

Ep. #225: 10 Reasons Traditional Discipline Fails Strong-Willed Kids



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 energized to be with you here today. And if you have a strong-willed kid, today's episode is for you. I wanna start by asking you a question and it might hit close to home, and it's this, have you ever noticed this with your strong-willed kid?

The more you try traditional discipline. You know, timeouts, grounding, taking things away. The more things seem to spiral, does it happen that instead of your kid or kids getting calmer and more cooperative, your kid gets more angry, more defiant, more disrespectful, more shut down. Yeah. Well, you're not alone.

I hear this all the time from parents, good parents just like you, who are doing everything they've been told to do, and yet. They feel like nothing's working. And if that's you, if you're in this circle, let me say this loud and clear, it's not your fault. It's not your child's fault either. You see, the real problem is that punishment based strategies simply don't work for sensitive, strong-willed kids.

And I'm sure I don't have to tell you this, but not only do they not work, they often make things worse. Right. So today I wanna help you and I wanna unpack 10 reasons that I see again and again and again inside my coaching practice over the last 15 years. 10 reasons, real reasons the traditional playbook fails are strong-willed kids.

You ready? Okay. First up is when we punish our kids, it creates power struggles. Strong-willed kids are wired to resist external control. And when we impose a punishment to force compliance, they feel the need to push back. Not because they're battered defiant, but because their nervous system sees control as a threat.

The harder we push, the harder they push back. Yeah. Number two, when we punish strong-willed kids, it triggers shame, not insight. Instead of learning from

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the experience, the child often thinks I'm bad, rather than I made a mistake, and this shame shuts down. Self-reflection, curiosity and growth insight comes from feeling safe, not from being made to feel wrong or small.

Coming in at number three, punishments don't work on strong-willed kids because punishing our kids, which I just wanna remind you, the definition of punish is to harm punishing our kids skips over the root cause. If we agree, the behavior is always a communication. Then when we punish without investigating what's underneath the behavior like.

Unmet needs or hunger or fatigue or sensory overload or fear. We miss the opportunity to teach emotional awareness and coping skills. Number four, when we punish our strong-willed kids, it damages trust and connection. Kids learn best from people they feel connected to. When our relationship becomes all about catching mistakes and enforcing punishments.

We chip away at the very foundation of our influence, our trust, and our attachment. Number five, punishing strong-willed kids teaches fear not understanding. When kids are afraid of punishment, when they're afraid of being harmed, they may obey to avoid pain, but they don't develop their inner discipline, what I like to call their inner compass.

Fear-based compliance does not build the emotional intelligence or self-regulation that strong-willed kids need in the world coming in. Number six, punishing our strong-willed kids doesn't teach what to do. Instead saying, don't hit your sister without showing them what to do when they're angry. Leaves your kid without tools.

Real teaching is modeling, practicing, and helping them build new skills. When they're angry. When they're frustrated, when they're upset, not just pointing out what they did wrong. Coming in at number seven, punishing our strong-willed kids fuels emotional dysregulation. Strong-willed sensitive kids are often already struggling with big feelings.

Punishing them adds more stress to their nervous system, making it even harder to stay calm, listen and learn anything in the moment that you're trying to teach it.

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Number eight, and maybe one of the most important, punishing our strong willed kids, makes kids sneakier when mistakes bring punishment. Harm.

Kids often learn to hide their behavior to avoid getting into trouble. This undermines honesty and openness and turns the parent into the enemy rather than the safe place for help. Coming in at number nine, punishing our strong-willed kids reinforces the I'm a bad kid story. And over time, repeated punishment can create a core of belief of, I'm bad, I'm always messing up and I'm not lovable.

And that belief becomes internalized and can shape their identity and self-worth for years to come. And coming in at number 10, punishing our strong-willed kids leaves you drained, discouraged, and second guessing yourself. Punishment doesn't just impact your kid, it takes a toll on you too, especially when it's not working.

It can lead to resentment, burnout, and guilt, and you deserve parenting tools that actually work and feel good to use. So which one of these sound familiar to you? 1, 2, 5. All of them. If so, I want you to know. I really want you to hear this. You are not alone and you are not broken. And I am here to help and I'm here to assure you that there is another way.

So you might be saying, okay, Lisa, well, if punishment isn't the answer, what is what actually helps? Well, here's what I teach every day inside the Hive and what I've seen personally transform thousands of families around the world. And I'm gonna share 'em with you right now. Number one is clear boundaries set with empathy.

Strong-willed kids feel safest when the world around them is consistent and predictable. They actually crave boundaries. They just want them delivered with respect, not force. When we, as the parents set clear limits with empathy, I won't let you hit. Or we're leaving in five minutes, and I know it's hard to stop playing.

We model respect and emotional leadership, and as a result, strong-willed kids learn they're safe and supported even when they're upset. Next is emotional coaching, not emotional control. Rather than punishing big feelings, we wanna teach our kids what those feelings are, what causes them. And how to move

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through them in healthy ways When a child learns, oh, I'm feeling frustrated because I couldn't get what I wanted.

They're building emotional intelligence over time. Emotional coaching, not control, strengthens self-awareness, emotional vocabulary, and the ability to pause. And respond rather than react. Hmm. That's a good one, isn't it? Next on our list is connection. During the hard moments. Now you might be like, what girl?

What? Hear me out. When your child storms melts down or acts out, they're signaling that their nervous system is dysregulated. And in those moments, connection. Is the bridge to regulation. You staying calm, offering presence and showing empathy tells your child you're safe. I've got you, and we'll get through this together.

The connection doesn't excuse the behavior. It supports the emotional repair your child needs in order to change it. Yeah. Awesome. Next on the list. It does work with strong-willed kids is collaborative problem solving. Once you've connected during the hard moment and your child is regulated, this is the moment for learning and growth.

When we bring our kids into the conversation with, Hey, what happened there? Or What could we try next time? Again, when they're regulated, we give them ownership and practice in critical thinking. This, my real world Peaceful parent teaches accountability without shame and nurtures problem solving skills they'll use for life.

And I see this every day with my kid. And then we're gonna bring up the rare with the last one, which is consistency. Kids thrive on knowing what to expect. Strong-willed kids excel on knowing what to expect. When we consistently show up with empathy while following through on limits and stick to our routines, we create a safe, emotional environment.

Consistency builds trust, reduces anxiety, and helps our kids internalize expectations over time. I promise you it's not about perfection. It's about predictably loving even when things get hard. This is real world peaceful

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parenting. So let me tell you a couple real life stories that exemplify the five tools I've just shared.

We're gonna call this one from storming to understanding a mom in the hive. Let's call her. Stacy used to ground her 12-year-old son every time he talked back. But as you probably know, it never worked and the disrespect just escalated. Once Stacey learned to pause, stay calm and get curious, not furious, everything shifted.

One day when her son snapped at her after school, she said, Hey, you seem really upset. You want to talk about it? And after a few minutes he admitted he'd been humiliated in gym class. She listened, validated, and stayed connected. No punishments, no threats, just calm, loving presence. And guess what? There was no more backtalk that week because he was able to feel seen and supported, and she realized that the backtalk was a signal for I'm struggling and I need help.

And over time the backtalk went away altogether. Okay, let's call this one from timeouts to teaching. Another dad, we'll call him. Jeff, used to put his 6-year-old in timeouts for meltdowns, but it never worked. She cried harder, stayed dysregulated, and escalated the storm. After learning about co-regulation, Jeff sat next to her during the storm and said, I'm right here.

You're safe. Let's breathe together. And what he discovered is she calmed faster. I. And then afterwards would say, thank you for staying with me. That's the power of connection when our kids are storming rather than punishing. Okay. Let me share one more story. This was a mom I worked with, we'll call her Denise, who came to me broken hearted because her 10-year-old had started lying to her.

Big things, little things, and she kept telling me I can't trust him anymore. Her go-to response had always been consequences when he lied, taking away screen time, grounding stern lectures, but none of that was working. The lies just kept coming. One day after we'd been working together for a few weeks, Denise told me, based on our coaching, that she tried something different.

Her son admitted he had broke something and hid it, and instead of yelling, shook a big, deep breath and said, thank you for telling me. That must have been hard. I know it feels scary to tell me that, but I'm proud of you. Denise reported that her

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son looks stunned, and then he started crying and he said, I thought you'd be so mad.

I thought you'd love me less. That was the moment the walls started to come down. That was the beginning of rebuilding trust, because when we create a safe place for truth telling, our kids don't have to lie. They don't have to hide. They can show up messy and scared and imperfect and know they're still loved.

Good examples. Yeah. Okay, so now maybe you're thinking, I wanna do this, Lisa and I believe in this, but I don't know how or what if I mess up? Oh my friend, let me tell you something important. You will mess up. I still mess up because we all do real world peaceful parenting isn't about perfection. It's about repair.

It's about coming back to connection again and again and again. It's about showing your kids the mistakes. Don't mean the end of love or less love. That losing your cool doesn't make you a bad parent or a bad kid. That you can show them that you can take responsibility and say, I'm sorry. Let's try again.

Because every time you repair as the parent, you are teaching them how to do that. And that's the beauty of this work. It's not about getting it right every time. It's about building trust that can hold anything. Even the hard days. The hard hours. The hard moments. So here's today's homework. Write down three punishment strategies you've used recently.

How did they work? How did they feel? What was the outcome? Just acknowledge what you've been doing that isn't working, and then try one moment this week to connect overcorrect, stay calm, validate, hold the limit, and see what happens. If you want help shifting away from punishment and into tools that actually work, if you're ready to shift from control to connection, from punishing.

Which is to harm, to discipline, to teach. Then I want you to come join us inside the hive. In the hive. I help you create practical, personalized strategies for handling your strong-willed kids with clarity, calm, and confidence. Come join us. You won't regret it, I promise. To learn more and join us right now today, go over to the [hive coaching.com](https://www.hivecoaching.com).

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Once again, the [hive coaching.com](https://thehivecoaching.com) and I'll meet you there. Sound good?
Awesome. 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](https://peacefulparent.com). See you soon.