

Ep. #221: Boundaries & Pushback: Why Resistance Is Your Child's Job (And How to Stay Calm)



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. As usual, I am super excited to be with you here today, and I think you're really gonna love today's episode. This is part two of our discussion on the Boundaries workshop that I hosted two Saturdays ago inside the Hive. In episode two 20, I focused on the parents' role in setting and enforcing the limits, and today I wanna focus on what often happens next.

I. Your child's response when you set and enforce those limits. My goal is to normalize what's happening so you can stay calm and regulated. When your child pushes back, I mean, do you have one of those? Do you have that kid that you swear should be a lawyer or a salesperson or a professional arguer because they push back on every limit you try to set and enforce.

I have one of those too. So I speak from experience here in what's going on. Two Saturdays ago in the Hive workshop, we dug deep into why limits matter, what common mistakes we make as parents, and practical strategies that actually work in the real world. And you know what kept coming up again and again, parents feeling frustrated, exhausted, and sometimes even defeated.

By how hard their kids push back against the limits they set. You feel that? Are you in that club? So today I wanna focus on something that might actually flip your perspective on your strong-willed child. What if, what if I told you that your child who questions everything, who negotiates every bedtime like a tiny lawyer.

Who says no before you even finish your sentence is actually doing exactly what they're supposed to be doing developmentally. I mean, are you like, what girl? What you talking about? What if their pushback isn't a sign? You're failing as a

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parent, but actually a compliment to your parenting? Is your mind scrambled right now?

I get it. Before we dive in further into this, I wanna share that inside the hive we dig deep into important parenting topics like this one. We record these workshops and send them to our members, and then we store them in our library of resources, so they're always available when you join. Now in today's episode, we can only scratch the surface of this important topic with limited time.

But my goal today is to give you the gift of a new way to think about your child's resistance to limits. Yeah. Awesome. So let's start with the big question. I mean, why do our kids test boundaries in the first place? Well, the simple truth is that testing boundaries is developmental, not personal. Our children aren't giving us a hard time.

They're having a hard time figuring out the world and how it works. I want you to think about it this way. Your kids are scientists. They're constantly experimenting with cause and effect. What happens if I don't put my shoes on when my mom asks? What if I ask for a cookie right now? What if I throw this toy?

I remember when my son, Malcolm was about four and we were at a grocery store, and I'd set a limit before going in of no candy at the checkout. In my mind, we were done with that. I told him, no candy, there would be no candy. And we were done. Ha. But alas, that is not what happened. When we got to the checkout, almost like right on cue, he started asking and reaching for candy.

When I said no, he got louder and more insistent. He threw himself on the floor and started crying. And in that moment. I remember it clearly. It felt like he was deliberately trying to embarrass me and to manipulate me into getting what he wanted. Have you been there? I'm sure you have, but that's not what was happening at all.

He was simply testing. Is this limit real subconsciously? Does it hold even when I really, really, really want something? Does it hold even when we're in public? Does it hold even when I show her how upset I am? And what's really helped me

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over the years is to realize and remember that in that moment he wasn't giving me a hard time.

He was having a hard time learning where the edges are. I'm really passionate about this reframe for us as parents, because what I understand so clearly, and I wanna help you understand. Is that your child's job is to push the boundaries and your job is to hold them steady. And when we understand that testing the limits is actually healthy, development in action, it becomes a little easier to stay calm when they push back.

Doesn't mean it's not uncomfortable and we don't have to love it or get excited about it or welcome it, but when we understand. The testing limits is healthy development in action. It does help us stay calm when they push back. Let me put it to you this way. Children who push back are learning critical thinking skills.

They're developing their sense of agency and autonomy within boundaries. They're figuring out that they have their own thoughts and feelings that might be different from us within boundaries. I. These are of all valuable skills they're going to need as adults. Now, here's where it gets really interesting.

When your child pushes back against your limits, it's actually a hidden compliment to your parenting. Yes, you heard me right? It's a compliment when your child feels safe enough to disagree with you, to test your boundaries, to have a meltdown in your presence. They're telling you something incredibly important.

They're saying, I trust you. I trust that your love for me isn't conditional on my compliance. I trust that you can handle my big feelings. I trust that you can let me learn the world by pushing back and finding the edges, and I trust that you'll still be there solid and loving even when I'm at my worst.

At this point in my career, I've worked with thousands of families around the world. Many where the child is absolutely perfect at school, follows every rule, never talks back and complies, and then comes home and falls apart. I mean, we've talked about this before. We have done many episodes on this, and when this happens, the parents are often confused.

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Why is he or she so well-behaved for her teacher? But such a challenge for me. We were just talking about this last week in the hive, and the answer is beautiful and heartbreaking all at once. The answer is because home is where she feels safe enough to let her guard down, because with you, she doesn't have to hold it all together because she knows your love isn't dependent on perfect or good girl behavior.

Now, let me share this with you. Children who never question authority. Who never push back, who are always quote good in every situation. These are often children who grow up to be people pleasers who struggle to set healthy boundaries in their adult relationships. They may have learned early on that their worth is tied to their compliance.

They love is conditional upon good behavior and that their own needs and feelings matter less than making other people happy. I. Sometimes that's hard to hear, but it's what's going on often. And my question is, is that really what we want for our kids, or do we want them to know their own minds, to learn to abdicate for themselves in a peaceful way and to have a strong internal compass that guides them.

I mean, that's what I want for my kid. Now, if you're resonating with this and you realize you've got some work to do. You want some deeper support in navigating these challenging parenting moments. I would be remiss if I didn't invite you to come join us inside the hive. In the hive. You'll get full access to all of our workshops, the past ones, and including Saturday's deep dive on setting enforcing limits, and then you'll get to come to live coaching calls.

Where you and I can troubleshoot your specific situation, and you'll become a part of a community of parents all working towards peaceful parenting. Even when it's hard inside the hive, you're never stuck wondering how to implement these strategies along the path to peaceful parenting that you hear about here on the podcast.

You're gonna figure out with my help, what to do. When your unique child doesn't respond the way they're supposed to or the way the book said it should, or the way

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that some, some script told you they should, because I'm there with you supporting you every step of the way. So if this speaks to you today and you realize that you'd like some more support around setting and enforcing limits and being patient while your kids push back with a firm and kind.

Parenting style. Then I want you to head over to the [hive coaching.com](https://www.hivecoaching.com) to learn more and join our community of parents who are committed to peaceful parenting. Now, let's talk about the difference between healthy developmental pushback and true quote disrespect because there is a difference, and as parents, as the peaceful leaders of our households, we need to be able to recognize the difference.

Healthy developmental pushback looks like questioning, negotiating, expressing disappointment, or even sometimes having a meltdown when the limit is set. It might be loud, it might be messy, but it's fundamentally about your kid trying to understand their world, where the edges and boundaries are, and develop their own voice.

For a toddler, this might look like saying no to everything, even things they actually want. For an elementary schooler, it might look like arguing about bedtime or screen limits, and for a teenager it might look like questioning family rules or pushing for more independence. All of these are appropriate forms, boundary testing for their developmental stages.

When your 2-year-old says no to everything they're discovering. Their separate self. When your 8-year-old negotiates for just five more minutes, they're developing persuasive skills. When your 15-year-old questions our rules, they're forming their own values and preparing for their independence. Pushback is also how children learn to set their own boundaries later in life.

By testing your boundaries, they're learning what boundaries are, how they work, and how to hold them. Which makes me question, how are you doing and modeling that for them. This is crucial preparation for adult relationships where they'll need to set and maintain healthy boundaries on their own. So how do we respond effectively when our children push back against our limits?

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Well, here are some practical tips for you. First, I want you to remember the mantra. He's having a hard time, not giving me a hard time. This is one of the greatest tools I brought into my parenting. This simple reframe can completely change how you respond to resistance. Instead of seeing defiance, you see struggle.

Instead of taking it personally, you see a child who needs your guidance. When your child pushes back, your job is to stay calm and regulated yourself. Take a deep breath, calm your amygdala. Remember that this is development in action, not a personal attack. Your calm presence helps them feel safe even as they struggle with the limit.

Next, I want you to validate their feelings while holding the limit. I know you really wanna stay at the park longer. It's hard to leave when you're having so much fun, isn't it? And it's time for us to go home for dinner. Let's walk to the car. For younger children, ages two to six. You wanna keep it simple?

Too much explanation. Invites more negotiation, a firm and kind. It's time for bedtime. Now works better than a lengthy rationale or lecture about sleep needs and tomorrow's schedule for school aged children. Seven to 12. You can acknowledge their growing reasoning skills. I understand that you want more screen time and you feel the limit isn't fair.

I've thought about it carefully and the answer is still no. We can talk about adjusting the limits next week if you show responsibility with the current limits. Yeah. And for teens 13 to 18 respect their autonomy while maintaining necessary boundaries. I appreciate, sweetheart, that you wanna make your own decisions about curfew.

I'd like to hear what time you think is reasonable and why, and then I'll share my thoughts and why. We might not land exactly where you want, but I value your input. The magic combination is always empathy plus firmness. I can see how upset you are, and the answer is still no. This shows them that you're considering an understanding that feelings and that you're confident enough in your boundary to maintain it even when they're unhappy.

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Remember? When your child pushes back against a limit, they're not just being difficult, they're learning critical life skills, how to express disagreement respectfully, and sometimes they start out expressing it disrespectfully on the path to respectfully. They're learning how to handle disappointment.

They're learning how to negotiate. They're learning how to recognize their own needs and feelings, and sometimes they're learning how to peacefully protest. All of these are skills they'll use throughout their lives, in friendships, romantic relationships, team situations, and even professional settings.

So the next time your child meets your limit with resistance, try to see it differently. They're not failing at being a good kid, and you're not failing as a parent. They're succeeding at the developmental tasks of childhood. They're not giving you a hard time. They're having a hard time. Their willingness to push back in your presence.

It's one of the greatest compliments they can give you As a parent. It says, I trust you to love me unconditionally, and I trust you to hold steady when I can't, and I trust you with my true self messy feelings. And all by holding kind firm limits, while accepting their emotions. Even the challenging ones you're teaching them.

They're loved exactly as they are. You're showing them what healthy boundaries look like, and you're preparing them to be adults who know their own minds and respect others' boundaries. Understanding the why behind pushback doesn't make it necessarily easier in the moment. As parents, it can still be frustrating, exhausting, and sometimes even embarrassing.

When our kids resist our limits, especially in public or in front of our in-laws, or at church or at school, or at the birthday party, but this understanding can give you the perspective You need to respond with compassion rather than frustration with confidence rather than doubt. I promise you that your child's pushback isn't a sign that you're doing something wrong.

It's a sign that you've created a relationship where they feel safe enough to fully be themselves and express themselves, to express their desires, to test the waters, and

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to learn through child and error how the world works. And that my real world, peaceful parent. Something to be proud of. Yeah. Awesome.

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 peacefulparent.com. See you soon.