

Ep. #253: When Peaceful Parenting Feels Like Being a Pushover



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 energized to be with you here today, and I wanna start today's episode with the message I just got last week from my mom who reached out asking about joining the Hive. Let's call her Jessica. Jessica was completely defeated when she sent me this email.

She said, Lisa, I've been trying to do peaceful parenting for six months now. She said, I stopped yelling. I started validating feelings. I'm working on connection, but my 9-year-old is walking all over me. She talks back, refuse to do anything I ask, and yesterday she told me, I'm not even a real parent because I won't let her have TikTok.

Like all of her friends. I held the boundary, but she was so upset with me. Did I ruin our relationship and am I doing this whole peaceful parenting thing wrong? Jessica asks. Oh my goodness. Can you feel the confusion in that message? The exhaustion, the fear that being peaceful means being a pushover. And here's what breaks my heart.

Jessica isn't alone. I see this pattern all the time. Parents come to peaceful parenting wanting to stop yelling and build connection. Beautiful, right? But somewhere along the way, they get the message that peaceful means permissive. Holding firm boundaries means you're not being peaceful enough, and let me say that's absolutely not true.

100%. Let me share a story with you from my own journey with Malcolm that illustrates this perfectly. When Malcolm was in sixth grade, we set a boundary around electronics and gaming. We told him that if his grades dropped below an A or B during the week. Or he had any missing assignments. There would be no gaming during the week until the grades came back up and we would check it every day.

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And the minute that the grades came back up, he could go back to gaming, but we were gonna hold this limit period. We communicated this upfront and over and over and over again. To him, it wasn't a reactive punishment, it was a clear limit to help him stay focused on school. Because if he wasn't getting his work in and he wasn't getting the grades up, then obviously he needed a little more time during the school week to focus on homework.

And it was only during the week. Weekends were still open for gaming if his grades were solid. Now, did Malcolm like this boundary, this limit? Absolutely not. He hated it. He pushed back. He told us how unfair it was. He complained that his friends didn't have these restrictions. But you know what? We held that boundary with calm, clear confidence.

The limit stayed exactly where it was, even when he was upset about it. And here's the beautiful part. The long-term payoff I want you to hear is by the time Malcolm was a senior in high school, something amazing happened. If and when his grades would temporarily drop, he would self-police his gaming time.

Without us saying a word, he'd tell us he needed to focus on school and he would cut back on gaming during the week. That boundary we held in sixth grade, the one he hated at the time. It taught him something profound about priorities, self-regulation, and taking responsibility for his choices. That's what peaceful parenting looks like.

It's not permissive parenting. It's not letting kids do whatever they want. It's peaceful authority. Today we're talking about the permissions. You might need to hear as a peaceful parent, because I'm guessing some of you, maybe many of you are feeling the same confusion. Jessica felt. You are wondering, can I hold firm boundaries and be a peaceful parent?

And the answer is absolutely yes. In fact, you must. You must hold boundaries in order to be a peaceful parent. So let's dive in to this topic. Here's the truth that's gonna set you free today. Peaceful parenting does not mean permissive parenting. Let me say that again because it's really important.

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Peaceful parenting does not mean permissive parenting. Peaceful parenting means you hold boundaries with calm confidence instead of anger and threats. It means you can be firm and kind at the same time. It means you guide with clarity. Instead of controlling with fear, but somewhere along the way this gets twisted.

Parents hear, validate your child's feelings and thought that meant never disappoint your child. They hear connection before correcting and think that means never have expectations. And listen, I get it. When you're coming from a childhood where boundaries were held with yelling, shame, and or punishment.

It can feel scary to set limits with our own kids. You don't wanna recreate that pain. You don't wanna be that kind of parent. But here's what I need you to understand, and there's actual brain science behind this. Your child's developing brain needs boundaries to feel safe. Needs boundaries to feel safe.

Their prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for decision making, impulse control, and emotional regulation, you've heard me say this many times before, is not fully developed until around 25 years old. 25. So when you give your kid too much freedom at 8, 9, 10, 12, 16. Too much freedom, too many choices and too few limits.

Their nervous system actually gets overwhelmed. Their brain is looking for structure that tells them an adult, a safe adult is in charge here and I'm safe. Think of boundaries like walls of a container inside the container. Your child has the freedom to play, explore, express themselves and be who they are.

The walls. The walls create the safety that allows the freedom without boundaries. Kids often feel anxious, unmoored like they're floating in open water in the middle of the ocean with no shore and sight. So when we hold boundaries, clear, consistent, calm boundaries, we're not being mean. We're not damaging the relationship we're actually creating.

The safety, their nervous system is craving and needs to develop into emotionally intelligent people. Now, here's where my particular strength comes in, and I'm really realizing this combination might be more rare than I originally thought. I

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balance empathy with practical action. I help parents feel deeply understood while equipping you with tools you can actually use.

It's not enough to just validate feelings and it's not enough to just set boundaries. You need both. You need to be able to say, I see how disappointed you are. This is really hard for you to hear. No, and the answer is still no. That's the both and of peaceful parenting and that's what we're building today.

So I wanna give you an image that's going to change everything for you. This is what I want you to remember. Every single time your child pushes back on a limit, your job is to be the solid redwood tree. Picture with me, a massive redwood tree. Been there for hundreds of years. Storms have come, storms have gone, and it's still standing.

Majestic. Unshakable, beautiful. Here's what makes the redwood so powerful as a metaphor for boundary holding. The roots go deep in the ground of a redwood tree, and that's your values, your calm, your conviction that this is the right limit for your family. Phones go off at seven 30. We take a shower every night.

We don't call each other names. The roots are what keep you grounded when the storm hits. Now the trunk of the redwood tree is steady and unmovable. The limits stay exactly the same, not bigger. When you're frustrated, not smaller limits. When you feel guilty and turning a blind eye, the limits are exactly what you said it would be.

Consistently, over time, the trunk doesn't bend the branches on the redwood tree sway with the wind. You have flexibility like the branches and how you respond to your kids' big emotions. You can offer a hug. You can acknowledge their feelings. You can be compassionate and understanding the branches sway.

They move, they're flexible. But here's the key. The tree doesn't fall over when the branches sway when the storm comes. Why? Because the trunk is steady and the roots go deep. And your child, your strong-willed, passionate, intense child, they're the storm and that's okay. That's actually developmentally appropriate.

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Their storm is in defiance, it's development. Remember what I said about the prefrontal cortex? It's not done developing. When they have big feelings about your boundaries, when they push back, when they test limits, they're not being bad. They're being human. They're being kids whose brains are still forming.

Your job isn't to stop the storm. Your job is to be the tree. To stay rooted, steady, let them have their big feelings and not move the boundary. That's what peaceful authority looks like. You're not yelling, you're not threatening. You're not shaming them for having feelings about your boundary, and you're also not backing down, not negotiating away the limit, and not collapsing under the pressure of their disappointment.

You are the redwood tree. And you know what happens over time when you consistently be their tree, your child's nervous system learns. Oh, when mom says this is the limit, she means it. I can stop fighting and I can rest in the knowing that she's got it handled. That's the safety we're creating. Now, let's talk about.

The specific permissions you might need to hear to actually do this. Permission. Number one, being a peaceful parent doesn't mean being a pushover. This is the foundational permission because everything flows from this truth. You can be firm and kind. You can be clear and calm. You can hold expectations and validate feelings.

In fact, that's exactly what peaceful parenting is. Let me give you an example of what it looks like across different ages. Your 3-year-old wants to stay longer at the playground, and you've already said it's time to go. They start melting down. Being a pushover would look like, okay, fine. Just five more minutes.

Stop crying. Being a peaceful parent looks like getting down on their level and saying, oh, I hear you. Playing is so much fun. You don't wanna leave. It's so much fun and it's time to go home for dinner. Let's walk to the car together. Then you calmly, firmly follow through, even if there's crying the whole way.

Let's say your 8-year-old doesn't wanna do their homework. They're complaining. It's too hard, they're tired, they want to play first. Being a pushover sounds like,

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okay, fine. Play for now and we'll figure it out later. The bedtime comes and the homework still isn't done, or it's time to leave for soccer and everyone's stressed.

A peaceful parent. Sounds like I can see you're tired and school is long today, and homework needs to be finished before screen time. Do you wanna do your math or your reading first? Let's say your 16-year-old wants to go to a party where you know there won't be adult supervision. They're telling you how unfair you are, how all their friends get to go, their parents don't care, and how you're ruin their life.

Being a pushover would sound like, well, I guess if everyone else is going, just be careful. Being a peaceful parent sounds like, oh, I hear how frustrated you are. I hear it and I know you really wanna go. I get it. And my answer is no. I'm not comfortable with you being at a party without adults present, and I know it's disappointing and you're really mad at me right now.

See the pattern? You're acknowledging the feeling, staying connected, and you're being empathetic. And the boundary is firm. It's the both, and it's the redwood tree in action. Permission number two, your child doesn't have to like your boundaries. Okay, listen. This is the permission that just might set you free today.

Your child does not have to like your boundaries for them to be the right boundaries. They can think you're too strict. They can wish things were different. They can tell you you're not fair. They can be disappointed, angry, upset, cry, stomp, storm, and none of that. None of that means you're wrong. In fact, and this is important, when your child pushes back on a boundary, they're often actually testing whether it's solid.

Their nervous system is actually asking, is this limit real? Will it hold? Can I trust that you've got this? And am I safe? Remember the redwood tree? They're the storm and you're the tree. The storm doesn't mean the tree is in the wrong place. The storm is just the storm. Let me go back to my story about Malcolm and gaming.

In the sixth grade when we set that boundary, no gaming. During the week, if grades dropped and or homework was not turned in, Malcolm was not happy. My

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full contact sports son who loved gaming pushed back hard. He told us it wasn't fair. He pointed out all of his friends that didn't have these restrictions.

He was genuinely upset and angry, and you know what I had to learn in that moment. His disappointment wasn't a sign I was doing something wrong. His disappointment was just disappointment. He was allowed to be unhappy about the boundary. I didn't have to fix his feelings or talk about him being upset. I didn't have to convince him it was fair or make him like it.

My job was to be the redwood tree, to stay calm, to stay connected, and hold the boundaries steady. Here's what that sounded like In real life, I can see you're really upset about this gaming role. You wish things were different. I so get that buddy. And this boundary is staying in place because school comes first during the week.

Did he magically become happy about it? No, but over time something happened. As I mentioned, when he was a senior in high school, he internalized this value and he would cut back on his gaming without us saying anything during the week so he could focus on school. Your child doesn't need you to make them happy about every boundary.

Your child needs you to hold the boundaries that serve them even when they don't like it. So remember, you're the tree. They're the storm. The branches sway, but the trunk doesn't move. Okay? Permission number three. You don't have to explain yourself endlessly. Let's talk about the 15th. Why you know exactly what I'm talking about, right?

You set a limit. Your kid ask why. You explain, and then they ask, but why you explain again? And then they say, but that doesn't make sense. You explain again in a different way. And they keep pushing. But why? Why? Pretty soon you're exhausted, you're triggered, they're still arguing, and you're confused, frustrated, mad, and the boundary feels like it's crumbling.

Here's what you need to hear. I'm the parent, and this is the rule is actually a perfectly valid answer. You don't know your kid, a full PhD dissertation on why or on your parenting philosophy. You don't have to defend your decision to a jury of peers or in this case, your 8-year-old. Now let me be clear.

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About something important. There's a difference between answering a genuine question of why and getting pulled into an endless power struggle. If your child is sincerely asking because they wanna understand, absolutely, explain your thinking. That's connection and relationship building. That's teaching them decision making.

But if they're asking why for the 15th time because they're trying to wear you down. That's not curiosity, that's power struggles and you don't have to participate. Here's what this looks like in practice. First, genuine question, why can't I have more screen time? Your answer, because we've decided two hours a day is what's healthy for our family or for you.

But why is two hours the limit? Because research shows that too much screen time affects sleep and behavior. We wanna make sure you have time for other activities too, but why does it affect sleep? That's a good question. We can look that up together. If you're curious and the boundary is staying at two hours, but why your response, I've explained my thinking, the answer is still two hours, the conversation is over.

See that you answered genuine questions, you were respectful, and then you stopped participating in the power struggle. You are the redwood tree, the trunk, the boundary doesn't move just because the wind keeps blowing the branches permission. Number four, it's okay if your roles are different from other families.

You've heard this phrase before, but everyone else gets to, I mean, come on. Oh my goodness. If I had a dollar for every time I heard that phrase, both from my own kid and from the parents I coach, I'd be a trillionaire. I mean, come on. Your 10-year-old tells you that all their friends have phones. Your teenager says everyone else's curfew is midnight.

Your 8-year-old insists that every other kid in their class is playing that game or watching that show, and you feel this pressure building. Just today, someone in the hive was asking, am I being too strict? Am I the only parent who cares about this? What if I'm damaging my child by having different roles?

Here's your permission. Your roles can be different from other families. In fact, they probably should be different because you're not parenting their children,

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you're parenting yours. Every family has different values, different priorities to certain circumstances. What works for another family might not work for yours, and that's okay, but when your child says, but everyone else gets to, here's what you can say.

Other families make different choices. This is what works for us, and that's it. You don't have to defend your family's values against what other families are doing. Let me give you some real examples. Maybe you've decided your child isn't getting a phone until eighth grade and their friends all got one in fifth grade.

You can hold that boundary with calm confidence. I hear that many of your friends have phones. In our family, we're waiting till eighth grade. I know that feels really hard right now. I get it. Maybe you've decided no social media till high school, but your middle schoolers friends are all on Instagram and TikTok.

You stay the tree. I know. It feels like you're missing out. Our families decided to wait on social media when your older will revisit this. Maybe you're not comfortable with sleepovers at houses where you don't know the parents well, but other families are more relaxed about this. You hold your ground. I need to know the families before you sleep over there.

And I know you don't like hearing this and you're probably pretty mad at me right now. And this might be different from other families and that's okay. You know what I've learned? The parents who hold their values with calm confidence, even when those values are different from others, they raise children who develop their own internal compass.

They learn that you don't just do something because everyone else is doing it. They learn to think critically about what's right for them. You're not raising your kids to fit in with everyone else's family. You're raising your kids to be their best self within your family values. Trust yourself, know your kid, know your family.

You don't need external validation that your boundaries are right. The redwood tree doesn't look around at all the other trees and change its roots based on what they're doing. It stays grounded in its own foundation. Permission number five, you my

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friend, are allowed to change your mind. Now, here's the permission that might surprise you.

You're allowed to tighten up boundaries that aren't working. Even if you've been permissive before, maybe you've been super relaxed about screen time. Now you're realizing it's affecting your kids' sleep behavior and family connection. You can change that. Maybe even letting your teenager come and go without much structure, and now you're seeing they need more guidance.

You can adjust. Maybe you've been avoiding conflict by not enforcing homework expectations and now you're watching your kids struggle. You can set a new boundary. You don't have to keep doing something that isn't serving your family just because that's how it's always been. Now your kids might push back, but you never made me do this before.

And you can say, you're right. I've been thinking about what our family needs, and I realize this boundary is important starting Monday. Here's the new plan. Now here's what's important about changing course. You're not being inconsistent in a bad way. You're being responsive. You're being a parent who learns and grows.

Let me tell you what this looks like in our house when Malcolm was younger. We were pretty relaxed about screen time, but as he got into middle school, we noticed it was affecting his mood, his sleep, and our family time. So we had a conversation and set up clear boundaries. Was he thrilled? No. But I said, I've been observing how screen time is affecting you, and I realize we need clear limits.

Here's what's changing and why you admit you're adjusting course without undermining your authority. In fact, it strengthens your authority because you're showing your kids, I'm paying attention and I'm willing to make hard calls when they're needed. I'm not afraid to lead this family. That's the redwood tree.

Staying rooted in what your family needs, even when the wind tries to push you in a different direction. Alright, so we've talked about the five permissions, but I know some of you are thinking, okay, Lisa, this sounds great. How do I actually do this when my child is melting down or my teenager's slamming doors?

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Well, let me give you the practical piece of how to be the redwood tree. It's not about what you enforce, it's how you enforce it. You can hold the exact same boundary with two completely different energies, energy, one, angry, reactive, punitive. I said, no, that's it. Tired of you arguing with me. Go to your room right now.

Energy number two, calm, connected, and firm. Hey, I see you're upset about this. You wish the answer was different. I understand that, and the boundary is staying the same. And I'm here if you wanna talk about your feelings, same boundary, completely different experience for you, for your kid, and for the connection.

ASO parent holds boundaries with a calm voice, even when the child is loud. A warm heart even when your child is angry with you or angry and clear expectations that doesn't change based on your kids' emotions. Let me give you a real life example of what this might sound like. Let's say your 7-year-old wants to watch another episode of their show.

You've already said one episode and they're begging you for more. Please, please, please, please, mom. The redwood tree response, you get down on their level. You make eye contact and you say, I hear you. You really wanna watch another episode? That show is so fun. I get it. And screen time is over for today.

Let's move upstairs and get ready for your bath. They start crying and saying, you're mean, you stay the tree. I see you're disappointed. It's okay to be sad about this. I'm gonna turn off the TV now and you can have your feelings about it, and I'm right here. You calmly turn off the tv. You don't lecture, you don't get angry, you don't negotiate.

You don't try to get their permission or justify what you're doing. You just hold the limits with compassion and empathy. Now, notice what's happening here. Your values or the roots, screen, time limits matter in your family. The boundary, which is the drunk screen time's over and there's no negotiation.

And your response, which are the branches, you're validating feelings, staying connected and being compassionate. You're firm and kind. You're clear and caring. You're holding the boundary and maintaining the relationship. That's peaceful

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authority. Yeah. Yeah. Alright, my friend, I have two pieces of homework for you this week.

Homework number one is the boundary audit. I want you to identify one boundary you've been apologizing for, feeling guilty about or backing away from because you're worried you're being too strict. Maybe it's a tv. Maybe it's screen time limits. Maybe it's homework expectations. Maybe it's curfew. Maybe it's how your kid speaks to you.

Write it down. Then practice holding it this week with calm confidence. No apologies, no endless explanations. Just this is the boundary. I know you don't like it, and I'm gonna hold it. I want you to notice what happens, not just with your kid, but with you. Notice how it feels to be the redwood tree instead of the willow that bends in every direction.

Homework assignment number two. Go back through the five permissions we talked about today. Which one did you most need to hear? Which one made you think, oh my gosh, yes, I really needed this. Write that permission down on a sticky note or on your phone and put it somewhere. You'll see it this week. Maybe in your bathroom mirror, maybe is your lock screen, maybe on your kitchen counter every time you see it.

Let it sink in. You have permission to hold boundaries with calm confidence. You're not being too strict. You're being the peaceful parent. Your kids need. And if you're thinking, I love this concept of being the redwood tree, but I need help actually doing this. Well then I wanna invite you to join us inside the hive.

Inside the hive. I'll help you establish and hold boundaries peacefully with personalized strategies just for you. We'll practice the exact scripts you need in those heated moments, and we'll work through specific scenarios. You feel most triggered or uncertain. You'll learn exactly how to be both warm and firm.

You'll learn exactly how to be both firm and kind, how to validate feelings while holding crystal clear limits. You'll discover how to stay calm when your kids are storming, and we'll build the confidence for you to lead your family with peaceful authority. Plus you'll be surrounded by a community of parents also working on

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this, who are learning to be the redwood trees themselves instead of bending with the wind like a willow.

This isn't about perfect parenting, it's about purposeful parenting. It's about growing into the calm, confident leader your family needs. And I'll be with you every step of the way. So if you're ready, I want you to run, not walk to the [hive coaching.com](https://www.coaching.com) to learn more and get signed up. Before we close today, I want you to picture the redwood tree one more time.

Hundreds of years old roots. Deep in the ground. Trunks. Solid and steady branches sway with the wind, but not breaking. That's you. That's the parent you're becoming. Just like Jessica's learning, the boundaries don't break connection. And like Malcolm, who learned to take responsibility for his gaming because we held the line with love and firmness, you two are building something powerful and lasting.

Your child doesn't need you to be their friend. Your child doesn't need you to make them happy about every boundary. Your child doesn't need you to be perfect. What your child needs is for you to be the redwood tree. Rooted in values, steady in your limits, flexible in your response, unshakeable in your calm.

Being a peaceful parent doesn't mean being a pushover. Not at all. It means being peaceful and in charge. It means holding boundaries with a calm voice and a warm heart. You can do this. You are doing it every time you choose to be the tree. Instead of getting swept up in the storm, you're building something beautiful.

A foundation of safety, security, and trust that will serve you and your kids for your entire lives. 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://www.peacefulparent.com). See you soon.