

Ep. #290: Can Your Kid Tell You the Truth About You?



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host
Lisa Smith

Ep. #290: Can Your Kid Tell You the Truth About You?

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 inspired to be with you today, because what we are gonna talk about today is something I feel deeply, personally passionate about. It touches something that goes all the way back to who I was as a 12-year-old kid, and I think it might be one of the most quietly powerful things you can do to change the entire trajectory of your relationship with your kid.

So let's jump into it. I wanna start today by asking you something, and I really want you to sit with it before you answer. You ready? Here's the question. Are your kids allowed to give you feedback? Not just allowed in theory, not, "Of course my door is always open," in an abstract kind of way. I mean, if your kid walked up to you right now today and said, "Mom," or, "Dad, when you do X, it makes me feel like I don't matter to you," what would actually happen in your body, in your face, in the next words that rush out of your mouth?

It's an important question, and what I want you to ask yourself is, would you be able to stay open? Would you be able to hear it? Or would the defenses go up before they even finish the sentence? Most of us would say we want our kids to be able to tell us hard things, and most of us, if we're being really honest, would have a hard time receiving it without flinching, without defending, without explaining, and that's what today is about.

I wanna take you back to something that happened when I was about 12 years old. I was laying out in the sun with my neighbor, just two kids talking the way 12-year-old girls do, and I said something to her that I've never forgotten. I said, "Kids are people too, you know, and if I ever have one, I'm going to treat them like they're a person," and I meant it, all the way down to my last cell in my body.

Ep. #290: Can Your Kid Tell You the Truth About You?

Because I grew up in a home where that was not the operating system. It wasn't unusual for the time, but the unspoken rule was clear. Kids don't challenge adults. Kids don't tell parents when something hurts. Kids don't get to weigh in on how they're being treated, and the adults are always right. The adults are the one in charge, and a kid who pushes back on that is being disrespectful.

Maybe you grew up in that home too, and you're right here with me reliving those memories. For me, what I know is that I absorbed that. I internalized that operating system or culture, and I carried it with me. And that 12-year-old girl made a promise, and when David and I had Malcolm, that promise became an intention we held deliberately.

Our kid would always have the right to tell us how he felt. He would always be able to say, "That hurt me," or, "I don't think that's fair," or, "I need you to hear this." And we would do our best to actually hear it, to really listen with an open mind, both ears, and low defenses. Now, what I didn't fully understand then, and what I wanna talk about today, is how hard that actually is to live out in the moments when it counts.

Yeah? Yeah. And here's what I want you to understand about why this is so hard for many of us. Well, most of us did not grow up in homes where this was allowed. And it's probably not because your parents were bad people, but because they were raised in the same way, and their parents before them. The rule, spoken or unspoken, was that the parent is the authority and the kid's job is to comply.

A kid who told a parent, "You're hurting me," was seen as disrespectful, dramatic, or talking back. So we learn not to say it. We learn to be quiet. We learn to stuff it down. We learn to figure out our feelings alone in our rooms where nobody could see. And now, here we are, raising our own kids, and we say we want things to be different, and I believe we mean it.

We really do. The challenge is, is that nobody ever showed us what different actually looks like. Nobody modeled it for us. And when our kids try to give us feedback, something happens in us that we didn't see coming. Because here's the thing about generational patterns. They don't just live in our memories, they live in our bodies.

Ep. #290: Can Your Kid Tell You the Truth About You?

And when our kid says, "I don't like when you do that," or, "That was hurtful," or, "I don't understand that," your body doesn't hear feedback, it hears something that feels like disrespect, and the old programming kicks in before your thinking brain ever gets a chance to respond. That is the cycle, and today we're gonna talk about how to break it.

Let me paint you a real picture. So let's say your, your kid comes to you, maybe they're eight, maybe they're 14, and they say something like, "Mom, when you talk to me like that in front of my friends, I feel embarrassed." Or, "Dad, when you walk away in the middle of what I'm saying, it makes me feel like you don't care."

Okay, what happens in your body in that moment? Well, for most parents, here's what happens. There's a tightening somewhere, maybe in the chest, maybe in the jaw, maybe in the stomach, and then the stories come fast. We say things to ourselves inside our brain like, "They're being dramatic. They're exaggerating."

They have no idea how much I do for them. I work so hard, and this is what I get." And before you've had one conscious thought, you're defending yourself. You're explaining. You're turning it around. You're telling them why they're wrong about what they felt. And here's the part that's hard to see in the moment.

You just proved exactly why they're afraid to come to you with hard things. Because in that moment, what they needed was for you to just receive the message, and what they got was a parent who couldn't receive the message. Now, I wanna be really clear. This is not a character flaw on your part, not at all, not one bit.

What it is is it's a trained response. Your nervous system learned somewhere along the way that feedback about you equals a threat, and when the body senses a threat, it protects. It defends. It either gets big, or it shuts down. That is biology doing exactly what it was built to do, but biology is not destiny.

Let me say that again. Biology is not destiny, okay? Now, before I go any further, I need to address something because I can already hear some of you thinking, "Lisa, if I tell my kid they can give me feedback, they're going to be rude about it. They're going to use it as an excuse to disrespect me." Okay, I hear you.

Ep. #290: Can Your Kid Tell You the Truth About You?

I really do. That's a fair concern, and I'm here to draw a really important line in the sand. The right to give you feedback and the delivery of that feedback are two completely different things. Giving your kid the right to tell you something is hurting them does not mean accepting any tone, any words, or any approach they choose.

For example, in our house, Malcolm always has the right to say how he feels. There are absolutely times when David and I had to say, "I wanna hear this, and I need you to say it differently." There were definitely times when we coached the tone. Frankly, sometimes there still are. There were times when we said, "The words you are choosing are not landing in the way you want them to.

Please try again." The delivery is workable. The delivery can be shaped and coached and learned over time, and I think that is a completely fair thing to address. But the message, the right to bring it to us in the first place, that was never up for debate. We never shut down the what. We might redirect the how, but we always tried to receive the what, and that distinction is everything.

Because a kid who learns that they can come to you, even if you sometimes help them find better words for it, is a completely different kid than a kid who learns their feelings about you are not welcome here. One grows up knowing their voice matters, the other learns to go silent. I want you to raise kids to know their voice matters, and I'm here to help you do exactly that.

Now, I wanna tell you what years of this actually produces, because I've seen it up close. When Malcolm was young, still in school before college, I was back in corporate America, running a team, managing a big role, navigating the world of business at a high level. And one day I was telling a colleague about a conversation Malcolm and I had.

Just a regular conversation, the kind where he was telling me what he thought about something, you know, his perspective on a situation, unfiltered and direct. And I'll never forget this, my colleague stopped me mid-story, looked at me and said, "Well, obviously someone has taught Malcolm his opinion matters."

Ep. #290: Can Your Kid Tell You the Truth About You?

I was stunned, absolutely stunned, and completely stopped in my tracks. Not because it was a criticism, but because for me it landed as a gift. This person, someone who did not know my family, who had no investment in making me feel good, had noticed something from the outside that I was living from the inside, and he saw it in one story.

That Malcolm was moving through the world like someone whose voice counted, like someone who had a right to have a perspective and share it with his parents. I gotta tell you, I was so full of pride in that moment. Not the performative kind, but the quiet, deep kind. The kind that says we're building something real here.

And this doesn't happen by accident. It happens because from the time Malcolm was small, we made a deliberate choice. We were going to be the kind of parents he could talk to. I mean, really talk to, and that meant that we had to be parents who could actually receive what he brought us, even when it was uncomfortable, even when it was about us.

The kid who grows up knowing his opinion matters becomes an adult who can advocate for himself. Who can name what he needs, who can name his feelings, who can navigate hard conversations in relationships, in work, and in life. And that is what we are building, you and I, when we give our kids a voice in our home.

Yeah? Yeah. So let's get practical, because wanting to receive your kid's feedback and knowing how to do it in the moment are two different things. Here's what I want you to practice. It's three moves that I'll admit are simple but not easy. You ready? Okay. The first move is the pause. When your kid brings you feedback, especially feedback that stings, your body is going to wanna respond immediately.

Do not. Please do not. Instead, take a breath. Even a few seconds of pause creates space between their words and your reaction. And in that space, your thinking brain, your higher brain, can come back online, and the goal is to respond, not react, and that pause is what allows you to respond rather than react.

The second move is to reflect before you defend. Before you explain your side, say back what you heard. "What I'm hearing you say is that when I do X, you feel Y. Is that right?" Now, this simple step does two things. It tells your kid that, that they

Ep. #290: Can Your Kid Tell You the Truth About You?

were heard, and it gives you another few seconds to actually process what they brought you instead of reacting to how it landed in your body.

It also confirms that you heard them correctly. And then there's the third move. The third move is to separate the delivery from the message. If the way they're saying it is a problem, if there's an attitude, if there are words that hitting hard, if the volume is really loud, address that. Address it, but do it after you receive the message, not as a way to avoid receiving it, okay?

Not as a way to avoid. You might say, "I hear what you're saying, and I wanna talk about it more, and I wanna work with you on how you bring things to me because I wanna be able to hear them clearly." Now, that is different than shutting it down. Those are the three steps, and I wanna share something from inside the hive.

As always, I've changed some details to protect privacy. There's a mom, I'll call her Cindy. Cindy came to me because her 13-year-old son had gone almost completely silent. One-word answers, constant retreat to his room. She felt like she was losing him, and she had no idea why. Inside the hive, we started talking through what the previous few years had looked like, and a pattern emerged.

Every time her son tried to tell her something he didn't like or something she did that hurt him, Cindy had responded by defending herself. Not harshly, not meanly, but she would go into great detail and take a great amount of time to explain why she'd done it or tell him he was misreading the situation or point out everything she did for the family.

She had never heard him or recognized him as someone who had a legitimate grievance. She heard him as someone who was being unfair to her. So guess what happened? He stopped bringing things to her. And when a kid stops bringing hard things to a parent, they don't stop having hard things. They just go somewhere else with them, or nowhere at all.

When Cindy started practicing receiving instead of defending, even just saying, "I hear you. Tell me more," before she said anything else, her son started to come back, slowly, one conversation at a time, because he was starting to believe that

Ep. #290: Can Your Kid Tell You the Truth About You?

maybe she could hold it after all. That is the relationship we are repairing when we learn to do this, and I promise you, it's never too late to start.

I promise. So in that vein, here's your homework this week. Just one thing, one question. Find a quiet moment with your kid, with each of them one on one, not in the middle of a conflict, when, not when things are heated, but a calm, connected moment, and ask them this, "Is there anything I do that sometimes makes it hard for you to come to me?"

And then, and this is the critical part, just listen. Don't explain. Don't defend. Don't fix it in the moment. Just hear it, and then thank them for telling you. And that's it. Let it land on you and them. That one question, asked with genuine openness, sends a message that no lecture and no parenting book ever can.

It says, "Your experience matters to me. Your voice matters, and you are safe to share your thoughts with me." That is the generational curse broken right there in one conversation. So in closing, if you're here listening because you wanna break the cycle, give your kids something you may never have had, a parent who can hear hard things without falling apart, a parent who says with their presence and their openness, "Your voice matters here, and you're always allowed to tell me the truth about how you feel."

That is not permissive parenting. That is not letting kids run the show. That is not disrespect. That is building the kind of relationship where your kid actually wants to come to you now, 10 years from now, 20 years from now, and on. I want that for you, and I want that for your kids, because I deeply understand how that level of connection can change the world one family at a time.

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 thepeacefulparent.com. See you soon.