

Ep. #235: The Hidden Reason You Keep Focusing on What's Wrong With Your Child



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 excited to be with you here today and wanna start with something that might make you a little uncomfortable, but I promise there's hope and transformation on the other side. So here's my question. What's the story you tell yourself about your kid or kids when they're having a hard day, when you're venting to your partner or friend?

What words come out of your mouth? Maybe it sounds like. He's being so difficult. She never listens. He's always defiant. She's too sensitive. He's such a handful. Yeah. Or maybe there's other thoughts or words that come out when you're talking to someone about your kid. Here's what I want you to know. I get it.

I've been there. And more importantly, your brain is just doing its job. But what if I told you that the story you tell yourself about your kid or kids is literally, literally creating the reality you're living? What if the thoughts you think about your kid or kids are actually shaping what you see and more importantly, what you miss?

Today we're diving into something deep called confirmation bias. And how it's been secretly sabotaging your relationship with your kid or kids. But more importantly, we're gonna learn how to flip the script and start catching your kid being amazing because here's the truth, and you've probably heard this before, what you've on expands and what you think about your child, your brain will find evidence to prove your right.

Every single time. Okay. Let me share something vulnerable with you and Honest and open. Before I discovered peaceful parenting, I had this constant loop running in my head about Malcolm, and honestly, it wasn't very kind and it certainly wasn't very helpful. I think things like, ugh, he's so strong-willed, he's so difficult.

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He never just goes to the flow. I. Why does everything have to be a battle with him? I thought this over and over and over again, if I'm honest. And you know what happened? My brain became a detective constantly looking for evidence to support that story. When he pushed back on bedtime, my brain would say, see, he's difficult.

When he had big feelings about his socks, my brain would say, there he goes again, making everything hard. But here's what I was missing. I was missing when he was gentle with our dog, when he shared his favorite snack with a friend. When he showed incredible creativity building something with his Legos, my brain literally skipped over those moments because they didn't fit the narrative I'd created.

And this is what I knew from my own childhood, if I'm honest. The adults around me had their stories about who I was. And those stories became my reality, and without realizing it, I at the time was doing the same thing to Malcolm. Fast forward almost 17 years and every day now, I coach parents just like you who are stuck in this same loop.

They come to me saying, my child is so, fill in the blank, whatever difficult trait they focused on. Their brain has collected mountains of evidence to prove them. Right. But here's the beautiful thing. Once you understand how your brain works, you Yes, you, yes. I'm talking to you. You can literally rewire it to look for evidence of how amazing your kid or kids are instead.

Okay? Let me explain what's happening in your brain, because this is gonna blow your mind. There's something called confirmation bias. You've probably heard of it before in a different context. Here's how it works in its most simplest form, your mind looks for evidence to support its beliefs, and it finds it a hundred percent of the time.

Here's the process. You have a thought about your kid and you think that thought over and over again, and that thought becomes a belief. Then your brain sets out to look for evidence to support that belief, to strengthen the belief, to support it. And here's the kicker. When it sees evidence to the contrary, it ignores it.

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I mean, you might be going, what? Okay, so let me say the process again. You have a thought about your kid. You think the thought over and over and over again, the thought becomes a belief. Then your brain gets the assignment to go out and look for evidence to support that belief, not other beliefs. That belief.

And when your brain sees evidence to the contrary, it is designed to ignore it. So if you think my child is difficult, your brain will only look for evidence that he's difficult. And those times when he is sweet with his sister, when he offers you his favorite toy, when he's kind to a kid at soccer, your brain skips right over that because the assignment given is find evidence that my kid is difficult.

Hopefully light bulbs fireworks are going off in your brain right now. You're skipping back 30 seconds to hear that again. Yeah. Another way to think about this is think of your brain like a Google search. If you type in, my child is difficult, Google is going to show you every single result that proves your child is difficult.

It's not going to show you articles about how amazing and capable your kid is. That's not what you searched for. But here's where it gets really interesting. When you start intentionally looking for evidence of your kid or kids being amazing. Something magical happens in their brain too. When you catch your kid or kids doing something right and acknowledge it out loud to them, their brain gets a hit of feel-good chemicals, dopamine, and serotonin.

And you know what this does? It makes them want more of that feeling. So they literally start seeking out more opportunities to be caught being good. So it's like we become positive. Dopamine and serotonin dealers for our kids. We're literally rewiring their brain to seek out positive behaviors because it feels so good to be seen and appreciated.

Once I started intentionally looking for evidence of Malcolm being cooperative, creative, and kind, guess what I found everywhere. Malcolm being cooperative, creative, and kind. Same kid. Same behaviors happening all along, but now I was seeing them. Yeah. Now let me teach you how to become a detective for your child's amazingness because here's what I've discovered.

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Your kid or kids, yes, you are doing incredible things every single day, even in the midst of making mistakes and storming and dysregulating and doing things wrong. Your kid is doing incredible things every single day, but your brain has been trained to look past them. So instead of waiting for big moments to praise, I want you to start noticing the small, everyday evidence of how amazing your kid is.

Here are some examples of everyday amazingness. You might be missing the way your kid concentrates when they're drawing. How he gently pets the family dog when she holds the door for someone. The patience they show when they're learning something new. How they comfort a friend who's sad when they put their dishes away without being asked.

The creativity they show during play, how they persist when something is challenging and many, many, many more. Shout yours out right now, and Adam, to the list of amazingness. I was working with a mom who was convinced her 9-year-old daughter was lazy and unmotivated. When I asked her to spend one week actively looking for evidence of effort and motivation, she was amazed.

She found him spending an hour teaching his cousin how to ride a bike, researching facts about sharks because he was genuinely curious, helping an elderly neighbor carry groceries. Practicing piano on his own because he wanted to learn a new song. Same kid, same week, but suddenly she was seeing all the initiative and kindness that had been there all along, and she switched from thinking her kid was lazy and unmotivated to when he's interested.

He spends time on things and he's really a kind human when you catch your kid or kids being amazing and acknowledge it out loud. Specifically, their brain gets that feel good chemical hit and it makes them want more. So one of our jobs is to catch them being good. Right. I noticed you gently petted that dog.

You have a kind heart. I noticed you've been working on that puzzle for over 20 minutes. I love seeing your persistence. I heard you ask a friend if they were okay when they fell. That's real empathy. You remember to put your backpack by the door. You're becoming so organized. The key to this is to be specific about what you see and connected to their character, effort, or growth, not just the outcome.

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Okay? Real world peaceful parent. Now it's the time in the podcast episode where the rubber meets the road. It's time for you to get honest with yourself about the thoughts you're thinking about your kid or kids. So here's your homework. Here's the inventory process. Number one, I want you to notice your thoughts.

Become the watcher of your thoughts about your kid during stressful times when they're not cooperative, during good times, during quiet times. And write them down. Yes, actually write them down and then look at them. Honestly, ask yourself, do I like these thoughts? If not, it's time to change 'em. Here's some common negative thought patterns that I see over and over and over again to get you started.

They never listen. They're always defiant. They're too emotional, they're lazy. They don't care about anyone but themselves. So let's break this down. Instead of, they never listen. You could go to, they're learning to listen or they're not an expert at listening yet. Instead of, they're always defiant. You could go to, they have strong opinions and are learning to express themselves respectfully, or they have strong opinions and they're not able to express themselves respectfully yet instead of, they're too emotional.

You could go to, they feel deeply and are working on managing their big feelings instead of they're lazy. You could go to. They have underdeveloped brains and don't always understand the outcomes. I was working with a mom inside the hive. Let's call her Jennifer. She was convinced her 7-year-old son was just difficult.

She said it constantly on her calls constantly, and I could see that she carried this thought around and noodled on it over and over and over again. So when I challenged her to do the thought work inventory. She came back a week later, shocked at how negative her internal dialogue was about him. Really shocked.

She said, I had no idea, Lisa, no idea that I was running that dialogue. In the background, we started with one simple reframe. Instead of, he's difficult, she started practicing thinking about 47 times a day. He knows what he wants. Which is a good thing and he's learning how to communicate it. And then she started looking for evidence for this new belief within two weeks.

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She was amazed. Lisa, he's the same kid, but I'm seeing him in a completely different light. Yesterday he negotiated with me about screen time instead of just melting down, and I realized he's not difficult. He's incredibly. Articulate for his age, and he likes to get his point across. Same child, different lens, completely different relationship.

And let me say, I want this for you and your kids. We can all stand to do a thought inventory. No one's having completely neutral or positive thoughts about their kids 24/7. So I really want you to commit to doing this thought inventory, and I wanna give you. Some age specific ways to start noticing your kid or kids' everyday amazingness.

So if you have a kid in the age range of two to five, which we call the foundation years, notice their natural curiosity and say you ask such a thoughtful question. Catch moments of independence and say you put on your shoes all by yourself. Wow, you're growing up appreciate their empathy. You saw that baby crying and you brought over your favorite stuffed animal.

Notice persistence. You keep trying to build that tower even when it falls down. That's determination. The rural learning years ages six to 10, you can acknowledge their problem solving with. I watched you figure out how to reach that higher shelf. You're such a creative thinker. Notice acts of service.

You saw I was tired and you set the table without being asked. That's being a part of our family team. Appreciate their empathy. I. You included that new kid at recess. You have such a welcoming heart catch learning moments. You're reading that chapter with such focus. I love seeing you challenge yourself.

Let's look at examples in the identity forming years 11 to 14, validating their emerging values. I heard you stand up to that kid. You really believe in doing what's right, or you can notice their creativity with the way you decorated your room. Shows an artistic vision. You can appreciate their growing responsibility with, you've been managing your homework schedule really well this week, regardless of what's happened in the past.

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You can catch emotional growth with, I saw you take a deep breath when you got frustrated. I saw that you're learning to manage big feelings, and then we look at the independent seeking years, 15 to 18 where you can acknowledge their character width. The way you handled that difficult conversation with me shows real maturity, or if you wanna notice their impact on others, you can say, I saw you helped that person by bending over and picking that up.

Your kindness makes a difference in the world. I, if they're arguing and battling something with you afterwards, you can appreciate their decision making with, I noticed how well you thought through the pros and cons of that and presented your argument. Or if you wanna catch their growth, you can say, you're becoming such a thoughtful, capable person.

I'm proud of who you're becoming. Now, here's the secret sauce. The more specific you are, the more powerful it is. Instead of, good job, try. I noticed the way you, or I love how you or I saw you. Right? The more specific, the more powerful. Okay, here's your homework. And this is gonna be transformational. If you actually do it, it's not gonna surprise you.

Homework number one is the thought inventory for the next three days. Notice the thoughts you have about your kid or kids. Write 'em down, don't judge. Just notice. Are they mostly positive or are they mostly negative? If you're honest. Do you like the story you're telling yourself about your kid? I know I didn't back then.

I do today. Even when I'm frustrated with him, I still like the story I tell myself about him. Homework number two, the evidence hunt. Once you've identified any negative thought patterns, I want you to actively look for evidence. To the contrary, if you've been thinking, they never listen. Start looking for all the times they do.

Listen, if you've been thinking they're selfish. Look for those little glimmers, those little moments of kindness and generosity. Set a timer on your phone three times a day. When it goes off, ask yourself, what is my child doing right in this moment? Even if it's something small, they're breathing peacefully.

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They're focused on their activity. They're concentrating on their iPad. They're existing beautifully in the world. They paused before they hit their sibling, like really find something they're doing right. In this moment, I challenge you to find at least three things to appreciate about your kid, each kid, every single day.

Three things. Even if it's something small, catch them being amazing and tell them specifically what you see. Watch how they light up when they truly feel seen and appreciated. And if you're thinking, Lisa, I wanna rewire my thinking patterns and consistently catch my kids succeeding, but I need help. All right, I got you.

You know what's coming. This is your invitation to come join us in the hive. Because it's inside the hive where I can teach you yes, you exactly how to rewire your thinking patterns and consistently catch your kid succeeding at doing things well inside the hive. We can do this. We can practice together, rewiring your thinking.

We can set your brain up to look for evidence that your kids are amazing. We're gonna work through the specific negative thought loops that are keeping you stuck. And you and I are gonna build new neuropathways that are gonna help you see your kid or kid's amazingness even in challenging moments. And that my friend is the rising tide that lifts all boats.

So if this feels like the moment to work on this, I want you to run, not walk straight to the [hive coaching.com](https://hivecoaching.com). Because the story you tell yourself about your kid or kids becomes their story about themselves, and that's the honest to goodness truth. And I want your kids to have the best story about themselves possible.

Remember this, your brain is always looking for evidence. The question is, what evidence are you training it to find? Because here's what I know, your kid is amazing. They've always been amazing. I. They're kind and creative and resilient and capable, and those qualities have been there all along. You might just need help adjusting your lens to see them.

When you start looking for evidence of their amazingness, two things happen. You start seeing it everywhere, and they start believing it about themselves, and that,

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my friend, is the power of the confirmation bias. What you focus on expands. So let's focus on exactly what you want to see more of. Yeah.

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.