

Coparenting Q and A with Dr. Laura Markham

Laura Markham: 00:00:00 Hello, this is Dr. Laura Markham. In this audio, I'll be answering some of the most common questions that parents ask about parenting with a partner, co-parenting, including after divorce. Remember, we're always applying our three big ideas. We start by regulating our own emotions and behavior. Then we connect with our child. Finally, instead of trying to control our child, we coach them to be their best self, both by helping them with their emotions and by creating an environment where the child can thrive. So these three big ideas not only apply to children -- they apply to all human relationships, including your relationship with your partner.

General Thoughts on Co-Parenting

Laura Markham: 00:00:48.5 The first thing to think about with partners is, instead of seeing your partner as wrong and needing to convince them of your position, see this as an opportunity to grow. You're each going to have to grow individually and you can grow together. Just keep reminding yourself, "We're on the same side. We just have a different idea of how to get to our goal, but we actually have the same goal." Like mom wants the baby to sleep in the bed because she gets more sleep and dad doesn't want the baby in the bed because he feels like he gets less snuggling with his wife. You both want a good relationship with each other, and you both want a healthy baby and you both want mom to be rested. You just had a different idea of how to get there.

Laura Markham: Or maybe mom thinks the kids should be held accountable when they do something or should learn to clean up their rooms or whatever, and dad thinks, "Well, you're only kids once or they should have a little bit of a break."

They both want a healthy, happy child who is responsible and they have a different idea of how the child is going to get to that. So how do you get to that shared view of how

we reach our goal? I think the answer is you have to research and discuss to create a shared philosophy of child raising. Where you start is really with your core values. What are your core values? Well, maybe your core value in your house is about kindness and respect, and so you would want to get clear on your parenting principles, like why do you do each thing you do?

Laura Markham:

You want these to be things in keeping with your ideal, not just the easiest thing to do. So maybe nonviolence, no hitting, respect and kindness, no name calling, no emotional violence, no yelling, no disrespect, no rudeness. Those could all be things that would come under that core value.

Now, most parents when they hear me say this, then say immediately, "Well, how do I enforce those rules with my kids? They're rude, especially when they're having a meltdown. They just yell nasty things at us or at each other." Well, yes, we're not talking about the children. Of course you're going to have that expectation for your kids and they will eventually learn it, but you always start by modeling it yourself. You have to start with no violence. I would ask your partner if he or she wants your children to hit and to yell. If you don't want your children to yell and hit, ask your partner, "Well, then how do we expect our kids not to yell and hit if we're yelling and hitting? We're modeling that."

Laura Markham:

Anything you model, spanking and yelling among those things, your children will eventually do.

I will say also that what worked in the old days no longer works for parenting. There was a time we lived in a more authoritarian society, where very strong word, children still did rebel, but more likely children were more compliant and they did go along with what their parents said. That day is long past.

Now that we have the influence of media and we see how other families do things, children do not buy authoritarianism. They only have respect when we earn it. You may think it should be different, that children should

respect you just for being their parents. Well, they will love you just for being their parents. I mean, for better or worse, children love their parents. Children even love parents who abuse them, unfortunately, and protect those parents.

Laura Markham:

But if you want children to respect you, then don't lose your temper at them because children lose respect for parents who lose their temper. They do. We do get respect from our children when we act in ways that garner that respect and that includes acting like the grownup and it also includes looking for solutions instead of blame and punishment.

I want to also offer one more useful perspective for couples. If you're in a heterosexual couple, you may find that you're in a traditional male female partnership where you get stuck in roles. And where mom is the one who's on the front lines with the kids more often and dad is not as involved as often and tends to be more uncompromising about the kids, more strict, wanting to teach them lessons. That's very common in our modern culture. Ron Taffel has a whole book about this called **When Parents Disagree and What To Do About It**.

Laura Markham:

What he says, which I think is fascinating, is that because dad isn't on the front lines in this kind of a traditional setup, he's more idealistic about what he thinks can happen. Whereas mom, who's on the front lines, is willing to do whatever it takes to get through the day and basically do whatever works. She's often closer to the children, more connected. So if you have this kind of a setup, (remember that) equitable involvement with your children creates a more shared perspective where you're less likely to disagree about what the kids need. That's important to remember. Also, equitable involvement, meaning both parents equally involved with the children really, really helps the child to develop well and to cooperate more.

Laura Markham:

So one thing you can do if you have a disagreement about your kids is to set up more positive interactions and more

one on one time with the parent who's less close to the child. Because usually that not only helps that parent to see things from the child's point of view, so they're more nurturing to the child, but it also helps the child to cooperate better with that parent. That warm interaction between each parent and the child really matters. So special time you can't always do with each parent every day. Often you can't do it that way. But at least to have one on one time on weekends and to really nurture each relationship in the family.

Question 1:

Laura Markham: 00:07:04 So our first question gets right to the point. "What if I want to do peaceful parenting, but my partner doesn't? How do we handle that disagreement?"

I understand that this is just really tough, because we all wish our partners would be able to just agree with us. But when you're in a human relationship, there will be conflict, because there are two different people with two different sets of needs and desires and beliefs, and that's the way it goes.

Laura Markham: So I think the rule of thumb with all disagreements with your partner is, "We're trying to understand each other. We're trying not to make each other wrong, and we're

trying to come to a place where we can help each other to understand our own needs." So how that might play out, there's often the difference of opinion, where one partner wants to try these peaceful parenting methods and the other one doesn't, and that was a question that got a lot of likes.

So one answer I've heard over and over again from parents is that, partners watch what we do, and they watch the results we get, and they want those results. So I'm thinking of one mom who, her children were fighting with each other. And her partner went into the room and started yelling at the kids. She went in, and she had previously said to her partner, "Honey, when one of us gets upset, what should we do as a signal?" And they had come up with a signal that was, "I've got this. Thank you, honey. You know what? You take a break. I've got it. I'll step in."

Laura Markham:

And they had come up with that, and I don't remember their exact wording, but they had agreed on this. When she went into this situation with her partner, his hackles were up. He wasn't enjoying the fact that he was being essentially told that he could hand it off to her. So he was angry. And so, of course, he didn't really want to hand it off, but he sort of stormed out of the room because they did have this agreement.

And she was respectful about it. I mean, she used the language they'd agreed upon. And she was able to use her peaceful parenting skills to listen to both kids and to get them to come up with a win/win solution, and everything was fine. And when she walked out of the room, he was in the next room, and he clearly had overheard the whole thing, and he sort of glared at her.

But a little bit later, after the kids were in bed, he came in to her and he said, "I heard that. I couldn't believe how you were able to settle that down. I want to learn how to do that. I know I was mad. I just was having a hard time calming down, but I want to learn how to do that. Will you teach me?" And I thought, what an amazing man that he was able to say, "Please teach me this."

But it's not the first time I've heard that story. Over and over again, I hear stories like this, where one partner demonstrates this, and the other partner, as long as you don't make them long, the other partner says, "I want to learn that." So I do believe that happens.

I also believe you have to have the conversation, which is, "What is it that's scaring you about this kind of parenting?" And the partner says something like, "Well, I don't want my kid to grow up to be immoral. I don't want my kid to be a bad person. I want my kid to be considerate, responsible." Of course.

And so, the other partner says, "Of course. We want the same thing here. And so the question is, how do we get our child to that point? And you think punishment is going to do it, but here's what I've observed. When we punish our child, it doesn't make our child better behaved. It doesn't make our child more considerate or more responsible. In fact, it ends up making things worse. So I want to try this other way. I want to do an experiment. Let's wholeheartedly give this a chance for three months and see what happens."

And I'm not saying that every partner would agree, but I think, once you acknowledge that you want the same thing and you just have a different means of getting there -- if you can avoid making the other person wrong and you can find the points of agreement -- you can often negotiate a temporary shift and reevaluation. And these practices, when you really put them into effect, do begin to work and your partner will see the difference.

And it doesn't mean things will be perfect, because you'll still be human and your kids will still be human, but you will see more calm, less drama in your house, and more responsibility, consideration, respect from your child over time, and your partner will see that. So I think, what we're really doing is, we're trying to help our partner set aside the fear that so often grips us about our child, because our partner thinks there's only one way to do it. Of course, it's punishment, because that's what we grew up with ourselves, and it's what we automatically do, and we just think you have to keep escalating the punishment if it's not working.

But once we respond to that fear that our partner has, and we help them to see that there might be other options, they can start to see that there are shifts, that there are changes, and each step in the right direction takes us closer to a life of less drama and more love, and our partners do feel it.

So I guess I would say, the bottom line is, don't make your partner wrong.

Question 2:

Laura Markham: 00:13:12 This parent asks what do you do to help a partner who's struggling to find the right tone, if they maybe didn't grow up with as much empathy. I would say you role model.

First of all, you have to empathize with them because that's how each of us learns empathy. If we don't experience it from someone else, we don't learn it. So you need to empathize with your partner and again, empathy is not necessarily labeling it. Your partner comes home from a meeting and they're upset. You don't say, "You are so sad and mad." You say, "Oh my goodness, I'm so sorry. Oh I can't believe it. Oh no wonder you're upset. Oh no. Really?" So empathizing with your partner and then role modeling for them. As you're interacting with your children, they're going to pick it up, they're going to see what works and they're going to pay attention and pick it up.

Question 3:

Laura Markham: 00:14:03 This question is about when your partner thinks you're undermining them if you're trying to stick up for the children. So I would say, have a conversation when you're not upset at each other about what your agreement is, what you can do in the moment to support each other. But also to protect your children when one of you disagrees with the other one in parenting.

So in our house, what my husband always did, was as soon as anyone seemed to be getting upset, he would say, "Let's everyone all calm down now", which was great because I didn't feel attacked, like I was doing something wrong. I was like, "Oh everyone's going to calm down. I can calm down too." Right?

Laura Markham:

So something like that is always a great way to step in. In general, the parent who's not frazzled, the parent who has the most inner resources, is the one who should be stepping in to deal with the upset child.

Maybe you agree that you're allowed to step in and acknowledge everyone's position. So if you have that agreement with your partner, or even if you don't, you might say something like, "Wow, you two are really upsetting each other. Can I understand what's happening here? It sounds like you really want to keep playing right now and get dressed later, but Daddy is saying he wants you to get dressed now. Sounds like Daddy's pretty worried about us being late. He's worried if we don't get dressed now we're going to be late. Yeah. You know I've got to agree with Dad on this one."

Laura Markham:

Or, if you don't agree with Dad on this one, you can say, "Hmm, wonder how we could all get what we need here. Honey, how about this? I'm going to set the timer for 15 minutes and in 15 minutes he's got to stop playing and get dressed, and I'll be the one to make sure that happens. Is that a deal? You can go ahead and do whatever you need to get ready. Okay, Hon? Thank you." Give your partner a hug. And you turn to your kid and you say, "Okay, we got a deal. 15 more minutes of play and then you get dressed, lickety split. Is that our deal? Shake on it. All right. We always keep our promises. Give me five. 15 minutes, right? That goes off, that buzzer, you're on it? All right."

So you stepped in and took over when there were voices raised. In this case, your partner let you do that. Sometimes your partner won't let you do that and you can tell, because you know your partner, how angry they are at that moment. Maybe at that moment you say, "Let's all

take a breath. Let's everybody calm down now", and your partner's like, "I'm not going to calm down. I've asked him three times to get dressed and he's ...", blah, blah, blah. And you can say, "I think your dad's pretty mad here. Don't you think you need to go get dressed? Out of here!" At this point hopefully the kid's going to go, and you turn to your partner and say, "Well, that was frustrating." I mean, you're acknowledging how they're feeling. So again, they don't feel undermined.

Laura Markham:

But again, you've had this discussion in advance so there's an agreement that the less frazzled partner can step in and deal with the child at those moments.

If what your partner is doing is an opposition to one of your core values of parenting, like hitting for instance, you have to intervene. Name calling, I think you have to intervene.

But a respectful intervention does not mean criticizing, saying, "What are you doing? Stop that right now!", to your husband or wife. I think what you do is you say ... You do need a signal. You've agreed on the take five signal. I've shared what mine was. And you can say it to your child the way you would like your partner to say it. You can get the kids out of the room and away from it. If your partner says, "No, I don't appreciate that. I could not believe he was being disrespectful." You can say, "Sweetheart, we can work on him being disrespectful, but if you're calling him names, that's disrespectful. We can't expect him to be disrespectful if we don't model it."

Laura Markham:

So you have to start from your core values and an agreement about your core values. When one partner is out of alignment with those core values, you're not treating them like a bad person, but there's no reason you can't intervene and remind them in a kind way and say, "I know that was really upsetting. Let's talk about it later, but now's not the time to work it out with him."

I want to say that in marriages that are healthy, the research shows they (the healthy couple) do not try to work things out while they're angry. There's this is whole

thing of never go to bed angry, work things out before you go to bed. I totally get that because you don't want a wall to build between you. But in fact while you're actually ramped up and angry is not ever the time to work things out. You're dysregulated. It's like trying to work things out with your child when they're dysregulated. People who are dysregulated cannot actually work things out. They're in fight, flight or freeze, and they're not in the thinking part of their brain.

Laura Markham:

So don't try to work things out with your partner when they're in that place or you're in that place. When they get to that place with the child, there has to be a prior agreement that you're not going to try to work things out at that moment and that the one of you who's not in fight, flight or freeze, will step in and take over at that moment.

Question 4:

Parent:

00:18:57.5

This course has been a huge life-changing experience for our family, so I can't thank you enough. I'll get to my question quickly. My partner and I are still trying to be more consistent between the two of us. I'm kind of, I think, a little bit more ... I'm finding that the peaceful parenting approach is kind of coming a little bit easier to me than to him. He still gets quite triggered. We have a very strong willed five-year-old and he's still learning how to express his needs, and often resorts to more aggressive behavior. So my husband's still trying to get his head around how if we were to, say, redirect or rechannel some aggressive behavior, when maybe the need behind that is he wants our attention or he wants to play. He feels like he's reinforcing this negative behavior by giving it positive attention.

Parent:

I've tried the metaphor like, "Well, if he was hungry, you would feed him, and if he's starving for attention, then you give him the attention and that's going to meet his need."

- Laura Markham: Let me ask you, has your husband taken the course with you?
- Parent: Yes. So he's slowly working his way through it. He's not at week 12 yet. He's just slowly doing it and he's kind of approached it with, "I'm doing this for you." I keep saying, "Well, no, you're doing this for you and your relationship with our children", but that's his attitude towards it.
- I don't think he's fully bought into it. He was raised with more of an authoritarian approach to punishment. Even though I've given him tools, I've made him flowcharts, I've said, "Let's try this instead of timeout or instead of consequences", he's constantly saying, "He's not going to learn consequences if we reward the behavior." So yes, he has the tools, but in a moment where he's very triggered, can't seem to draw on those tools yet.
- Laura Markham: Yes, and you know what? That is so normal for all of us that when we grow up a certain way and we have a certain belief system, it can be very hard to change that. I would say if your five year old is perfectly behaved based on how you've been parenting and you're not beating him to get him to behave perfectly, then okay, go ahead and do it.
- Laura Markham: But if not, then maybe it's time to look at what you're doing and find something that works better. What the research shows is that children are not lab rats. This idea that you don't want to reward the behavior by giving him attention. Yeah, it's true. Children are like little Geiger counters for energy. They desperately want our energy because it's a signal to them that we'll keep them alive, right? If we were not invested in them, then we might wander off and not be there to save them when there's an emergency. But if we're getting a lot of juicy energy going with them, then they know we're invested and they're programmed by evolution to like that and to pull for that and to want that. So yes, children do notice our energy. That's why you give juicy energy to everything they do that's positive.
- Laura Markham: So please don't get me wrong and think that you're only giving them attention when they act out. No, you're giving

them attention all the time and you're noticing every positive thing they do. Not making them the center of your universe, but simply appreciating it. No matter how badly a kid behaves, there are some things they do in the course of that day that are positive. If you can find those positive things and give them positive energy, they will do more of those things. Right? So to that degree, I'm totally in agreement with your husband. So if he really believes what he's told you or what you've expressed that he's told you, then I hope that all day, every day he's finding positive things, at least three of them an hour, for each of your children, to comment on, "Oh, I love how you took your shoes off instead of coming in with your dirty boots."

"I love how you brushed your teeth with only two reminders." That's a positive thing. With only two reminders. Right? So if your husband is doing all that and he's really walking the talk that he's giving them, I find-

Parent:

No. The answer to that is no, he's not doing that. It is very hard for him to recognize the positive things that we take for granted. For sure.

Laura Markham:

So if someone uses the argument that children won't learn unless there's a result, that they get a positive or negative result to what they're doing, well the research shows that they learn a lot better when it's a positive result, that they're much more likely to alter their behavior. So if he's going to take that position, this would be a really important part of this idea to introduce to him.

The second thing is the reason they don't learn as well from the negative response is that it sends them into a place of fear. When we're in fight, flight or freeze, we have to survive.

Laura Markham:

So the immune system basically shuts down. The digestion basically shuts down and the learning center of the brain basically shuts down. So if a parent yells at a child, the child isn't learning, because they're in fight, flight, or freeze. Even if your five year old rolls his eyes. If he did, I'm betting that your partner would raise his voice more. So I'm betting that he doesn't roll his eyes, but even a kid

who rolls their eyes is scared by a parent's anger because the parent's a lot bigger. Children do not learn from the negative response.

So I guess I would just say it doesn't mean you don't set limits. I know that you're expressing that you and your partner have had some differences in your approach to parenting and your partner is worried that if the child acts out and you give them attention, you're reinforcing it.

Laura Markham:

Well, I don't know what an example of the acting out would be, but if they behave inappropriately and break a rule, you're not ignoring that they broke the rule. Depending on the seriousness of the infraction, you're saying, "Uh-huh. You can't do that." But you're also dealing with the reason they broke the rule because then you nip the behavior in the bud and you prevent it from happening again. So I don't know how to say it any more clearly to your partner. I think the research is pretty clear on this and the proof is in the pudding.

Parent:

Yeah, that's what he keeps saying. "Well, it's not working. It's not working", and I say, "Well, people have been doing this and they've said sometimes it can take up to a year to see changes. We have to be consistent so that we can see the changes. We've had five years of not being consistent."

Laura Markham:

Your child is only five. I mean, he's five and a half, but it shouldn't take a year. Once they're over the age of six, the brain has rewired and so it can take a year at that point when they're over six. But a kid who's five, usually that's not the case.

But what you do have to do, is they have to feel safe enough to cry and if they're still having a parent who's authoritarian or who's yelling at them and who's not being positive with them, that's what would delay it, because you're not actually using the tools and so ... or some of the tools, that you're not actually creating safety and so the child doesn't feel safe enough to cry. That's what makes it take longer.

Parent:

Great. Thank you.

Laura Markham:

Yeah, you're so welcome and good luck.

Question 5:

Laura Markham:

00:26:35

This question is about limit setting at bedtime. Five year old and a two year old share a room. They've always gone to bed easily, but in the last couple of weeks they don't, so one of the parents sits in the room until they calm down, but the minute they leave the room, the little one gets up and bothers her sister, climbs in bed with her. Her husband, who doesn't parent the way she does, gets really frustrated. He goes in there over and over again, he threatens to take their loviies away, they get upset, they cry.

So this sometimes happens when kids feel anxious. When you put them to bed, all the anxieties of the day will come up to the surface. So that's what happens when we don't have the ego in charge. You know, all of the things that have been bothering us, we haven't really dealt with, come up to the surface. Maybe your two year old starts to feel like a little girl in a big world and she wants to be in bed with her sister.

Laura Markham:

Or maybe she's jealous, like her big sister seems so capable and she wants to **be** her big sister. You mentioned that she climbs in the bed even at nap time when her big sister is not there. Might be she just doesn't want to be alone.

It might be unrelated to the course, but it might be related to the course. If it is, then it's anxiety and in that case you need to make sure she's getting lots of laughter during the day.

Then I would say stay in the room, not just until she calms down, but until she falls asleep at night. Because once she falls asleep, she won't do this.

You can just sit in the room and listen to an audio book on your phone and don't worry about it. It's your downtime.

Tell your husband you'll handle bedtime for now. Since you've made everything worse by taking this course and changing your parenting, which seems to be what he's telling you, then you'll handle bedtime and you'll deal with the repercussions and he can do the dishes.

How great. You can listen to a story on audio. But I do think that you can probably stop this from happening by doing more laughter with the two year old earlier in the day.

Question 6:

Laura Markham: 00:28:20

This parent is saying that her husband likes to avoid conflict, so how does she get help from him to change things in her home? She feels anxious and alone with parenting worries. Yeah, I get that. I totally get that. You want a parenting partner.

But it's the same as you would do with children. You get clarity about what you expect and you give the other person the support they need to meet those expectations. So your partner, in this case, your expectation is he would help you co-lead your family. What support does he need to do that? You can't use punishment and reward. What you might be able to do is help him with the feelings and needs, and find a win-win solution.

So his need is to avoid conflict. So you could help him get better at working out conflict with you, so he doesn't have to avoid it quite so much. He could watch you navigate conflict with your kids, so he could learn how to do it too.

You also could look for a way ... you could say to him, "I get you don't want to set limits because it's hard for you. I'll set the limits in the moment, but I need your help later to discuss these incidents to help me come up with the best decisions as a parent so we can decide together how we can make things better in our family and change things." So you at least get help from him later on.

Question 7:

Laura Markham: 00:29:41 This parent asks: "How do I get my husband on board? The course is super helpful to me. I do all these things to get him on board. I make him CDs from your audios. I share things I think are helpful. I forward the emails. But he hasn't really bought into it. On a daily basis he has problems with my five-year-olds."

So you're doing great, trying to get him involved. Those are great ideas. I would also ask him if he'll do a coffee date with you where you can actually listen to an audio. You could listen at a coffee shop and each of you take one side of the ear bud and listen, because it doesn't have to be in stereo, and listen to my audio and stop it frequently to discuss it.

Also start sharing your success stories with him about how you were able to calm down and connect, or how your son's behavior changed in some way. You can also share success stories from the group Facebook page. If you're not on that Facebook page, it can be overwhelming when people talk about their problems, but people do share success stories that worked for them. So you can go on and you can look for a success story, or even ask people to share them, and then share those with your partner.

Question 8:

Parent: 00:30:52 I'm an occupational therapist in pediatrics. I have had lots of daycare experiences that have sold me on everything you believe before even reading your books. So I'm reading it now, hearing it and loving it, but I'm all about self regulation. I'm not saying I'm perfect, but I'm all about that and I'm about treating kids with kindness and respect. My frustration is environments that I have no control over and it starts with the home. So basically my husband is a "should" parent. He's got a 15 year old stepson with ADHD, and my son is six and my husband is all about what

kids should do. So everything that our children do which is developmentally normal, or normal if you don't have self regulation skills, are things that he takes personally. It doesn't seem to matter what I say to him, he doesn't seem to get that he brings something to the pot and he brings a lot of escalation.

Parent:

So for example, we're trying to get out the door. My son's teeth need to be brushed. My son doesn't want to go to school, much less have his teeth brushed. So my son will not go and I've told him a thousand times, if he's not willingly going with you, don't touch him. He will try to pick up my son and that immediately leads to my son will kick him or punch him or something. Not usually punch, but I mean I said to him a million times, "He's not okay right now, so the second you try to force him, you're asking for it", and he just cannot understand that it shouldn't just be a given that a child should fall into line. So it's always the child's fault and it's never about anything he's doing.

Parent:

I'm wondering if you have suggestions on how I can sell things because being in this environment unfortunately has an impact on me too, which is to say that when I land in a daycare or a school that doesn't have exactly the same approach that you would have, my tolerance is low because I feel like I can't fix home, so I can't cope with kids being talked to disrespectfully, and not having their points of view accepted elsewhere. So I'm now at an alternative school with my son and he's finally thriving there, but it's making it a hard road. I could use some help for how I can continue to try and massage things and most powerful statements or things I can make, because honestly what I notice when I'm listening to your things now is that I'm mostly not even thinking about what I have to do with my son. I'm thinking I need to do those things with my husband.

Parent:

But since I expect him to be a grown up, I am getting mad at him sometimes with how he's treating the kids. It's very difficult in those moments to empathize with him. But I'm

sure a lot of it applies. I'm sure a lot of it applies with him too. So help.

Laura Markham: Yeah. Of course it does. Yeah. I'm afraid we could talk about it for hours.

Parent: Yes.

Laura Markham: You can't expect your husband to change very much unless you can really love him through his own healing in a sense. That he is a should kind of parent because he has a should kind of parent in his own head. We always take our own wounds and perpetrate them on our children and-

Parent: He has a lovely, really interesting mom, so yes, I hear you.

Laura Markham: Okay. Okay, good. So I would say to talk with him. I would say this is not one conversation. This is constant conversation. But of course you'll drive him crazy if you make it constant.

Parent: Been there, done that.

Laura Markham: Right, exactly. You have to start from a place of great love and affection for him and understanding of who he is and tolerance in a sense of like, "Of course this is who he is." So you're almost seeing him as you would see one of your children. So this is the behavior that you don't like that is in a way self-sabotaging that he does, because he's undermining his relationship with his own sons. But you see it with the same tolerance that you would see your own child's....

Parent: It's "see him beautiful" from Compassionate Communication. Yeah, I get it.

Laura Markham: Exactly.

Parent: Yeah, I get it.

Laura Markham: You have to be coming from that place and then you have to talk about the positives. "Wow. I loved it when you were talking to our six year old today and you said X , Y, Z.

That was so great. Did you see the look on his face? He was so inspired when you said that to him. He really loves it when you X, Y, Z".

Parent: I do do that, but what about in the moment, Laura? What about in the moment when he is doing stuff with my son that you know is going downhill fast, it's not going to get there. It's only going to make things worse and it's intolerable for me in that moment too.

Laura Markham: Yeah. Yeah. So, I would say first of all, have a conversation in advance and make an agreement about how you're going to handle things. That is all covered in the four hour audio set.

Laura Markham: But you can say to him, "Hon, you know our son is really reactive. He's not an easy kid. He's very challenging. Those moments when you're starting to get irritated at him, and I can see that it's going south, I would love to be able to step in"...

But before I can say that, I need to back up. In the same conversation with your husband, before you even get to that, I would start by saying, "You know, he's so difficult sometimes. In those moments where he's being really difficult and I'm starting to lose it, I would love to be able to give you a signal and have you step in calmly, Hon. What do you think? Could you do that?" And your husband will say, "Of course I can, darling", and you'll say, "Great, how about our signal will be X, Y, Z?"

And then you say, "How about, if I see it happening with you, that he's really getting on your under your skin and I can see it's going to start to go south, how about if we had a signal that says I got this, Sweetheart -- how about if I step in?" And he might be willing to go for that. He might not.

Parent: There will be a lot of resentment, because he's always thinking that I'm thinking I'm better.

Laura Markham: He thinks you're wrong.

Parent: Yep.

Laura Markham: But there's another thing you can do in the moment and it depends on how well you can do it. You're going to have to really work hard on calming yourself. I heard you just say, 'It's intolerable to me to see it when he is like that.'

Laura Markham: I hear you. When someone is mistreating your child, it feels intolerable. However, if you come from that place, you're charging into battle with your guns a blazing. And that's not going to work.

Parent: Yeah.

Laura Markham: If instead...

Parent: And usually, I'm sending him away, because he's not going to get up and get out of the door anyhow.

Laura Markham: So just try to-

Parent: So he believes it's just me, and it's not really working either. It's not really getting anywhere better.

Laura Markham: Yeah. Charging in with your guns blazing leaves a lot of casualties on the field and it's not necessary and it doesn't work actually.

Parent: Yeah.

Laura Markham: It creates more resentment on his part and makes him act worse. Right?

Parent: Yeah.

Laura Markham: To your kid. So forget that. So instead, try this. Stop, drop, and breathe as you see it mounting. Right? Try to calm yourself.

Laura Markham: And then, intervene by going in and saying, "Wow!, Lets everybody take a deep breath and calm down." But I think your husband will feel criticized. So I would just bypass him in that case, and I would just come in and go, "Wow,

Sweetheart, you don't want to put your shoes on, but it looks to me like your Dad feels really strongly about this." And then, you're sort of nodding in the direction of your husband behind you. "He's getting pretty mad this. We really do have to get ready to go."

Laura Markham:

Instead of escalating the drama, you're acting like you would act between two siblings in a sense. You're building a bridge between them, with a very reasonable attitude. Does that make sense?

Parent:

Yeah. Yes, that does. That sounds like probably my best place to be. Thank you so much.

Question 9:

Laura Markham:

00:38:43

This is a question about how do I deal with, "My co-parenter has a disproportionate amount of anger, from my perspective, and what do I do about that? How do I support my co-parent, not undermine their authority, and yet support my kids at the same time?"

Laura Markham:

A lot of people have this problem. You mentioned, in your submission, a united front. I don't believe in a united front. This is in the audios that I've gifted you. (Conscious Co-Parenting Series.) Please make sure, if you've got a couples issue, that you listen to these. I don't believe united fronts are necessary or desirable.

Laura Markham:

When your husband demonstrates anger, I would try to see it with the same compassion that you would with a child getting angry. You can say to your kid something like, "Your dad feels really strongly about this. You can see he's pretty upset. How can we help here to make things better?" Right? You can say it right in front of your partner. You're not patronizing him. You're helping the kids to see that it's a serious thing.

Laura Markham: If you're in private with the kids, you can say things like, "Your dad and I have different ideas about this. We love your dad. He's a wonderful person. I married him because I love him so much. He's a good guy. And your dad would do anything for you. But he gets really bothered and very frustrated about some things that don't bother me as much. People who love each other try to be aware of the things that set each off, because everybody has different triggers. So, for instance, your dad can't stand it when there are toys around and things are messy. I don't love it, but I don't get upset about it the way your dad does. So it's important that we clean up the toys if we can, because it really upsets him."

Laura Markham: So that kind of a discussion, you're not undermining your partner. Right? If your partner heard you having that discussion, that would be okay to do. But you also asked about your own emotional response when you get angry at him, because you're the one who ends up with all the fallout with the kids.

Laura Markham: Look, you're choosing to live with your husband instead of leaving him. I presume you have good reasons for that. I'm not suggesting that it would be a good idea to leave, by the way. I'm saying, acknowledge that you're actually consciously making a choice to be in that relationship, and so you're going to put up with the situation, and you're going to work on the relationship to make things better.

Laura Markham: And I would insist to him that you're going to go to couples counseling, and I would bring up, in couples counseling, that he's modeling tantrums to the kids. And when he does it at home, I would try to have a big enough heart to take care of the kids and prioritize them, but I would set aside time to actually work on it so that he's not doing that modeling.

Question 10:

Laura Markham: 00:41:11.5 Here's someone who's saying: " My husband didn't want to do the class with me, and I'm trying really hard, but the

kids, I'm not seeing a magical transformation, or at least my husband isn't, so he isn't convinced this is the right approach. And he's agreed to read your book with me, but he wants to read the book by Ted Tripp also with me, but it encourages spanking, that book."

Laura Markham:

So you are in a bind, you're feeling very alone. I hear that, and you said that you're upset about the strife between you. I hear you. And you know what? I'm sure your husband's a wonderful guy and he wants the best for his kids.

Laura Markham:

I want to be really clear here for the record, for you, for him, and for anyone listening, that there's 30 years of evidence that is clearly against spanking. No reputable pediatrician or psychologist would ever recommend spanking. Ted Tripp comes from faith, a faith based tradition. He is not a psychologist and he's not a pediatrician, so he doesn't actually know whether it's for a child's best wellbeing.

Laura Markham:

Now, if you're a Christian and you think, "This is a Christian perspective, I want to follow it." Okay, but I should then say, there are many Christians who advocate gentle parenting. My favorite is Linda Knost, K-N-O-S-T. She wrote a lot of great books, but one of them is Jesus, the Gentle Parent. She's really wonderful, Linda Knost. And I would advise you to give your husband Jesus, the Gentle Parent to read, and spend some time on her website. She has a wonderful website. And I would just say, parents who were not hit as children would not hit their child. It's learned behavior.

Laura Markham:

So I am sorry about the strife between you, but this is a real disagreement about something that really matters, about belief systems and values, and you can't just shove it under the carpet. So, again, I would urge you to go to counseling together and talk about how to work out this disagreement. You can find a faith based counselor. They probably won't agree with my approach, but no, no counselor, who is actually certified, will ever recommend that you hit your children. It's against the ethical code.

Laura Markham: So that person is going to talk to your husband about why he wants the kids to behave and have better ways to get them to behave. And if you have to compromise with your husband and give your kids time outs, it's a whole lot better than spanking them. You won't get the best behavior, but it's better than spanking. And it's my opinion that you have a responsibility to protect your kids from letting somebody hurt their bodies.

Laura Markham: I want to add, that if your children were being spanked before this course, you wouldn't expect a magical transformation. Spanking changes brain development, so it takes time for their brains to adjust to this new reality. There's a lot of healing to be done, emotionally and in the brain. So that healing takes a lot of work and it's all on you, and I'm sorry, and it's a hard thing. You're a brave woman, but you can do hard things and you can do this for your children.

Question 11:

Laura Markham: 00:44:01 This question asks: "My wife and I have had marital issues throughout our nine year marriage. We were not careful about fighting in front of the kids. We fought in front of the kids. They're now seven and four, and the stress has taken a toll on our oldest daughter who, starting about four, changed from being a bubbly, friendly, sweet child, and now she has a hard crust to her personality. We're starting to see the same change in our four year old, and we're worried about this. The seven year old has a lot of meltdowns in education. So we're working on our marriage, but things are slow going. What do we do?"

Well, I would say, I hope working on your marriage means you're going to counseling. I would get in touch with a therapist who is trained by the Gottman folks, John Gottman. Theirs is the most evidence-based approach, so you know that person is going to be good. They'll know how to be a good counselor for you.

Laura Markham:

There is nothing more important than doing this. Your children are already four and seven. You need to be in therapy together, you and your partner. You need to be working on your relationship daily. If your therapist is not giving you homework to work on daily together, and you're not prioritizing that, you need a new therapist, who's going to really make this the most important thing you do. Please take advantage of the free audios I've given you.

And just in case anybody's wondering, when you fight in front of children, they have a physiological stress reaction. It causes them to not feel safe, thus they become self protective, thus the hard edge that he's describing. It would also cause your children to fight more with each other. So that's not surprising, that this is how your children would react to the stress.

When we fight in front of kids, this is what happens, and even when we have a lot of stress and tension in the marriage, this is what happens. So I'm really sorry. I know you didn't know this or you wouldn't have done it, but now is the time to make this your top priority.

Question 12:

Laura Markham:

00:45:50

This question is about a three year old, three and a half year old, who gets worried and really gets upset when dad is angry at him. Dad thinks that he needs to use a scary voice to scold, so his child will learn the lesson, and that's what worked on him when he was young.

Laura Markham:

The question here is, "How do I convince my husband that my son doesn't need that loud voice, and my son actually gets really scared, and he gets ashamed or embarrassed, and he says, why does dad have to yell or why do my grandparents have to yell at me like that?"

I think, in your case in specific, whoever asked this question, that your husband thinks that your son is like him, and he's trying to treat your son with what was done

to him, which he says worked for him, but actually your son is more like you. He's more sensitive and he doesn't need that kind of parenting, and in fact, no one does, but your husband was able to stand it. With your son, it will undermine his confidence.

And if your husband hears that your son is more sensitive, the way you are, and that this will undermine his confidence, and it will make it harder for him to stick up for himself for the rest of his life, I think your husband might hear that and might rethink his approach. And that's what I would explain to him.

"Explained" sounds like you're going to lecture your husband, which of course, you're not going to do. But I think, if you could point this out to him, I think he might have an aha moment and realize that he's inadvertently sabotaging his son, when he wants good and he wants only success for his son, and yet, he's creating a situation that will undermine his son for the rest of his life.

Question 13:

Laura Markham: 00:47:26 This question is about a mom who writes that her husband works long hours, and when he gets home, he often still has to work. After the kids go to bed, he's back on the computer. She has to do most of the parenting. She says, "I end up feeling not even grateful for what he does and how do I talk to him about this without coming across as angry or ungrateful?"

Laura Markham: I think the answer is, you have to not be ungrateful and angry, so it won't transmit itself. I'm not saying you're not allowed to have those feelings. Of course, you have those feelings. It's always a question of noticing our own feelings and working with them before we talk to the other person. That's the only way we ever make a breakthrough with another human being.

And so, I guess I'm saying, start with your own feelings. Notice, "Oh my goodness, I feel overwhelmed. He, once

again, wasn't home, and I put the kids to bed myself, and I'm so overwhelmed that I'm exhausted and I feel like nobody loves me and it's all on me."

Those are legitimate feelings. Notice them, feel them. Feel how that feels and love yourself through it. Be your own compassionate parent. Take care of yourself, hug yourself. And when you do go to your partner and express them, don't express them as, "You're not there for me."

Laura Markham: Express them as, "Sweetheart, please don't take this as an attack. It's not about you. Could we just talk about me for a minute? Just pretend you're not even my partner. You're my best friend." And just express those feelings to your partner and let him also take care of you.

Laura Markham: Then, you're in a place where you can start from scratch and say, "You know what? I am grateful for all you do, AND I don't like feeling this way. Is there any change we can make that would make this different?" Now, maybe there isn't, and I think the critical thing here is to notice you're choosing it.

Laura Markham: So the way I would say this is, when we don't like something and we resent it in our life, we incapacitate ourselves. We make ourselves powerless. We give our power away to circumstance, or to our partner, to whatever. And the secret, believe it or not, is to choose what we're actually doing.

Laura Markham: So you could say, "I don't like getting up early in the morning, because it means I have to go to bed early the night before, and I don't like going to bed early. I'm a night person. I like to stay up at night. I don't like forcing myself to go to bed," and you sort of resent it. "I resent that my children get up so early, and it means I'm either going to be a basket case in the morning and be angry at my kids, or I have to go to bed early."

Laura Markham: You could feel resentful of your kids, or you could say, "You know what? For this point in my life, I choose. I choose to go to bed early. I choose to not have as long an evening or as much me-time at night, because I actually

need to go to bed early to wake up rested, so that I can actually enjoy my children in the morning and not feel resentful of them. I'm choosing that."

Laura Markham: That's the secret to not being resentful the next morning. And with your partner, the person who asked this question, I would say, you are choosing to be with this person, who has this kind of a job for right now, and this is the circumstance of it, and when you really see it from their perspective, you obviously understand it, because that's the way your question is framed.

Laura Markham: And so you're choosing this situation, in a sense, and that doesn't stop you from finding ways, with your partner, for your partner to support you, so you're not so depleted, and finding ways to support yourself, you're not so depleted. But it does mean that, if you want to get past the resentment, you have to choose. Not just choose love, meaning love for your partner, but choose the situation you're in, because you're actually choosing this, as opposed to the other things you could do, like have your partner quit their job or divorce your partner or whatever.

Laura Markham: Often, when we're in a situation where we feel trapped, what we need to do is choose, and that reclaims our power. And from there, we're able to actually take action to solve the situation.

Question 14:

Parent: 00:51:29 I had some questions in regard to the partner conflicts, and what do you do when you're still learning these techniques and you make a mistake and you're sort of trying to model something to encourage them to want to take on? I'm having challenges where it's like, "Oh well, yeah, that's working real well for you." You get those kinds of comments when it's difficult.

And then, secondarily to that, I find that my kids are responding. I mean, I've been following you for a long time, so I've been trying to implement this for a while

now. But my kids will respond to me positively and they'll open up about things, but then they'll be like, "Oh. Well, don't tell mom. Don't tell mom about this because she'll get mad," because they recognize the difference in how we handle stuff.

Laura Markham: Sure. So the second part I get is, how do you help the kids to open up to both parents when they trust you because you've been doing this, but your partner hasn't been doing this? Is that right? That's the second question.

Parent: Yes.

Laura Markham: Okay. And your first question, tell me more precisely what's the first question.

Parent: I guess it's, how do you deal with, when I'm still trying to learn the techniques and I find myself tripping up? I'm trying to avoid doing consequences. "Well, now you can't do this because you didn't do what I asked," and I'm trying to avoid doing consequences and yelling or whatever, and I'm trying to model the behavior to encourage my partner to take on this technique, and when I fail, it's sort of like this. "Oh, well yeah. Hey, that's really working out for you. I thought you were taking a class so you didn't do that?"

Laura Markham: Right.

Parent: I feel like I'm not being the good example.

Laura Markham: I got it. Okay. So it's really hard, because we are not perfect. So if you try this and you screw up, in a sense, which is what you're saying, you end up resorting to punishment or whatever or threats, and your partner says, "Yeah, I thought you were the perfect parent."

Laura Markham: And the answer is, "I wish, I wish. You know what? I am taking the class, I'm working hard. I've been reading these posts for a long time. I'm getting better at it. It's not perfect." But then, find the positives. Say, "But you know what? The kids do open up to me more than they used to. And, yes, I do resort to threat sometimes when I get stuck, but more and more, I'm able to stay calm in the moment."

- Laura Markham: Just look for the positives, express those positives, and just keep saying, "It's one foot in front of the other. I get better and better at it, and the kids get better. We don't have to be perfect." I mean, that's the best you can do. You don't have to model being perfect for your partner, because frankly, it's not going to happen. We're not going to be perfect. That really is the best you can do.
- Laura Markham: And the more we talk to our partners, it's not a one time conversation. The more we say, "I'm working on this. I do see a result, but it's hard to stay calm. Honey, what do you do to stay calm?" Right? I think it sort of enrolls your partner in your efforts. Even if your partner tends toward punishment, it enrolls your partner in the idea of calm.
- Laura Markham: Now, your partner may say, "I don't see why you do need to stay calm," in which case, you have to deal with that, like, "Well, because then I'm pouring gasoline on the fire instead of water." But most of the time, if you can find something positive about what your partner does with the kids, it's a way to enroll them also, that you can say, "Show me how you do this. Show me how you do that." And just take the attitude of, "We're in this together, Honey. We're doing this together." And, again, you don't have to be perfect.
- Laura Markham: The second part of your question, about the kids, how old are your children?
- Parent: Ten and six.
- Laura Markham: Ten and six, okay. So they're old enough to understand that you parent differently. When they say, "Don't tell mom," is that what they're saying? Don't tell your partner?
- Parent: Yeah. Yeah. They'll open up to me about something, and yet, not want me to share it.
- Laura Markham: Right. Honestly, if you don't have to share it in the beginning, I wouldn't share it, because it depends on what it is, but often kids will open up, and then if we say, "I have to share this with the other parent," kids will stop telling us anything. I distinctly remember doing that with my

mother when I was in the second grade, so that's a long time ago now, not much older than your youngest, when my mother wanted to tell her husband, my stepfather, something. And I was like, "Okay, then I'm not telling you anything," and I never did again. Like I'm serious.

Laura Markham:

So I think you have to be careful about breaking a confidence, so I would tell your child why you want to tell mom. Like, "Okay, I hear you, Hun. And I hear you don't want to tell mom this, but I think mom needs to hear this and here's why. She needs to know how strongly you feel about this," or whatever. And you can maybe coach your child to tell your partner about it, or you can say, "How would it be if I talked to mom about this, and then I can tell you what happens?"

"No, no. Don't do that."

"Okay. I won't do it without your permission. But you know why I think it's important? Here's why."

So I'm not a fan of secrets in a family, but I'm a fan of safety, and I think you need to build the bridge. You don't want to be in a position of decreasing your child's safety before that bridge is built. The bridge will increase the safety. So look at yourself again as a bridge. You're the interpreter between your partner and your child. Does that make sense?

Parent:

Yes, absolutely. Thank you.

Laura Markham:

Okay. You're so welcome.

Question 15:

Parent:

00:56:49

So I have a strong-willed boy. He's just going to be turning four in December, so just shy of four. We go to a school that's very free spirited. We used to be in a Montessori, and it was very structured and very follow the rules, and the timeouts, and you do what I say type of thing, and it wasn't us. I realized it within six months to a year. As he

got older and much more strong willed, I realized there was constantly notes sent home, constantly meetings, and their advice was I have to really show that I'm angry and that I'm the boss and that what I do is what I say. I'm the parent. And my husband believes in that.

Parent: I was born and raised in the U.S., and my husband is Moroccan, and I'm half Moroccan, and so we come from the background of "you do as the parent says and that's that." But I've been a 100% against that. I resisted it as a child, and so I am very much the positive parenting and letting him have a say and a choice with everything. Not with everything. I shouldn't say with everything, but with everything within limits. I mean, if he wants to take his bath, yes or no. If he wants to eat this or eat that, then, "Get dressed on your own. Or do you need my assistance?"

Parent: And he's very, I don't want to say advanced, but when other adults see him, they are amazed at how well he can speak and how well he can express what he wants and his needs and his feelings. He is sensitive. He does cry, he does tear, he's not afraid of that.

Parent: So the two challenges I have is, one, how do I -- other than constantly having the battle with my husband to try to follow, and to try to do the positive parenting, because he sees when I do it, it does deescalate situations. My son and I definitely have that connection. He definitely knows that I'm his rock. He can come to me anytime, happy, sad, full of dirt, or super clean. I mean, any which way, he knows it's all okay with me.

Parent: So the challenge I have is, when I'm in that moment and we do have a tantrum, or we do have an upsetting situation, or he is not wanting to listen, or he is not wanting to follow, and I'm trying to do the connection, in the back of my head, I'm hearing my husband, "Just tell him I said this, and just show him your authority, and show him that he needs to get in the bath now."

Parent: And my son hears these things. He hears my husband saying these things. So how do I try to keep my son

focused on us and not hearing those things, but at the same time, respect my husband, and have my son know that daddy does things differently?

Parent:

Because I think it's really confusing him, and sometimes, when he doesn't want to do something, he gets that voice. He gets my husband's voice, and says, "Mom, no. I told you I'm not doing it."

Laura Markham:

Yeah, of course, of course. Okay. So really the issue is not your strong willed son who, your parenting takes a lot of effort on your part, but you're working hard to parent well in ways that will be beneficial for him. Your problem really is that your husband comes from a different background and he doesn't agree with you about the way to parent, and so your son is hearing that, and he's seeing also conflict between his parents about him, which is not great for kids to see. Right? And he is also getting role modeling from his dad about the way to act. You're saying you see that voice.

Basically, the answer to your question -- it could take two hours to answer -- is your husband wants what's best for his son. You're on the same side and you just have a disagreement about what is going to raise a human being, who is the human being you want to raise. So sometimes parents say, "Well, I don't care what he turns out to be. I just want him to cooperate in the moment." And that could be true. But I think, when it's this strong a belief about parenting, like the one your husband has, I think there's also an idea that he should be a certain way because of the kind of person you want him to grow into.

So I think that's, in a way, easier to answer than you think, because the research is pretty clear about what kind of person someone's going to grow into. Your husband hasn't read that research. He may have zero interest in reading that research. But you can keep talking with him about his goals for his son and what kind of person he wants to raise, and what he thinks about the way he, your husband, was parented, and what effect do you think things had on

him. And you can just keep having the conversation, so that's the first thing.

And then, secondly, you can keep role modeling the kind of parenting that you want to do, which is about empathy, and your husband's going to see that your son actually has a better relationship with you than he does with his dad. That will end up happening, because you're role modeling how to do it.

I think he will notice that you and your son have a special bond and that your son is more responsive to you because of that, and I think that he'll see that happening, whereas, your son will end up being more defiant with him because he's strong willed.

It is a hard thing, but I would just say you're on the same side. And treating your partner with the same compassion that you would want to be treated and that you would treat your child matters tremendously, and it disarms the fear that your partner may be feeling that comes out as aggression about the way you're treating the child, and I think that makes a tremendous difference.

Question 16:

Laura Markham: 1:03:02 This parent asks: What do we do when one partner reverts to an authoritarian style, and you find yourself caught in the middle of trying to protect your child, while not undermining your partner?

And, yes, this is so stressful, but I would say the short version is, make an advance agreement with your partner about what's going to happen in those moments. So if one of you disagrees with a parenting decision the other is making, then you need to have a way to step in and model without the other person feeling disrespected.

And then you can say, "Wow, you two are so upset," just like you would with siblings, except you're not demeaning your partner. Of course, you're not demeaning when

you're talking to your children either. "Wow, you two are having a really hard time right now. What's going on here? It looks to me like you really want to keep playing and get dressed later. I hear daddy saying he wants you to get dressed now. It sounds like Daddy's worried. If you don't get dressed, now we're going to be late. I think it sounds like you need to get dressed, Sweetheart. What can I do to help here?"

Laura Markham:

If your partner has just said something like, "I can't stand another minute of this. You kids are driving me crazy," or maybe something even more angry and upsetting to your children, you might step in and say, "Wow, Mom is really upset. I think she's really tired right now, and she needs a few minutes of quiet. I've got an idea, kids. Let's go do X, Y, Z." Right?

Laura Markham:

And you take over. You take the kids out of the room, right? And you give your partner a break because we all lose it sometimes. So there are a lot of different things you can do. None of those things, you notice, is criticizing your partner. Those are all respectful interventions.

Question 17:

Laura Markham: 1:04:50.5

This parent asks: "I have a five-year-old with big emotions. His dad is inconsistent with limits, is not empathic. Our son wants to bond with his dad, but they have power struggles. What can I do so my son doesn't bring along the negativity created from his relationship with his dad?"

Laura Markham:

Oh, it's such a hard question. It's a tough situation. This is the price you pay for choosing to have a child with someone who is not empathic to his son. And I wish every person, before they got married, went through some marital counseling before they had a child with someone they should do some counseling where you work out basic differences and where you also talk about children. And I think fewer people might get married or have kids together, but I think the ones who did would raise much

healthier kids. I just think you would eliminate this whole level of struggle.

Laura Markham:

I would say your son is going to bring the negativity created from his relationship with his father in his relationship with you because he feels safer showing it to you. That's the situation. You can just keep listening, understanding, reflecting back to them. That will help him feel understood. It will deepen your trust. And also keep working with the preventive maintenance tools to help him with his emotions, using roughhousing, special time, scheduled meltdowns.

Laura Markham:

And about your partner, you can help him become more empathic. It's hard, but you can, by talking with him about empathy so he sees it's important, by being empathic to him, and by role-modeling in front of him what you're doing with your son. And you can help him become more consistent about setting limits by talking with him about that, and also by role-modeling. And maybe he'd be willing to listen to my book on audio. I often hear that dads who don't want to read it enjoy listening to it in the car.

Question 18:

Laura Markham:

01:06:36.5

This question is: "My husband uses rewards and punishment with our five-year-old. Whenever the child is furious or is aggressive, my husband takes him and holds him in a pretty aggressive way and threatens him, well, threatens him with no screen time, not with hitting. But I notice that when I intervene, not only does my husband get mad at me, it's bad for my kids."

That's right, it is bad for your kids to intervene with your husband in front of them because then you end up fighting with your husband in front of your kids. And children are very sensitive to parents fighting in front of them, and it scares them.

Laura Markham:

So I would talk with your husband in advance, not when he's angry and doing this with your son, and tell him that

he shouldn't be holding your son aggressively because that's going to make your son hit more. It makes him more aggressive over time, and you can show him the studies about that. There are lots of them. I'm sure they're easy to find online.

Question 19:

Laura Markham: 1:07:50

This parent says: The problem is that my son has a full backpack, cries a lot, and my husband is not empathic and tells him to stop crying. Well, that's a tough problem, and it's very common that it makes adults uncomfortable when children cry. It happens all the time. Many people listening to this call probably recognize that they feel uncomfortable when their child cries.

So I would just say to have the conversation with your husband. "Sweetie, it seems like it makes you really uncomfortable when he cries," and your husband will say, 'Of course. He shouldn't cry.' And you would say, "I hear you saying he shouldn't cry, but he does cry. He's going to cry. I mean, he is just a kid. Children cry. Did you cry when you were a child?" And he might say, "No, of course not. I would have been smacked."

Laura Markham:

And you can say, "Wow. Oh, sweetie, I'm so sorry. So no wonder you feel like children shouldn't cry when you got smacked. That is so awful. And you had to stuff those feelings. I wish I had been there to be your friend and hold your hand so you could have cried. Everybody needs to cry sometimes." Even a conversation like that allows your partner to surface their feelings a little bit about what got stuffed down when they were a child.

If your partner doesn't remember anything but just says, "No, he shouldn't cry," maybe your partner will say something like, "Boys don't cry," in which case, you have to say, "Everybody cries. Boys cry, too." And if your partner says, "I don't want him to be a sissy," you can say, "You know what? Everybody cries. That doesn't mean he's going to be a sissy. What's a sissy anyway? What is a sissy anyway? A boy who doesn't stand up for himself or a girl who doesn't stand up for herself? Don't worry. We'll coach him to stand up for himself. That has nothing to do with crying. Crying is an expression of when someone's in pain, and it's our job as parents to listen to his pain."

So this is going to be not just one, but many conversations with your husband. I would try to make an agreement with your husband that you understand it makes him uncomfortable in your son cries, but when your son cries, you're going to support your son to cry because you've done the research. You've paid for this course. You've learned that that's what needs to happen.

Laura Markham:

He needs to cry, and that's when it's going to help him move past the full backpack so he doesn't cry all the time. And would your husband let you step in and be in charge of those moments when your son is crying, and leave the room? If you can get that agreement, you're home free.

You say it's about the backpack. Yeah. Try as hard as you can to empty that backpack when your husband's not around. Let your husband be in charge of the laughing part of it and you be in charge of the crying part with scheduled meltdowns when your husband's not around.

Question 20:

Laura Markham:

01:10:38

This parent asks, "Single mom, six-year-old daughter, but when she goes to her dad's on the weekend, he talks badly about me in front of our daughter. I'm scared he'll influence her to be rude and to not love me, to disrespect me and speak to me rudely, especially since I'm using peaceful parenting."

So this is very upsetting to have him badmouth you to your daughter. I want to reassure you that she's six years old. She'll make her own judgments about whether to love and respect you, no matter what he says. I want to tell you that my parents were divorced, and when I was six, my stepfather would say nasty things about my father. And I was very clear that my father was a good man who adored me and was good to me, and my stepfather was not. And even at six, kids can have total clarity about that.

I also want to challenge you on something. Why is it an emergency if your daughter's rude to you? All kids experiment with rudeness. You can just say, "Ouch, it sounds like you wanted to hurt my feelings. You can tell me whatever you want without attacking me."

Laura Markham:

And if she says, "You're bad. Daddy says you're bad," you can say, "Oh, honey, that must've really upset you to have Daddy say that I was bad, because you know I'm not bad. You know I'm your mom and I love you and I always take care of you. So it must've really upset you when he said that, right?" Because sometimes kids will be rude trying to work out the trauma of having been told something like that.

You say you're afraid she'll speak to you especially because you're using peaceful parenting? I want to just challenge you again on that. Do you mean that if she knew you would punish her, then she would not be rude? Maybe at age six, but not when she's nine. Not for long. And again, you're controlling with fear in that case, which is going to erode your relationship and destroy her wanting to cooperate with you.

Laura Markham:

Don't you think it's more likely that the way to protect your relationship with your daughter is to use peaceful parenting, so she wants to be connected to you and she won't want to attack you, no matter what her father tells her? Don't you think that peaceful parenting is the way to maintain the relationship you want with your daughter? I hear how afraid you are, but when we act out of fear, that's when we create what we're most afraid of.

Question 21:

Laura Markham: 01:13:00 This parent asks: What do you do when there's a divorce and you've got a stepson and he goes back and forth to his mother who is doing conventional parenting? That is hard. I'm sorry because the child will act out more with you, honestly, because he feels safer with you. And so you'll hear from the other parent sometimes, "Well, I don't see those problems with the child. They act fine for me. They only misbehave for you. You must be doing something wrong."

Laura Markham: But what I see over time is that the child begins to trust you more and is able to articulate that they don't feel heard or respected by the parent who's doing conventional parenting. And so they do actually come to articulate what the issues are and stand up for them more with the other parent. So I think over time you're going to see things get better, but I do understand that it can be hard initially.

Question 22:

Laura Markham: 01:13:51 This parent is asking about her children being traumatized by her ex-husband who is a narcissist. I've counseled a number of women whose ex-husbands are narcissists. I have to say, I think they can be very charming. They can make you feel like the most special person in the world when they first meet you, but then it doesn't last long. But if you find that you have one in your present or your past, I can see why you'd be worried about your kids.

Laura Markham: The answer for your children is therapy. That's the answer. And of course, it's helpful that you help them with their emotions. But I would go to family therapy with them and help them to deal with the traumatic things that are going on now and in the past with their dad.

Question 23:

- Parent: 1:14:30 I had a question about working with an ex. My son is three years old. His dad and I separated when he was two. His dad was never really involved in the intimate aspects of parenting or the emotional aspects of parenting, loves him very much, is a committed dad, but inconsistent, not very present, hasn't done things like diapering, bed and bath. Sometimes he's there. Sometimes he's not.
- Parent: It's having a real impact on my son, and I'm struggling with how to deal with this. For a while as we were sorting through the separation, we were still living together. It's been a while now that we're living apart. My ex is now wanting more time with our son, wanting overnights, which I think is a good sign. He's moving towards wanting to be more actively involved, but still isn't consistently present and isn't doing any of the intimate parenting.
- Parent: And so he says things to our son like, "You're going to spend overnights with me." And I see my son being anxious, being concerned, not knowing how to cope with it. Over the last few months, he's shown more and more and more anxiety. He was previously a great sleeper. His sleep is now disrupted. He's hitting himself. Every time he comes home from a visit with his dad, he's more and more anxious. Every time his dad cancels or isn't there, he's sad. He's visibly sad.
- Parent: I've tried to cooperate with my ex, and he's just not interested. He won't talk about it. He won't go to speak with anybody. He won't read any books. So I'm kind of assuming I'm on my own in this one. I want to maintain a positive relationship between them and create opportunities for them to bond, but also help my kid cope with what is a really anxiety-inducing situation that will continue to be inconsistent and unpredictable. His dad will continue to disappoint him. I'm not sure how to cope with that.

Laura Markham: Oh, oh, it's heartbreaking. So this is the thing about having babies. When you have them with somebody else, which is usually the case, you've got to be really careful who you're having babies with. And of course, most of us don't know that. We aren't taught that. And we have a baby, and lo and behold, then we have a baby with somebody who may or may not be able to show up well as a parent. And it has a profound impact on our child.

Laura Markham: So I guess that's all water under the bridge. I wouldn't give up actually on helping his dad learn some things. But I think you can't make his dad wrong because none of us want to learn things and when we're made wrong. Here's an example. Seems to me that since he's anxious ... your son, sorry ... since your son is now anxious about this that he needs a plan. The entire family needs a plan.

Laura Markham: And so when dad says things like, "Well, you know you're going to be spending nights with me," but there's no actual plan to do that at a particular point, naturally, your son is going to get anxious about that. So I think what we need ... You could start a plan that would be like a book for your son, a book about how there was this little boy who was loved very, very much by his mommy and his daddy.

Laura Markham: And his mommy lived in an apartment over here where they had a flower in the window, and his daddy lived in an apartment over there where there was a playground down the street or whatever, something identifying that he likes in each place. And he loves to be with his mommy because of this. He loves to be with his daddy because of that. And I would actually make the book for him and say someday when he's bigger, he's going to be able to sleep at Daddy's house overnight.

Laura Markham: But there are some things that have to happen before he can learn to sleep at Daddy's house overnight. One, he has to teach Daddy what stories he likes to read every night. You're trying to put this within his control, your son, that he feels like there are things he can do that will make it happy for him. Daddy has to tell him what will happen if he wakes up at night and misses Mommy. That would be

something to throw in there. But I wouldn't make that number two. I would make that number six or something down the list.

Laura Markham:

But basically, ask your son. I mean, before you commit this to paper, I would probably start by telling him the story and saying, "You're just not going to just go spend the night with Dad. There's things that are going to happen that you're going to know what's going to happen. Like for instance, what would you need to know, what you want to bring with you over to dad's house so that if you're feeling sad, you have your special gecko with you?" Or whatever, right?

Laura Markham:

I would brainstorm with your son and tell him it's not going to happen for a while and until he's ready. I would actually say, "Until you're ready, until you're older. And when it is going to happen, what would you need to be ready? Let's talk about that. You would need to be able to know what to bring with you. You'd need to know what to do before you go. You'd need to know while you're there, the various things that would be like what you would do with your dad for fun and what you would do if you're sad and what would you do if you're mad at your dad. Could you tell your dad? How would you tell him?"

Laura Markham:

And this is all prepping him, but what I'm hoping is that eventually, it becomes a storybook that he's able to take to Dad's with him even before he starts going over there and that Dad can begin to work on it with him and can sort of see ... and you can say, "He was feeling so anxious, and I really want him to be able to come and be with you overnight. But he was feeling so anxious about it that we started this book so that he would feel more in control of it. And I'm hoping you can read it with him and reassure him about things, and there are probably things you can come up with that should go in the book, too."

Parent:

And if my ex doesn't cooperate ... So my ex's approach is very much kind of more strictly disciplinary, a lot of fault, a lot of blame, a lot of anger, and doesn't really cooperate with any of the approaches that I've proposed that are

more in line with your teachings. So I'm anticipating that there'll be dual voices here, right?

Parent:

There'll be the work that I'm doing with the kid, but then the time that he spends with his dad, there will be different messages. And I'm anticipating anger and blame and likely stress for my son. So is there a way of again, of kind of empowering him, giving him the support that he needs, but without laying the blame on his dad, which is of course not the direction that I want to take?

Laura Markham:

So if he's mostly with you, what happens with you is always going to be more important in who he is. And the research shows that children can make it through just about anything, even the death of a parent, even abuse, if they have somebody in their corner, a parent who really sees it from their perspective and accepts and loves them through it and somebody they can always talk to about anything. So you're the insurance policy for your son's well-being here.

Laura Markham:

I think there's nothing wrong with explaining things to him about his dad in a way that is still respectful. So an example would be, "You're really sad because Dad had to cancel this weekend. You really wanted to go see him on Sunday, didn't you? Yeah. Sometimes Daddy can't do it. He says he's going to come and get you, and then he can't."

Laura Markham:

And I don't know what his reason was. Let's assume it's work. "His job means that sometimes he has to go and work, and he doesn't want to. He doesn't expect to. Your father would always rather be with you." I don't care if he's out with a hooker. It's like, "Your father always rather be with you," right? "He would always rather be with you, and he wanted to be with you. And it's because of his work, and your dad was really sad, also."

Laura Markham:

And I would just be really clear. He matters to his father, which we know he does. And later as he gets older, I have used the story with kids with parents who can't come through for them. "You know, when your dad was little, his parents, really didn't know how to be good parents, and they hurt your dad's heart a lot. And your dad had to

build walls around his heart just so he could grow up. And sometimes those walls around his heart make him say things that he doesn't even mean. And it makes it hard for him to show you he cares. Your dad really does love you, but Sweetie, he's got those walls around his heart from when he grew up. And it's hard for him."

Laura Markham: Now, it depends. I probably would be careful about that kind of language. I wouldn't use it with a three-year-old because he'll probably repeat it to his father, right? Yeah. And that'll make his dad defensive and furious. I wouldn't be using that language until later, but I think you can use a version.

Laura Markham: " In your dad's house growing up, parents yelled all the time, and that's what your dad does. But your dad really loves you no matter what, Sweetie. And you can tell your dad, that hurts my feelings when you yell at me that way." You can coach him. Now, I don't know if that would work with his father.

Parent: Yeah, his dad is more passive aggressive. It's less yelling. It's more just kind of conveying a sense of disappointment.

Laura Markham: Disapproval, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, and that's hard. I mean, they're both damaging to kids, but in some ways, that's harder to talk about, right? It's like, "I know when your dad looks at you that way, it feels like he's disappointed in you, right? Your loves you no matter what. It's just hard for him to show it, right?" That kind of language might help. Okay. I hope that's helpful.

Parent: Very helpful. Thank you.

Question 24:

Laura Markham: 01:24:41 Three-year-old daughter has a strange relationship with her dad, who loves her, but is not actively present or emotionally available, and is quick to snap. Oh. Before she visits him, she screams, runs, hides. She does return happy, but irritable, angry, clinging, and she started

hitting. Oh no. And the question is, how do I help her cope and prepare her for overnights because we co-sleep?

Laura Markham:

Well, it sounds like your daughter already has a negative reaction to her visits with her dad, and now he's asking for overnights, which will make those reactions worse. And obviously, since she co-sleeps with you, you'll see much more separation anxiety from her. So the first suggestion I would make is to postpone overnight visits for as long as you can.

Laura Markham:

And the second suggestion is to involve your ex in this course. He can participate for free, and even if he's somewhat reluctant, I think any exposure at all will help him be more emotionally accepting with your daughter. And then finally you have to step up the preventive maintenance before and after visits.

Laura Markham:

I've worked a lot doing coaching. Back when I took new clients, I had so many people who had children going back and forth from one home to the other. And basically, you spend so much time preparing them for going and then, when they come back, helping them readjust to being back and offload the full backpack. And it is really hard. But that's why children of divorce ... It's a risk factor, divorce. It's because of that. And so here's the thing. It's the work of a saint, but if you don't do that work, your child has a risk factor.

Laura Markham:

I believe from my experience watching families that when you do do that work, your child's okay, and thank goodness. And so you get around the risk factor. So I would just encourage you to really help your daughter do whatever laughing, crying. Give her as connection time as you can, and hopefully she will be able to adjust.

Laura Markham:

In terms of preparing her for overnights, please listen to the question that I answered earlier where I talked about how to create a book for your child, that would prepare her for overnights and deal with whatever she raises that might be an issue, or whatever you can think of that might be an issue, that will help her get used to the idea of overnights.

Question 25:

Laura Markham: 01:26:57 And what's your question?

Parent: Yeah, first of all, Dr. Laura, thank you so much for your time today, and I can tell that you really care about us parents and really appreciate you sharing the knowledge that you have. So thank you so much.

Laura Markham: You're welcome. You're welcome.

Parent: So I wanted to talk to you about my eight-year-old. She's my eldest, and she's from my first marriage. We separated and divorced when she was two, and it's been a long time now, six years. And I still see the effects of the divorce in her life with my current husband and her friends. And she's going to her dad's for the first time this Christmas, so she'll be leaving and will be with his wife and their new baby. And I'm really worried she's going to be regressing back to where we were just last year when we started listening to you and reading your book and going to therapy.

And I'm just wondering what advice you would have to prepare me for when she comes back from visiting him. She's going on the flight alone. She has anxiety. I mean, there's so many things...

Laura Markham: Does she want to go? Does she want to go?

Parent: No. She asks me if she doesn't have to go, and I just think, "You really don't want to go." Because it is a part of the agreement for the divorce that she has father time, and there's not much I can do about that. And so she does need to go, but I hear that she doesn't want to go. And I validate that.

Laura Markham: How is she going to handle a flight when she's anxious about it?

- Parent: So what we've set up is that we have me going up to the gate with her, and then a flight attendant will come and put her on a plane and be there with her and checking on her. And then when she arrives to her dad's, he'll be at the gate, could be there, right there when she gets off the flight. There'll be no stops or anything like that. It'll be a direct flight.
- Parent: But I am. I'm nervous about her going and really want to make sure that she knows that I'm there for her. But I am worried that she's going to, at the plane, have a little bit of a meltdown, and I just don't know quite how to be prepared for that.
- Laura Markham: Is she generally pretty independent or pretty dependent?
- Parent: I would say she likes to do things on her own.
- Laura Markham: Good, okay.
- Parent: She doesn't really like to have help, although she'll ask for help when she really needs it.
- Laura Markham: Okay, that's good. So first of all, my concern, my biggest concern about this is the flight because there's so little support for her on the flight. So I would work hard to pull out all the stops to make the flight like an experience that she is so looking forward to because on the flight, she'll get to ... I don't know what.
- Laura Markham: She'll have some presents to unwrap that you've put in her bags that will be there. But she isn't allowed to see them until the very end. She isn't allowed to open them till she's on the plane. A movie she's going to watch, some candy, if that's what it takes, whatever it takes, something that she will really be looking forward to on the plane.
- Laura Markham: And she needs something that is her backup. You can say to her, "It's normal to get anxious the first time you go on a plane by yourself. It's normal. And so if you feel worried, scared, alone, let's talk about what you can do so that you're okay because there will be a flight attendant who takes you on the plane and who checks on you. And that's

wonderful, and hopefully, it'll be a really nice person. But she's going to have other people she has to look after. So what can you do? Well, while the plane is in the air, you can ..."

Laura Markham:

I don't know if there's a way she can be in touch with you. Obviously, if you're on a computer, you can do your email. Well, is there a way that she can text you from an iPad? Is there some way that she can be in touch with you on the plane? That would be great if that were the case. She needs something that she can do to reassure herself on the airplane because otherwise this could be, obviously, traumatic for her. So that's step one, phase one.

Laura Markham:

Phase two. What happens when she's there? How long will she be with her dad and his wife?

Parent:

Seven days. And the routine since she was two was that he comes out here, has her for two or three days, and then he comes and drops her back off and goes back home. So she hasn't been to his home. She's never been with his wife and their new baby.

Parent:

And when the new baby was born, that last week, she was hitting. She was kicking. She was fighting. She was throwing things. I mean, it was full out. She had regressed all the way back to huge tantrums and meltdowns until we started realizing we need to figure out how to do this. And how can we help her through these things?

Laura Markham:

So I would talk with her about those days when she used to act like that and how hard it was for her and tell her that there are going to be some times when she's with her dad in his house that she may have some of those same feelings. And when she gets home, she might have some of these same feelings.

Laura Markham:

And of course, you understand, and you want to help her so that she ... And you know she can handle it, but you want to help her so that she has the resources to handle it then, and so that when she comes home, she can talk with you in words instead of just falling apart completely. Now that she's older, you know she can do this, but you know

she's going to have some big feelings about it. So I would again make sure ... Does she have a phone?

Parent:

No, she doesn't.

Laura Markham:

I would get her a phone. I wouldn't have her have to access the family phone in front of other people. They may not have a house phone. They may just have cells, but even if they do have a house phone, she'll have to make calls in front of them and answer questions in front of them. That's not good.

Laura Markham:

I would literally get her a phone for this trip that she can text you and should text you on a regular basis and call you every day from the phone. And it will help her come back less ... She won't fall apart as easily when she comes back because she'll actually have stayed better connected to you, and it will help her. It'll make her more resilient as she's there.

Laura Markham:

And I would absolutely encourage her to be excited about the trip. I would have a conversation, if you can, with your ex about the fact that you're a little nervous about this on her behalf. She's never been away for that many days from you guys, and it's hard.

Laura Markham:

And you know that she's going to be with her dad, and you hope that he can just be really aware that she's going to have some homesickness. And don't take it personally, and you want to be able to talk to her every day, that you've been told by a therapist that would be good for her. And you're so supportive of her doing this. You want her to have a relationship with him, and you also want to be able to support her to be able to do this so she has a good experience this first time and can do this in the future without it being a problem.

Laura Markham:

So if you need more than this, which I'm thinking ... I'm hearing the anxiety in your voice about what happens when she comes home. You might want to do a coaching session with a parenting coach. Just have a session with someone to actually talk about how you can talk to her more about it before she leaves and when she comes back

because it's a big deal, what you're talking about. And I know this will get you started, but you'll probably have a lot more questions as you start to work through it.

Parent: Yeah, definitely. That's great. Yeah, it's good to know that there's continued resource, too, because I'm sure this will just keep ... Divorce is definitely something that ... just a big thing. And people are like, "Well, it was when she was two," and they try to say, "Well she should be fine. She shouldn't even remember that." And I'm like, "Well, I think she does, and it's definitely altered her personality a lot through this course of the last six years of her life."

Parent: So I really appreciate that. I will definitely make a really fun trip for her and get her things. I'm not sure about the phone because my husband and I really limit our technology with our kids because there are so many things out there.

Laura Markham: Well, you can take it away from her. You know what? It's not a permanent phone. It's a temporary phone for this one trip.

Parent: Oh, okay. Okay.

Laura Markham: I wouldn't get her a phone forever. She's only eight. I'm with you. But for this trip.

Parent: I know. I'm like, "She's only eight." I don't know if I could open that door yet. I've really tried to ...

Laura Markham: But only for this. And you don't have to-

Parent: She has friends that have phones, and I'm like, "What are you talking about?"

Laura Markham: Not a smartphone. Not a smartphone. A flip phone. She doesn't need access to the internet. She needs access to her parents, her mother.

Parent: Yeah, and staying connected.

Laura Markham: Yeah, exactly.

- Parent: Okay, I like that.
- Laura Markham: Exactly right. Yeah, yeah, a flip phone just for the trip.
- Parent: Okay. That's good to clarify because I'm like ...
- Laura Markham: Yeah, yeah, I know. I'm glad you did. And you said she's in therapy, right? Or you're in therapy with her or something? She's going to a therapist.
- Parent: That's another thing. So this last year, she was going to a therapist, and we were doing play therapy. And it was going really well. And then she became really resistant and said she didn't want to go anymore. And I took her to another session, and she just told her therapist, "I don't want to come anymore. I'm done. I don't want to see you anymore." And so we're taking a little bit of time.
- Parent: When her sister was born from her dad and stepmother, she had the whole meltdown. So I did take her again, but she was very adamant that she not want to go to therapy anymore. And it's really hard to take a kid to therapy that doesn't want to go.
- Laura Markham: Of course. So I think she needs therapy, but I think she needs a different kind of therapy. And I would also bring that up with the coach that you talk to because I think you need to think of a different answer, like maybe a somatic experiencing or an EMDR, but something that is going to help her here, so that she doesn't carry this with her in quite such a present way.
- Parent: Yeah, okay.
- Dr. Markham: Okay. Bye bye.
- Parent: Okay. Thank you so much. Bye bye.
- Dr. Markham: You're welcome. Bye bye.

Question 26:

- Laura Markham: 01:37:52 The next question is: "I'm going through a divorce. The children's father makes statements and engages in behavior intended to alienate the kids from me. So in the past few months, the kids have become extremely rude, often ignoring my requests. They throw tantrums in which they hit me, throw things at me, and tell me they hate me and they only want to spend time with their dad. I know I can't control their dad's behavior, but how can I connect with the children despite his actions?"
- Dr. Markham: Well, this is heartbreaking, but your children are six and four-years-old, so they're old enough to realize that people don't always tell the truth, or have the same perspective. So I would begin a discussion with them, in which you talk on an ongoing basis about this. Talk about how hard it is to have a divorce, how they liked it better when you all lived together, and how hard it is to go back and forth from their dad to you, and how hard it is when they love both their mom and their dad, but their mom and dad disagree about things.
- Dr. Markham: Give them explicit permission to love both of you. Tell them that divorce is a grownup problem. It is not their problem. They're allowed to love both of you, and both of you will always love them. Be really explicit about it and say, "Your dad sometimes says things to you that confuse you about me, but you know in your hearts what's true, which is that I love you no matter what, and you love me no matter what."
- Dr. Markham: Then really use the peaceful parenting tools. Make sure that, when they're reunited with you after they've been apart, and they use that time to act out and fall apart and have tantrums -- which is very common after visitation, when kids come home to the other household -- welcome those tears, welcome that upset and say, "You are so upset. You're telling me you hate me and you only want to be with your dad. It is so hard to go back and forth. It's hard to be at your dad's and then come here. But no matter how upset you are at me, or how mad you are at

me, I will love you no matter what, and I will always listen to what you have to say.” Then make room for all those big feelings and let them have a scheduled meltdown with total empathy from you.

Dr. Markham:

I'm also going to suggest that you're probably going to want to take both kids to family counseling with you, without the dad. If you need to invite the dad for a session, that will become apparent in the course of talking with your therapist. But I think it will really help you to reestablish your relationship with the kids and get to the bottom of the upset. They may not feel safe doing it just with you, but a good family therapist who works with kids and divorce situations, should be able to help your kids express to you all of their pain and confusion, and help you reestablish yourself as the parent who is the leader and who the kids want to follow. Please check out the article on the Aha! Parenting website about finding a therapist that gives you some questions to ask the therapist.

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/ask-the-doctor-1/finding-a-therapist-who-understands-my-child-raising-practices>

That will help you to find somebody who is aligned with the peaceful parenting practices.

Question 27:

Dr. Markham:

01:41:2.5

Our next question is: “I'm divorced. My son's father is like a kid. Doesn't take responsibility, never says no. For example, they were playing football with apples, and when I stopped them from doing that, he just asked me, ‘Why not?’ I always want to teach my son to be right and raise him to be good. I also worry because he hurts others in nursery. He's three and a half.”

Dr. Markham:

First of all, I know how hard it is to have someone else as a co-parent raising your child when you're not there, and you're worried that the way they're doing it is not good for your child.

That's sort of the definition of divorce, once you have children, and it's the reason to be so careful about who we marry. I always want to say that to young people before they get married. Think about what kind of a parent your partner will be. But of course, people don't come to me until they're already parents. But it is totally anxiety producing to have someone else who you can no longer live with, and you're not convinced is a very good parent, being a parent to your child, and realizing you can't control that.

Dr. Markham:

It might be fine to play football with apples. I don't know the context, and it sounds like he's a guy who likes to have fun, and that's not a problem for your son. It is a problem if he never says no to your son, in terms of food, bedtime, screen time -- the kinds of things that kids push the limits, where they don't always know what's good for them.

As far as your son hitting other kids in the nursery, that's also very common, and may have nothing whatsoever to do with what his father does with him. Raising a child to be good does not mean you have to set strict limits. It does mean you have to get clarity about your own values, and you need to listen to your child. And when you do set limits, do it with empathy. So all the things that I teach in this course.

Dr. Markham:

I would say, first of all, make sure you're practicing what's in the course. And secondly, invite your husband to do the course with you. He could do the course also, and he would learn a lot about parenting.

If in fact, you're convinced that the things he's doing are not okay for your son, then in that case, I would ask him to go to a couple of sessions with a parenting coach. You can do that even via Skype online, so that the two of you can get in sync about your parenting for your son's wellbeing. All parenting coaches have dealt, at one time or another, with parents who are divorced. We're used to that, and you can look on the Aha! Parenting website, put the word "coaching" into the search box, and you'll see parenting

coaches I've trained, all of whom are wonderful, and most of whom work via Skype, in addition to working in person.

Question 28:

Dr. Markham: 01:44:26.5 Our next question is: "I have a five-year-old son. His dad lives with his new wife. We've been apart since my son was a year and a half old. He's with me one week and with his dad one week. Is this beneficial for the child? I'm okay alone for four days, but for longer times we both feel disconnected."

I'm so sorry, but I think you already know the answer to your question. If you feel disconnected after longer than four days, then no, that's not a beneficial relationship. Now, maybe there's a way that you can connect during the week that he's with his dad. Maybe at the very least, you can have a Skype call. Maybe you could even see each other. But no, this sounds like an old fashioned arrangement that doesn't serve anybody, because it doesn't really understand attachment needs.

Dr. Markham: And of course, it goes the other way also. I'm sure your son feels disconnected from his dad during the weeks he's with you. Divorce is always hard on kids, no matter what. It's a loss, and it's hard for them to go back and forth. Imagine if you had to go back and forth to two different houses, with two different sets of rules and two different sets of people. It's hard for kids no matter what, but that disconnection makes it worse. So maybe you and your ex could set something up where, your son would be able to Skype with the other home, at least once when he's at the other home.

Question 29:

Dr. Markham: 01:45:54.5 Our next question is: My seven-year-old son is sad because his dad is absent. We haven't had any contact for five and a half years. I don't actually know where his father lives. He was abusive. What can I say to help my son? I haven't

said much to answer his questions. Things like, "I don't know where dad is now. He must be very busy, or he might have some problems that keep him from visiting." My dad's sister is out of state. She's been asking us to visit. She and her siblings supported me in court, and she's broken contact with my son's dad. Do you think it's okay for my son to visit her, with me, of course?

Dr. Markham:

First of all, yes. I think it would be great for your son to visit his aunt with you, of course. And I think it would be very important to talk with him more about his father. Acknowledge his feelings, how he's sad that his father can't be part of his life, isn't part of his life. You don't have to trash his father.

You can say, "Your dad had a hard childhood, and it made him really angry at the world. And he took that anger out on me, and he used to hit me. That's never okay to hit another person, and he wasn't able to live with us and be a loving husband or a good dad to you. And I'm so sorry that he's not here, able to be a good dad to you. There were a lot of wonderful things about your father, and that's why I wanted to have a child with him. But he wasn't able to overcome the things that were so hard inside his own heart. His heart hurt so much he had to build up walls around his heart to keep the pain out. But that also kept the love out. He couldn't feel his love, not for me, not for you. And it made him not able to be the kind of dad you deserve. In fact, it makes him not even able to stay in touch with us. He hasn't been in touch with us since you were a baby."

Dr. Markham:

Then you listen, you acknowledge when he says how sad he is, and you make it very clear to him that it has nothing to do with him. Most children think that, if they'd only been a better kid, their parent wouldn't possibly have left them. And he needs to hear that that's not the case, that his dad left, and it has nothing to do with him, and he was the best kid, the best baby in the world. And even if he was the worst, it wouldn't have had anything to do with him. That his dad couldn't be a father. There was just too much pain in his heart, and he didn't deal with it in a

healthy way. He dealt with it by taking it out on other people.

Dr. Markham:

I want to add that there is a letter and answer on the Aha! Parenting website, that is not actually your situation. But it has some pointers that I think would be helpful about talking with your child. The letter is called Helping Kids When Asperger's Dad Leaves the Family. It's a specific situation, obviously, but some of the things to say to your kids about, your father would think you are wonderful if he could know you, I think you might find really helpful. So take a look at that article as well.

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/ask-the-doctor-1/helping-kids-when-asbergers-dad-leaves-the-family>

Question 30:

Dr. Markham:

01:49:17

The next question is: "My husband is a well-respected health professional. He's also a charismatic, outgoing Christian. We've been together 20 years and have two boys. I just discovered he's been living a triple life. He's an uncontrolled addict. It turns out he had a live-in girlfriend in another place, while I was birthing both my boys. He would return three days a week to see us. He's already claiming that his private practice is going bankrupt, so he can't pay us any child support. My therapist has labeled him as a sociopath, because he shows no remorse for the emotional and financial ruin his extravagant hidden lifestyles have caused us. He's no longer able to be alone with the boys without supervision. How can I raise my five and seven-year-old kids to think about their dad? I've already had to walk them through the scenario of what to do if Daddy tried to pick them up at school."

Dr. Markham:

First of all, I am very sorry, and I urge you to get some counseling support. This is a major betrayal and shifting your life, and you need someone you can talk to who can help you deal with all the feelings that are going to come up. There's no way to be the mom you want to be, be level-headed, talk with your children in a way that allows them to work through their issues, when you have so

many of your own issues pressing. So most important, get help for you.

Secondly, the most important thing is to listen to what your kids have to say and to empathize with them.

“You're so disappointed Daddy couldn't be here to see your soccer game. You wish daddy had come to visit you. You really miss your dad.”

Just acknowledge all of that stuff. When they ask you why, say that “Your daddy loves you very much. It has nothing to do with you. Any dad would be proud to have you as his sons. Any dad would be lucky to have you as his sons.”

Explain that he's unable to live with you. They must know other kids whose parents are divorced. And just explain that he's living in another state. You don't have to go into the details of the double life, not at this point. As your kids get older, sure, that's fine. But not yet.

You said that you did a few sessions of therapy. I think it makes sense for you to take the boys to therapy, because this is a big change for them as well. And a therapist can help you talk with the boys in a constructive way and answer their questions.

Dr. Markham:

For instance, you said in your note to me that you would tell them something like, good fathers love their children and make sure to live with them and see them as often as they can. That is not something I'd choose to say, because the point isn't to talk about good fathers, or whether their father is a good father. The point is to talk about how your boys feel. I think that's something that will be really helpful to have a therapist guide you through. And finally, please listen to my answer to Joyce, the question just before this, about how to talk to kids about an absent father. Good luck to you.

Question 31:

Dr. Markham: 01:52:25 This parent asks: "I have a husband who has the best of intentions, but is so stressed with work. He handles our kids in a not so peaceful manner. This is hard because I feel like I'm managing tantrums from my husband, and then the fallout meltdowns from the kids due to the lack of connection from him. He won't prioritize self care and managing his own wellbeing, and he isn't conscious of how his confrontational nature impacts how the kids treat him. Then he expects them to be nice to him.

Dr. Markham: This is a very hard situation, and it sounds like he has not participated in this course with you, or he would already have more understanding of what's happening.

I also want to suggest that, you begin slowly giving your husband a taste of what you've learned in this course. Just talk about it a little bit at a time. Talk about the victories, about how one of your children wasn't cooperating, and you tried empathy and it worked, lo and behold. Talk about how you don't have a need anymore for

Dr. Markham: punishment. Talk about how you've noticed that you thought you were connected, but as you've worked harder doing special time and roughhousing, that connection really makes a difference in the kids' level of cooperation.

Over time, he'll see that what you're doing is working. And it won't be a quick fix, but I think you'll see him working

harder to connect. I would also raise the issue of self care with him that you both need it -- and work out ways for you both to get it. Because that will help his patience level, and it will only be good for you as well.

Question 32:

Dr. Markham: 01:55:02 Here's a question: "My six-year-old had been stealing and lying in the past. Things had improved over the last months with more understanding and connection, but then he stole again and lied about the details. My husband, hating liars, spanked our child, claiming that my method has failed, and I fall too easily for his lies. I feel awful about the spanking. Should I have stopped it? How? I've tried so hard connecting and listening to him. And a part of me thinks my husband was right, but my heart says no way."

Dr. Markham: I'm so sorry that you, your child, and your husband, who I'm sure is suffering also, are going through this. Your heart is right. Spanking will not teach your child not to lie, just to lie better. That's what the research shows, and it's also common sense.

Should you have stopped the spanking? Yes. The more you let someone else hurt your son, the less he will trust you. And the more he will believe that there's no understanding out there. So he might as well steal and lie to get what he wants. I don't know how you could have stopped it, but I'm hoping that if you put your body between your husband and your son, your husband would not have hit you. And after he calmed down, I'm hoping he would have been willing to listen to you and your six-year-old, talk about repair, about what your son can do to earn back his father's and your trust.

Dr. Markham: To start, I will say that stealing for a six-year-old is completely normal behavior. Most children that age will try stealing. There's an article on my website, [A Teen's Perspective on Peaceful Parenting](#), which was written by my niece. She describes how, when she was about that

age, she came home with some stolen items from, I think, the drugstore. Her mother discovered them, took her back to the drugstore, made her return the items and apologize, and took her home. That's a much more appropriate response than punishing the child.

Dr. Markham:

And if the child lied to escape punishment, again, what you say is, "I guess you wish you hadn't taken these, and it looks like you did." You never ask your child the details to give them an opportunity to lie to you, and then punish them for that. It is normal behavior, again, for a child that age to lie to try to get out of something that they've done wrong.

So I think these are very conventional responses, what your husband has done. The problem is, they harden your child into thinking of himself as someone who steals and lies, instead of someone who can repair and make things better.

I want to make sure you know that I'm not suggesting you ignore, either the lying or the stealing. But if you to stop these behaviors, you need to know why your child is doing them, and you need to address that cause. Otherwise, he may stop stealing right now for a time, because he's been hit. But soon, he will be driven to steal again. If you don't come up with a better intervention, you're raising a child whose stealing and lying will intensify.

Dr. Markham:

Violence does not create an emotionally healthy child. It makes the child feel ashamed, more alone, more self-hating. And of course, that self-hatred is part of what's behind the stealing to begin with.

Luckily, your child is only six. I urge you to go for family therapy -- your husband, your son, you, and probably, also, your older child -- with a therapist who is trained to work with children and their parents. I'm hoping that a few things will happen here. One is that, the therapist will teach your husband more effective ways to guide his son. Secondly, that you'll uncover the cause of your son's behavior. And finally, that you'll transform the entire family dynamic before your kids get any older.

Dr. Markham: What if your husband won't agree to go to family therapy? Well, it's up to you. You have to step up as the leader here and take your kids, and keep inviting your husband, and ask the therapist how to get your husband involved. But don't wait for him to agree on the front end if he won't. It's your responsibility as the parent of your children to give them the support to develop in a healthy way. And that includes making sure nobody is hitting them.

Question 33:

Dr. Markham: 01:59:55 Our next question is: "I try to follow the Peaceful Parenting course. My husband refuses to do this type of parenting. For him, there's only discipline, timeouts, and punishment. How can I present this to avoid confusing our four and six-year-old?"

Well, your kids might indeed be confused. A four-year-old assumes that parents know what's right and they're doing it. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't continue to parent in the best way you can, even if their father has different ideas. There are worse things than confusion.

Dr. Markham: Tell your children that you believe that they will learn more from making repairs than from being punished. Tell them, you know they have reasons for what they do, and that when they're upset, they don't always act perfectly. That's true for most adults, too. But you want to hear when they're having a hard time so you can help them. You will always be there to help so they can try to be their best selves.

Your dad also wants them to be their best selves. He thinks the way to do that is punishment. You don't agree. But if he decides to give them a consequence or a timeout, that's between him and them. So you hope they'll work with you to solve problems that come up in a good way, and make repairs, so their dad doesn't have to be involved.

Dr. Markham:

Then of course, you don't let your husband intervene if you're working with kids on something -- making a repair -- he's not allowed to step in and administer some kind of punishment. You're already on that. It's between you and them.

And if he can't agree to that, I would insist that you to go to couples therapy together. And by the way, don't give up on your husband. Keep talking with him about these ideas. He might, over time, begin to see it's working a lot better, what you're doing with your kids, than what he is.

Question 34:

Dr. Markham:

02:01:33.5

Our next question is: "I invited my husband to take the course with me, but he declined. He comes from a background of yelling and threats, though he rarely spansks. Despite this discipline style, my son still gravitates to him much more than to me. Therefore, my husband doesn't really see a need to try the Peaceful Parenting approach. How can I support him as a parent, while still working toward peaceful parenting myself? He often steps in with yelling or punishment when my son is not responding to my limits."

Dr. Markham:

Very interesting that your three-year-old gravitates to your husband, even though your husband yells at him. And also interesting that, your husband seems to see you as ineffectual. You set a limit, your son doesn't respond, so your husband steps in with yelling and threats, and then your son responds. I know that must be frustrating for you, but it is something you can address. I'm betting that your son feels like your husband's in charge, and he feels safe with him. It sounds like your son doesn't really see you as being in charge. He doesn't do what you say, and he may feel less safe with you.

You could measure that question by noticing, who does he go to when he's hurt? If he goes to you, then he does feel safe with you. But he gravitates your husband because he

thinks he's in charge, and maybe, also, because of fun and excitement.

Dr. Markham:

Either way, your main goal here is to become more effective yourself, as a parent. Remember, children only cooperate with us to the degree that they feel connected to us. And you've already said your son gravitates to his dad. That may be why, when you tell him to do something, he ignores you.

So I would really use every tool you've got to connect. That means, special time, daily roughhousing, empathy 24/7, and in the Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids workbook, which we did not use in this course, there are a lot more ideas for how to connect with your child and strengthen your relationship with him.

Dr. Markham:

In fact, I would suggest that you do some parenting coaching. You can see the list of coaches I've trained on the Aha! Parenting website.

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/coaches-directory>

I think that coaching will really help you to build a stronger relationship with your son, and to set limits in such a way that he'll be more responsive.

But the short version of how you set those limits is, you are firm and you're empathic. So when you ask him to do something, you are right in his face in a friendly way until he does it. And you give him as much support and understanding as you need to for him to meet your expectations. That might mean being playful. But if you're using the Peaceful Parenting tools, roughhousing, special time, if he feels connected, and if you set limits in a calm, kind, empathic, understanding, but firm way, he should do what you're telling him to do.

Dr. Markham:

And I would be very firm with your husband that he's not allowed to step in with yelling or threats if your son isn't responding to you. If that's the case, it's on you to be a more effective parent, and you know how to do that. And you're still learning. That's why you took the course. But

your husband stepping in does not help establish your authority as the parent.

So your question was, how you could support your husband as a parent, while still working toward peaceful parenting yourself.

I don't see a contradiction there. I think you're working to learn peaceful parenting by learning to set limits, and by strengthening your relationship with your son.

Your husband does yells and threats. Well, it's not a great thing, but at least he's not spanking your son. And I think, over time, as you master Peaceful Parenting, he won't need to step in, obviously, to enforce things with your son. And in fact, he's going to see that your approach works better.

But please do listen to the Happily Ever After: Conscious Co-Parenting series as well, which gives you a lot of tips on how to support your partner, even when they don't completely agree with your parenting approach.

Question 35:

Dr. Markham: 02:05:54 This parent asks: "My husband doesn't agree with my Peaceful Parenting practices. He'll mostly leave the child rearing to me, but when my daughter is acting out in a big way, hitting her brother, for instance, he'll sometimes put her in timeout. I try to explain my approach and offer rationale, but he just won't buy in. How can I reconcile this with my daughter? I often go in with her and use it as a time to let her talk, but that creates tension with my husband. She's three and a half."

Dr. Markham: The good news is, you do most of the child raising, so that's going to have the biggest effect on your daughter. And your husband is not hitting her, or even yelling at her, it sounds like. He's just putting her in timeout. And you're talking with your daughter after the fact.

So you're saying that you go in there, but that creates tension with your husband. It's even okay if you don't go

in. You could talk with her about it later. And you can empathize with her about how it didn't feel good that Daddy put her in timeout. Just let her talk about all her feelings about it. But you can also point out how her dad was really upset, and he feels frustrated, and he doesn't know what to do when she hits her little brother. So that's how he responds, because he thinks that will teach her a lesson.

Dr. Markham:

And ask her what she thinks might help her stop hitting her brother. In other words, she shouldn't be hitting her brother. That's what he gets most upset about. And that's something you can intervene to stop, and should.

I also would not give up on your husband. Keep talking with your husband about this, about why she hits, about what you're doing to stop it, to prevent it, and about the effect you think timeout has, that it actually doesn't help the hitting, and might be making it worse. So don't give up when you and your partner disagree. Keep talking about it.

Question 36:

Dr. Markham:

02:08:07.5

Our next question is: "My oldest boy, who is six, and my husband seem to have a battle with each other over who is the dominant one in the house. This leads to a lot of bickering between the two, and me having to intervene like they're both my children. What can my husband do in his behavior to keep himself calm? Clearly, this is a trigger. And for us to work on transitioning my son's behavior to be more respectful of his father."

Dr. Markham:

Well, we earn respect from our children. When we stoop to their level, and we get sucked into debates and bickering and power struggles, we are acting like kids ourselves. And they do lose respect for us. This is all about

how your husband deals with your son. And it sounds like he isn't acting like the grownup in the situation. He's acting like a kid.

So I guess my first question is, has your husband been involved in the Peaceful Parent, happy Kids online course? I think that would make a big difference.

Dr. Markham:

Even if he won't listen to the entire course, he might listen to parts of it that you pick out for him. And he also might listen to my book, Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids, on audio if he's not open to reading it.

I think, you're not going to get your child to change, unless you get your husband to change here. And if your husband won't do the work to listen to the course, read the book, then it might be that you need to go into family therapy together, so that your husband can work with a therapist who can help him see himself as the adult, who doesn't need to bicker with the child, and who can be the leader in the house.

Dr. Markham:

As far as your son's dominance, I would just add that, something you can do is to begin to use language about roles. Meaning, when you talk with your son and he says, "But I don't want to go to bed," you can say something like, "I know. It's hard to stop playing and get ready for bed. But that's not a decision kids get to make. Moms and dads are in charge of deciding bedtimes. Kids are in charge of deciding about play time, what to play during the time that they're allowed to play. But parents decide the schedule in the house, mealtimes, and bedtimes. So your dad and I say, this is bed time. Now, what you can decide is, do you want to play for five more minutes, or do you want to come right now and take your bath?"

Dr. Markham:

So you're starting to establish who makes the rules, and where his decision making purview, his span of control, begins and ends.

I would also look at the things they bicker about. Which of those things are things that need a family rule, such as, we treat each other kindly, we don't call each other names.

That might be an example of something you'd have a family rule about.

And which of those things are things your son should be allowed to decide for himself. Like, whether to accept an invitation to a birthday party from a friend, or which book he wants his parent to read him. And which things are just things parents get to decide, like what's for dinner.

Dr. Markham:

There are many things you'll listen to your son's opinion about, like what's for dinner, but you reserve the right to make that decision. And that's something you want to talk to your son about, and explain to him that, that's a decision the grownups make in the family. But you'd love to hear what he thinks. And truthfully, the more we listen to kids' preferences -- we can't always meet them -- but the more we listen and try to include them, the less conflict there is in the home, generally. And the more children feel heard and respected, and as if their happiness matters to us.

Question 37:

Dr. Markham:

02:12:02

This parent asks: "My husband is not 100% on board with this journey. His adherence to traditional parenting methods is frustrating and undermining for me. But at the same time, he feels I undermine him, too. I know I can only control myself, and peaceful practices are the best way for me to parent.

However, I don't want to make him the bad guy in my mind or the children's. What's the best way to invite him along without him feeling attacked? And if he doesn't want to come along, how do I keep from undercutting him? For instance, if he yells and my kids come to me for comfort, I want to be able to say to them, 'You don't deserve to be yelled at.'"

Dr. Markham:

I would say you can represent both points of view as you coach your child. So you can say, "That really hurt your feelings when daddy yelled at you. He was so upset about

X, Y, Z, wasn't he? Yeah. And it really upset you to be yelled at. You don't deserve to be yelled at. No one does.... Honey, can you see why daddy was upset about that? He was very frustrated, and when people are frustrated, they often lash out, don't they? You do, I do and daddy does. We all do. Your dad thinks the best way to convince you to follow our rules is to show you how upset he is by raising his voice. Did you see that happen? He was really trying to get you to follow the rules. What do you think about that?"

Your child might say, "Well, you don't have to yell at me to get me to follow the rules," and you can say, "I am so glad to hear that. I agree with you. Why don't you tell dad that?"

Dr. Markham:

Now, you aren't excusing your child's behavior. You're also not undermining your partner's attempt to address your child's behavior, and you can even be sure in that discussion that your child has a plan to address whatever his father was upset about, so he doesn't repeat the behavior. You are still supporting your child's right to be treated with respect.

Now, at some point in that discussion or some discussion with your child, it'll probably come up that your child will say, "But you don't yell at me," and you can say, "I try very hard not to shout because I don't like being shouted at, and I don't think anyone ever deserves to be shouted at. I guess your dad, maybe he feels differently, or maybe it's just a habit."

Dr. Markham:

If your child is very angry at her father, you can say, "It sounds like you really don't like it when daddy shouts at you like that. It sounds like you feel disrespected. You know how I ask you to tell me things in a calm voice so I can hear you better? You can ask your dad to do that. It might make him more angry, but if you can ask him politely, especially when he's not angry, like now, it might help him notice how his tone of voice affects you and how it affects your ability to listen to him."

Dr. Markham: I think it's a much harder job to parent when you have a partner who does not parent in the way you do, and you'll use a lot of the kinds of bridge-building techniques that you would use for siblings that are outlined in my sibling book. People have often said to me, "Wow, I read Peaceful Parent. Happy Kids and it really helped me with my husband." But then they read the sibling book and they say, "I read your sibling book, and it helped me even more because then I was able to work with my husband and my child to build a bridge between them by sort of interpreting for each of them."

Question 38:

Dr. Markham: 02:15:24.5 Our next question is: "I think my husband agrees with peaceful parenting for the most part, but he won't actually read the book or listen to the audios, so I don't think he fully gets it. He also doesn't like it if I try to coach him, so what do I do when I hear him blowing off my daughter's emotions or when he snaps and yells at her. He's not very patient and I don't think he's prepared to spend the time empathizing with her when she's whining or crying."

Dr. Markham: I think it just takes lots and lots of conversations so that he gets the importance of empathy. You'll also have to make an agreement with each other about how each of you will step in to support the other, so don't set it up as he's being stepped in on. Set it up as you want him to step in sometimes to support you, and you're there also to support him. I've got your back.

I also think the way you are with your daughter is going to be modeling for him, and he'll see that it works and he'll copy you.

I think you can step in also with, "Let's everybody calm down now. We're a family. We can figure this out together."

You can also represent to your daughter what your husband is saying. "I hear daddy saying it's time to go, and

I hear you saying you want to finish your project. You are both so upset. You're having such a hard time, and daddy's having a hard time too. He's been waiting for you to put your shoes on."

Dr. Markham:

I hear that your husband won't listen to the audios. I wonder if he would listen to the books on audio. Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids is on audio, and so is Peaceful, Parent Happy Siblings. I've heard from many people that they really strengthen the partnership, the marriage relationship.

Question 39:

Dr. Markham:

02:17:06.5

This parent asks, "My husband is not interested in the peaceful parenting course. He'll read articles and he understands intellectually this approach, but he's unable to commit without a daily practice. When he yells at our son, I become protective and attack him. We end up fighting in front of our son, so I'm helping to create this toxic environment. How can I respond in this situation while protecting my son and maintaining a positive relationship with my husband?"

Oh, it's so heartbreaking, right? You're just trying to protect your son. This is a lot harder than parenting with somebody who could be a partner with you with this approach, but it's where you are, and it's what needs to happen to be the parent you want to be to your son. You can do just what we're always trying to teach our children to do: ask for what you need without attacking the other person.

Dr. Markham:

You can ask for respectful voices in your home, and that's not an attack on your husband. You're right that attacking your husband creates a toxic environment, and if your son sees you fighting because of him, that's a heavy burden for your son to carry.

It actually sounds to me that from your description like your husband is open. He's willing to read articles. He

understands the approach intellectually. So I would have lots of nonthreatening discussions where you talk about respectful communication and you agree on a code to step in to support each other. And, of course, you do need to coach your son privately and set an example of compassion for your husband as well as for your son.

Question 40:

- Dr. Markham: 02:18:42 This question is, "Both my husband and I were raised by parents who smacked, yelled and shut down feelings. I would say I had a happy upbringing, but I certainly didn't feel like my parents were on my side. I want to change that legacy, but my husband believes his parents did a great job. There was nothing wrong with the outcome, and he continues to model the parenting style he was raised with. There's such a conflict of parenting between us. I have concerns about the impact this will have on our children. He's unwilling to change or to support my interest in change."
- Dr. Markham: This is really hard. It's the kind of thing you want to have long talks about before you have children, but, of course, that doesn't always happen, and here you are in this situation. Your husband's attitude is called avoidant or defensive in the psychology literature, which means that the person does not want to go near the pain from their childhood, so they hold a belief system that their upbringing was fine. Of course, they then have to treat their children the same way or it shows that their parents might not have been so perfect, which puts holes in their defense and that lets all the pain in. This is why many people who suffered as children cause their own children to suffer. It protects them from having to deal with their own suffering, their own pain from their childhoods.
- Dr. Markham: Anytime we're not brave enough to work through our own pain, we perpetuate it onto our children. At some point, each of us is responsible for stopping that cycle and not passing it on to the next generation. Of course, these are our beloved children, so that's the motivation often that

we need. Otherwise, this work is just too hard, but when we do it for our kids, we're willing to do it.

But some people are too defended to see that this is what's happening. So if I were to prescribe a cure, it's more consciousness, more awareness. That's the cure for most negative patterns. If your husband could become more aware of the pain he felt as a child, he would start to loosen this tight defense that deflects any ideas about a new way of parenting.

Dr. Markham:

That means the conversations about your childhoods are a good place to begin, even asking about his relationships with his parents, the things he loved and the things he didn't love. Nothing is all black or white or all good or bad, and no one is perfect or terrible. We're all shades of gray. That's how psychologists evaluate mental health. We look for maturity and understanding, the ability to not take things personally and to actually look at things and see both the positives and the negatives of them.

I don't know how much you've explored this with your husband, but it's possible he could still change. I also do need to point something out. Even if you divorce tomorrow, he's still the father of your children, so you couldn't possibly stop him from having an effect on them. He'll have visitation. They'll live with him part of the time, and in fact he'll get a new girlfriend and then **she'll** have an impact on them.

Dr. Markham:

I think we too often think, "Oh, I'll stop him being such a negative influence on the kids by getting a divorce." I'm not saying whether you should get a divorce. I don't know. But I just want to caution anyone listening to this, that even if your parenting partner has a different attitude than you do about parenting, divorce may not be the easy solution it looks like at the moment. Because your ex is still going to have plenty of opportunities to interact with the kids. Of course, you should be aware that your children do need you to protect them from abuse, physical abuse or emotional abuse. If someone's abusing your kids,

obviously you can't let that happen. You wouldn't let someone besides your partner do that to your kids.

Dr. Markham:

I would get clarity about that, about whether what's happening is actually abusive, and you may need to talk to a counselor about that, and have a real discussion to work through whether this is something you don't like, but with you there as the parent who understands, your child will be able to make it through intact, because it's very hard on kids when their parents get divorced. My parents were divorced, and they both were sorry about it later that they had gotten divorced, actually. They could have worked it through if they'd had good counseling at the time.

Dr. Markham:

I would also have lots of conversations with your partner, have a private discussion about respect, and I would model love and compassion with your partner, not just in front of your partner with your children. Then finally, I think counseling is a great option for parents in such a polarized situation. Before I would even think about a divorce, I would absolutely insist that my partner come with me to counseling. If they won't, then you could threaten separation. But again, I'm not urging you to do that. I'm saying I would pull out all the stops to get your partner to counseling, to tell them how important it is to you that you find a meeting place.

Question 41:

Dr. Markham:

02:23:51

This parent asks: "My partner says my parenting issues are because I'm inconsistent, partly true. And he says, I need to spank more. I've done that. I hate it. It doesn't work. I'm overwhelmed. He works seven days a week. He's not home evenings and weekends, and I work, come home exhausted to three kids to all the housework, baths, cooking, homework. My wellbeing is zero, and I find it difficult to give each kid 10 minutes of special time to help improve their behavior. What more can I do?"

Dr. Markham:

So, you're raising three issues here. This is just a really hard position to be in. The first is that your husband

disagrees with your parenting, but since he works seven days a week and is largely absent, that's less pressing than issue number two, which is that you're running on empty. Of course, issue number three is how you can have time for special time. The answer to that one is just start small because anything is better than nothing. You can even begin just on weekends.

But really you're asking how you even have energy for special time. I could speak with you about this for an hour, and a good parenting coach would and would help you set up a program to change your life, basically help you build a lifeboat. But all I can do on a call like this is throw you a life preserver, so here's what I'm going to say.

Dr. Markham:

This is the one life you get. I understand you feel like you have a raw deal because your husband is not an equal partner, but that attitude keeps you stuck in resentment and being a victim. If you're willing to take the responsibility to be a single parent, you can actually create a good life for yourself here, and I don't mean divorce your husband. I mean just step up to do the work and make the decisions. Just accept that he's not going to be around that much.

Of course, that means that you have to start with your own wellbeing, since you're basically operating as a single mom. Your children would benefit tremendously from special time, but what they need most is for their mother to be emotionally generous, which means in a good mood most of the time and able to respond in the moment in a healthy, supportive way. This is not easy when you have three kids and no spousal support, but it is possible.

Dr. Markham:

I encourage you to take one step every day toward that goal. Beginning today, I urge you to start a habit of listening to something on the way to work that will uplift you, and also of using a prayer or a loving affirmation towards yourself every single night as you go to sleep. Just keep taking steps in the right direction, and as you build -- You could think of it as inner resources, you could think of it as emotional clarity or spiritual power or simply a full

cup -- As you build a full cup, you'll find that you'll do better and better with your kids, and **they** will do better and better in their behavior.

This process will take months, but you will see constant encouraging signs as you go. Just keep putting one step in front of the other, and things will get better. I promise.

Question 42:

Dr. Markham: 02:26:56 This parent asks what to do when your stressed, impatient partner can't accept your four year old's big feelings and blames you for welcoming them or not setting limits on them.

Well, the first thing you do, is you have a conversation with your partner when they're not feeling stressed and impatient, and when your four-year-old is not with you. You talk about what you're learning about emotions. I know it's hard if you're just starting to learn this stuff, to communicate it. You invite your partner to listen to these audios, you invite your partner to read the book -- or I find often partners do better at listening to the audio book, which you can easily order online.

Dr. Markham: Basically your goal is to share with your partner that there is a lot of research on emotions and also on child development. It turns out that children learn to manage their emotions better when they're allowed to express them and those emotions are accepted. Emotions are not bad behavior. Now, hitting you would be bad behavior, but having big emotions is not bad behavior.

Now, that's a new idea to most people in this culture. Most people think that children express far too many emotions, and that they should learn not to do that and that limits should be said. Children should not be allowed to get upset, but of course you can't stop a child from getting upset. Children learn to manage their emotions when they see adults manage their emotions. That's number one. Children also learned to manage their

emotions when they're under conscious control, which means the emotions have to be accepted.

Dr. Markham:

If we put stoppers on the kids' emotions, if we tell them the emotions are bad, they repress the emotions, and then they don't have conscious control over them.

So first I would have that discussion with your partner, and then I would say, " I realize it's hard when our four-year-old gets really emotional and angry or upset or throws him or herself on the ground wailing. What can you and I do so we can cope better, because I know it stresses you out and it stresses me out too. What could we do in those moments that would be accepting of the child's emotions, limit behavior if necessary to keep everybody safe, and help us to stay calm and be regulated ourselves, in the face of that stress of the child's emotions. What could we do?"

Have a real discussion about it, and maybe your partner needs you to take over at those moments, because your partner just finds it too stressful when your four-year-old gets all emotional, right?

Dr. Markham:

I just think you need to be at least in communication about why you're doing what you're doing, because if you're not in that communication, then your partner thinks that you're doing something wrong. This way your partner may have a difference of opinion about what needs to happen, although they can't really have a difference of opinion with the research, which is pretty clear. They might have a difference of opinion about what should happen, and you can discuss that difference of opinion and you can agree about how you want to handle things. But otherwise, once you're in agreement about the general ideas, you can talk about the practicalities. I really suggest that the person who is most regulated at that moment is the one who steps in to deal with the child when the child is upset.

The question, of course, is how do you work that out with your partner at that moment when one of you is getting stressed? I think the answer is, "I got this. I got this,

Sweetheart." Of course, you have to make an agreement in advance.

"Okay, so what we're saying is that when one of us feels like we can handle the situation, so Hon, you can say to me, 'I got this. I got this, Sweetie. Take a break.' And I can say that to you, and hopefully the one of us who's calmest can step in at that point, and the other one, even if we're sort of engaged and feeling upset at our child, hopefully we can step aside while we calm down."

So if you make that agreement with your partner in advance, when you're both in a reasonable mood, you'll at least have something to go on when this interaction begins to unfold. If it doesn't work, you'll have to refine it. That's okay. That's how problem solving works, but at least you have an agreement between you about how to proceed.

Question 43:

Dr. Markham: 02:31:22 This is a great segue into the next question: How do you respond when your partner escalates situations that you were in the process of trying not to escalate? "My partner thinks we should have a united front, but I often disagree with his tactics. He thinks he's trying to back me up, but I find it wipes out what I'm trying to do."

So again, I think it's very hard to partner when you're in a stressful moment, no matter what you're trying to do, and if you're parenting, there are other human beings involved, so it's even harder. So I think it's far better to have the kind of conversation I just described and agree that which ever one of you is calmer, you're the one who's going to handle it. If the other partner thinks you handled it wrong, they can bring it up later, not at that moment.

Dr. Markham: That alleviates your partner stepping in when you're trying to do something and your partner just thinks you're wrong. You can have the conversation about it later. Of

course, the problem with this agreement is if your partner is doing something with the children that you think is wrong, you can't really step in. The only time I think you would step in is if your partner is breaking basic house rules or rules that you two have established for parenting. Like if your partner hits your kids, obviously, you would step in.

Dr. Markham:

If your partner is punishing your kids and you've agreed that's not going to happen, if your partner starts threatening to punish your child, you can say, "Wow, this is getting pretty intense, isn't it?" Then turn to your kid and say, "Daddy feels really strongly about this. He feels so strongly that he's saying you won't be able to go with us swimming later if you don't do what he wants right now. You know what, Sweetheart? Sounds like you really need to cooperate with your dad here. This is a really big thing for him."

Now, that's not disrespecting your partner. It's adding a little bit of a voice of reason there with your child. If your partner turns to you and says, "I got it," then I really think you walk away, and then if it's a punishment that's going to happen later, you deal with that later, right? If it's a punishment at that moment, then you have to weigh what to do. But in general, you can let your partner handle it at that moment, even if they handle it in a way you wouldn't. Then later you can have a conversation about it.

Dr. Markham:

As far as the united front thing goes, I don't believe in a united front. I don't believe that parents are the same person. I believe in house rules. We have certain house rules about the way we treat each other. We always treat each other with respect, adults and kids.

Certainly if your child is asking for something special, "Can I have an ice cream?" When the child comes to the parent to ask the parent's first question needs to be "What did mom say? or what did dad say?" That's a united front in the sense that you're not going against what the other parent has already decided. But if it's basic things like house rules and the way children are to be treated in the

house, then the united front is, look, it's hard to parent. We don't always stay patient and calm, but we try. We sometimes lose our tempers and yell, but we try not to, and we always apologize. That's the united front we need.

Question 44:

Dr. Markham: 02:34:52 This parent asks: "Our five-year-old boy does not like my husband. He's very aggressive toward him, hitting him for no reason. If my husband says 'I love you,' he says 'I hate you' or 'You're stupid.' He's defiant with both of us, but more with my husband."

So this is very challenging, obviously, and it's interesting because the three and the six-year-old are not having this issue, so there's something about the way the five-year-old and your husband are relating to each other that's an issue, and we don't know what that is.

It might be that your partner relates differently to the three-year-old and six-year-old than the five-year-old, and your five-year-old is therefore on the defensive and angry and embittered toward his dad.

Dr. Markham: I think it's also really possible that when the three-year-old was born, that dad had to step in and take care of the five-year-old more, and the five-year-old felt like his access to mom was now limited, and it was dad who was in the way keeping him from getting to mom. I'm betting that's probably what's going on, and that, therefore, your son got angry at dad and was nasty to him. And now dad might respond differently to that son and then to the other kids.

There's a game you can use for this. It's called the, "you can't get to mommy" game, and it's designed to help your child realize that he has unfettered access to you; that dad is not the problem.

I've seen it happen over and over again that when you use that game, kids get past this and they start to be willing to spend time with dad. Their hostility toward him turns out

to have really not been so much about dad, but about wanting to have access to mom.

Dr. Markham:

So that game is explained in an article called "Playing with Your Child: Games for Connection and Emotional Intelligence" on the Aha! Parenting website. I urge you to give it a try, because I've seen it work over and over again. I'm betting that that's what's going on. If you use this game and your son loves it and wants to play it, then bingo, you know that you're on the right track. Keep playing it for as long as he's the least bit into it, and he'll get past it. He won't be as interested in it after a week or two, and that's fine because I think you'll see a change in how he relates to his dad at that point.

Question 45:

Dr. Markham:

02:37:31

Our next question is: "I rarely yell at my kids, but I'm challenged because my partner stays at home with the child and is a living example of the results of punishment. No guidance with emotions when he was young, so he gets triggered between one and five times a day. He takes everything personally. He starts yelling and doesn't stop. He won't listen while he's angry, makes emotional jabs, leaves in a huff when he doesn't get his way and then later feels bad. How can I catch him up on what he didn't get as a child?"

Dr. Markham:

So this is heartbreaking. Your partner needs therapy, and you can't catch him up. It's going to have to be therapeutic help that he gets. I would say do everything you can to get him into counseling, not by himself, but with you. I say that because I've seen situations where people get their partner into counseling, and then they don't focus on their anger issues. They don't focus on what's really the problem. They go to therapy for a long time, sorting out their career options or whatever. I would present this as couples counseling that you want to go to with him so you can learn to work through issues together better. Then when you get to a couples counseling, you tell the therapist what you've told me about your husband's anger

issues, and that you want constructive ways for you and him to both self-regulate with your child. This will be a process. It'll take a lot of love and patience on your part, but if your partner will do this, this could really transform things.

I want to add that you would not leave your child with a daycare provider who got triggered one to five times a day and yelled at your child, so please do not leave your child alone with your partner. You need to start your three-year-old in daycare.

Question 46:

Dr. Markham: 02:39:28 Our next question is: "My daughter's father was a great dad when she was small, but as she got older, he started using corporal punishment like a slap on the behind or pinching her hard. This has created conflict between us. I want to leave him because of this, but I can't right now economically. In the meantime, when he does hit her, what do I do to respond to her when she comes crying? What do I say to him?"

Well, I think what you say to him is the two of you need to start counseling together now, or you'll leave. Then you do have to follow through if he won't do it, but I think you'll see that he'll go into counseling. It's not that he doesn't love his daughter, it's that he's acting out of a compulsion from the way he was obviously parented.

Dr. Markham: When your daughter comes crying to you, you comfort her and you tell her you are so sorry. When daddy was little, this is how he was treated, so when he gets mad he forgets to use his words, and he instead lashes out physically. He's still learning how to not do that, and you are so very sorry. But she will perceive your inaction here, not defending her, as saying that it is okay to let a man hurt her physically. That's how she'll perceive this, so you do have to get him to counseling.

Question 47:

Dr. Markham: 02:40:50.5 The next question is:. "My spouse has done a lot of therapy and reading and has improved, and he embraces your theories, but occasionally he lapses into what I see as hypocritical or even abusive statements or physical actions. How can I support my kids during or after a lapse? Please don't advise divorce. There's been too much improvement for that, and there's too much love."

So I would say keep working, talk openly, non-defensively, regularly, about the things that you see happening. Acknowledge your co-parent's desire to raise a great kid, and also how when they get triggered they're afraid and acting from that fear. Acknowledge your own fear about how physical punishment and harsh statements will affect your children. Because again, if that's happening in your home and you're observing it, your children get the message that it's okay for someone to treat them like that.

Dr. Markham: You're saying how do you support your kids? You support your kids by telling them that their dad had a childhood where this was standard procedure, so he still automatically does some of those things. He's still working through that. They should tell him. Coach them. "You can tell your dad, 'When you say things like that, it hurts my feelings, daddy.'" So coach your kids to stand up for themselves the same way you would coach them to stand up to a friend's negative statements to them. Also, I do recommend therapy. I'm not recommending divorce, I hear you. But I am recommending therapy. I would say couples counseling or even family counseling.

Question 48:

Parent: 02:42:38 I have a three and a half year old and one and a half year old and just to quickly share something, I was very tired one night and my daughter asked me, "Mommy, are you sad?" and I said, "Yes, honey", and she just said, "I love you." She just hugged me like I hug her each time, like you

have been teaching me. So thank you, this has been really amazing.

Laura Markham:

Oh, how wonderful.

Parent:

I think I have done a lot of work now with the kids and I know how your voice is magic to me. I really need help also to take down those blocks around my heart and I would like to ask for some suggestions if you can.

Laura Markham:

Oh, so I'm hearing that you feel still some blocks around your heart even though you've done a lot of work and that...

Parent:

With my husband.

Laura Markham:

With your husband? I see. So you're okay with the kids, but your husband is the issue?

Parent:

Yes. It's basically the last one year I have been doing everything alone and it's just really, really hard to take care of two little kids like this and it takes a lot away.

Laura Markham:

Yes, it's so hard.

Parent:

Somehow we lost the connection because we actually don't have time.

Laura Markham:

Yes. It's very hard when he's working all the time and you don't have time to connect. And when you have a backlog, it sounds like, of a little bit of resentment too, that you've resented that he hasn't been there for you.

Parent:

Yes.

Laura Markham:

So I want to tell you that when my son was born, I had some of those same feelings because my husband worked all the time and I worked really hard to get rid of those feelings and my relationship with my husband is wonderful at this point and I was able to do it. So don't give up hope. It is completely possible to reclaim your love for your husband. That's the first thing I would say.

The second thing I would say is you have to start with self care because if you don't take care of yourself, you can't be emotionally generous to someone else and it's even hard to forgive him for not being there and you'll resent that he's not showing up to help you. So anything you can do to care for yourself really matters a lot. Did you listen to the couples audio that I put up one of the weeks earlier in the course? Did you listen to that one?

Parent: Yes, I listened to that. That was very helpful. It has been really helping me a lot. Because, I don't know, when I listen to it, it's really like an angel. It's really helping me a lot and I was wondering if there's anything else or you have written anything else.

Laura Markham: I haven't written a book about couples. I've written a couple of articles. They're on the website.

Parent: Thank you. Somehow you really reached my heart and it really has been doing a lot of miracles in me. So I'm really looking forward to that so I can connect again with my husband because I miss him.

Laura Markham: Of course, of course. You can. And you will. You will.

Parent: Thank you.

Laura Markham: You're very welcome. Good night.

Dr. Markham: 02:45:42 That's all our questions for today. Thank you for listening, and I hope this was helpful. If you still have a burning question that wasn't answered on this audio, please submit it for possible inclusion on my podcast. Just go to ahaparenting.com/podcasts, so A- H-A parenting.com/podcast, and leave your question as a voice memo. This is Dr. Laura Markham, wishing you less drama and more love. Goodbye for now.