

## Helping Kids with Anger and Aggression-Toddlers through Age 4 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 helping young children with anger and aggression. We'll be focusing on the toddler years through age four. 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 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:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:00:44](#) Hi, what's your question?

Parent: [00:00:47](#) Okay, so I have a question and I will start by saying that I have a two-and-a-half-year-old and generally things go pretty well. And a lot of the strategies have been really helpful, the special time. But, for me, the hardest thing in parenting right now is when he tantrums and especially when he hits me. At certain times I feel so overwhelmed and the worst is when it happens in the bathroom. I think because it's such a small space and so loud.

Parent: [00:01:27](#) And I try to use the mantras, and I try to use deep breathing and the calming statements, and a lot of the time I'm successful. But every once in a while I just feel so overwhelmed, but it's really hard to be there. It's hard not to speak harshly, or to pick him up in a way that is not my gentle way. I mean, I don't yell or hit him, but it doesn't feel good to me to be interacting in that way. And what I

really want to do is leave and take a break. But I don't want him to feel abandoned.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:02:14](#) Of course. And he's two, you said? Two and a half?

Parent: [00:02:17](#) Two and a half.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:02:18](#) So he would feel abandoned and that's a tough situation because I hear how you would be a much better mom if you could just take a minute, a break, to step back and gather yourself. And yet, he's only two and a half, so he would take it as abandonment at that point. It would be a threat to him.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:02:40](#) So, I wonder if, since it's really mostly for you at this point it sounds like it's about the noise level? You said it's especially in the bathroom, or with a small room. I have seen this really work for other moms. It's going to sound crazy, but I'm going to tell you. What if you carried some ear plugs in your pocket? And the thing about ear plugs is they don't actually cut off all sound. You would still hear him crying and even if your phone rang or somebody said something to you in a normal voice, you would still hear it. But it takes the edge off.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:03:16](#) If you had something in your pocket to quickly put in your ears, and you also at the same time did some breathing, I wonder if that would make a difference?

Parent: [00:03:29](#) Yeah, yeah. I think that would really help. And it's a lot easier for me, like tantrums in the living room or the kitchen, I'm pretty good at just kind of riding it out. So, yeah, I could leave a pair of ear plugs in the bathroom, for sure.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:03:45](#) Yeah, yeah. So you're saying you wouldn't even need them in the kitchen, or the living room? It's just in the bathroom?

Parent: [00:03:49](#) No, I don't.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:03:49](#) Yeah.

- Parent: [00:03:49](#) I don't know why it's so hard, but, yeah, it's tough.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:03:53](#) No, I think you're right. Well, you know it just may be, you have more noise sensitivity than a lot of people. You're not the first parent I've spoken to who had noise sensitivity and it's really the loudness of their child that sets them off. And that's understandable that you want a break because you go into a state of emergency, so you want to run.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:04:15](#) But I love the idea that maybe if you had them there in the bathroom, and you put them in, and at the same time you let yourself know that it's not an emergency. You have a little antidote, or a mantra that you say, "It's not an emergency. It's okay." And you breathe, and then you could even pitch your voice lower for your son. Whispering, "It's okay, Sweetheart." And you might find that he lowers his decibels in response to that.
- Parent: [00:04:44](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay. Yeah, I'll give it a try. Thank you so much.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:04:45](#) All right. Good luck.

## Question 2:

- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:04:51](#) This parent is saying she has two-year-old twins who started preschool last year and one has been scratching and biting her classmates. And also, does this at home with her twin to the point that her sister cringes when she comes near. So, ouch. That bothers me that her sister cringes.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:05:10](#) I think you need to separate your girls as much as possible for now to protect the one who's getting hurt. It may seem like overkill, but she deserves protection. If this were a five-year-old hurting her, you wouldn't leave them with a five-year-old that could hurt her. You would separate them.

- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:05:25](#) So, a two-year-old can cause even more harm because they don't realize the harm they can cause, right? And right now your daughter has something going on with her. You can't just assume that she won't hurt her sister. You can assume that she will hurt her sister. She's been doing this on an ongoing basis.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:05:42](#) So, you need to do this project to help her cry, to stop hurting her sister, and then maybe she'll stop. But until then, you shouldn't be leaving the kids where one can hurt the other.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:05:53](#) Okay. Aggression comes from fear. Your little hellion needs a chance to let that fear out. And maybe something in her life, like maybe she's super sensitive to having to share toys with her classmates because she has a twin? Or maybe it comes from something you would never guess like maybe she had a hard birth, or a medical intervention? But, regardless, she needs a chance to cry.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:06:16](#) Before she gets any older, make this into your project. Use the Peaceful Parenting tools, lots of laughter, which is going to make her more willing to cry. And she's only two, so this is great. You can get her laughing. Lots of empathy, but clear limits. And then when she heads for her sister in anger, put your hand out, put it on her belly to stop her momentum, empathize, and set a limit.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:06:40](#) "You want that toy your sister has. You want that. Right now your sister has the toy. I will help you wait." Keep your voice soothing, but firm. Remember the "tears of futility" -- she can't think she can get the toy. Hopefully, she will dissolve into tears. If she does get very upset, you'll need to put her sister somewhere safe while you tend to your little hellion.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:07:04](#) So, it's best to start this project when you have another adult with you to tend to the sister. Over time, she'll be less upset and over time you can develop someplace to put her sister. Again, in front of a screen is okay if it's a safe room to be in, and it will keep her from hearing her sister scream because that could otherwise make her

upset. Otherwise, you would use sensory boxes, or bags, in a place that had something like that to keep her safe.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:07:33](#)

Now, it may be that if she's hitting a lot, that you're going to be doing this every day for a week, or even three or four times a day. And she'll dissolve into tears every time, and that's fantastic. You will notice that in between times she's happier, she's less aggressive. And then the tears and the aggression just begin to fade away. Or, it might be that she'll have some really big meltdowns and she'll be writhing, and clawing, and kicking. And remember, that's what fear looks like.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:08:06](#)

When fear comes up, it doesn't just look like crying. Fear comes up like we are terrified and we're kicking and clawing our way to safety if that's what it takes. So, just stay kind, create safety, and support her in her storm, and you will find that afterwards she will be so much better.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:08:25](#)

I'm going to also just add, there's an article on how to stop biting at preschool, that would be really probably helpful to the preschool and to you, on helping your daughter feel safer at preschool, so she doesn't have to bite there. It's just called "How To Stop Biting in Preschool" on the Aha! Parenting website.

### Question 3:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:08:41](#)

A parent is asking, "When my two-year-old hits me, I say, 'I understand you're upset, but hands are not for hitting. I won't let you hurt me.' Naturally, my words don't stop him, he continues. If hugging doesn't help I put him in his old cot where he doesn't sleep anymore and this is the only place he can be restrained and safe, but I don't like doing it."

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:09:03](#)

First, I would say, you said, "Naturally, my words don't stop him." Well, you're right, that if he's super mad, words may not stop him, he's only two. But I have seen two-year-

olds stop hitting when they really feel understood. So, that would only happen if you're matching the resonance of his tone. So, you would say, "You are so mad! You're mad. You're saying, 'Mommy, no,' right? So you're hitting. No hitting."

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:09:29](#)

Remember, he's already in the breakdown lane, so prevention tools would've worked, right? That would've been what you needed to do in advance. I've talked about the preventative maintenance tools, but also I see when kids hit a lot, that you can play games in which they feel powerful and that often dissolves the fear that's driving their aggression. Because powerlessness is a form of fear, and often when kids feel powerless they act out that fear.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:10:01](#)

If you have a pillow fight with your kid, and every time he hits you with the pillow you fall on the ground, and he laughs a lot, then you're on the right track. And kids who hit often need those kinds of power games. So, there's a list of power games in the *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids* workbook. Take a look at those. You can just go into a bookstore, or a library.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:10:26](#)

Of course, buy the book, I think it's really helpful and it can change your life, but if you're not ready to buy another book right now, get your local library to order it. And then look at all the games and Xerox those pages, and put them up in your house so you have them. And I think you'll find if you play those power games with a kid who's aggressive, that they become less aggressive.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:10:46](#)

Okay. But you're still wondering, what if he does hit? In that case, empathize with the anger that's driving the hitting. Remember, rage only dissolves when it feels heard. State his perspective. "You don't want shoes, you're saying 'No!' Is that right?" And you said you hug him? That's great if he wants it. And if he attacks and doesn't stop, take a deep breath, lower your voice to a really soothing tone. His prefrontal cortex is offline, he's two, you can't reason with someone who's in fight or flight, but you can help them feel safer. His limbic system will tune into yours and feel safe enough to stop attacking. And,

hopefully, with all the roughhousing you'll be doing, he'll feel safe enough at this point to cry.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:11:33](#)

And, you're asking me if it's okay to put him in the cot? I'm betting if he's in the cot he doesn't come out in a better mood. He doesn't come out cooperative, connected, and affectionate. If he did, I would say it's fine. But I'm betting he feels like he just stuffs it, right? So, I would say, no, you want to help him feel safe not to work through the feelings, then **these** are the ideas that are going to work, not putting him in the cot where he's being restrained. And he's only two, so I'm not sure why you need to restrain him. He's only two.

#### Question 4:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:12:07](#)

This parent says her 20-month-old uses his play broom to hit her. He's just experimenting to see what happens. When he hits you, frown, and say, "Ouch. No hitting. Brooms are for sweeping, see?" And then you demonstrate, show him sweeping. So, get excited about the sweeping, don't get excited... you said "Ouch," but don't say it, "Ouch!" because if you say "Ouch!" he's going to feel like, oh, he discovered a secret super power, getting you excited by hitting you with the broom.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:12:36](#)

When he hits you with the broom, you frown, and you say, "No. Ouch. No hitting. Brooms are for sweeping." And then you get excited about the sweeping and you demonstrate that. And you just keep setting the limit and redirecting him, and I guarantee you he will learn.

#### Question 5:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:12:53](#)

A parent wonders if it's really enough to get the point across with a two-year-old that their behavior is not okay.

So, yes, it is enough. I mean, what else are you going to do? Are you going to punish them, which just encourages them to use power against other people and sets up that power struggle? No. I would say it's a two-year-old, you mostly use prevention.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:13:14](#)

So, if you're modeling calmness and you're keeping your cool when you're dealing with the aggressive behavior, your child is going to learn to do that from you. As long as you're following through in the sense of doing prevention, doing laughing opportunities. If your kid is hitting, buy a Bobo doll for them to knock down.

#### Question 6:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:13:37](#)

A parent is asking about his son who is two and will be happily playing, and suddenly biting and pinching. He's probably just experimenting to see what happens because this is not happening when he's angry. So, it's more like a puppy playing. You know, puppies will do this and they nip harder to see what happens, and that's how they learn not to bite so hard. And what you say is, "Ouch! Ouch! No. Gentle, gentle." And then you model gentle petting instead of pinching, right? And then you might show him on the teddy bear, "This is pinching," and you pinch the teddy bear and the teddy bear goes, "Ouch!" You say, "Oh, poor teddy," and you make nice, make nice. And your son is allowed to pinch the teddy bear, but he's not allowed to pinch you. He's allowed to bite the teddy bear, but he's not allowed to bite you.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:14:22](#)

Some people are worried that they're modeling biting and pinching if you use it with a teddy bear, but I actually think it's fine. They know the teddy bear's not alive, and they're doing this as a way to figure out where the limits are with human beings, and the teddy bear's not a human being. So, I think it's fine.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:14:37](#) If that freaks you out, you could have them pinch something like a ball, like a squeeze ball, or bite the squeeze ball. As long as it's not something that can be bitten through and he'll get something toxic in his mouth. But, biting and pinching can happen usually with a toy that you can find and that would be the way to teach him not to do it with you.

### Question 7:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:14:59](#) A parent is asking about aggression. Her two-and-a-half-year-old will bite her and not let go when she's nursing before bedtime, before she passes her off to Dad for the bedtime routine. And she wonders, "Am I too focused on her?" because she gets so much attention. So, I don't know if you're too focused on her. I can't tell that from your question. In general, spending time with a child is not a problem, right? But, it is true that every moment does not need to be about your child. That would make any child anxious.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:15:37](#) You want to instead take your child on errands with you and have a regular routine. She has some time where she's helping you with the grocery shopping, or the dishes, or the laundry, and sometimes she's playing nearby while you're making dinner, or whatever. It's that you're responsively parenting, you're responding to her needs and the environment is set up so that she can thrive and explore, but you're not saying, "Oh, what do you want to do now?" Right? Life shouldn't revolve around her, but that doesn't mean that you're not meeting her needs.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:16:09](#) But, just to address your question about biting, I think she's biting for a very specific reason. You're nursing her and then you're handing her off to Dad for the evening routine and she's showing you that she doesn't want you to do that. So I would just say change your routine very slightly. When you finish nursing her, don't hand her off to Dad. In fact, finish nursing her before Dad's in the room.

And then, as you stop nursing her, warn her before you stop nursing her, that what's going to happen is you're going to do a new thing tonight. You're going to sing her a song.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:16:39](#)

So after you nurse her, sing her a song, and then hand her off to Dad. It could also be a very short book, but you don't want to drag it out, obviously, and spend another hour with her. You're just trying to make it be something that is not nursing, so she can't bite you. That's all. And you sing her a very short song and then you hand her off to Dad, and as you do that acknowledge how she feels. "You love it when Dad puts you to bed, but you're sad to say goodnight to me. You're trying to hang on to me. I love you and I'll be nearby. And in the morning we're going to have so much fun together, you and me." And that's it. You're not giving in to her by putting her to bed, Dad needs his time with her, but you're also acknowledging the feelings that are making her act that way.

### Question 8:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:17:25](#)

A parent is saying that her three-year-old will hit her, or bite, or throw things, and not just her, but also (hit) Dad or Grandma. Sometimes it's just when they're snuggling on the couch and he'll smack her. So it's not just when he's mad that he does this, it's also boredom or maybe he's trying to initiate play. And she says, "I've tried to redirect and distract, but to no avail." I'm not a big fan of redirecting and distracting. I mean, I do believe in redirecting to some degree, but if you're distracting a child from what they're trying to tell you, those feelings are just going to come up later. You don't want to give a child the message that their feelings are not permissible to come into the relationship between you. You want to give them the message that you recognize the feeling, you'll help them with the feeling.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:18:13](#)

It doesn't really work, usually, to redirect and distract and that's why, because you're not directly dealing with the message. Three-year-olds don't hit for no reason, right? So, if he's developmentally typical, then he already knows there are better ways to initiate play. And if he's doing this more than once a day, I can't quite tell from what you're saying, but it sounds like you say he has "times" daily, so it sounds like it's more than once a day. Then it's repeated behavior. It's getting a bad response from the adults around him, so I don't think he's just bored and trying to tell you stop reading the story to him and he wants to initiate some kind of a game. I don't think that's what's going on.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:18:54](#)

So, you're not mentioning any other issues with him, but sometimes when aggression comes out of nowhere... Aggression comes out of nowhere when it's a full backpack thing, and you've already heard me talk about that a lot in this call, so I'm not going to address that again. But, it can be a sign, also of sensory processing challenges, specifically proprioceptive behavior. Proprioceptive is really about where we are in space, and there's proprioceptive avoidance, and proprioceptive seeking. This would be a sign of proprioceptive seeking behavior, which if this is what's going on, other signs of it would be that he might run into people a lot, like he doesn't know where his own space should be, run into objects and walls, use lots of force in general, not knowing he's being too rough and invading people's personal space.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:19:48](#)

If he does have those signs, I would have him evaluated by an OT, who is experienced with sensory issues. Anyone whose child has these signs, don't wait. OT's who are experienced with sensory issues can help your child rewire their brains in a positive way. It's a really important thing to do while the brain is still plastic, right? He's only three so if you have a child, even if they're six or seven do this if they have these signs, but, if they're younger, don't wait, do it now. And if I'm wrong and your child doesn't have that, great! You have them evaluated and there's no problem. You have the reassurance.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:20:26](#)

But I will tell you that a lot of times, kids with these sensory issues, they can have other issues, too, at the same time like they're highly anxious, or they're highly sensitive and they seem anxious, or they seem wired and hyper. Sometimes, it's possible to miss the signs of sensory processing challenges. I don't want you to miss them. I want you to get your child evaluated if they have any signs of it. If you have any sense your child might have sensory issues, go look up online, take one of the little online tests and see. And if you're answering yes to a lot of those questions, get your child evaluated.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:21:04](#)

Okay. Back to this parent's question. You don't mention any other issues, so I'm going to assume that's not the issue. And laughter, therefore, is your cure because I think your son is hitting out of emotional discomfort. He's safe, he's snuggling up to you, the old unprocessed emotions are bubbling up to get healed, he lashes out. So, you want to help him notice when he's feeling discomfort and communicate it to you directly instead of hitting. We're increasing his awareness. When this happens, say "Ouch," move away from him, and then describe what happened. "We were having such a nice time snuggling and then you smacked me. Ouch! Are you trying to tell me something? Are you telling me you're mad?" And if he's mad he'll say, "Yes! No story." Right? "No book." And he'll throw the book on the floor, he doesn't like the book. But, it might be that it's not really about that book, it's about old feelings, but he's just taking it out on that book.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:22:02](#)

If he doesn't know why he's mad, that's okay. He might just say, "Bad Mommy." Right? You can say, "Okay, you're mad. No hitting. Hitting hurts. You were feeling bad inside, right? So you hit me. When you feel bad inside, you can tell me and I will help. Can you say, 'Feel bad?'" And then you can play a game with him with stuffed animals where they tell each other that they feel bad instead of hitting. So, this is just "full backpack" stuff. I'm just going to really lay this out here in a cut and dried way. If your child has any issues with aggression, or any issues with anxiety, you need to get them laughing 15 minutes every morning, 15 minutes every evening, not too late in the evening, and 15

minutes another time during the day. And I think then the aggression will start to vanish. They'll start to cry more and the aggression will vanish.

### Question 9:

- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:22:57](#) This parent asked about aggression. She says it's been improving slightly since she's trying really hard to stay calm and not react. But, she still sees hitting, kicking, spitting, and throwing things. And I would say yes, this is exhausting. And thank goodness you're dealing with this while your child is still in nursery where you can still heal it and change your child's brain. So, remember about aggression, aggression is a sign that the child feels disconnected from us. They're in fear. And if you use these Peaceful Parenting tools daily, the aggression will diminish and fade away. It will, I guarantee it, unless there's some other issue.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:23:36](#) In the moment, when your child gets angry and is aggressive, the most important thing for you to do is to not react and engage with the child. So, you want to keep yourself calm, as you said, that always makes it better. You want to move away if you need to, take a deep breath. Often a little kid will follow and try to hit at you, in which case you might have to hold them to stop them from hitting you. Keep breathing, stay calm, work on your own reactions, and, again, if you do the preventive maintenance, you'll find that this will happen less and less.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:24:11](#) But in the moment, the only thing you can really do is restore safety. Don't talk much, just say, "I'm going to keep us both safe, Sweetie." And if your child is saying, "No, no. You can't say no. I have to see the iPad," or whatever they're begging you for that they're getting angry at. You can say, "I hear you. You really wish you could have the iPad." And often, just recognizing their

perspective will be enough for the child to throw themselves on the floor and sob, as opposed to continuing to attack you.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:24:44](#)

Also, sometimes children have fear coming up and that's why they lash out with anger. And to get the fear out, it's going to look like a two-year-old tantrum, which is writhing, kicking, screaming, spitting. And that's because when fear comes up it's not just tears. If it's sadness, disappointment, kids will just cry. But if it's fear, it looks like a nightmare. If you think about a nightmare that you've had where you were terrified, maybe you were so scared you couldn't call for help. It's like your throat shuts down and you can't breathe. That kind of feeling, that terror, is what your child is feeling when they get aggressive. And so you'll see them just attack whatever's in their way because they think that this is what's causing the fear.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:25:34](#)

So, at that moment, to keep your child safe and keep you safe, I mean, if you can just move away and say, "You are so scared and angry. I am right here." And your child might yell, "I'm not scared! I'm not angry!" even though they're obviously enraged. And you can just say, "You're safe, Sweetie. You're safe. I'm here. I'm right here." If your child does come after you violently, then just pull them into your arms, turn their back to you, sink down on to the floor, maybe your back is against the wall to hold you up, put your arms around them as loosely as you can. But they may need to push on your hands because when they're in fear like that, they're scrabbling to safety and they have to claw their way to safety, and they're pushing on you to do it.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:26:21](#)

And sometimes kids really do need to push. And you can say, "Sweetheart, you can push on my hands. I'll keep you safe." And sometimes they'll go, "Ugh! Ugh!" And they'll be pushing at your hands and break free. Let them go. If they're not attacking you, there's no reason to hold them, ever. In fact, if they say, "Let me go!" You can say, "I will let you go as soon as you stop hitting me, Sweetie. When you're ready to stop hitting I can let you go." "I'm ready!"

And you let them go, and of course they turn around to hit you, and you grab them up again and you say, "Sweetie, I'm going to hold you until you're ready to stop hitting. I'm going to keep us both safe." You breathe deeply, you might have to do it 20 times, but they will eventually stop trying to hit you.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:27:10](#)

And you can ask, "Do you want to push my hands to get free?" Often that really works with them to push at your hands to get free because then they feel empowered like they pushed their way to freedom. It's like pushing their way out of the fear. So, some kids really love that and they stand there, glaring at you breathless, but they pushed their way to freedom and then notice they're not attacking you now. And you say, "You pushed, you're free. You're safe. I'm right here when you're ready for hugs, Sweetie. I'm so sorry this is so hard. It will feel better soon." That's really the only kinds of thing you're saying when they're that upset.

### Question 10:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:27:51](#)

This mom is saying that she wants to protect her baby and herself. So she removes them from the situation, and the three-year-old goes wild and runs after them screaming. You know what? If I were three, almost four, I would do the same thing. If I were worried about losing my parents because this baby had been born, and my feelings got the better of me and poured out, and I was showing how upset I was, by hitting in this case, and my parent removed herself, I would go ballistic because I would be so worried that I would never get my mother back and that I had lost her forever.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:28:33](#)

And so I'd say, whenever possible, do not remove yourself. I know this is a very hard situation. The most helpful thing, besides my sibling book, which has lots of stuff in it about introducing a new baby, the most important thing is preventive maintenance so that you don't get to these

points. But, I think you do need to pick up the baby and move the baby, and calm the baby. Right? If you're in the same room and your three-year-old is clawing at your knees, while you're holding your baby, put your baby down on your kitchen counter and hug your baby, and calm your baby. You may need to nurse your baby to calm them down, or whatever. So, it's true that's really tough at that point.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:29:22](#)

It's very hard to calm the baby and the three-year-old at the same time. I would say at this point you're probably in tears yourself. You're probably feel like smacking your three-year-old across the room. Don't, obviously. Go ahead and cry if you need to. And try to talk yourself and your children off the cliff. Try to talk down the situation to de-escalate. So you're saying, "Ouch, that really hurt." Let's say the three-year-old came by and whacked the eight-month-old. You pick up your eight-month-old and, as I say, you take them to the kitchen counter, or you take them to the dining room table, and they're on the table, and you're holding and you're soothing. And you say, "Ouch, that really hurt."

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:30:07](#)

And, meanwhile, your three-year-old is scratching at your legs, right? You have your arm around your baby and your other arm is on your three-year-old's head and you say, "I know, Sweetie. I know. You are so upset. It's okay. We're going to make this better." And you turn, "I'm just calming your sister, or brother, down. It's going to be okay. I'm going to take care of you, too." Your three-year-old will stop scratching you, even if they're still screaming. You turn back to your eight-month-old, who's still in your arms, and you say, "It's okay, Sweetheart. It's okay. It's going to be okay. You got scared. You got surprised. That really hurt."

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:30:49](#)

And then you turn back to your three-year-old and you say, "Wow, that really hurt your sister. She's screaming and you're screaming. You are so upset, too. Everybody's having such a hard time." This is the only way you can go back and forth between two kids who are both upset at the same time. But, it allows them both to feel tended to

and notice you're not leaving the room. Now, if your three-year-old is still continuing to lose it, it may be that if you can get the eight-month-old calmed down, you can put the eight-month-old down in a safe place. That will depend on your house, what's a safe place. But you don't want to just go dump them unceremoniously in their crib and walk out because they're going to scream, too.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:31:36](#)

You should have, if you've got a kid who's being aggressive, a safe place to put your baby like a play pen. Even if you use it for nothing else. It should have toys that the baby really wants. You put your eight-month-old in the playpen and smile, and hand them a toy. And then you turn to your three-year-old, and you pick your three-year-old up, and you try to calm them down at this point. Because your baby is now safe and you can calm your three-year-old down.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:32:04](#)

So, hopefully that helps you. The hard part, and you'll notice in all this, is managing your own emotions, right? That is really hard. But if you can pick your three-year-old up from the perspective of, "Oh, my goodness. My poor three-year-old is so upset and so worried," rather than, "This is going to be an ax murderer here. I've got to strangle this child while I can." It's a whole different way of relating. And if you want to have a positive effect on your three-year-old and avoid these situations in the future, that's where you have to be coming from.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:32:41](#)

I would say calm yourself down. Give yourself a mantra that's going to calm you. You work on that in advance. And you do whatever breathing you need to do, and you don't pick your three-year-old up until you're able to do it without being aggressive.

### Question 11:

Parent: [00:33:01](#)

My question is, I have a two-and-a-half-year-old and a four-and-a-half-year-old, and it was about aggression and

about my daughter, who's four and a half. It's about keeping everybody safe, and how to go about doing that. So, she's been throwing tantrums ever since she was very little. And I have to say, in the past, I was not positive parenting. I was brought up with time-outs, and then they cool down, and then they come back to you, and then you have a loving connection.

Parent: [00:33:37](#) So she was used, up until age four, being sent to her room when she would lash out. And that would entail hitting her brother and hitting me, anybody else around that she could get her hands on. So I would take her up to her room and then assure her that she could come out when she was ready.

Parent: [00:34:03](#) But since starting the class, I have been attempting to do it a different way. And so, I'm staying near her, staying in the room with her. But I often have her younger brother with me and I'm alone. So, when she starts hitting she will charge at him, or charge at me. And I've tried holding her, but I find that it just makes her more enraged. And she starts kicking, and screaming, and biting, and spitting. I find that it triggers me because I'm worried that she's going to hurt me and she's going to hurt her brother. I find that I am holding her tighter than I feel comfortable with.

Parent: [00:34:46](#) I guess my question is, is there another way of doing it? I've tried staying right outside the door, but having to hold the door shut because she will open the door, and come out, and start hitting. And just assuring her that I'm there, that when I can make sure that everybody stays safe that I will be there for her and I will give her a hug. Eventually, within 10 minutes, she says, "I want a hug." And I go in and I give her a hug, and then we move on with our day.

Parent: [00:35:24](#) But that doesn't feel that it's really true to what you've said in the course. I guess I'm just at a loss of how to deal with the situation when she gets like that.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:35:37](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative). You know, it is so much easier when you start off parenting this way, partly because she

was sent to her room before. And so, the rage never got heard.

Parent: [00:35:48](#)

Right.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:35:50](#)

Right? The pain never got heard, and so the rage is on the surface of that, protecting her from the pain. So, I guess I would ask you, you say within 10 minutes she's ready for a hug, and then how is she after that?

Parent: [00:36:09](#)

She's fine. I mean, she's actually very connected. She wants to read a book, she's sharing, and she'll say, "I was really angry. I had really big emotions," which is the language I've been using since starting the course. And I say, "Yeah, you did, and that's okay. But we do have to keep everybody safe."

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:36:28](#)

You know, often when you send a kid off to their room and they calm down, they stuff their feelings. And then for the rest of the day they're still pretty ornery.

Parent: [00:36:39](#)

Right. No, it seems like she's better than she was earlier in the day. You know? It's like she's getting ready to unpack her backpack and then it explodes. And sometimes I allow space for it, but it very quickly escalates to her yelling and hitting. Not just yelling, but hitting and physically harming. What I intuitively feel is that my presence actually makes her angrier, which I know, when I've been reading the material, it seems like that's not necessarily the case, but that's what I feel. Like it actually makes it worse versus if I step out, but assure her that I'm still there. And she'll hit against the door, which is, in a way, I think similar to what you've described in hitting against the parent?

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:37:27](#)

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Parent: [00:37:30](#)

And then she starts really crying. It becomes tears and all the upset comes out, and then I can go in and then she wants a hug. But it's like I need to have a barrier, which feels like it's the opposite of what I should be doing, but I'm not sure.

- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:37:47](#) Well, I don't know. I actually would judge it by how the child responds, right?
- Parent: [00:37:55](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:37:56](#) If she's fine, and it sounds like she's safe enough, she feels you on the other side of that door because you're talking to her, right?
- Parent: [00:38:06](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative), yes.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:38:07](#) So she feels safe enough to start crying. And then afterwards she shows all the hallmarks of someone who's emptied her backpack, she's connected and cooperative. Right?
- Parent: [00:38:17](#) Okay. Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:38:17](#) It sounds like she is emptying her backpack. If you said to me we're going to go behind the door, and shut the door. It's going to be me and the little one, and she's going to be on the other side, that I would generally say no, that's a bad idea. She's going to be enraged. But, it sounds like what happens is she does experience your connection from the other side of the door. She is able to feel safe enough to start crying. And then she's cooperative and connected.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:38:44](#) So, given that, I think what you're doing is fine. I don't have a problem with it.
- Parent: [00:38:49](#) Okay.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:38:50](#) I do think that it would be a good idea to set up a safe spot in your home for the two-year-old with something that would distract him. It would be great if you could put him down because I think otherwise she feels like you're with him and she's the one who's left out. Do you know what I mean?
- Parent: [00:39:07](#) Yes.

- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:39:08](#) I'm not a big fan of screens, but even a screen that would help him to focus on something other than his upset sister who's making noise down the hall, right? Even a screen.
- Parent: [00:39:20](#) Right.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:39:21](#) But I would say that she is four and a half. She's getting old enough to not need to hit to get those feelings out. So, does she cry any other time?
- Parent: [00:39:36](#) No. That's a good question, and no. It actually has to start with anger and then she will cry.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:39:43](#) Well, that's very common for humans because people don't think about the things we're feeling. And so, as a result, they often won't allow themselves to feel the painful feelings. The defense against the painful feelings, is the anger, right? And so it's only once they realize there's no way to get what they want.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:40:07](#) I mean, I think that's what you mean when you say she's more enraged if you're there. You've heard me probably talk about the "tears of futility". This is a Gordon Neufeld idea. When kids finally cry, when humans finally cry, it's because we've come up against the immovable object. Which is why when I talk about scheduled meltdowns I say, "Set your limit. Kind, but clear, so the kid really gets, 'Okay, this is an immovable limit.'" Then they really realize there's no way out. There's no way to get what they want. And so then the "tears of futility" come.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:40:41](#) And I think that's what's happening to your daughter is that she's fending off those hurt feelings by being angry, but then she has that door and the "tears of futility". And it's not so different, really, from hitting a pillow that the parent is holding, which parents do all the time. So, I actually think she's clearly releasing, and she's getting the connection with you and she's also giving up. That is causing the "tears of futility".
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:41:07](#) So that's all right. After she's six she'll be able to put this into words instead of doing it. That's a good thing. But

even before then, I would love to see her working out more of this through laughter and tears so you don't have to go through this whole drama. I would say work from the laughter and the tears. And you might start to see her laugh all this out, actually, and then even be willing to cry without anger. She might stub her toe accidentally when she's roughhousing with you and then have a big meltdown, something like that.

Parent: [00:41:45](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay. Thank you. That's very helpful. I really appreciate it.

### Question 12:

Parent: [00:41:50](#) My question is, I have two boys, one of them is almost four and the other one is almost one, and the almost four-year-old has always been extremely volatile. I mean, from the time he was six months he was screaming, or shrieking, then it was biting, hitting. Now he's a screamer. When he doesn't get his way, when his toys frustrate him, on the drop of a hat he's screaming and throwing stuff everywhere. And screaming at the top of his lungs is a trigger for me, for one.

Parent: [00:42:24](#) And, for two, it's impossible to have my little one nap when my older one can just explode because his toys aren't hooking up right, and he just screams.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:42:39](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative). I hear you. It's frustrating if you've got a baby who's asleep and your older one is waking the baby up. Yeah. So, children scream when they feel they can't get their point across otherwise.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:43:11](#) I want to say, some children are definitely louder than others. You say your almost four-year-old has always been

volatile, he's always been loud, he was a screamer. And he's more of a screamer now. Some kids are just going to be louder than others and that's who he is. By the way, they all eventually outgrow it. They do learn to express themselves in more appropriate ways, I'm happy to say.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:43:32](#) But you can hasten that day by trying to handle the screaming now in a certain way. And that certain way is to stay calm. That's your number one thing. If you raise your voice, you escalate the drama, and then he's like, "All right, screaming. That's how we do it around here. Screaming louder." Right?

Parent: [00:43:49](#) Yeah.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:43:49](#) Right. So I would say when he starts to scream that you crouch down, I mean, he's not a hitter, so you can crouch down at his level, look him in the eye, and I would whisper. Like he's screaming, "Ah! My toy fell apart!" And you crouch down and say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Your toy fell apart. Oh, my." Right? If he's mad at you, "Oh, no. You didn't want me to peel the banana, you wanted to peel it yourself. Oh, no." Right? And if you don't know what he's upset about, if he's just screaming, you can be curious about it. He is communicating something to you.

Parent: [00:44:26](#) I know.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:44:26](#) And he needs to know that you care about it. And that connection with you is what's going to help him calm down. I don't know if he was one of these kids, but there are a lot of 11-month-olds who will point to something that's too high for them to get, like on the kitchen counter, and they start screaming at the top of their lungs.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:44:44](#) And parents want to teach them to wait, or to ask nicely. And I say, no, no, no, you just give it to them. Because once they know they don't have to scream to get it, then they don't scream. And you comment on it like, "You wanted this. You don't have to scream. I'm right here to help. Here you go." And then they learn they can trust you to do it and they stop doing the screaming to get it.

- Parent: [00:45:03](#) Okay.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:45:03](#) So I think he's like that. I think he'll like feeling understood. I'm sure it isn't easy for him to have an 11-month-old sibling, right? That's hard for all of them.
- Parent: [00:45:14](#) Yeah.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:45:15](#) I think he'll stop screaming when you're acknowledging, "I want to hear what you have to say." And if you use another word, you notice what I said for banana was, "Oh, no. You didn't want me to peel it. Oh, no." I know a family who used, "Oh, dear! Oh, dear, it fell down. Oh, dear." And their son started saying, "Oh, dear!" Right? Instead of screaming.
- Parent: [00:45:39](#) Okay. Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:45:39](#) Yeah. So if you can give him a substitute, it is more effective to redirect than to just try to stop the behavior, right?
- Parent: [00:45:48](#) Right.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:45:48](#) I mean, you could even try something like, "Fiddlesticks! This didn't work." Right? If he likes "fiddlesticks", you know?
- Parent: [00:45:54](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:45:55](#) But probably something that he likes to say and if he's screaming because he's enraged, he may not remember "fiddlesticks". Right? Or even "oh, dear". But if he's screaming because he's communicating and that's what he thinks is the best way, hearing you feed it back, and hearing you say "oh, dear" might really work for him.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:46:14](#) And if he's enraged, then what will work for him is actually the safety to cry. And the way to get to that is laughing and roughhousing every day, right? And then I would just finally say, any time he uses a positive, an appropriate voice, to express anything negative, even if it's like, "Oh, I don't like this. No, I don't like that. I hate this food." You may

not want him to say "I hate this food," but it's better than screaming. And you can say, "This isn't the dinner you wanted. You really wish we could have pasta every night, don't you? You know what, Sweetie? I am so impressed that you could tell me that in a calm voice. You were able to tell me and I hear you."

- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:47:00](#) You might even be willing to reward it. I'm not saying you pull out pasta if you've made a dinner he doesn't like, but maybe you can find some part of the dinner, or something easy you can grab out of your fridge that he does like. Because what you water, grows. And you want to be acknowledging and making sure there's a good result when he does use an inappropriate voice.
- Parent: [00:47:23](#) Uh-huh (affirmative). So, now, especially when the baby's sleeping and he's screaming, I whisk him up and go outside with him. And I'm like, "If you need to get those screams out, this is the place to do it." Is that an okay thing, or not an okay thing?
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:47:37](#) I think it is an okay thing. And I think there will be times when you can't do that and you can try this other thing that I've described with the whisper.
- Parent: [00:47:46](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:47:47](#) And, even when you do this, you can say, "Oh, dear! It didn't work. Let's go outside and you can scream." I've known other people who've done this outside thing where they take the kid outside and they said, "Outside voice, let's scream." And they might scream with the child. And that's totally fine. I think there will be times when you can't do it, and so I would try both, see what's more effective.
- Parent: [00:48:09](#) Okay.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:48:09](#) And the final thing I want to say about this, is that we're talking about self-regulation here. Not just communication, it's also his own ability to regulate the big feelings. And I wonder if he thinks his world is falling apart

because his toy didn't work right or something. If that's the case, again, that signals to me that this is a kid that feels he may not have enough back up. Which, again, I know not in general, but maybe because there's a new baby and you can't always go and help him because you've got a baby to tend to.

- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:48:41](#) So, I do want to encourage you to make sure that he's getting enough one-on-one time with you and getting special time every day. It can be hard to do that when you have a baby, I know. But I would encourage you to make sure of that, as well, because I think you'd find him being a little more resilient, also.
- Parent: [00:49:03](#) Okay. So, even when he's in the other room playing by himself, and he screams, should I acknowledge it and go in that room? Or just sort of let him work through it?
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:49:12](#) You're saying when you're with the baby, and if things are fine, and you really don't have to worry about it?
- Parent: [00:49:17](#) You're absolutely right, when I don't have to worry about it. He plays upstairs, he has a little farm set. I'm down in the kitchen and I can hear him just going off up there. Should I go up there?
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:49:31](#) I think if he comes to you for help, of course.
- Parent: [00:49:36](#) Okay.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:49:37](#) It's interesting that he isn't coming for help even though he's clearly going off up there. Right? So it does sound to me like he's feeling like he might not have back up. You might be busy and he just has to get through this moment himself.
- Parent: [00:49:50](#) Okay.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:49:50](#) I don't think you have to be at his beck and call if you're changing the baby's diapers and he's going off up there, you can't run upstairs. But, on the other hand, I do think that if you go check on him and say, "Oh, it sounds like

you're having a hard time. Can I help?" Maybe it would help him to feel a little less alone and a little less like he has to roar to get help.

Parent: [00:50:20](#) All right. Thank you.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:50:22](#) You're welcome. Enjoy him, he sounds great.

Parent: [00:50:24](#) He is great.

### Question 13:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:50:28](#) A parent says, "What do I do when my twin four-year-olds won't stop hitting, kicking, biting, or pinching? And I know I have a long way to go to regulate my own emotions and to connect with them. And I know I should meet their physical needs and emotional needs through playing/connecting, and things will change over time, but in the moment when things are falling apart, what can I do?"

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:50:50](#) Call a tow truck? I'm being facetious, but that's because this is the perfect description of the breakdown lane. When your kids are a wreck, you're in the breakdown lane. And the only thing you can do at that moment is call a tow truck, right? You didn't do the preventive maintenance, so your car's engine seized up and it's in the breakdown lane. I guess what I'm saying is there's no good answers, when you're there. And I'm sorry because I know it's an impossible situation that you find yourself in. It's awful, I get it. But, there really isn't anything you can do at that moment that is going to be that helpful.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:51:25](#) So, of course you separate them. If they're hurting each other, you're going to have to separate them. And if they're both coming at each other and you're having a hard time separating them. And you're the only adult there and you have two kids, you actually might have to put them in separate rooms and shut the door. You'll stay with one of them and they don't go to the other one.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:51:53](#) And that's really a last ditch thing that you do when you're desperate. It's certainly not a good thing to do in the sense that you're only exacerbating their fear that you don't love them and you're with the other twin. Right?

So, there's no way around it. First of all, you have to do the preventive maintenance to let the feelings out so they don't get to this point, the laughter. And you have to do the special time and the connection. Only when you do those things you're going to find yourself not in the breakdown lane.

#### Question 14:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:52:32](#) This is a question from a parent about their four-year-old who doesn't get the message when someone says, "No, stop. Don't get in my face." Or pushes and hurts when he doesn't get what he wants, and ignores, or says, "Ha, ha," and doesn't show any signs of remorse. "By the fifth time doing this in one afternoon my patience is spent."

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:52:52](#) Yes, and you're afraid you're raising a bully. That is really hard. And, yes, I say the bully thing because four-year-olds are actually famous for engaging in bullying behavior. It doesn't mean they're bullies or that they will be bullies. All four-year-olds act like some version of a bully because they're just figuring out how to get what they want and they don't understand that using force is actually self-defeating, and using threats is self-defeating.

- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:53:16](#) But, you know, I'm hearing from you that your son is purposefully provoking you, which is why he ignores you when you say "stop" and he says "ha, ha" to you. And that, to me, is something else. It's not just bullying behavior. I think it's a signal that he has a "full backpack" because kids get provocative like this, where they start a fight with you, instead of being willing to feel what's going on inside. And you said this goes on four times in the course of an afternoon? No. The first time he does it, you see as a signal. He's got a "full backpack".
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:53:47](#) You pick him up and you throw him around, and you get him laughing. And then you put him down. And you say, "What do you mean, 'In-my-face-boy?'" And you get him laughing and you put him down. Then he'll either do one of two things. He'll be done and he won't get in your face anymore because you helped him laugh out what was in his backpack. Or, he'll be back in your face, like almost taunting you. And you do it again. Or he'll start to cry. He'll bump himself, or something, and use that as an excuse to cry, in which case that's great. It's just like laughing, only better because he's actually getting to a deeper level of self.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:54:23](#) So, you may be wondering, well, what if every time I put him down he just keeps provoking me again and again? At some point I'm going to lose my temper, or, at least the strength to throw him around. And I agree with you, that you would. At some point after three, or four, or five times, -- they could be pretty short -- so it could be 15 or 20 minutes of this, you would put him down, dump him on the couch, and he's laughing the whole time, right?
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:54:52](#) At that point when he goes after you again, starts to provoke you again, get in your face, you would say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Okay, son, enough. We've had a great time playing. I love throwing you around. That was really fun, it was a fun game. We'll play it again tomorrow, but I've had enough for right now. We're not going to do more. And in my face is not okay. You know that." And you're looking in his eyes, and you're keeping him at

enough of a distance that he can't be in your face, and you say, "No getting in my face. That's it. No."

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:55:20](#)

At this point, either, again, he'll have had enough laughter and he'll stop, or he'll start to cry, at this point. In which case you get a scheduled meltdown. Bingo! Perfect. But I think this is what's important here is that he's showing you he has feelings he needs to offload. And if you want a more in-depth discussion about this, it is in the *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids* book. I don't remember what page it's on, but there is in the Emotional Intelligence chapter, on emotion coaching, there is a description of how to do this with a kid who can't get to tears and stays stuck in anger, and he's provoking you. Take a look at that and it'll give you a more in-depth description of how to do this.

### Question 15:

Parent: 00:55:37

I have two kids. I have a three year old and a five year old. And I guess before I say anything else, thank you for everything you're doing to support all of us parents out here. It really means a lot. I appreciate and value deeply all of your resources, so thank you.

Parent:

So my question is about my three year old and how best to support her, and I don't want to say the word "manage," so I'm trying to use the word "support" instead, when she's pushing back against limits with hitting and throwing things. Recently I've been seeing this a little bit more and really struggling with how to manage the situation when she's either being dangerous toward myself or her older brother and trying to figure that out.

Parent:

So, the way I've been approaching it is trying to respond, of course, with empathy first. That's my motto, is empathy first. So I'm always trying to repeat that and remember it all the time, but at the same time, trying to clearly set

safety limits, of, "No, you cannot throw that stool at me. No, I can't let you throw the toothbrush at me. That's not safe," like an electric toothbrush. That's what happened the other night. It was pretty ugly in the bathroom.

Parent: But she's so emotional in those moments that she doesn't seem capable of really hearing us even empathize with her, and let alone, setting any limits. And the limit setting seems to almost make it worse. And so I was talking to my husband today. I said, "Maybe we should try not even correcting the behavior," because I think I heard that on one of your podcasts. "Let's just try not correcting it and let's just try empathy."

Parent: But she can't even hear the empathy, and I feel like there's no right thing to do or say in these moments, because I can't do **nothing**. I have to do **something**. I have to respond in some way for safety, and so I've been struggling with how to manage that situation.

Dr. Laura Markham: Hmm. So I think what you're doing is great, which is you're empathizing, and you're also clearly setting a limit. "Whoa, no throwing a stool." Right? And you can use that kind of a voice. It doesn't have to be, "Oh, please don't throw this stool." In fact, it shouldn't be. Right? It does need to be, "Whoa, no throwing a stool. Ouch, that could hurt somebody. You are so mad. Tell me in words or let me help you with that," or whatever. Right?

Dr. Laura Markham: So you're matching her level, not of upset, but of passion, I guess is what I would say, so that she understands there is a limit here. Right? Because she's in the throes of great emotion at this moment, and she's only three, and three olds do throw things when they get angry, but that doesn't mean that you don't confront the limit. I do think you need to, when it's a safety thing. You do need to correct, in a sense. You need to set a clear limit on the behavior.

Dr. Laura Markham: I wouldn't call it correcting. I would just say, you need to enforce your limit that they don't do something that's going to endanger somebody else's well being, at that moment. So definitely, you want to set the limit. I would

say, the times when I wouldn't correct would be with her tone of voice. If she uses a nasty tone of voice with you, you wouldn't necessarily even correct that, because it's so much better than her throwing the stool at you, right, or the toothbrush.

Parent: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dr. Laura Markham: You would just say, "You are so upset about this. Oh my goodness, let's see what we can do." Right? You're not even saying, "Don't be rude to me." Right? Because what you need to do first is to hear her, so she doesn't escalate into physical violence. But the physical violence, I think you do have to set a limit on. Right?

Dr. Laura Markham: So it sounds to me like you're doing what you need to do. I would say the question is, are you doing the preventive maintenance to head this off and to make sure that she hears you before she gets to the point where she's picking up the toothbrush or the stool? Right?

Parent: Yeah.

Dr. Laura Markham: I mean, maybe the toothbrush situation happens because it's the end of the day and she's exhausted and there's nothing you could've done, but maybe if you had done some roughhousing earlier, or you had more empathy before she brushed her teeth, or whatever, maybe at that point you would have been able to head that off at the pass. Does that make sense?

Parent: Got it. Yes, that does make sense. And often, it's also around sibling stuff. For instance, she had wanted to put her foot on her brother's stool, while he's there brushing his teeth, and it was like pushing him off and scaring him, and so it was setting the limit of, "No, you have to stay on your stool, and he has his stool." And she just blew up, and the issue was, it was the end of the day, and we're not napping anymore. So she's exhausted.

Parent: That's what it feels like and she doesn't have the capacity to manage her emotions, because she's three and she's

exhausted, and I get it. It's just a challenging situation. I want to keep everybody safe right now. How do we do that in a way that's positive, but still is setting clear limits and being empathetic and doing all the right things?

Dr. Laura Markham:

It sounds to me like you are doing all the right things, and during that time when they give up their naps is so difficult because, they actually just don't have the inner resources. Think about you on your worst day when you do want to throw a stool at somebody sometimes, and you're able to stop because you're a grownup, but she's three. She just doesn't have the capacity when she's under resourced with sleep, but that will get better. That will get better, and you are doing all the right things it sounds like. So really, it's more about heading off at the pass with as much preventive stuff as you can do.

Parent:

Got it. That's helpful. Thank you.

### Question 16:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:01:38

Our next question is from a parent who says, "My three-year-old son is the youngest of four kids. While out to eat the other day, a woman walked past us and he reached out and smacked her arm. In places like Sunday School he'll go up to children who are unsuspecting and push them over. I've had to take him out of the gym daycare because he's hurting toddlers."

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, it sounds like something's going on with your three-year-old. I hear that you don't see any provocation from any of these acts, but there's always some reason. It's just not a reason we understand. For instance, that woman walking past you might have bumped him, or more likely, she surprised him? Or maybe he was angry at someone else like his sibling, or his food choices, and he took it out on her? But you also say he's hurting other kids on a regular basis, so something is definitely up.

Dr. Laura Markham: It might just be that he has an over reactive alarm system, which makes him always on the alert and worried. So he easily gets threatened and lashes out. That can just be something he was born with. But that kind of random aggressive behavior also happens when kids are being hurt themselves. So is it possible that one of the other children in your family, or some other person, is hurting him?

Dr. Laura Markham: And you don't say how long you've been using Peaceful Parenting, but children who have been punished become aggressive. And they become randomly aggressive because they're carrying around a "full backpack". So, if you've just started Peaceful Parenting, that's what's going on. Your son is in need of some healing from the punishment that he's had in the past, especially if he's been spanked or slapped. But even if he's just been scared, he would respond to being scared by shoving that down in his backpack and then when it comes out later, he would respond by lashing out physically. So, if you've just begun Peaceful Parenting, it makes perfect sense that your son would be lashing out randomly.

Dr. Laura Markham: So, just to wrap up, if he does not have any of the things that we've talked about, like you've been Peaceful Parenting since he was born, for instance, then there's something else going on. Maybe a past medical intervention? Again, EMDRIA online is the place I would look for a trauma specialist.

Dr. Laura Markham: And, of course, you can always look at his diet. If there's nothing else that you can find going on, leave no stone unturned. Diet is possible and one good resource for that is feingold.org. I have seen miracles for children who have food sensitivities. But I would start by assuming that you're probably a newcomer to Peaceful Parenting and your son, as you use these preventive maintenance tools, is going to heal this pretty quickly. Just lots of roughhousing, laughter, empathy, connection, and after all that laughter, some crying. And I think you'll see a lot less aggression after that.

**Question 17:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:04:34

Our next question is from a parent who says the hardest time is when her two-and-a-half-year-old hits his baby brother, who's eight months old. The rest of the day they adore each other, but it can happen many times in one day, and almost always a handful of times. This parent says she wants guidance on how to integrate this with "it's not an emergency," as it can be tempting to shout his name and "No!", if she's, for instance, holding a hot pan a few feet away and she can't get to them in time.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Well, I would say of course you shout his name. The eight-month-old needs your protection. But, I'm assuming that if this is happening a handful of times every day at least, you can figure out when it usually happens. So you can stay close in those more difficult times of day or you can separate them. If you're going to be handling hot pans, and you're in the kitchen, put the eighth-month-old on your back, seriously. If this happens a few times a day then this needs to be a priority to separate your kids unless you can be with them. Do prevention.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And, of course, please read my sibling book. Flip straight to the last section about the first year with a new baby. I think you'll find that there are really helpful ideas in that book to help your son not need to lash out. Because, remember, he's two and a half, he's a baby himself. And he needs your support here to stop this hitting, to nip it in the bud, rather than just to respond to it after the fact.

**Question 18:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:05:59

Our next question is from a parent who says, "Our three-year-old has always been spirited and has frequent meltdowns. While the frequency of his tantrums has now improved, even before this course, the intensity has not. When he begins to get upset, his behavior rapidly goes

downhill. He throws himself on the floor, throws toys, hits, kicks. We calmly tell him no, we let him know it's okay to be mad, but it's not okay to hurt people or things. And if the hitting continues we take him to his crib where he can't hurt us, and we sit with him until he calms down. We know we need to build connection, but is there a better way to deal with his aggression in the moment?

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, how great that the frequency of the tantrums has diminished. And it sounds to me like you're doing great with staying calm. And, by staying with your son, if it's necessary to take him to his cozy corner to calm down -- I wouldn't move him if he's not hurting anyone -- And I prefer not to use a crib because then kids associate this calm down corner with sleep. But you aren't seeing any sleep issues, so I think you're fine.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But you don't say what happens when you sit with him. Does he calm down and reach for you? Does he sob in your arms? If so, then it sounds like he's working through something with this meltdown and he's coming to some resolution of it where he's actually letting something out of the emotional backpack. If not, if he's stuck in anger, and he doesn't get to a positive resolution at the end where he is in your arms, affectionate, cooperative, then I think you need to focus, as you said, more on connection.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Connection will also probably slow that quick downhill slide and stop some of his aggression. Remember, people escalate their aggression when they don't feel heard. So, in the moment, it would help a lot to use your words to describe his point of view. Use his name to get his attention. So, for instance, "Luke, you're saying 'No.' This isn't what you wanted, is it, Sweetheart?" Keep describing and he might start yelling words instead of hitting. And in this case, yelling would be huge progress.

**Question 19:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:08:03

The next question is from a parent who says that her three-and-a-half-year-old and 19-month-old both have the habit of biting. Although, neither of them seem to do it out of anger, but more when they're excited. So, I have a book for you. It's written by Lisa Poelle, P-O-E-L-L-E, and it's called *The Biting Solution: The Expert's No-Biting Guide for Parents, Caregivers, and Early Childhood Educators*. And I've heard from many parents that by using this book they were able to stop their child from biting.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I do want to add that since you say your kids don't do this out of frustration, but more when they're excited, or overwhelmed, I think that sounds again like anxiety. I think your reaction has to be very firm, "Ouch!" and putting the kids down. Now, your 19-month-old, that might be too strong a reaction because it's like handing your 19-month-old a magic wand when they can get that big of response out of you. But I think even with a 19-month-old you might start there and see whether that stops the biting because your child will probably cry when you put your child down.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But you should always put your child down no matter how old they are when they bite you, and say "ouch", and move away from the child. And if they burst into tears, you pick them up and you say, "Oh, Sweetie, you're sad. But that hurt Mommy. Ouch! No biting." And then you put your hand up to their mouth and you put your finger on their teeth and say, "Ouch, those teeth hurt. No biting Mommy." And I think when you respond really clearly, you'll find them stopping if it's really not about frustration.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But I would also pay attention to the recommendations in Poelle's book because it may be that there's some kind of anger involved, too, that you're not really picking up on with your three-year-old. Because usually by the time kids are three, they're only biting out of anger, they're not just biting out of overwhelm, the way you're describing.

**Question 20:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:10:09 Here's a question from a parent about her 26-month-old daughter who is currently hurting, biting or kicking or hitting, and then observing the outcome, and then empathizing. So she bites them and then says "ouch" and makes whining sounds. And she does this with her toys, too.

Dr. Laura Markham: So, when she hits you, hold her hand so she can't hit again, and help her pat you gently using the word "gentle," "Gentle, Sweetheart." And when she hurts her doll and looks at you for response, she's checking to see what's allowed. You can say, "Ouch. Is Dolly hurt? Let's help Dolly feel better. Gentle." I want to add that some kids, usually as they get older, do want to act out their aggressions on dolls or stuffed animals and hurt them, but that's usually when they're really angry. And I think that's fine, by the way, because they know the doll's not real.

Dr. Laura Markham: But I don't think that's what's going on with you right now. I think she's asking what's allowed in terms of behavior and I would treat the doll with the same compassion that you would treat a child who gets hurt, as your daughter's watching you.

**Question 21:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:11:12 Our next question is from a parent who says her three-and-a-half-year-old keeps trying to hurt her after trying to empathize and connect with him during a meltdown. And his meltdowns rarely end in tears, usually after 10 or 15 minutes she resorts to distraction. Either because she's run out of patience, or because she has to attend to her one-year-old. So when she encourages his feelings, he's quite ferocious with her.

Dr. Laura Markham: Well, your son's ferocity is an expression of fear, of feeling threatened, and that threat could come from anything. He

could be a highly sensitive person, he could have had an early medical trauma, we know he has a one-year-old brother. But, it sounds like the aggression is specifically linked to when you express empathy to him, which makes sense. It's like ripping the scab off a wound when he feels all those feelings, and he can't bear it. And, of course, your empathy helps him feel those feelings. Now, that's also what heals the feelings, but he doesn't know that.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, I would back off of any scheduled meltdowns for a while. The point of a scheduled meltdown is to give a child the opportunity to cry, and he's not crying. So, back up and focus on creating the conditions that will make tears more likely. Your son's only three, so using the basic Peaceful Parenting tools should get you results probably in a month.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, first and foremost, that means laughter. Not when he's mad, but at least for a half an hour every single day. I know that's a lot of laughter. I've seen it happen over and over that once kids spend a month really laughing half an hour every day, they start crying more.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And, as you know, when you're laughing with someone, you're releasing oxytocin into your bloodstream. And you feel closer to them. So, daily roughhousing also helps them feel closer to you, which increases the safety. And the more safety, the less aggression.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Again, to increase safety you would do special time. That's not something you can skip, especially since you have a one-year-old. And, finally, connection and redirection. See things from his point of view. No raising your voice, no threats, because every time you succumb to that temptation, you're creating more aggression.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now, in the moment when he does get angry, acknowledge what he's upset about with real empathy. "You're shouting at me. I guess you really don't want to get ready to go. You're having such a good time playing, huh? Is that right?" You'll find that kind of empathy is less threatening. It's not the kind of empathy where you're

encouraging his feelings, but he does feel heard. And that means that he's less likely to get aggressive. So I think using these tools daily will help your son be less angry. And you'll see him start to cry without attacking you, and I don't think it should take more than a month.

### Question 22:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:14:03

The next question is from 2 parents who say, "Our strong-willed four-year-old always responds with 'No' to anything we want him to do. And also, if we don't do what he wants, he says, 'I will punch your face.' But he's only saying it, he never actually does it. We started Peaceful Parenting only a few weeks ago."

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, your son is not really threatening to punch you. He's showing you the depth of his upset. I think as you continue to use Peaceful Parenting, and acknowledge his feelings, you're going to see this problem really diminish and vanish because he won't have to escalate to get your attention. When he says that, respond to his emotions, the emotions he's expressing, instead of to the threat. So you would say, "You sound very angry. It sounds like you really wish I would let you have the candy," or whatever it is he's upset about. Don't respond so much to the threat as to the emotions under it.

These parents are also saying that he jumps and climbs on Dad whenever he can, and hurts him badly, even though they ask him not to, but it's not done with anger. So, that's interesting. It sounds like your son is actually trying to connect physically. I know that having a four-year-old spitfire throw himself at you could hurt. You're going to need to teach him about physical space bubbles and also about consent. We never touch people without asking. That's a good thing to begin doing, talking about consent in this time of Me Too because that understanding of consent begins in childhood.

Dr. Laura Markham: But, most important, I would say this is a child who needs roughhousing. The research shows that roughhousing teaches kids the limits to roughness, just as it teaches puppies who are playing and roughhousing with each other. So, I think these are all ways that you can help him to manage his aggressive impulses, or at least his rough impulses. But I would say he's probably trying to connect physically with you. And I would say welcome to Peaceful Parenting. I think you're going to find that your son is going to change a lot now that you're using this approach.

### Question 23:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:16:08 The next question is from a parent with a four year old who is acting violently when she knows she did something wrong. She gets defensive and starts physically attacking. This parent says, "I've tried to use empathy, but she just says, 'Yes, I am angry at you and you should be killed!' while she continues to attack me. Holding her doesn't work and I lose my cool if she hits me." Yes, that's very common and you wouldn't want to hold her unless you have to, to keep her from hurting you.

Dr. Laura Markham: "Walking away doesn't work. She won't stay in time-out. And in order to keep ourselves and our youngest child, who's a toddler, safe we started locking our daughter into her room. But then she starts to kick the walls and door, and rips things off the walls.

Dr. Laura Markham: Well, I do understand that being attacked triggers us. It always triggers all of us when we're attacked. But your daughter is just four, and if your way of handling her attacks is to lock her in her room, you're going to worsen her violence. So then in a few years you will not be able to handle her violence. When she gets dysregulated like that, she needs your help. She is only four.

Dr. Laura Markham: But the good thing about being four instead of two is that you can use words to de-escalate her. She needs to feel

like you understand her upset. So, apparently, just saying, "You're so angry," isn't enough for her to feel understood. I would ratchet that up a notch and say, "You're showing me how mad you are. I see you are so mad and you want to hurt me. I'm not going to let you hurt me."

Dr. Laura Markham:

I do want to challenge you on a more fundamental point that I think is at the heart of her behavior pattern. You said, "Whenever she knows she did something wrong, she gets defensive and starts physically attacking me." You know, the whole idea of doing something wrong, I think your child is finding that intolerable. She can't bear that shame, so she must be perceiving that she did something "wrong" often. It must be an ongoing part of her life. This is a four-year-old who's learning and she's going to miss the mark, she's going to make mistakes.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But I think the whole idea of doing something wrong is destructive. I just don't think it's necessary. I honestly think you can raise a child with that idea being very rare. And even then it's not about doing something wrong, it's about how she was out of integrity. So if she hurts the little one, then you offer understanding about why she might have done that and you reinforce that it's never a way to solve problems. And, you offer her the opportunity to redeem herself by making a repair. There's no "she did something wrong," there's just "she was out of her usual self, which is a good self. She did something that wouldn't be usual for her and now she can repair that."

Dr. Laura Markham:

So you mentioned time-out, that's one of the problems with the time-out, is it reinforces the idea that the child has done something wrong. Since you're in this negative pattern, I'm going to recommend that you reach out to a parenting coach immediately. Don't wait until the end of the course. You have the basic tools to build connection with your daughter, but you need to interrupt this pattern of feeling shame, and the violence that is making you lock yourself in a different room, or lock her in the room. That's just going to make this all worse.

Dr. Laura Markham:

When you work with one of the parenting coaches I've trained, I don't get any financial remuneration from that. This is just between you and them. The only reason I advise this is because I want you to have as much support as possible to be the parent you want to be and to be able to have a peaceful home. And I just want to say, don't wait. There's no shame in getting coaching. It is so helpful. A good parenting coach can really help you turn these problems around.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And the course is great to give you an introduction to the ideas and the tools. And for some people the course is all they need. But if you've gotten into a bad habit like the one that was just described, then you really benefit from having a parenting coach to support you through it.

#### Question 24:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:20:04

A parent is asking when the four-and-a-half-year-old hurts the one-and-a-half-year-old, she says, "I personally can't help an emotional reaction, which usually includes yelling." So, again, this is just what I said to the last parent, of course you can't help an emotional reaction. But here's the thing, you're actually perpetuating the violence. I know that sounds odd to say, but you are. The reason your four-year-old is aggressive to the toddler is because he's worried that he's losing your love to the toddler. So when you yell at him, even for what we adults understand is a very good reason, you're confirming for your four-year-old that he has a reason to be worried about this.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Do you think he responds to your yelling by saying, "Wow, Mom's right. I never thought of it that way. I'm not going to hit my brother anymore, of course, poor thing"? No. He thinks, "It's all my brother's fault. Ever since he arrived, Mom's been yelling at me like this. She doesn't even love me anymore. She doesn't care about me. All she cares about is him." So you're asking your four-year-old to change, to not lash out when he's upset. That's what

you're asking me to tell you, how to get this to happen, right? That's what we want the four-year-old to do. But you're telling me that you, an adult, are not capable of changing yourself to not lash out verbally when you're upset. I don't know how we can expect this of the four-year-old if you're not willing to do it yourself.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, I want to add I'm not blaming you. I get that you are going to be upset when this happens, of course. We all would be, I would be. But, if you want it to stop happening, you need to step up and self-regulate in those moments. Channel that upset into caring for the one-year-old. Don't react with your four-year-old until you calm down. Really. Your job is to notice that you're upset, take a deep breath, stop, drop and breathe, and tend to the one-year-old. Do not interact with the four-year-old.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I talk about this in my sibling book. I talk about it on the (Aha! Parenting) website in several different articles. You can read them if this is new information to you. But your job is to regulate yourself and, in fact, the hitting can stop in a very short time. I've seen it happen over and over again. And the only way it's going to happen is if you control yourself, connect first with your one-year-old, calm down, and then connect with the four-year-old to help him with those feelings that he just lashed out from.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If you can connect with the four-year-old then, and at other times, so that he feels valued with special time. You're doing prevention, preventive maintenance, especially if he's able to start crying about this. This does not have to take more than a few weeks. You could stop this entrenched pattern, but you need to do prevention as well, of course, in this transitional period.

Dr. Laura Markham:

By the way, one way to control yourself is to drop your fears about what will happen when they're older. As you mention in your question, what if this doesn't ever stop? Well, it's your reaction that's perpetuating the cycle. So if that fear is driving your reaction, just consider that we have a way of creating what we're most afraid of. But you

sound like a self-aware person to me. You don't have to do that. You can turn this around.

### Question 25:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:23:32

The next question is from a parent who says, "My husband and I are having a hard time agreeing about how to handle our son's anger when he hits, bites, or scratches. He's four. It usually happens at bed time, which is a hard time of the day for us when we tell him no or that he needs to stay in bed. My husband agrees with a lot of Peaceful Parenting, but strongly believes our son needs some sort of consequence when he hits." So, obviously, it's not okay for your son to be lashing out and hurting you at bed time, or any other time. And I can completely understand why your husband thinks that punishing your son might stop him from lashing out. Because that's what a consequence is, it's a punishment, right?

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, the real question is, what do you think is going on with your son when you tell him he needs to stay in bed and he lashes out physically? He must be desperate. I'm wondering what's going on that is making him so desperate. If you solve that, you'll solve the lashing out. So my approach is to address the needs of the child that are causing the behavior. And it is not normal behavior to lash out when you tell him it's time to stay in bed, right? But it is true that he is only four.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, I'm wondering about your bedtime routine. Is there some kind of support that he needs that he isn't getting? I just think if he's willing to attack you when you ask him to stay in bed, then either your relationship with him really needs work, which is entirely possible. Maybe you've just come to Peaceful Parenting recently and lots more connection is needed. Maybe you work long hours and he doesn't see that much of you. Or maybe he's stressed about something else because he's in a situation with a caregiver during the day that stresses him. But you say

that you don't think that the problem is in the relationship. You do a lot of work to support the relationship and you think you're close. So if that's the case, then this is probably anxiety about separation.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If this is anxiety about separation, punishment will just make that worse in terms of increasing your son's anxiety. You know, if you punish him he might stop lashing out, which would be great, but what would he do with that desperation? You wouldn't have solved the problem that's making him feel so desperate. And what do kids do when we shut down their fear? They stuff it in the emotional backpack.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, at the age of four, you can really help him with this. By the age of 14 it's too late, all bets are off. And you don't want him self-medicating that desperation at the age of 14. I also want to point out that this exact issue of emotion coaching with a child who has a tendency to anxiety and has a hard time going to bed, is covered in the reading for Week Four. The name of the chapter is EQ Coaching With A Difficult Child. And it's about a little girl named Morgan, who is the age of your son, and has a hard time going to sleep at night.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I think you'll find that chapter, and especially that part of the chapter, really helpful. And, of course, there are articles on the Aha! Parenting website on bedtime that you would also find really helpful.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You said your husband wants to punish your son because this is just unacceptable behavior and he has to learn that. I'm saying, yeah, sure, but he's four years old. Punishing is not addressing the reason he's hitting. You have a much bigger problem than him hitting you. Your problem is that he's desperate enough to hit you. And if you say it's not the relationship, then it's anxiety. So that's what I would be addressing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Those are the tools to address it. And I do want to add that if you're at the point where you've tried those things, you've actually followed the recommendations in *Peaceful*

*Parent, Happy Kids* about how to deal with that, and you've read all the articles on the website about bedtime, and you've worked with the routine in reducing your son's anxiety, and you've stayed very calm at bedtime, and you really see that you're totally stuck and there's nothing you can do except punish him, then I would say have a session or two with a parenting coach. Maybe it's time to get your son assessed, right? There's something going on.

### Question 26:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:27:46

The next question is from a parent who says, "My son who just turned four has started in the last few months to kick, hit, punch, throw things. Most of the aggression is only toward me. I've tried empathy, telling him that we don't hit because it hurts, and everything else you've taught us so far to do. I'm behind in the course, I'm only at Week Three, but nothing has helped. His father and I separated a year ago. I'm not sure if that has anything to do with this."

Dr. Laura Markham:

I don't think the divorce is the immediate cause. The divorce was a year ago. Your son only started this aggressive behavior in the past few months. So something's different in the past few months. Now, maybe you started dating someone new? Maybe his father started dating someone new? Maybe he started a new school? Or, maybe you started parenting differently because you started this course? It is possible that your son had a backlog of emotion from being conventionally parented, from having another baby be born, because I see you have a one-year-old, as well as two older kids. And, of course, from the divorce. Divorce is very hard on kids, notoriously so.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So if your child had a backlog of feeling from all of that, and then you started to not punish the way that you had done before. Your son might have begun to act out because now he feels safe enough to let all this out and he doesn't know how to handle it. If that's the case, then this

is a typical "full backpack" situation. And intensively using the Peaceful Parenting tools will solve it. Meaning this is a kid who needs to roughhouse every single day and laugh uproariously for 20 minutes a day. This is a kid who needs special time, one-on-one time, with you every single day. And this is a kid who needs to feel understood all the time, meaning 24/7 empathy. He needs routines. And you can still expect that when he goes to Dad's house, he's going to have a hard time when he comes home. I assume that's (the time) when he's mostly being aggressive and acting out, but maybe he's aggressive all the time? I don't know.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, the next thing is the scheduled meltdown to allow him to cry. But to do that you need to have built up some trust and some safety using the other tools. Then, I won't go through how to do a scheduled meltdown because I think that's pretty clearly outlined. But you are only on Week Three, so you may not know about this. So, it's outlined in the book, *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids* book. And, please, keep going with the course so that you can also see from the course how to do a scheduled meltdown.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Basically, you're setting up safety and then when he gets angry, you don't let him hurt you, but you speak to the anger. Basically, you're acknowledging his anger and you're speaking to the unhappiness underneath it, the sense of powerlessness. "You really don't want to go to Daddy's this weekend," or, "You really don't want to take a bath. You hate it when I tell you it's time for bed, don't you, and you have to stop playing?" Whatever it is that sets him off.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If he feels understood, he's less likely to be aggressive, right? And, as he feels safer, he's going to be more and more willing to let down those barriers and let the tears come out. And once he's willing to cry, there's no need for aggression. The aggression is there to defend against the tears. So please don't stop, you're only on Week Three. The information you need is waiting for you.

**Question 27:**

- Dr. Laura Markham: 01:31:36 "Our four-year-old hits and kicks when angry. He gets irate when we touch him in any way when he's upset. For instance, if he's having a meltdown and being violent, so we carry him to a private spot and sit with him. In the past we did yell at him, but we never spanked or hit him. He has a one-year-old sibling and that's been a difficult transition. How can you deal with this without using discipline?"
- Dr. Laura Markham: It's very upsetting to have our child hit and kick us. It pushes all our buttons, for most of us. But we know your child was not born aggressive. So from his perspective, he's become aggressive in response to his experience. This last year has been tough because of the new sibling and, clearly, something's going on with him that's making him have a very hard time. And his aggression is letting you know that, it's communication.
- Dr. Laura Markham: First, when he's having a meltdown, I would not try to touch him. That's always upsetting to kids, it makes them feel less safe, so they go on the attack. If his meltdown feels dangerous, maybe one parent can take the baby out of the room rather than taking the four-year-old out of the room. If you have a cozy corner set up at your house you might be able to tell him you're taking him there, but even that is a step down the road given how dysregulated he is now when he gets mad.
- Dr. Laura Markham: But do go read on the Aha! Parenting website about "cozy corners" because that might help you, moving toward that in the future. Second, I have to ask how you're using the Peaceful Parenting tools? I know I sound like a broken record bringing this up in reaction to every question, but it would be as if you went to a doctor with an infection and the doctor says, "Are you taking the antibiotics?" And you said, "Oh, no. I know they're a good idea, but I don't have time."

- Dr. Laura Markham: You won't get the aggression to go away unless you use the Peaceful Parenting tools. And that means half an hour daily of laughter, daily special time, and a chance to cry. If he's crying regularly I would be very surprised. I'm hearing this is a child who's aggressive, which means to me he doesn't get a chance to cry. So, dedicated use of the tools always increases the tears, and reduces aggression.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Your question really is, how can we deal with this without using discipline? So I think you're saying that when your son is aggressive like that, you think you need to punish him. Maybe that will stop the aggression next time? Actually, I'm sorry to say, but that will be throwing fuel on the fire. A child who's already showing you that he's having a hard time, will only have a harder time once you start punishing him.
- Dr. Laura Markham: It's much more effective to solve the problem at its source, which is that your son is afraid you don't love him anymore, that he is worthless, of no value, that you could leave him. And as every child knows, if their parents stop loving them and taking care of them, the child is not protected and dies. I know that sounds extreme, but that's why children have abandonment panic. And that's one of the reasons that the reaction to a sibling being born is so great. Because children, on some level, experience it as a threat to their existence.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Now when I say that the answer is not punishment, that doesn't mean you don't set limits. Of course you set limits, but you're connecting at the same time. "Whoa, whoa, whoa. You are mad about this. I hear you. No hitting. We can solve this together, Sweetheart." Remember, rage doesn't dissipate until it feels heard. So the most important thing to stop the aggression when he's angry is to describe what he's angry about so he feels heard.
- Dr. Laura Markham: So I don't know if this is going on at your house, but it's so common with children who are aggressive that I want to make sure to bring this up so that all the parents listening hear this. So many parents go wrong when their child gets angry by trying to control the anger instead of listening to

it. And that's because of our relationship with our own anger, from our own childhoods. We become so afraid of our child's anger. The child gets angry, he sweeps everything off the table onto the floor, the parent yells at the child to pick that stuff up, and the child, of course, in the middle of the fight, refuses. The parent tries to force the child and the child hits.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, often, it's when we try to correct the angry child's behavior in the moment that we ignite the aggression. You have an immature human being who's angry at something they think is reasonable, and we escalate the drama. We set up conditions that make the child more threatened, so they respond with aggression. What if instead, when the child threw the stuff on the floor, we said, "Wow, you really are mad. You really don't like this. You didn't want me to say X, Y, Z," whatever. At that point instead of escalating the drama, you're acknowledging the child's feelings. You've just transformed the interaction.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now, there's a dialogue. The child is expressing a communication and you're hearing it. The child feels understood, their rage begins to dissipate, you connect. And the child feels bad about what he's done. So, later, when he calms down, of course he can help clean up, and should help clean up. But he's not going to start to calm down until his emotions are acknowledged.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So notice the child swept everything on to the floor, is it really a tragedy? Is it really an emergency? No. You take that as a red flag in your own head that you need to listen better so he feels heard. And instead of correcting him, you respond to that communication by acknowledging how angry he is. He begins to calm down. He tells you what he's upset about more and more, but he begins to calm down as you acknowledge what he's upset about.

Dr. Laura Markham:

As he calms down, you're moving closer together physically, you're holding him, you're hugging him, you're working together to solve whatever the problem is that set him off, you're reconnecting. And then you pick up all the stuff on the floor together because by now he's calmed

down and he actually feels bad. And you may need to wait a little while until he's really calmed down. You're not shaming him or blaming him because of his outburst. You're responding to the pain, helping him through it and then he's able to make repairs for what he's done.

Dr. Laura Markham:

One of the reasons that children continue to be aggressive is that we respond to their aggression in ways that perpetuate the aggression. So, if we respond with punishment and rejection, the child's aggression worsens. We absolutely say, "This isn't okay." But if we respond with our own rage, and we're getting into a power struggle with our child, and we're punishing them emotionally or physically, what ends up happening is they're out there in the dark crying for help and we leave them there. We solidify that wall. So, to heal and prevent further aggression, instead what we do is we go out there into the dark, we get our child, and we bring her back to us so that she doesn't need to continue to act out in this way.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I'm not saying to any of the parents who've asked questions today, I'm not saying that you caused your child's aggression. I think it's a combination of causes. These are young children, they're still learning impulse control. But I will say that very often I see that the parent, in a totally unwitting manner, ends up inciting the aggression by getting drawn into a power struggle. And that is completely avoidable.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And, of course, the reason this happens is that we want to teach our child an appropriate way to deal with their anger. And it's not appropriate when you get angry to sweep everything off the table onto the floor. But you don't have to teach your child that lesson, they already know it's not appropriate. They're doing it because they think they have to. The situation is that dire. Nobody's listening. In fact, when the parent then responds to that instead of listening, cracking down with punishment, that escalates the drama. It's not teaching the child to behave, it's actually exacerbating the feelings that are leading to the aggression to begin with.

- Dr. Laura Markham: So if you're wondering how the child learns to express their anger appropriately, think about what you're role modeling. Can you say that you're role modeling how to express what you need without attacking the other person? And sweeping the things off the table onto the floor is indeed a form of attack, right? And so is yelling at our child. So the way children learn is through our modeling.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Now you may be saying, "But I've never been aggressive to my child. Why are they being aggressive?" And, of course, the child needs to be able to manage their angry feelings, right? But that's not simply impulse control. You're also talking about how many angry feelings do they have? Do they have an anger management problem because there's an avalanche of angry feelings? If so, where are all those angry feelings coming from? Two places.
- Dr. Laura Markham: One is a "full backpack" of tears and fears. So when those feelings start to come up, the child gets anxious and feels threatened and lashes out with aggression. Also from a worldview that says, "The world isn't fair. My parents aren't fair. No one listens to me. I can't get my needs met unless I raise my voice and, maybe, my fist." So that's what we're trying to heal here. A child who bursts out with aggression is a child who doesn't feel safe and feels like no one is listening. That's what we need to address.
- Dr. Laura Markham: If we can help express those upsets in words, they don't have to act them out physically. And that's our whole goal here. Not just to teach our child how to behave, but to set up the conditions that make that behavior possible, both in our home and inside the child by helping them with their emotions. Once they stop stuffing those tears and fears, you'll stop seeing the aggression. So don't worry in that moment about teaching lessons for the future. Pay attention in that moment to how to help your child feel heard and everything begins to shift.
- Dr. Laura Markham: So if your child is aggressive, I understand how scary that is. I want to remind you that you're the adult. You don't have to escalate the drama. You can calm the drama. And

the way you do that is by listening to your child's anger, acknowledging it, and not getting hooked into the power struggle. If you have a child who's being aggressive, I ask you to try an experiment. When your child gets angry, try really hard to stay calm yourself, don't get hooked in, don't get into a power struggle. Listen, acknowledge, really try to see it from your child's point of view, and stay calm, and de-escalate the drama. I think you'll see a big difference in the level of aggression.

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