Setting Limits and Discipline with Children Ages 7 & Older Q and A with Dr. Laura Markham

Dr. 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 setting limits and discipline with ages seven and up. 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, let's see how to apply these three big ideas to daily life with children.

Question 1:

Parent:	00:00:42	We're trying to focus on building connection right now. It seems to be working somewhat, but limit setting without punishment is a concept that we really struggle with.
Dr. Laura Markham:	00:00:53	I hear you.
Parent:	00:00:54	And we have rules about picking up after oneself and limits on computer time, et cetera. But if the child's informed of the limit or expectation, ignores it and continues to violate the limit, we're kind of at a loss what to do then. I mean, for example, if our child's on the computer for an allotted fixed period of time and that time expires, and the child continues to play, our policy is not to let them play the next day on the computer, but how do we get them to stop without physically grabbing the computer from their hands, which only leads to violence from the child toward the parent? If we inform them that they've exceeded their limit and they continue to play for

a lengthy period, don't they just learn that they can ignore the limits?

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:01:39 Yes, they do. That is exactly what they learn. You're right.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:01:43 That is what they learn. Yeah. And it's not the message you want to give them. You're absolutely right.

Parent: 00:01:47 Right. What do we do?

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:01:48 Well, first of all let me ask you how old your kids are.

Parent: 00:01:54 12, 10 and seven.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:01:56 Okay.

Parent: 00:01:59 And if one of them is on the computer then they all crowd around and watch as well.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:02:02 Of course. Oh my goodness.

Parent: 00:02:04 It's very frustrating.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:02:05 And you know, the thing about screens is they're harder than other limits because they're addictive. If we're honest, we know that screens are addictive and there's a lot of research that now proves that this is true. You know like, you put your cell phone anywhere within your sight and scientists have shown how distracting it is. That's how addicted we are to our cell phones. And certainly they spend a lot of money to make those games that your kids are playing completely addictive to the kids. Right? So we know that.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:02:40 The first thing I would do is I would sit down and have that conversation. "We've been struggling a lot about screen time and what our policies are around it and what the limits are around it. And I want to ask you guys what you

think. Do you think our policies are fair, how much screen time you get to have? Uh-huh (affirmative), uh-huh (affirmative), tell us more. How does it feel when you have to stop? Yeah, it feels bad, doesn't it? Yeah, well you know it turns out that's because your brain is really enjoying being on the computer and playing this game, and your brain is releasing all kinds of biochemicals like dopamine that are making you love doing it. And if you go to interrupt that and stop playing, you know what happens? It's really hard to stop. If you eat an ice cream sundae, it's hard to stop eating an ice cream sundae, right? But sooner or later you get full and then you don't want it anymore. But with brains it doesn't actually work that way. You would have to do it for days before you got full and didn't want to do it anymore. Or how long do you think it would take?"

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:03:49 Then you listen to them some more and they tell you how long it would take. And you have a fun discussion about the nature of addiction. That's really what we're talking about. Then you say, "Well, given this," and maybe this is what you start with, "How do you feel when you have to stop?" Then you say, "So what about the amount of screen time you're allowed to have? What do you think?"

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:04:12 Well if the 10-year-olds are doing the game and the 12-year-old and seven-year-old are watching, "Is that part of your screen time? And that means you're getting more screen time."

Parent: 00:04:23 Right.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:04:23 "So it's hard to know how much screen time to give you given that. What do you think is a fair amount?" So I would actually have that discussion and then I would ask the question about, "Well, given that you have other responsibilities like homework and you all have a little bit to do around the house for chores, you have to feed the dog or set the table," or whatever your chores are, and,

		"We want some family time and of course we all want to eat dinner together, you have to get enough sleep every night, given all that, does it even make sense to do screen time on the weekday?"
Parent:	00:04:59	Right.
Dr. Laura Markham:	00:04:59	I mean, so let me ask you that. Do you have screen time on weekdays?
Parent:	00:05:04	Yes, they get 30 minutes a day during the week.
Dr. Laura Markham:	00:05:10	And then what about on weekends?
Parent:	00:05:12	On weekends they get 40 minutes.
Dr. Laura Markham:	00:05:15	Okay. And they each get 30 minutes, so they're really getting an hour a half combined, is that right?
Parent:	00:05:21	Yeah, a lot of times when they do crowd around and watch, yes. But we try not to let them do that, but they wind up doing it. Yeah.
Dr. Laura Markham:	00:05:36	Yeah, I understand.
Dr. Laura Markham:	00:05:38	Let me ask you a question, do you feel like this cuts into other things they might be doing things like kicking a soccer ball outside, or building a tower or a LEGO machine, or whatever? What do you think?
Parent:	00:05:52	Yes, yes. Very much so.
Dr. Laura Markham:	00:05:59	I personally think that while 30 minutes a day sounds completely reasonable, the problem is that it ends up being an hour and a half and that they don't do other things. So by the time they get home from school, have a snack, do homework, spend an hour and a half dealing with the computer, then it's time for dinner, you know?

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:06:24 So I wonder if you actually even want to have a rule in your family that they're allowed to do this every single day.

Parent: 00:06:32 Right.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:06:33 That's a question I would ask you and your wife. So you and your wife are going to have to have this discussion I think. Personally, I wouldn't. I wouldn't let kids do computer screen time during the week. I would give them more time on the weekend if that works for you.

Parent: 00:06:57 Sometimes we split them up so that one is using the iPad and one is using the computer, so it's not like an hour and a half every day.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:07:08 Okay.

Parent: 00:07:09 But sometimes it winds up being more, yeah.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:07:11 Okay.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:07:12 Well so it's possible, it sounds like, you can do something to make it shorter, right?

Parent: 00:07:17 Sure.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:07:17 That they can be split up that way, although not always.

Parent: 00:07:20 Yeah.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:07:22 So for me, it's a matter of opinion. Every family has to make a decision about how they want the children's time to be used. But my opinion is, the children need time outside and need time to run around and should not be sitting at computers. They're going to sit at computers for the rest of their lives like the rest of us.

Parent: 00:07:39 Right.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:07:40 And they shouldn't be doing it for an hour and a half in the afternoons. And here's the thing, more and more, I don't know about your 12-year-old yet, but very soon all of your children are going to do all of their homework on the computer.

Parent: 00:07:54 Right.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:07:54 So they're going to be in front of the screen anyway when they come home from school for two hours every day while they do their homework.

Parent: 00:08:02 Right.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:08:02 Right? So I think that's a discussion to have, and it may be that you're going to put a new policy into effect, and you would still have the discussion that I mentioned just having, but you might actually end up with a different policy, like, "Fridays are fine, no problem. Friday, Saturday, Sunday, three days out of the seven you're allowed to have screen time, but not Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. That's just the way it goes, or Thursday."

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:08:27 That might be what you'll do with the policy. Or maybe you'll leave the policy exactly as it is. But I think you start from the discussion of it's addictive. And then I would say, "Here's the thing, when you get to the end of your time it's really hard to stop. Really hard to stop. But I'm not willing to get into a physical tug-of-war with you to get you to stop. That's actually violence and that's not what we're going to have in our home. No way. So if that's what happens, then there can't be computer time. Period. So what are we going to do help you?"

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:09:08 "I totally get it's hard to stop. It is addictive, that's why it's hard to stop. So what can I do to support you so that you're actually able to stop using the computer when your time is up?" And I would brainstorm with them. I would let all three of them give you ideas, write all the ideas down,

you and your wife can throw in ideas, and say, "Hmm, okay. Cool, this is interesting." And maybe some of the ideas will be, "Well, just let us keep playing." And you can say, "Well, that's not an idea I'm going to agree with, but we'll write all the ideas down." And I would write them all down.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:09:43 If you can, take a big piece of paper and write it down. Hold it up and everyone can see them because your kids now can read. But if not, you can have it on a smaller piece of paper and just read them back to the group. And you can say, "Now, which ideas can we all agree with?" Obviously the two adults have to agree with the other ideas. You know? You're not going to have an idea that says, "We're going to extend it more than 30 minutes."

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:10:09 So if they need a warning at 25 minutes, it's their job to set the timer for 25 minutes when they first sit down. I have found that it's very helpful to most kids to know what they're going to do next, like there's something they're going to do next. And I've also found it helpful to most kids to have something physical that they're going to do.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:10:37 So start a ritual, a routine that they do every time they stop the computer. So like before they sit down at the computer, maybe they have a little ritual like they stretch and they do a jumping jack, they do something, right? And then when they sit down, they do their 25 minutes, the buzzer goes off and they're like, "Oh, I need more time," and you say, "You know how it is, kids. Sorry, no more time. 30 minutes." And they do the 30 minutes.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:11:04 Then, at the end of the 30 minutes when they get up, which is really hard to do, they get up and they have a little ritual that they engage in, which is like the stretch and they do a jumping jack, or they give you a high five... Well you're not necessarily standing there to give them a high-five, and neither is anyone else necessarily, although maybe their brothers are and they can give their brothers

a high-five, whoever's there gets a high-five. But something physical is usually very helpful. And go get a drink of water.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:11:33 And you can say, "Your body gets dehydrated when it's under pressure, when it's under stress. And it's stressful to play your game because it takes a lot of focus and energy, so go get a drink of water and it replenishes your body. That's great." Something that is a regular ritual that they do actually turns out to make it much easier for them to tear themselves away. But in the end, it's going to be that they know they can't get more time. If you're walking away, they're getting more time. So if they know they can't get more time, then they're going to be more willing to go ahead and do it.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:12:06 Now, you have all this discussion in advance, you write down what your agreement is and you say, "I'm going to help you to remember this before you get on the computer." Next time, tomorrow, whoever's home with them says, "We're going to go over these rules. And you're signing them right now. We're all signing that these are our new computer agreements. We're all signing them," including the seven-year-old, "And tomorrow we're going to review them before you get on the computer," and here's the question, "What if at the end of the time it's still so hard for you to stop using the computer that you don't want to get up? What's going to happen then?"

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:12:43 And the boys will look at you and say, "I don't know. What's going to happen?" And you say, "Well, what would be the right thing to do?" And they'll say, "Well, I guess I couldn't use it the next day." I would say, "You know what? If I have to take it and do it for you, I think it means you cannot use the computer. You're actually not capable of turning it off, and we should try again when you're older." And they're going to be like, "What!? That's ridiculous." And you're going to say, "Well, that's how strongly I feel about this. So we need to make sure we

have an agreement about what happens here. It can't just be that you skip it the next day. We've been trying that and it's not been effective. And I'm not getting into a fist fight with you about turning off the computer, so what are we going to do?"

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:13:26 And I think a 12-year-old and a 10-year-old are old enough to keep to this if they get how serious it is, don't you?

Parent: 00:13:34 Yep. Yes.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:13:35 Okay. And they'll keep the seven-year-old in line probably. Don't you think?

Parent: 00:13:40 I think so. He's actually the best at turning it off when told.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:13:46 Fantastic. So the 10-year-old and the 12-year-old are pushing the limit because they can and because they've gotten away with it. So what you're basically saying is, "It's a privilege to use the computer. We're going to sign an agreement about what we're going to do with it. We're going to listen to everything you say. We're going to acknowledge how hard it is. We're going to offer you support. And if you actually can't do it, if it's just too hard for you to use the computer, then you can't do it. So we're going to try again when you get a little older."

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:14:13 And they're going to be like, "That's crazy." And you'll say, "All right, then we'll try again next month." I mean, I would seriously... I know that it's a punishment in that sense, but I don't see it that way. I see it as you're taking the child out of the sandbox because they can't stop throwing sand.

Parent: 00:14:26 Right.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:14:27 And I would just use that as your example, "If a kid's throwing sand, he can't be in the sandbox. If you can't turn off the computer, you can't use the computer."

Parent: 00:14:39 Right, yep.

Dr. Laura Markham:	00:14:40	What do you think?
Parent:	00:14:40	Sounds good.
Dr. Laura Markham:	00:14:40	All right. Wonderful. Thank you so much.
Parent:	00:14:41	Thank you.
Dr. Laura Markham:	00:14:43	And I want to say that I know that it's a work in progress for most families to know how to get kids to cooperate without punishing. And if you have the confidence that it can be done, it can be done. And it does mean that you will have to set limits, and sometimes those will be really stern limits, like, "You can't use the computer if you can't turn it off when it's time."
Dr. Laura Markham:	00:15:06	But I do think that as your kids get their natural scientist, they watch what happens, and then they adjust accordingly. And if they find that you get in their face, in a friendly way, but you get in their face and say, "Oops, oops, oops, wait a minute. Time's up. Your buzzer went off." They will respond to that. If they know that you will ignore them, that you'll throw up your hands and leave the room, then why wouldn't they continue to push those limits?
Dr. Laura Markham:	00:15:36	So I think a lot of it is connection, which is what this parent said. He and his wife are working on this at home, but a lot of it also just being willing to follow through on your limits and with full presence and with a sense of humor, but saying, "You know what? This isn't okay. This is not what we're going to do. Sorry Buster, you know better than that. Come on, let's go." And you're the leader and as long as you show up calmly and with understanding and with authority, as I'm saying, as you hear it in my voice, you can be totally empathic and completely in charge at the same time.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:16:17 "Excuse me, you know what our rule is. Come on. Let's go." That's being the leader. And children actually want you to be the leader. They may challenge you and say you're too strict or whatever, "You're mean, I hate you," but the truth is, as long as you aren't being disrespectful to them, as long as you're being empathetic to them, as long as you're not yelling and losing control of yourself, but as long as you're empathetic to them, and you're clear about the limits you're setting, children want to follow your lead. And they do have to feel like their needs are taken into account, which is why we didn't just lay down the law when we talked about what this parent would do with his three kids. We suggested that he really listen to them, open the discussion by talking about how hard it is to stop playing computer when you've been playing. But we also talked about a really clear limit, and really acting on your values. You're the parent.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:17:31 So I think if you're struggling with limits, it helps to know that it's good to set them really clearly. Even while you're empathizing, it's important that you set them really clearly, so kids know where that limit is and they don't have to keep testing to find out where it is.

Question 2:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:17:48 A parent is asking about when her kid openly disobeys to her face. He comes home, he's 10-years-old. She says, "It's time for homework," and he runs out the door to ride his bike instead and doesn't come back in for a half an hour. So when he disobeys you, address the why, the needs and feelings that made him disobey. And you set clear expectations and you give him support to meet your expectations in the future, right? Which you do partly by helping him solve whatever problem is keeping him from disobeying.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:18:20 So when he comes back inside, you sit him down and you say, "Wow, you came home and I said it was time for homework, and you said, 'Not now,' and you ran out to ride your bike. I called you in, but you didn't come back." So notice there's as little judgment as possible in that, but I'm describing what happened. And then you try to connect, you're trying to understand his position. "I guess you didn't feel ready to do your homework. Is that right?" And then you listen to what he says. And then you reflect what he says.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:18:51 So you might say, "So you just wanted to move around some before you started your homework?" Those are the needs and feelings driving his disobedience, right? And you ask more questions. You know, "Was there some part of you that knew it was a bad idea when I had asked you to stay here? Was there something else you could've done? What kept you from listening to that part of you?" Those are really important questions for whatever the kid has done.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:19:20 Then you need to talk about your expectations, but really listen to him first and reflect what he says and say, "Well, you do need to do your homework before dinner, when you first get home before you go out and play. How are we going to avoid this problem tomorrow?" And you have to help him solve the problem. Maybe he does need to move around, ride his bike. Can he ride his bike before he can do his homework? Make an agreement with him, write it down, both of you sign it, review it that night, review it the next morning, review it again when he gets home from school, celebrate it when it's successful. This may seem like a lot of work when he should have just obeyed you, but it's a great learning opportunity for him to develop self-management skills, and also for you too, to develop great problem solving skills for win-win solutions.

Question 3:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:20:02 This parent asked about how to set limits rather than punishment with teenagers. How do you set limits for technology? So you set limits with teens by first talking with your partner about what you think is non-negotiable. And then you sit down in a family meeting to discuss the issue. I would do technology by itself, it's such a big issue. I wouldn't do a lot of issues at once.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:20:25 So you state the issue from your perspective. "You know, kids there's a lot of research showing screens are addictive. Games are really fun, but they're just one part of life. Your dad and I, we want to be sure that you're keeping your grades up and taking care of your bodies and participating in our family life." And they roll their eyes. You go, "I know. You'd rather just be with your friends or playing your games, but you know what? Someday you'll be happy that you had a good family that you came from. I've noticed that sometimes screen time is eating into homework time, or sleep time, or connection time with the family. Let's talk about how we can keep a healthy relationship with our screens." Then whatever they say you listen, you restate it and you can come up with a short list of suggestions, agreements that you can all live with.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:21:13 Then, after you have the agreements, you can say, "We all know screens are addictive. Every one of us, even me, might be tempted to break these agreements at some point. We might be tempted even daily, but that doesn't mean it'd be a good thing to do, right? We came up with these agreements for a reason. So what can we do if we're tempted to break our agreements? If I'm tempted to have my phone when I go to bed, which is a really bad idea scientists tell us. And that's in our agreement, we don't have phones in the bedroom. So what can we do to support ourselves, to keep the agreement?" And then you

write down those ideas and you say, "These are really great ideas. These are really going to help."

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:21:50 "But what happens if somebody does break the agreement? What if I do take my phone into my room? What if you take your phone into your bedroom? What should happen then?" And the kids will probably say some sort of consequence. And you're not coming up with this and imposing it after the fact as punishment, and these kids are not four or six. They are 16. So it's actually, I think, if it's an agreement on the rules, it's more like if you throw sand in the sandbox, you have to get out of the sandbox. That's the rule of using the sandbox. "The rule of being allowed to have a cell phone is you do not sleep with it under your pillow because it's going to give you brain cancer. No, you leave it in the docking station with everybody else's phones down in the living room," or wherever place, you know, the entryway to the house or whatever.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:22:38 So if someone takes the phone into their bedroom, what do we do when they break that agreement? What kind of repair is warranted? Because some trust was broken as well, right? So whatever they come up with as the answer to that, that's what you write down. And it might not be about phone privileges, it might be about making a repair to trust with you.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:23:05 So then you write down your family agreement, everybody signs it. You shake on it, literally you shake on it, and you post it. Then you expect there are going to be infractions. You handle them graciously using your family agreement. "Those same questions I listed earlier, was there some part of you that knew this was a bad idea? What kept you from listening to that part of you? How will you handle that impulse next time? What can you do to make things better now?"

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:23:28 You may need another meeting to refine your agreement. Now, I know you're probably thinking that this is harder than just laying down the law to your teenagers, and of course it is. You're having to share power. You're having to keep your sense of humor. You're having to be patient. But there's much more chance that they'll keep the agreement, and even enforce it with each other, and you're teaching your kids life skills that are really important.

Question 4:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:23:49 Our next question is from a parent who says,"My 10-year-old will only do chores, or cooperate in other ways if there's a reward in it, or she's in a good mood. She makes grunting noises. Later she'll feel bad and apologize, but this behavior keeps going on."

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:24:06 So this isn't just about the chores, it's about being considerate of other people. So I wonder if you could strengthen your connection with her, so she wants to cooperate. I would talk to her about this when she's in a good mood too. Talk about the grunting. Play a game where you grunt at each other and get her laughing about it. But then tell her the grunting feels like an attack to you and you want her to use your words. And what code should you use at that moment if she grunts again at you? Make it really funny so that when she does grunt at you when you say, "Time to clean up your room," or, "Oh no, don't play that piano. So and so's sleeping," and she grunts at you. You need a code you can use. I mean, you could say, "Ouch, are you grunting at me?" And you could turn it into something funny that way, or you could ignore it.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:24:54 But probably the best thing to do is to have a code you've agreed on that's funny, that you use during the game with her where you grunt at each other, and then in the future when she grunts, you could get her laughing, and that way

you've transformed those moments that were disrupting your relationship, and you're using it as an opportunity to get closer.

Question 5:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:25:14 This parent has a seven-year-old who gets upset easily, and she's got a long list of things her seven-year-old does. "All these things make me upset at her and I can't help but yell at her because the fact is she's always upset because she yells back at me or she shuts down."

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:25:30 So you're in a negative cycle with another person. That person is your child though. And it's an unequal power dynamic, which means you're the one who has to take the responsibility to stop it. She doesn't have the same internal resources you do. And also, our children depend on us to be their mirrors. So how you see her is how she's going to see herself. So when you yell at her like this, you're scaring her and you're proving to her that she's a bad person. Someone who's so bad that even her mother can't think she's good.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:26:06 So I understand she's a difficult kid. I understand she does all these things to drive you crazy. But you have a choice here. You can wait for your daughter to change, or you can change yourself. And if you wait for your daughter to change I guarantee you this will get worse, and worse, and worse, your life will be miserable, and you will be raising a child who has a miserable life for the rest of her life.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:26:29 So I advise you to pick option B, changing yourself. And it's really hard, and I see you've already started it and that's why you're taking this course. You are working on

changing yourself, so I want to give you credit for that and you can keep going in this direction. You can change yourself enough to have things with your daughter be different. That means regulating your own emotions, so no matter what your daughter does, you respond with positivity instead of negativity.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:27:00 Of course, you still need to set limits. She can't hit her brother for instance. But that aggressive behavior, I think, is going to go away once she's not getting yelled at because it comes from fear and when you yell, you're scaring her. And she's still not going to be easy, I understand. She's not an easy person. But when you change how you're relating to her, she will change how she's acting. I guarantee it.

Question 6:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:27:27 We have a question here about lying. "I'm heartbroken to see my eight and six-year-old boys lying constantly. Especially the oldest seems to assume he can get away with lying to his parents, the school and everybody in general. We confront him every time we find him lying and it's very hard to get him to finally admit that he has done something wrong."

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:27:50 Well, if you're confronting him, he wouldn't admit it. None of us want to admit that we've done something wrong, and we certainly don't want to do it when we're being confronted. So to be fair to this parent, the parent continues, "We highlight the fact that mistakes are acceptable to us and we're there to help, but we need to know the truth." And that's great. That does sound like you're on the right track of not shaming and blaming. The question is does he need to accept his own responsibility?

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:28:17 Well, kids who are lying do not feel safe. So there's a famous story about this, Gandhi's grandson lied to him. Gandhi's grandson forgot to pick him up one day when he was hanging out with the other kids and was supposed to drive his grandfather home, and he forgot to pick his grandfather up. And when he finally did show up he had a big excuse for what had happened. It was a trumped up excuse that he was lying about. Here's what Gandhi could have said, "I know you're lying to me. Making mistakes is okay, but you need to tell me the truth. You have to admit that you did something wrong here."

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:28:59 Notice that's going to harden the kid into his position. Here's what Gandhi said, "Something about me must not be safe enough for you to tell me the truth." Wow. So that's what I guess I would encourage you to think. When a child is younger and is lying, like a three or a four-year-old, you don't even get heavy about it. You just say, "I know you wish you washed your hands. I guess you wished you washed your hands, but these hands aren't clean. I can tell by touching and smelling them. Come on, let's go wash your hands. We'll wash your hands together."

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:29:31 But when a child is six or eight, and it says (in this question) especially the oldest, so the eight is hardened into this position, then lying has become the way they cope. They've either have been punished or they've been shamed and blamed in a way that they experience that as punishment. And they feel that they are not good enough, and the only way that they will be accepted is to lie.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:29:52 I think there's something serious in the relationship here. And with an eight-year-old I would go to counseling. You could start by doing a coaching session with a parenting coach, and there is a page on the Aha! Parenting website, and you can link to it from the course page, The Peaceful Parent Happy Kids course, but it's on the Aha! Parenting website.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:30:17 So there's a page there of coaches who I have trained. And they're all wonderful. And you could work with somebody for a couple of sessions, but because your oldest is eight, I don't know that there's anything that a coach can say. There may be something I'm missing here because I just have this one question, so maybe there's something a coach will immediately see and will say, "You know, this is happening because of XYZ." But since your kid is already eight, I would probably go to counseling. I would go to a therapist who works with kids and parents, who's going to see you together.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:30:49 I would in the sessions say, "I want to know what is unsafe about me and about my partner that our eight-year-old and our six-year-old," and they're both in the session with you, "Feels the need to lie to us. I feel there must be something I'm doing that's making it not safe." And I would work with that in a counseling session and have them tell you with the help of a counselor. Because this is a serious issue. Not because I think lying is serious in itself, but because it's a serious indicator of a problem in the relationship with the child. I want to make sure that you handle this before your kid gets any older.

Question 7:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:31:33 A parent asks about her eight-year-old lying a lot about minor things. Brushing teeth you mentioned. "I guess you wished you had brushed your teeth." So yes, you say, "I guess you wish you had brushed your teeth. Come on, let's go." And of course you're not going to set her up by asking whether she's brushed her teeth if you can see that she has a milk mustache. You mentioned you could tell because she had a milk mustache. Well if you see she has a milk mustache, don't ask if she brushed her teeth. That's trapping her in a lie.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:32:01 Maybe it happens that you just say, "Oh it's time to brush your teeth," and she says, "I already did," and then you see the milk mustache or whatever. "You say you left your homework at school because of XYZ. I guess you wish you hadn't left your homework at school. And you need to explain to me somehow why you did it. But you know what Sweetheart? You don't have to tell me a whole story about it. I would always understand. Is it so scary to tell me? What do you think I'd say or do?"

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:32:28 So Gandhi said, "What about me wasn't safe enough for you to tell me the truth?" And I think that's where I would go first with a kid who lies a lot. But sometimes of course kids lie, not because they're afraid of your reaction, but because they're ashamed of themselves. So if she expresses embarrassment, I would talk about that possibility too. Like embarrassment that she left her homework at school. Tell her that embarrassment is a message, but she doesn't have to lie to get rid of the embarrassment, to act like that didn't happen. She can do something else to get rid of the embarrassment. And that is to take action. Like, "How can you remember tomorrow so you won't be embarrassed?" Right?

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:33:11 And if it's something she's lying about because she feels out of integrity, like she shouldn't have done it, then I would ask her what she needs to do to get back into integrity. She might not know what the word means. It just means being your best self and doing what you know is right. All kids should know the word integrity. And hopefully that will help her not to lie.

Question 8:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:33:33 This parent says, "My strong-willed eight-year-old has a hard time making repairs after she hurts someone. Am I expecting too much of her to apologize?"

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:33:41 I don't think so. I think you're expecting too little. It's great that she can move on and play nicely with them like you describe, but if she's hurt him I think you need to set the expectation that she makes a repair. I would do that not by blaming and shaming her, but by telling both kids at the same time that this is your family policy now. And brainstorm together with those kids a list of things that someone could do to make a repair and write it down and put it on the fridge. Like, apologize, hug them, draw pictures for them, do a chore for them, sing a song with them or for them.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:34:16 As you make the list you could ask each person, your two kids and maybe your partner if you have one, what thing they would most like. "If you do something to hurt their feelings accidentally or on purpose," Or accidentally I would say, "And you need to make a repair with them, what would they most like you to do? Do a chore for them? Give them a hug? Say you're sorry? What would be their most important things?

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:34:39 And of course you can talk about the kinds of things that might require a repair. When you tell your children to go to bed at night, that's not a breach of the relationship. It doesn't require a repair even if they don't like it. But hurting someone's feelings or their body requires a repair. So that's an important thing to talk about because it's clear that if your daughter hurt somebody she owes them a repair.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:34:59 This doesn't have to be one discussion, but also discuss with your children how hard it can be to admit when you're wrong. And talk about how you feel when someone offers you a repair, "Don't you feel closer to them?" And what about when someone refused to admit they're wrong? "Do you admire that person? Probably not."

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:35:17 So start holding the expectation that each of your children makes the repair that is necessary. You can say to her,

"You know, you don't have to decide what to do right now to repair with your brother, but you need to come tell me sometime before dinner. I know you'll come up with just the right thing." And then expect it of her.

Question 9:

Parent:	00:35:37	Dr. Laura, I've been doing some parenting education for single parents for about 10 years and took your class as continued education and there are aha moments, lots of aha moments.
Dr. Laura Markham:	00:35:53	Great.
Parent:	00:35:53	And it correlates with some of the things that I have been teaching. My question is, I am a parent of adult children. And I have one daughter, I was a single mom raising her and made lots of mistakes. So do you have any advice of older parents to backpedal a little bit. I know connection is important and we're very close. But she's actually coming down here in about a week and a half and we're going to do a lot of talking about some forgiveness and moving on. So any advice that you can give?
Dr. Laura Markham:	00:36:30	Yeah. I would say that it can be really hard when you realize that you didn't parent perfectly. And no one does. The problem is no one does.
Dr. Laura Markham:	00:36:45	So if your child feels safe with you when they're older, whether they're a teen, or in their 20s or 30s, they'll start to talk to you about it. And they'll say things like, "You know Mom, it really was bad for me when XYZ happened to me," or, "I really felt that you weren't there for me in XYZ ways." And it will always hurt when your child says this.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:37:10 So my advice is to always go into those discussions with a great deal of love for yourself and compassion for yourself and permission to not be perfect, or have been perfect for yourself.

Parent: 00:37:23 Right.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:37:24 And when you hear that, to try to not feel attacked by it. Your child is sharing their truth. And you know, I had a discussion like this just yesterday with a mom whose daughter is still in college. So not even 20, maybe she's 20. And the mom was saying, "It's not like I hurt her. I never touched her. I was basically a good mom. She came out a good kid. It's not fair that she says to me that I was emotionally abusive. Okay, I yelled, but that's not abusive." And I said, "You know, it doesn't matter. Don't take it personally. She was hurt. She's coming to you to heal. She's trusting you with this now."

Parent: 00:38:06 Right.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:38:07 And the mom ended up saying to me, "Yeah, I guess I deserve it. I did yell a lot." And I said, "Then it sounds like you're beating yourself up and shaming yourself. It's not about shame. It really isn't. You did the best you could with your daughter. You did the best you could with the information you had at the time. And you know what? You would do better today, but we don't get do-overs eventually when our kids grow up". That's the way it is.

Parent: 00:38:35 Yeah.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:38:35 Think of it this way, it's like spilling milk. Everybody spills milk sometimes. Do you sit there and berate yourself? No, you go get the sponge and you say, 'Oops, the milk spilled. I'm going to clean it up.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:38:47 So, like the mom I spoke with yesterday, you're just cleaning it up. That's what you're doing. You're cleaning up

the spilled milk. Don't berate yourself. In some ways even though this kind of parenting that I teach can be hard, people say, "Oh my gosh, it's a lot of work. It's hard. It's challenging to make the transition," it's so interesting because it gets easier and easier, and it's so much easier than cleaning up the milk later. You know?

Parent: 00:39:15 Yeah, exactly.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:39:17 It's so much better, and I just wish every parent could have the tools to not have to do it later. But I'm impressed that you're doing the work with your daughter now, and that you're willing to grow. And I think that's the thing to say to her is, "I never meant to cause you pain. I am so sorry. I am here. I am willing to do whatever cleanup is necessary. I take responsibility and I'm willing to grow myself."

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:39:41 And I think when our young adults, when our adult children hear that, and our teenagers hear that, I think it goes a long way to healing and strengthening your relationship.

Parent: 00:39:55 Right. Well it is my passion to help single parents not make the mistakes I made and to encourage them that they can do better. So thank you.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:40:05 Well, I'm so glad that you're doing that work because that is really important work. Yeah. Thank you.

Question 10:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:40:15 Our next question is from a parent who says, "Although my kids are older, 11, 14 and 17, I still found the course very useful. The kids are now more willing to cooperate. But what they are still struggling with is taking responsibility. When something happens I try to keep calm, follow-up asking them to make amends and discuss what they could do differently next time. They do make

amends most of the time. But the next time they find themselves in the same situation, they act exactly the same way."

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:40:45 First of all, I want to say how great that you have been able to get your kids to make amends when they do something wrong. Your kids have lived a long time and for their entire lives they've, I'm assuming, had a different kind of parenting than this and something's really changed for you in the course it sounds like. And you must have changed or your kids would not be responding so well. So congratulations on your hard work, and this is fantastic.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:41:21 It's going to take some time for stuff to really sink in. So when you say that they act the same way when they find themselves in that situation next time, it sounds to me like they didn't actually commit to handling things in a different way. And if they did commit to it, they didn't really think about how they could give themselves support in that situation to handle things differently.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:41:47 So let me give you an example of how this works for an adult. Let's say I want to go to the gym and instead of going to the gym, I suddenly recall a bunch of errands I have to do and I do those instead. And at the time I say to myself, "Well, it's really important to get these errands done. I'll go to the gym tomorrow." But of course the next day I can't go to the gym because of whatever reason. So I lost my chance to go to the gym, and I'm not keeping my commitment to myself to go to the gym twice a week let's say.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:42:20 I say to myself, "Okay, how can I keep myself from doing this next time? I'm committed to going to the gym every Tuesday and Friday. And next Tuesday I am going to go no matter what." And then next Tuesday rolls around and I just can't motivate myself to go to the gym, and I come up with another reason. "Oh, I forgot to return that email and once I get that done, oh my gosh, look at this. I didn't take

care of this, and I have to pay that bill." And what happens? Before you know it all of a sudden, Tuesday has come and gone and my window to go to the gym that day is gone too.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:42:52 Now, what happened here? I was committed to going. I said I was going to do it differently next time, and then I didn't. So somehow I didn't give myself enough support to get myself to the gym. Right? So your kids, when you talk with them, it sounds like they are able to say, "Yeah, I didn't do what I wanted to do here. I did screw up, Mom. Sorry. I'm going to do it better next time. Next time I can do XYZ in that situation instead." Right? And, "Yeah, I'll make amends for it." It sounds like that's what your kids are doing, which is great. That's huge already.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:43:31 But then, the next time they don't do the right thing. Again, they make what you're considering to be a poor choice. Like my making the poor choice not to go to the gym. So first of all, you could say, "Well, that's human." And secondly you could say, "Well, I didn't really take responsibility about going to the gym." That's what you're saying, your kids are not taking responsibility.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:43:54 Now maybe it's true. Maybe I never really was going to go to the gym. But that may not be it at all. Just like I intended to go to the gym at that moment, your kids might have intended to do the right thing next time, but somehow they got to that situation and they just couldn't do the right thing, whatever it is. Remember to call you after school before they went off to Starbucks with their friends or doing their homework before they played the video game when you were still at work, and they knew they weren't supposed to play video games. They knew they were supposed to do their homework. Whatever it is. Something kept them from making the right choice.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:44:30 So I think instead of blaming and judging, you sit down with them, and you say, "So you made a choice that we

said you weren't going to make. Seems like it was really hard for you to make the right choice." Just like it was hard for me to go to the gym. "Hmm, I wonder what kind of support you could've given yourself to do the right thing. At the time, was there some part of you that knew you were making the wrong choice? What kept you from listening to that part of you?"

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:45:03 And I might say about the gym, "I really didn't want to go to the gym." Right? And your kid might say, "Mom, I really didn't want to do my homework, oh my God, after working all day at school." So your kid does have to develop self-discipline to not play video games when you're not there and instead to focus on homework. That is true. And the way they develop that self-discipline is the same way we all develop it. Right? They coach themselves through it so that they choose the right thing.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:45:36 So your job is to talk with them about these hard choices and not to see it as they're not taking responsibility, or they're doing something wrong. No, they are still learning how to manage themselves. And that's the work that all of us have to do in the years you're talking about, 11, 14, 17. These are really important years for kids to learn how to support themselves to make healthy choices.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:46:01 So your job is to help coach them so they can learn to coach themselves, even when they'd rather make a different choice. How can they help themselves choose the right thing? And as you can see from listening to this, it's not going to help for you to lecture them. It's only going to help if they sincerely want to make that choice, and consider what could get in the way of making that choice with them, and if they are able to come up with ways that they could then manage themselves in the face of that difficulty.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:46:39 This is the exciting part of parenting. This is... Once we get past all those power struggles and the stupid stuff that

comes up when we parent conventionally, this is the good stuff. This is where we help kids develop the art of managing themselves, so they can live wonderful lives.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:46:59 So I know that sometimes it probably seems like they really are messing up and they could do a better job and it's very frustrating because you've had the conversation three times about what they're supposed to do. They're supposed to call you and not go off to Starbucks, or whatever. But if you can manage your own frustration and see this as an opportunity, it's like teaching your kids blue versus red, or one, two, three. It takes repetition. It takes patience, and it takes compassion, understanding why they might be doing what they're doing. But this is an opportunity to help your child grow a brain that is more self-disciplined and able to make wise choices, and to help your kids develop good judgment. This is what parenting is all about.

Question 11:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:47:51 "I'm starting to incorporate emotion coaching with my seven and a half year old daughter after big, emotional outbursts that might have included name calling and/or aggressive outbursts directed at me and my husband. I wait until she's calm, but I'm finding it challenging as my daughter doesn't want to discuss what happened. She's resistant to my attempts to talk about ways to handle difficult emotions in the future. I don't shame her. I try to accept her emotions. What can I do?"

Dr. Laura Markham: First, how great that you're beginning to emotion coach. That's fantastic. And how great that you're able to figure out how to talk with your daughter without shaming her. And third, I don't hear you saying this, but I'm hoping that in those moments of upset you're able to really listen to

your daughter because rage only begins to dissipate when it feels heard. So I think you may be able to disarm your daughter's anger by acknowledging what she's upset about before she's in a complete rage.

Dr. Laura Markham: Let's talk about how you can help your daughter to be more open to discussing what happened and how to handle things differently. I think the key here is what you said at the beginning of your question, which is, "I'm beginning to emotion coach." Your daughter's seven and a half. She probably has an entire lifetime of conventional parenting, certainly not emotion coaching because you say you're just starting that.

Dr. Laura Markham: So she's learned that there's something wrong with the way she's acted. Probably. I'm not saying that you've shamed her in the past, but you haven't emotion coached and it's just so hard when kids have big emotions. The way that most of us deal with it is that we immediately want to tell them what they did wrong and how to do it differently next time, and because it's so hard to have that conversation, what they walk away with is very often shame. So even though you're working hard not to shame her and to emotion coach right now, I think we're probably working with a backlog of upset from the past. She's already carrying shame from the way she was either parented by you, or the way that other people related to her feelings in the past. I'm betting.

Dr. Laura Markham: Now, it's also true that she is losing her temper at you and she's name calling, or even being aggressive with you and your husband. And she's already seven and a half, so she knows that's not okay to do. So regardless of the way you treat it, she's got some shame. And obviously we want to stop her from being aggressive and we want to stop the name calling. At seven and a half she should have the inner self-regulation to be able to stop herself from those outbursts, unless she has special challenges, in which case all bets are off.

Dr. Laura Markham: I will add that most parents who are taking this course, well not most, but many, do have kids with special challenges. So if you're listening to this, take that into account with my answers. But I think the key here is to focus on the empathy before the correction. In other words, the only way we get around that shame that she's carrying is to go overboard on the connection before you even think about correcting her.

Dr. Laura Markham: So you might say something like this after her upset, when she's calmed down and you're snuggling and you've got a good connection, "That was so hard, wasn't it, for all of us? You were so disappointed about what I said when I said no and you got so upset. I understand how upsetting that was. You really wanted X and then I said no. Is that what happened?" And then let her talk about how much she wanted X and how unfair you were. And tell her, "I completely understand why you were so upset and I'm so sorry we couldn't say yes to that. We just couldn't." And you can give her the reason. "We want to make sure your body stays healthy, so we're not going to give you a treat in the afternoon. You've had your allotted screen time for the weekend," whatever it is you're going to say.

Dr. Laura Markham: But let her talk about how much she wanted it and empathize. And then say, "And you know what Sweetie? When you get so upset like that and you just want to lash out, you don't have to lash out. You can always tell your dad and me how you feel. We will always listen. We will always understand, even when we can't say yes. We always want to hear how you feel. Do you think that's true, that we always listen and we also understand?"

Dr. Laura Markham: Then hopefully she'll say yes, and if not, then you have some repair work to do. Maybe she's just trying to prove she's right, or maybe in fact you could improve your listening, and maybe she's really responding to the past. And you can say, "You're right Sweetie, there was a time when we used to tell you to go to your room to calm

down. That's what most pediatricians tell parents to do. And that's what most parents do. And we learned that maybe it's not the best thing. So we're working hard to become better listeners and to try to understand. We're working hard at it. And I think if you notice, you'll see that we're doing better at it. You can trust us to talk to us and tell us, no matter how upset you are."

Dr. Laura Markham: And then you finish, "And Sweetheart, no matter how upset you are, it is never okay to hit us, or to call us names. You know those are our house rules. That hurts our bodies and our feelings, and it hurts the relationship that I have with you. Right? I know you were really upset, but I also know you value our relationship. You value the trust we have with each other. I know that even when you're upset, you don't want to hurt me, really. And I know that you can handle that upset. You can handle it by telling us what you need without attacking us, just the way we do with you. And we will always listen, and we will always try to help."

Dr. Laura Markham: "So your dad was pretty upset when you called him names. I know you were mad, but your dad doesn't call you names when he's upset. He loves you so much, and you and your dad usually have such a great time together. It's like you had all these good feelings between you and your dad, and you just took a bunch of them and you threw them in the trash. There's a cost to that, to your relationship with him. I wonder what you could do to make things better with him now, to repair things."

Dr. Laura Markham: So notice you're not having that discussion until things between you are good. You're not having it while she's still upset. And the way you're phrasing it, you're talking about the damage that was done to the relationship and that she can make it better, and you're empowering her to make it better. I think we have to have an expectation for our kids. Whenever they damage something, they do need to make it better.

Question 12:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:54:49 Our next question is from a parent who says, "My seven-year-old really struggles when we set limits. He's generally a really good kid, but sometimes we have to say something and we say it gently and with empathy, and he says, 'I hate myself,' or, 'I'm so stupid.' We try to disentangle his not so good behavior from his person-ness, i.e. just because you made a bad choice, doesn't make you a bad person. We make mistakes too. We can all get better, et cetera. But so far he's not responding to that. What can we do?"

Dr. Laura Markham: So you don't say how long you've been using this kind of parenting. And he's going to respond in a big way to anything that he perceives as a correction. So if you've been parenting differently than in the past, conventional parenting, you'll find that he has a lot of shame. I did address this in an earlier question.

Dr. Laura Markham: If you've been parenting with my kind of parenting approach for a while, then I'm wondering why he responds with such self-criticism and feels so bad about himself. If that's the case then this sounds like anxiety to me. But I would just say if you're setting limits without shame and very gently, and it's still too much for him, think about how else you can present a limit. So instead of a correction, it's more of a connection, and then, how can you take your game up a notch, right?

Dr. Laura Markham: I will say that the preventive maintenance tools will heal shame. Preventive maintenance is guaranteed to help your child feel loved, and the antidote to shame is love, always. So if you can help him to feel loved by accepting all of his feelings, by helping him work things through during special time, by following his lead in play, by doing some roughhousing to get rid of his fear, because shame is partly a fear of being neglected, or left, or rejected because you're not good enough, right? So you can heal that fear with roughhousing.

Dr. Laura Markham: I think all of these things should make a difference, but I'm going to go out on a limb here and say this sounds like perfectionism. It sounds like he has really strong, negative judgments about himself that any correction from outside confirms. I don't know where he learned it and it's not always so easy to unlearn those things, but the human mind tends toward judgment, even though it never serves us.

Dr. Laura Markham: So I think that's probably showing up as anxiety. And I would listen to the anxiety addendum and get your hands on a book or two about anxiety. See if that seems to resonate for him. And of course, just pay attention to more connection rather than corrections in the moment. So, if your son took a shower and he left his wet towel on the floor of the bathroom, and he left the bathroom light on, and you want to say, "Hey, get back here. Pick up your towel. Turn the light off. Come on." And then he says, "Oh, I'm so stupid."

Dr. Laura Markham: Maybe the way to handle it is that when you go in his room you give him a hug and you say, "Oh, you're all clean. Look at you. Wow, you smell good. I love that you can take your showers by yourself now. There's only one disadvantage to it for me. You know what it is? You don't always remember to hang up your towel and turn off the light. No worries. I think that's the last piece most kids learn. And I already took care of it tonight. But I'll be interested to see when you begin to work that into your repertoire too. I love watching you get more and more capable and competent. It seems like every day you're doing new stuff. I'm so proud of you." And then you give him a hug and you leave the room.

Dr. Laura Markham: Now, did that sound like a criticism? I don't think so. It did sound like a suggestion for improvement, but not one that compromised who he is. A kid who would respond negatively to that probably has some anxiety. And he might still, but I'm betting that if you can be sensitive to

how you're offering suggestions for improvement and you pay some attention to the anxiety aspect of this and perfectionism, and you use the preventive maintenance tools to help him heal any shame or self-blame he's still carrying around, I think you'll see an improvement.

Question 13:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:59:28 Our next question is from a parent who says, "Our seven-year-old has very strong anger and aggression. It's difficult to remain loving, unconditionally connected when he's in attack mode."

Dr. Laura Markham: Yes, you know what? You are so right. It is difficult. Aggression is one of the hardest things to deal with, partly because it triggers us and partly because we don't want to get hurt.

Dr. Laura Markham: The question continues, "It's especially hard when I'm trying to keep myself and two other children safe. He can't even hear me when I try to say, 'You're really angry, but no hitting.' So that doesn't work. How can we keep safe while continuing to work on the course ideas?"

Dr. Laura Markham: Well, you're asking the right question because the course ideas are the ones that will help you to avoid this to begin with. So what you're describing is being in the breakdown lane. And when you're in the breakdown lane, your car is not going to drive. There's nothing you can do except call a tow truck. So when your seven-year-old is enraged enough to start attacking people, you're in the breakdown lane already and there's almost nothing you can do short of holding your seven-year-old to keep everybody safe.

Dr. Laura Markham: There are times when I recommended holding that child to keep them safe and keep you safe, but only when absolutely necessary. I would say first of all, your 10-year-old is old enough to take the three-year-old into another

room. Set up in advance things for them to do in the other room. Blow bubbles together, have a sensory box for the three-year-old to play with. Have something engrossing for the 10-year-old. They can put on music.

Dr. Laura Markham: So the really good news here is that as hard as it is when your seven-year-old gets aggressive, you have a chance to work with it because your other kids can keep themselves safe. Of course, you have to set this up in advance. You tell your 10-year-old that you're going to be working with the seven-year-old to help him with his feelings and if he does get super angry, you're going to give the 10-year-old a signal, which is going to be, "Now sweetheart, take the three-year-old," and the 10-year-old will take the three-year-old into the other room, whatever room you set up as far away from the main living space as possible. It could be the three-year-old's bedroom, the 10-year-old's bedroom, could be your bedroom, but it's the 10-year-old's job to keep the three-year-old entertained.

Dr. Laura Markham: Then, you're free to work with the seven-year-old. And remember, rage doesn't dissipate until it feels heard. So when your seven-year-old is angry, if you want to keep it from escalating, you listen and you feed back what you're hearing. Your ultimate goal is to create safety for your seven-year-old so that the tears and fears behind the anger can be expressed. And at that point your child doesn't need the anger anymore, right? That's what allows the aggression to melt away.

Dr. Laura Markham: So you work with your seven-year-old, you listen. You're trying to create safety, that's your goal. And if your seven-year-old attacks you, you say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Sweetie, you are so mad you want me to see how mad you are." But if he's enraged that he can't even hear you or pay attention, and he just continues to hit you, then you will have to hold him if you can't move away and have him stop attacking.

Dr. Laura Markham: I think if you can get through to him by saying, "I am right here. I see how angry you are" and look him in the eye, he might hear you and he might stop because your level of passion matches his. But if he doesn't, if he's so enraged that he can't even hear you, then you'll have to take him into your arms, sink down onto the floor, have his back to you and you're holding his arms, you're in back of him with your arms around him holding him in a bear hug.

Dr. Laura Markham: Now, I don't recommend this unless you absolutely have to because I don't actually think it increases your child's sense of safety, but if they're hurting you, then this is safer than them hurting you. And you hold them and you say, "You are really mad. I will let you go as soon as you can take some deep breaths and stop hitting me." And he's going to say, "I will stop hitting you! I will!" And you can say, "Great. You take three deep breaths and show me that you're in charge of yourself and then I'll let you go."

Dr. Laura Markham: And of course you're going to have to go through that five times before he actually stops hitting you when you let him go. I'm sorry to say, but that is usual. But over time, as you do special time, you said, "How can we work on the other course ideas," well, special time and empathy 24/7, and roughhousing, will all combine to create safety, and also to keep your child from having such a short fuse.

Dr. Laura Markham: Then, if you can follow what I've just described, you'll be able to work with him in the moment to really hear him so he doesn't have to escalate, and to create safety. And that's a scheduled meltdown, and that's what allows him to feel safe enough in your undivided attention, to actually surface all of those feelings. I think you'll see some tears, and I think then you'll see the aggression begin to diminish and melt away.

Question 14:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:04:51 Our next question is also about a seven-year-old's aggression. When we have parented in a child's early years with conventional parenting, children do what we say because we're a lot bigger than they are, but they're doing what we tell them because of the threat of punishment. They're not doing it from the relationship, from the connection, from the warmth between us, even from wanting to please us. They're doing it out of fear of punishment.

Dr. Laura Markham: By the time they're seven they're no longer so afraid of punishment. They'll fight back physically. So if they don't feel heard, they'll escalate. And that's why so often we as therapists see families come to therapy when their children are seven or eight years old, or nine or 10. When they're no longer able to be put in timeout and conventional punishment no longer works. So remember, rage only dissipates when it feels heard. So if you have ongoing aggression then there's a way in which that child doesn't feel heard.

Dr. Laura Markham: Now, it's possible your child has something else going on. If your child has special needs, if your child is on the Autism spectrum or has sensory issues, then they're going to have a lag, a delay in their ability to master their aggression. That's a different situation. I'm talking about neurotypical kids here when I make these statements.

Dr. Laura Markham: So this next question is about repeated sustained attacks of biting, hitting and destruction. So that's definitely the breakdown lane, right? That description. So what we have to do is preventive maintenance before we get in the breakdown lane. And that is using the Peaceful Parenting tools to create connection and create safety. So the question continues that this behavior was occurring before, but is definitely worse now during the transitional time of the course.

Dr. Laura Markham: So it's true that if you've been punishing and you remove punishment, and the child does not have connection or safety, then the connection is what would motivate them to behave and the safety is what would allow them to show you all of those old hurt feelings. If they don't have enough connection and safety, and you remove the punishments then they begin to act out more, so that may be what you're experiencing. The cure for that is to increase the safety and to increase the connection. So everything you consider doing in response to your child's aggression should be through the lens of increasing safety and increasing connection.

Dr. Laura Markham: So this question continues, "I find it hard to do the stop, drop and breathe as I am being hurt, or I'm watching our property being destroyed. I end up having to lock myself in a room for protection and hope the lock on the door will sustain the kicking which ensues." Well, let me just say no. No! You can't lock yourself in a room. That doesn't increase the connection and it doesn't increase safety. It worsens both. So you're worsening the aggression every time you lock yourself in a room.

Dr. Laura Markham: You're also giving your child the message that you're vulnerable, fragile, that your child is more powerful than you are. That's a pretty scary message to give a child. And that will also increase your child's acting out because it increases the fear your child is feeling. So I realize it can be scary when your child gets aggressive. But they're only seven and you're an adult. I know you might be a small person and maybe you have a big child, but I myself am under 5'3 and I would just say even if you're a small person, you're the grown-up. You should be able to handle a seven-year-old.

Dr. Laura Markham: So it sounds to me like you're getting triggered and some old childhood fear is coming up. Maybe you were hit as a child, or you have some other incident in your past of violence. But you as an adult need to work on that

because it's your trigger that's getting triggered here. You're saying you're finding it hard to do stop, drop and breathe. Well, stop, drop and breathe is to keep you from getting triggered that is true, but you'll have to practice it at other times. While you're being hurt, you can't withdraw. It is true that it's very hard to calm yourself down if you're being hurt. So first I'm going to suggest that you need to do work on yourself. I suggest you get your hands on my workbook. I suggest you find a listening partner. I think you may want to find a therapist.

Dr. Laura Markham: You need to talk to somebody about your reaction when your seven-year-old gets upset because if you're locking yourself in a room, that's an overreaction. And remember, if you do that your child does not feel heard and they feel even more disconnected. So they're going to ramp up, they're going to escalate. And you're actually creating the cycle of aggression that you're experiencing.

Dr. Laura Markham: And I'm so sorry about that because I imagine that you experienced aggression as a child and that's where this is coming from, but your child needs your understanding and connection now. That's the only way you're going to settle a pattern of aggression. If you keep doing what you're doing, he will keep escalating and there is no positive way out of that. So if you can manage your own trigger, you can notice when your child is starting to get angry. You can listen better, reflect better and stay engaged and your child will not escalate. But of course you'll also have to do all of the preventive maintenance work to increase safety and increase connection.

Dr. Laura Markham: Then, in the moment when he gets angry, your priority is understanding your child and extending connection. So I'm going to suggest that you reach out to a parenting coach who can help you put the preventive maintenance work into effect and can also support you to work through your own triggers so that you can feel stronger when your child does get angry and you can keep this cycle from

happening. You'll find a listing of the parenting coaches I've trained on the Aha! Parenting website, just put the word Coach into the search box.

Question 15:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:11:15 A parent asks, "How can I better coach a seven-year-old who in the past few weeks has become incredibly defiant when I use the Peaceful Parenting methods, especially when she's lashing out at her younger twin siblings? She plugs her ears, yells, 'No! Never!' And gets very angry. The stop, drop and breathe scenario makes her upset. She interprets this as me ignoring, or not listening, or taking the twins' sides. She was very responsive to the new parenting approach in the beginning, but now she's incredibly resistant."

Dr. Laura Markham: So we have to figure out why she was responsive before and now isn't. Usually when parents begin using the Peaceful Parenting ideas they start to regulate themselves better, so that may have been a factor here. That always increases trust and connection because the child feels they can rely more on their parents to stay calm and help them instead of flying off the handle.

Dr. Laura Markham: The parent also focuses on connection, empathy, special time, and roughhousing. So the child feels connected. There's more trust in the parent as backup for them, and there's more of a sense of feeling seen and understood. So it really helps that attachment bond. And the parent starts coaching instead of controlling through rewards and punishment. So the child feels understood and is given help to work out their emotions. Right? By doing emotion coaching we're actually helping the child to feel the emotions safely and to work through them.

Dr. Laura Markham: So that's why kids usually respond positively. And the negatives that can come when we start to use this

approach would be if the child has only cooperated out of fear in the past and we don't build enough connection. Then what can happen is the child doesn’t have a lot of connection, no longer any punishment and really no reason to cooperate with you. Right? But that doesn't sound like what's happening to me, even though that is very common when people skip the connection step or somehow aren't doing enough of it. But in that case we don't usually see more cooperation initially. We see less cooperation because the child has no incentive to cooperate now that there's no punishment.

Dr. Laura Markham: But that's not what happened with you. You saw initially more cooperation, but now your child is very resistant. I wonder if she got hopeful that you were going to back her up, but then it turned out those twin siblings are still there, the five-year-olds, the bane of her existence, and she really doesn't trust that you're going to take care of things and make things better for her. She's worried that you're taking their sides, or you're ignoring her needs, or you're not listening to her, all the things that she's told you. That's especially true because you're working on self-regulation. So instead of yelling, you're pausing to take a deep breath and she thinks you're not going to intervene to help her.

Dr. Laura Markham: So I want to clarify something about stop, drop and breathe. Stop, drop and breathe means you stop what you were doing, so for instance you were making dinner, you literally turn off the stove, you drop your agenda, your agenda is just to get her to stop yelling at her siblings, right, in this case let's say. And you take a deep breath. But you don't stand around in the kitchen taking deep breaths, you're walking toward the problem, which is the dispute between your kids. As she's lashing out at them, you're walking toward them taking deep breaths.

Dr. Laura Markham: As soon as you can, you're saying something as calmly as you can like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa you guys are having such

a hard time. I hear loud voices." Right? So when she looks at you and yells, "No! Never!" At this point, It's because she doesn't think you're going to help her. So I think you have to start proving that you are going to be helpful to her. In fact, you can confront this head-on.

Dr. Laura Markham: "You're saying, 'No, never,' that you don't want to listen to me. It sounds like you don't think I'm going to help you, huh? Don't worry Sweetheart. I am here to help all of you and we're going to figure this out. Right now I hear you saying that you are pretty mad at your sisters. Is that right? You don't think that they should touch your markers. You think that these are your markers, and you don't like how they left the caps off last time. Is that what I'm hearing you say? Did I get that right?"

Dr. Laura Markham: Notice that she's going to be intrigued by the fact that you are listening and repeating what she said. She's probably going to stop yelling and at least pay attention to you. So I'm suggesting that the way you talk to her, as well as the twins, in these sibling disputes will be the key to helping her become more receptive again. But you should also be using the Peaceful Parenting tools to build your relationship, because this is a question of trust. If she's not receptive it's because she doesn't trust you to be on her side.

Dr. Laura Markham: So use special time, roughhousing, empathy 24/7, because these things really matter just so she feels like you really are on her side. And even those times when you have to back the house rule, which gives the twins the benefit, you absolutely always listen to what she has to say and you care about how she feels.

Question 16:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:17:07 Our next question is from a parent who says, "My eight-year-old and I are slowly making progress with the

program." Good for you. "One area that I'm still struggling with is bedtime. About every fourth night it will be a horrible experience of name calling, potty words, et cetera. I am remaining calm, but having a horrible time redirecting the behavior on those nights. Walking away doesn't help. He will just follow me."

Dr. Laura Markham: So absolutely you should not walk away. There would be no reason to walk away. He's acting out for a reason and it's something that you need to respond to. Clearly he's being provocative, right? Hitting his brother, potty words, calling names either at you or his brother, I don't know which. So something is going on with him at these times. So we need to be curious about what's going on.

Dr. Laura Markham: So in between on the other three nights, is he fine with bedtime? If not, if he always has a hard time, but every fourth night things really blow up, that suggests there's some anxiety about bedtime. In that case, you need to address the anxiety about bedtime. If bedtime is usually completely not an issue, but then every fourth night it's terrible, then it's not about bedtime. It's because something happened that day that he's offloading about.

Dr. Laura Markham: So we really don't have enough information here to understand what's going on. Right? Is something going on with him at school that he's then acting it out that night? Or is there anxiety around bedtime? But you might be able to tell just by observing what's going on.

Dr. Laura Markham: So first of all I need to ask, are you doing roughhousing every day? If something's going on at school that's upsetting him, or if he's having anxiety at bedtime, either way if you do roughhousing, never right before bedtime, but after school, or when you first get home from work before dinner, that will help reduce the anxiety load, it will also help him work out something if something happened at school.

Dr. Laura Markham: So either way, roughhousing should really have helped with this. My challenge to you is are you doing rough housing every single day? Is there belly laughter happening? And there are lots of ideas for how to rough house with a child and get them laughing, even when they're as old as eight, in the workbook, the *Peaceful Parent Happy Kids* workbook.

Dr. Laura Markham: So if you're rough housing with him every day, that should improve this situation. Then of course, you'll need to do special time where you're connecting with him. And 24/7 empathy. And then let's say he starts acting like this. It's bedtime, he's starting to pick fights with his brother, call names, use potty words. Clearly being provocative using the potty words.

Dr. Laura Markham: The first thing you do is take a deep breath and you step up and you're the leader in your house. That means you set a limit on his behavior and you redirect the emotions that are driving him to this behavior and you speak to those emotions. Since he has a history of this, you know what he's feeling. It's anger, right? He's picking fights. And he's really unhappy about something.

Dr. Laura Markham: So you say to him, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Honey, something's going on with you. You are having such a hard time." And you try to reconnect. You might go over and put your arms around him and say, "Are you out of hugs again? I wonder what's wrong with you. Are you out of hugs again? Come here Sweetheart." And if he'll let you hug him, then you're done. What he needed was connection. And at that point, you get him laughing and you move him through the routine and you get him to bed, and you're done.

Dr. Laura Markham: But the getting him laughing part is important, right? Because there was something driving him. And you haven't done anything except connect. You haven't given him help with the emotions. So once you've connected,

use that opportunity to get him laughing to help with the emotions.

Dr. Laura Markham: Now, what if he rejects your hug? You say, "Wow, you don't even want to hug me. You're pretty upset about something. What's going on Sweetheart?" You're being empathic, right? You're being connective, and how is he going to respond? He's going to either say, "I'm mad because my brother XYZ," or, "I'm mad because Daddy's gone again tonight," because you mentioned that these are nights when your husband is not home. Or, "I'm mad because you're giving my brother too much attention."

Dr. Laura Markham: If he's able to articulate something like that, again, bingo, you're home-free. You acknowledge how hard it is and how hard it must be for him, and how much you love him, and how you can see how this upsets him, and how you can make it better, which is, "You really miss Dad. Let's write Dad a note so it'll be waiting for him when he comes home." Or, "You wish I would spend all my time with you at night and not with your brother, huh? It's hard for you when you need my attention and I'm spending time with your brother."

Dr. Laura Markham: Whatever it is he's saying you can respond in an empathic way and maybe help make him feel better in the sense of solving his problem and helping him express those emotions as much as possible.

Dr. Laura Markham: Now, let's say he rejects your attempts to do that. Let's say you try, and he certainly can't articulate how he feels. So you try to connect with him and he just is, "I'm not mad!" Or, "Of course I'm mad. And I'm not even going to tell you why." And then you say potty mouth, and he's using the worse language he can think of. That's trying to be provocative to you, right?

Dr. Laura Markham: At that point you say, "You are using a very loud voice and words that you know are only okay in the privacy of your

bedroom by yourself or in the bathroom by yourself. So you are trying to show me how upset you are. And I see. And I'm right here to listen to whatever's wrong. Things are really not going your way right now, are they Sweetie?" And he might just soften. Notice you're softening. You're saying, "I see you're upset and I see you showing me you're upset." And he might soften and tell you whatever. I think he probably will if you've been working hard on roughhousing and connection.

Dr. Laura Markham: If he escalates at that point, he is being provocative trying to pick a fight. And that's your signal that you need to do a lot more preventive maintenance starting tomorrow morning. And right now it's bedtime and there's only so much you can do, so it's fine if he follows you, but you go to the 12-year-old and give him a hug and ask him to get himself ready for bed, and tell him you'll check on him soon.

Dr. Laura Markham: Then you turn back around to the eight-year-old, and as you say, he'll follow you, great. You walk out of the room and he follows and you do everything you can to connect with him and to soften yourself until he gets to a point where there's a breakthrough. And if you can't do it, then you just get him to bed as best as you can and the next day you move heaven and earth to do all the preventive maintenance you can.

Dr. Laura Markham: Preventive maintenance prevents this kind of meltdown. This is when you're in the breakdown lane when your kid is acting like this. And you say you're making progress, both of you, so you're moving in the right direction. That's wonderful. And you're still struggling with this because there's still some big breakthrough that needs to happen. And that will happen if you faithfully use the tools. And if it doesn't, then reach out to a parenting coach and get a little extra help so you can make that breakthrough. He does need to empty his backpack, or you do need to intervene to help him with something that's happening on

a regular basis, like at school. Something is going on for him and he's letting you know it, and how great because it gives you an opportunity to help him.

Question 17:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:25:22 A parent asks, "How do you respond to, 'I don't care'?" I guess you mean your eight-year-old says this. You remind her to use a kind voice and she says, "I don't care." What she's really saying is, "That doesn't matter to me right now. I don't care about that. I'm not going to let that matter to me. I'm too mad."

Dr. Laura Markham: So I would just speak to the feeling under the "I don't care." When she says, "I don't care," you could say, "You're so frustrated that right now you don't even care about being kind. I hear you. You know what Sweetie? You'll care again soon because I know you. You have a big heart that cares a lot and I think that right now your big heart hurts. Tell me about it." If she stays angry and says, "No! I don't even care," you can say, "Well you know what? My heart cares enough for both of us. And when you're ready Sweetheart, you can tell me what's bothering you so much that it's making you not even care."

Question 18:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:26:27 A parent asks, “How can I help my seven-year-old with impulse control? She bit a child's hand as he raised it in class. She likes him. She said he hadn't done anything wrong. She threw a large rock under a glass roof. She pulled electrical wires in the boiler of a holiday rental out after being told they were dangerous repeatedly. She doesn't know why she does these things. She can't explain

them afterwards.” I'm so glad you asked this because impulse control is at the heart of a lot of the things that people are asking about in these questions. Kids who have worse impulse control actually are the kids who have the hardest time with aggression because they're more likely to lash out and they're more likely to experience anxiety and depression as well, the research shows. Impulsive kids just have a harder time meeting expectations around them and it makes them feel worse about themselves. So there is a lot of research on impulse control and one of the things we’ve found is that children need to believe that their self control will be rewarded. In other words, the famous marshmallow test, children only control themselves and don't eat the marshmallow or the cookies if they believe that the researcher is trustworthy and will in fact give them the two marshmallows or the two cookies if they can wait to eat it.

Dr. Laura Markham: So as I've said many times, children have to believe that their needs are going to be met. Once they think their needs are going to be met, they're more likely to be able to control themselves and not get upset. Now the kinds of examples that you're giving about your daughter are not things where she's having to wait for you to do something. So throwing the rock on the glass roof sounds like it didn't really seem like that would be a problem to her. And in that kind of case, I would encourage her to reflect on it by asking, "What made you want to do it?"

Dr. Laura Markham: And you said she can't explain these things, so don't do it judgmentally, say, "I would want to see if it was sturdy. I mean a glass roof is sort of unusual and I'd want to see if it could break, wouldn't you? Do you think that's what it was? But of course that could be really dangerous. Was there some part of you that thought it was a bad idea? What kept you from listening to that part of you?" As far as the electrical wires in the boiler, when she was told they were dangerous repeatedly, that's sort of serious, that she was repeatedly told that and she couldn't stop herself

from doing it. So I don't know. Is that boredom? Is it that she likes to figure out how things work? That sounds unusual actually. And I think that's the kind of thing where you need to keep her away from things that she can't stop herself from touching.

Dr. Laura Markham: So just like you would a four-year-old, you wouldn't assume the four-year-old could stop herself from pulling electrical wires out. You could assume a seven-year-old could, but obviously your daughter doesn't have that self control. And the biting of the boys hand is really bizarre. It sounds to me like she had some feelings she didn't know what to do with. And when he raised his hand, she saw an easy way to do something with those feelings, right? It wasn't about him personally. And the hand was right there and convenient. But it's still odd, right? I don't think it's just impulse control. There's something else going on with her. So I'm wondering what that is. You said she would meet the descriptions of ADHD, so it might be that she just doesn't think about things before she does them.

Dr. Laura Markham: So I guess I would introduce that idea to her. She's seven, so she's old enough to do that. "So sweetheart, let's try, every time you think of doing something and some part of you says it's a bad idea, let's stop and give that part of you a chance to be heard." You might say, "Was there any part of you that knew it was a bad idea to bite him and you went ahead and did it anyway? What kept you from listening to that part of you? So give that part of you a chance to be heard." Now that's going to be really, really hard for her. And that's where the rest of the research on self control comes in because researchers have done a lot of playing with kids, playing games that ask kids to practice self control.

Dr. Laura Markham: So you've probably heard of this, red light, green light. So the child needs to follow the directions and move only when they're given a green light, not when they're given a red light and then they have to freeze. And the child has to

self regulate. So researchers did a lot of playing those kinds of games with kids, they did all kinds of different things. They had them do the freeze game with music, right? So kids dance when the music plays and then they freeze when it stops, right? And they would have them freeze when they shouted “freeze!” And when kids played those games twice a week, 30 minutes each time, after eight weeks, the kids who had started off with low self control actually got a lot better. So I'm going to suggest that you give your child a program where she can practice things that basically help her increase self control, and see what happens.

Dr. Laura Markham: I'm sorry that I don't have a book to point you to, but I'm sure that there are books out there on ADHD kids and workbooks that help ADHD kids to learn self control. So if you find such a workbook that works for you, please let me know about it and I'll recommend it to other people in the course and on my website because it seems like we really have a need for such a book.

Dr. Laura Markham: And 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/podcast and leave your question as a voice memo. This is Dr. Laura Markham wishing you less drama and more love. Goodbye for now.