

## Helping Kids with Anger and Aggression Ages 5 to 6 - 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 children with anger and aggression. We'll focus on ages five and six. Remember, we're always applying our three big ideas. We start by regulating our own emotions and behavior. Then we connect with our child. Finally, instead of trying to control our child, we coach them to be their best self, both by helping them with their emotions and by creating an environment where the child can thrive. So let's see how to apply these three big ideas to daily life with children.

### Question 1:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:00:44](#) A parent says her five-year-old struggles with impulse control, and when emotions take over, he hits and kicks and sometimes even bites and charges after them. And they don't want to hold him because that seems to make his anger worse. So often, it's not necessary to hold a child. The only reason you would do it is to stop them from attacking. And once kids feel understood, they usually stop attacking. Rage dissolves once it feels heard, right?

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:01:10](#) If you speak to the disappointment or pain behind the anger, he might even begin to cry. And of course, that's much more likely if you've done daily special time and daily laughter and empathy. So most of the time, I find that when parents use the peaceful parenting tools, and they really empathize, kids do stop attacking them. I also find that when you play power games, when you bumble, the kid laughs and laughs. They are more able to self-regulate the next time they get angry.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:01:43](#) But if you really can't get him to stop charging at you, then it means he is trying desperately to release those feelings, and he doesn't know how else to do it, and he needs to cry. So in that case, if you need to do it to stay safe, I would say, "I'm going to keep us both safe," and hold his wrists so he can't hit you. If necessary, sit down on the floor. Pull him to you in a hug. Speak soothingly. Tell him you're going to keep everyone safe.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:02:08](#) It's very important that you communicate to him that his anger doesn't upset you, and that you stay connected. If he struggles against you, remember, that's what fear looks like. He's trying to work out that fear. It would be better if he could struggle against a pillow, if you could hold a couch pillow for him to struggle against and to hit (instead of your hands), and he might actually be willing to do that. I would talk to him at some point when he's not angry about it and see if he thinks that would help.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:02:34](#) He is five, so he might be able to articulate that. And if you do need to hold him to keep him from attacking you, I would let him go as soon as you can, when he promises that he won't hit you. And then, if you need to hold him again, hold him again. But remember, the goal is not holding him or prolonging the struggle. The goal is to get him crying, right? So you're really trying to get him to a point where he feels safe and he's willing to cry, and that does mean they have to hit the wall. They have to have the tears of futility of hitting the wall. That's why holding kids, sometimes they will begin actually crying and just sob their hearts out. But if it seems to make him more angry and it doesn't help him cry, then don't do it.

Dr. Laura Markham: And if it doesn't work and you can't get him crying, then I'm going to suggest, again, to get some parenting coaching so that he stops attacking, because he's five. It's time to stop lashing out physically.

**Question 2:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:03:35

“My six year old started becoming very strong-willed and aggressive at age three. When he gets angry, he hits and throws things. I try holding, I try empathizing, telling him we need to be safe, but he gets angrier and says I'm hurting him. How do I stop him from breaking things and hurting people?” So I wonder what happened at age three. Kids' personalities don't change. So you said he got very strong-willed and aggressive at age three. Was there some trauma at age three? Maybe another baby was born? Something happened, and I'm wondering if that's the case, and that's causing this, then it might even be he needs EMDR or some other therapy to work out whatever the trauma was, if there was one. So that would be the first important point.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Secondly, it sounds like you've been doing great with preventive maintenance, but I don't hear you mentioning laughter. Laughter is really important so that kids are able to get past their anger to the tears behind it. Right? Tears are the cure for aggression because they express that powerlessness, and futility, and fear, and pain, and hurt. But to get to the tears, you have to start with laughter. I'll just say to you and everyone who's child is hitting, you don't have to do this alone. If you follow all of my suggestions and you're not seeing positive change, don't wait. Reach out to [administrator@ahaparenting.com](mailto:administrator@ahaparenting.com), and we will find you a parenting coach. You really do not have to do this alone.

**Question 3:**

Parent: 00:04:58

We have a six year old daughter. She's very spirited, she's smart, but she's very sensitive. Your book is very helpful and we've been doing a lot of the work, but in those moments when she's being incredibly difficult and

inaccessible, we are trying to connect with her but she isn't letting us connect. And obviously, at that time also, she's being hurtful in her words and being very difficult. It's hard to switch to having empathy when she's defying us in that moment and she's being basically mean. How do we continue to have discipline to really empathize with her and to be there for her when she's being very hurtful and mean and doing everything that would turn us off to being loving and caring? I guess this is the simplest way to put it.

Dr. Laura Markham: Did you say she was six? Is that what you said, she's six?

Parent: She literally just turned six a couple of days ago, and she's been like this. She's been spirited for many years. So basically, since she was two we've noticed her highs are really high and the lows are really low. Socially, she's better with one-on-one. But when there's multiple people, we've had problems. We've been doing better, but she doesn't make it easy.

Dr. Laura Markham: So you've just described a child who is having a challenge, right? You've actually just described a child who has a hard time when other people are around, probably some anxiety. Right? That's why it's been hard with the grandparents. Some anxiety, maybe she's super sensitive, and has a really hard time regulating herself. Right?

Parent: Yeah, especially when things don't go her way.

Dr. Laura Markham: Right. Right. Well, that's when we all have a hard time. I mean, it's easy to regulate when everything goes my way. When things don't go my way, I have to exercise a little self-regulation, right? And so what you're saying is that when things don't go her way, she has a harder time regulating. That makes perfect sense because it's true for all of us. And for a six year old, they can still have a really hard time when things don't go their way. We think they should be pretty even keeled, and they're certainly better than when they were three, but that doesn't mean that a

six year old doesn't get pretty overwhelmed by big feelings when things don't go their way.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I guess that's the description of your daughter. And yet, when you first talked about it, there's the description from your point of view. And from your point of view, what I'm hearing is, she acts difficult. She acts mean. She shuts you out, and you can't get through to her, and she's being mean. And why should you try to be patient and nice to her and compassionate and empathic when she's actually being mean to you? I know you didn't use those words exactly.

Parent:

Well, yeah, I understand from your book and everything to choose love and empathy. I'm just saying in those moments, my wife and I, we're not mean and we're not sure where all that's coming from. So it's really hard for us to kind of understand. If it was coming from behavior that we were exhibiting, I guess maybe we could understand it a little bit better, but we're not quite sure where it's coming from. And it's hard to relate to her anger and then to her frustration.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Of course. Listen, I think that it's hard for every parent, any parent. And I would put myself on this list. It's hard for any parent when your child is being hateful to you, to be loving back. Right? That is really hard. It's also the way it works, because they're children and we're the adults. We need to hold the space. And so I guess what I would say is, first of all, she's not hitting, right?

Parent:

Not really, no.

Parent:

Used to when she was younger, but that has stopped.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Right. Right. Okay. So that's great. Great news. So you've been doing something right, because if she were hitting, it would mean that she was escalating and that she hadn't learned to control herself even to that degree. So you've been doing something very right with her big rages

because she's not hitting. And I hear you that she still has big rages and she uses mean words when she's in a big rage. So I think when she's in a big rage, your job is to listen. When she says something mean, what's an example of something mean she might say to you?

Parent: She'll say, I hate you.

Dr. Laura Markham: Okay. Great. So that's not mean.

Parent: Especially more to my wife. But, yeah.

Dr. Laura Markham: Okay. I know it feels like an attack. I totally get that. I want to say "I hate you" is not mean. It's kids' code for "I am hurting so badly and I'm so angry and I don't know how to express it to you. I am going to use the nuclear option here. The biggest, baddest word I know, hate." Most parents say, "Oh, we don't even allow that word in our house." Well, I mean, I wouldn't disallow a word like that because to me it's just normal. I'm not saying that it's a good thing for your kid to say "I hate you." I'm saying that it is normal behavior. It is not a mean thing to say. And the answer back is, when she says, "I hate you," the answer back is, "Oh, Sweetheart. You are so angry at me that you're using the worst words you know to tell me. I hear how mad you are at me." And then it depends on what has preceded it. It might be, "You really didn't want me to say no to that," or, "This isn't what you wanted to have happen," or whatever, and you would describe her point of view. And you, seriously listen and you describe it, because rage does not dissipate until it feels heard.

Dr. Laura Markham: She's not actually being mean. She is using the worst word she knows to communicate that she is really upset. Now if she called you a name which is specifically against your rules like, "You stupid idiot," which kids will do, then in that case you can say, "Ouch. You must really be trying to hurt my feelings. I guess that shows me how mad you are and how upset. You really didn't want me to say no. You really didn't want this to happen this way. This is really

ruining your day, isn't it? I am so sorry. Sweetie, we're going to work this out. Let's take a deep breath." Or maybe not the deep breath. Maybe she just needs to cry and you know that, because that's usually what is the case, and you say, "I am so sorry you're having such a hard time, honey. Of course you're mad about this. You didn't expect this to happen. You thought XYZ was going to happen and now I told you this is going to happen. No wonder you're upset." Now she feels understood. She feels like someone's listening.

Parent: Right and I appreciate that, and I've read a lot about the scheduled meltdowns. She doesn't seem to cry in those ways. We're looking for that. We would love for her to have those emotional cry breakdowns, but we're not really seeing that as much. We're seeing some crying, but it's not as much from the heart that we're hoping for, like what you're describing.

Dr. Laura Markham: Yeah, I hear you. So I think when kids get stuck in rage and they don't cry ... and by the way, it's very common for that to be the case for kids who are six and up because their brain has rewired and it's much more defended. They don't have as easy access. They don't get overwhelmed by their feelings as much, really, is the truth, all their feelings, but also the tears. So the way to make it safe for her to cry is to switch gears here. Because I heard you use the word discipline. How do we have discipline when she's in this state? And I would say it's not a time for discipline. You can absolutely set some rules for her.

Parent: No, I meant discipline for me. I meant discipline for me not for her.

Dr. Laura Markham: Oh, I see. Your own discipline. Got it. Thank you for clarifying. Yeah.

Parent: I meant discipline for me and my wife to keep on the tools that you've given us.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Got it. Okay.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Great. So I think that's great. Thank you for clarifying that. So, don't take it personally, realize that she's not actually trying to be mean to you, she's expressing pain, and really try to see it from her perspective, and make it safe for her to show you the pain. And I know that you could say in response, "Oh, well then, what? I'm just letting her beat up on me emotionally." But actually that's not what's happening. What's happening is she's showing her emotional pain and you're saying, "Oh my gosh, I see this. Don't worry, Sweetie. We can handle this. We are here. Show us what you got. You've got this old pain. I get it. We're listening. We see how you're feeling." And you make it safe for her to show it to you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And at that point, then she might begin to cry, especially if she's been doing a lot of laughing recently. The bad news is they don't cry as easily. The good news is they can use words to process the feelings. The way the brain develops, the more verbal we are, the more we can reflect on the upset and integrate that big emotion, even without actually crying about it. She might get tears in her eyes, but not sob so deeply, but be able to talk about it. And there's also the option of drawing you a picture of how upset she is. Put music on for her and have her dance it out. There's a reason for there to be dance therapists and music therapists and art therapists, which is that we can express emotions often through those art forms better than we can in words, in ways that are more visceral and get it out.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And again, I want to say it's not just getting it out, it's getting it out to a witness, so that you're there saying, "Oh my goodness, Sweetie. You're so upset about this." Right? And again, you don't have to agree with her to have compassion. The more you can move toward having tears in your eyes as you feel her pain, the more she will be comfortable with that pain and with allowing it to surface. And this is the way emotions work, right? It's the big thing.

If she allows herself to feel the emotions, then they no longer drive her behavior because they begin to dissipate.

Parent: Well, thank you very much. We'll stay the course.

#### Question 4:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:16:00 “Our six year old is having a hard time emptying his backpack. I feel like I'm just skimming the surface. When he does tantrum, I get some tears but mostly anger and rage.” Same answers, right, that we just gave. I want to add that your child has six years of learning, and the learning is that he's not sure he can trust you to accept him when he gets upset. Will you still love him? It takes daily experience of you accepting his upsets for at least a few months to heal that six years. And the older the child, the longer it takes. And so it can take months, but if you keep staying compassionate and create trust and safety and offering understanding, it will happen. Don't give up.

Dr. Laura Markham: I just want to say it's always about fear. Kids who do biting, hitting and aggression -- it's always a sign of fear. If kids will cry, that's the way you get them to stop fighting, hitting and being aggressive.

#### Question 5:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:16:59 A parent says there's been a lot of change in their home because of the course. And their six year old's meltdowns are not anything like they were before, but he still does hit either in mild anger or in a playful way. So I'm really glad things are better. I'm glad he's less violent, but he's (still) not crying. So that does mean he's stuck in anger, and the way around that is, you need to build safety.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Start with laughter every single day. Start with 24/7 empathy. And here's the secret: in the moment when your child is angry, listen to the anger. Acknowledge the anger. "You're so mad because I said no. You wish I would say yes. I hear you, Sweetie. I wish I could say yes, but we can't do that right now. You wish you could have this. You're so mad about this. I hear you."

Dr. Laura Markham:

I had a mom say to me yesterday, I was at a talk and she said that she realized what was going on was her kid would get angry at her and she would say, "Why are you angry at me? It's not my fault," or, "You know you can't have candy now," or whatever. And he would get angry or even lash out at her and hit her, which was a new thing he had never done before. And she realized, as she was listening to me talk, that she was not actually acknowledging the anger. She was saying to him, you shouldn't be angry. You don't have a right to be angry. There's no reason to be angry. So if you can acknowledge the anger, kids don't have to raise their voice louder. They don't have to escalate the anger. That's your goal.

### Question 6:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:18:39

A parent says, "My five-year-old boy gets so angry and physically aggressive when he's frustrated." And she gives a whole example of what happened where she ended up leaving him at his class. His dad was there, and she left him at the class so that she could take her daughter to the restaurant because her daughter was hungry. And he came into the restaurant and was really angry and loud and kicking and hitting her and screaming, "Why didn't you wait for me? So I think in this kind of situation, your husband should never have brought him into the restaurant if he was that angry."

Dr. Laura Markham:

You say that after 10 minutes you started crying. I mean, you got him out of there and then you started crying with him and you both cried. Fantastic. The fact that you softened like that is why he was able to cry at that point. Remember, the reason he was so upset is that you abandoned him. I know you didn't see it as abandonment, but you chose your sister over him and you abandoned him at the class. And if you can do **that**, maybe (he thought) you could leave him anywhere. He didn't feel safe. And so that's what this is about. This is the fear of you abandoning him.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So then you say that when he cried, then he calmed down because you offered him to watch a movie. So that is something you really want to stay away from. Why not just let them cry? You say that you were both crying. Great. If he cried for an hour, fantastic. That's a full backpack. You'd rather have him cry, no matter how long it takes. Don't buy him off with a movie. I understand it can be hard when they cry, but don't buy him off with a movie. You also say that he gets screen time on weekends, so he refuses to go on family hikes or fishing or something on the weekend and he has tantrums (because he wants to stay on the screen).

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I would say stop the screen time. The screen time is obviously a big problem. Just stop it. Don't do any more screen time with him. This is not a kid who can handle the screen time. He's having violent meltdowns every weekend because he doesn't want to do things with you because he'd rather have the screen time. That's a problem. So I just think it's really not worth it to give him any screen time at all. He's showing you he can't handle it. I have a book for you that will help you a lot. It's a book written by Victoria Dunckley. It's called *Reset Your Child's Brain, End the Meltdowns, Raise Grades, and Boost Social Skills by Reversing the Effects of Electronic Screen Time*. And it's a four-week plan for how to stop doing screen time basically, and for your son, I think screen time's not a good idea.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would also suggest to you, this is a child with a full backpack. He's not very (emotionally) resourceful, and you wrote me a long thing that makes me come to this conclusion. And he really needs all the preventive maintenance so that he can cry. And also, in the moment when he's really upset, acknowledge what he's expressing. Put it into words. "You didn't want me to leave. You're so mad that I left. You didn't want me to leave. I'm so sorry I didn't understand this would've upset you so much. It must've really hurt your feelings." So I hope that's helpful. I think after you really use all the tools, of course, by week 12, I think you're going to see a substantial positive difference, especially if you're able to stop the screen time.

#### Question 7:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:22:04

A parent is saying their six year old has serious rage and aggression issues that are getting worse, even though he's been raised from the beginning with gentle parenting. So, if you actually have raised him with gentle parenting as you described and you're allowing all emotions, then don't wait. Get your son assessed. He needs some kind of support he isn't getting. I don't know whether this is an allergy to wheat or a genetic issue, like your grandmother was bipolar and he's inherited that tendency. That doesn't mean he'll be bipolar but he could have a mood regulation thing in that case. Or whether there's some issue, it could be anything. I'm just pulling those two things out of the sky. I have no idea whether you have a wheat allergy in your family or anything else. But if your son has serious rage and aggression issues after being raised from birth with my kind of parenting where you allow emotions but you set limits, and it's getting worse, then he needs your help. He needs some kind of support he isn't getting. So I would get an assessment immediately.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You're also asking how to protect the one-year-old or how to help the one-year-old feel better. You've got to set the one-year-old up with a way to stay safe when her brother loses it. So when you have more than one child, you always need to set up a special box for each child that is like a plastic box that you can grab down with one hand, like if you're holding a baby or whatever, and is up high that they can't get to at other times so that it still has the novelty factor so they want to play with it, and has a lot of really cool things in it, preferably including an audio book of some sort that they can listen to that you have easily set up for them with one of the old audio recorders or something.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And take your one-year-old into a safe room that is completely baby proofed and that has a baby gate in the doorway and you put your one-year-old down, just ignore the six year old as you do this. You say to your six-year-old, "I'm going to get your sister set up and I'll be right back to take care of you, Sweetie." And you take the one-year-old and you put them in the safe room. They're not going to be able to listen to an audio book if they're a one-year-old, but that was an instruction for like a three year old, let's say, or a child who is old enough. And even with a one-year-old, you can create a special box of cool things that are safe. Look online for sensory bags, really reinforce it with a lot of duct tape. There are a lot of good ideas for one-year-olds online. And set her up so she's safe.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And if you're all set up in advance, it's going to be very easy to put her down, give her smooches on the way there so she's not feeling bad. You have to breathe deeply so you're not freaked out. And then just put her down and step over the baby gate and go back to your six-year-old and then you help your six-year-old through his meltdown. But I do want to really encourage you, if this is the situation that I'm hearing, then he needs some sort of support that we need to get for him that's new in the situation here. Don't just keep going. He's already six.

**Question 8:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:25:07

A parent says she has a child who has intense tantrums that are uncontrollable and would rage for 45 minutes in the past. The tantrums are now shorter after following my approach for a year and 90% of the time things are good, but sometimes there's still that shaking and pure rage. So again, this might be an innate genetic issue, a mood disorder or something. It might be a full backpack. But either way, it depends on how old she is. But if she's six or up, I would get her to someone to assess her. If she's younger than six, I think you can still do what's happening in the course.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, you wrote that your behavior and yelling has improved, but that her behavior is not making progress. So here's the thing: If you just started in the last seven weeks to make progress with your yelling, it could take longer to see a change in her behavior. If you get to the end of the course and you're still not seeing any progress in her behavior, then she needs to see somebody. But it does sound like this kind of approach has actually helped, so that 90% of the time she's better. Thank goodness.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Because of the way you were parenting before and because of her own innate stuff, she probably has a full backpack. So all of the preventative maintenance stuff should help. And remember, the backpack gets emptied starting with laughter, then crying. It's not ever good when kids just get stuck in rage -- that never empties the backpack. Rage is not even in the backpack. Rage is, well, rage is the defense against what's in the backpack. It's what the child does so that they don't have to feel those upsetting feelings. So I just want to make sure that you get, all of you who are listening to this and are concerned about emptying the backpack and anger, when kids are expressing anger, it's because they don't feel safe enough

to express the feelings under the anger, which are fear and pain and hurt and all those desperate feelings that are so big that the child really needs a chance to cry. But they have to start with laughter. So it's not helping things to have them express anger.

### Question 9:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:27:35

A parent says his six-year-old hits himself sometimes and he calls himself stupid and he says he doesn't like himself. So I would not ignore that. I would say talk about how he's being so mean to himself and ask questions about why he's being mean to himself. And reassure him about how much you love him and he's more than enough exactly as he is. And this is probably a kid with some anxiety. So I think preventive maintenance should really help. But I would really pay attention to this. There's some reason he thinks he's stupid. There's some reason he's hitting himself and he feels bad about himself. And we don't know what that is so far, but if you can really get going on the backpack and the preventive maintenance stuff, I think it'll start to come to the surface and you'll be able to do more to help him stop this.

### Question 10:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:28:27

Our next question is from a parent who says, "Our five-year-old was assessed for autism, and it's inconclusive, but he'll be assessed again. He's been hitting or kicking or spitting for two years now. He starts hitting us even at the slightest frustration, even if we're not the source of his frustration. For instance, if his Lego car gets broken, he might come and hit me. He also hits his two-year-old brother." So first I want to say that kids on the spectrum have a harder time regulating their emotions generally and have a harder time with impulse control, so if he is on the

spectrum, that will be part of the explanation for what's happening. It doesn't mean you can't stop the hitting, it just means it's harder for him to stop hitting.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I also want to add that it's very human to blame someone else when your Lego car gets broken. Even adults do some version of that. When something goes wrong, we automatically blame, because it's so hard to realize that we bear some responsibility, or worse yet, that there's nothing we could've done, that sometimes we're simply powerless in the face of circumstance. That's an awful feeling to tolerate. Of course, we adults try to not actually say such things and blame other people openly, and we try to take responsibility. If we're over three years old, we are expected to be able to control our desire to hit, but the blame part, it's very human. So the issue so far with this parent's child is impulse control, but let's hear a little bit more of her question.

Dr. Laura Markham:

She continues, "If he hits me or kicks me, I block his hands, try to understand why he's hitting, offer to cuddle him, try to get him to tell me what he feels in words, and sometimes this diffuses the anger." So it sounds like this parent is doing a great job of helping her son to feel understood. You can see that feeling heard and understood and loved can sometimes melt anger away. But this parent continues, "But most of the time it doesn't. It seems I can't get through to him when he's angry." So again, very normal that it doesn't always diffuse his anger, and also very human that you can't get through to a human being who's angry. When we're angry, we're in fight, flight or freeze, a state of emergency, we can't take in new information. In fact, the centers of the brain that have to do with learning and attention are shut down. We're only in survival mode, when we're angry.

Dr. Laura Markham:                    This parent continues, "For instance, yesterday he was out of control because he wasn't allowed to have more screen time. We had prepared him. We told him TV will be off when his favorite

cartoon finished, and he could turn it off himself, we gave him some control, but he started hitting and kicking his dad." So again, I'm sorry to say, this is within the realm of completely normative behavior for a five-year-old. He shouldn't be hitting and kicking his dad, but it is very common when kids have a screen turned off that they go into hyper alert, being threatened and they lash out. It's just very hard for some kids to deal with that, and kids on the spectrum often seem to be more prone to screen addiction, so we see this more often with those kids.

Dr. Laura Markham: In fact, it's so prevalent that I often advise parents whose kids are on the spectrum to phase screens out of their lives, because kids on the spectrum often react very badly when their screens have to be shut off, so it's much easier to live with them if they don't even have access to screens and the screen addiction is not triggered. It's just very hard on them, the whole screen addiction thing. They can't handle it. It's like exposing your child to some other addictive substance, and with kids on the spectrum, they're much more prone to the addiction itself.

Dr. Laura Markham: Okay, back to our question. The parent says, "I could see that his dad was getting angry himself, so I wanted to pick my son up and calm him down. He pulled my hair and hit my face several times in a space of perhaps three seconds as I was picking him up. In retrospect, I should not have tried to pick him up." Exactly. Yeah. When a person is that angry, they see you as the enemy. Picking them up makes them feel less safe, like they're under attack, so they attack you.

Dr. Laura Markham: The parent continues, "I wonder if his aggression is because I used to yell at him in the past." Well, it's certainly true that yelling makes kids feel less safe. Even if at that moment they submit because our yelling frightens them, it does increase their tendency to be aggressive at other times, because remember the root of aggression is actually fear and feeling threatened.

But as we've discussed, this child possibly has other reasons for being aggressive as well. This parent closes by saying that when his anger has passed, she asks her son how he can make amends, and he almost always apologizes. But he doesn't seem to be learning any skills to tolerate his uncomfortable feelings, because he keeps lashing out the next time.

Dr. Laura Markham:                    Okay, so if your son is indeed on the spectrum, then he probably has sensory issues, issues with rigidity, and that would make it more likely for him to be aggressive, but that doesn't mean we can't teach him some skills to better manage himself. It doesn't mean we can't reduce the frequency of his outbursts, both by motivating him to manage himself and also by reducing the stresses that are driving his explosiveness. So first of all, if your son feels heard, he won't need to escalate. Hitting is an escalation. You've already said that sometimes that works when he feels heard. I would ask yourself if there's anything else you can do to help him feel heard when he's angry. Usually, this is a matter of you showing up with more empathy so that he feels understood. Sometimes he won't hear you no matter what, because he'll slide too quickly into anger.

Dr. Laura Markham:                    In those cases, the question is are you using the peaceful parenting tools for preventive maintenance that would keep him from that quick downhill slide? For instance, you don't have the luxury of skipping roughhousing. It's essential to get him laughing every single day for at least a half an hour, because it reduces the fear, and fear is what drives the aggression. Also, special time increases the sense of safety, and it makes kids more willing to give you the benefit of the doubt, so special time is non-negotiable. Also, when you roughhouse, make sure that at least some of the time you're using games that tap into your son's fear. So as you know, when you play something like Bucking Bronco where you're carrying him around the house, and he's afraid you're going to knock him into the wall, and then

you dump him unceremoniously onto the couch and he's screaming with laughter, he's actually dancing on the edge of his fear. That helps him offload that fear, and fear is anxiety, and fear is at the root of aggression. Kids who are aggressive need these fear games to reduce the load of anxiety they're carrying.

Dr. Laura Markham: It also helps kids like this to have other opportunities to reduce their fear, so anything physical they can do that they find scary is actually really good for them. That includes simple things like going out in the dark and standing with you on a dark night until their eyes get used to the dark. If they're a little afraid while they're standing there, well, that's a good thing, actually. It helps the child to essentially go through their fear. Of course, you're not asking them to do this alone. You're there as backup, which is what gives them the courage. So anything your child is afraid of, it's very helpful. Let's say your son is afraid of dragons up in his room. Help him to confront those dragons, not by making him go up by himself to his room, but step by step, getting closer and closer to the dragons with you behind him as backup until he's actually in the room with them and they aren't there, or he's speaking loudly to them and telling them, "I know you're invisible. You need to leave. It's my room," and he reclaims his room.

Dr. Laura Markham: Anything like that will help your child get through fear and will actually reduce aggression. Another thing that reduces aggression is crying. You don't mention whether your son cries regularly, but if he doesn't, that would be important, because if he cries, he won't need to hit so often. It will basically be offloading those tears and fears he's carrying around. As you step up the laughter, usually what you find is, the kids do begin to cry more frequently, and you'll notice that when they cry more often, they aren't as likely to get stuck in anger and they aren't as likely to hit.

Dr. Laura Markham: Another thing to do is to develop an ongoing conversation with your son about how to express what he needs. Since you clearly have a good connection with him, he'll want to please you. Obviously, you have to be very firm that hitting is never okay. Tell him that everyone feels the urge to hit at times, but we practice not doing it because it hurts other people. You know that he doesn't want to hurt other people. You'll tell him that every day his brain is growing and that's giving him the ability to feel his anger and express it in healthy ways without acting on it. That's his goal, and you want him to tell you every time he feels anger and doesn't hit or doesn't physically lash out, or doesn't spit. Even if he yells, that's okay. What we're trying to do is keep him from lashing out physically.

Dr. Laura Markham: Now, of course, the problem with anger is that we can think about it in advance, but when we're in the moment, we're hijacked. Our thinking brain is no longer online. To avoid just getting hijacked by the anger and lashing out, we need to develop habits to notice the anger and redirect it. Make a list with your son of things he can do to redirect his anger. He won't be able to get rid of it and just make it vanish, and that wouldn't be healthy anyway. He needs to redirect it in a healthy way. Obviously, one of the ways that we want to encourage is to ask for what he needs in a way that is constructive, but another thing is to simply clap his arms around his body and shout, "No" at the top of his lungs. He might like that better when his dad turns off the TV. Practice that with him, that game of clapping his arms around his body.

Dr. Laura Markham: It usually takes at least a month to develop that habit, but once kids do, it can be very effective. Just make a whole list of things like that and put that list up where he can see it. If you need to take pictures -- if he can't read yet -- of him doing those things, you could have a lot of fun and get him really laughing while you take pictures of him doing all these things to

redirect. Another thing that's very helpful is reading books about anger. That helps normalize anger and also normalizes that your son can control it. It's like a social story, which we often use with kids on the spectrum to teach them appropriate ways of handling something. Reading books and discussing them in a non-lecturing way takes the shame out of learning to handle his anger and gives ideas about how to do it. There are a lot of books on the Aha! Parenting website. You can start at the article, "10 Tips to Help Your Child with Anger," at the bottom of the page, and also on the "Books to Help Your Child Develop Emotional Intelligence" page.

Dr. Laura Markham: I'll finish by saying that kids who have special challenges developmentally often have impulse control issues and brain delays in managing themselves. They often do tend to be more explosive, so I would recommend Ross Green's book, *The Explosive Child*. And I would work hard with your partner so you're both on the same page, that when your child is facing any kind of frustration, you're aware that you need to help him feel safe in the face of that frustration. He's not under attack. He's not under threat. He doesn't need to lash out. The more you can keep that in mind and communicate that to him when there's a frustration as a part of your daily life with him, the less he'll end up lashing out.

### Question 11:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:41:33

A parent is asking, "I've got a six-year-old who has a tendency to hit and bite when she gets angry." And says, "My partner, when pushed to an extreme, will resort to a spank. But we tell her that hitting hurts and it's not acceptable." So, I know this isn't lost on you. But if you're telling her that hitting hurts and is not acceptable, why would she believe you when her experience is that one of her parents solves problems by spanking her? Right? Children may not always do what you say, but they will always, in the end, do what you do. You're asking if you hold her back and protect yourself, then she hurts herself

and she gets angry. I guess the real question is, does she cry? Or is she getting stuck in anger? Because it may be that she needs more safety.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You worry she feels disconnected, because when she's connected to you, she doesn't act like this. Yep, you're right on target. When children lash out, it comes from fear, and fear often comes from feeling disconnected. And you say that, even then, when she's connected, she may still get angry and upset about something small towards the end of the day. That says to me, you've got a highly sensitive child, who has got a full backpack at the end of the day, and she needs to do more laughing. That's the answer.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And you say she enjoys roughhousing. Great. She's showing you what she needs, more laughter, and that will lead you to more tears, and the way to deal with the anger is to deal with the feelings under the anger, but again, you don't get to them until you create safety, and creating safety is how you deal with the emotions.

### Question 12:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:42:56

A parent is asking about her five year old who's just recently started to be aggressive with his little sister and with her. He started school full-time this year. Her husband's been feeling very low and is having some hard times. This parent says, "As we manage our own emotions, we're seeing improvement. As for social time, we see improvement, but maybe school is too much for him."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Well, since it's a recent thing, this aggression, something is too much for him. It could be the school is too much, it

could be because his dad has been feeling low, could be the full backpack (coming up) from taking this course. Right? We don't know. He might feel safer to show you his upsets.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would really step up the laughing and the roughhousing daily. When he does get upset, sum up all your empathy, disarm his aggression with that. But I do hear your instinct that it could be school related. I would definitely speak with the teacher and see if he's experiencing stress at school, that she can tell, and I would consider another school. Otherwise, I would just say really amp up the connection and the backpack emptying and the self regulation for you and your husband, and I think you'll see that he will start to improve here.

### Question 13:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:44:11

Okay, biting, hitting and aggression, so remember, this is always fear. This is always the full backpack. When kids bite, when kids are aggressive, it's always having too full of a backpack. This is about a six year old who can be rude and say, "Shut up," and you've tried to ask him what he can do differently next time, and he always promises he won't do this again, and talks about what he could do, instead of lashing out, but then the next day, he does it again.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So first of all, I want to say, how wonderful that he's not resistant to that conversation, but he actually agrees to not hit when you have a conversation with him, and that shows me you're doing something right, so that's fabulous. But of course, in the moment, he's still choosing to hit, and so what he needs is support to not hit in the moment. Just remember, that's really hard to do, especially for a six year old who has SPD.

Dr. Laura Markham: Other six year olds probably would not hit so much. If they're still hitting, they probably have special challenges. But always remember, when our kids don't meet our expectations, we need to reexamine the expectations. Is it a reasonable one? And I think in this case, yes, it's reasonable for him not to hit you. He can learn not to hit.

Dr. Laura Markham: But it's very hard to stop the impulse. In fact, you can't stop the impulse. Right? You need to help him divert the impulse, but that takes heightened support on your part. So there's this game that you teach kids -- when things are going well, not badly -- where they call you, and they clap their arms around their body. So if you're listening to this, take your arms right now and throw them around yourself, so your right arm ends up on your left rib cage, shoulder blade, or shoulder, and your left ends up on the right side of the body. And if you clap your arms around yourself, several things happen.

Dr. Laura Markham: One, you can't use your hands to hit. Two, you feel held and secure, especially if SPD is an issue for you, but this is also for anyone. And three, it becomes a trained response, and you also can yell, "No!" or, "Mom!" or something when you do this. You teach your kid to do that and you practice it all day long, and you make it a game and you get them laughing about it, and maybe you have a game where you both do this and you can call it the hugging game, the hug yourself game, and then practice it. Practice being angry by saying, "Do something to make me angry," to him, and so that's like an invitation to this behavior and he'll be rude or something.

Dr. Laura Markham: You could say, "All right, I'm going to do the hug myself game," and you hug yourself and you shout, "No," and then you say, "Okay!" or you shout, "Breathe!" That would be a good one, and you take a breath and you say, "Don't speak to me like that. That word hurts. You can tell me what you need without attacking me," or whatever we might say when he's rude.

Dr. Laura Markham: So the point is, you're teaching him a skill to use in those moments, and I've heard from parents over and over again that it takes a month to get the kid to use this, but kids do start using it. It's very helpful. And then the final thing I would say is, you are equating when he's rude and says, "Shut up," or he'll kick or hit. Those are very different responses, kicking and hitting, versus being rude and saying, "Shut up." To me, you want to stop the kicking and hitting first. So when he says, "Shut up," to you, that's a huge advance. That's great. You should be celebrating.

Dr. Laura Markham: So when he says, "Shut up," I would say, "Ouch. You're telling me to shut up. You must be so mad. I hear how upset you are about this, Sweetie. This isn't what you wanted. See, I can't say yes right now to that, because right now, we need to blah, blah, blah, but I see how upset you are. Tell me more about this. Tell me what you want."

Dr. Laura Markham: So you'll find that, as you do this, he doesn't need to escalate. It's when children yell at us, "Shut up," and we turn around and say, "Don't you speak to me that way," that the child escalates and hits or kicks. So remember, when children don't feel heard, they escalate and lash out physically. So you don't need to ever have that happen. Your job is always to soothe the storm, calm the storm, soothe the drama, and then they won't need to escalate.

#### Question 14:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:48:42 A parent is asking, "Is there anything else I can do to help my daughter express her emotions instead of hitting?" Yes, teach her to clap her arms around herself and use her words. Yell for help from you, yell mom, yell dad, and use your words to say why she's mad. This parent is also asking a question that other people have also asked that I think is really important. "I wonder about the anger. Is it always bad? I think children should see that we're angry and we

should let them know we're angry. It seems like a valid emotion, provided the anger is not related to old feelings and hurt and from childhood and that it doesn't mean we lash out."

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, anger is actually, of course, a valid emotion, but it's a secondary emotion. What's under the anger is always something else. Fear, hurt -- if your child is yelling at you, you might be hurt. You might be afraid she's going to end up being an ax murderer because of the way she's yelling and being angry. So those are the feelings under your anger. At the moment, you won't believe it. When we're angry, we don't believe that in the moment that there's something under it. But if you reflect on it later, you realize there's always something else under it. So if you want to be authentic with your child, you can share what's under it. But even then, I think you have to be somewhat careful because you need to be the grownup. You need to be in charge, right? So you might be hurt by your child, but that's not your child's problem.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If your child just ordered you around and you feel hurt and it makes you angry at your child, you're not going to say, "That hurts my feelings." Right? You're going to notice it from her point of view, "You're ordering me to do this. You're so unhappy right now. You think if you control me that you'll feel better. Sweetie, I'm not going to do that right now, what you're telling me to do." You're helping her through her feelings. That's the important thing right now. She's not your therapist, you're hers. That's the way to see it. There's a power differential here.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So is it okay to tell them we're angry? I can't imagine what the situation would be. Of course there are times when it's fine. If your three and a half year old has just picked up a marker, looked right at you, and drew it across your white couch, which you probably don't have if you have kids, but you would probably be enraged. And you can say, "I am so mad. I can't even think straight." That's okay to do. And then you say, "We're going to talk about this when I calm

down. Let me have the marker." You take the marker away. You try not to wrench it out of her grip, but you take the marker away.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So you have just shown her that you're angry, absolutely. But you're not taking it out on her, right? You're not lashing out at her and saying, "That's it. No more markers. I'm throwing all the markers away," or whatever else you might feel inclined to do. Right? I mean you might get rid of the markers since she can't handle them responsibly, but you're not doing that in a fit of anger. You're not threatening, punishing, et cetera in a fit of anger. So I hope that makes it clear for anybody else who was confused about that.

#### Question 15:

Parent: 00:51:50 So I have a six year old boy and a four year old girl, and a 19 month old girl, and I have found that the changes I've been making over these past three months have really been effective with my four year old. She seems a lot more connected to me and she comes and gets me when she's upset and she'll cry in my arms at the end of being angry.

Parent: But my son, the six year old, he doesn't seem to ever get beneath the anger, and it feels like there's been a lot more tantrums than there used to be, even, and maybe that's because, now, I'm just present for them, and I guess in the past, I probably left the room, or just tried to escape them. So maybe there's the same amount, but it just feels like, "Is this ever going to end? Is his backpack ever going to be empty," so to speak? And it's especially hard because he gets kind of aggressive with me and hits me, and so I'll do the thing where I hold him and I say, "I won't let you hit me." I'm behind him holding him and he'll turn his head and try to spit at me, and then I kind of don't know how to stop that.

- Dr. Laura Markham: Yeah. That's hard. That is hard. I mean, if he spits anywhere except in your face, you can probably just ignore it, but you can't stop someone from spitting obviously. But I would say, first of all, I'm very glad you asked this question because I don't think you're alone, and I would say that it sounds to me like he's not emptying his backpack and that's why it's still going on.
- Dr. Laura Markham: He's not actually emptying his backpack, and the reason I know that, is that he's angry. Many children start with anger. Many of us, humans, start with anger when we're upset, but then we break through the tears and we just sob.
- Parent: And he doesn't get there.
- Dr. Laura Markham: And he doesn't get there at all, exactly. So he's not ever breaking through, and the problem is that the anger is not actually the backpack emptying. The anger is not even in the backpack. What's in the backpack are emotions that are much harder for him to face than anger.
- Dr. Laura Markham: It's fear that he's not good enough, that you had these two replacements, who are girls, and maybe girls are better, and you don't actually love him. If he were conventionally parented, if you were parenting conventionally, that he's been shamed and he's been punished and he feels like there's something wrong with him.
- Dr. Laura Markham: And so I think those feelings are awful, the feelings that there might be something wrong with us and mom might love someone else more, and not only that, two other people. Maybe we turned around and had another one after that, right? So I think he could be having a really hard time with all this, understandably, and what we'd love is if he could show you the hard time, if he would actually cry about it.
- Parent: Well, that'd be nice to see him cry.

- Dr. Laura Markham: So crying would be the grief. The grief is, "I lost you. You are my mom. We had two wonderful years together, and then all of a sudden, there were these interlopers and nothing has been the same since, and I've never gotten you back." That's a lot of grief.
- Dr. Laura Markham: And then the other thing is fear. When kids are grieving, what comes up is just tears and crying, but when kids are in fear, fear is a weird thing. Fear is, if you think about the times you've felt fear in your life, it's like you can't breathe, almost like your inner source is being choked off. Sometimes people feel crumpled or nauseous, or there are all kinds of things that people say they feel when they feel fear. But mostly, it's like this panic.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Thank goodness most of us don't have opportunities to feel real fear in our daily lives, but if you imagine a nightmare, where you're so scared you can't even call for help, that's extreme fear. So if he was two years old and his sister was born and he felt like, "Oh my goodness, if a tiger jumped out of the bushes, she's going to save the baby and not me." Now, a two year old can't put that into words, but that's terrifying.
- Dr. Laura Markham: And so I'm betting that, like many oldest children, he has all that fear and grief locked up inside, and he is keeping it down by being angry, and the anger is not in the backpack. What's in the backpack is the fear and the grief. So when it starts to come up, the fear and the grief -- and I bet there **is** more, I bet there may be more tantrums and there is more anger since you started parenting this way, and there's a reason for that.
- Dr. Laura Markham: I bet as you've been more empathic to him and more understanding, that the fear and the grief are bubbling up to get healed. But as they bubble up, he can't deal with it because he is terrified of those feelings, so he lashes out instead and gets angry, and that's a thorny place to be because we need to disarm that anger.

- Dr. Laura Markham: Just getting stuck in the anger and replaying it over and over again, he's not actually getting anywhere. He's not emptying the backpack. So what we have to do is somehow make it safe enough for him to let those feelings begin to leak out, bubble out in any small way. So one thing I would ask you is, does he ever cry?
- Parent: Yeah, but it's not usually like crying, like the type that we're going for. It's more like, if he gets hurt, he cries in a big way. Sometimes, when he's just mad, he might cry.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Great. So when he gets mad and cries, that's great, because even though he's mad, he's tapping into something behind that anger. He's frustrated. He feels powerless. Being powerless is a certain kind of fear, and we cry because it's terrible to feel powerless. That's why we get angry. Right? But if he's able to go beyond the anger to cry when he gets angry, fantastic.
- Dr. Laura Markham: That is what we're going for, and believe it or not, when he gets hurt and he cries, we're going for that too actually, because it doesn't really matter why he's crying. What matters is that he's letting out that stuff that's in there.
- Dr. Laura Markham: So I think it's actually great if he cries when he gets hurt. I would milk that for all it's worth. "Oh, ouch. It can really hurt when you hit your funny bone, I know. Yeah, everybody has to cry sometimes, I know." Just really milk it. Let him cry as much as he can.
- Parent: Okay.
- Dr. Laura Markham: So the problem is, how do we help him feel safe after those moments when he gets angry? So what I have found, I've never seen a study on this, but I'm not the only one who has found this. There are people like Larry Cohen who write about this as well, and Patty Wifler, who work a lot with emotion in play. What I have found is that when children laugh, it seems to siphon off the top layer of fear in the emotional backpack. Therefore, they're less

reluctant to cry. So they're more likely to cry the next time they get mad, instead of getting stuck in rage. So how much laughing is he doing?

Parent:

Well, I've been trying to do more roughhousing and more special time and all of that, and I've definitely improved since the beginning of the course, but we don't do it every day. But, I mean, he laughs. But it's interesting, one thing you just said. So sometimes before the tantrum begins full-on, and I kind of sense that it's beginning, he's whining and I'll say, "Okay, you seem to be getting upset. What can I do to help you?" He might do something like he'd go to throw something at me, to hit me with it. So then I'll say, "I won't let you hit me with that," and I'll take it away and I'll put it somewhere high.

Parent:

Then he'll try to climb up on the counter to get it, and he's looking at me to see if I'm looking at him to catch him in the act of doing this. Then he starts laughing while he's doing it, even though I'm not punishing him, I'm not doing anything to get him to stop and I'm saying, "Please don't do that," or whatever, and being gentle. But it's weird, because he's laughing and two seconds later, he starts being angry again and trying to hit me again. It's like all these emotions coming out at one time and I'm just confused. Sometimes I think, "I'm not sure what's going on for him right now."

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think that's exactly what's going on. I think that you've nailed it. He has all these confused emotions, he doesn't know what to do about them. It's a full backpack, and he has not emptied it. You're being much more empathic to him now and he feels safer with you. So the feelings are coming up to get healed, because the feelings are stored in the body and the body wants to heal itself. If it (the body) had an infection, it would bubble up to the surface to get healed, and so that's what's happening here. So those feelings are coming up. And we need to get him laughing as often as possible, as much loud belly laughing, raucous laughing as we can, as much as possible.

Parent: Sometimes I might turn it into a game. If he kind of grabs something and then starts running away from me, because he thinks I'm going to chase him to get the contraband from him, and I'll say, "Oh, did you want to play tag? You don't have to do something you're not supposed to do in order to play tag with me, just ask me to play tag."

Dr. Laura Markham: I think that's great. In that moment, if he's willing to turn into laughter, do it. So I would be a little more light hearted, because that's a little lecture. So your message is the right message, but I would say something like, "Excuse me." You know, mock indignation. "Did you take that so I would catch you? You just wait, Buster." But, I mean, it's a mock threat, obviously, you're laughing as you're saying it. You're running after him and you do the tag game, and you lament how he's so fast and he gets away from you and you grab him and then he gets away again. When you finally get him, you say, "Oh, and now I think I need to give you more kisses or more hugs," or whatever.

Dr. Laura Markham: You can say, if he's climbing up on the counter, even before he's run away with the contraband. If he's running, climbing up the counter and you're saying, "Please don't do that," and he's looking at you and starts to laugh, you can say, "You know what I think? I think you're out of hugs again." Because by laughing, he has let you know that you can turn this into more of a game.

Dr. Laura Markham: So I would go over and sweep him off the counter into your arms and say, "How many hugs is that, that you need? Three?" Oh, and then he's laughing again. "No, no, wait a minute, you needed a kiss on your belly button too. Oh, oh, nope, it's your ear? Wait a minute, I hear your toe calling." You're turning it into a game and he's laughing and laughing. When you're done with either the tag game or the counter game where he's been laughing and laughing, you say, "I love playing with you. I love you so much."

Dr. Laura Markham: "I could never love anyone more than I love you. I love you so much." You're really just pouring your love into him. At this point, one of two things is going to happen. One is that he feels good and he's going to go on with his evening. The other is that he's going to find a reason to cry, because you've helped him feel so safe and connected.

Dr. Laura Markham: Now, does that sound right to you? Which one does he usually do?

Parent: I think he would turn back to anger. Maybe that's because I haven't done it completely right, like the way you're saying. Your voice is so wonderful, I often am moved to tears listening to your audios, because it's so sweet and such a wonderful way to be talked to, and that is not natural to me. So when you said the way I said it was lecturey, I'm so aware of that and I want to change it, and it's something I'm working on.

Dr. Laura Markham: So how great that you know this and that you're working on it. Obviously, you're doing something right, because your four-year-old, you're already getting traction with, right? Your 19 month old is way ahead of the curve here. So the question is, since your six-year-old has grown up hearing it for longer and he's a little less malleable, how can you shift into that for him? I think one thing is, if he's hitting you, it must be really hard to stay sympathetic towards him.

Dr. Laura Markham: So one thing that might help you move toward that voice with him, and I think this is true for anyone who's listening who has a hard time with a child, is to really see it from their point of view.

Dr. Laura Markham: If we can just see it from their point of view, I think our voice does soften, because we realize, "Oh my goodness, this child has so much." If we really see it from their point of view, and we see that there's pain there. So seeing it that way helps us, I think, to shift the voice some. The

other thing that will help is the laughter. As you laugh with him, it helps you bond and it helps him feel safer, and you'll find it'll shift your voice even. Do you think that's true?

Parent: Yeah, I think it'll be hard for me. I have to take a deep breath and put myself in the frame of mind. Like, "Okay, I need to stop being frustrated and start being silly with him." That'll be a challenge that I need to overcome.

Dr. Laura Markham: Great, great. Okay. You're right, it's a conscious decision. It's a conscious choice you have to make to do that. But the minute he starts to get frustrated, that's your signal. Now, ideally -- I know you have three children and it's hard -- but ideally if you can do roughhousing with him every single day and connection time with him every single day, whether it's special time or just a few minutes of connection, you'll find, I think, that you're increasing the safety. Then in the moment, sometimes before it kicks off, you'll be able to turn it into laughter.

Dr. Laura Markham: Then the question is, what happens in those times when he's just angry and you can't do that? Really, all the work is done in advance, it's all preventive maintenance. The safety is created by empathizing 24/7, by laughing every day, by special time every day. So the more you can do that stuff with him now, I think the more likely he'll break through the tears when he's angry. But, let's talk about when he's angry. Can you avoid holding him? You only hold him if he tries to attack you, right?

Parent: Right.

Dr. Laura Markham: Good, okay. Because that's the only reason to hold a child, we don't want to hold them otherwise. It sounds like it really pushes his buttons, that he's spitting at you, he's really mad. So the way I would phrase it if he's attacking you is, "Sweetheart, I need to keep us both safe, so I'll hold you if you need me to. But I wonder if you just need to push on something? I wonder if that would make you feel

better." Because here's the thing about fear, when we feel that feeling like we're choking to death, which is what fear makes us feel like, often we're sort of clawing for our lives. That's what that feeling is like. Kids need to sort of push on something or push through something.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, I think it really can help them to put up our hands or to hold a pillow and they can push on the pillow, if you're worried he's going to be scratching your hands. But even just pushing against your hands and saying, "You are so angry. I see. Show me how mad you are, push on this." You might find that this stops him from attacking you, that he doesn't have to kick you or hit you or spit at you, if he's able to push with his hands against you. Do you think that would work?

Parent:

Maybe. Is this something that you think I could talk to him about in advance when he's calm? Because often we'll have conversations when he's calm and I'll say, "Remember when you got angry today? Let's talk about that." I'll try to empathize and say, "Everyone gets angry and it's okay to be angry" and accept the feelings and all of that. But then I'll say, "When you get angry though, you don't have to always hit me. Let's talk about what can I do to help you do something else?"

Parent:

I made up a little rhyme for him to say, "When you get upset, don't forget. Take a deep breath and call mom." I say, "I'll always come to you if I'm not around (wasn't nearby, so that you don't run away with these angry feelings." But then in the moment, he still can't do it. So is it unreasonable to think that he could learn less at this age?

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think he absolutely can learn it, and I've seen six-year-olds learn this over and over again. I would definitely talk with him about it at a time when he's not angry about the pushing. I wouldn't go into, "What you're feeling is fear under your anger," necessarily, because he doesn't know that. In the moment, it never feels like it's fear. If you and I

at this moment were enraged, we wouldn't be open to hearing that it's fear under there, because it doesn't feel like it at that moment. It's when you look back later, you realize it was. I've never known a child that would go hit a couch instead of yelling at their mother and lashing out at her. The couch is not a good stand-in. But I have known many children who are willing to push on a pillow that you're holding if you're behind it and saying, "I see how angry you are, Sweetie, show me by pushing, wow, you are so angry about this. Oh my goodness, this really seems unfair to you." So you're empathizing as they're doing it, but you're seeing how angry they are, because that's what they really are trying to show you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Notice I'm not using a voice that's escalating their anger, I'm using a voice that's hopefully empathic, so that it allows what's under the anger to come up. I'm hoping that that will help. He has to have the willingness to do something like that, right? But I think the real key here is actually laughter for the rest of the time. The other 24 hours a day that he's not lashing out, that's the time to do the laughter. If you do more of that, I think you'll find a lot less lashing out.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But then in that moment, and this is hard thing for all of us to learn how to do, but in that moment when he's angry, just shift yourself into understanding, into love, into softness. If you can soften yourself at that moment, you'll find that he doesn't need to be so aggressive. I've heard this from parents hundreds of times, honestly. So I think that's the key in the moment, is softening yourself. Does that sound like something you could work with?

Parent:

Yeah, I mean, I think I know that. I'm not sure, but this is obviously just my issue, that I'm somehow able to do it with my four-year-old and that's why I've made this progress with her. This is probably adding fuel to the fire for him, that he probably sees this and then I'm different with him because his anger looks different to me and so I

guess I react differently to it. It's harder for me to shift with him.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Yes.

Parent:

Yeah, if I can overcome this, I do think that this is probably half the problem.

### Question 16:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:11:48

“Can you give advice on what to do when holding an aggressive child, when he's being aggressive, when that escalates the situation. It makes him freak out more, he hates being held that way, if I hold his hands when he lashes out.” So I would say don't hold his hands when he lashes out. A lot of kids freak out more, don't hold his hands, step away from him. I realize that he'll probably just follow. So don't go into a different room, stay in that room, but just step out of his reach.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The hard part is if you have a younger child, you really have to do a lot of prevention when you have a child who's acting out. This is a six-year-old acting out and there is a toddler sibling. So you have to have a safe place for the toddler sibling to go, into a play pen or a crib and you have to have something that the toddler wants to do. The minute your six-year-old starts to get irritated, it's a whole lot better to intervene at that point.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Don't just assume it's going to get better and nurse him along, you want to stop the situation before it spirals out of control. So mostly what I'm talking about here is prevention, which you de-escalate with your empathy and if possible, get him to cry. With your preventive maintenance, you sometimes can keep it from getting to that point. But let's say that he's not laughing and crying

daily, then he's going to act out aggressively. You can count on that.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So you start by reflecting his anger. You say to yourself, "Okay, I'm going to do special time later, I'm going to get him laughing later. I've got to get a mother's helper to come in and take the toddler for a walk every day, so that I can be with my six-year-old." Whatever is necessary to stop this from happening. Because it's like when your car ends up in the breakdown lane. If you don't get a tune up, you're going to be in the breakdown lane, and then, really, you've got very limited options.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So if you're not doing the things that are going to lead to daily laughing and crying, you can count on ending up in the breakdown lane with him. So once that happens, you don't have a lot of options. But let's say it happens, at that point, you reflect the anger, but you speak to what's under it. "You are so mad. Oh, you're so disappointed. Nothing is going your way today, is it Sweetheart?" That disarms the kid.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now he doesn't have to hit you to get you to pay attention, right? So, you can see that so much of it is how you show up in that moment and whether the child feels safe enough to let you in. He's only going to feel safe enough if you're actually doing the daily special time and the daily laughter and roughhousing stuff. In that moment when he comes at you to attack, turn away from him, pick up your toddler, smile at your toddler. Take a deep breath, walk over to the playpen, and put your toddler in it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Hand your toddler that really special thing your toddler likes to do, even if it's a screen, an iPad, who cares? I mean, I wouldn't generally show toddler screens, but if that's what it takes, that's what it takes. He shouldn't be violently acting out for more than another month if you follow the preventive maintenance. So this is a temporary thing. It's like when you have a new baby in the house and

you have to put your kid in front of a screen, it's the same thing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So you hand him whatever you hand him. Now you turn back to your six-year-old who has followed you and is screaming and hitting you. You turn back and you say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, Sweetheart, whoa, whoa." You have your hands up in front of you so he can't hit you, and you say, "Let's go over here, I want to hear why you're so upset." Notice you ratcheted your voice down, you're not letting him hurt you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If there really is no way, he doesn't calm down based on your voice at this point, you may have to take his hand, sit down and sink down on the floor, pull him into your lap and say, "Whoa, Sweetie, whoa, whoa, whoa. I'm going to let you go in one second." But he's probably going to panic and try to pull out of your grasp and headbutt you and bite you. Really, it's just not worth it to send him into that kind of a panic. The only reason to do that, to grab him, is if it's going to have a better result than simply fending him off, and I don't see how that's the case.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think you're always better off putting your hands up in front of you, maybe grabbing the pillow off the couch and holding it in front of you and saying, "You are so mad at me. Do you want to show me how mad? Push as hard as you can, show me. Oh, Sweetie, that mad? Oh my goodness, I guess I really wasn't listening. I guess you were more mad than I understood. You're so disappointed about this." Now you're going under the anger again, and that's what disarms the anger. So, that's how you deal with anger in the moment. But really as I keep saying, it's all in the prevention.

### Question 17:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:16:39

Here's another question about anger issues. "How do we deal with a child who is very angry at the world? If we try

to talk about an incident or even ask a question, the immediate response is very defensive and we get screamed at." So there are two different issues here. One is how do you talk to the child about an incident? Sounds like an incident that the child did something wrong. Then the other question is a child who is angry at the world.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I would say a child who's angry at the world, leave no stone unturned to find out why. This is a kid who needs to cry, has a full backpack, or there's some ongoing stressor that you need to solve. If it's a question of talking to the child about an incident and they get defensive, then you've got correction going on and the child doesn't feel connected enough. They're on the defensive, so join with them. Before you even go anywhere near correcting or talking about an incident, you need to be acknowledging what they were so upset about and why the incident happened, from their point of view. Why did they do whatever they did?

Dr. Laura Markham:

It doesn't matter if you agree with it. You're not condoning what they did by understanding, you're just saying to them, "I get it. I see why you did that, I see how you feel. You felt X, Y, Z." Once you do that, you've offered zero corrections. This could go on for a long time of them saying, "Of course I felt X, Y, Z. You always prefer him or you never listen to me, or I hate what we eat around here, you never let me have sweets." Whatever it is, it doesn't matter.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Your job when they respond back angrily, is to take a deep breath, not justify your position, but acknowledge his feelings. "Yeah, you're so upset about this. I hear you, Sweetheart." So whatever she's going on about, your response is to take a deep breath and say, "Oh my goodness, no wonder you were so upset. Now I see. Wow." Now I get that she acted out in a way she shouldn't have, but if you start with this, then she feels understood and maybe she even gets to tears. Then she's open to your

influence and you can talk about how the way she chose to handle the situation really is not ever okay, period.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But if you've got a child who's angry at the world, you're not going to get them there in one conversation, you first have to solve the full backpack problem.

### Question 18:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:19:03

A parent asked a question that I love. "Is it okay that I taught my child to stop, drop and breathe when he wants to hit someone?" Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. It's great. Kids actually need tools. The thing I teach them is to clap their arms around themselves. So if you throw your arms around yourself, your right arm ends up on your left shoulder or under your left arm around your body, and the left arm ends up around your right side of your body or on your right shoulder and you hug yourself.

Dr. Laura Markham:

That's very effective for a couple of reasons. One is it's the sensory stimulation of it. You're holding yourself, you're containing yourself, you're actually containing your rage. So it's a great thing to do, it's a great thing to model for your kids when you're angry and it's a great thing to practice with your kids. It also means their hands are busy, they can't use their hands to hit somebody.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You could make up another thing like hug and yell. What they might yell is, "Mom!" or "Dad!" or "Help!" or "No!" Whatever is going to make them feel in that moment like they're likely to get back-up. You know what I'm saying? They're not so powerless. Because it's when we're powerless that we lash out.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, there are lots of tools you can teach your child not to hit, but I love stop, drop and breathe, and I love a self hug. If you come up with a great thing to call it -- you could still

call it stop, hug and breathe or stop, breathe and hug. But whatever you come up with, if you come up with a good one, let me know and I'll share it on my website.

### Question 19:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:20:39

Some parents asked about major fast escalations. This is a six-year-old and he gets so angry so fast, that she can't even begin to empathize with him. That's fragility, emotional fragility and it's from a full backpack. So it's what we've talked about so far in this call. If his backpack is that full that he can't take anything new and he can't handle any frustration, or maybe it's because there is an ongoing stressor and that's why it's full. But it is not a normal way for him to be, so he really does need your preventive maintenance and your help to empty that backpack.

### Question 20:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:21:21

There's a question here from a parent about her six-year-old who gets one angry look and then picks on someone in the family until the situation escalates. Yeah, well, don't wait, intervene the minute she starts picking on someone, don't wait until it escalates. Because at that point, you're in the breakdown lane. This parent also says, "There's a history of meltdowns, but lately it's intensified. I'm worried it's not emptying her backpack." Well, if it has intensified and it's different lately, something's changed to make it different. So unless you have another change in her life? Maybe she started a new school, maybe parents are fighting or somebody is bullying her. There are all kinds of things that could be causing her to act like this. But if you're sure there's nothing like that happening in her life, then probably what's different is this course, that you're different since you started the course in the last few months. At that point, she feels safer, so she's showing you what's going on. Again, remember the rage is a

defense against backpack emptying. So what she needs is laughter and empathy and special time, in order to get to the point where it is backpack emptying and it's not just rage. That's the key.

### Question 21:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:22:46

Here's another question about a strong willed five-year-old who is only angry, never melts and cries, has a toddler brother, and he seems to lash out in that moment. There's no way to get him to stop from lashing out in that moment, except to hit him. At that point, he will snap out of it. Now I want to just say to this mom, I know how bad you feel about this. I get how ashamed you feel and how powerless you feel and how you feel like you don't know what else to do. I get that you know this isn't the right thing to do, to hit him. It seems to work, it seems to stop him and snap him out of his rage.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But we know why it does that, right? If I were hysterically yelling at my husband and he hit me, it would certainly snap me out of it, but it would not make the situation better. It would not increase my sense of safety, which is what we need to get to under the rage. You're saying the five-year-old does not feel safe enough to cry, all he does is rage. So it's a cycle that happens, where if we hit them, they feel less safe and then there's more rage from them.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I'm not trying to make you feel bad about what you're doing. You feel powerless, I get it. So you have to make a commitment now, no matter what, no matter how powerless you feel in that moment, you will not hit him, no matter what. He's only five, if you need to, you can pick him up and carry him away. You can sit on him if you have to, but you can't hit him. Your only goal is to create more safety.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Also, if you have been through this course and you have faithfully done everything in the course, special time, the empathy, roughhousing everyday so he laughs, and this is

still going on and he won't cry, it is time to get your kid to a counselor and get yourself to a parenting coach. Don't wait. Something else is going on with him. If in fact you've only made it to week two and you still are doing a lot of shouting and you're under a lot of stress and whatever, then you're not actually using the tools yet, so it makes sense that he hasn't gotten to cry yet, and I would say use the tools.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But what you're doing is not working. You can see it's not working and you're not going to get a different result if you keep up what you're doing. The only way to get a different result is for you to do something different, and you actually have the tools to do something different here. So I encourage you, no matter what, in that moment, you can de-escalate matters with your verbal empathy, you can see things from his perspective. But getting him to stop by hitting him, it never is the answer. Never.

### Question 22:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:25:43

A parent is asking about her son who's five and how it's a big trigger for her when he hits and then he starts laughing. "He's trying to tell us something, but with dinner to make and housework to do, I can't be present with him all the time. I've been doing special time for awhile and he just wants more of me. I'm usually very tired from my 21 month old waking me all night and I parent alone 12 hours a day, six days a week."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Oh, I hear how overwhelmed you are and I know what it's like to have a baby wake you up all night and it's pretty hard to stay patient the next day and feel like you have enough to go around. So you're right that your son is trying to tell you something. Here's the thing, until you hear him and help him with what he needs, the hitting is not going to stop. He has some feelings that he needs help

with and he's asking you for help and you're saying, "I'm too tired to help you."

Dr. Laura Markham:

It's not his problem that you're too tired to help him. I understand why you're too tired, but he doesn't, and it's not going to help him resolve things. It's like if we say to our child, "I know you're hungry, but I'm too tired to make you dinner." We all feel like that sometimes, but we manage to get food into them anyway. So I hear that you're too tired to do more than you're doing with him. But he has feelings of fear. I know that, because he's hitting, and aggression comes from fear. Since he has a little brother, that fear is that you don't love him or find him valuable compared to his brother. So until you help him with those feelings of fear, he's going to keep hitting.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I want to add, of course you get upset when he hits, it's a big trigger for all of us. But that's at least one of the reasons he does it. Children are like little Geiger counters for energy. So if they can't get positive energy, they go for the negative. He is purposely being provocative. I think he's feeling like he's not getting enough positive energy from you. As you said, he always wants more. So, he's purposely provoking you by hitting his brother to get some kind of energy to know he matters to you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I would begin by really ramping up your connection with special time and with roughhousing, even though you're exhausted. Do one of those games where you lie on your back on the bed and buck him off. There are plenty of games that you can do. I know there were a bunch of them on the Facebook page, The Peaceful Parenting Collective. So this is just a plug for that Facebook page. If you're not using it, it's a great source for ideas. I know that there was a whole thread of parents talking about ideas for when you're exhausted to roughhouse with your kids and get them laughing. Then when you've ramped up the connection, schedule a meltdown for some time when another adult can take your 21 month old and help your son break through that anger to the tears and fears that

are underneath it. Because he really needs to, and he's going to keep acting out until he gets those feelings worked out.

### Question 23:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:28:57 This parent says, "When my oldest is playing with me and accidentally gets hurt, he thinks I'm hurting him on purpose and he gets vicious. It's the only time he's like this." Hmm.

Dr. Laura Markham: So this sounds like an old hurt that's getting triggered, right? Like there's some sort of a trauma that's getting triggered here. I wonder if he had a medical trauma when he was younger where he got hurt and an authority figure hurt him? I mean, that would be the case for a medical trauma, right?

Dr. Laura Markham: I think you should schedule a session with an EMDR therapist. EMDR stands for eye movement desensitization. If you go to EMDRIA, they are an international association. A lot of people will hang out a shingle and say, "Oh, I've been trained in EMDR," but I would only go to somebody from the EMDRIA website who is absolutely certified.

Dr. Laura Markham: I once saw an EMDR person who didn't really know what they were doing, and I would make sure your person knows what they're doing before I would take my child there. So someone who has experience with kids. This sounds like a trauma problem. And I don't know what it is, but I think you'll find that this will solve it. Try it. Let me know what happens. I'll be very curious after you do a session or two. And the thing about EMDR is the kid doesn't have to know what's upsetting them to work through it.

Dr. Laura Markham: So, I think that's going to be your best bet since otherwise he doesn't do this. He's only doing it when he feels

extreme threat. And we don't know why when he gets hurt, he goes into fight, flight or freeze. But something's happening that's getting triggered.

#### Question 24:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:30:31

A parent is saying, "We have a six year old who will deliberately hit us or even his sister and then declare that it was an accident. We see it was on purpose, so it's hard for us to let it go. But it just turns into a childish, 'Yes, it was an accident' or 'it wasn't' kind of a debate." So you know what? Don't argue about his motivation. You can't win that argument as you've learned. Point out that even an accidental hit can really hurt and needs repair. He's responsible for what his body does, even if it's an accident. He's responsible for repair.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So keep a light touch. You don't have to be shaming about it, but focus on it being his responsibility to repair. And here's a real question. Why did he feel the need to hit you? Maybe more laughter is needed here to get rid of that fear that's causing aggression.

#### Question 25:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:31:20

A parent asked a question about how her son says horrible stuff to her when he's angry, like he wants to kill her or kill his sister. That's just backpack anger. It means he's in fight or flight. He's attacking with the most angry words he can find. He's six. He doesn't even understand what killing is. He's saying the worst thing he could possibly say to you at that moment to show you how angry he is.

Dr. Laura Markham: And you can say, "You are so mad at me. You're telling me how mad you are at me." Just focus not on what he's actually saying, but on his anger.

### Question 26:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:31:59 A parent asks, "Well, what about in the moment when the kid's behavior is dangerously out of control?" And she says she has a back injury so she can't physically restrain her kids. And what if they're out of control and a danger to themselves or each other or her.

Dr. Laura Markham: So, this is hard. This is really a problem. Obviously if there's a back injury and you can't contain your children, it's dangerous. So you have to rely on preventive maintenance because you can't at that moment do anything. It's like when I talk to parents who are in a wheelchair and they say, "I actually can't restrain my child and I can't even protect myself if he hits me."

Dr. Laura Markham: So I would say you rely on preventive maintenance. You have to really do the preventive maintenance like it's your religion no matter what else you have to give up in your life. And I would also say backpack emptying becomes of supreme importance. So, if you have a partner who's home sometimes and that partner can do backpack emptying with the child when they are home, absolutely that's of the highest importance. And after a time of backpack emptying and preventive maintenance, the kids will not be out of control.

Dr. Laura Markham: And in the meantime, I don't know what to tell you because you know, I guess you could hire a babysitter to be with you at those times if you have to just because that's the only way to keep everybody safe. Because until you've done the backpack emptying and made the preventive maintenance into a habit, kids can be out of

control. But after that they won't be. So it's a temporary period of time that you would need some extra help. Out of control behavior is a symptom. It's a symptom of past hurts that are coming up to be healed or of past trauma that you can work to get healed. So you shouldn't have kids feeling out of control or being out of control if you're following this process.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And if you do, then I would say you need to hire help to be with you because you're incapacitated and you can't necessarily keep your kids safe. In the same way that you couldn't keep them safe if they were running into the street and you would need help with you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So that's a unique situation, but you obviously have a responsibility to keep your kids safe from each other. So you have a unique problem and you're just going to have to address it in a unique way. But luckily it's temporary. It's not, thank goodness, a permanent thing.

### Question 27:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:34:19

A parent is saying that she's using special time and most of the time using empathic limits. But her strong-willed son who is six yells at her says, I hate you, and screams "No!" at her. How do you repair trust? Don't give up. He is only six years old. He really needs to cry. So, if you have a child that gets stuck in anger and doesn't cry, your first tool is laughter because laughter siphons off the top layer of anxiety from the emotional backpack. It makes all the other tears and fears more accessible and it loosens things up so your child does not have to stay so tightly in control.

Dr. Laura Markham:

It actually diminishes anxiety, it transforms the body chemistry to diminish the stress hormone circulating, which makes us less tense physically. But it also works on the psychological level of making us less tense. So, you mentioned in your question that it's hard to get him

laughing. Follow his lead, whatever makes him laugh, do more of that.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Start small with whatever you need to do, but get him laughing every day. Minimum of a half an hour a day. If you can do it twice a day even better. And I think you're going to see that once he starts laughing, he's going to start crying. And obviously look for ways to create safety in other ways too. Just empathize, whatever he says, empathizing and seeing it from his point of view. And look for moments to connect with him and to appreciate him no matter what, which also changes the tone of your relationship to a positive valence instead of a negative valence.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And then finally, when he says, "I hate you," don't take it personally. He's telling you that he hurts. That is so important for everyone listening to this call. It's so important for all of us. When our child expresses anger at us, don't take it personally. What they're really saying is, "I'm hurting inside. Please help me. I'm desperate to be connected to you and to know you love me and to get rid of these awful feelings."

Dr. Laura Markham:

So what you say is, "Ouch. You hate me? You must be so upset to say that to me. I guess you want me to know how angry you are at me." Maybe you know what he's mad at. You could say, "No wonder you're so mad at me." You're so mad about X, Y, Z, or if you don't know what he's mad about, you can say, "Sweetie, I've been thinking about all those times when I used to yell at you or punish you or whatever the past is that you're healing and you must've felt like I didn't understand at all. And you know what? I really didn't understand sometimes and I made everything worse, didn't I?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

"And you must've been so sad, and so scared, and so lonely, and so upset at me. And I didn't know how to understand you and help you. I'm so glad you're telling me now how awful that was for you." It might be too

vulnerable to say “how scared you were” or “how much that hurt” but you can move into that as he softens.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Initially when you say something like this, your child will first lash out at you because you've just pulled a scab off a wound and they're hurting. But if you can keep saying things like this and keep your calm, compassion, which by the way, when I just said that I had tears in my eyes.

Dr. Laura Markham:

When you say this to your child, you will have tears from your eyes. And they will resonate with that, meeting them on that level and they will shift to that level out of their anger. And that's the way that you connect with someone who's angry, is you just keep moving yourself to the level of more understanding and compassion, and they will lash out at you once, twice, three times, but it will be diminishing and the anger will diminish and the hurt will increase so that they begin to get tears in their eyes, too.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And if you can continue to do this, your child will eventually trust you with all that pain. And you will see -- I see parents on the Facebook group and this is a wonderful, wonderful group of parents who have been on this journey. Some of them for a year and a half now -- These parents will say things like, "I've been working on this for a year, working hard to control my own anger and working hard to show up with compassion for my kid and we just had this amazing breakthrough where he cried and cried and everything's been different since."

Dr. Laura Markham:

And I look at that and I think, "Wow, it took a year. I'm so sorry it took a year because that was so hard. That was heroic work for that parent." But you know what, a year to heal six years of the past, or eight years or whatever it is, sometimes that's what it takes. Often it doesn't. That's an outside limit. Usually it takes a month, two months, but whatever it takes, it's worth it because you change the course of your child's entire life and of your relationship with your child. To me, there's nothing worth more than that, and you will be so happy that you did it.

**Question 28:**

- Dr. Laura Markham: 01:39:23 Two parents are asking about the five-year-old who's a bottomless pit of constant overflowing anger lately. Oh my goodness. "And the empathy just gives him more fodder so we can't get beyond the anger and into the tears for a good cry. He just stays angry, gets stuck and angry. We've given him ideas of how to handle it better, like hitting a pillow or ripping up old newspapers, but he won't. He just hits and yells and says, 'I wish you were dead.' So we have to send him to his room to settle down because he triggers me so much. So I go somewhere to calm down and he comes and hits me and yells at me. The only thing that works is to send him to his room to diffuse it. It's exhausting. And he blames everyone else."
- Dr. Laura Markham: Okay. So, first of all, this is really hard. It is so hard to hear your child say, "I wish you were dead." I want to start by saying he does not really wish you were dead. He doesn't really even know what that means. He's just coming up with the worst thing he can think of.
- Dr. Laura Markham: He's trying to just show you all that pain he's feeling. I know it feels like an attack to you, but it's actually a communication from him asking you for help. He's saying, "Mom, Dad, I feel like I'm a bad person because I know you just think I'm mean and overly dramatic, but I feel so bad inside and I don't know what to do about it."
- Dr. Laura Markham: So yes, it's exhausting to feel all these emotions. But remember the emotions did not come out of nowhere. He's five. So this has been happening somehow for five years. So I'm going to assume that you just started using peaceful parenting. And that pain is now coming up. And that's why this is going on. This is not a permanent condition. And I'm going to tell you how to deal with that.

- Dr. Laura Markham: I want to add that if that's not the case, if your son has been doing this for the last five years, then he has special issues. And so you need to figure out what those issues are, you need to address them and you need to get intervention now. So, I'm going to go with the assumption that you've just started peaceful parenting with this course. And the reason I'm going with that assumption is that you say he's been angry lately.
- Dr. Laura Markham: So I assume this is just since you began peaceful parenting, and that means this is a full backpack issue. So the way to help them past anger is to listen and accept it and help them get past the anger. Then you can get to tears and fears behind it. Telling them to hit a pillow does not listen to his anger. That tells him, "Go work out your anger by hitting that pillow." What you want is for him to tell you about the anger, to show you the anger so he feels heard, not tell him to manage it himself.
- Dr. Laura Markham: You say you're giving him empathy, but it's just fodder for more anger and he doesn't move on. It sounds like he's stuck in anger. And to change that, you need to create more safety for him. So sending him to his room is exactly the opposite. It does not create more safety. Every time you send him to his room, it tells him you can't handle those feelings. The way to create safety is with empathy in the moment for what he's upset about.
- Dr. Laura Markham: You don't say, "You're so angry, tear up these newspapers." I mean, it's great to have kids tear up newspapers if they're just a little annoyed, but if a kid is really angry you say, "Oh my goodness, you are so upset about this. This isn't what you wanted. No wonder you're angry. Oh Sweetie, I hear you." You're speaking to what's behind the anger, right? You're not saying, "Go off and deal with your anger yourself."
- So, you also can create safety the rest of the day with empathy 24/7 and with laughter. That's really important for kids who are stuck in anger. I hear that you're getting

triggered and so you have to go to your room to calm down. If there are two of you, that's great. One of you can say with him, but if there's only one of you, I think you have to prioritize your own healing here. Because you're getting triggered. Your son's anger is triggering you so much that you can't be with him to help him with what he needs.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So you need more support to heal here. You're feeling stuck and I'm not criticizing you. Most people get triggered when their children get angry. But I am saying that if you can't be there for your son to help him work it out, then you need to do that work on you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, I want to urge you to get coaching. I strongly urge you to set up a coaching session with one of the coaches I've trained. Don't wait to do it, it's making your life too hard, it's not helping your son to be stuck in anger. That does not empty the backpack. You're just going to have more of exactly the situation you're having now that you don't like. You're going to get frustrated, you're going to lose your temper at him. You're making it worse every time you send him to his room.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, I would say please write an email to [administrator@ahaparenting.com](mailto:administrator@ahaparenting.com) and she will help you choose the best coach for you. And we just want to make sure you have the support you need. You know, I'm going to suggest to other people who've asked questions that they work with a parenting coach.

Dr. Laura Markham:

These are coaches I've trained, I've only ever trained 15 people and they aren't all in the business of parenting coaching at this point. So there aren't as many of them available, but some of them are available and they're wonderful. I recommend them only because I know them and I can vouch for them. But there are other good parenting coaches out there. I do not make any money when you work with one of the parenting coaches I've

trained. And there's no financial incentive for me to mention this.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You make the arrangements with them. I'm saying this because I want you to get what you need, the support you need for your journey, for you to love parenting your child. And I have seen coaching over and over again turn these situations around after people have really struggled with them for a while. So, that's why I'm encouraging you to do it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You notice I'm not saying this to everybody. I wouldn't say it lightly because I know it costs money. But, I would urge you to do this because I hear how hard it is and I hear you're stuck.

### Question 29:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:44:57

A parent asked, "What do I say when the child is lashing out? I say, 'I'm right here. You're safe. You're so mad. You're so sad.'" That's perfect, that's fabulous. That's exactly what you say. You don't have to say a lot. Remember the definition of empathy is that you're feeling it in the insula, which is actually governed partly by the stomach.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So you're feeling it in your gut. And so it's like you're resonating with the other person. You're feeling what they're feeling. And so again, it isn't so much the words. What you're doing is you're noticing. So your kid's lashing out and you might be saying, "Whoa, Whoa, Whoa, no hitting."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Your goal remember, is to soothe the situation instead of escalating it. So you're saying, "Whoa, Whoa, Whoa, ouch. No hitting. You're so upset. Oh Sweetheart," this really helps, "I'm so sorry. Oh Sweetheart, I'm right here. You're

safe. It's okay. We can fix this. We're going to make this better." And that was just a lot of words. You probably are using fewer words or you're not using them all as quickly as I did. There's space in between them, right?

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, that's all you need to say. Remember, the child is in fight, flight or freeze. All you're trying to do is de-escalate the situation.

### Question 30:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:46:24

A parent says, "My five year old loses her temper every day with violent, angry tantrums when she doesn't get her way. She attacks me and has tried to push me down the stairs."

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, you're not saying this is new behavior. If it were, I would say it's backpack emptying and you need to get her past the anger into the tears, which we've just talked a lot about at the beginning of this call. But if it's an old behavior, then the aggression you're describing is an indication of something big in her background. It's a lot of fear she's carrying around. Maybe she's had an early medical trauma, an early separation. Maybe she's just highly sensitive.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Either way, you need to deal with this immediately and not on your own. You need more support. Please make an immediate appointment with a parenting coach, they will fine tune your approach and your use of the tools and they'll support you to handle the aggression in a good way. And if you don't get immediate traction in their work with you, they're going to advise you on how to find a counselor that's going to be good for you.

**Question 31:**

- Dr. Laura Markham: 01:47:29 A parent says she started peaceful parenting three months ago and her youngest who's three is aggressive and her husband won't listen or read any Aha! Parenting resources and this is all escalated because she's in a professional fellowship program. (She asks) "Should I quit my program?"
- Dr. Laura Markham: So, I don't know that you should quit your program. I don't know when you got into it, if you only started peaceful parenting three months ago, it might well be that is causing this issue, right? That you started peaceful parenting and your six and 11 year olds are doing okay with it. But the four year old is having a hard time. But you did say that she started biting when she was two, so it's possible she's been aggressive for a long time. Also, it's rare for the two older kids to adapt well to the peaceful parenting when the younger one doesn't, which signals to me that your youngest has an issue.
- Dr. Laura Markham: I don't know what her issue is, but something has to shift for her. And you said since she started school, she's gotten more aggressive. So I'm wondering what you're doing to help her with that. Does she get daily roughhousing? Does she get special time? Whatever this issue is, it's not getting better with peaceful parenting yet. You have only been doing it for three months, but she should have already been getting better. You've been doing it for three months. That should be enough for a four year old. And since this has gotten so much worse, I'm going to urge you to get a parenting coach session right away and I think you should ask your husband to be on those calls.
- Dr. Laura Markham: I know he won't read anything or listen to anything but I think he should be on those calls, which would help you guys get in sync a little bit more. And the reason I'm saying a coach for you is because it sounds like your four year old has a special issue and that's what I want you to get

assessed, by somebody who can work with you a little more in depth and decide whether to refer you.

### Question 32:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:49:25

A parent says, "How much bad behavior can be attributed to the full backpack and when is it a different issue? Our six year old does have a full backpack but also is regularly physically aggressive with her younger sister over small issues, has emotional outbursts. I'm asking this because I want her to have appropriate support." Well, good question. Rigidity like you're describing is an inability to shift gears. Anything new feels like a threat. Ross Green who wrote *The Explosive Child* says, "You can view this as a developmental delay." So he wouldn't call it a backpack issue.

Dr. Laura Markham:

He would say it's a developmental delay and kids can learn to be less rigid and they do learn to be less rigid over time. I think learning to be less rigid comes from creating safety and I think that's part of what he describes. Although he doesn't use my terminology in his book. You're basically helping the child solve their problem and they can count on you to help them solve their problem and you're creating safety.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So you're really talking about fear, right? When you're creating safety, you're reducing fear. So you're really talking about how to deal with anxiety. But of course anxiety is intimately linked up with a full backpack. Kids who have anxiety, have full backpacks, kids who have full backpacks are anxious. So you can have a kid with a full backpack who wasn't born anxious, but when you have one, you generally have the other, and anxiety often shows up as explosiveness, not obvious fearfulness. That's why kids who are diagnosed as ODD or oppositional defiant -- and your daughter may have some of that -- are

actually showing us they're worried that they won't get their needs met.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Even if we think it's a small issue that they're getting upset about. Right? Like which chair they get to sit in. Those issues feel major to them in trying to maintain their equilibrium. So I would say we don't know all of these things going on with your daughter, but even if it's one of these other issues, helping her offload some of that fear and the emotional backpack is always going to help with the other issues.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, you might want to see a counselor who she likes, who can help with emotional regulation or anxiety issues or you know, they can be very helpful with teaching kids tools. You just have to be careful you're not going to get someone who insists on punishment. I want to just add, I love that you brought up executive function. That's just the decision maker in the brain taking in the incoming information, right?

Dr. Laura Markham:

And then deciding it's not actually an emergency. That's what the executive function does. It hears the signals coming from the amygdala, the alarm system, and it says, "Ah, okay, but I'm not seeing a tiger here. There's not any emergency really." And it chooses a more productive response.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So creating safety in the moment of drama helps children feel less threatened so they have more access to their executive function. If they don't have that sense of safety, then they still can't use their executive function. But it does sometimes help children to read books about emotions at times, of course, when they're not already upset. And that does develop executive function.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So what I'm going to suggest is the book, *My Mouth is a Volcano*. It's in my books to help kids develop emotional intelligence. (<https://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/emotional-intelligence/books>)

You'll find a lot of great books there. That one is by Julia Cook and I like it because it has an activity book that goes along with it.

### Question 33:

- Dr. Laura Markham: 01:52:54      Our next question is from two parents who say, "Our daughter is almost five. She has high anxiety and sensory processing issues. She often gets aggressive when she's triggered. We've been using your techniques to de-escalate angry behavior and one that works well for her is pushing against our hands when she wants to hit.' That's great. I find that often helps kids. "This seems to have been key in helping her release the energy and then shift her mood, which gives us a chance to work in laughter.
- Dr. Laura Markham:                      When we're able to bypass the physical aggression, she expresses her feelings verbally by talking back and using mean words like, 'I'm not going to do that.' Is there a technique that can help her calm down so she doesn't progress from the verbal to the physical impulses?" So, how great that some of the time she can put her feelings into words instead of lashing out physically.
- Dr. Laura Markham:                      Yes, the technique that keeps her using her words instead of her hands is to help her feel heard. It's when we feel powerless and unheard as humans that we escalate. So, we don't have to escalate when we feel heard. So to address the specific examples from your question, when she says "It's my body, my choice," you say, "It is your body, Honey and you're in charge of your body in most things. The doctor says, you do need the shot. You can choose your right arm or your left arm and I will help you manage this, Sweetheart. You can handle this."
- Dr. Laura Markham:                      So you're trying to calm her down and give her a sense of choice even though she does have to accept the situation.

Another example you gave was "You can't make me do that." So if she says, "You can't make me do that, you poopy-pants." You say, "Wow, you want to show me how mad it makes you to have to do this, so you're calling me a name. I see you really don't want to do this," right? You're acknowledging.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Again, for the example you gave, "I'm not going to do that." You say, "I hear how much you don't want to do that. You really don't want to do that. I wish you didn't have to. AND I know you can handle this." And then you find a way to give her a choice.

#### Question 34:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:54:57

Our next question is from a parent who says, "My one-year-old keeps hitting people in the face, myself and his older brother, and laughing about it. My six-year-old thinks it's funny to trip people or punch daddy in the gut for a funny reaction." Well, a one-year-old doesn't know that hitting hurts. He's laughing because he loves getting a response and it makes him feel powerful, and it's incongruous, so one-year-olds often will hit to get laughter, so with him, just respond with sad dismay when he hurts and show him, "Gentle, gentle." So I assume you know what I'm talking about. I'm using my hand to pet his face at that moment, "Gentle." So you would take his hand in yours and pet your face with it if he's just hit you, but of course keep your face away from him and train your six-year-old to do the same thing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But of more concern to me is your six-year-old, who certainly knows that hitting hurts, so what does his father do when the six-year-old punches him? I think he needs to say, "Ouch! No hurting." I think your son is asking for a limit here. Of course, he may also be asking to roughhouse, and then I would urge you to do rough

housing with him. But, of course, then you do safety rules for roughhousing. I encourage you to go on the [ahaparenting.com](http://ahaparenting.com) website. Look at the roughhousing articles. One of them has "how to make safety rules" in it. Then sit down with your son and make some safety rules for roughhousing, and encourage your husband. You do some rough housing with your son as well, so he doesn't need to initiate roughhousing this way.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would also have a discussion with your son about consent. We do not touch people's bodies without an okay from them, and that includes punching daddy or hitting daddy or jumping on daddy, no matter what. So if you're roughhousing, that's fine, but then you follow those rules for safety. If you're not rough housing, you don't jump on somebody or punch them no matter what. After you talk about this family rule, you write it down, you sign it, your six-year-old signs it, and then you work on enforcing it so that if he breaks that rule, you can ask him what would he have to do to make things better. Is there a way to take away the pain from daddy that he's caused? Obviously, you're having this discussion not right after the fact, but while you're talking about the rule that you're making. He's going to have to come up with how he can repair things with daddy to make things better.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then, in the moment, if he does jump on his dad or trip him or punch him, it's Dad's job to say, "Ouch! Ouch! Son, no hurting. You know our rule." If he's too upset to talk about it at that moment with authority, that is fine. He can say, "We'll talk about this later when I calm down," and leave the room. Your son will get that this is a big deal, and when Dad comes back, he can sit his son down and say, "Now, you know what our family rule is. Why did you come up and punch me like that?" "Well, I thought it would be funny," because you said that's why he does it. Dad says, "There is nothing funny about it, and you know what our rule is. Now I feel like I can't trust you to follow the rule. I wonder what you could do to repair the trust between us that you've broken by hurting me." I think if

you take that kind of an attitude, you're going to find that a six-year-old is going to stop hitting. There are better ways to get dad's attention.

### Question 35:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:58:41

The next question is from a parent who says, "When my son comes home from school, he always asks for the tablet or phone to play games. He's six, in kindergarten. If we say no, he throws a massive fit that includes hitting, pinching, kicking, spitting at all of us, including the two-year-old. This is very triggering for me, and I have a hard time keeping calm and not reacting. I learned that for me to calm down, I need to remove myself from where he is for a few minutes, but if I leave him alone, he starts throwing things around the house."

Dr. Laura Markham:

I'm glad you asked this question, because it allows me to address a really important issue. This is the behavior of an addict. Those games are highly addictive, and some children are more susceptible than other children to the addiction. I would begin by sitting your son down and saying that for three months there will be no phone and no tablet usage, and after that, you'll allow it in small doses on weekends to see if he can handle it responsibly. Now, he's likely to have a tantrum, but that's just more evidence, if you needed it, that he can't handle screens at this point. Obviously, you need to break this news to your son while both parents are available to handle any upset. Well, the predictable upset, the unavoidable upset that your son will feel.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If you're wondering how you could be brave enough to break this addiction, I highly recommend the book by Victoria Dunckley called *Reset Your Child's Brain*.

Second, this happens after kindergarten because your son has had to stuff emotions all day long. When he comes home, he needs a way to keep those feelings in check, so of course he asks to play the games the way an adult might pour a drink. So when your son comes home, he needs roughhousing and laughter right away. That will help him work out all those feelings, and it's a much better way for him to do it than a screen.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Finally, it is natural that these massive violent tantrums are triggering for you. Of course, when your son does this, it would trigger you. That alone, by the way, is reason enough to shift your screen policy, but I would say that you can't expect to be able to leave the room while your son is exploding and not have him react. Listen, if you were very upset about something and you were yelling at your husband and he left the room while you were in mid yell, saying, "I need to calm down," wouldn't you follow him? Wouldn't you throw something? So I think you'll solve this by solving the screen addiction, but I also think you need to do some work on your own self-regulation so you don't get triggered when your son gets angry.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I want to add, of course your reaction is completely normal. It's natural that when our child attacks us, we get upset and we have to find a way to calm ourselves down. But I want to add that, also, not every parent would react that way, so it is possible to stay regulated in the face of your son's anger. Not easy, but possible, and your son needs to know you can handle his anger without leaving the room. First, I'd like you to start a daily guided meditation, which helps with self-regulation. Something that's a bit longer than my four minute daily meditations. Look for one. They are many, many of them online. There are some that I recommend in the first week of the course. Use one that is specifically about self-regulation and calming yourself, because that's going to help your brain rewire so that in those tough moments, you have an easier time calming down.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then second, do some journaling about how you feel when your son gets angry to see if you can work through your own reaction a bit. I think you'll find that once you stop letting your son use the screens, things will settle down, but your son has some issues about self-regulation, so you really need to use preventive maintenance with him, so that when he gets out of kindergarten every day he needs a way to work on those feelings and doesn't come home and take it out on you and the rest of the family.

### Question 36:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:02:35

Our next question is from a parent who says, "My oldest son who is five likes to bother his three-year-old brother very frequently by pushing and jabbing. When he gets in that mode, it almost appears as if he's no longer in control of his actions and is on automatic. What kind of limit can I put into place that won't appear to be a punishment?" Well, I think you separate your kids when your older one is doing this. Even though you're not punishing, you have a very clear limit. "Pushing is not okay. Pushing hurts. You can tell your brother what you want without touching him. Use your words." If he does it again, don't wait. Just separate them. One of them can be next to you and one can be a little further away, but they can't be close enough for physical contact, especially because he's probably in that provocative mode where he's not really in control of himself, because in fact, he's triggered.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Again, you don't say how long you've been using peaceful parenting, but many people who ask about kids' aggression are newcomers to peaceful parenting. What's happened is that they've stopped punishing and then their child feels safe enough to show you what's in the emotional backpack, and as the stuff comes up, the kid doesn't like how it feels and they get provocative. They lash out, because the best defense is a good offense, so

they're fighting with you. If that's what's happening with your son, then you're right that at those moments he's no longer in control, so he's actually being provocative; trying to start a fight with you. You absolutely put the limit in, but you also go and you sit with him and you look in his eyes and you hug him and you say, "You are having a hard time, Sweetheart. What's going on?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

If you're building safety through your roughhousing and laughter through your connection, your empathy, then your son might feel safe enough to complain to you about the three-year-old and how it's all the three-year-old's fault for whatever reason. Obviously that's not true, but he may feel victimized by the three-year old because ever since the three-year-old arrived, he has to share you. So I do also recommend that you read my sibling book, because I think it will help you give your five-year-old enough security that he won't have to do this to the three-year-old. But it may just be backpack emptying, and the three-year-old is a handy person to take it out on. That's what's going on, and once you work with the preventative maintenance tools enough, you'll find that this behavior will stop.

### Question 37:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:05:00

A parent says, "When my six-year-old son is angry with me, he sometimes gets aggressive. I'm pretty sure he thinks I'm being mean and I'm the bad guy he must defeat. How can I manage his physical aggression?" Well, I think you have your clue. As you said, you're the bad guy, right? He's in warrior mode trying to defeat the mean bad guy who is a threat to him and his well being. You need to not escalate, but instead calm that sense of threat. First, I would have a discussion with him sometime when he's not upset and you have a nice connection about the warrior in his own head who's overreacting. You might say something like, "Honey, sometimes when you get mad, it

seems like you think I'm being mean and I'm the bad guy you have to fight and defeat, so you attack me like you really want to hurt me. Do you know what I mean? Do you ever think I'm a dangerous bad guy who you have to hurt?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

He'll probably answer "No, Mommy, of course not." And you can add, "Well, what about when I tell you it's time to get ready for bed?" And he'll say, "No." And you say, "Not even then, right? That's a pretty silly idea. I'm your mommy who loves you and takes care of you, even when you don't want to get ready for bed, or if you want a cookie and I say no. There's a reason, right? What do you think the reason is? That's right. I'm trying to help you stay healthy. That's my job, because I'm your mom. You know, there IS a warrior in your own head that's in charge of keeping you safe. We all have one. It does a good job, like if another kid tries to push you out of line at school, what does your warrior do? That's right. It says, 'Hey, I was standing there.' But what about when I tell you to get ready for bed and your warrior doesn't like it? Sometimes your warrior acts like I attacked you, right? That's when you try to hurt me, right? It's like your warrior gets carried away, and it hurts someone you love."

Dr. Laura Markham:

"So here's the thing about warriors: they're great at protecting you, but they're not always great at knowing what's dangerous, right? Like the warrior hears a loud noise and it's ready to fight, but maybe the loud noise was just the vacuum cleaner. Then it's your job to say to your warrior, 'Oh, that's just the vacuum cleaner. No worries. It's okay. Don't worry about that. I got this.' What about when it's your mom telling you it's time for bed or even something you really don't like, like time to turn off the TV? It's your job to tell your warrior that it's not an emergency. You're safe. Everybody's safe. It's all good. It's your mom. Even if you think I'm being mean, even if you're really mad at me, it's never okay for your warrior to attack me."

Dr. Laura Markham:

"That warrior is important. It's to protect you in real emergencies, but not from your own mom, who would never hurt you. You can always be mad at me, and you can always tell me, but it is never okay to hurt me, right? Do you really need that warrior to start attacking your own mother? No. That's silly. That's only for when there's danger. So the next time that happens, you tell that warrior, 'She's not dangerous. She's my mom.'" I think starting that as an ongoing discussion will really change his sensibility to manage himself.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But as far as tips to manage physical aggression in the moment, they're hard because anything you do to manage someone else's physical aggression will just escalate it. But remember, anger doesn't begin to dissipate until it feels heard, so as your child begins to get angry, the best thing you can do is acknowledge what he's mad about. Don't label his feelings. We've already talked about how that can backfire. Just describe his point of view. "It sounds like you wanted to finish this now and here I'm telling you, it's time to stop. Oh, this isn't what you wanted. No wonder you're upset."

Dr. Laura Markham:

At this point, he'll begin to elaborate on how unfair it all is, so keep acknowledging what he's upset about, but also work a reference into the conversation about his warrior who's protecting him. "I hear you. You think this is unfair. I know Sweetie, and that warrior of yours really doesn't like it when things are unfair, right? He works hard to keep you safe. Will you remind your warrior that even though you're mad at me, even though this doesn't seem fair, I am not the bad guy. I am your mom who loves you, and I am going to work with you to figure out when you can finish this, since you can't finish it now. Let's work together." What you're doing is you're partnering, so you're disarming the part of him that would become aggressive towards you.

**Question 38:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:10:04

Our next question is from a parent who says, "What is the most peaceful way to handle a child throwing objects during a tantrum? How do I keep myself and my one-year-old safe? Do I put us temporarily in a timeout? My five-year-old will kick the door open. If I get the one-year-old in her crib and go to comfort the five-year-old, I have a scared one-year-old who wants me. Of course, my other one doesn't want sister to see her while she's having a hard time."

Dr. Laura Markham:

This is the toughest thing when you have two kids who both need you at once, and I would say work ahead of time as much as possible to set something up for your one-year-old. Have music easily available that you can just turn on, have some cool toys, sensory bags ready, so you're not just dumping the one-year-old in the crib with the five-year-old screaming behind you. You're saying to the five-year-old, "I want to take care of you. I will be right back to take care of you." Then you're going to the one-year-old, which means you've got to do a lot of breathing as you're putting the one-year-old in a safe place with some very cool toys that they can't resist. You say, "I'll be right back," and you put the music on so they're not hearing the five-year-old screaming. Then you go back to the five-year-old.

Dr. Laura Markham:

In answer to your question about whether you should go behind a closed door to keep yourself and the one-year-old safe, I have seen that, over and over again, completely backfire. Your five-year-old gets worse behaved, the tantrums escalate. They feel like you don't love them. They feel like you can't handle their feelings. So you do want to put the one-year-old somewhere safe, but you can handle your five-year-old's feelings. You can and you should, and if you don't now, you're going to have to when they're 9 or 10 because they're not going to outgrow the tantrums (if you don't listen to the anger). I would also just give you the encouragement that unless your five-year-old has

some special challenges, they're going to be outgrowing their tantrums, I'm hoping soon, and really this is probably just an emptying the backpack thing if you've just gotten into this kind of parenting. You can do a lot to avoid these tantrums and anger by using laughter and really using the peaceful parenting tools, so the child is more likely just to cry and there will be less rage.

### Question 39:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:12:28

A parent says, "Overall, my shouting has reduced lots over the last few weeks. However, my oldest continues to hit, bite, kick and spit at his younger sister who's four. Sometimes I can diffuse this early on, but other times we've had great play and connecting time, but he still goes from one destruction to the next. If I need to protect my daughter from his hitting, how do I move away or calm myself down to calm the whole situation down as he follows me?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I want to again say this is one of those situations where it's over the last few weeks that you've reduced your shouting. So your child who is six has been living for six years with this situation where he's been shouted at a lot, and I assume this was before you started peaceful parenting. So he may have had other kinds of punishment that were really hard for him. And now you see what has happened inside him and he's showing you all that pain.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But emptying the backpack does not mean you have to put up with aggression. The aggression, the anger is not in the backpack. What's in the backpack are the more vulnerable feelings underneath the anger, the tears and the fears. That's what we're going to get to. So your kid is stuck in aggression. Our goal is to get him laughing so he can then begin crying.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And so, that's all about creating safety. So I want to say, congratulations. You've reduced your shouting. That is

really hard. It's huge. And it will help your son to begin to regulate better also. But it is only the first step. Your son has some healing to do from the shouting and punishment of the past. So it's great you're having connection time with him, and it seems to be working because he follows up the connection time by being provocative, by destroying things in your house.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So that means when he feels connected, he feels safe. And all those old feelings come up from when he felt scared and hurt and alone. They don't feel so good. So he starts to fight with you. That's why he's being provocative. That way he doesn't have to feel those feelings. So the most important thing to do with your son, even more than one-on-one connection time, is to get him laughing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

That will make his tears more accessible. Then when he gets provocative like this, your job is to put your four year old in the next room with a sensory bag or a box that only comes out in emergencies or even a screen if you need to, to keep her safe so you can focus on the six year old who's having such a hard time. Turn your full attention on him and offer understanding. "Wow, we had such a good time together. We felt so good and now you feel so bad inside and you want to break things. Honey, breaking things isn't okay, but you can tell me in words. I'm right here. Let's calm down together, and you can tell me. You can do this.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If you can stay calm, he'll stay calmer. So, don't run away from him. He'll only follow you anyway as you say. He needs you to stay engaged and that will help him through this so he can actually surface his upsets and cry. If he doesn't seem upset, but he's just still doing his trail of destruction, he's trying to numb himself out. He's using fight and freeze. And since he's continuing to move, flight too. At that point I would start wondering aloud if maybe he was upset about the past. I would say something like, "You know how I used to shout all the time and it was scary to you? I wonder if when we have such a nice time together like we just did it makes you think of those other

times when it wasn't so nice and I wasn't so nice and you felt scared and lonely." He will almost certainly respond with anger to you when you do that because it's naming the stuff that he wants to stay away from, all that pain. He might shout, "Stop talking," or, "Why did you shout all the time?" Or even, "You still shout," which might not even be true, but he's just lashing out. If he does, you'll know you hit a nerve and tears are not far behind. Just get still. Feel her sadness and say, "Oh sweetheart, I'm so sorry I hurt you."

Dr. Laura Markham:

If he says to stop talking then first say, "I'm going to stop talking right now, but first I need to apologize to you. I am so sorry I hurt you." You asked how you can stay calm. That's what the daily inspirations are for. Make sure you're using those every single day.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I also recommend a longer meditation on weekends. And you'll see that throughout the course that those are recommended, but mostly in the moment when you're upset, stop, drop, and breathe. It's hard, but you can do this. There's lots of info on self-regulation on the Aha! Parenting website. I also want to say that I have a new workbook that will be out at the end of February, and that book is all about helping parents regulate themselves. So if you're having a hard time with this transition, you've done such a great job of not shouting, but if you're having a hard time staying calm when your son gets aggressive, I recommend that you get your hands on that book as soon as you can. In the meantime, if you're having a hard time with it and it's not the end of February when the book is available, think about a parenting coach, just one or two sessions to give you the tools you need to calm down in those tough moments. It's hard, but you can do this. You're role modeling for your son. Remember, that's how he is going to change too.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You're breaking the cycle for the future for your son to grow up as somebody who won't need to break this cycle, because he will automatically not be shouting and angry

with his kids. Can you imagine what kind of parenting he'll be doing? That's because you are taking the action now, doing all the hard work to stop the cycle and not pass it onto him. Good for you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

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