

Ep. #298: You Know What to Do—So Why Can't You Do It?



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 glad to be with you today, and I wanna start with something I hear from parents all the time. It goes like this: "I know what I'm supposed to do, Lisa. I do. I know I'm supposed to stay regulated. I know I'm supposed to connect before I correct. I know my kid isn't giving me a hard time, they're having a hard time.

I know I'm not supposed to yell. I know consequences aren't going to magically teach my kid a skill they don't have. I know, I know, I know." And then it's 7:42 on a Tuesday morning, and your kid still doesn't have their shoes on, or your high schooler's not out of bed yet, and you've asked four times, and you're going to be late, and suddenly every peaceful parenting tool you've ever learned has left the building, and you're yelling or threatening or lecturing, or you're standing there thinking, "Why am I still doing this?

I know better." Can you relate to this? Because I've been a parent coach for 17 years, and I've worked with thousands of families around the world, and I've spent a lot of time thinking about what actually happens in coaching with my clients. And the real question is, why can't a parent like you, maybe this is you, you've read the books, you've listened to the podcasts, maybe you've taken a course, and you know the tools, and yet you get completely stuck in the same pattern with your kid over and over and over again?

And why can one coaching conversation, one, sometimes help you see something you've been struggling with for months or even years in a completely different way? Well, I think it's because most of us assume that when we have a parenting problem, what we need is an answer. Tell me what to do. My kid won't do his homework.

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What should I do? My daughter ignores me. What do I do? My kid won't get off the screens when I ask him to. What do I do? My teenager is lying. What do I do? My kids are constantly fighting. What do I do? Just, just give me the tools, Lisa, right? And listen, sometimes that is exactly what you need. Sometimes there is a tool I can teach you.

But after 17 years of doing this work, I can tell you that very often the most important work happens before we ever get to what you're going to do, before we get to the tool. Because in our session, first we have to figure out what is actually happening here, not what it looks like is happening, not what your brain is deciding is happening, not what you're terrified this behavior means, but what is actually happening.

Because if we're solving the wrong problem, the world's greatest parenting tool isn't gonna help you. And if you listened to last week's episode about the after-school meltdown, you already heard an example of this. Once we understood what was actually happening for the kid at the end of the school day, the response changed.

The tool came after the understanding, and that's exactly what I want you and I to talk about today. Let me give you an example. Years ago, a mom sent in a question for the podcast. She had three daughters, 10, six, and three, and she said, "My kids constantly ignore me. I know they heard me." She would ask them to do something, and nothing would happen.

She'd ask again, and nothing. Then she'd explain in great detail why she needed them to do it. Nothing. Then she'd repeat herself, and eventually, yep, she'd lose her shits, and then they'd move. So from her perspective, she had a very straightforward problem, "My kids ignore me until I yell." And I remember hearing her question and immediately, uh, noticing four words, "I know they heard me."

And so the question is, do you know? How do you know? Because that's where coaching often starts, not with me telling you what to do, but with me questioning something you didn't even realize was a question. Because this mom wasn't saying, "I'm having the thought that they heard me," she was saying, "I know."

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Lisa, I know they heard me." To her, it was a fact. But these kids were 10, 6, and 3. Kids are incredible single taskers. They can be coloring, or playing, or reading, or watching something, or thinking about something, and they're fully into it, completely 100%. And their brains aren't necessarily scanning the environment while they're doing that, waiting for the next request.

So mom's standing in the kitchen saying, "Girls, get your shoes on." And in her brain, the communication has happened. She said it, therefore they heard it. Therefore, if they aren't doing it, they're ignoring her. Now watch what happens next. If I believe my kid is ignoring me, what happens inside my body? I get irritated.

I maybe feel disrespected. My voice changes, "Girls, I said get your shoes on." Still nothing. So now I'm gathering more evidence, "See? See? See? They're ignoring me. I knew it." And then eventually I might even feel justified to walk into the room and yell, "Get your shoes on. We have to go." And suddenly, three little heads look up, and they start moving.

And what does my brain conclude? "See? They heard me the whole time. They just don't move until I yell." But what if that's not what happened? What if yelling finally did get their attention? Yelling is a very effective pattern interrupter, not one I recommend as your everyday parenting tool, but it will interrupt a pattern.

So maybe the actual problem isn't my kids won't listen unless I yell, maybe it's I'm making requests before I have their attention. Whoa. Right? Whoa, Joey. Same kids, same shoes, same Tuesday morning, completely different problem, and now we can actually work on it by coaching you to go to them, get close, say their name, wait, make sure you have their attention, then make the request.

"Girls, I need you to put your shoes on now, please." And maybe you add in, "Tell me what I just asked you to do." "Put our shoes on." "Yep. Thank you." Now we're solving an actual problem. And notice what happened. I didn't start with, "Here's my three-step system to make your kids listen." First, we got curious. We dug in to the premise the parent was walking around with, and then we questioned it.

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What if they're not ignoring you? What if something else is going on? What if when you think the thought they're ignoring you, you immediately become dysregulated? That's coaching. And by the way, I want you to notice something else. The behavior didn't change first. The parent's understanding changed first, and when her understanding changed, her nervous system had the opportunity to change because, "My kid didn't hear me yet," feels completely different in your body than, "My kid is deliberately ignoring me."

And those two thoughts create two completely different versions of you as the parent. Can you see this? Yeah, I thought you could. Here's another example. I coached a mom, we'll call her Angela, who was struggling with limits, particularly around screen time. Her son was strong-willed, and she felt like he was constantly pushing the limits.

Can you relate to that? I know I can. So naturally, she wanted help getting him to follow the limits. Okay, fair enough. Let's look at the limits. As we started talking and coaching, something interesting emerged. One day, he might get an hour of screen time. Another day, his friends come over, so she'd give him more.

Another day, she was trying to get some work done, so he stayed on longer, and then she'd look up and realize, "Oh, shoot, you've been on that thing for three hours." And she'd get immediately dysregulated at the thought that her kid had been on gaming or watching YouTube or doing something on his screens for over three hours, and she would immediately get angry and start yelling, "That's it.

No screens tomorrow." Maybe she'd even threaten to take it away longer. Then tomorrow would come, and the circumstances would change again. So as we started working on this together, she started seeing something. She thought the problem was, "My son doesn't respect the screen time limit." But what we actually discovered was the limit wasn't clear and consistent yet.

To him or her. That's different. Now, this isn't about blaming the parent. I didn't say that so Angela could go, "Oh, great. This is all my fault." No, that's not gonna get us anywhere. We're gathering information. We're getting curious. What is actually happening in this system? Because if I'm trying to solve my strong-willed kid won't respect limits, I might come up with bigger limits.

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I might take the screen away longer. I might get tougher. I might decide he needs to learn that I'm serious. But if the actual problem is we haven't created a clear, realistic limit that I, the parent, can consistently follow through on, now we're doing completely different work. Can you see that? So with Angela, we got specific What amount of screen time actually works for you and your son?

Not fantasy Angela, real Angela, the Angela that has work to do and dinner to make and a life. What can you realistically follow through on? When does screen time end? How are we gonna handle it if he doesn't get off? How are we gonna communicate that a- all ahead of time while you're regulated and he can hear it?

How can I help you follow through without turning the consequence into a punishment because you're angry? We worked through all of that. That's coaching. I completely helped Angela feel confident with the limits she set, communicate it to her son, and follow through day in and day out, and she had a massive transformation in her home.

And here's something I really want you to hear. Sometimes you come to coaching wanting me to help you figure out what's wrong with your kid's behavior, and we might discover that nothing is particularly wrong with your kid's behavior. They're responding pretty predictably to the system around them.

Sometimes we need to understand the kid differently, and sometimes we need to understand the pattern between you and your kid differently, and sometimes we have to look somewhere even more uncomfortable, like within ourselves. I worked with another mom years ago. I'm gonna call her Katie. Katie came to me because she desperately wanted to break a generational cycle.

She'd grown up with a father whose parenting had been deeply harmful to her, and she was terrified of repeating it. She did not want to parent her son the way she was parented, but sometimes she yelled, and when she yelled, she would feel horrible afterwards. Not just, "I wish I hadn't yelled." It was much bigger than that.

The yelling meant something to her. It meant, "Here is proof that I'm becoming my father." And she would be in utter agony over this. She would promise herself she wasn't gonna do it again, and she'd hold it together for a while, just like humans do,

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and then parenting would get really hard and stressful, and she'd lose it again, and then the shame would come crashing down, and the cycle would start over again.

She came to do coaching with me because she wanted to stop yelling, and during one of our sessions, I asked her a question. I said, "What are you thinking right before you're about to yell at your son?" And Katie said, "No matter what-" I'll always end up like my father. Mm. There it was. Now, I really want you to think about this.

Katie had been living with that sentence. She wasn't waking up every morning and consciously choosing it. She wasn't walking around and saying out loud to everybody she met on the street, "Today I'm gonna believe I'm doomed to become my dad." But it was there floating in the back of her mind, running underneath everything.

And the truth is she believed it. So I challenged her. I asked her, "So you're doomed to become your father no matter what? No matter how much work you do? No matter how many books you read? No matter how much self-development you do? No matter how much coaching you get?" You're going to become your father.

And when we slowed it down and looked at it, she could see that wasn't actually true, not one bit. Eventually, we landed on a new thought. My father is my greatest teacher of what not to do. Now, that's interesting. Her history didn't change. Her father didn't change. Her son was still a strong-willed five-year-old.

What changed? Well, her understanding of herself, the thoughts that she told herself, how she viewed her world, and her image of herself as a parent, and that changed how she showed up. Now, here's the part of Katie's story that I really love. A few weeks later, she yelled again, and her brain immediately went, "See?

Didn't work. I'm still doing it. Maybe this coaching thing doesn't work." And I think this is such an important part of change that we don't talk about enough, because we tend to think growth should look like this. I learn the thing, I understand the thing, I do the thing, problem solved. But let's be honest, that is almost never how real growth works.

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A friend of mine, a dear friend of mine, Jane, who's also a coach, said something recently that really stuck with me. She was talking about getting back into running, and she said, "In the beginning, you don't see much progress, and it's hard, and it feels awkward. And you're putting in effort, but you don't necessarily have a lot to show for it yet."

And then, then it happens. You see a little glimmer of progress, and then a little more, and eventually that progress begins to compound." And as soon as she said it, I thought, yes, that is exactly what I see with the parents that I work with. In the beginning, peaceful parenting can feel awkward. You might recognize that you're triggered, but only after you yell.

And then you might recognize it while you're yelling. And then one day you catch yourself right before you're about to yell. And another day you actually pause. And then the next day you don't yell at all. You set the limit calmly on Monday, and then you completely lose your shiz on Wednesday, and your brain wants to take Wednesday as evidence that none of this is working.

But Wednesday doesn't erase Monday at all, not one bit, because you're practicing. You're building a new skill, just like Jane with running, and over time, those little changes start to compound. What happens? You begin to recognize the trigger sooner. You recover faster. You repair more quickly because you know how, and it feels more comfortable. You stop making every mistake mean you're a terrible parent.

You become more capable of staying regulated when your kid isn't. You start noticing the story your brain is telling you before you automatically act from it. The things that initially required enormous effort begin to become more available to you. You begin to really deeply understand, pause, and respond rather than react.

And that, my real-world peaceful parent, that's growth. That's growth over time. And Jane said something else to me that I haven't been able to stop thinking about. She said one of the reasons running with other people is so helpful is because sometimes you can borrow their energy, and you can borrow their belief.

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You can borrow from them what you haven't created on your own yet. And I thought, "Oh my gosh, that is parent coaching." Because there are going to be moments in this work when you cannot create the belief you need on your own. You just can't. You can't see it yet. Katie couldn't. Katie was looking at one incident and seeing, "I'm failing."

"I'm becoming my father. Nothing has changed." But I, her coach, could see something she couldn't see in that moment. One yell doesn't erase all the work you've done. It doesn't erase all the work she'd done. She wasn't back at square one. The fact that she could recognize what happened, bring it to a coaching call, examine it, take responsibility for it, and learn from it was, are you ready for this, was evidence of growth.

Her brain was measuring the mistake. I, as her coach, was looking at the trajectory, and in that moment, Katie was able to borrow my belief that she was making progress until she could see it for herself. By the way, I want that for you and your family. Now, I want to make an important distinction here, because coaching isn't simply having another person believe in you.

Your, your friends can believe in you. Your partner can encourage you. Your mom can tell you you're doing a great job, and that kind of support matters. But coaching is something different. A skilled coach isn't just standing on the sidelines saying, "You've got this." Not at all. It's not Ted Lasso here. I'm bringing 17 years of experience and thousands of families that I've worked with into the coaching with you.

I've been trained to listen for patterns. I've seen what change looks like. I've seen what- Gets parents stuck. I can hear the thought you're presenting as a fact. I can notice when your expectation doesn't match your child's development capacity. I can help you find the skill underneath the behavior. I can notice when you're trying to teach your child whose brain or your brain is completely dysregulated.

I can look at the pattern or the dance between you and your kids when you're standing right in the middle of it. And sometimes I'm going to believe in you when you can't believe in yourself. And sometimes I'm also going to challenge you.

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because you may be working really, really, really hard at solving the wrong problem.

Because here's what I know. You don't need someone cheering you down the wrong road. You need someone who knows what to look for, and there's a difference, a big difference. So let's come back to the question I started with. What does parent coaching actually do? Well, I don't believe my job is to be an expert on your kid.

You're the expert on your kid. You know your kid or kids in a way I never will. You know the history and the nuances. You know the look on their face that means something is coming. You know their heart. Now, what I bring is a trained set of eyes. I bring pattern recognition. I bring experience. I bring a deep understanding of child development, nervous systems, strong-willed kids, behavior, connection, limits, triggers, and thought patterns.

I bring enough distance from your particular Tuesday morning meltdown that I can sometimes see something that you can't see while you're standing in the middle of it. You might come into the coaching call saying, "How do I get my kid to stop doing this?" And instead of immediately answering the question, we're going to investigate three things.

What's happening with my kid? What is their brain capable of right now? What skill might they be missing? What are they communicating through this behavior? What is happening between us? What are my thoughts about what is happening? Is the expectation clear? Am I consistent? Are we stuck in a pattern? And am I accidentally escalating the very behavior I'm trying to stop?

And then we're gonna look at what's happening inside you. What are you making this behavior mean? What are you afraid of? What story are you telling yourself about your kid or kids? What story are you telling yourself about you? Because once we understand these things, then we can make an action plan and decide what to do.

Then we build the skills, and then you go practice. This part matters because coaching doesn't end when our call ends. You go back into your life, back to

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breakfast, back to homework, back to screens, back to your strong-willed kid saying no, and you practice. Practice, practice, practice. And then you come back and say, "Okay, Lisa, here's what happened."

And we look again. What worked? What didn't? Where did you get hooked? What did you notice? How do we adjust? What do you practice next? And then you go practice again. This is how growth compounds, just like Jane getting back into running. And this brings me all the way back to the start as though we're playing Candyland.

Remember when we started, I said, "Many of you say, 'I know what I'm supposed to do.'" I believe you. You may know a lot about peaceful parenting. You can understand regulation intellectually and still need help figuring out why this particular thing, whatever this thing is your kid does, sends you through the roof. You can know that behavior is communication and still look at your teenager and think, "Oh, man, you are so trying to manipulate me right now."

You can know how to set a limit and still not recognize that you've changed the limit four times this week, or moved from setting limits into threatening. You can know you're supposed to connect and still be so activated by fear about your kid's future that connection feels impossible in the moment.

And that's all because knowing something and being able to access it when you're triggered are two completely different things. Information matters, and I hope this podcast gives you useful information every single week. That is my goal. Information can show you where you're going, coaching helps you practice getting there, and sometimes coaching helps you keep walking when your brain is telling you that you're not getting anywhere.

Sometimes coaching isn't about giving you an answer. Sometimes it's about helping you hold on to what you already know long enough for it to become something you can access easily in your real life. And here's what I think is really beautiful about this process. At first, as your coach, I might be doing a lot of the noticing.

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Did you hear what you just said? Did you notice what you made that behavior mean? Did you notice that he was already dysregulated? Did you notice you gave the direction from three rooms away? Did you notice what happened in your body right before you yelled? But then, then over time, something starts to change, and this is my favorite part.

You start coming to the coaching calls and say, "Okay, Lisa, I know what happened. I see that I didn't have her attention. I realized I was making his refusal mean he doesn't respect me. I realized I was trying to teach him while he was already dysregulated. I realized I was scared, and I turned my fear into control.

I see that I wasn't holding the limit. I was changing it depending on how frustrated I was." Yes. Yes. Yes. Now we're cooking. Because the goal of great coaching isn't for you to need your coach to tell you what to do forever, in my humble opinion. It's for you to practice seeing, thinking, regulating, and responding differently often enough that more and more of it becomes available to you on your own.

That's compound growth At first, you borrow some of my perspective, you borrow some of my pattern recognition, sometimes you even borrow my belief. And while you're doing that, you're building your own right alongside. So I have a question for you this week. Take the parenting problem that is driving you absolutely bananas right now, whatever it is, and before you ask, "What should I do?"

I want you to ask, "What am I not understanding yet?" And then look in three places. What is happening with my kid? What is happening between us? What is happening inside me? Get curious. Maybe your kid isn't ignoring you. Maybe you don't have their attention. Maybe the limit isn't clear. Maybe the behavior is bumping into a fear that was already there.

Maybe the thing you've been trying desperately to solve isn't actually the problem, and that can be good news. Because when we understand the problem differently, we give ourselves the opportunity to respond differently. Not perfectly, differently. This is the work. And if you're listening to this thinking, "Lisa, this is exactly where I am.

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I know a lot about peaceful parenting, but when I'm standing here in the middle of my own situation, I can't always see what's happening," this is the work I do every day. I coach parents both privately, one-on-one, and inside the hive on our live support calls. You can bring me the fight you had this morning, the screen time battle, the thing your teenager said that you can't stop thinking about, the pattern you keep getting stuck in even though you know better.

You can bring it. We'll slow it down together. We'll figure out what's happening with your kid, what's happening between you, and what's happening inside. And then I will coach you on the path to peaceful parenting. So if you're ready for support applying this work to your triggers, to your kids, to your family, and your real life, it would be my absolute honor to work with you.

If this feels like the moment and now feels like the time, the next step is for you to go to thepeacefulparent.com. I have a tab on there that you can click on, on how to work with me and learn more about the process. And again, it would be my absolute honor to work with you, serve you, believe in you, and help you be the parent you've always wanted to be.

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.