

Ep. #220: Why Setting Limits Is So Hard (And How to Do It Anyway)



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 absolutely thrilled to be with you here today and to bring you. Today's episode this past Saturday, I hosted an incredible workshop inside the hive, all about setting and enforcing limits with our kids, with both kindness and firmness. And let me tell you the energy in that virtual room was electric.

Parents were having so many light bulb moments as we dug into why setting limits matters and how to do it effectively for both you and your kids. One thing became crystal clear during our discussion. This topic really resonates deeply with so many of us because it touches on one of the most challenging aspects of parenting.

I mean, we know we should set limits, right? We even set them. But the rub is in enforcing them. That's where things get really tricky. Let me ask you, have you ever found yourself saying something like, it's time to turn off the TV now, only to cave five minutes later when your child protests? Or maybe you've set a limit around snacks before dinner, but then given when the begging starts, you're nodding right now.

Aren't you? I see you. I get it. And today we're going to explore exactly why enforcing limits is so hard and what we can do about it to make it easier for you and your kids. But first let's talk about why limits even matter, because understanding this will help us find the courage. to hold firm when it gets tough.

I want to invite you to think about limits in a new way. Imagine your child is like a young plant growing in a garden. The limits and boundaries you set are like the fence around that garden. That fence isn't there to restrict or confine the plant, it's there to protect. The fence keeps out dangers while still allowing in sunlight, rain, And all the good things your child needs to grow.

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And when that fence is sturdy and well maintained, your child can actually feel free to explore within the fence. They know exactly where the boundaries are, which gives them confidence to play and learn without constantly wondering, is this okay? Am I going too far? But here's the thing about garden fences and limits.

They require regular maintenance. If we let the boards get loose. Or the gate hang open, our garden becomes vulnerable. Similarly, when we don't enforce our limits consistently, our kids feel insecure rather than protected. Let me say that again. When we don't enforce our limits consistently, our kids feel insecure and unstable rather than protected.

The most important thing to understand, and I ask you to please hear this, is that when you offer limits. From a calm leadership position set and enforced by a regulated, connected parent with both kindness and firmness. It helps our kids feel three essential things. Number one, our kids feel loved. Number two, they know what's expected.

And number three, they feel safe. Let me say that again. When limits are coming from a parent who offers a calm leadership, who sets the limits and enforces them from a regulated, Connected place and sets and enforces the limits with kindness and firmness. Your kids feel loved, know what is expected and feel safe.

And this safety isn't just physical, it's emotional. When your kids know where the limits are and that you'll consistently enforce them, they can relax into the security and safety of your leadership. Let me share a story from one of our Hive members. Let's call her Maya. Maya was struggling with bedtime routines for her six year old son.

Every night, the same pattern would play out. She'd announce bedtime. Her son would beg for five more minutes. And after several rounds of this, she'd end up giving in only to have him ask for another five minutes. By the time bedtime actually happened, they were both dysregulated, exhausted, and frustrated.

During our coaching sessions inside the hive, Maya realized something profound. She knew exactly what limit she wanted to set, but the truth is something was stopping her from enforcing it. And that brings us to the heart of today's episode.

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So why is enforcing limits so hard? Can you relate to Maya? I mean, it can be very difficult and I will admit that over the years at times.

I've struggled with this myself, and I use this information to reground myself in how setting limits from a kind and firm place actually helps my kid feel loved, know what is expected, and safe. So let's break it down. The first big reason we struggle to enforce limits Meltdowns. I mean, let's be honest here for a moment.

Nobody enjoys watching their kid dissolve into tears or a tantrum. We dread that explosion of emotions, that storm of resistance. And if you've got a strong willed kid, you also dread the pushback. Okay. Back to the mom inside the hive Maya. Now, Maya would consistently give in. to just five more minutes at bedtime.

And one of the reasons she admitted is because she was terrified of the meltdown that would follow if she didn't give in. She told me, Lisa, I know I should hold firm, but by the time bedtime comes, I can't handle another screaming session at the end of an exhausting day. So here's what I help Maya understand.

When we delay enforcing a limit because we're afraid of the emotional reaction, we're not actually avoiding the meltdown. We're just postponing it and making it bigger when it finally does happen. Okay, let me say that again. When we delay enforcing a limit. Because we're afraid of the emotional reaction.

We're not actually avoiding the emotional reaction. We're just postponing it, and we're giving it more fuel to make it bigger and bigger and bigger when it finally does happen. And we're teaching our kids that persistence pays off. If they just push hard enough, we'll cave in the moment and give in to their immediate gratification.

Yeah? You see that? Hopefully you're having a lightbulb moment. So what's more effective? Well, setting the limit calmly and being prepared for the emotional pushback, the emotional reaction. You might say it's bedtime now. I know you want to keep playing and I understand that you're upset and it's still time for bed.

When we approach this this way, the meltdown might still happen, but I promise you it's going to be shorter and less intense over time. As your child learns to trust

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you, you're going to hold So good, right? The second major obstacle is our fear of being seen as mean. Again, I can relate to this one. So many of us equate kindness with permissiveness, as if those are the only two options.

Be the harsh, authoritarian parent, or be the nice parent who lets kids do whatever they want. I remember struggling with this myself when Malcolm was little. There were moments when I'd set a limit, and I'd see his disappointed face. And immediately think, oh no, I'm being too harsh. I don't want to be that mean mom.

And in that moment of doubt, I'd sometimes backtrack. Have you done this? But here's the truth I want you to hear today. Setting and enforcing limits is not mean. In fact, it's one of the kindest things you can do for your kids. It's like the garden fence. It's an act of protection and care, not restriction.

Being kind does not mean giving in to everything your child wants. Remember, your child has an underdeveloped brain. It's hardwired for fun and impulsivity. So let me say it again, being mean does not mean giving in to everything your child wants. True kindness as a parent means providing the structure and guidance your child needs to thrive, even when the guidance is met with resistance.

When we combined firm limits with kindness and empathy, we are actually demonstrating the deepest form of love when we're offering. I know this is hard for you and the limit stands. We're actually demonstrating the deepest form of love. Here's where I want you to pause for a moment and speak directly to those of you who are nodding along, feeling seen in your struggles and limits.

If you're thinking, yes, this is exactly what I'm dealing with in my home. I want you to know there's a place where we can go much deeper than we can today in this short episode. And sometimes going deeper and working on this intentionally is really what's required to break the generational cycles you might be spinning in.

So if this is you, I want you to know that inside the hive, my peaceful parenting membership community, we just spent a full 90 minutes on Saturday. Diving deep into this topic. We explored not just why setting limits matters, but specific scripts for different situations, role playing exercises, and personalized strategies.

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For each family's unique challenges. You see, this is what we do every single month in the hive. We take one critical parenting topic and we go deep and we break it down into practical, actionable steps that you can implement right away in your own home. And beyond our monthly workshops, you get access to live coaching calls.

Where we can address your specific challenges and questions on this topic. So if enforcing limits is something you're struggling with, or if you're working to become a more peaceful parent in general, I want to invite you to join us in the hive. In today's podcast, we can only scratch the surface of how to peacefully set and enforce limits that your kids will understand and follow.

But once you join the hive, you'll get full access to the entire workshop recording plus our live coaching calls. So you're never stuck wondering what to do and how to be the peaceful leader of the home who sets and enforces. The limits in a kind and firm way. So if this speaks to you and you're ready, I want you to go over to the hive coaching.

com to learn more about the hive and join our community. It would be my absolute honor to support you with specific tools tailored to your unique family. I can't wait to see you there. Okay. Let's continue exploring why enforcing limits is challenging for so many of us. So the third major reason we struggle with limits is the guilt and conditioning from our own childhoods.

Many of us, my hand is raised, were raised with overly harsh, punitive parenting, or extremely permissive parenting, and we're desperately trying to find that middle ground. Are you in this club? During Saturday's workshop, a dad shared that he realized that he was avoiding saying no to his kids because of how harshly he was treated as a child.

This guy realized that his parents no usually came with yelling, shame, or punishment, and he had unconsciously decided to be different from his parents. And with that came the idea that he needed to say yes as much as possible. So saying no felt completely dysregulating and agitating to them. So if this resonates with you, I want you to hear this.

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When we set loving limits with our children, that's limits that are both kind and firm, we're actually healing our own inner child as well. We're showing ourselves what healthy limits and boundaries look like. What it means to be both strong and compassionate at the same time. This might be the most powerful realization of all.

Holding limits with warmth and consistency is you reparenting your own inner child as well. It's you healing childhood wounds that are getting in the way. Of you showing up and being fully present with your kids. When you say to your kids, I know you're upset and it's still bedtime. You're also speaking to the child within you who perhaps never experienced that balance of empathy and structure.

Yeah. Okay. So now that we understand why this is so hard, what can we do about it? Let me share some practical strategies that have helped countless parents in the hive. Move from knowing they should enforce the limits to actually enforcing the limits with kindness and firmness. First, remember that effective limits require two key ingredients, kindness and firmness.

Many parents lean too heavily on one or the other. Either they're too empathetic, but cave under pressure, or they're too firm and forget to acknowledge the child's feelings. Can you see that? Try these phrases. I know you want to keep playing. I so get it. It's so hard to stop when you're having so much fun.

And it's time for dinner now. You notice I'm not using but, I'm always using and. Here's another one. I understand you're upset about this. And your feelings are totally valid. And iPad time is over for today. And here's the third one. I see how disappointed you are. And those big feelings are okay. And we're still going to leave the park now and walk to the car.

Can you see this structure here? Empathy plus firm limit. Not empathy instead of the limit. Second, practice staying calm and regulate yourself. When you approach limits from a calm leadership position, rather than frustration or anger, I promise you, your kid or kids feel the difference. They may still protest the limit, but they're less likely to escalate if you remain steady.

Take a deep breath before responding. Remind yourself, I'm a strong, calm leader. My child feels safety when I hold limits consistently. Let's do that again. Take a

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big deep breath and remind yourself. I am a strong calm leader My child feels safe when I hold limits consistently and One final but essential strategy follow through every single time if you say it's time to turn off the TV and your child doesn't Respond calmly walk over and turn it off yourself.

Don't make threats You won't follow through on or give multiple warnings They teach your child they don't have to listen the first time. Consistency is the key to the garden fence. A fence that gaps doesn't provide security. Similarly, limits that are enforced sometimes, but not others, create confusion rather than safety.

Yeah? Hopefully you're having a light bulb moment here, and I feel like I need to say that again. Limits that are enforced sometimes, but not others, create confusion rather than safety. Okay, let me give you some homework this week. Number one, choose one limit you'll commit to holding firmly each day.

Start small. Maybe it's no screens during meals or brushing your teeth before bed. Write down exactly how you respond when your child pushes back against the limit. Script it out. I know you want to keep watching your show. I know it's hard to stop and it's dinner time now. I'm going to turn the TV off.

After the interaction, take a few moments to reflect. What was hard about holding that limit? What feelings came up for you? Did you notice any patterns from your own childhood influencing your response? And most importantly, celebrate your consistency, no matter how your kid responded. Remember, success isn't measured by whether your child was happy with the limit.

It's measured by your ability to hold it. With kindness and firmness. Remember your child's job is to test boundaries. That's how they learn. We're going to have more on that next week. So let's put a pin in that for now, but let me say it again. Your child's job is to test boundaries. Your job is to be the sturdy garden fence, providing both security and space for growth.

Every time you set a loving limit and follow through, you're building your child's sense of security. You're telling them, I care enough about you to be consistent. You can count on me to mean what I say. Now listen, real world peaceful parent.

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This isn't about being perfect. We all have moments where we cave or moments where we enforce the limit from frustration rather than calm leadership.

Remember our mantra here is progress, not perfection. Every day is a new opportunity to practice setting limits with kindness and firmness. Let me leave you with this thought as we wrap up here today. When you set and enforce limits from a place of calm connection, combining both kindness and firmness, you are giving your kids an incredible gift.

You're showing them that big feelings are okay and the boundaries matter. You're teaching them that they are deeply loved and that there are expectations to meet. This balance is what helps them feel secure enough to thrive. I want that for you, and I want that for your kids. So go forth and hold the limits with kindness and firmness.

And if you need help, guidance, coaching, and support around this, please join us inside the hive. You won't regret it. I promise. 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 ThePeacefulParent.com.

com. See you soon.