

Ep. #238: The Secret Sauce to Getting YOUR Kids to Cooperate



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 absolutely thrilled to be with you here today, and I wanna start today's conversation with a question that might completely change how you think about getting cooperation from your kids. What if I told you that the secret to maximum cooperation isn't louder consequences, better rewards, or more creative punishments.

What if the real secret is something so simple, yet so profound that once you understand it, you'll never look at challenging moments the same way again. The secret is validation, making your child or helping your child feel truly seen and understood in their experience. Let me share a story that happened when Malcolm was round 14.

That I think illustrates this well. He came home from school one day and I could see it immediately. You know that look when your kid walks through the door and you can tell they're carrying something heavy. I asked about his day and he just exploded. Everything is stupid. My teacher is unfair. I hate this assignment.

Nothing ever goes right now. The old me would've jumped straight into fix it mode or correction mode. You know, don't talk like that. Don't call your teacher stupid. Just calm down and do the work. But instead, I paused. I looked at him, I really looked at him and I said, wow, this feels like a really hard day.

Something must have happened that felt unfair, and you seem really frustrated. And you know what happened? His entire body softened. He said, yeah, mom. It was really hard. And then he told me what actually happened. We walked through it together. I resisted the urge to make any comments, and by the end he came up with a plan for how to handle the assignment, and that interaction taught me something profound.

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Validation had completely shifted our dynamic. What I didn't know then, but I understand now, is that I was actually working with his brain not against it. Connection before correction isn't permissiveness, it's neuroscience. It's the secret to success. It's the recipe for connection. And today we're gonna dive into why validation is the recipe and the roadmap to cooperation what it actually looks like in real life.

And how you, yes, you can start using this powerful tool with your kids this week. Sound good? Alright, let's dive in. So let's start with what's happening in your child's brain when they feel seen versus when they feel threatened, because that's where the magic happens when your child is struggling, whether they're melting down, pushing back, or being defiant, their nervous system is activated.

They're in what we call a dysregulated state. You hear me use this word all the time. Their emotional brain is online, but their thinking brain, the part that handles cooperation, learning, and problem solving goes offline. I feel like I need to say that again. In a dysregulated state, your kids' emotional brain, the middle brain is online.

Their thinking brain. The part that handles cooperation, learning, and problem solving goes offline. Here's what's fascinating. When you validate your kids' experience, you are literally helping their brain, their higher brain, their learning brain come back online, mirror neurons in their brain, start firing, sinking with your calm regulated energy.

Your validation communicates safety to their nervous system. But when we jump straight to correction without connection, stop that behavior. Do what I said. Don't call your teacher stupid. Stop hitting your brother. Give the toy back. Put your phone away. Right? Now when we jump straight to correction, were actually keeping their threat detection system activated.

Their brain interprets this as danger. Which means their learning centers stay offline. Dr. Dan Siegel talks about this beautifully when he says we need to connect and then redirect connection first, then redirection because the brain needs connection to activate the learning centers. Let me give you a concrete example of how this plays out.

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Your 8-year-old refuses to do homework and starts arguing with you. If you respond with, that's enough, you'll do your homework. Right now. Your eight year old's brain hears threat even though it's coming from you. The 8-year-old brain hears threat and then fight, flight or freeze kicks in, and they might comply out of fear, but they're not learning and they're not developing internal motivation.

But if you pause and respond rather than react, if you pause and say, I can see homework feels really hard right now. You seem frustrated. Their brain hears safety. Oh, my mom sees me. She gets that. This is hard. When they feel understood, when they feel validated, their nervous system can regulate their thinking.

Brain comes back online. And now they can access problem solving and cooperation. This is why validation reduces shame and restores emotional regulation. The truth is feeling seen is one of the fastest ways to help someone move through dysregulation. Now, I know what some of you might be thinking, but Lisa.

Lisa, as Malcolm says, Lisa, won't this make my child soft? Won't. They think they can just have big feelings and get out of responsibilities? Doesn't this make me a permissive parent? Here's the thing. Validation isn't about removing expectations or limits. Validation is about how you hold those boundaries because when your kid or kids feel understood, they actually become more willing to cooperate, not less, more willing, not less.

Think about it in your own life when someone dismisses your feelings versus when someone truly sees and understands what you're experiencing, which scenario makes you more open to their guidance, right? I know when I feel like someone sees and understands what I'm experiencing, I'm like putty in their hands.

One of our Hive members shared this beautiful insight. I realized I was spending all my energy trying to control my daughter's behavior, but when I started validating her feelings first, she started choosing better behavior on her own. That's the neuroscience validation in action. Connection activates cooperation.

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All right. Let's get really practical here because I want you to know exactly what validation looks like in the heated moments with your kids. First, let me myth bust here. Validation is not agreement. You do not have to agree with your child's perspective to validate their experience. Validation is not praise.

You're not saying good job, you're saying I see you. Validation is definitely not permissiveness. You're not removing boundaries. You're creating safety within those boundaries. Yeah. Okay. So what is validation? Validation is seeing and reflecting your child's experience back to them without judgment. Let me say that again.

It is seeing and reflecting your child's experience back to them without judgment. It's being a mirror for them. It's saying, I understand this is hard for you right now. I understand you really want to play with that toy. I understand you want to stay out later. I understand you don't want gaming time or time on your phone to be over.

Validation is seeing so you gotta be present and reflecting your child's experience back to them with no judgment. Let's walk through what this looks like across different ages. Let's say you have a toddler who refuses to leave the playground instead of, we're leaving right now. Stop crying. It's time to go.

Validation looks like getting down on their level and saying You don't wanna leave. You're having so much fun here, and it's hard when fun. Time has to end. I get it. Then you can just pause and let them absorb the validation, and then you can say, and it's time to go home for dinner. Let's walk to the car together.

Or you could say, would you like to hold my hand or my pant leg as we're walking to the car? In this example, you're validating their experience, your kids' experience of having fun and not wanting to leave and, and you're holding the boundary. Let's look at an example of a school aid child melting down over homework instead of just sit down and do it.

Just power through and get it done. It's not that hard. Validation could sound like, I see that you're really frustrated that you have homework and that you're frustrated

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with the math. I can see that you're overwhelmed right now. Pause and let them really absorb that. And then you might say, would you like help?

Figuring out how to make this more manageable. If you validated the front end when you asked the question, let's, would you like help making this more manageable? You're so much more likely to get a yes because they're feeling seen in their frustration and overwhelm with regard to the math homework.

Yeah. Alright. Let's look at an example with a teenager pushing back on curfew. Why, mom? Why? Why? Why instead of, because I said so. You're not old enough to make these decisions. You could try. Hey, I hear how frustrated you are about this curfew. I imagine you're feeling restricted and wanting more freedom.

I get it. I totally get it. And really get that for them. And then you can add in, I've done my homework. This makes sense. At your age. And this boundary is staying in place. And you could even ask what would help you feel better about following the boundary? Notice the pattern you're gonna see your kids' experience.

Reflect it back to them like a mirror. Give them a hot minute to absorb it, and then move to the problem solving or boundary holding. Those are the steps and they work. I've worked with thousands of parents around the world on these steps, and they work. You've just gotta work to implement them. Let me share a story from one of our Hive members that really illustrates his transformation so you can see what it looks like.

Jennifer has a 10-year-old son who is having daily battles about screen time. I mean, come on, who isn't right? Every day when it was time to turn off the devices, he would argue, negotiate, and sometimes have a complete meltdown. Jennifer was exhausted from the power struggles, and I'm sure you can relate.

After joining the hive and learning about validation, Jennifer tried a different approach when screen time was over and her son started arguing. Instead of getting into a power struggle, instead of getting into the battle, Jennifer would say, with the most sincere tone in her voice, I can see you really don't want screen time to be over.

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I can see that you were right in the middle of something fun. I, and I can see that it was disappointing to stop and she would leave it there. Just pause, seal her mouth shut, bite her tongue, and just really give him a moment to absorb the mirror. She said his whole demeanor started to change. He said, yeah, it was almost at the next level.

So she responded, oh, that must be so frustrating. He said, yes, mom. It was, I get it, buddy. I get it. And then she said, tomorrow we can make sure you know when you have 10 minutes left so you can find a good stopping point. Now, here's what's crazy and might feel unbelievable to you if you've not been connecting before, redirecting.

If you've not been validating, I kid you not. Within a week, screen time battles virtually disappeared. Same boundary, same amount of time on screens. But a completely different approach through validation, connection, and then correction. Jennifer says, her 10-year-old feels seen and understood, and much your surprise cooperation became natural.

This is the power of validation. Hopefully you're able to see this is not about being permissive, it's about creating connection that leads to cooperation. So now I wanna give you a step-by-step roadmap that you yes, you can start using today. This is the exact process that transforms resistance into cooperation.

So when your kid or kids are struggling at any age, resist the urge to immediately fix or correct. Take a breath and look at what's really, really happening with them. Come and be present and look at it from their point of view. What are they feeling? What might they be needing? This pause is crucial because it shifts you from reactive mode to responsive mode, and it helps you regulate.

So you can offer them co-regulation. So that's step one. Step one, pause and see their experience. Step two, reflect. What you observe, name what you see without judgment. I can see this is hard for you. You seem frustrated. It looks like you're feeling overwhelmed. You really wanted something different to happen.

I get it. Keep it simple. You're not trying to fix, you're trying to be a mirror to their experience. Step three, stay present while they feel seen. Now the truth is this is

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where most of us get uncomfortable. We wanna rush to step four, but step three is so important, and I've tried to point it out throughout today's episode.

This is where we have to seal our mouth shut, hit mute, pause, count to 10, maybe 20, because it is uncomfortable for us. Many of us, after we validate, we need to just sit. With them for a moment, just let it sink in. Their auditory processing system isn't fully developed until the age of 15 and is often much slower than ours.

So when you pause, even when you're uncomfortable and you let the validation soak in, you're letting your kid feel the relief of being understood. So I beg you, do not rush to the next step. Sometimes they'll cry when they feel validated. Sometimes they'll share more. Sometimes they'll take a deep breath.

Sometimes they'll co-regulate with you, but do not rush through. Step three, pause and trust the process, and only after they feel validated. Is that your green go card? To move to step four, which is problem solving or reinforcing the boundaries, but only after the connection. Only after they feel seen and their nervous system is regulated.

Should you move to guidance boundaries or problem solving? This step four might sound like, now that I understand how frustrated you are, let's figure out what to do next. Or I hear this feels really unfair and I get how you see it that way. Let's talk about how we can handle this, or you're disappointed and I totally understand that.

Here's what we can do, or here's what needs to happen. Now, maybe you're asking why does this sequence matter neurologically? Well, the answer is because connection activates the prefrontal cortex. The part of the brain responsible for learning, cooperation, and problem solving. When your children feel seen, the brain literally becomes more receptive to guidance.

It's true of any humans, by the way, but today's episode is about kids. So let me say it again. When your kid feels seen, their brain literally becomes more receptive to guidance. Here's what one Hive member said after he started using this roadmap. I always thought I had to choose between understanding or expectations.

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This approach has showed me that I can do both. My daughter actually listens better now because she trusts that I care about her feelings, not just her behavior. Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding. Hopefully light bulbs are going off for you right now. This dad realized that my daughter actually listens better now because she trusts that I care about her feelings and her behavior, not just her behavior.

I promise you connection before correction isn't permissiveness. It's neuroscience and when you get the sequence right, cooperation becomes the outcome. Yeah. Yeah. Alright. My real world peaceful parent. Let's get you practicing this week because I want you to experience, I want you, yes, you, to experience the power of validation in your home.

This week, I want you to practice validating one emotion or one experience your child has each day. It doesn't have to be during a meltdown. You can start with smaller moments. Maybe they're excited about something and you say, I can see how happy this makes you. Maybe they're disappointed about a plan changing.

You can say, wow, you were really looking forward to that, weren't you? It's disappointing when things don't go as expected. Just keep it simple. Just practicing and reflecting their experience without trying to fix or change anything. Then homework assignment number two, choose one recurring challenge in your home.

Maybe it's bedtime resistance, maybe it's homework battles or morning routines. Choose one and this week before you address the behavior of the one thing you've chosen, just try validating it first. Instead of jumping straight into you need to brush your teeth. Now you could validate, wow, I see you really hate brushing your teeth.

Right. I mean, maybe the, the bristles hurt the teeth, or it's boring, or the toothpaste burns the mouth, or they don't really understand how to do it. So instead of jumping straight into, you need to brush your teeth. Now you could even say something like, I can see you're not ready for bedtime yet. I can see that you wanna keep playing.

It's so hard to stop the day and go to bed, and you can let that just absorb. And you can say, it's time to get ready for bed. Let's brush teeth together. Maybe you bring

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your toothbrush in and you and your kid brush your teeth at the same time. But the real homework is to notice what happens. Does the resistance decrease?

Do they cooperate more willingly? Part of the homework is to track your observations and their response. Now, what if validation doesn't work immediately? You're thinking, I've tried that before, Lisa. Yes, it might not work immediately. It's a great question. First, I want you to remember that validation is a skill for you and your kid.

If they're used to battles and power struggles, it might take your kid a hot moment to trust this new approach and to adjust. Point number two is the validation isn't magic. It's not there to prevent all meltdowns or eliminate all resistance. But what will happen is it will create more connection and more cooperation over time.

Because remember when we validate, we're bringing that learning brain back online. And thirdly, sometimes children need to feel their big feelings before they can move to cooperation. And when we validate over and over and over again, what's happening is we're giving them permission to feel. Which actually helps them move through their emotions faster.

So if you're thinking at this point, Lisa, this sounds amazing and I hear what you're saying, but I wouldn't even have the foggiest idea how to actually do this with the specific challenges that are coming up in my home. I have a unique situation. Well, I want you to hear this. I get it. I'm validating that you have a unique situation and you may not exactly know how to do this given your family dynamics.

I totally get that, and that makes sense to me. And if this is you, I want to extend a personal invitation for you to join us in the hive. It's inside the hive. Where I can help you and coach you and teach you these tools, it's inside the hive where you can learn to create cooperation through validation with your unique family.

You and I will practice these skills together and we will work through the specific details of your family and the scenarios that trigger you. And while we're doing that, you're gonna get support. From a community of parents who are on the exact same journey with you, because here's what I know, every parent wants

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cooperation from their kids, but most of us were never taught how to create cooperation.

Through a connection. We default to dominance and control because that's what we learned growing up. We were forced into cooperation. We were not offered it through connection. And I get that. I grew up in that home too, so I had a lot of work to do on myself to be able to validate my kid to pause and respond, to let his auditory system catch up, to learn how to mirror validation for him and invite the cooperation.

I've done my own work on this over 21 years, so I know the process. I know how to take you through this process. Inside the hive, you'll learn exactly how to validate your kids' experiences while still holding clear boundaries, and I'll show you how to create the kind of safety that leads to cooperation.

I'll help you build the confidence to respond and learn exactly how to respond instead of react during those challenging moments. So if you feel validated with this invitation, you feel like I really saw you today. I spoke to what's going on in your home, and I offered you after validation a way to get cooperation.

I offered you a path to figuring this out. Then I want you to run, not walk, run to the [hive coaching.com](https://www.hivecoaching.com) and get signed up. Come and join our community where you will feel validated, where you will feel connected, and where you will learn how to offer that connection and cooperation to your kids.

Remember, validation is the roadmap to cooperation. When your kid feels truly seen and understood, their brain becomes receptive to your guidance. Connection before correction isn't permissiveness, it's neuroscience, and I'll leave you with this. Your kids don't need perfect behavior from you. They need validation from you.

They need to know that even in their hardest moments, you see them, you matter to them. They need to know that even in their hardest moments, you see them and they matter to you. That's the foundation of connection that lasts a lifetime. I want that for you and I want that for your kids. 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.