

Ep. #229: Storming Child, Frozen Parent: What to Say When Your Mind Goes Blank



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 I wanna start today's episode by sharing something that happened in our Hive community this week that touched my heart. A brand, brand, brand new hive member. We're gonna call her Melissa, who's a mom of three kids under this age of eight.

Reached out to me with this message. She said, Lisa, this week. I've worked on keeping in my mind the things you coached me on, and for the first time ever have been able to actually pause and keep myself calm. I've always struggled with pausing because in that pause, I think I can't do this, or I don't wanna do this.

I, it disregulates me, but you taught me to say, this is hard and I'm safe. Or this is hard and we'll get through it. And this has been a small but mighty shift that has been a game changer, and this week has helped me stay calm. For the first time ever since becoming a mom, she went on to say it's become evident that the explosions have been because I've been a storming parent, meeting my storming child, especially my 8-year-old in these past few days.

I've been able to remain calm and we've had zero explosions. Zero. Melissa said, the environment, my home is calmer, but most amazingly is how the environment within myself has become more peaceful. I'm so thankful for all you've taught and help me with Lisa. Isn't that beautiful? I mean, honestly, y'all, that's why I do what I do.

That gets me out of bed every morning to show up and help parents just like you. But something else Melissa shared really got me thinking. She asked, okay, here's where I need help. Lisa, what are some questions to ask when getting curious? Instead of furious, she wrote, I feel like my mind goes blank and I can't think of what to ask to scuba dive down.

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To the bottom of the stormy waves. Raise your hand if this happens to you too. I mean, this used to be me. You're in the middle of a challenging moment with your kid. They're melting down or pushing back, or flat out refusing to cooperate. And you know, intellectually that you should get curious, not furious that there's something deeper going on beneath the behavior.

But in that heated moment, if you're anything like my old self. Melissa, your mind just goes blank. It feels impossible to think of a single thing to say, except because I said so, or that's it. I've had enough. Now, if you're nodding your head right now, today's episode is especially for you today, we're tackling one of the most common challenges parents face when trying to shift to peaceful parenting.

What to say when your mind goes blank in the heat of the moment. Let's get real for a moment when your children are storming. Our own central nervous system often goes into survival mode. Our thinking brain, us the parents, our thinking brain, our prefrontal cortex starts to go offline. That's the part responsible for staying calm, creative problem solving, empathy, and yes, asking those curious questions.

Instead, our emotional brain, which I call our middle brain, takes over and we instantly become flooded with stress hormones. Our heartbeats faster, our breathing gets shallow and suddenly. Accessing those thoughtful connecting questions feels like trying to remember a phone number while someone's shouting in your ear.

It's not your fault. It's not, I promise. It's your brain doing exactly what it's designed to do during stress, and those moments feel stressful. But here's the good news. There are concrete ways to prepare for these moments so that even when your mind goes blank, you have a lifeline to pull you back to curiosity.

Wanna know more? I thought so. Now I wanna tell you about something that happened with my own son, Malcolm, when he was about eight years old. We were running late for school, which was already stressful because I hate to be late for anything, and I'd asked him to put his shoes on. I left the room. I came back.

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Shoes still weren't on. I asked him again, left the room, came back. Shoes still not on. I felt like he just wouldn't do it. He sat on the floor, arms crossed, face stormy, and I could feel my frustration building that volcano inside of me was ready to erupt. Malcolm, put your shoes on. Now was on the tip of my tongue.

I promise you. In that moment, I remembered something that I'd been practicing over and over and over again, something that I'd been front loading. I had written down a few key questions on a small note card in my purse for exactly these situations. So I took a deep breath. I pulled out the card, and I simply read, Hey, what's making this hard for you right now?

His little 8-year-old face crumbled. Mommy, these shoes hurt my feet. There's something poking me inside them and just like that, what could have been a power struggle turned into a problem solving moment. There was actually a small rock inside his shoe. It was probably digging into his foot. Now let me share.

I was not a magical all-knowing parent in that moment. I didn't have a crystal ball. What I was is I was just a parent. Who had prepared for my mind going blank by having one simple question ready to go. And that's what I wanna give you today. A toolbox of questions you can use when your mind goes blank in those heated moments with your kids.

So I wanna share some categories of questions that can help you scuba eye beneath the surface when your kid is storming and your mind is drawing a blank. You ready? Okay. So they're grouped into categories, and the first category is questions that help you identify unmet needs. And they go like this, Hey, what happened before this started feeling hard for you?

Is your body tired, hungry, overwhelmed, or just done? What are you needing right now that you're not getting? Are you feeling out of control? Would you like some help making a plan? Let me give you an example. How these might work in real life. Imagine your 6-year-old is having a complete meltdown about eating dinner.

They're pushing their plate away and screaming, I hate this. Your instinct might be to respond with, you're eating it whether you like it or not, which is what I was told

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when I was a kid. But instead, you pause, take a breath, and ask, is your body tired, hungry, or something else? Your kid might reveal something like.

My tummy hurts when I eat that food. Or maybe your kid says, Tommy said he doesn't wanna play with me anymore at school. Suddenly you have information that changes everything about how you'll respond. Okay? Category number two. These questions help you understand the feelings driving that behavior. You could ask, Hey, what's the feeling under this anger?

Are you sad? Are you scared? Are you hurt? That's actually one of my favorite questions of all time. You could ask, are you worried? I won't understand you. You could ask, do you feel like I'm not hearing something important to you? And here's a real world application. Your 12-year-old slams their homework down and says, this is stupid.

I'm not doing it. Instead of jumping into, don't speak that way, you have to do your homework. You might ask, Hey, what's the feeling underneath this frustration? Are you worried about getting it wrong? And you might get a response that might surprise you with something like Ms. Johnson said, I need to show my work, but I don't know how to explain.

How did I got to the answer? Now you're dealing with the real issue. Fear of failure or not knowing how to meet expectations rather than apparent defiance. Yeah. Can you see that? Alright, category three. Now these questions are gonna help you move from power struggles to partnerships with your kid. These questions include, can we figure this out together?

I love that one. What would feel good to you right now, or what would feel successful to you? How do we move forward? Here's another favorite of mine. Is there a way we can both get some of what we need? Hmm. It's good. Right? And lastly, if I really listened to what matters to you, what would I hear? Let me share how this played out.

Recently in the Hive, her 12-year-old daughter refused to clean a room despite repeated requests. Tensions are rising. Instead of escalating, instead of reacting, the

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hive member paused and responded with this question and asked, is there a way we can both get what we need here? I need the room cleaned.

What do you need? Her daughter admitted she felt overwhelmed by the mess and didn't know where to start. Very common, by the way, together they broke down the task into smaller steps and put on some music to make it more fun. The room got cleaned, and more importantly, their connection stayed intact. I love that example.

Okay, onto the next category. This one is about safety and reassurance. Sometimes what our kids need most is to know we're on their side even during difficult moments. So the question might be, do you want me to sit with you while you calm down? Or maybe you say. Even when you're upset like this, I'm here and I love you.

Or you could say, I can tell this feels big. You're not in trouble. I just wanna understand. And lastly, you don't have to handle this alone. I'm your teammate. I remember a time when Malcolm was having huge meltdown over something that seemed minor to me. Rather than trying to fix it or shut it down, I simply sat next to him and said.

Hey, you don't have to handle this alone. I'm your teammate. He took that in and his entire body softened within moments, and he was leaning against me ready to talk. These are some really helpful statements and questions that offer our kids safety and reassurance when they need it most. And heading into our last category, these questions are for you.

These are questions that you can silently ask yourself to help stay regulated in these heated moments. This is a favor of mine. What am I assuming about this moment or this situation that might not be true? Another one, what is, or what might this behavior be trying to communicate to me, even in the most ugly of ways?

Lastly, if I knew my child was hurting, instead of quote being bad, how would I respond? One mom in our hive community shared how transformative this category was for her. Her 4-year-old kept having tantrums at bedtime. Every single

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night was a battle. She was exhausted and frustrated, but when she started asking herself, what might this behavior be trying to communicate?

She realized her daughter was actually afraid of the dark. Something she hadn't expressed directly but was obvious when she got curious, a nightlight and a special bedtime ritual, which we coached her on in the hive, addressed the real issue and the tantrums disappeared almost overnight. Now I know what you might be thinking.

Well, maybe, I don't know, but I can guess. You might be thinking Lisa. These questions sound great, but how, Lisa, how am I supposed to remember them when my mind goes blank? Fantastic question. Here are four simple ways to make these questions accessible when you need them most. The easiest and my most favorite is to create a phone note inside your phone with these questions so that you can quickly reference them.

And let's be honest, most of us. Have our phones on our body when we're with our kids. You could even pin the note to the top for easy access. Another way, another idea is make small index cards with a few questions in each category and keep them in strategic locations. Your purse, the kitchen drawer, the car.

Another one is choose just one question from each category and memorize it, and then practice it over and over again. Just one. You could start with what's making this hard for you right now and add more as they become natural to you. And lastly, you can post this list of questions on your refrigerator or bathroom mirror.

Make them visible so they become a part of your daily landscape. Remember, the goal is not to interrogate your child with a barrage or litany or list of questions. It's to have a few reliable lifelines. They can pull you back to curiosity when your mind goes blank. Okay, and lastly, let's talk about this.

The other reality is sometimes we as the parents, we need a moment. We need a moment to gather ourselves before we can even access the curiosity. And that's where what I call bridge phrases comes in. These are short scripts that buy you a hot minute to gather yourself. Buy you time without interrupting.

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So this is what these sound like. I'm going to take a deep breath because I care about how we talk to each other. This is hard and we're gonna figure it out together. But I need a moment, first to gather myself. And lastly, I'm not sure what's going on yet, but I want to understand and I'm committed to it.

These are good, right? These phrases act as a bridge. Between your initial reaction and your thoughtful response, they give you permission to pause, which is essential for accessing curiosity. Let me share a recent, personal example. Just last week, I was having a challenging conversation with Malcolm, who's now a young adult, and I could feel myself getting defensive.

My mind went completely blank, so I simply said. This matters to me and I wanna understand your perspective better. Can I take a minute and gather my thoughts? The simple bridge phrase gave me the space I needed to connect to reconnect with my curiosity rather than my defensiveness. Let me say that again because I really want you to get this.

That simple bridge phrase gave me the space to. Grab or connect with my curiosity and drop my defensiveness. One of the most powerful things you can do to stay calm and regulated and curious is to practice these questions during calm times over and over and over again. Also known as front loading. Just like athletes practice their moves over and over and over again before a game.

We need to practice our questions over and over and over again before the big storm. Does that make sense? So try this next time your child is calm and connected, say something like, I'm working on being a better listener. When things get tough, can we practice something together? If you were upset right now, would it help if I asked you what's making this hard for you?

Or what do you need right now? Not only does this help you get comfortable with questions, but it also signals to your kid or kids that you're committed to understanding them even or especially during difficult moments. Okay. As we close out today's episode, I wanna tell you that there was something Melissa said in her message that really struck me.

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She wrote, I always struggled with pausing because in, in that pause, I think I can't do this, or I don't wanna do this. And you know, that's so honest and relatable. That pause can be uncomfortable in that space between our child's behavior and our response lies, all our self-doubt, frustration and overwhelm, and sometimes it all comes crashing in at once.

I've been there many times and occasionally still find myself back there. Remember, peaceful parenting is about progress, not perfection. But Melissa found a way through. She replaced those discouraging thoughts with, this is hard, but I'm safe. And she also used, this is hard, but we'll get through it.

That's something I coached her on inside the hive right away as one of her most helpful go-to tools that would allow her to tolerate the discomfort. And that small shift made all the difference. It reminds me of something I often tell Hive members. The pause is an empty space. The pause is where your power lives.

The pause is where connection starts. In that pause, you can choose, will I react from my storm or can I respond from my wisdom? And sometimes all you need in that pause is a single question to guide you back to curiosity. Can you see that? It's possible for you, I promise. Now, before we wrap up, I wanna give you a simple homework assignment that can start making a difference right away.

Number one, choose three questions from today's episode that resonated with you the most, just three. Number two, write them down somewhere. You'll see them daily. Your phone, a note card, a post-it note at your desk, a post-it note on your bathroom mirror, a post-it note above the stove, wherever you'll see them daily.

Number three, practice asking these questions during a calm moment with your kid or kids. Get comfortable with how they feel in your mouth and how your child responds to them. And lastly, when a challenging moment arises, give yourself permission to pause, take a breath, try one of the chosen questions instead of your reaction, your habitual response.

I said it before, but I really want you to hear this. It's not about perfection, it's about practice. Every time you reach for curiosity instead of fury, you are rewiring your

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brain to make that path a little clearer and a little more easier to access next time. And if you find that you're really struggling with this, just like Melissa was.

Then I wanna invite you to come and join us in the hive. Melissa had a massive transformation within her very first week of joining, and this is completely possible for you as well. The Hive is my membership community where you are going to get personalized coaching from me. You're gonna get practical tools and a supportive community to help navigate the real challenges of peaceful parenting.

Inside the hive, you'll find weekly live coaching calls where we work through real situations, just like the ones we've discussed today. A library of scripts and questions that you can use in those mind blank moments. A supportive community of parents who understand exactly what you're going through and step-by-step guides for handling everything from tantrums to bedtime battles to sibling rivalries.

Most importantly, you're gonna find a place where you're never judged for struggling, only supported in your growing, just like Melissa discovered sometimes the smallest shifts, like having the right questions ready when your mind goes blank can create the biggest transformations in your home and in your heart.

To learn more and join us, I want you to visit the [hive coaching.com](https://thehivecoaching.com), the [hive coaching.com](https://thehivecoaching.com). I can't wait to see you there, so I wanna close out today's episode with a reminder that's so important. Getting Curious instead of Furious isn't about being a perfect parent. It's about being a growing parent.

Every time your mind goes blank and you reach for a question. Instead of reaction, you're teaching your kids something powerful, that understanding matters more than being right. The connection matters more than control, and the curiosity can light the way through even the stormiest moments. And if your mind still goes blank sometimes, that's okay.

Give yourself grace. Take a breath. Remember, tomorrow's a new day with new opportunities to get curious. You're doing the hardest job in the world and you're doing the heart, and that matters so much more than getting it perfect every time. Yeah. Awesome. Okay. Until next time, I'm wishing you Peaceful Parenting.

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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.