

Ep. #231: Are You a “Don’t” Parent? Flip Your Words for Better Behavior



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host
Lisa Smith

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Flip Your Words for Better Behavior

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 thrilled to be with you here today, and I wanna start today's episode with a quick quiz or experiment. Are you ready? I want you to think back to yesterday, and I'm going to ask you to mentally count how many times you told your kid or kids what not to do versus how many times you told them what to do.

Let me help you jog your memory. How many times did you say things like, don't run, don't talk with your mouthful. Don't hit your brother. Don't yell, don't doddle. Don't touch that. Don't argue with me now. No judgment from me ever. You know that we're just doing a little self-assessment. Now, think about how many times did you tell them what you did want them to do?

And if you're feeling a little uncomfortable right now, you're not alone. The truth is most of us spend the majority of our parenting time telling our kids what not to do. And here's what's wild. Your child's brain literally cannot process what you don't want them to do, not in the way you think it can.

So today we're gonna dive deep into why this happens. What's going on in your kids' developing brain at any age, and how to flip the script in a way that will transform your home. Because what I know for sure is when you start catching your kids doing things right and telling them exactly what success looks like, everything, and I mean everything changes.

Let me paint a picture of what a typical morning sounds like in so, so, so many homes. Don't leave your backpack there. Don't forget to brush your teeth. Don't take forever getting dressed. Don't slam the door. Don't forget your lunch. Right, and then we wonder why our kids seem scattered, why they're not listening, why they keep doing the very same things we keep telling them not to do.

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Here's what I realized when Malcolm was a little guy, and this was a total game changer for me. I was rushing around one morning, already running late, and I heard myself say, stop dragging your feet. Don't forget your homework. Don't leave without saying goodbye. Malcolm just stood there looking completely overwhelmed.

Finally, he said, mom, I don't know what you want me to do. You keep telling me what not to do. I mean, come on out of the mouth of babes, right? And that's when it hit me. I had become a professional, don't parent. I was so focused on preventing problems that I forgot to actually guide him towards solutions or I didn't know to guide him towards solutions.

The thing is, we default to don't language. When we're stressed, when we're rushed, and when we feel overwhelmed, it feels faster to point out what's wrong than to take the time to explain what we want. But here's the plot twist. What we're doing now. The professional donting is actually making everything harder for our kids and for us.

Let's get nerdy for a minute because this is going to blow your mind if you're a longtime listener. You've heard me say this many times before your kids' brain, especially the prefrontal cortex that handles executive function planning and impulse control, isn't fully developed until 25 years old. 25. So when we're giving them all these don't commands.

We're asking their underdeveloped brain to do something that's actually neurologically challenging. Here's why. When you say don't run, your child's brain has to first process the word run, which creates a mental image of running, then try to suppress that image, then try to figure out what to do instead.

Okay. Right now I'm gonna say to you, don't think about a pink elephant. Don't think about a pink elephant. Don't think about a pink elephant. What just happened in your brain? You totally thought of a pink elephant, didn't you? That's because our brains can't process the negatives the same way they process the positives.

When we hear don't run the brain first has to understand run before it can try to negate it. But here's what's really fascinating. When you say walk, please. The

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brain creates a clear, positive image of walking. There's no confusion, no extra processing needed. The neural pathway goes straight from hearing to understanding to action, and this is where mirror neurons come into play.

We're gonna get really geeky on science here for a moment, but stick with me. Mirror neurons are those amazing brain cells. Fire both when we perform an action and when we observe someone else performing that action. Mirror neurons are basically our brain's copy and paste function. So when you clearly communicate what to do and then you catch your kid doing it right, you're activating the mirror neurons in the most powerful way.

You're literally helping their brain build positive neural pathways. Have you heard this saying that I love so much. What you focus on expands? Well, there's actual neuroscience behind this. Every time you focus on a behavior, whether it's positive or negative, you're actually strengthening neural pathways.

Every time you say don't hit, you're actually reinforcing the concept of hitting in your child's brain. But every time you say, keep your hands to yourself when you're angry. Then catch them doing exactly that. You're building a super highway in their brain for appropriate behavior. One of our hive members, let's call her, Jennifer, discovered this with her 8-year-old son who was constantly getting in trouble at school for disrupting class.

When we dug deeper, Jennifer realized that both she and the teacher were spending all their energy telling her son what not to do. Don't talk at a turn. Don't get outta your seat. Don't bother your neighbors. So we flipped it. Jennifer started working with the teacher to be crystal clear about what they did want.

Raise your hand before speaking. Stay in your seat during work time and keep your hands to yourself. And then this is the magic part. They started catching him doing these things right and really appreciating him for it. Within two weeks, the behavior problems virtually disappeared. Same kid, same classroom, completely different approach.

What happened is his brain finally had clear directions instead of a to-do list of don'ts, and those positive neural pathways started getting stronger every day. So

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let's get practical here. I wanna give you specific examples of how to flip your language. Across all ages, because this works whether your kid is two or 20.

Believe me, I know. So let's talk about ages two to five, the foundation years instead of don't run in the house, try walking feet inside, please, and then catch them doing it. Well say, I love how you're using your walking feet. That keeps everyone safe instead of don't throw your toys, try I. Toys, stay on the floor or in the toy box.

Then catch them with you. Put that block right back in the box. That's exactly what we wanna do with our toys. See that instead of don't scream or don't yell, try use your inside voice please. Then catch them with Thank you for using your quiet voice. That helps Mommy's ears feel good. At this age, the brains are like little sponges absorbing everything.

When you give them clear, positive directions and then celebrate when they follow through, you're literally programming their brains for success. Alright, let's look at the rural learning years, ages six to nine. Instead of don't be mean to your sister. Try use kind words with our family. Didn't catch them.

I heard you ask your sister nicely if you could play with her toy. That's exactly using your kind words. Instead of, don't interrupt me. You could try. Hey, wait for a pause in the conversation and then say, excuse me. You can even practice that. Then catch them with Well done. You waited for me to finish talking and said, excuse me.

That shows good manners. Instead of, don't forget your homework. Try put your homework in your backpack right after you finish it. Didn't catch them. I noticed your homework is already in your backpack. That's awesome. And I can see how organized you are at six to nine. These kids are developing their sense of right and wrong and clear expectations, help them feel secure and successful.

Let's move on to the identity forming years, ages 10 to 13 instead of Don't leave your stuff everywhere. You could say, put your backpack by the door and your shoes in the closet when you come home, and then you catch them with, wow, I

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really appreciate that you put your things where they belong. It helps our entire house stay organized instead of don't talk back to me.

You could drive. If you disagree with me, say I have a different opinion, and then we can discuss it. Then you can catch them with. I really respect how you expressed your disagreement respectfully, and I'm here to talk about it instead of don't spend all your day on your phone. You could try, phone time is from four to six on school days, and then catch them with, I noticed you put your phone away at six without me reminding you.

That shows great self-control during these years. Preteens are trying to figure out who they are and when we give them clear boundaries. With appreciation for meeting the boundaries, we're helping them see themselves as capable and responsible. Now, let's talk about the independent seeking years. 14 and up instead of, don't be disrespectful.

You could try. I need you, or I ask you to speak to me with the same respect I show you. Now, that means you are showing them respect, but that's a different podcast episode for a different day. So let me say it again. You could try, I'd like you or I want you, or I need you to speak to me with the same respect I show you.

Then you could catch them with, I really appreciate how you talked through that disagreement with me, that felt respectful and mature. Next one, instead of Don't stay up too late, you could try, curfew is 11:00 PM on weekends and I need a text when you arrive home safely. On time, then you could catch them with, thank you for texting me when you got there and coming home on time.

That helps me trust you with more freedom down the road instead of don't fail your class. You could try. I expect you to check in with me every Friday about your grades and ask for help if you need it. Then you could catch them with, I love that you came to me about struggling in chemistry. That shows real maturity and responsibility.

Teenagers are almost adults. And when we treat them and talk to them with clear expectations and genuine appreciation, we're preparing them for the real world where people respond to positive leadership, not constant criticism. So here's the

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secret sauce, and this is what makes all the difference, and you're probably already figured it out.

Once you start giving clear positive directions, you have to become a detective for success. You have to catch them doing it right and tell them about it. Bear witness, tell them that you saw it, because here's what happens when you appreciate your kid for following your clear direction. You are basically saying more of this, please, you're reinforcing the exact behavior you want to see.

I feel like I need to say that again. When you appreciate your kid for following your clear direction, you're basically saying more of this, please. You're reinforcing the exact behavior you want to see. Some of my favorite catching phrases include, I noticed. I love how you, thank you four. I appreciate that you, that's exactly what I was hoping for.

And listen, you're gonna slip back into don't sometimes. We all do. We all do. When you catch yourself, just pause and reframe. Actually, let me try that again. What I really need is you to put your shoes away. When you come home from school, your kids will appreciate your honesty and your commitment to communicating clearly.

It shows them that we're all learning and growing together. Alright, my real world peaceful parent, I have two pieces of homework for you this week, and I promise they're game changers number one. The don't audit just for one day notice and keep track of how many times you say don't to your kid or kids.

Don't judge yourself. Just notice awareness is always the first step to change in homework. Assignment number two is the flip practice. No, not the flip cup. Flip practice. Choose three of your most common, don't phrases, and flip them into clear positive directions. Write them down somewhere, you'll see them.

Then practice catching your child doing these three things right and appreciating them for it. Easy peasy, right? Easy peasy with big results. Now, if you're thinking, Lisa, this sounds amazing, but I need help. I need help making this a consistent habit in my home. I totally get it. Learning how to communicate clearly about what

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you want and exactly what success looks like is a skill, especially if you grew up in a home of don'ts.

I get it. And in the hive, I teach parents exactly how to do this with personalized strategies created just for you. We practice the language flips. I teach you how to catch success in real time, and you and I will do it. All with the support of a community that gets it. So if you feel ready to transform the way you communicate with your kids and see them light up with confidence as they succeed at your clear expectations, then I want you to come join us inside the hive.

You can learn more and sign up@thehivecoaching.com. Please come join us. All you're gonna regret is that you didn't join us sooner. I promise. Alright. Remember, your child's brain is literally designed to succeed When you give them clear, positive direction every time, every single time you tell your kid or kids what to do instead of what not to do, and then you catch 'em doing it right.

You're building their confidence and your connection. Remember what you focus on expands. So let's commit to focusing on exactly what we want to see more of from our kids. Yeah, awesome. You've got this. And I'll be with you every step of the way. 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](http://peacefulparent.com). See you soon.