upset, but it's not okay to yell or hit.

And then you teach the emotional tools instead of punishing. Next time you're feeling overwhelmed, you can say, mom, I'm upset. Or mom, give me some space. Or, Mom, please leave me alone. So let me illustrate this for you, an example. You might say to your kid, I'm sorry I yelled earlier, that wasn't fair to you, I can see you're overwhelmed, and it's still not okay to yell at me.

And we both need to work on how to handle those big feelings next time. This works because it sends a clear consistent message. You're human too, emotions are not bad, but there are limits on behavior. So, let me add in here some things to avoid. Avoid apologizing too much, which many of us have or do do.

If you say, I'm so sorry, I feel terrible, I'm the worst mother ever, I don't know how you'll ever forgive me, I can't believe I did that, your child might interpret this as you losing control, which actually makes them feel less safe. So when you go to apologize, you want to keep it simple and matter of fact.

I'm sorry I yelled, it wasn't fair to you. You also want to avoid asking for forgiveness. Which might scramble your brain a little bit when you hear this. The problem with asking their forgiveness is it puts emotional labor on your child when they're not mature enough to process it. Repair isn't about them forgiving you.

It's about them seeing you model emotional responsibility. Yeah, awesome. Okay. Step three is you're gonna apologize without letting go of the boundary. Step four is you're gonna circle back to what happened. This is Liquid gold. I'm telling you,

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once things have cooled down, you can revisit the meltdown in a calm problem solving way.

And let me say you're doing this as an investment in next time, next time, Hey, earlier, you were really upset. Help me understand what was going on. You might ask, what do you think would have helped in that moment? You might ask, next time you feel upset, what could we try instead? This is what I call an after action review.

And it's prompting your kid for the next meltdown and front loading them for how they'll handle the next meltdown instead of throwing the backpack at you or hitting or fighting with their sibling. And this gives your child the emotional language they need and teaches them that they're not bad. But that they're learning and preparing for the next meltdown.

This is really, really, really important. And I highly suggest you make this a priority in your parenting. Step four, which is to circle back to what happened. Because what you're doing is you're teaching without lecturing. You're teaching your kids that feelings aren't dangerous, even anger. You're teaching them that yelling isn't effective.

Calm problem solving is. You're teaching them they don't have to be perfect to be loved, and you're teaching them the boundaries are firm, but love isn't conditional. So good, right? Oh, I love it. I love it. So here's the bottom line. You can feel mad, and you can hold the boundary, and you can repair without letting your kids off the hook.

Now, I didn't know this, Before peaceful parenting, I did not know this. I thought it was an or never an and so let me say this again. What's possible is you can be mad and hold the boundary and you can repair without letting them off the hook. Repairing isn't about making your kids feel better. It's about teaching them that even when things get messy, The connection is still safe.

And guess what? You don't have to get it. Perfect. Every time just catching yourself in the moment and handling it a little differently is already breaking the cycle. And that my friend is how peaceful parenting works in a nutshell. So let me

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give you your homework this week. And then we'll wrap up your homework at this week is to create an after school or fill in the blank for the situation and after school, after practice, after work weekend, after sport, after church, after visiting friends and after event transition ritual that works for your family.

Maybe it's 15 minutes quiet time with a snack. Perhaps it's a quick walk around the block to decompress. The key is to build in a buffer between A and B, to build in a buffer between, like, the school and the home demands, between running around the soccer field all morning and transitioning back to home.

And I want you to think about how to adapt this for your kid's specific age, whether you have a kindergartner, a middle schooler, or a teenager coming home from high school. Homework assignment number two is I want you to practice the volcano awareness exercise. At least once a day. I recommend you do this about 25 times a day, but I'll settle for at least once a day.

Check in with your body. Notice any tension in your jaw, your shoulders, your chest. Practice taking three deep breaths when you notice these warnings, even if you're not upset. This is called front loading, my friends. And building this habit during calm times makes it easier to access when you're triggered.

And homework assignment number three. If you do yell this week, Because remember, we're all human. Try the repair approach I shared. Notice how it feels different from just saying sorry, or skipping the repair altogether. And remember to adapt these words to fit your unique family situation, and your kid's age and personality.

The key isn't to memorize exact phrases, but to convey the message. The feelings are valid while still maintaining the boundaries on behavior. Yeah? Awesome. Now, if you've been struggling with these after school meltdowns and finding yourself yelling more than you'd like, I want you to know there's a place where you can get even more personalized support from me, where we can go even deeper.

In The Hive, my parenting membership community, we can work through exactly these kind of challenges together. Inside The Hive, you're going to get access to tools and strategies Specifically tailored to unique family situation, including your

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kids age and temperament inside the hive, you're going to get access to weekly coaching calls where we can address your specific family dynamics.

You're going to get access to a community of parents who get it and won't judge you at all. And you're going to get access to tools that are going to help you identify your triggers. before they lead to yelling. Yelling will become a thing of the past. The After School Meltdown isn't just about your child's behavior.

It's about creating a transition routine that works for your unique family, understanding the real reasons behind the behavior, and building your own customized regulation toolkit so you can stay calm even when your kid isn't. So if this feels like the moment, if you feel ready to transform these afterschool meltdowns from chaos to connection, go over to the hive coaching.

com and join us. You don't have to figure out this alone, I promise. Okay, so this week you're going to work on creating the after school transition ritual. You're going to practice the volcano awareness. And if you do yell, you're going to try the repair approach. So good, right? I love it, and I love you, and I'm proud of you.

And your kids say thank you. Thank you for being calm when I'm melting down. Thank you for showing me the way. Remember. Even implementing just one small strategy from this episode can create meaningful change in your home, and I promise you don't have to be perfect. Progress is where it's at. All right, 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](https://www.peacefulparent.com). See you soon.