

Rudeness and Disrespectful Language 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 rudeness and disrespectful language. 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. Let's see how to apply these three big ideas to daily life with children.

Question 1:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:00:42](#) This parent is asking about her nine year old. So, from the description you're giving, it sounds like you're very connected with him. But about once a week he gets very cross about something and talks back, and mutters under his breath so his mom can hear him, "I'm not going. You can't make me. Swimming is stupid," or even saying, "She's stupid. She's an idiot," so she can hear, which of course is very hurtful to Mom. Of course.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:01:12](#) It's interesting, because you even mentioned that he decided he was not going to do something, clean his teeth, because you've been bossing him around for eight years and that's over now. It lasted all of an hour, and then he apologized. He usually apologizes. That's really interesting that he'll come to you and say, "I was a real jerk," with no prompting. That's great news. He knows this isn't what he wants to do, and he knows it hurts your feelings. But there's something about someone bossing him around that's really interesting.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:01:44](#) He sounds to me like he needs more control of his life, like he isn't generally oppositional, but he's oppositional with

the things he hates, like swimming lessons, and he's oppositional even for things like brushing his teeth from time to time when he's feeling bossed around. Somehow he's feeling either bossed around, or like he doesn't have choices, or like you aren't understanding when he doesn't want to do something. My suggestion is to experiment with giving him more control over his life. That's the first thing. I mean he is already nine years old, and that's old enough, preteens, that they start to really want control of their own lives. You can't let them control everything, but they certainly they can have more control.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:02:29](#)

I would also focus on empathy in the moment. I know you said that once he gets cross, showing him empathy just makes him more angry, but actually I think that just means you could refine what you say and how you say it, because I think he does need understanding. He doesn't need to whisper under his breath about what an idiot you are if he feels like you actually understand him.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:02:54](#)

It doesn't mean you don't send him to swimming lessons. I get that you're committed to that. First of all, you want to warn him the night before and empathize with whatever he says. The night before, you say to him when you're having a nice time together, "What are you looking forward to tomorrow? Yeah, me too. I'm looking forward to that too. Oh, and you know what else? I bet you're not looking forward to this, swimming." "Oh, Mom, do we have to go?" "I know, but it's Tuesday, and we always have swimming on Tuesdays." "Mom, you know I hate swimming. I'm not going."

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:03:26](#)

"I hear you. You hate it so much you wish you didn't have to go. I'm sorry, sweetie. I know you'll be so happy when the lessons are done. You're getting to be a better swimmer all the time. This will be over. I promise you at some point you'll be a good enough swimmer to not go to swimming lessons. I wish you didn't hate it so much. I wish we could make it more fun. I wonder if there's a way to do that?" Notice now I'm even problem-solving, but notice that I also didn't take offense when he raised his voice to

me, and notice that I also completely acknowledged that he doesn't like it, and tried to give him hope for the future.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:03:58](#)

The next day, when it's still Tuesday morning now or whatever, you say, "I'm going to pick you up after school. You know what? Swimming. I know." He'll say, "I hate swimming." You can say, "I know, sweetheart. I know you hate it. What can we do so that we can redeem this afternoon and make it a little better? Maybe we should have a special dessert tonight that you and I can make together. What do you think? Or we could pick it up at your favorite bakery." Is that a bribe? No. I'm actually just trying to make it a win-win solution.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:04:28](#)

You have decided to impose swimming because you think it's important that he learn to swim. Okay, I get it. No problem. No argument. But he doesn't have to like it, so what you're trying to do is show him that even though you're not going to let him not do it -- It's like you won't let him not do other things that are safety-related, like he has to wear a seatbelt in the car, or his helmet when he's cycling -- You understand, and you're going to try to make it up to him by finding something else nice that at least he can look forward to, right?

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:04:58](#)

At that moment when you've asked him to put his suit on, and he says, "Oh, I don't want to do it. You're so stupid. You're so stupid," notice he doesn't even say it loudly, just under his breath. You can say, "You really don't like the idea of going swimming. I hear you. You're so mad at me. You're mad, and you want to make sure I hear when you say how stupid I am, right? I do hear that, sweetie. That's hurtful. You don't need to say how stupid I am. I really do hear you, and I get you don't want to go," and then you leave the room.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:05:27](#)

You leave the room at that point. He'll get yeah, she heard me. That's not a very nice thing to do. He gets that. But notice you haven't lost your temper. I know that you're taking this personally. (You say) "The drama's forgotten in an instant, but it's hard for me to switch back to being kind

and happy after such rudeness." You know what? It's not rudeness. He's showing you how he's upset. The more you allow him to show you, and you acknowledge it, the less he has to escalate. I actually think you'll find he's being less rude when you handle it this way, but I really would like to encourage you to not take it personally. In fact, everyone on this call, just write this down. Post it on your refrigerator. Do not take your child's behavior personally, ever. That will change your life, I guarantee you.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:06:20](#)

Going back to your question, you said, "Later in the day, he wants me to put some effort out, organize a playdate for him, or take him somewhere, and I don't want to because he's been rude to me, is that a consequence or a punishment?" Well, it sounds like a punishment if you're not doing it because he was rude to you. That's a punishment.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:06:43](#)

You could say, "Sweetie, when you're rude like that to me, and you say I'm an idiot, you know in our house we don't call people names. You can tell me when you're angry and I will always listen. When you call me names like that, it makes me feel like not putting out any extra effort for you. Now you want me to take you to such and such? You know what, sweetie? I actually don't feel like doing that. I think we need to do some work to repair our relationship first," and then find something you can do that you're actually going to be able to repair the relationship, otherwise it's just like giving him the cold shoulder. He's in the doghouse and he doesn't know what to do to redeem himself. He has to have a way to redeem himself. The way to do that is to work on your relationship at that point.

Question 2:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:07:28](#)

A parent is asking, "What about my five-year-old hassling me? He's following me around, and making huffing, rude noises when I can't play with him, and threatening me." I love that he really wants to play with you. "He's one of

these kids also who has a hard time playing by himself.” Again, I would make sure he doesn't get much screen time, because that makes it harder to play by yourself. I would make sure he gets enough time to play with other children. You can't just throw him in his room with the legos. You have to get him started playing by himself, and then step away to check the laundry. Make sure he learns to play by himself in that way.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:08:02](#)

Then as far as his bullying tone with you, I get that you're annoyed, because no one wants to be bullied. But it is normal for five-year-olds to bully people to get what they want, so I would just start by keeping a light tone. Describe what's happening. So when he threatens you like that, you could say, "You wish I would play with you. You're saying if I don't play now, you'll never play with me again? Wow, you really want me to play with you. You're threatening me. Sweetie, you know what? I bet you wish I would only play with you, and never do anything else. It sounds like you wish you could put me in your pocket and carry me around, and I would always be there to play with you. Wouldn't that be great?" Get him laughing about it. Then say, "But Sweetie, you don't have to threaten me. I love you. I love playing with you. Right now I have to get dressed. Let's see what else you could do." That's it.

Question 3:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:08:56](#)

A parent asked about rudeness when a child is emotionally upset. She says, "I know it's important to set limits on physical aggression so everyone stays safe, but what about limits on screaming at people, or saying rude things to them? Maybe not during the meltdowns, but at least afterwards?" You're exactly right. You can't do it during the meltdown. Even adults say things during a meltdown that they're sorry about later. I wouldn't even go there during the meltdown. They're showing you how upset they are. At least they're not hitting you. That's great. The more you accept the feelings and help them with the feelings,

the more they will be able to self-regulate, and the less they will act like that during the meltdown.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:09:34](#)

But I also agree with you that you don't want to just let it go unremarked. You don't want to act like it didn't happen. You do want to address it later, because otherwise your kid's going to think, "Oh, when people get mad, they say mean things to each other, and you just let it go afterwards." I wouldn't want your child to get that message about life. So afterwards, I would work through your own stuff, talk yourself off the cliff, stop, drop and breathe, and make sure you're not upset anymore, and get back in touch with how much you love your child, and all the lovable things about them.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:10:08](#)

Then with warmth and a sense of humor, I would remark on it. Maybe it's bedtime, and the meltdown was this afternoon. I would say, "So this afternoon you were pretty mad at me, weren't you? You were really yelling. We had a hard time, but we worked it out. We always do. I love you so much, and I'm always here for you. You can always tell me what you're upset about, and I will always listen." Your kid gives you a hug and says, "I love you, Mommy," or at least gives you a hug.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:10:40](#)

Then you say, "Hey, I should just ask you. Do you really want a new mommy?" Because your kid was telling you how she wanted a new mommy, and kid says, "No, I was mad." You say, "Boy, I'm glad to hear that, but you know what? No matter what, you're the daughter I want forever and ever, no matter how mad you get at me. You are the daughter I want. You can be as mad at me as you want, even so mad that at that moment you feel like you want a new mommy, but I know that we will always work things out because that's what families do." It doesn't go unremarked, but there's zero blame or shame in there.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:11:22](#)

You're saying, "That's not really what you wanted. You didn't really want a new mommy," and you're making light of it, which allows you both to let go of that tension. You're saying to your child that they have not damaged

the relationship. You're rebuilding the bridge for whatever erosion happened from that mean remark. You're saying, "I'm not taking that personally, honey. I know you were upset. You can't tear down the bridge between us, no matter what you do. I am always here for you."

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:11:54](#)

If your child is open to it, you can even toss them around and make it into a game like, "Remember today when you were so mad at me, and you called me a ... what was that you said? Poopy head? Look at me, I am the poopy head coming to hug you. Poopy head is coming in for a hug. I have to give you 10 hugs with my poopy arms." Your child shrieks and races away, and you grab them and catch them up. You can do that with little kids. But I think the point is, whether you're laughing or you're being more serious like you would be with an older kid like I just did, you're always rebuilding the bridge. You're never shaming them about having hurt your feelings, because you're the grownup. You're in charge of managing your own feelings.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:12:40](#)

As they get older you can say, "You said you wanted a new mommy. Ouch, but you know what? I know better. I know you didn't mean that." You're acknowledging your feelings, but what you're doing is you're making the repair. You're telling your child, "I don't care that you're trying to build a wall between us. I'm dismantling that wall. You can never build a wall between us, no matter what you say to me."

Question 4:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:13:22](#)

A parent is asking, "What about when the answer to everything and everybody is stupid, you're stupid?" I'm assuming this is when he's angry. In that case, the answer is you empathize with the anger that's under it. "Wow, everything is stupid right now, even me. You must be so angry about this. Sweetheart, tell me about it. What's upsetting you here?" "It's because you're stupid. It's because everything's stupid. It's because," and he just goes

on with stupid. You say, "Wow, you are so upset. It seems like it's about your lunchbox. Is that right?" Whatever it is. If you've got a clue what it's about, you've got a door in.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:14:02](#)

You can ignore the stupid thing, and just talk to him about what he's upset about once you help him process what is going on, and remember, it's the feelings under the anger. "Oh, they tease you about your lunchbox. Oh, Jimmy called your lunchbox stupid? Oh, Sweetie, no wonder you're upset. I am so sorry. Oh my goodness, I'm upset too to hear this. You must've been so embarrassed. That makes you feel like everything's stupid, even me, because I got you this lunchbox. Is that right? Oh, s\Sweetie, come here. Let me give you a hug."

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:14:38](#)

Notice I haven't said, "Don't call anything stupid." You have no influence until you connect. When your child is upset, you have to connect first, and then you can correct. At that point, you can say, "You know what, Sweetie? That word stupid, that's a mean word. It makes people feel bad. You can tell me that you're upset without calling me names." That's all. That's what we're trying to teach our children all day, every day. How do you express your wants and needs and upsets without attacking somebody else? That's all it is.

Question 5:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:15:16](#)

This is a question from a parent who says, "My almost five-year-old has learned some nasty language from other kids at school, and also from his father and me during heated moments. He uses these words constantly. I say, 'That's not a nice word. Try this word instead,' but it doesn't work." Well, the problem with that is that he's using those words because they are powerful words. He's not about to give them up, especially since they have the power to get a big reaction out of you, and especially since he's heard you and his father use them. You know how it is. Children will not always do what we say, but they will always eventually

do what we do. It is important that you and your husband role model what you want him to do when he gets angry so that he's not using that language.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:16:03](#)

I want to say that I'm not going to give you a detailed answer, because there's a very detailed answer on the website. If you go to the Aha! Parenting website, and you put the word swearing into the search box, the first article that will pop up is called Three-Year-Old: How to Stop Swearing. I know your child's five, but it's the same set of principles. It's basically a three part thing where you do what you've done so far, where you explain why it's problematic, and you give him substitutes, but you brainstorm and you make it really fun.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:16:32](#)

You explain that these are rude words that people say when they're angry, and they can't figure out how to express their feelings in a respectful way. They're like an attack on the other person, to make the person feel bad. As he knows, in your house you don't call names. That's the rule, because your family rule is to be kind. Ask him what kinds of things you could say in your family when someone's angry or frustrated, to express the anger without attacking, because all people get angry. But how can you express the anger without attacking the other person? You can do it, and turn it into a brainstorming game where you write down the things that you come up with.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:17:10](#)

Then you'll see in the post that finally you're going to eliminate any power struggles that might be causing him to torment you with his swearing. You're also going to give him an opportunity to experiment using the word during special time and in safe ways. I'm not going to go into more detail about this, but I think when you follow that set of principles and those specific suggestions, I think you'll see that this practice will actually die away.

Question 6:

- Parent: [00:17:39](#) I have three kids, a four-year-old, a three-year-old, and a nine-month-old.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:17:49](#) Oh my goodness. You have your hands full.
- Parent: [00:17:52](#) Yeah, we're very busy. My husband slipped a couple of times in the last year in a fit of frustration and said a potty word. My kids now repeat it endlessly.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:18:14](#) Of course.
- Parent: [00:18:16](#) I went to your website and found an amazing article you wrote about curse words, and practices you could try to get them out of that habit. I tried basically following your advice, and doing that work. It felt like it actually got a little bit worse, so maybe I wasn't applying it quite right. Then somebody else, another person who I respect, had said, "Well, just as an alternative, why don't you try to ignore it?"
- Parent: [00:18:50](#) You mentioned earlier on today's call that you should never ignore bad behavior, but I do feel like that worked a little bit. However, when my husband gets mad, it's like even though I ignore it, they don't really use it anymore with me, but they do use it a lot with him because they know that's what triggered it to begin with, I think. I'm just curious what is the best practice when a child learns a potty word, and uses it with power. If I'm not going to ignore it, what are the alternatives? I probably just need a little bit more guidance on this.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:19:37](#) Okay. First of all, when they do it with your husband, he's not angry at that moment when they're doing it, right? And they're not angry?
- Parent: [00:19:48](#) He is a little escalated. More like they can tell they're starting to work on him, and he probably should be stopping, dropping and breathing, but he's probably not doing that. They're recognizing he's about to blow, and in

the past when he's used those words is when he got frustrated. His version of blowing is not that dramatic. It just involves one or two of these words. Now they know exactly that the triggering moment is coming, and they start to throw in those words. It's crazy.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:20:23](#)

Yeah.

Parent: [00:20:24](#)

It's been six months since he ever said it, but this little series of action has been happening in the last six months on a regular basis.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:20:33](#)

That's so funny. So he's not swearing at them anymore, or in front of them anymore, but they know about the charge?

Parent: [00:20:40](#)

Yeah. It has power. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:20:43](#)

They don't swear around you anymore, because you don't react, right? It doesn't have power with you. In general, the article that you read, I say, "Don't just ignore it," because your child still knows that you had a reaction, and the word has power, and also then the child will use it with somebody else to try it out, right? That's why I suggest not just ignoring it. But it did work because you said, "Look, that doesn't have any power to me," and so they stopped, right? No big deal. But they know it has power with their dad.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:21:15](#)

Go back to my original article that you read. I think your husband needs to read it, and needs to use words with them in a way that shows that it doesn't have any power with him. As you know, playing a game with it like, "What did you say? Did you say ..." getting them laughing about it, and doing that in a special time context. It may be that if he can get them laughing about it, that the power struggle goes away. In general, "What did you say? Did you say you need 100 kisses?" Just turn it into a roughhousing game.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:21:57](#)

Whatever that word is that they're using, it doesn't have any power unless we give it power. It could be like they

look at us and go, "Snake oil," and we would say, "Oh, snake oil." They would laugh, and that would be that, right? There's a reason they're doing it. They're doing it to shock him, so he has to stop being shocked. He could even transform it into a roughhousing opportunity and get them laughing, and then it would be done. But until he's able to do that, I think they're going to keep doing it. This is not something you're in control of. You've already done your part. They're, unfortunately, still going based on his part, what he's already done in the past. I'm sorry. I wish I had a better answer for you, but it's really going to have to come from him.

Parent: [00:22:36](#) Yeah, that's good. Thank you very much.

Question 7:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:22:40](#) This parent says her nine-year-old is swearing a lot from something as simple as he's upset about losing a game, or they ask him to put sunblock on. He definitely has a full emotional backpack, but he can't seem to empty it. Sometimes he says he needs to cry, but he can't manage to cry. He just gets a sore throat instead. Oh my goodness. The body never lies. The feelings are locked in. They're trying to surface to consciousness. They're in the body. They're trying to come up into the mind, into consciousness, but they're getting stuck at the level of the throat because they can't find their way up into the mind where he could be conscious of them. What we need to do is we need to help him surface those feelings and become conscious of them. Then they wouldn't give him a sore throat.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:23:32](#) So when he gets upset, the only release he knows is swearing, which is basically a ritualized form of anger or attack. I would say the cure is to help him laugh. If you can get him laughing every single day, and you empathize with everything he says or does, I think what you're going to see is that he's going to feel safe enough to cry, even

though he's already nine. But I want to add there's a big difference between expressing disappointment about losing a game and not wanting to put on sunblock.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:24:07](#)

When he curses at you about the sunblock, you can just say, "It sounds like you're letting me know how much you hate sunblock, Honey. I hear you. I understand, but you know what? It's better than getting cancer later in life. We do put on sunblock. That's nonnegotiable. You can tell me how much you hate it, but swearing is never okay. You can tell me in some other way, without attacking me. Let's try that again." If he says, "No," and he swears at you again, in that case, that is really a full backpack issue. I would just walk away until he calms down a little bit, and you say that he gets past it. But notice that when you react badly to the swear words, he's more likely to use them.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:24:55](#)

I'd also have a time when he's calm when you explain to him, "Swear words are designed to make people uncomfortable. That's what they are. They are attack words. It's like calling somebody a name, like calling somebody stupid. Swearing at them is the same kind of thing. It's an attack word." He is old enough to tell you how he feels without attacking you. I would just tell him. Anytime he does, I would just set a limit calmly about it, but I wouldn't get into a big power struggle about the swear words because you won't win. I would instead go to the root of it, which is the full backpack.

Question 8:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:25:29](#)

This parent says, "My five-year-old son shouts, 'You fool,' when he's frustrated. He learned it at school." I get it. But the three-year-old has now learned to do the same thing, and you tell them it's not okay to speak disrespectfully. What I would do is listen to what the child is saying. At least your three and five-year-olds are not lashing out physically, so I would just say listen and reflect. That's the first thing you do. Your five-year-old shouts, "You fool!"

You would say, "Ouch, you're calling me names." Now connect before you correct. You just described what's happening. You've recognized it. You're not ignoring the behavior.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:26:07](#)

"Ouch, you're calling me names." Now you're connecting before you correct. "You must be so mad at me that you're calling me names." Now you put the limit. "No name calling, Sweetie. That's not okay, ever. You can tell me how mad you are without attacking me. You're upset about XYZ. Tell me about it. Oh, you didn't want that. You wanted this." You're listening and you're reflecting. He's going to learn "I never get away with calling names, but it works better if I just tell them what I'm mad about, and then they understand and they empathize."

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:26:44](#)

Okay. It says here, "They keep doing it, and they shout louder." Yes. Any child who calls you names or swears at you, and you respond by taking it personally, getting hooked on their expression of anger, and telling them they're being rude, they will always escalate because what's happening is you're missing their cue. You're not responding to the anger. You're responding instead to something completely unimportant, which is that they're using the nuclear option to tell you they're angry.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:27:12](#)

If your four-year-old said to you, "You can't come to my birthday party," would you get into a fight with them about whether you were allowed at their birthday party? No, you would recognize that this is the nuclear option for a four-year-old, and they're showing you how angry they are. You would try not to laugh. When your child says, "You fool," or curses at you, it's exactly the same thing. Don't get sidetracked by that. It's totally unimportant. What you say is just what I just said.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:27:40](#)

But if you stop and you correct it before you've connected, of course they're going to escalate, because you haven't listened to them. Okay, I hope that's helpful. I realize, by the way -- I'm not taking this lightly -- I understand that having your child call you a fool is not only unpleasant, it's

totally embarrassing if they do it in front of other people. But I think you'll find if you do this, that this behavior will quickly go away.

Question 9:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:28:08

This is a question from a parent who says her four-and-a-half-year-old gets very upset and frustrated with her, and says, "You're mean. You're not listening, you hateful thing," every time she doesn't get her way. This parent wants to know if there will be light at the end of the tunnel if she refrains from punishment? I would say yes, there will be. She won't keep acting like this. But there is a way to react. You're not just going to ignore her acting like this. You don't want her to think it's a normal way to treat another human being, but the point is you want to deal with the feelings under the words, instead of just responding to the words, right?

Dr. Laura Markham:

Stay calm, describe what's happening. She's telling you as best she can how angry she is. We can help her with that by accepting the anger, and connecting with her, and redirecting so that she begins to use her words. It's really like setting any other limit. "You're mad. No name calling. Name calling hurts. You can tell me in words that you're angry." That's really what you're doing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Here's an example of how this might go. She says, "You hateful thing," and you say, "Ouch, you called me a hateful thing? You must be pretty upset to attack me like that with a mean name. What's going on, sweetie?" She says, "You're not listening to me." You say, "Oh, I'm not listening to you?" Maybe you weren't. You say, "I'm sorry. You're right. I was distracted. Tell me again. I'm listening hard." She says, "I want a cookie," like she's already been telling you this, and you in fact know that this is what she's been telling you, and you'd already said no to it, right?

- Dr. Laura Markham: You say, "I am listening so hard, and I hear you. You really want a cookie. Do I have that right?" She says, "Yes, right now," because she's still being very demanding because in fact there's hunger going on, and there's anger at you because you were saying no, and she didn't get her way. She's having a hard time controlling herself. You say, "Wow, right now? You are yelling right now. You really want that cookie. You know what? We can have a cookie after dinner. Cookies are after dinner treats, but I hear how hungry you are. I think you do need some food right now. Let's go get you milk or an apple. Come on."
- Dr. Laura Markham: She says, "No, I don't want milk or an apple. You're mean." You say, "You are so mad about no cookie. You're calling me names, right? Sweetie, name calling hurts. You can tell me you're mad. Can you tell me you're angry right now? Tell me why?" "I'm angry. You won't give me a cookie. I need one now." The parent now has a victory here. This child has just put her anger into words in a completely appropriate set of words. I mean, she is only four. You say, smiling and warmly, "Yes, I really hear you. You're angry because I said no cookie, right?" "Yes." She feels heard and understood.
- Dr. Laura Markham: You say, "I hear how hungry you are. I hear how much you want a cookie. Let's go see what we can find that's healthy for you to eat, and you can tell me more about this cookie. You can have it after dinner. Let's go. What kind of cookie do you think you'll have?" Now some kids will go with you reluctantly into the kitchen, and they'll accept a glass of milk as you're chatting about the kind of cookie they'll choose after dinner. Some kids will just have a meltdown at this point. That being mean stuff, that calling you names stuff about you're a hateful thing is ... which, by the way, how'd she learn "you're a hateful thing"? That came from somewhere, right? I'd like to explore that. That's a separate issue.
- Dr. Laura Markham: But her crossing the limits on using language like that with you could be simply a provocation, just like she might turn around and hit her little sister. That provocation is

designed to get you to set a limit with her so she can cry, so she can empty her backpack. You're never giving in and giving her the cookie, just like you wouldn't let her hit her sister. But you are setting a limit with the understanding that she's got a lot of feelings going on, and what you're really trying to do is help her with the feelings. If at this point she has a meltdown, "No, no, I need a cookie," great. Then it means she really needed to cry, and you'd rather have her do this, than do it during dinner. The meltdown in that case is fine.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The way you'd have the conversation about you hateful thing is later after things are good, and you've had a nice time together. Let's say she's in the bathtub, and you're with her. You might say, "You know earlier when you called me a hateful thing?" She'll smile, maybe a little embarrassed, and she'll say, "Yeah." You'll say, "Did you know that's an attack? Did you know that's like attacking somebody? It's not like hitting, but it's like an attack with your words to use that. Did somebody say that to you? Did somebody attack you with those words?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would really want to know where she heard it. She'll probably tell you. Notice you're not reprimanding her for saying it to you. You're trying to find it out. Then when she tells you, "Yes, Bethany said it to me, or yes, Grandma said it to me, or yes, I heard someone say it to someone at the playground," you say, "Wow. That could really hurt someone's feelings, right? Did it hurt your feelings when Bethany said it?" She might say, "Yeah."

Dr. Laura Markham:

You could give her a hug and say, "You know what? That's a mean thing to say to somebody because it could really hurt their feelings. You know what? It was wrong of Bethany to say that to you. I guess she was pretty mad, and she wasn't grownup like you. She didn't remember to use her words and be grownup like you were today when you said to me how mad you were. Instead, she attacked you with the mean name, right? We can always tell someone how we feel without attacking them with mean names, right? That's what we do in our family, right?"

That's it. You're not reprimanding her about what she did. She knows what she did, and she's getting it. Yet, she wants to aspire to be this better person, so she hears that.

Question 10:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:34:42

A parent asks, "Is there an age when she could expect the disrespectful language to stop, and they can express their anger in a better way?" Yes, yes, yes there is. It depends on when you start doing this kind of parenting. If you have been doing this kind of parenting their whole lives, kids won't do this for much longer than the age of six. Actually, usually it's less long than that, as long as they're not seeing it modeled by parents. If they see anyone, parents, big brothers, kids at the playground, model this kind of language, they will try it out, just as in the example with Bethany.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So if your child uses this stuff routinely, then they've seen it somewhere, or they've been allowed to do it, and that was the best way they could get heard. So once you start parenting this way, and you do what we just said in that last little script, you'll find that they will stop doing this. Also, the stronger your relationship with them, the less likely they are to attack you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If you have a great relationship with your partner, even when you get very angry at each other, you're probably not attacking each other. However, if you don't have a great relationship, you're more likely to attack each other when you get upset. Really think about that. If you have a partner, if you've ever had a partner, you know how easy it is to attack when you're upset. Think about that in relation to your child. Of course, a six-year-old feels like attacking when they're upset. They're only six. They don't have the same brain development we have. As I say, many of us have attacked a partner verbally. Just keep that in mind as you wonder what's developmentally normal. The more patient you are in working through these things in the way

that we've just described, the more quickly the kids will give them up and stop using those coping methods.

Question 11:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:36:29

This is a question from a parent about cursing and swearing. "My three-year-old has started using disrespectful language. Asking him to stop doesn't work." I'm going to keep this answer very short, because there's a whole article on the Aha! Parenting website about this. Just put the word swearing, not cursing but swearing, into the search box and you'll find the article. Basically, what I would say is of course a three-year-old wants to swear. They're experimenting with power. That's the age they're at. He's found a very powerful word, and it has the power to get a big reaction out of you or anyone else. He wants to say it all the time.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Some people say, "Ignore them and it'll go away." I don't think so. If you don't react, they're going to try it on your best friend when she comes to visit, so I wouldn't do that. Instead, I would try some other strategies. One strategy is redirection. One is letting him experiment, and the other is to eliminate any power struggle around it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Basically, the redirection is, you're going to ask him what he thinks the word means next time he uses it. You're going to explain that swear words like this one are rude words that people say when they're very angry, and they can't figure out how to express their feelings respectfully. It's an attack, like calling someone a mean name. He can see that it makes people feel bad when he uses those rude words.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Since you know he's smarter than that, that he can come up with lots of words to use when he's angry or frustrated so that he can express his feelings about attacking someone, because people in your house have a rule that you don't call people names. Then you brainstorm really

cool words like buffalo bung, or Agamemnon that he can use when he's angry, or simply, "I'm furious!" You write those all down, and you start using them in your house when anybody's mad at anything. If you stub your toe, if you discover you're out of bread, whatever. That's the redirection one.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You can also let him experiment during special time. Tell him that he can use any words he wants during special time for 15 minutes. Set the timer, and when he does it, pretend you're hard of hearing when he uses his words. Say, "What did you say?" If he's using a swear word, you can find a word that rhymes with it and say, "Is that what you said? What does that mean?" Just act like you're hard of hearing, and get him laughing about it. The anxiety he has about this word will be diffused, because it may be that he heard this word at school and he wants to be cool like those other kids, or that there's an overlay of anxiety about it because you have told him not to use the word.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The giggling will actually really help. You can also meet his word. You can tell him you're shocked, shocked, shocked by that word. You can use a word back at him like snollygobster, or supercalifragilistic or whatever. You can do that even not during special time, but just anytime he uses the word. You can somehow get him laughing. Basically, what you're playing with there is the ability to shock you. You're letting him act outrageously, but in a safe way so that he can get it out of his system in a way that makes it less enticing to need to shock you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You can say at the end, "That was a fun game, wasn't it? Okay, I'll do this with you whenever you want during special time, but otherwise no swear words in our house. If you want to use them, you can say them privately in your bedroom or the bathroom, but no swear words otherwise in our house, except at special time. We'll have special time again tomorrow, won't we? Give me five."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then the other thing would be the power struggle. Find ways that he can be powerful without using words like

that. If he does use words like that, you grab him and you say, "What did you say? Did you say you need 100 kisses? We'll see about that." You grab him up, and you do a little roughhousing and kissing him and stuff. He'll be laughing and laughing. He will stop needing to use the word because he's having too good a time with you playing. Hopefully that will solve your issue, and you can look up the article on it and get a little more information too.

Question 12:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:40:32

Our next question is about disrespectful language. This is for a four-year-old, and it's very common to have disrespectful language from four-year-olds. What you have to understand about four-year-olds is they're natural bullies. I use the word lightly, on purpose, meaning they're not actually bullies. They're trying to understand power. They act disrespectfully because they're trying to understand power. In other words, I'm four years old. I know what I want. How do I get what I want? Then they pull all the levers to get what they want. They'll threaten you. They'll tell you they hate you. They'll tell you you can't come to their birthday party. They'll call you stupid. Because they don't understand that those are the nuclear options, and you don't have to use the nuclear options if you're just trying to be heard. But they don't know that. Often, we don't help them feel heard.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So if you have a four-year-old who's using disrespectful language, the first thing to know is, it's natural and normal for four-year-olds to do that. They will outgrow it. That's the first thing, so don't freak out. You're not training your child to be a terrible teenager, because there's no relationship. They will not be doing this as teens. If you parent this way, they will not do it as teens. If you parent with punishment, they will do it as teens because then they'll be fighting with you, openly.

Dr. Laura Markham: But the other thing to remember is that children escalate when they don't feel heard. Imagine that you are trying to express something to your partner. Your partner is not really listening to you, in your opinion, and keeps doing whatever he or she is doing that's aggravating you and upsetting you. At this point, you feel like they're not really getting it. Of course, what do you do in that instance? You escalate. You raise your voice. You shout at them.

Dr. Laura Markham: You might say things that are unkind, or that you don't even mean, or you might generalize, "You never do this. You always do that," things that are not even true. But you might do that if you were trying to get your partner to pay attention to what you were saying, and to really take you seriously, and take your concerns seriously. I'm not, by the way, saying this is ideal conflict resolution. It's not. Our goal is always to express what we need without attacking the other person.

Dr. Laura Markham: I'm saying that it's human nature, unless we work on ourselves, to attack the other person to get what we need. That's the work we're all doing, and hopefully it's what we're helping our children to learn to do from the time they're four. So when your daughter at the age of four calls you, "Stupid idiot, I hate you," then you have to remember that she's escalating in an effort to feel heard, and also because she's four.

Dr. Laura Markham: I would say the first thing is really ... the person who posed this question, she's saying here that when her daughter does that, she says, "I'm so mad, Mommy." That's great. That's exactly what you want to do. Give her a way that she can express her anger without attacking you. I'm so mad. She said she even gave her daughter permission to stomp her foot, which is great. Kids sometimes, that's all they need is they need a better way to express it. But in this case, it hasn't worked. Her daughter is still yelling these disrespectful things at her on a regular basis.

Dr. Laura Markham: So then I wonder, why is it that she's doing this almost daily when her mom has given her other ways to express

it? That to me is a red flag. I would say something else is going on. The child doesn't feel heard, and she doesn't feel connected. In a way, that's the important question here. I understand that the parent here is going to say, "I feel disrespected. My child has no right to call me a stupid idiot." The child, by the way, picked this up at school. It's not like the parents use this language, of course. But the parent always feels bad, like their child is being disrespectful to them.

Dr. Laura Markham:

What I would encourage you to do is to change the language you're hearing. Instead of hearing it as disrespectful language, hear it as a red flag. What's really a problem here is that your child feels so powerless, and disconnected and unheard that she has to escalate this way. That's what's really the problem. I'm not blaming the parent here and saying, "You're doing something wrong," but I am saying there's a reason she's doing this, and that even though you gave her an alternative way to express herself, that she's still doing it says to me that something else needs to be changed.

Dr. Laura Markham:

It isn't to crack down and be fierce about it, although you might want to be firm. But I really think you'd be firm in the sense of, "That kind of language isn't okay," with a six-year-old, but with a four-year-old I would say something else is going on that we need to solve first. Here's what you would actually do. Your child says, "You're stupid. I hate you." The answer to that is, "Ouch. It sounds like you're trying to hurt my feelings, sweetheart. You must be so mad at me. What's wrong? Tell me." Now your child feels heard.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You're not trying to make her express it in a different way with the stomping or the, "I'm so mad." You simply recognize what's going on and say, "I'm open to hearing you," at which point your child says, "I'm mad because..." In this case, the child has a two-year-old brother, and maybe she feels the brother is getting special treatment, or she doesn't want to go to bed, or whatever it is. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if you are going to insist

on your limit, and she doesn't like the limit. You can still insist on your limit, but totally hear her upset about it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The more you can empathize with her upset, and just bypass the language, then you're going to reconnect. Then she doesn't, in fact, have to use that language. Find a mantra that works for you. Whenever she uses that language, you say to yourself, "She's having a hard time. She doesn't feel heard." You can say, "Ouch, it sounds like you're trying to hurt my feelings. You know we don't call each other names in this house. Sweetie, what's going on? Why are you so upset?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

That invites your child to actually talk about it, instead of just calling names. Now you're getting to the point where you can help her, and where she'll feel connected enough to not want to call you names, in the same way that if your partner said to you, "Wow, Sweetheart. You sound so upset. I didn't understand you felt so strongly about this. Tell me about it." Then you're not going to escalate. You're going to say, "Oh, well here's how I feel." That's what you're inviting your daughter to do.

Question 13:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:47:30

Here's a question from a parent who says, "Our seven-year-old has recently begun to be rude. We've tried to curb punishing him, but we're increasingly concerned about his lack of respect. We feel we don't have adequate tools to set him on the right track." You say the rudeness is recent. Did it begin with the course? If so, then the reason it began is that he doesn't have a good reason to cooperate and not be rude now that you've stopped punishing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Obviously, the reason you want him to have is not fear of punishment, but a feeling of love and connection with you, so he wants to follow your lead, right? If you're using

punishment to keep him from being rude, then you're using fear. Believe me, that's not going to last long. He's seven, but he'll be 15 before you know it, and bigger than you are. You want to use love and connection as your reason, and that increases as you use connection.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You're asking about the adequate tools to put him on the right track. The adequate tool is connection. So even as you set the limit, you would create connection. Here's an example. "Ouch, that tone of voice," or if he's using rude words you would say, "Those words. Those words could really hurt someone's feelings. It sounds like you're mad at me about something. You can tell me what you're mad without attacking me. Tell me what's going on, Hon. I can help."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Later, after you resolve the issue that's making him upset, then you can have a conversation with him like, "Hey, son. I love you. I would not use a mean voice towards you. I wouldn't use mean words towards you. I would just tell you if I'm upset about something. I expect you not to use that mean voice and those mean words with me." That's a little curt, that tone. That's the most curt I would ever be, but I think you're being very clear about the limit. Since you clearly were doing punishing before, he'll recognize okay, this is a limit. Dad is serious about this limit.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You mentioned that the three-year-old is argumentative at bedtime, like he's copying his big brother. You know what? He's a three-year-old. It's bedtime. Keep setting the limit calmly and kindly, and with a sense of humor, and building connection as you do. He'll get that he can argue, but you're not going to argue back. It takes two people to have a power struggle.

Question 14:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:49:47

A parent says, "My six-year-old often calls me names and verbally attacks me if I don't do what he wants." It sounds

like this is a new situation since you stopped threatening him with punishment. The answer is that punishing relies on fear, connection relies on love. You have to be connecting. The fact that you're doing special time is great. You also need to connect with empathy as you go through your day. So when he says he wants something, and you say no, acknowledge how much he wishes he could have it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then in those moments when he calls you a name, model emotional regulation. Express the hurt, and state what you need from him, but don't resort to the parental tantrum. You're modeling. "Ouch, you just called me a name. You must be really mad at me and want to hurt my feelings. I expect you to tell me how mad you are without attacking me, Sweetheart. No name calling in this house."

Dr. Laura Markham:

If he keeps calling names, it moves to a whole new level where he's actually provoking you. In that case, you move in close, you empathize with how upset he must be to be talking to you this way, and what you're trying to do is get him crying at that point. I have to add it really does sound to me from your question like he's purposely provoking you, and needs to cry. Make it safe enough for him to cry by not attacking back. If you can get him to cry, I think you'll be amazed at the difference afterwards, and his level of trust and cooperation.

Question 15:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:51:07

"How do I teach my kids not to talk back to me, not to disagree with me, and how not to boss me around, and not to criticize my behaviors?" She has a three and a six-year-old. First of all, that sounds really frustrating. It sounds like there's an attitude of disrespect that's going on with your kids where you're feeling criticized, and talked back to by your three and six-year-old, and bossed around, and doesn't sound like a good situation.

- Dr. Laura Markham: I would say that the way children learn to respect is when the tone in your home is respectful. Kids learn from the way they are spoken to, how people should be spoken to. The first thing I would ask myself is, "What is the general tone in our home? Is it a tone of respect? Am I using a respectful voice when I talk with my kids. Any other adults who interact with them -- Is that person using a respectful voice?" That would be the first thing.
- Dr. Laura Markham: The second thing I would say is that children will try on tones of voice. They will absolutely try on rudeness, for instance, because they hear that from other kids at school. When they do, the appropriate response is, "Whoa, excuse me. Are you mad at me about something, Sweetheart?" I'd start there. Are you mad at me? If they're mad at you, then you would listen to it.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Maybe they're using the tone of voice because they're angry at you, in which case you say, "Oh, you're really mad that I said we couldn't have some screen time now, for instance, or a cookie. I hear you, Sweetie. You wish you could, and you're pretty mad at me about it, and you want me to know. I hear that. You can tell me in a normal voice. I will always listen when you're mad at me. You know what? Sometimes we can even do something about it. I can try hard to make things better for you, but I can't always. Sometimes when it's a cookie before dinner, we're just going to have to say no."
- Dr. Laura Markham: Notice that I'm not responding to their angry tone by being angry back. I'm responding by encouraging civil conversation, even about something they disagree with me on. That does get to one of the things you asked, how to keep them from disagreeing with you. You're not going to keep your children from disagreeing with you. They are going to disagree with you for the rest of their lives, from time to time. Disagreement is part of every human relationship. In fact, conflict is part of every human relationship.

- Dr. Laura Markham: Our job is to teach our children how to express their needs and their disagreements without attacking the other person. So if you're feeling attacked right now, that's the thing you say. When your child says something to you, say, "Ouch. Ouch. You told me that, and that really sounded really harsh to me." That's when you say, "Are you mad at me?" If your child is just rude, like your six-year-old tries on something that they've heard at school and they're like, "You should know better, Mom," that kind of thing, which is both a mean tone and also a rude remark.
- Dr. Laura Markham: You could say, "Excuse me. Let's try that over again. It sounds like you think I should know better, and maybe you're right, and maybe you're wrong, but that's not a tone I use when I talk to you. You can't use that tone when you talk to me. Let's try that over again. What are you trying to tell me?" Just say, "Excuse me," or "Ouch. Are you trying to hurt my feelings? Because that tone sounds like it. What's going on, Sweetheart?"
- Dr. Laura Markham: The bossing you around part, no one can boss you around if you don't do what they're telling you to do. When your three-year-old says, "No, do it this way," unless you do it that way, they're not bossing you around. They may be trying to boss you around, because that's what children with a full backpack do. They give orders. They get whiny. They get demanding. They get actually really demanding, and sometimes they'll say, "No. No, do it my way." That's what kids with full backpacks do.
- Dr. Laura Markham: I think the real answer to your question is, it's all about connection, and it's all about respect. If your kids have full backpacks, they can't really connect, and they can't really be respectful. All of what you're learning in this course should help you to completely transform the tone in your home.

Question 16:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:55:23

This is a question from a parent who asks about when kids are rude, and how to set the limit around that when the kids are rude, or speak rudely to their younger sibling or their parents. She knows it's happening because the sibling has to share her. She does special time, even every day for more than an hour, which is fantastic. That's wonderful. But still hitting and rudeness happens. So if the hitting and rudeness is still happening, then it's about a full backpack.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would say make sure that you're getting time -- Since you're doing an hour anyway of one-on-one time -- make sure some of that time your child gets to decide what happens, and some of the time **you** get to decide what happens. You can do roughhousing, and make sure your child is laughing. That's really important.

In the moment when your child is rude or hits, if your child is hitting, you stop your child from hitting. You say, "No hitting. Hitting hurts. I'm not going to let you hit. Tell me what you're mad about." That's it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If the child is speaking rudely to their younger sibling, you can say, "Wow, those words can hurt." It's the five-year-old talking to the two-year-old in this case. "Those words can hurt. Sweetie, we don't talk to each other that way. You can tell your sister or brother what you need without attacking them. Tell me what you need. Let's figure this out. We can work together." You do have to set a limit. You can't ignore that kind of behavior, even though you're also working in a parallel way to help your child to express their feelings through play and laughter, and of course tears, which you don't mention is happening, even though you're doing the special time, which is so great.

Question 17:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:56:58

This question is from a parent who says, "My seven-year-old has been exposed to inappropriate words, mainly from older kids at school. We can usually get at the root of what's bothering him, and get him to stop using them momentarily, but he'll use them again when he's anxious, or startled or angry. What's the best way to help him to not use inappropriate words? Well, the good news is that your son isn't using swear words to shock you, but it does sound like he's developed a swearing habit so that he automatically uses swear words when he's startled. You know that many adults swear at those times. That can be a hard habit to break.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would treat it like any other undesirable habit. Agree on a substitute word. Every time he uses the swear word, remind him of the substitute word. Don't do it in a shaming way, but with a sense of humor. So if he decides that kerfuddle is going to be his swear word, when he uses an inappropriate swear word, say, "Kerfuddle! I agree, Kerfuddle!" Now you might need to have something that has more charge to it. He'll have to choose whatever that word is. But don't shame him, just say, "Kerfuddle!" or whatever it is. Be patient but insistent, and don't give up. He will eventually be able to let go of this habit, and he'll have a new word in his vocabulary, whatever your substitute word is. Luckily, he's only seven, so it's easier to undo a habit for someone that age.

Question 18:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:58:22

A parent asks, "How do we handle continued rudeness and bossy behavior? Our four-year-old has attitude and demands. We use connected parenting, but I'm not going to lie. Being around her right now is a struggle with her constant screaming, demands and rude behavior." I would say you're describing a child who just needs to cry. I hear you're putting in the special time, and roughhousing, and

empathic responses throughout the day. That's fantastic. You're building safety. You're getting her laughing. I'm assuming she laughs when you do roughhousing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

What happens then with crying? Does your child get a chance to cry? For a highly sensitive four-year-old who has a full backpack, as she obviously does, then this child may need to cry a lot over a period of time, and then it will decrease, diminish. In between the crying, you'll see a lot less demandingness, a lot less rude behavior and screaming. I'm not sure what's going on, but that's what it sounds like.

Dr. Laura Markham:

When you say you try to be empathic, I don't want that to mean that you just put up with your child's behavior. When your child is being demanding or being rude, you stop, drop, breathe. Then you say to her, "Ouch. That was a voice that could really hurt somebody's feelings. Let's try a do-over. You can tell me what you need without being rude." Remember, four-year-olds are experimenting with power. They're trying to learn how to get what they want in the world. They will use the nuclear option, whatever that is at that moment to them. It's our job to set those limits. How we act toward each other, how we act toward them, all of that matters a lot, but most four-year-olds will still experiment with rude, and nasty and demanding behavior. It's our job to say, "Sweetheart, no. That's not okay in our family. Remember our family rules, be kind. Let's try that again."

Question 19:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:00:34

A parent says, "Our five-year-old heard his father swear. Now the two-year-old copies him. It's hard not to be triggered, as I didn't grow up with this. So far, offering alternatives and being playful about it only works occasionally." I would say, your children know that you're triggered. You just handed them a remote control that

they can get you upset. They can't resist that power, so naturally they do it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I'm going to suggest that you, A, do set limits, but B, don't get triggered. Now I know that's easier said than done. But I think, as always, our children demand that we work on the parts of ourselves that are unhealed. I think if you didn't have such a trigger around this language, probably they wouldn't have taken this to such extremes where you just can't get rid of it. After all, they don't know these are such powerful words, except by our responses.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I'm going to suggest you really work on your response so that you can seem unflappable when your kids pull out these words. Then I suggest you have a conversation with your five-year-old about this. The next time he uses his big, bad word, ask him what he thinks the word means. Explain that this is a rude word that people say when they're very angry, and they can't figure out how to express their feelings respectfully, or they say it to make someone else feel bad, like an attack, like calling someone a name. It's a rude word, like calling someone a name, and you know he can come up with other words to say when he's angry or frustrated to express himself without attacking someone else. Because in your house, no one calls other people names. No one attacks each other. That's the rule. You're kind.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If he says, "But I heard Dad swear," then you say, "You're right, and Dad shouldn't have said that. Dad's working really hard to not ever say it again. Have you ever heard him say it again? No. See?" Once your five-year-old is no longer modeling for your two-year-old using swear words, I think you'll see that the two-year-old will drop it, especially if everyone else in the house says, "No, that's not what we say," and gives him a substitute word to say instead, right?

Dr. Laura Markham:

You've probably read my article about this on my website, but if you just search swearing on the website, there's an article about how to get kids to stop swearing that

includes using the words during special time, et cetera. I would also just say in the moment, if your son insists on using those words, you can send him off to the bathroom like, "Okay. You want to use words like that? That's where it's appropriate. You have to do it in private." I think he'll find that it's pretty boring to get sent off to the bathroom, and he won't want to. He'll want to hang out with the family. I think you'll see the word go by the wayside.

Question 20:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:03:43

A parent asks a similar question, but her son is 13 with developmental trauma, and possibly autism. He calls her other disrespectful things, as well as swearing at her. I would just say sit down with your son while you are doing well together, while you have a nice connection, while you've been doing some laughing together or something and say, "Sometimes when you get mad at me, you want to make sure I know, right? You use the worst words you can think of, right? You call me an idiot, or you swear at me. Isn't that right?" He'll probably look a little sheepish. He might even look a little proud of himself. You can say, "Sweetie, that's never okay. I don't call you names when I'm mad at you. You can't call me names when you're mad at me. If you do, I can't hear you. I can't hear what you're mad about. I can't help you. I can't talk to you. So when you call me names, what should I do?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now maybe he'll say, "You should tell me to stop and I'll stop," or maybe he'll say, "I don't know." If he can come up with a solution and you're willing to try that, great. If he can't, you can say, "Okay, then I'm going to need to walk away until you can talk to me without attacking me." He's not three, right? He may have had developmental trauma, but he's not three, where you're going to be creating an abandonment panic if you walk away from him. In that moment when he starts swearing at you and calling you names, you say, "I really want to hear what you have to say, and I can't hear it when you swear at me. As soon as

you're ready to talk to me without attacking, I want to hear what you have to say," and you walk away, literally. You go in your room and you shut the door.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think you'll see that pretty quickly he'll want to repair the relationship if you have a good relationship. If this is a signal to do some relationship repair, well, then that's a great signal to have. Of course, you want to take that cue as well and work on your relationship to strengthen it, so he does feel more in distress about driving you away with his words.

Question 21:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:05:58

This parent says, "Both my nine and 12-year-olds have begun to be very rude and defiant. I'm worried that video games are partly to blame. My older son wants to be left alone, and seems to think the whole world is against him. We do use special time and positive parenting techniques. Those work with the two-year-old, but not so much with the nine and 12-year-old. What's the biggest thing we can do to make sure we keep a strong connection with them?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

Well, it is harder when kids get to be in the tween years. You have to find ways to connect with them that are ways they want to connect. So even though I would limit video games and screen time, I would also find ways to connect with them over video games and screen time, especially because your 12-year-old seems to think the world is against him. So if you can be with him while he's playing video games, you can join him at those moments and be excited about his achievements. He might feel not so alone.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would also say that I have seen many nine-year-olds whose parents began using peaceful parenting techniques, which means special time, and roughhousing and laughter, and just connection and empathy. Those nine-year-olds took a lot longer to come around than three and four and

five-year-olds, but eventually they did. Usually, there was some crying first. Always, there was a lot of limit setting done empathically. But nine-year-olds who've been conventionally parented have a full backpack usually, and have learned some really bad habits like unless they're punished, they don't care, because that's how they've been trained to do things.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would just say if you're still new at this, that you can expect that your nine-year-old might take longer to come around than your two-year-old. What about the 12-year-old? Well, even worse, I'm afraid, because the brain's already rewired twice, and your 12-year-old is really set in their ways, and often beginning to look beyond the family for closeness. You said, "What is the biggest thing we can do to make sure we keep a strong connection?" I would say empathic responses to everything where you really try to see their point of view. Absolutely set limits as necessary, but always with empathy and understanding, and always regulate yourself. Never throw your own tantrums. I think when you do, kids lose respect for you, right?

Dr. Laura Markham:

With tweens, you just can't get away with that anymore, if you ever were doing that. I think the special time really matters. Let them decide what you're going to do for special time. It might look a little different with older kids than with younger kids. As I say, it might include screen time, for instance, but it's totally worth it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If you have a boy, I would recommend one of Michael Gurian's books like *A Fine Young Man*, and he has several others. If you have a daughter, I'd recommend *Untangled* by Lisa Damour. The point is that this is a whole new stage, tweens, and you want to stay connected so your kids aren't growing away from you. The biggest thing you can do is to really focus on connection every single day.

Question 22:

- Dr. Laura Markham: 01:09:35 Our next question is from a parent who says, "My question is what to do when there seems to be no natural consequence to negative behavior. For example, what should the consequences be for using swear words in our home when they know that it is against our family rule of respect and peace? How do we motivate them to complete their morning responsibilities like brushing their teeth on time without using a reward system?" I don't recommend consequences at all, natural consequences or any other kind. I can't tell from your question whether you actually know that, so it may be you're not very far along in the course yet.
- Dr. Laura Markham: The way you motivate kids to complete their morning responsibilities is you set up a chart that gives them the right to move themselves through the schedule, and then you work with them on it. You set up the chart with them. They make the chart. They take a picture of themselves brushing their teeth. Then every morning you say, "Hey, where are you on your chart? Oh, you're there. Cool. So what else do you still have to do?" Your kid tells you. They're in charge of themselves.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Of course, before you would expect a kid to be able to move themselves through the schedule, you would've connected with them. That's really important so that they have some motivation to cooperate and do what you're asking them to do, because otherwise why should they move through the schedule, right? So if you haven't read my article on the morning routine, then please take a look at it, because I think it'll tell you everything you need to know for that.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Basically, your question is assuming that you have to use rewards or punishments. Rewards to get your kid to do something, and punishments to keep them from doing something. That's what it sounds like you've been doing. But actually, there's a much more effective way to do this, which is to motivate your kid based on their deeper needs,

like their need for mastery. That's what the chart system does in the morning, where they get to be in charge of themselves. Their desire to be warmly connected to you, which is the most important need for any child.

Dr. Laura Markham:

That warm connection is what motivates children to follow your lead. So when you talked about swearing, your children are nine and seven, so they know swearing is not okay. If they're doing it, they are not being open to your influence and following your lead. The preventive maintenance that you need to do is all about connection so that your child feels warmly connected to you, and doesn't want to endanger that.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now the problem is if you've been doing conventional parenting with rewards and punishments, you destroy that connection. Punishment destroys the connection. It erodes it. It doesn't destroy it. It lessens it. You've got some repair work to do on your connection before your children want to do what you're asking them to do. So if you've just begun using this kind of parenting, really focus on the connection. It can take a while before that gets stronger and stronger, but it does get stronger every day. It's compounding. As opposed to punishment, which you have to increase the punishment over and over again to continue to get kids to not do what you're telling them not to do.

Dr. Laura Markham:

As you've seen since you have a nine-year-old, they get too big for the punishment to work. So if your children are still swearing, and they know it's against the family rule of respect and peace, it sounds to me like they're doing this to taunt you, or as a defiant thing, which sounds like a power struggle, or they're doing it to shock you. I would be unflappable, unshockable. As soon as your kids use profanity, I would say, "Hey, you know the rule. Those are words that can only be said in your room. Up in your room, please." But most important of all, step up the connection.

Question 23:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:13:33

Another parent also has a question about potty words. "Our almost five-year-old uses potty words all day, every day. We calmly set limits. We tell him the language is unacceptable, but he continues the behavior. We try to engage, connect. 'Those words aren't funny, but I bet you can think of some other silly words to say,' but he always comes back to the potty talk no matter how much special time or positive attention we give him. He's our only child." How frustrating.

Dr. Laura Markham:

First of all, I don't know if you have read the article that I just described about the three-year-old and swearing, but the techniques that I suggest in that article absolutely should be effective for you. It does sound like this is a power struggle. Kids often use potty words when they feel powerless. It definitely sounds like your son has discovered something that gives him power in his relationship with you. Start by explaining that this is a rude word, like calling someone a name. It's an attack, because it's designed to make them feel uncomfortable. You will always listen to him without him attacking you, and you don't want that rude word in your house. In your house, no one ever calls names. That's the rule.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Brainstorm about other things he can say when he's angry, or feeling silly, and post a list of such words so you can remind him. Of course, you can allow him to say the word during special time, whatever his profanity is that he likes, and be shocked by it, or you can say, "What did you say?" and make up something, and act like you can't hear him so he has to keep repeating himself. So far, what we've done is we have educated him about the word. We have taken some of the sting out of it by letting him use it during special time.

Dr. Laura Markham:

There's an article on my website about how to do that, that goes into more detail about it. It is the article on the three-year-old swearing. Then finally, when he does use the word, tell him he's in charge of choosing whether to

say such a word, but he has to go into his bedroom or bathroom to do it, because we don't use rude, mean words around other people. That's not a word to use around other people. If he wants to express frustration or anger, there's a whole list of great words that we brainstormed. They're on the fridge. You can help him read them to choose one. You'll always listen when he's upset.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The next time he repeats his word, don't rise to the bait. You don't have to attend every power struggle to which you're invited. Instead say, "What did you say? Did you say you need 1,000 kisses?" Grab him, and hug him and kiss him, moving the interaction from a standoff power struggle to a playful, connecting romp. That will completely change the tone, and your son will lose interest in his word at that point, or shocking you, because really he's doing this to get a rise out of you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

He's just gotten a much more satisfying response from you, a much more satisfying interaction because of the way you're handling it. Instead of a power struggle, it's become a delightful connection. As you build the connection, he's not going to be interested in using a rude word with you because he can get that connection anytime he wants it. Finally, make sure you're not having other power struggles, because if you are, he's going to use everything he can to continue the power struggle. If you can avoid power struggles in general, then this one also will fall by the wayside.

Question 24:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:17:24

Our next question is from a parent who asks, "How shall I respond to no-go behavior? She's hitting, having tantrums and aggression, both in the moment and long term." Well, a few things here. One is hitting and aggression are not okay, and so I would agree, those are no-go behaviors. Tantrums are not no-go behavior. If you respond to

tantrums as if they're no-go behavior, and you severely limit a tantrum, they're going to escalate. You're going to get hitting, and you're going to get aggression.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would start by normalizing tantrums. When children have a meltdown, when they get upset about something and they're two, which your child is, what's happening is that your child has reached the end of their ability to process. Nature has designed your child with tantrums as a way to express all that overload of emotion that otherwise your child doesn't know what to do with. Important that when your two-year-old starts to have a tantrum, your response is to listen and to acknowledge how upset your child is. That will be very helpful to avoid hitting and aggression, because if your child doesn't feel heard, your child will need to escalate to get your attention, and that will include aggression.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So when your child begins to have a meltdown, you say, "Oh, my goodness. This isn't what you wanted. You're so sad about this, or you're so mad about this, or you're so upset about this," right? You're acknowledging what your child is feeling. Now if in the course of this, your child hits you, you move away. You move away and you say, "You are so mad you want to hit. Hitting hurts. No hitting Mommy. I will keep us both safe. No, no, no. No hitting."

Dr. Laura Markham:

If your child comes at you and attacks you, and won't stop hitting, which is unlikely for a two-year-old, but if he or she does, you can catch their little wrists and say, "Whoa. Whoa, you are so mad. Tell me in words. Mad, Mommy. No hitting. Hitting hurts. You tell me. You are mad, aren't you? You are so mad." If you respond to the tantrums that way, and the aggression that way, I think you'll see the hitting and the aggression will begin to vanish.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You asked, "How do I handle it in the moment and long term?" There's no long term. Your child should not be hitting or aggressive, and unless you have a special needs child, the hitting and aggression comes from not feeling heard, and from having a backlog of feelings and a full

backpack. If you use the peaceful parenting tools you've learned in this course, there will be no long term on the aggression. I notice that you're pregnant. I strongly advise you to get your hands on my sibling book, which will really help you introduce the new baby. Most parents say they wish they had this book while they were pregnant, because it helps you support your older child to adapt better to the baby.

Question 25:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:20:39

Our next question is from a parent who says, "How do we handle our 12-year-old who sometimes yells profanities, and says really disrespectful, unkind things to us? You say to stay and be there during the big angry feelings, and show empathy, but this feels like enduring verbal abuse. We do work on showing empathy when he lashes out at us in an angry rant, but we say it's not okay to use those words, and we can talk when he can speak to us civilly. Is this an appropriate time to step away for our own emotional and possibly physical safety?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

This is a 12-year-old. 12-year-olds are much more sophisticated than four-year-olds. They don't say, "I hate you. I want a new daddy, or you can't come to my birthday party." They say, "I hate you, you're a fat pig," or something else that is similarly injurious. Something that can feel to us like verbal abuse. Why do they do that? Same reason the four-year-old is yelling at us, but they are better at pushing our buttons. They're more sophisticated, right?

Dr. Laura Markham:

So when you say, "Should we step away from our own emotional and possibly physical safety?" This makes me uncomfortable. Not because you shouldn't step away, and we'll talk about that in a minute, but where's the physical problem? Is your child threatening you? Is he saying, "I'm going to pull a knife on you, or I'm going to punch you"? If that's the case, that's a different story than simply saying,

"I hate you, you're fat." You said that your child is saying unkind things, so I don't know what the unkind things are, but I imagine it's a personal attack of some kind. Stepping away for physical safety is not necessary in the face of that.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If your child is threatening you physically, a 12-year-old is saying to you, "I'm going to get a knife, and I'm going to carve you up," I would probably still stay right there and say, "I'm listening. I hear how furious you are, that you're so furious you think you even want to take a knife to me. Oh my goodness. I didn't understand how mad you were about this. You are really mad, and I want to hear about it." Right? So even that I would stay present for, because I'm not actually taking it seriously that the child might hurt me physically. From what you've described, the child is saying hurtful things, but they're not actually threatening you physically. So no, you don't step away for your physical safety unless there's actually a threat to your physical safety.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now let's talk about what hurts your feelings, what you're saying feels like verbal abuse to you. The disrespectful, unkind things. I would generally begin by listening, just as I've described, just as I did in response to the physical threat. If your child says something unkind to you like, "I hate you. Nobody likes you. You're a fat pig." I'm trying to think of the worst things your child might say at the age of 12 to you. When your child does that, I would acknowledge the anger, and I would as much as possible acknowledge what's under it. But I would also make a mental note to myself that there's something obviously lacking here in the connection. Your child is not feeling connected to you, and so they're resorting to this kind of language.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now if the rest of the time -- not when they're mad, but the rest of the time -- if they're loving and delightful, then this is an issue of the child getting enraged and having no impulse control. But if the rest of the time they also have this chip on their shoulder, then this is a question of "How

do you melt the chip on the shoulder and reconnect with the child?" If this is a child with a chip on the shoulder, and they're already 12, I wouldn't waste any time. You don't want to go into the teen years like this. Absolutely use all the peaceful parenting tools to reconnect, which means one-on-one time. It means get them laughing. It means 24/7 empathy, and it means you try to get them to cry by creating safety.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The way you create safety is you don't fight back. You acknowledge their anger, and you say, "Wow, you must be so furious to use words like that to me. It seems like you're really trying to hurt my feelings." Then you don't say, "And that hurt. Don't speak to me like that. That hurts me," because you're above that. You're not a vulnerable child. A 12-year-old is a child. They may not look like a child anymore, but they are.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You're not that. You're the adult. You're the parent. It's your job to be invulnerable, not to show your child that they're wounding you by calling you names. So when your child calls you names, says unkind things to you, or even uses profanity, your job is to say, "Wow, you are so mad. You're making sure I know how mad you are. You're using all the swear words you know. I hear you. I can hear you better if you don't use swear words when you tell me what you're so mad about, but I really want to hear what you're mad about, Sweetheart."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Again, why would you step away for your emotional safety? You provide your emotional safety. This is a child, a 12-year-old. You're the one who provides your emotional safety. So would I suggest that you stay in the room with a boss or a colleague who's using profanity to you, or calling you names, or being unkind to you, saying unkind things? No, of course not. That's another adult. It's a different situation. But this is your child, and it's your job to hear what he's so angry about, and help him go under that anger to get to the tears and fears under it.

Dr. Laura Markham: If it really triggers you to have him call you names, then it's your job to do work on those triggers away from your child so that you're not getting triggered. Don't see it as your child **means** these personal attacks. See it as your child is pulling out all the stops to use the worst things they can against you at this moment because they feel that desperate to show you how upset they are.

Dr. Laura Markham: Now it may seem like a long shot to you that a 12-year-old would be willing to show you that vulnerability, those tears and fears. It is. You'll have to be working on all the other fronts at the same time to try to melt those defenses by connecting, but I've heard many times from parents about 12-year-old boys who, when the parent says, "Oh my goodness, you are so angry at me about this. You thought I was showing your sister I loved her more when I did that, and you felt like I was unfair to you. It must always seem like your sister gets more because she's younger." I've heard from parents that the boy begins to tear up. Now he may not sob, but he begins to tear up. At that point, softening yourself even more, and acknowledging even more how awful it must feel, and how much it must hurt might well help your child feel safe enough to show you what's under that anger.

Dr. Laura Markham: So is there ever a time to step away for your own emotional safety? I don't think you need to step away for your own emotional safety because you're safe inside yourself. If you're getting triggered because your child is being unkind to you, you can say, "I hear how angry you are, Sweetheart. I really want to hear more about this, but when you're yelling, calling me names, using profanity, being so unkind with what you say, it's hard for me to really stay on your side because I feel so attacked. I'm going to go in the other room. We're going to wait until we're both calmer, and then I really want to hear what you're talking about."

Dr. Laura Markham: If he says, "No, don't go away. You don't want to hear anything. You're proving it by walking away," you can say, "Oh, I do want to hear. Are you ready to tell me?" I bet

you'll find that he will tell you without the profanity, and without calling you names or being unkind, because what he really wants is for you to hear why he's so upset, and for you to understand, and for you to help him make it better. I want to close by saying that since he's already 12, as I said, start using the tools right away.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But if this is a child with a chip on his shoulder, and you can't get through to him despite your best use of the tools, I would go to a counselor who is experienced in family therapy, and can help build the bridges of safety and communication in your family, because clearly there's a lack of safety. You're not feeling emotionally safe, and your son feels like he has to escalate to such a level of unkindness and disrespect to be heard. I'm not sure why he feels he has to do that to be heard, but that's the kind of thing a family therapist will help you work out. But don't stop using the peaceful parenting tools, because that's where you get big breakthroughs, because you're creating safety then 24/7, not just in the therapist's office.

Dr. Laura Markham:

That's all our questions for today. Thank you for listening. 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.