



Healing the Nervous System: Breaking the Intergenerational Cycle of Trauma

Dr. Lynyetta Willis

Interviewed by Dr. Laura Markham

Dr. Laura Markham ([00:04](#)):

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Dr. Laura Markham ([00:10](#)):

Hi there. I'm Dr. Laura Markham, founder of Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids and organizer of this online summit, Nurturing Hearts, Nurturing Minds: The Neuroscience of Peaceful Parenting. Our guest today is the dynamic Dr. Lynyetta Willis.

Dr. Laura Markham ([00:27](#)):

Dr. Willis is a psychologist, family empowerment coach, speaker, and award-winning author of *My Forgotten Self*, a story about a girl, a powerful encounter, and a universal message. Her neuroscience training through the Medical College of Georgia and over 20 years of journeying with countless clients led her to design her brain-based and research-supported Elemental Living Model and PATHS Relationship Framework, which we'll talk about in our interview today. We're talking with Dr. Willis today about healing the nervous system, breaking the intergenerational cycle of trauma. Dr. Lynyetta Willis, welcome to the Summit.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([01:09](#)):

Hello. Thank you so much for having me here. So, good.

Dr. Laura Markham ([01:13](#)):

I'm so glad to speak with you because I love the way you talk about how parents can notice their own triggers and heal them. So, let me ask you, why is it so hard for us, this getting triggered thing that makes us not be the parents we want to be?

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([01:32](#)):

Absolutely. So, a lot of the parents that I work with, they are what I call a cycle breakers or revolutionaries, and a revolutionary, the way I use it, stands for relationship evolutionary. They are really big on evolving the most sacred relationships that are in their life, and they are committed to it. And it's a revolutionary act because a lot of the people that I work with, their parents and their parents', parents and all, they didn't do that. They didn't do that work.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([02:03](#)):

So, it's a lot of pressure, but it is also beautiful work. And the reason why it's a lot of pressure and it feels so hard, is because one thing I always ask parents when I first start working, I say, "When did you start learning how to become a parent?" And they'll say, "Oh, well, I guess my kid's 12. So, maybe 12, maybe 13 years ago. I read some books and things like that."

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([02:28](#)):

And my answer is, "No. You started learning how to become a parent the day you were born. Some would say when you were still in the womb." So, all of the habits that you have around parenting, they were nestled and they started being ingrained in many cases decades and decades ago. So, to expect yourself to be able to just all of a sudden you follow all the information in the book on day one, basically what you're saying is, I should be able to override decades of ingrained wiring and training and a month.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([03:09](#)):

And that's not what it is. You're what's being called of you is to rewire neural pathways and things of that nature. So, it's hard because when we're stressed, when we're triggered, our prefrontal cortex, where we're all that great book knowledge and learning is, that shuts down. So, we don't have as much access to it anymore. And so, we rely on the stuff that we knew or that we learned growing up.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([03:33](#)):

We rely on the defensive patterns that have formed within us that were passed down to us, whether literally genetically, whatever, to help us get through the moment. And then, when the lights come back on, we look around the house and we're like, "Ah, shoot, what did I do?" So, it's hard because a lot of times we try to willpower ourselves into making the shifts and changes when it requires a little bit more than that. And we don't give ourselves credit for that.

Dr. Laura Markham ([04:07](#)):

That's pretty clear. So, our brain, the part of our brain that would think clearly shuts down and the emotional part takes over. But what's triggering us at this moment? It could be what's happening in this moment, but I know you talk a lot about how the past can trigger us.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([04:23](#)):

Oh, 100%. Our triggers are often defined in the past. They're created in the past. So, our triggers are those the things it's when our past is impacting our present. That's how I look at a trigger. And there could be, you could have "positive triggers" or negative triggers.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([04:42](#)):

So, '80s music, I have such positive associations with '80s music. So, if you start playing something from the '80s, it triggers me and I'm like, "Oh, such good memories, yay." But when my kids were younger, and even now when they start whining or something like that, "Ugh." And a lot of my reaction, it will come from how I was raised. So, when I was raised growing up, I was definitely raised in the stop crying before I give you something to cry about household.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([05:16](#)):

So, whining, crying, needing, those were not things that were often appreciated or led to good outcomes, let's say. So, for me and for many parents, it's that sense of, "Oh, well, how can you identify what's happening, how your past is impacting your parenting?" That's the first step. And it's interesting because a lot of people I work with, they're often very clear on what happened in their home. It's like, "Oh no, I get that how my father was or how my mother was that is impacting how I'm showing up with my kid.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([06:00](#)):

I just don't like it." But that is always the first step, figuring out how is what happened in the past impacting how I'm showing up in the present.

Dr. Laura Markham ([06:10](#)):

So, when we get triggered, our child is whining. We get triggered if we think that that's a normal reaction we're having. But really that reaction is based, as you say, on our own childhoods and how we were responded to if we were whining, and then... I don't know about you, but if you got slapped, which I might've been, then it might be an emergency if someone whines, things could get better.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([06:33](#)):

Absolutely.

Dr. Laura Markham ([06:33](#)):

So, when the kid whines, suddenly we get anxious and it becomes an emergency to us. But in the moment we think it's normal, but later we realize, "Oh, I overreacted." So, how can parents notice these things happening? And then, how can we get into the healing?

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([06:51](#)):

Yes, yes, absolutely. The first thing I always tell parents is do nothing. First, just notice. Start to notice what's going on around you. And I actually use a framework, it's called the PATHs framework. And I walk all my parents and I work with couples as well and couples through this framework.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([07:13](#)):

And I find that it really helps to shift and transform how you show up in a step-by-step way that it feels good, is not overwhelming, and ultimately allows you to shift habits. One thing I say that really resonates with a lot of parents is you nor your child are broken. You just have habits that need to be.

Dr. Laura Markham ([07:37](#)):

Beautiful. So, we're talking about changing our habits.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([07:40](#)):

Yes, changing our habits, really how we react and how we respond to food or our kid, they're very similar, right? It's like, "Oh, I see a chocolate chip cookie there, I really shouldn't eat it, but I'm going to." And so, if we think about it in terms of habits as

opposed to, "I'm being a horrible person, or I'm a horrible parent," that can often help us to shift how we're showing up in the moment or give ourselves at least more grace. And the PATHs process, I created it to really break it all down in bite-sized chunks.

Dr. Laura Markham ([08:14](#)):

Can you take us through the PATHs process?

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([08:16](#)):

Yes, yes, yes. So, PATHs is an acronym. It stands for... So, the P stands for perspective.

Dr. Laura Markham ([08:23](#)):

Perspective.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([08:24](#)):

Yes. I always say before you go on any journey... Yes. Before you go on any journey, you have to know two things. You have to know where you are and where you want to go. You have to know those two points. If you don't know those two things, you're just wandering aimlessly, which is fine.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([08:37](#)):

But in this case, we want to know where we're going to go. So, where we are is getting really clear on how are you showing up, what does it look like? What is it that you really want to change? And that's why I often tell people at first, "Do nothing. At first, you got to get clear on what the problem is that you want to change.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([08:54](#)):

So, figuring out is it that you're yelling? Is it that you're shutting down? Is it that you're giving in? What exactly is it about you that you want to shift? And when are these things happening? Is it when your child whines?

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([09:04](#)):

Is it when your child begs? Is it when your child yells? So, getting super clear on where you are and what is it that's throwing me off? And then, where you want to go. What do I want to do instead? Do I want to just sit and breathe?

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([09:20](#)):

Do I want to respond compassionately? Do I want to hold that boundary? Do I want to stay engaged? And what does that look like?" So, the perspective is really that first step of getting clear of where am I, where do I want to go, and how does that look for me when I show up?

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([09:42](#)):

And the last thing I'll say about perspective, why it's so important is we talked about the prefrontal cortex. When we start talking about where we want to go, our vision, and we start getting clear on where we are, that requires us to think that activates our prefrontal cortex, and we have a really solid vision. It allows us to really think about... We have to recall it like, "Oh, okay, I want to be calm. I want to sit." And I tell people, get as specific as you can.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([10:08](#)):

"Doc, I want to be a calm parent." What does that mean? That could mean 10 different things to 10 different people. And when you do that, when you start to visualize, and we actually see this when we put people in MRIs and we ask them to visualize thing, that prefrontal cortex lights up. So, being able to get a clear vision in the moment of, "Oh, it can be something very, very simple of, imagine yourself just sitting on the floor at crisscross applesauce in those moments, we're way more likely to do that if we can have that super crystal-clear vision already formed in our mind."

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([10:45](#)):

So, that's the first one perspective. I know I said the last thing, but this is also really important because perspective involves our mind. It also involves what are the stories in your head? Because those stories are going to have way more impact on how you react than you think. So, if I say, if the story in my head is, "Oh, my child is really struggling right now," I'm going to react one way.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([11:11](#)):

If I say, "My child is being a little monster, they're going to do this in school, they're going to make me look bad, they're going to get kicked out and they're going to be living in my basement at 40." That is a very different reaction I'm going to have because now I'm freaking out. So, getting clear on where you are, where you want to go, and the stories that you tell yourself in those moments.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([11:33](#)):

Now, perspective is often done outside of the moment so that you can use that information inside of the moment. So, that's the first step. You want me to keep going? All right. A stands for-

Dr. Laura Markham ([11:45](#)):

Yes, I definitely do.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([11:46](#)):

Okay. That stands for awareness. So, once you get clear on where you are and where you want to go, now you have to start thinking about, "Okay, how am I wired in these moments?" If you're like me or many of the people that I work with, like we said earlier in my household, emotions were a liability, especially the difficult ones. Sadness, anger, shame, regret, don't bring those, those are not allowed. Those were not allowed.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([12:13](#)):

Those were not allowed in the house. So, growing up, and even this sense of stop crying before I give you something to cry about, that statement or statements like it right there, they really lead us to and our children to not trust their bodies. Because you say, "Stop crying before I give you something to cry about." And it's like, "But I'm crying, so I assume I have something to cry about and I feel bad, but you're telling me I don't have anything to cry about. So, I guess my body's lying to me.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([12:45](#)):

I guess my feelings are lying to me." So, a lot of times we learn to distrust our body and our emotions. And what ends up happening is when we are in those moments as adults with our kids, when our amygdala is hyper activated and we're in that fight, flight, freeze mode, we don't even notice it. We don't even recognize that we are living in that fight, flight, freeze mode. There is a chart that I have, and if listeners download what I'm going to talk about in the end, you'll get this.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([13:13](#)):

And the way it's a very simple chart. It's like red at the top, blue at the bottom, and purple in the middle because red and blue makes purple and it happens to be my favorite color. And red is that fight, flight, freeze mode and blue... Or fight, flight mode. And blue is the freeze mode. And purple is that in-between, where ultimately we would love to live or at least come back to much quicker than we do.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis (13:40):

And when I ask my clients to track where they live, where they tend to live, what they tend to call home, it gets me every time how they're like, "I spend 90% of my day in red. I did not know this. What?" And so, not even with their kids all the time in red. So, your amygdala is constantly over functioning regardless. So, when you are dealing, whether you're dealing with traumas, dramas, as I like to call them, or chronic stress, your amygdala is overactivated.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis (14:16):

When that happens, our prefrontal cortex is shut down. So, what awareness does awareness helps us to notice that, to notice when we're in that red space. And get in different strategies and tools that we can use to be able to, "Whoo, calm down," and bring us towards purple. I don't even say, "You don't have to... The idea should not necessarily be, let's be in purple all day all the time. That sounds fantastic."

Dr. Lynyetta Willis (14:41):

But I personally don't know how to do that without drugs or alcohol. And I'm not saying we should use that to calm ourselves down. There are other ways to do that. But what we can do is we can get purple-ish, as I like to call it, right? And the idea is like, in our day-to-day life, we're going to pop up into red. It's necessary.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis (15:04):

If you're driving and somebody cuts you off, you want to bump up in there. But if you get to work and then at lunchtime you're still thinking about that person that cut you off or you're still... That's an issue. So, awareness helps us to befriend our emotions and our body sensations in a way that we may never have done before to notice when we're stuck in red, to notice when we're stuck in blue, to notice when we're in purple, because then we can use that insight to help us see when we're getting to that point with our kids.

Dr. Laura Markham (15:41):

Yeah. And recover.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis (15:44):

And recover. Exactly. Exactly. Be able to say like, "Oh, I can feel it. I know. I know when I'm getting into red because the back of my neck starts to get really tight and tense, my breathing gets shallow. So then, I can take responsibility and proactive as opposed to reactive steps to handle myself."

Dr. Laura Markham ([16:03](#)):

Yes, yes. And you're shifting your nervous system. So, tell us about... Well, I want to hear the T and the H. But like the proactive steps might be in there, but if not, we'll get to them.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([16:12](#)):

Yes, yes. So, the T stands for tools. So, once you are aware of where you are and where you want to go, you got your emotions and your body sensations on board, you're starting to listen to them, you're starting to respond in relation to where you are. The next step is, "Okay, now how do I shift these habits that I've fallen into?" I always say, "You're always using a tool in any relationship."

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([16:37](#)):

The question is never, "Am I using a tool? Is the tool I'm using helpful or unhelpful?" Yelling is a tool. Five deep breaths is a tool. They're both tools. It's just which do you choose to use in any given moment?

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([16:52](#)):

And so, when we start to engage on that tool level, we're doing a couple of things. The one thing is from a neurological perspective, we are engaging our HPA, which is our hypothalamic pituitary adrenal axis. Just call it HPA. I was at a Medical College of Georgia when I was studying neuroanatomy, and I remember that was on the test. It was like, "What is HPA?"

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([17:18](#)):

Points deducted, spelled incorrectly." I'm like, "Are you serious right now?" So, we just call it HPA, but that's the part that controls our cortisol levels, our stress levels. So, when we are engaging new tools with our kids, whether it'd be deep breaths, whether it'd be calm voice, whether it'd be exercise, whatever tools we choose to engage, I know you have tons of fantastic tools on your website and in your books, so that's where those books come in. A lot of times what we tend to do is when we want to become different parents, we rush for the books or we rush for the courses, and then we end up feeling bad.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([18:03](#)):

Because we're like, "But I just read it. I just read it two seconds, and then my kid did the thing and I went back." Well, did you do the P and the A? Right? That's why tools,

which can include the books, comes later on in the process. So, once you start to say, "Okay, what are the new habits that I want to form?"

Dr. Lynyetta Willis (18:21):

And what are the tools that I need?" I want to yell less. Okay, "What do you want to do more?" "I want to breathe more." "Now we got a ball game. What's an experiment?"

Dr. Lynyetta Willis (18:32):

Which is my favorite word in the English language. "What is an experiment that you can create to play with that tool? Two days a week, whatever, an hour. What is one experiment, short experiment that you can use to play with that tool?" "The next time my kid yells, I'm going to do this thing. And I'm only going to hold myself for that one time and just see what happens."

Dr. Laura Markham (18:55):

Beautiful.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis (18:55):

And it doesn't have to be big. So, tools are where you can get playful and you can bring in things. And then, the H stands for healing and its way down in this process. One, because if it was first, it wouldn't spell PATHs, but two, because you really do need to do all the other work first. If we start with healing, there are going to be parts of us that are going to resist.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis (19:22):

Because they're going to say, "Our system is not safe. We're not safe. No." But once you have your perspective, you got your nervous system starting to regulate that, starting to tell those parts of you, "We're safe, we're okay, we can do this."

Dr. Lynyetta Willis (19:37):

You get some tools on board and some wins in relation to those tools. Now we can start healing some of the stuff that may be leading us to consistently show up the way that we are.

Dr. Laura Markham (19:51):

From what you've just said, describing the PATH, the perspective, awareness, tools, and healing. It seems to me that the awareness is what the mindfulness folks talk

about all the time. I just notice. But then, you get into the tools. You have a couple of different kinds of tools to choose from.

Dr. Laura Markham ([20:08](#)):

I mean, many tools to choose from, but different kinds of objectives here. One objective is to calm my nervous system. Another is to change what I'm saying or how I'm relating to my kid at that moment. But I know you're a brain person, so some of those tools are changing the nervous system. So, do you have any particular go-to tools that you find work for pretty much everybody?

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([20:33](#)):

Oh, no.

Dr. Laura Markham ([20:34](#)):

Okay. Everybody's different. Everybody's different.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([20:37](#)):

Yes. Yes. I do say though, what I often encourage people to do is to go with their impulse. I'm really big on intuition, and I know you and I have talked about having being spiritual geeks a little bit and that sort of thing. I am so big on, because many of us have been raised to not trust our intuition, to not trust where we are and how we are. Once we get to this point, I always say, "What feels like a good next best step for you?"

Dr. Laura Markham ([21:08](#)):

Beautiful.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([21:09](#)):

For these moments, what feels like... And I will tell you, Laura, I have yet to have someone say, "I got nothing." Right? When we get to that part, because often there's other stuff that's going on in that moment, a lot of times we're looking at the parts of us that are resistant, and you usually have to do this when you're in a calmer state. But if I sit you down and I say, "Okay, you say that you want to stop yelling, you have your vision. You know what you want to stop doing.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([21:36](#)):

You know what you want to start doing. You have some insight into maybe what brings you towards purple when your child is yelling next time, what is one good next

best step?" And when I say next best step, I don't mean some big grand plan. I mean, literally your child is yelling, "You're standing there, what's the next best step?" "Deep breath."

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([21:59](#)):

"There you go. Experiment with that for a week, and then let me know how that goes for you."

Dr. Laura Markham ([22:07](#)):

It could be so many different things to different people. I remember one mom, she would hurt her child when he was yelling if she didn't get sit down on the floor and sit on her hands. But that worked for her. And after that... And while she sat there, she started taking deep breaths. Everybody has different things that they need at that moment, but once they have, as you say, the perspective and the awareness, then they have that channel into their deeper wisdom that they can.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([22:35](#)):

Exactly, yes. Once you have that access to the emotions and those body sensations, that's when your... Those are your inner allies. Once an enemy is now an ally, and now you can tap into that and sit with that and come to that next best step. I think we work too much on outsourcing our inner wisdom. And when in reality, it's like we all have what I like to call the empowered guide.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([23:01](#)):

We all have that within us to being able to sit and be like, "Okay, what do I need right now? What's good for me? Following your impulse?" This is one thing I will say I encourage everybody to do. Back up on my last comment.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([23:13](#)):

And it has nothing to do with your kid really. Spend a week just following your impulses. That's it.

Dr. Laura Markham ([23:21](#)):

Following or acting on.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([23:23](#)):

Huh?

Dr. Laura Markham ([23:24](#)):

Following your impulses. Acting on your impulses. Tell us.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([23:26](#)):

Yeah. And when I say that, I mean, "I need to pee. I want water. I think I want to stand up and go for a walk." So, when you feel like an impulse to... We're so good at pushing those down, this is how we start to tap into our intuition. It's always, it's to carry people who are like, "Oh, how do I hit enlightenment?"

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([23:46](#)):

It goes back to chop wood, carry water?" It starts with super simple things. Just go to the bathroom when you have to, don't overwork. Don't rock in your seat. Get up and go. And that's how you learn.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([24:01](#)):

That's something you can integrate in your basic day to day to start really befriending those emotions and body sensations, which are really going to then help you to access the tools that you need. And when you get to that healing phase, which the healing phase, that really works well, especially with the hippocampus and our habits. Because the hippocampus is that part of our brain that's set to learn new behaviors, break old patterns. And when we are in chronic stress and we are overwhelmed, research shows that that part of our brain, it shrinks, can literally shrink. And so, it's harder for us to learn new behaviors.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([24:39](#)):

So, if you're chronically stressed trying to read Laura's book, it's not going to be as helpful. So, refer back to step one and two, right? Decrease that stress, decrease those cortisol levels. And then, when you try to do the healing and the neurogenesis occurs in which is new neurons and neural pathways are formed in the hippocampus, then you'll start to see how those different habits that you're trying to form, they stick a little bit better. The healing that you invest in from healing that past stuff, that starts to... You start to notice, "Wow, it's sticking."

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([25:17](#)):

I'm deepening. I'm expanding a little bit more." And you can sit in that space and that's where, you're not broken. You just have habits that need to be, that's where the rubber really hits the road because all the other work that you've done really can start to sink in and marinate.

Dr. Laura Markham ([25:37](#)):

I love your idea that the healing is a radical act, especially because humanity is evolving. Let's hope. And it's not a straight line. It's a two steps forward, one step back thing. But there is certainly trauma in most of our backgrounds and some more than others, but most of our backgrounds, this is the way that humans have existed.

Dr. Laura Markham ([26:12](#)):

You talk a lot about healing intergenerational trauma. So, how can parents recognize patterns of trauma and the effect today and try to break those cycles in their families?

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([26:26](#)):

So, good. So, the first thing that I say on something you could do very practically, the ACEs, it's the adverse childhood experiences test. So, that's something that you can take. You can Google it. It's free. And what I often encourage people to do is take it for yourself and then take it for your parents and your grandparents.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([26:43](#)):

And that can give you... And if you don't know, if you still have access to them, ask them to take it. Be like, "Would you take this test?" I'd be like, "Wait, what? What's happening here?" It's a very short test. It's like, I don't know, 15 questions or something, 12.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([27:00](#)):

It's very, very short. And that can give you some really concrete ideas around what are some things that have been passed down from generation to generation. The other thing is sometimes you may not know, you may not know, or you may not necessarily feel it. So, I talk about intergenerational trauma, but I also talk about intergenerational dramas. Because sometimes some people don't always resonate with the word trauma.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([27:28](#)):

They're like, "Well, it wasn't from a psychological DSM four diagnosis standpoint. It really wasn't traumatic in that sense." So, they'll think like, "Well, I don't know what I need to heal. I mean, yeah, there were some problems but I don't know." And so, what I tell people is, "Okay, you don't have to necessarily think of it as a trauma.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([27:47](#)):

Think of it from a drama perspective. And I literally mean a play on a stage." So, when we come into the world, it's like we're handed a script and we all act out these scripts on stage from generation to generation. And so, looking at what are some of the dramas like, "Oh, when she says this, he does that. And when she moves there, he moves there," type of thing.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([28:17](#)):

An example that I often give is, so I am African-American and Guyanese. My father's side of the family is from Guyana, but my mother's side of the family is African-American. And growing up, what would be talked about in my house were whoopings and beatings, that's what we would call it. If you go back long, long ago in my African-American lineage, you will find slaves that I would say was an immense trauma. Immense trauma, but one that I do not have a direct memory of.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([28:55](#)):

I don't have a direct knowing of that. But does that mean it doesn't still impact my family? No, it absolutely does. Because growing up, we talked about whoopings and beatings. Now, where did we talk about whoopings and beatings? That was slavery talk.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([29:10](#)):

That's what would often happen when slaves would get out of line. They would get whipped. They would get beat. And to think about it, like talking about that for your children, when you think about it's like, "That doesn't make a whole lot of sense. Why would you?"

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([29:25](#)):

That's intergenerational trauma passing down. And that's why I say it's a revolutionary act. I've gone to family reunions and my kids were like, "Whoop." And I've had the whoopings and beatings side of family look like... You know what? They'll say, "Oh Lord, she's doing that White people parenting."

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([29:45](#)):

That's what I'll hear. And I'm like... And it is in those moments, it can feel hard when you have family looking at you, family that raised you, those elders who you respect and you see the judgments and you're like, "I'm doing this differently. I'm doing this differently." That's why it's revolutionary. That's why it's hard.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis (30:10):

But being able to say, "And we don't do that." And I'm going to hold this line because it's important, because what's most important is my connection with my child right now. And I have said that I'm going to do this differently. And that includes getting rid of the whips and the sticks and the belts and all that kind of other stuff. We don't do that here.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis (30:35):

And being able to stand in that truth with firmness and confidence, that can feel hard. But when you get to start noticing, what are those dramas for your family line? What are the things? Where do you see things not quite going right? But the other piece that I think is important too, we talk about the burdens, the legacy burdens.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis (30:57):

And those could be things like, in my family line, there's a lot of addiction, but there's also, I like to call them legacy blessings. And I think it's important that we look at those as well, because there are strengths that we gained from our ancestors and our history. So, being able to say, "What were the good things too? And what were the things that I want to pass down because they were blessings and they were good." And for us, the importance of family and getting together and communing, those are really important.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis (31:40):

I have years and years of memories, decades of memories of us getting together for family reunions and running around in the country and feeding the chickens and running through the cornfields and all that. I don't have chickens and cornfields, but the importance of family is something that I really, really, whether it's created or biological, that is important to me. So, being able to focus on those. And then, what, if you think about it like a tree, the blessings, that's what you want to nurture. And the burdens, that's what you want to prune.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis (32:11):

That's what you want to clip off, bring down, make something new. And in many ways, I'm grateful for both because they made me who I am. They made me who I am. And being able to, I can talk to my kids about the burdens. They are blown away when I talk about... They will literally, my kids are 12 and 15 now.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis (32:34):

They still will come to me randomly and be like, "So they would get a branch off a tree and hit you with it?" They literally cannot wrap their mind. I'm like, "Where did that come from? It's so random." But they can't wrap their minds around, "Why would you do that?"

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([32:53](#)):

I don't understand." And that makes me so happy.

Dr. Laura Markham ([32:57](#)):

Yes, yes.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([32:58](#)):

And that's the last thing I'll say. Giving yourself, celebrating yourselves when you do well, because it's so easy to point out the things you do wrong. It's so easy to look at that, but also saying, "You know what? I did this, this, this, and this.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([33:17](#)):

Well, these were the wins. These were the gains. These are the things I'm doing well. I might not have done it today, but I'm doing it. And this is a revolutionary act. It's not easy, but I'm doing it and I'm committed to continue doing it."

Dr. Laura Markham ([33:30](#)):

It's heroic. It's revolutionary act of saying, "We're not doing it that way anymore." It's heroic. I wonder about self-compassion in these moments, because every parent is going to have times when they don't live up to their values of who they want to be as a parent. But they can turn those things around next time if they bring the PATH, the perspective, the awareness, the tools, the healing that you're describing.

Dr. Laura Markham ([34:00](#)):

So, what advice do you have for parents who are hard on themselves or feel guilt when they make mistakes in their parenting?

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([34:12](#)):

I do think self-compassion is huge and I think it's hard. I struggle with it. And remembering, number one, that is just a part of you. It's just a part of you that yelled, it's not all of you. Our kids are very resilient.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([34:31](#)):

There's always the opportunity to repair and celebrate the tiny wins. If you had to repair three times yesterday and two times today, that's a win.

Dr. Laura Markham ([34:46](#)):

It's a win that you did the repair.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([34:48](#)):

Yes, it's a win that you did the repair. And it's a win that, "Wow, I had to do one less repair today." It's a win that you got up when you noticed, "I got to pee." You got up and you peed. That's a win.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([35:03](#)):

I mean, a lot of people I work with were overachievers, and we got to get the A. And I was having conversation with my daughter the other day. She's in middle school, and she has a bit of a perfectionistic streak. And I said, "What if we say we celebrate C's?"

Dr. Laura Markham ([35:20](#)):

Ooh, that's a radical thing to say.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([35:23](#)):

It's a very radical thing to say, what if we celebrate Cs? And then, the other thing, I actually wrote a poem. It's so funny. I love creating things, but I was like, "We're going to celebrate Cs. And then we're going to ask, what did I learn?"

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([35:39](#)):

If you're not happy with the C, what did you learn from the C? What did the C teach you? And how can you use that to do different next time?" And I say that same thing to parents. If you yelled, repair, and then ask, what did I learn?"

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([35:57](#)):

What did I learn? And what can I do different next time? Can you make an experiment out of that? One thing I heard a long time ago, it's not mine, I didn't make it up, was instead of practicing hindsight, hindsight is, what was I thinking? Practice kind sight, which is, what was I learning?

Dr. Laura Markham ([36:16](#)):

Beautiful.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([36:18](#)):

What were you Learning?

Dr. Laura Markham ([36:19](#)):

It's not a mistake, if we learn from it.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([36:20](#)):

Exactly. It is not a mistake. If you learn from it, paint it plain and simple. So, ask, "What did you learn?" And then, create an experiment and do it differently next time.

Dr. Laura Markham ([36:32](#)):

Because that takes away any blame, shame. It's okay to have the sadness of, "Oh, I can't believe I did that again," but then to say, "And I can learn from this." So, it's not-

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([36:44](#)):

Yes. Yes. That's the thing. I always say, "By definition, you can't fail an experiment. That's not how experiments work."

Dr. Laura Markham ([36:54](#)):

That's right. Yeah. Beautiful.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([36:57](#)):

Right? You don't fail it. It's you either you support the hypothesis or you don't. You don't fail an experiment. It's not possible. It's impossible.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([37:05](#)):

So, once you set an experiment, you can only learn from it. That's it. By definition, that's why I love it. It's my favorite word.

Dr. Laura Markham ([37:14](#)):

It has been such a pleasure to speak with you today. I know you made reference earlier to something that you have for people listening.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([37:23](#)):

Yes, yes. So, I created a quiz. It's called the, it's a Parent Trigger Score Quiz. And you can go to mytriggerscore.com to access it. And this quiz is so good because what it

does is it tells you your trigger type, who you tend to become when you are triggered, which falls into that first step of perspective.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([37:47](#)):

It basically gives you your first step. And from that, after you do that for every day, for I think five days, you're going to get personalized messages from me that based on your score, it's going to tell you which aspect of the PATHs you need to focus on to take you to your next best step. So, it's really like a mini quiz and a mini course. So, please go and download that.

Dr. Laura Markham ([38:12](#)):

That's wonderful. Thank you so much.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([38:14](#)):

Yes, of course. Thank you.

Dr. Laura Markham ([38:15](#)):

Thank you for joining us today and for the important work you're doing.

Dr. Lynyetta Willis ([38:18](#)):

Oh, ditto. Likewise. Thank you so much for having me, Laura.