

# Ep. #302: You Want to Teach Your Kid a Lesson. But What Are They Actually Learning?



**Full Episode Transcript**

With Your Host  
**Lisa Smith**

# **Ep. #302: You Want to Teach Your Kid a Lesson. But What Are They Actually Learning?**

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. Now, I want you to imagine this. It's the end of a long day, and you've asked your kid to do something Not once, not twice, three times. Maybe it's putting the tablet away. Maybe it's picking up the mess in the living room.

Maybe it's getting in the car because you're already late, and your kid looks you right in the eye and says, "No," or rolls their eyes, or keeps doing exactly what they're doing as though you haven't said a word. And then you feel it, the heat coming up your chest, the tightening in your jaw, the thought that flashes through your mind, "Are you kidding me right now?"

I mean, you've been patient. You've explained. You've asked nicely, and now you are done. And somewhere in the back of your mind, you're thinking, "Oh, you're gonna learn your lesson this time," right? Maybe you start thinking about what you can take away, the screen time, the phone, plans with friends. What consequence will finally get through to this kid?

Because you're frustrated, and you're tired of repeating yourself, and most importantly, you want this behavior to stop. Okay, I wanna ask you a question, and it's the question we're gonna sit with today. When you say you're gonna teach your kid a lesson, I want you to ask yourself, what exactly are you teaching?

Not what do you hope they'll stop doing, not how quickly you want them to listen, but what do you want them to know how to do differently the next time this happens? Because there is a world of difference between making a kid pay for what happened and teaching a kid how to handle it differently next time.

And this is what we're talking about today in this episode, discipline versus punishment. The kind of difference that can change the way you show up in your

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kitchen, in your car, and in your relationship with your kids for years to come. Here's a sentence I want you to hear today and maybe even write down.

Discipline is helping a kid solve a problem. Punishment is making a kid suffer for having a problem. Let me say that again. Discipline is helping a kid solve a problem, maybe even for next time, and punishment is making a kid suffer for having the problem in the first place. Now, these aren't dictionary definitions that cover every possible situation.

They're a way to examine the purpose behind what we do as parents, and here's the thing, purpose matters a lot. For so many of us, discipline and punishment were basically the same word when we were growing up. You need discipline meant somebody needs to make sure you don't do that again. Sometimes that meant a lecture.

Sometimes it meant losing privileges. Sometimes it meant yelling or something even harsher, like a spanking. And we learned a formula in our own childhood. Kid makes a bad choice, parent creates something very unpleasant, kid learns a lesson. But let's pause for a second and ask, okay, but what lesson? What lesson does the kid learn under that old formula?

A kid might learn, I better not get caught. They might learn, when mom gets that look on her face, I should be quiet. They might learn, when dad is mad, I need to agree with him whether I mean it or not. Now, none of those lessons is the same as learning how to manage feelings like frustration or learning how to tell the truth or learning how to follow through on responsibilities or repair a relationship.

Because here's the thing, punishment looks backwards. You did something wrong and now I need to make you pay for it. Okay? And teaching or disciplining looks forward. Something happened that wasn't okay, and therefore, what does my kid need to understand, practice, repair, or take responsibility so they can move forward differently, so that next time there's a different response?

Notice what I did not say here. I did not say the behavior doesn't matter. I did not say let it go, and I certainly didn't say your kid can do whatever they want as long

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as they have a big feeling. No, not at all. Peaceful parenting is not permissive parenting. You as the parent can be firm. You can hold the limit.

You can require repair. You can say no. Your kid can be disappointed or angry about your decision. All feelings are welcome. All actions are not welcome when we're having those feelings. That's peaceful parenting. Now, the question is whether you're using your authority as the parent to teach and protect or to make your kid hurt because of what they did.

That's the question. And here's the way I think about it. I don't want my kid to become an expert at avoiding punishment. I do want my kid to become an expert at making good choices and decisions, and I want that for your kids, too. So that brings us to a place where parents get stuck all the time. I can almost hear you right now.

Lisa, I get it, but my kid knows better. I hear this all the time in coaching. He knows he's not allowed to hit. She knows the homework has to get done. He knows the phone charges outside his bedroom. She knows not to talk to me that way. And you know what? You might be completely right. Your kid might be able to recite the rule back to you with perfect accuracy.

But knowing the rule and having the skills to follow the rule consistently are not the same thing. Think about you for a moment. Have you ever known you should get to bed earlier and then you stay up scrolling? Come on, tell the truth. Have you ever known you should stop arguing with your partner and then you say one more thing?

Yep, I'm guilty of that one. Have you ever known that yelling at your kid wasn't how you wanted to show up and you still yelled? Check. I'm part of that group occasionally. Of course, because you're a human, and knowing better isn't a magic button that makes doing better automatic, right? I mean, we get this on an adult-to-adult level.

And for kids, there can be an even bigger gap between understanding and executing. A young kid might know they shouldn't throw a toy and still not have a

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reliable way to handle a wave of frustration. A middle schooler might know not to interrupt and still have trouble pausing when they're excited and overstimulated.

A teenager might know their assignments are due and still struggle to plan, start, and finish them. An older kid might understand budgeting and still have a hard time pausing before an impulsive purchase. Those situations don't all have the same cause. Sometimes a kid needs practice. Sometimes they need a clear expectation.

Sometimes they need support or a different system. And yes, sometimes they have the skill and still choose not to use it. A choice can still require accountability. But if we automatically treat every repeat behavior as evidence that the kid doesn't care, we may miss the very thing we could teach.

There's a difference between, "You know better, so what's wrong with you?" and, "You know what the expectation is. What's getting in the way of following through, and what needs to happen next?" The first one invites shame and defensiveness. The second one invites responsibility, accountability, and a plan. Let me show you what this sounds like in real-life coaching.

I was recently coaching a parent who has two boys, an older one who is six and a younger one who is four. I've changed their names and some details of the situation to protect their privacy. The older boy was having a really hard time managing frustration. When something doesn't go his way, he would sometimes hit or throw things.

And one afternoon, he was sitting on the floor building his blocks. He had worked hard on it, and then part of it collapsed. He got really upset, furious I would say, and he picked up one of the blocks and he just chucked it across the room, and unfortunately, it hit his younger brother. Now, imagine you're the parent.

You have one kid who's furious because his creation fell apart, and you have another kid who's crying because he just got hit with a block, and you're standing there and you might be thinking, "Are you kidding me? How many times have we talked about this?" Because you've told the older kid many, many, many times that hitting and throwing things at people isn't okay.

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Now, here's the thing. Part of his brain knows that. In fact, once he calmed down, he felt really bad that he hurt his brother. Hurting his brother wasn't even what he was trying to do. He was frustrated, and in that moment, he didn't know what else to do with that frustration. So when this parent came to coaching, the question was, how do I get him to stop hitting and throwing things?

That's the question the parent brought to our weekly Hive coaching call. And listen, I get it. When a kid's behavior is unsafe, stopping it matters. We do not stand there and let someone get hurt while we calmly analyze feelings. Not at all. We intervene. We protect people. We hold the limit. But after safety, I wanted the parent to ask a different question.

What if the problem isn't that he doesn't know that he's not supposed to throw things? What if the problem is that he doesn't know what to do when he gets frustrated? I always say our kids are born with all the feelings, but not all the skills to manage the feelings. Now, in this situation, when the kid feels that surge because the blocks fell, I want it to work, it just fell apart, all the work I put into it fell apart.

I can't stand this feeling. What is the kid's go-to move? In this instance, throw, hit, and explode. The parent has told him 100 times what not to do, right? Don't throw blocks. Don't hurt people. Don't throw things. Don't throw things at people. But has he told the kid what to do instead when the feeling of frustration comes up?

And the answer was no. I haven't told my kid. I haven't practiced. I haven't helped him manage frustration. And that was the pivot in our coaching conversation. I talked with the parent about helping their kid develop an alternative response to frustration when they're calm, and practice. Maybe clapping hands, maybe stomping feet safely, maybe jumping in place, maybe taking space or saying, "I'm getting really frustrated.

I need help." Maybe it's screaming at the top of their lungs because screaming would be better than chucking a block across the room, right? Now, think about this, real-world peaceful parent. You wouldn't wait until a kid is in the deep end of a pool to teach them how to swim, right? We don't do that. You'd practice in a place

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where they can learn, where they're safe and calm, and can learn to swim before they go down into the deep end.

Well, it's the same principle here. For a younger kid, we can even make it playful and fun. The parent can act out the moment. "Oh, my. My blocks fell, and I feel so frustrated, and I want to chuck a block across the room. But instead, I'm going to stomp my feet and scream at the top of my lungs asking for help."

Right? The parent demonstrates that out loud, and then the kid takes a turn. We're modeling it, we're practicing it, and we're repeating it over and over and over again so the kid can be prepared with what to do the next time they feel the feeling of frustration. And when the real moment comes, while we don't assume the kid will perform it perfectly just because we rehearsed it twice, instead, we move in, we keep everyone safe, we acknowledge the feeling, we hold the limit, and we cue the skill we've practiced, all the while staying regulated.

We move in and say, "Oh, my gosh, I see how frustrated you are. I won't let you throw that, so let's put it down. Remember what we practiced? You can stomp your feet right here and scream at the top of your lungs." Now, let's be honest here. Not every kid wants to or can be coached in the middle of being upset.

Some kids need less talking and more space, especially if they're strong-willed. If an approach makes things more intense or unsafe, just adjust. The point here of this episode isn't a particular trick, and we never need to force physical contact to make a lesson happen. The point of today's episode is helping you understand how the parent can begin moving from how do I make my kid regret this to how do I help my kid learn a safer response?

These are completely different missions and tasks and approaches. And I want to be clear about something. That call did not give us a magic ending where the kid never threw anything again. Real skills take practice, and I don't want to pretend otherwise. What changed in the coaching conversation was the plan.

Instead of waiting for the next explosion and then deciding how unpleasant the aftermath should be, the parent had something to teach before the next explosion

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ever even happened, and that's discipline, my friend And here's what I love about the story. The principle behind the story isn't limited to elementary age kids.

When a teenager blows up and sends an awful text, they might need to learn how to pause before responding and how to repair the damage afterwards. When an older kid repeatedly misses a commitment, they might need help building a workable planning system and to own the impact of not following through.

The behaviors change with age. The question we ask ourselves as the parent stays the same. What are we helping them learn to do? How do I use discipline instead of punishing? Now, I can imagine some of you are listening right now and thinking, "Lisa, I hear you, but what if my kid is doing something dangerous?

Do I really have time to teach?" No, not in that second you don't. Absolutely not. This is where I want you to remember the calm leadership sequence. You regulate, then you offer co-regulation, then you hold the limit, and then later when it's time, you teach. Regulate means I attend to my own nervous system so I can lead instead of react It doesn't mean I have to be perfectly calm or that I need 20 minutes of meditation before I respond.

It might mean putting both feet on the floor and taking one deep breath and lowering my voice. Co-regulate means I use my steadiness and my presence and my connection to help my kid find their way back to a place where they can think. This looks different with a three-year-old than it does a 16-year-old.

A teenager may need you to stop talking and give them room, but that can still be a connected, respectful response. Holding the limit means I keep the limit. I do not permit hitting. I do not hand over the keys when driving isn't safe. I do not abandon an important agreement because my kid dislikes it or is pushing back hard.

And teach means when the kid is ready, we look at what happened and what needs to change for next time, and we examine if repair needs to take place. Sometimes parents try to do the teaching while everyone is still in the storm. The kid is yelling, the parent is activated, and now we're delivering a 10-minute lecture on respect.

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Well, my question to that is, how's that working for you? Probably not very well, right? So first safety and the limit, and then when learning is possible, the conversation and practice. That's strong spine, soft heart. And I want you to imagine two parents responding to the same situation. Their teenager has ignored an agreement about turning in the car keys at a certain time.

One parent explodes, "You think you can do whatever you want. You're grounded for two months. Maybe you'll finally learn not to mess with me this time." Yeah, that's probably not gonna go well, right? And then there's parent two who approaches this with calmness and firmness. "Hey, we had an agreement about the car, and you didn't follow it, and I'm not handing you the keys again until we have a plan for how you'll follow through and meet the limit we've set."

We'll talk about it when we're both ready. Does the second teenager like it any more than the first one? No, probably not. The car keys have just been taken away. They might be furious, but the difference is, is that the second parent isn't trying to win an emotional contest. The second parent is addressing what happened while calm and regulated and setting the conditions for next time, for trust and responsibility.

I'll devote another episode to consequences because, yes, kids need accountability, and we need to be thoughtful about what that looks like. Today's goal is that I want you to notice the difference in purpose for us as the parent. A firm limit is not automatically a punishment. It isn't to harm. A kid being upset doesn't automatically mean you caused harm.

Let me be clear about that. And speaking gently doesn't automatically mean you're teaching. You can say something punitive in a sugary voice. It's not just the tone. It's the intent behind your words. It's the job you're trying to do. And there's another layer I don't want to skip because it matters so much in real life.

Sometimes the urge to punish isn't coming from a thoughtful plan about what our kid needs. If we're honest, it's coming from what their behavior brings up in us. And oh, do I know about this one. I speak from experience here, my friend. We have thoughts like, "They ignored me, and now I'm being disrespected."

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They made a mess, and I feel taken for granted. They lied, and now I feel scared. They snapped at me in front of another adult, and now I feel embarrassed." Now, let's be honest, those feelings are real. We're allowed to have our feelings, too. I'm not asking you to deny them. But notice how quickly the mind can make this leap from you made me feel this way negatively, and now you need to feel something, too.

Maybe you've never said it out loud. Most of you haven't. But if you're willing to look, you may recognize the energy of it. I know what it is to get triggered as a parent. I remember times when Malcolm was younger, and I was so focused on getting cooperation that I lost sight of the person standing in front of me.

I wanted the behavior to change now. I wanted him to obey me now. I wanted him to do exactly what I said. And when he didn't and I got dysregulated, my response wasn't always the response I would have chosen from my calmer, wiser, higher brain. What changed for me wasn't that I suddenly stopped caring whether he followed through.

I cared deeply. What changed was learning to notice what was happening inside of me before deciding what happened next. Because an angry parent can turn even a reasonable expectation into a power struggle and have the desire to punish. A regulated parent can hold the very same expectation without having the desire to win the argument and punish the kid. This is why I ask you to get curious about your own motivation.

If you can hear yourself thinking, "I'll show you," that's important information, not evidence that you're a terrible parent, information that you might need to regulate before deciding the next step. So let me give you three things to practice, three moves that help you shift from punishment to teaching in the moments that matter.

Step one, check your intention. Before you decide what to take away, what to say, or how to respond, ask yourself, "Am I trying to teach my kid something, or am I trying to make them pay?" You don't have to ask this question out loud, obviously, just check in with yourself. Be willing to notice if your first instinct is coming from frustration or fear.

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Sometimes this one pause changes the next five minutes of your evening. Second, identify the missing piece. Ask, "What does my kid need to understand, practice, or take responsibility for so next time goes different?" Maybe the missing piece is something like managing frustration. Maybe it's remembering a commitment.

Maybe it's using res- respectful words even when you're upset. Maybe it's clear that the limit hasn't been consistently communicated. Maybe it's repairing harm they've caused. And sometimes the answer isn't obvious. That's okay. Get curious rather than jumping straight into a verdict. You know- knew better may be true, but it's not always the whole story.

And then third, teach and practice the next move. This one is huge. Don't stop at, "Don't do that again." What do you want them to do when frustration arises, when the assignment feels overwhelming, when their friend pressures them, when the temptation to break an agreement shows up? Help them name the next move.

Talk about it, model it, practice it when everybody's brain is online, then reinforce it when they make progress. With little kids, that might look like role-playing with a stuffed animal. With teenagers, it might sound like, "Okay, walk me through what you'll do when your friends wanna stay out later than we agreed."

With older kids, it might be letting them build their own plan and then helping them assess whether it's realistic. The goal is not to produce a kid that never makes a mistake. The goal is to help a kid get better at making good choices, and when they don't, recover, repair, and choose differently next time.

And as we wrap up today, I want you to think about the adult your kid is becoming. Someday they may be in a situation you can't manage for them. Most likely, they will be. There will be a difficult boss, a fight with a partner, a bad decision, an overwhelming project, a moment when nobody is watching, and in that moment, I don't want the voice inside their head to be, "What will happen to me if I get caught?"

I want them to have something more useful. I want them to... their voice to say, "I can pause. I can take responsibility. I can ask for help. I can make this right. I can make a good choice." That's the long game. Your kid does not need to become an

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expert at suffering for mistakes. They need to practice becoming someone who can learn from their mistakes, and you are the best teacher to teach them this.

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 [thepeacefulparent.com](http://thepeacefulparent.com). See you soon.