

Ep. #234: The One Thing Your Child Craves More Than Your Love (And How to Give It to Them)



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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 grateful to be with you here today, and I wanna say thank you so much for being a listener today. I wanna start by sharing something that happened this week in our Hive community that absolutely filled my heart. One of our members, let's call her, Sarah, reached out after our most recent workshop on validation to share this beautiful moment.

Her 17-year-old son had been distant lately. You know how teenagers can get just existing in the same house, but not really connecting. But after learning about attending, which is what we're diving into today, Sarah tried something different. Instead of asking him about his day or trying to fix his mood, she simply attended to him.

She noticed he seemed stressed. She made space for that stress. Without trying to solve it. She just saw him and you know what happened before he headed out that night? He gave her a hug, a real genuine hug from her almost adult son who'd been keeping his distance lately. And that my friends, is the power of attending and because it's so powerful, I wanted to talk about it with you here today.

Because here's what I've learned after years of doing this work, before cooperation comes connection and before connection comes attending, let me paint you a picture of what most of us default to when our kids are struggling. Your 7-year-old comes home from school, throws his or her backpack down and says, I hate math.

I'm never doing homework again. What's our instinct? It's usually to jump straight in to fix it mode. Honey, you don't hate math. Come on, you're good at math. Let's just sit down and work through it together. I mean, math is important and you

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really like it. Or maybe your teenager stomps through the house, slams the door and mutters something about their friends being fake.

Our brain immediately goes to what happened, who said, what should I call someone? How do I solve this? But here's what I've discovered. I. Miss has truly been revolutionary for my relationship with Malcolm over the years, and for every family I work with, what our kids need first isn't our solutions. It's not our advice.

It's not even our love necessarily. What they need first is to be seen, really, truly seen, and this is where attending comes in. I wanna credit Dr. Caroline Fleck and her incredible book *Validation* for giving Beautiful Language to something I've been doing for years. She's really done a brilliant job of putting words to attending and explaining it in an easy to understand way and attending, truly Attending to your child is like sunlight for their emotional world.

It helps everything else grow. So what exactly is attending? Attending is the simple, profound act of being fully present with your kid with absolutely no agenda, no fixing, no solving, no teaching, just being with them in their experience. Attending is also known as active listening, and it's saying with your entire being, I see you.

I'm with you. This experience matters. Now, when we talk about attending to our kids, we're really talking about validation. Validation covers a person's complete experience, their emotions, their thoughts, and their behavior. Let me be crystal clear about what attending and validation are not. Validation is not agreement.

You do not have to agree with your child's perspective. To validate their experience. Validation is not praise or approval. You're not saying good job, you're saying I see you. And validation is definitely not problem solving. You're not trying to fix anything in the moment. You're accepting their experience is valid.

This requires acceptance, my friends, and here's the key. It's not about you. It's about bringing mindful awareness and understanding and empathy to your child's experience so they feel truly accepted. Now, I wanna share something personal with you that makes this work so meaningful to me. Growing up, my experiences

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that I was having as a kid were often invalidated, not because my caregivers didn't love me, they did, and they were doing the best they could.

With what they knew. But when I was upset or struggling, I'd hear things like, you're being too sensitive, or That's not that big of a deal, or You shouldn't feel that way. And you know what that taught me? It taught me that I couldn't trust my own experiences. That my feelings were somehow wrong, and as a result, I became a people pleaser, and I became someone who was constantly looking to others.

To tell me how I felt or what my experiences meant, and it was confusing, it was painful, and it made me doubt myself for years. So when I started this Peaceful Parenting journey with Malcolm about 16, 17 years ago, I didn't have the language of attending yet, but I knew deep in my bones that I wanted him to trust his own experiences.

I wanted him to know his feelings mattered and that his perspective was valid and that he didn't need my approval to know what he was feeling. And that starts with attending. Yeah. Okay. Let's get practical. Maybe you're wondering or thinking, okay, Lisa, but how do I actually attend to my kid? Well, it's simpler than you think, but it does require intentionality.

So let's go over the steps. Step one, you're gonna pause and observe, and to be totally honest with you, for many of us, this may be the hardest step because pause and observe means putting our phone down, turning away from the dishes. Stop scrolling through the mental checklist in your mind. It means giving your full attention to what's happening to your kid right now.

Not what you think should be happening, not what you wish was happening, but what is happening? Your 4-year-old is melting down because their sleeve is wrong. Your 12-year-old is frustrated about a friend's situation. Your teenager just got rejected from something They really want pause. Look at them, really see what's happening in their body, their face, their energy.

Pause and observe. Step two, name the moment. This can be silent or out loud. You're simply reflecting what you observe without judgment silently. You say to

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yourself, she's really upset right now. This matters to her out loud. You could say, I see this is really hard for you right now. You're not fixing, you're not minimizing, you're not rushing them through it.

You're simply naming their reality of this moment. Step three, you hold the space. Now, this is where things get spicy, and for some of us is going to be the hardest part because our instinct as a parent is to do something. Many of us think parenting equals. Solving, fixing, correcting, and immediately finding a solution and listen.

That can be helpful and sometimes necessary, but always after attending. So holding space means staying present in the first few moments without trying to fix your experience. It might look like sitting nearby while they cry. It might be a gentle hand on their back. It might be saying, I'm right here with you.

Let me give you some real world examples of what this looks like across different ages. So let's say you have a toddler that's having a meltdown about the wrong cup. I mean, come on, we've all been there, right? So instead of it's just a cup, this one's fine. Attending. Looks like getting down on their level.

Staying calm and saying, you really wanted the blue cup, didn't you? That's disappointing. Then just staying with them while they feel that disappointment, just staying with them. You don't have to run and find the blue cup. You can just stay with them while they work through that disappointment with the school age child frustrated about homework instead of, it's not that hard.

Let me show you. Attending could look like. Oh my gosh. I see you're really frustrated right now. I bet this feels hard. Then waiting to see what they need from you instead of jumping in with solutions with a teenager upset about friend drama instead of what happened. Tell me everything attending. Looks like something's bothering you.

I'm here if you want to talk. Then just giving them space to share or not share on their timeline, not yours. Now, you might be thinking, Lisa, this sounds nice, but how does just being with my kid actually change anything? Well, here's the

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beautiful neuroscience behind attending when humans, but for this purpose, we're gonna say when your kid feels truly seen and accepted, truly not fixed, not judged.

Just seeing their nervous system starts to settle that fight, flight, freeze, or fawn response that makes them unable to think clearly or cooperate begins to settle down your presence, your calm attending is literally co-regulating their emotional system. I need to say that again. Pretend I'm saying this in.

Your presence, your calm attending is literally co-regulating their nervous system. But even more importantly, your attending communicates something profound to your kid. Here's what your child receives. When you truly validate their experience, you are enough, even when you're struggling. I'm here. Even when you push me away, you can trust me to stay connected even when we disagree that my friends is the foundation of connection, not agreement, connection, not approval of their behavior, connection to their experience.

And one of the biggest mistakes I see parents make is trying to force connection on our own timeline. We want our kids to open up, to share, to connect, and we want it now, right now. But the truth is connection can't be forced. It can only be invited. An attending is the most powerful invitation we can offer.

I wanna tell you about another breakthrough that happened recently in our hive community. A mom was struggling with her 10-year-old who'd been having daily meltdowns after school. Instead of trying to prevent the meltdowns or talk her daughter out of them, she started practicing attending. She'd simply sit nearby and say, this feels big.

I'm here. No questions, no solutions, no rushing. And you know what happened? After about a week of consistent attending, her daughter started talking, not because mom was asking questions. But because she felt safe enough to share what was really going on. Turns out she was being excluded by her friend group at school and didn't know how to handle it.

But she couldn't access that information because she was in meltdown mode and her mom was trying to fix things and she wasn't able to take it all in from

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meltdown mode. So the mom just started attending. This feels big, and I'm here when you're ready. Yeah. Which leads me to share with you some of the biggest pitfalls I see when parents are learning to attend.

So let me share these with you. I want you to be aware of them as you're practicing attending. Mistake number one is too much intensity. Sometimes. We're so excited about this new tool that we come in with way too much energy. I'm guilty of this all the time with Malcolm. It's like I see you, I'm attending to you.

I'm ready, but your child might not be ready for that level of intensity if you don't know. I have pretty high energy and I can be pretty intense, and sometimes I've been thinking about something for so long that when I get on the phone with Malcolm or we FaceTime our See him in person, my energy is really high and sometimes it's just too much.

Sometimes our kids aren't ready for that level of intensity. So my suggestion is read the room. Sometimes attending. Looks like quiet presence, not dramatic connection. Read the room. Mistake number two, forcing opportunities instead of leaning into natural ones. Here's something so many of us do. We get excited about attending and then we try to create or force opportunities for deep connection.

We demand our kids be vulnerable or expect them to engage simply because we're ready or it works on our timeline, or it's the perfect time while we're driving them to soccer. But here's the awareness issue. Although our intentions might be benevolent, we're trying to connect, we may actually be responding more to our own needs than attending to theirs.

And the truth is that attending to someone who doesn't want our attention reflects a lack of awareness, and it's not validating. It's annoying. The solution. Wait for your kid to open up naturally. Like the mom in the example did it took a whole week. She just kept doing it. She was committed to the tool, and don't flood them when they do read the room.

And respect their timing, not yours. Mistake number three. This is a big one. It's being authentic. And I wanna share something that Caroline Flex says in her book

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that I a hundred percent agree with. She says, you should think of validation as a matter of degrees. The degree to which you communicate. It depends on the amount of mindfulness, understanding, and empathy you can actually convey.

Inauthentic validation is not validation at all. It's manipulation, exploitation, and possibly ignorance, but it's not validation as crafty as you might be. Trust me when I say you should not fake validation in the hope of achieving the positive transformation, it promises it won't work. Thank you, Caroline, for sharing that with us.

It's so true. Do not fake it. Your children can sense when you're being authentic versus when you're just using a technique. Attend from a place of genuine curiosity and care, or don't attend at all promise. Okay, and mistake number four, negativity bias. Human brains are wired to notice problems first, but when we're attending.

We wanna consciously look for what's valid in their experience, not just what's wrong, instead of focusing on their being dramatic, attend with their, having big feelings about something that matters to them. And mistake number five, forcing your timeline when attending gets rejected. And it will sometimes, I promise, our job as the parent is to stay calm.

Respect their boundaries and stay available. Your teenager might say, I don't wanna talk about it. Your job isn't to convince them your job is to attend. Okay, I see you're upset. I see this is hard for you. I see you're not ready yet to talk about it. I want you to know I'm here when you're ready. Alright?

Here's your homework, and I'm keeping it simple because I want you to succeed. Today, I want you to practice attending during just one moment. It could be a neutral moment. Maybe your child is playing or doing homework. It could be a challenging moment when they're upset or frustrated, but I want you to keep it simple.

Pause and really look at 'em. Notice what you see without trying to change it if it feels right, name what you observe, or you're really focused on that puzzle. You're

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really enjoying watching this show or this seems hard. I see that for you. And then just be with them in that moment. That's it. Don't try to solve anything.

Don't give advice. Don't teach a lesson. Don't praise. Just attend. And notice what happens, not just in your kid, but in you. Notice how it feels to drop your agenda and simply be present. Here's what I want you to remember about attending. You're not just changing this moment. You're building something bigger.

Every single time you attend to your kid or kids, you're making a deposit in their emotional bank account. It's like a 401k. You're teaching them that their inner world matters. You are showing them what it feels like to be truly seen in that foundation of feeling seen and valued. That's what opens the door to everything else we want.

Cooperation, communication, confidence, emotional intelligence. You don't need to fix your kid. You need to see them. Trust is built in these small moments of attending. Trust creates connection. Connection is the gateway to everything beautiful you want for your family. Now, if what we've talked about today resonates with you and you're thinking, yes, I wanna learn how to build this kind of deep connection with my kid, I wanna go beyond today's podcast episode.

Then I want you to know I've got you. The solution is to come and join us in the hive inside the hive. Is where you and I are gonna get an opportunity to work together to build profound connection through validation skills. And we're gonna do it with personalized strategies that are created just for you inside the hive.

You and I are gonna practice attending. We're gonna learn how to read our, your kids' emotional needs, and I'm gonna help you build the skill and the confidence. To hold space for your kids' big feelings. This isn't about permissive parenting, it's about connected parenting. You're not giving up boundaries.

You're building the trust that makes the boundaries possible. The validation workshop that inspired today's episode, that's just one of the many tools you'll have immediate access to when you join the Hive. So if this feels like the moment, and

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this feels like the skill. That's gonna be the gateway to getting more cooperation and more connection with your kids.

Then run to the [hive coaching.com](https://hivecoaching.com) and join us. Join us right now so we can get started on this immediately helping you work on your connected parenting. 'cause here's what I know. Your kid or kids, their craving connection, their longing. Be seen, heard and valued, and it starts with the simple, powerful act of attending.

Let me just remind you, as we close out today, before cooperation comes connection and before connection comes attending. An attending starts with this moment right here, right now. 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.