

# Ep. #239: The Secret To Handling Your Kid's Meltdown



## 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. Let me ask you, do you ever wonder why your kid completely melts down when you ask them to put their shoes on or put their phone away or get ready to go somewhere? Or why trying to talk them down only seems to make things worse?

Well, it's not because they're trying to make your life hard. It's because their nervous system is in charge and it's firing off like a castle alarm bell. Today I'm going to help you understand exactly what's happening inside your child's body during these chaotic moments and what you can do to help.

Because once you understand this, and I mean really understand it, everything changes. I wanna tell you about a moment with Malcolm. When he was little, they completely shifted how I saw challenging behavior. I asked him to clean up the Lego bricks, just a simple request, right? And within seconds, seconds, he was yelling, stomping, and throwing pieces across the room.

My first thought, why is this happening? It's just cleanup time. Why is it being so dramatic? But you know what I understand now that I didn't then. His body felt overwhelmed. His nervous system kicked into overdrive. It was a full on fight or flight response, not a defiance issue. And that moment changed everything for me because once I understood that his nervous system was sounding the alarm, I could stop seeing him as bad and start seeing him as overwhelmed and in need of support.

I feel like I should say that again. Once I understood that his nervous system was sounding the alarm, I could stop seeing him as bad and start seeing him as overwhelmed and in need of support. And that's exactly what we're diving into

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today. The science that will transform how you see your kids most challenging moments.

Yeah. Awesome. All right, let's talk some parenting science. Don't worry, I'm gonna keep it simple and use metaphors because that's how my brain works best and I'm gonna assume yours does too. So I want you to picture your kid's nervous system like a castle with two main parts, the CEO, which is the central nervous system, is this thinking part of the brain logic, language, executive function decision making.

Being able to see a couple steps ahead, connecting dots. It's the CEO and it includes the brain and the spinal cord. But here's the thing, the CEO is slow to react. It doesn't even get the memo until the body feels safe. Now, the second part of the castle are the castle guards, also known as the autonomic nervous system, and this part works automatically.

Your child doesn't control it. Heck, you don't control yours either. It runs the fight, flight, freeze, or fawn system, and it has two main guards. It has the sympathetic nervous system. This is the part where the alarm goes off and it gets ready to fight, run, or freeze. And then there's the parasympathetic nervous system, which is the guard afterwards that rings the all clear bell, time to rest, digest, and relax.

So when your kid screams no at bedtime and runs away, or crumples into tears when you say no to ice cream, or gets really angry when you make them finish gaming even though they're in the middle of a game and throws the controller across the room. That's not manipulation. That's the guards pulling the alarm before the CEO even gets the message.

Let me say that again because this is huge. The guards are responding before the thinking brain even knows what's happening. Let's get practical here because I want you to start recognizing this in your own home. Your kid melts down over socks. Their system is overwhelmed. Maybe they're tired, maybe they're hungry, maybe they've been holding it together all day at school.

You try to reason with them mid tantrum and it totally backfires. Right? Well, that's because the CEO isn't online yet. You're essentially trying to explain taxes to

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a firefighter during a five alarm place. They yell, you're the worst mom ever, and your heart breaks a little. That's their nervous system talking, not their true self, not the child who snuggles with you at bedtime and tells you they love you.

Now in these moments, and this is so important, your job is not to correct the behavior. Your job is to calm the guards so the CEO can come back online. You know what changed everything for me, understanding that my child's worst behavior was actually their nervous system. Crying out for help and safety.

Let me say that again. The thing that changed everything for me was understanding that Malcolm's storming was and still is at times, his nervous system crying out for calm, for help and for safety. So what can we do when our kids' alarm system is going off? Well, here are my go-to strategies. Tool number one, co-regulate.

First, your calm nervous system helps calm theirs. This isn't just cute or nice or fun advice. It's neuroscience. Breathe with them, lower your voice. Get down on their level. Offer connection before correction. Tool number two, use movement to shift their state. Take a walk, shake it out. Jump dance. Do animal walks, anything to help release that fight or flight energy and bonus points for making it silly.

Sometimes the fastest way out of a meltdown is through movement. I use this personally all the time. Tool number three, offer predictable transitions. The guards, they hate surprises. They hate them. So use countdowns, visual timers, and verbal cues. Two more minutes, then it's bath time. First, we'll finish this puzzle.

Then it's time for dinner. Five more minutes. And then we need to end gaming for the day. Tool number four, validate before you educate, before you try to explain or teach anything, try validating with something like I can see you're having a hard time right now, and I'm here. It's okay to feel big feelings.

Let's ride this out together. Your body is upset and that's okay. I'm gonna stay calm while you work through this. Let me share a story from one of our Hive members that perfectly illustrates this. Nicole is a 10-year-old son who is having daily meltdowns during homework time. I mean every single day.

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Michelle was exhausted. She felt like a failure, and she started dreading after school every day. Then she decided to give the hive a shot. After learning about the nervous system in our community, Nicole tried something different when her son started to meltdown over math. Instead of saying, come on, it's not that hard.

Just focus. Pay attention. Let's power through it. Let's get this done. Instead of that, she started saying. Your body is telling me, this feels really big right now. Let's help your body feel safe. First, she sat with her son, helped him take some deep breaths, and just waited. After a few minutes, he looked up and said, mom, I don't understand this problem.

Can you help me? Same child, same homework. Completely different outcome. Why? Because Nicole worked with her son's nervous system first. Instead of working against it and trying to power through. When you start to understand your child's nervous system, everything changes. You stop taking their behavior personally.

You start seeing the root cause, not just the symptoms. You begin to scuba dive down to the feelings and needs. Instead of snorkeling at the top with the behavior, you're able to respond from curiosity instead of frustration. Best of all, you build a deeper connection based on safety and understanding, not control and compliance, and here's what happens.

Your kids learn that you're a safe person to fall apart with. They learn that big feelings don't scare you away and shouldn't scare them. They develop trust in their own emotional experience because you've shown them that it's valid. That's the gift of understanding the nervous system. It transforms both of you.

Yeah. Okay. I have two pieces of homework for you this week, and I promise they're game changers. Homework number one, the nervous system detective. This week when your child has a challenging moment, pause and ask yourself, is this their CEO talking or are the guard sounding the alarm? Don't try to fix anything yet.

Just practice identifying which system is in charge. Homework number two, co-regulation experiment. Choose one tool from today's episode and practice it during

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a calm moment. First, maybe it's deep breathing together. Maybe it's silly movement, maybe it's validation. Practice practice when everyone's regulated, so it's available when you need it the most.

And if this episode resonated with you and you're thinking, I wanna be like Nicole, I wanna learn how to do this, but I don't know yet. I wanna learn how to work with my child's nervous system instead of against us. Then I wanna invite you, yes, you to come join us inside the hive because it's inside the hive where I can help you and teach you how to create safety and connection with your kids' nervous system, with personalized strategies created just for your unique family.

Inside the hive, we will practice co-regulation tools together and we will learn how to respond to big emotions with confidence instead of panic. Because here's what I know, understanding your child's nervous system isn't just about managing behavior. It's about building the foundation for emotional intelligence, resilience, and trust that will serve them for life.

So if you're ready to jump in. And learn your kids' guards and CEO, then I want you to run, not walk, run to the [hive coaching.com](https://hivecoaching.com) to join our community of parents who are transforming their homes through nervous system awareness. And in closing, I wanna remind you, your child's challenging behavior isn't defiance.

It's communication from a dysregulated nervous system when you respond with understanding instead of correction. With co-regulation instead of control, you're teaching them that they're safe to feel safe to struggle and safe to be human. Your calm and their chaos is the greatest gift you can give them, and that's not just good parenting.

That's nervous system healing that will ripple through generations. I want that for you and I want that for your kids. 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.