

## Parenting in a Challenging World Q and A with Dr. Markham

- Dr. Laura M.: [00:00:00](#) Hello, this is Dr. Laura Markham. In this audio, I'll be answering some of the most common questions that parents ask about Parenting In A Challenging World. We'll discuss screens, media, body awareness, child safety, sexuality, gender, money, materialism, and other cultural influences on our families.
- Dr. Laura M.: [00:00:23](#) 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 M.: [00:00:53](#) This mom says "When we go to any shop, my daughter always wants to buy something for herself. When she sees a toy, especially she wants it. She has many toys, and I feel they have lost their value to her. How can I stop this habit, ensuring that she won't be binge buying when she's independent? She's six."
- Dr. Laura M.: [00:01:11](#) So, I want to say, this is completely age appropriate for a six year old. They don't understand how money works, even when we try to tell them. They want what they see, and of course, they ask for something every time they're in the store. But remember, young children learn from us how the world works. So, if we buy them something every time we're in the store, then we are teaching them to expect that. So, no wonder then that they fuss when we say no. They think it's normal to get something. Or, maybe they've just learned that they might get something if they fuss enough. So, they fuss, even though they only sometimes get something.
- Dr. Laura M.: [00:01:47](#) I actually still remember that I learned that fussing would not get my stepfather to buy me something. But, if I stayed quiet, stayed right next to that toy, lovingly holding and fondling the toy, whatever I wanted, sometimes he

would buy it for me. But you know what? That was my step-dad. With my father, no matter what, I knew he would not buy the toy. He would kindly say something like, "I see you really like that toy. I'm sorry, honey. We're not buying a toy today. That's not in our budget. Maybe for your birthday or Christmas, if you still want it." So, you know what I did with my dad? I didn't stand around that one toy. I enjoyed walking around the whole toy store. I didn't try to fuss. And I didn't try to get him to buy me something, because I'd learned that.

Dr. Laura M.:

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But here's the thing. I'm sure when I was six, I was just like your daughter. And I learned from the way my parents handled it over time, how to act with each one of them to increase my likelihood of getting a toy, or to accept that I wasn't going to get one. So, here's the thing, I assure you that once I got my own money, I did not binge. You know why? It's because I had to earn my pocket money by babysitting. So, I was very careful about spending it. And I think that all gives us the keys that you could keep in mind with your daughter. So, first, be sure your child knows that the only reason you buy something is a special occasion, like a birthday or a holiday.

Dr. Laura M.:

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And, if your family has the means, I think all kids benefit from receiving a small allowance that they can save up to get things they want. So, if she really wants that toy, she can save her allowance to get it. And if she needs extra money, you can set up opportunities for her to earn money by doing extra chores at your house, that you wouldn't normally expect her to do. I used to wash the car, for instance. And finally, when your child is old enough, don't just give them lots of spending money. Expect them to work for money as they get older. Even if your family has the means. Every child needs the experience of

working for money, so that they can truly value it. If we just pay what they want to charge on their credit cards, how do we expect them to ever understand and value money?

## Question 2:

- Dr. Laura M.: [00:04:04](#) Here's another question about buying things, but this one's about sweets. "When my eight year is away from me and she has her pocket money, she spends it on something I don't allow at home, like soda or sweets. I consider health is a very important part of our life, and it's not an option to let her eat whatever she wants and wait until she learns better. It could cost us a lot, and as her mom, I'm responsible. But honestly, we're just at the beginning of the road at healthy food, and that makes everything more complicated. And she often sees me as a mom who cracks and points out what is wrong, so she may feel like she has to rebel against me."
- Dr. Laura M.: [00:04:42](#) So, I understand how important healthy eating is to you and I share that, but here's the thing. You can't control your child when she's out of your sight. And if you crack down on this in a big way, she'll just learn to lie to you about it. But, usually you don't have this problem with a child until they're old enough to be away from you unsupervised. Mostly with eight year olds, there is an adult with them, like another parent or a babysitter. And you can explain to that adult that your family rule is no sweets or soda.
- Dr. Laura M.: [00:05:11](#) So, I'm wondering how your daughter's able to be buying things unsupervised. So, maybe you live in a very safe

place where your eight year old is allowed to go to the store by herself, but in that case, you probably know the storekeeper, and you can have a conversation with the storekeeper that you'd appreciate it if your daughter not be allowed to buy soda or sweets at the store.

Dr. Laura M.:

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I also need to point out that you said, "It could cost us a lot." Your daughter's spending money is hers to do as she wishes, so, of course there are certain limits. She can't buy heroin with it. And it's fine to say you think sugar is terrible for her, and you don't want her buying candy with it. But in general, the point of an allowance is for children to learn to manage it. And they tend to do that by spending it quickly. And then it's gone, and then they learn lessons. So, it's not appropriate for us to see their spending money as something we have control over. So, if she has spending money, she should be in control of that, I think. If it's a lot of spending money, like birthday money, then I totally get this. And you can just say, "No, your birthday money from grandma is not something that you can use on sweets or treats. Grandma wants to know what you buy, and she said no sodas and no sweets with it."

Dr. Laura M.:

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Okay, leaving all that aside, let's get to your question, which is what to do to help your daughter make healthy food choices when she's away from you. First, educate her at home about healthy eating, serve healthy food, do some research together about why sodas are terrible for you. Every meal, comment on how delicious the healthy food is. So, how happy your tongue is, deliciously eating these carrots, and how happy your body is that these probiotics from the fermented beets are going into your body and are going to help your digestion and your immune system. But, I would warn you that if you never have treats at home at all, then you're setting up

forbidden fruit and of course, your child will want treats. That doesn't mean you need to have them daily, that probably wouldn't be a good idea. Or even weekly, which I think probably is a good compromise. But, at least have treats at family game night or family meeting. I would recommend some healthy sweet things in your life on a regular basis, to avoid setting up forbidden fruit.

Dr. Laura M.: [00:07:28](#) And you will have to be patient about this, since as you say, you're at the beginning of this road. It takes time to create new eating habits. You'll also want to notice where you're critical of your daughter, and try to avoid that, and really work on building connection. Because, as you say, you want her to follow your lead, so she needs to feel connected, not criticized.

Dr. Laura M.: [00:07:49](#) Finally, I'll share a story with you. My daughter was also brought up on healthy food with minimal treats, and at age eight, she begged to go to McDonald's. So, I did all the education I could at home. I used a tip I love from Karen Le Billon, "Less talk about health, more about good taste." She says, "In France, parents don't use nutritional information. Parents say, 'Taste this, it's so yummy.' Instead of 'It's good for you.'" And kids begin to believe that good-for-you foods taste good. Then with my daughter, we did some research online about how food companies, including McDonald's, entice children to make poor eating choices, so that the companies can make money off of them. My daughter still loved her french fries, but suddenly she had a reason to resist them. It wasn't just me telling her, "No, you can't have french fries." I should add, I had seen studies showing that this was the best way to get teens to eat healthy. And I really saw it work with her, even though she was younger.

Dr. Laura M.: [00:08:47](#) And yes, she was responsible for her own food choices a lot of the time by the time she was a freshman in high school, because in New York City, your kid leaves early in the morning and gets back late, often. So, she had to make her own food choices during high school, and then of course college and traveling. And I noticed her food choices get better and better. And I would say now, in her early 20s, she's a very healthy and adventurous eater. So, your early education is not wasted, even if you can't see an impact yet. I think the most important thing is to model good eating choices, and not overreact and set up forbidden fruit.

### Question 3:

Dr. Laura M.: [00:09:30](#) So, this is a question about materialism. We're pretty strict about not buying new toys or books. We put them on the list for the holidays or for a birthday, but we ourselves do choose new toys fairly frequently. We buy a lot of second hand books, and we use a library, but we also buy toys that we think are encouraging development or think are supporting our child's interests. But, our three year old doesn't really care if we buy toys, but he likes the ones we buy, but he's not begging for them. Is it a problem that we buy him toys?"

Dr. Laura M.: [00:09:56](#) And I would say, that's a family choice. I was like you, I went to the library a lot, but I also took my kids to the bookstore, and it was an activity that our family did where we would go spend a couple of hours reading books. And each child could select one to go home and that was an important part of learning to love reading for my kids that we connected around. So, I guess that's a family choice.

And certainly, you might buy a special toy for a special reason. A beach toy in the summer, or I would buy a building toy for my son, just to keep him busy if I knew that people were coming to visit or whatever, or we were going to be doing a play date where someone would come over with a child the age of my daughter but not a child his age. I would let him play with a building toy, because that's what would keep him busy.

Dr. Laura M.: [00:10:48](#) So that's, I think that what I would just notice is, if your child interprets these purchases as something he has a right to expect, that's a problem. But otherwise, as long as it's in keeping with your values, I don't think it's a problem. I think the problem arises when you get constant requests for toys. I think usually when you have constant requests, one of two things has happened. Either the kids are toy addicted because they're used to getting new toys all the time, or they're feeling deprived because they feel like they never get anything. So, I would be conscious about the way you talk about purchases. It's not a matter of, "We can't afford that," which makes kids feel needy. It's a matter of, "That's not in our plan for today," or, "We don't do new toys except for special occasions like the holidays or birthdays."

Dr. Laura M.: [00:11:43](#) And by the way, for birthdays, I would always get the child whose birthday it isn't a present as well. A smaller present but a present. If you've got three kids and it's only one of them's birthday, I would get the other two kids a smaller present on that one's birthday. And you can even have it come from the birthday child, because it's a wonderful tradition to give things away on your own birthday. So, and of course the birthday child will get an even bigger present, and maybe even another smaller one, and plus they'll probably get something from the grandparents. So,

it's still their birthday. They're the ones getting the party, et cetera.

Dr. Laura M.: [00:12:17](#) But the other kids are involved in planning the party, and helping do the things for the party, to throw the party for their sibling. So, everybody gets in on the action and doesn't feel so left out. That's just a way to handle birthday parties. But, I would say, we don't want kids to feel needy, like our family can't afford presents. It's more, "This isn't in our plan. This isn't what we do. Just because you can afford it, doesn't mean you should always be buying things.

Dr. Laura M.: [00:12:45](#) Another example, recently a little girl was graduating from her pre-school. She's four years old. She's going to be starting kindergarten in the fall. And other kids in her pre-school are getting graduation presents. There's actually a graduation ceremony, and the families are going out to lunch afterwards separately from each other. And kids are getting presents. And my response if my kid was in that class, I have a client whose kid is in the class, I would just say, "That isn't what we do in our family. We celebrate what a great year you had. How much you learned, how wonderful your teacher was, how many good friends you had in the class. All the ways you're different. We want to hear you tell us at lunch, all the ways you're different today than you were before you started this class last August. And we don't want to distract ourselves with a present. That's not what this is about. This is about you, and what a wonderful year you've had."

Dr. Laura M.: [00:13:41](#) And so, I think putting the emphasis where it belongs -- on the child, and the child's growing and learning, and changing, and not on presents is ... put it on your values. And don't be afraid to say, "No." Limit, if your child is toy

addicted, limit the number of toys that you're giving them, and just be really clear about what your policy is.

#### Question 4:

- Dr. Laura M.: [00:14:06](#) So this dad is asking about parenting in a challenging world. "How do I deal with money, with my seven year old? Should we introduce an allowance?" Yes, the answer is absolutely, every seven year old needs an allowance. "When should we introduce money?" Well, now. Give her an allowance. Try part tied allowance. "Here's the jar for spending. You can spend it on whatever we want." You want, sorry, what you want. "Here is the jar for," what I call tzedakah, which is the Hebrew word for making the world a more just place. You might call it charity. So, giving money when other people need it. And then the third jar is for savings, for big things like if the child is saving up for something and you might match it for a bike, for instance, or a phone, or something big. And it takes a long time to save up that.
- Dr. Laura M.: [00:15:00](#) And so you put the money in the jar, or into a piggy bank that they can't get it out. It can only go in, it can't get out without you helping with it in some way, like a safe. Okay. And you're saying, how do you deal with her with money? "She had coins from the Tooth Fairy, but she forgot to bring them, so we paid for the stuffed penguin at the store, and then we wanted the coins back from her later, and she feels like we stole them." Well, she clearly is not getting the understanding here of what's going on. Of course, she feels like you stole them from her, because she doesn't understand that they're the same as the penguin. So, I think you have to not buy her something at ...

Dr. Laura M.: [00:15:39](#) I think what I would do is, I would act out the whole interaction all over again. I would actually give her back the money, and take back the penguin. Say: "We're going to go to the store again, and get your penguin at the store. Don't worry. Here's your penguin. We know where to get it at the store. We're going to take it back to the store," and you put it in a bag. And you say, "And, here's your Tooth Fairy money that you had. Here it is." And you give it to her. So, you say, "Let's go to the store now. Take from your Tooth Fairy money so you can get your penguin." You go to the store, you go to the counter.

Dr. Laura M.: [00:16:07](#) The clerk won't know what's going on and you don't have to actually involve the clerk, but you can walk up to the clerk and say, "We bought this elephant here last week," because you don't have a receipt for it. And say, "But, I'm going to put this here so my daughter can pay for it." And the clerk won't know what's going on. That's fine. And you say, "Where's your money to pay for your elephant?" Is it elephant? No, penguin. "Your penguin?" And you have her put the money on the counter and you have the clerk hand her the stuffed penguin, and then you say, "Yay," and you give her five and she starts, and you scoop up the coins and throw them in your back pocket as you're walking out with her. But, I think you have to act it out with her. I don't think she understands what happened.

### Question 5:

Dr. Laura M.: [00:16:51](#) Here's a parent who's saying that, she's wondering why her five year old doesn't seem to be super grateful. That she's been doing peaceful parenting since her child was a newborn. She sets limits but sets them playfully and with

empathy, and she sets many fewer limits than the people she knows. Why is her kid not more grateful? And she says, "Other kids we know with twice as little time from their parents and twice as little thought put into their growing up are happy with a little attention, and grateful for crumbs."

Dr. Laura M.: [00:17:27](#) Well, I would just say, deprivation does have a way of doing that to people, but it also has huge bad effects so I wouldn't use that as your model. And then, I do understand that you want her to understand that she's not the center of the universe, and that ... and to have gratitude for what she does get. I guess I would say, I'm not hearing that she's doing anything that is problematic in what you're describing. You're saying, she doesn't feel happiness with small stuff, like she takes it for granted. Well, that's very normal for young children, she's a five year old, that they take things for granted and that they beg for more stuff. Doesn't mean you have to give it to them, but they're not, they don't yet have the cognitive understanding to know that other people are hungry, or that other people don't get toys like they get. Doesn't mean you give them all the toys they want, but you can't necessarily expect them to understand it.

Dr. Laura M.: [00:18:16](#) I remember wondering about my own daughter, and I think she was around five when this happened. And I remembered that my son, who was four years older, had been at this age in my recollection, at the age of five or six, he'd been very grateful. And he'd been very considerate, and why was she not more grateful and considerate? And I remember thinking, "Wow, is this maybe, this kind of parenting doesn't work on all kids?" And I'm happy to tell you that she became a super considerate teenager. Super considerate and super grateful.

- Dr. Laura M.: [00:18:56](#) So, I don't think that it's anything to do with this kind of parenting that makes kids this way. I do think that the difference in this case, between my two children, is that one of them, she, was a much more sensitive kid. And so, I think she felt more overwhelmed and less empowered. I think she wanted more things to sort of self-medicate from that degree of anxiety, of tension, from being so sensitive. So, I do think kids like that are more likely to seem less grateful, but I do think you'll see that she will change as she gets older.
- Dr. Laura M.: [00:19:34](#) I think it's really important to do gratitude practices at home. Not in a lecturing way, not in a shaming way, but in a way that kids pick up the gratitude and learn from it, and become, have the experience of appreciating, as part of the routines of daily life, and of sharing with others. Not things they don't want to share, but having the experience of giving to others and seeing others be happy is part of what develops generosity in kids. I think all of that will help your child become a more grateful person. But, I would never lecture.
- Dr. Laura M.: [00:20:12](#) I remember the book, Little House on the Prairie, or the whole series, not just that book, where she talks about how her mother scolded her for how she was so greedy and not generous. That her sister would just give the shirt off her back, almost literally. She would give her only orange ... They got an orange once a year at Christmas. And the sister would give her orange to somebody. And the heroine didn't want to give her orange to somebody! She wanted her orange. And it made her feel like a terrible person to get lectured about that. I think we have to be careful about putting our adult judgements on a five year old, or a six year old, or a seven year old about what they should be grateful for, or what they should be generous

with, because they are not grownups yet. So, as long as you're treating her with empathy, so that she gets her needs met, and as long as you're modeling gratitude practices and doing them as part of your family routines. I don't think you're going to end up with a problem.

#### Question 6:

Dr. Laura M.: [00:21:13](#) This takes us to a question from a mom who's wondering, her son is now at that same age of me, me ... Not me, me, me, but more, I want, I want, I want. There's a barrage of he wants things. And I would say, I'm not going to go into how to handle that but I made a video about it. So, if you go to the Aha! Parenting website, and you put in, there's a blog post that links to this video. It's called, Giving Your Child the Gift of Abundance, that's what it is, Without Spoiling. If you just put in the word spoiling, you'll get this. But, Giving Your Child the Gift of Abundance Without Spoiling. It will tell you how to do this, and it will also give you a video where I'm talking to my kid who wants even more cars than he already has.

Dr. Laura M.: [00:22:01](#) So, there's a lot of stuff about teaching values on the Aha! Parenting website. I know it's a big website, so you may not have read the whole thing yet. Take some time to look at the section that's about character on the Aha! Parenting website, and I think you'll find there's a lot there that will answer these questions.

#### Question 7:

- Dr. Laura M.: [00:22:36](#) Our next question is about what is typical behavior and what we can see as something that deserves empathy versus what we can see as something that might be more spoiled or entitled. So, she describes, the kids are outside with their dad, she brings out a bag of carrot sticks for them to snack on, and the four year old throws the bag on the ground and says, "I hate carrots." She says, "I'm sorry to hear you don't like carrots. I just thought you kids might like a snack." And the four year old says, "You didn't pack any dipping sauce for it." So, yes, Jessica you are completely right. That certainly sounds as you said, "Entitled, bratty, and spoiled." It does.
- Dr. Laura M.: [00:23:22](#) When we go to the trouble of bringing a healthy snack to our kids, we want them to respond to us with gratitude, of course. So, the question is, how can we best foster that gratitude? Obviously, it's not going to come from a lecture. When we lecture, kids tune out. They hear that as a reprimand. So, the change that fosters gratitude comes when kids understand that we just gave them a gift, and they appreciate the effort we went to, even when they don't like the gift. Because, obviously she didn't like the carrots. She wanted something different. So, the problem is that a four year old doesn't necessarily have the development in the brain, the pre-frontal cortex development to appreciate that. They're just evaluating the gift. Is it what they want or not?
- Dr. Laura M.: [00:23:50](#) So, if you'd brought her cookies, she would have been, "Yeah, wow, cookies. Yay." And she might have remembered to say thank you or not. But with carrots, the four year old looks at it, just like they'd look at a birthday present they weren't so into and say something like, "That's not what I wanted." Right? We all have seen four year olds at birthday parties say, "That's not what I

wanted." So, this is just like that. Your four year old will grow up and out of this behavior. It doesn't mean she's going to be an entitled, spoiled brat her whole life. It just means that at this moment, she doesn't have the pre-frontal cortex development to be able to look at it and say, "Oh, this isn't what I wanted, but wow, how nice of my mom to think of me." And the thought that counts thing.

Dr. Laura M.:

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So, the good news is, you can actually hasten the day when she'll be showing you that kind of gratitude, and here's how you do that. First of all, don't take it personally. I know that what happens when she does that, is that you ... She just threw your gift on the ground, and naturally, you'd get mad. So, if you can remind yourself that this is a learning opportunity, not a personal affront to you, that helps a lot. Don't take it personally. Secondly, if you can help her to notice that she's disappointed, and that she could express her disappointment rather than attacking you, that will help her to do that in the future.

So, you could say, "Wow, sounds like you're disappointed you didn't get something different. You didn't really want carrots, huh? You can always tell me you're disappointed." And she'll probably say, "I'm disappointed. Why didn't you bring cookies," right? And then you say, "Well, cookies are for special treats," or, "Cookies are for after dinner dessert," or whatever your family rule is. "But carrots are for any time. So, I thought you might be hungry and like some carrots. I'm sorry it's not what you wanted." That's, that. "And you can tell me next time that you're disappointed, instead of throwing the carrots, because that could get them dirty." And you pick up the carrots.

Now, if she's still feeling disappointed and she says, "I do like carrots, I just want dip sauce." You might see that as

further evidence of her being entitled. But, you could also see it as an opportunity to empower her. So, again, she isn't responding with upset to a disappointment, she's responding with empowerment. You want a kid who, when they're disappointed with the way things go in life says, "Hmm, this isn't quite what I wanted. Maybe I can figure out how to get what I wanted?" And so, you say, "It sounds like you want dip sauce. What do you think is the best way to get that dip sauce? Yes, exactly Sweetie. You can ask me, and say please. Now, what about throwing the carrots on the ground? You think that helps? Um-mm (negative). You're right, not really because it hurts my feelings, right? So, what could you do to get dip sauce? Exactly. You could ask me if we could go in together to get the dip sauce. Give me five. Let's go, girlfriend." And you go get the dip sauce with her.

So, she has just learned an appropriate way to deal with this. She's just learned that in fact, she can make the world different when she's disappointed, so you've empowered her. And there's much more connection, and much less likelihood that she'll respond next time by throwing the carrots on the ground. The final part of your question seems to be about helping kids develop gratitude. And I won't go into a lot of detail on to his, because it is on the Aha! Parenting website. But, there are many research proven ways to foster gratitude. You can do a family gratitude journal that you record things in, your family blessings. You can list things at dinner or bedtime. Everyone can list things they're grateful for that day.

You can read books on gratitude from the library. You can take a photo or two every week of something beautiful, that you appreciate and you can share with your kids your own gratitude of it and your appreciation, and ask them

what they were grateful for this week. You can help your kids write brief thank you letters, or dictate them to you, that you can either mail or email, or deliver in person. That's been proven to help kids be happier and more grateful, even believe it or not, three months later after they did this. So, there are many different ways that you can foster gratitude for your child. But, don't assume that the kind of reaction you saw is about entitlement or lack of gratitude, because I think it's really about brain development, and learning to deal with disappointment.

### Question 8:

Dr. Laura M.:

[00:28:18](#)

This parent asked about how you handle peer pressure to have the latest gadgets. And I would just say, you say, and it's the same way you would handle peer pressure about eating sugar, or seeing scary movies, or anything else. You would say, "Wow, you really want to see that scary movie. Sweetie, that's not something we're going to do in our family. We don't think that's good for kids." "You really want a hover board. Sweetie, that's not something we're going to buy. We think they're expensive and they're not something we're going to spend our money on." "Yes, your friend Brienne has a cell phone. We're not going to get a cell phone until you're in middle school because that's our family rule." So, there's a whole section on values on my website that you can check out, but in general I think, the key is to empathize with what they want and why they want it, but that doesn't mean that we're going to give it to them. That's all. Like any other limit we set.

### Question 9:

Dr. Laura M.:

[00:29:13](#)

How can we get leadership that is kind and peaceful, and spreads love within our country and our world? What a beautiful question. I would say the answer is, we raise children who are compassionate, who have a strong inner compass, who understand that we're all connected to each other, that an injury to one is an injury to all. Who bring more conscious awareness to their lives, and therefore are more empowered. People who do not have strong triggers cannot be manipulated by demagogues. That's really important to know.

And the other thing to know is that -- this is now just my opinion. You asked, I'm telling you. I know you didn't come to this course for political reasons, but since you've asked, I would say from the point of view from a psychologist watching the dynamics of our culture, that our social structure is transitioning very dramatically at this time, and our social order is going through dramatic changes. And for a long time, things haven't been working for a lot of people. So, in the last 30 years economically, things have gotten very bad for a lot of people, because there's been a concentration of wealth in the United States in the hands, 85% of the country's wealth is in the hands of the top 20% of people now.

So, economists will tell you that the reason for this is tax policy and trade policy. And I'm not an economist so I'm not even going to go there. But, I will also say that it's partly our idea of how we continue to expand the economy worldwide. If you've got a limited planet with finite resources, you can't keep cutting down your forests indefinitely, and making more things out of that wood. So, you can't keep burning coal, and expect not to have an effect on the climate. So, we can't grow indefinitely because there are only so many resources, and we can't

just be greedy and be looking to bless ourselves economically when other people are needing things.

And so, I think that we're being asked as human beings to step up and join hands with everybody all over the planet to do things differently. Many of us are economically blessed but spiritually impoverished. And we need to begin to meet our needs spiritually and emotionally, so we're not just trying to meet them by accumulating more things. And I think if we model that for our children, and we do the kind of parenting that I advocate, we're going to raise more compassionate people who have a strong inner compass, who are empowered, and who are able to feel connected to people all over the world. And it doesn't matter whether they look like those people or not. And it doesn't matter what economic class they're in. They'll feel connected and be concerned about everybody's well-being. And I think that's where we want to go for all humanity. And I believe that we all, all of us that do this peaceful parenting, are helping humanity move in that direction.

#### Question 10:

Dr. Laura M.:

[00:32:28](#)

There were questions about body awareness and child safety. The short answer to this, I would just say in general, you don't have to teach kids about stranger danger. Stranger danger's a terrible idea to teach kids, because you're not, you don't want kids to be afraid of strangers. You want them to keep themselves safe from somebody who might hurt them, but that somebody is more likely, statistically speaking, to be someone they know like a teacher, a coach, an uncle, a babysitter. A friend who's a year older, whatever. So, I think instead what you say is, "These are your private parts. The parts

beneath your bathing suit are your private parts. They're very special, because they're involved in helping you have a baby later in life. Helping you have a baby if you're a girl," or, "Helping you make a baby, so you can be a daddy later in life," if you have a boy.

And you say, "Private parts are just for you. Nobody else ever needs to see your private parts, or to touch them. The only times that somebody needs to see your private parts, if mom or dad might help you wipe. Now that you can wipe yourself when you pee, mom and dad don't need to touch you there. You can even wipe yourself when you poop, but if you need help from us, that's okay. We'll help you. But, now that you're three, you wash yourself in the bath yourself. No one needs to wash you there ever."

"If you see the doctor, sometimes they need to touch your private parts, but only if mom or dad is in the room. And those are the only times anyone will ever see or touch your private parts. So, if anybody, anyone at all, no matter who, it could be a friend, it could be a teacher, it could be a babysitter, it could be a relative like an aunt or an uncle, no one should ask to see or touch your private parts. And if anybody ever does, you have to tell me about it, okay? You must tell me right away." That's it. That's what you say. And it's a normal part of learning that you teach kids, just like you teach them to wipe after they go to the bathroom. There's no extra overlay of embarrassment or shame there.

So, it's not about, it's dangerous. It's like, "This is the way we do it." And I think body awareness starts very early. It's really a matter of giving your child control over their body. And sexual abuse is a risk for every child, boys as well as girls. A huge number of children are sexually abused, so

you can't avoid the conversation. You have to have the conversation. So, there's some good books. I recommend that every parent go to the page on my website that's called, What Every Parent Needs to Know to Keep Your Child Safe From Sexual Abuse. Just go read the article. There are books at the bottom of the page. Use those books as a way to begin a conversation with your child.

Make sure your child knows what a vulva is, and the correct terms for their body parts. Otherwise, they get a lot of shame around sexuality, and also when they ... I mean, I had one situation where the girl said that a boy pushed her bottom. And the teacher completely didn't take it seriously. "He was just in line with her and pushed her bottom." He put his hand up her skirt and into her vagina, but she didn't know the name for vagina. So she said he pushed her bottom. This didn't come out until much later, unfortunately. So, you want your child to know the exact names for her body parts. Yes, this is my bottom, this is my butt, this is my bottom. This is my anus. That's a part, it's not just the whole butt, it's the actual hole where the poop comes out. And this is my vulva and this is my vagina, and this is my penis, and this is my scrotum.

Kids need to know those words. There's nothing wrong with those words. There's nothing shameful about them, and in fact, when you say, "This is your knee, this is your ankle," if you're leaving those words for the body parts out, you're inducing shame. Those are the un-namable parts. The part of your body that must not be named? So, those are the basics. There's a lot more on the page that I've sent you to, but I would just say, "We ask people before we touch their body. That's a basic rule. When someone says stop, we stop." You start introducing consent very early. And you also always have a rule of no

secrets. You just say, "We don't do secrets in our family. Sometimes we have surprises but never secrets. We tell each other everything." And so, if grandma or grandpa says, "I'll get you an ice cream later, it'll be our little secret." You want your child to turn to them and say, "We don't do secrets in our house." Right?

Those are the basic rules about how you talk about body safety, but like I said, there's more in the article, and there are references in the article to other people's work who spend their time on how to keep children safe in this regard. So, you can follow those references and read some books yourself that will really help you feel comfortable, talking with your child and knowing how to keep your child safe.

#### Question 11:

Dr. Laura M.:

[00:37:16](#)

This question is from a mom who says that where she lives there are a lot of stamps. They go to the doctor's office and the kid gets praised for being a good boy, and gets a stamp on his arm. And then she goes on and describes all the other things. He comes home from kindergarten with a stamp, which was every day. So, she wants to know what kind of a conversation to have with her child about it. And there's another question which adds onto this one, saying that, so often the praise is for compliance or achievement, with the implicit understanding that the child isn't good if she isn't compliant, or doesn't achieve. And so she simply tried to describe things like, "You climbed up the ladder. You pushed with your feet and pulled with your hands. Now, you're on top of the climber." Instead of, "Good girl."

So that is beautiful. I couldn't have said that better myself. That is a beautiful thing to say to your child, and it completely bypasses whatever "Good girls" they're hearing from other people, because it's so much more effective in reaching your child. So, that is indeed what you want to say, something like that. And I think the answer is that this is an ongoing conversation. It's not a one time conversation. And it's a great conversation to have, for all of us. Even if you don't have stamps where you live. It helps your child build a strong inner compass, and insight into other people, empathy with other people. And it keeps them from being a people pleaser.

So, for instance, you go to the doctor's office and they give them the stamp, and as you're leaving, you might say something like, "The nurse said you were a good boy and gave you a stamp on your arm, huh? What do you think about that? I wonder how it is for the nurse? I wonder if there are times they don't give kids stamps? Like when kids cry. Huh, you think so? I wonder how that is for the nurse when the kid cries. Ah, I guess the nurse doesn't like that very much. It makes her life a lot harder. But, do you think it would help the kid to have a stamp? Or, do you think maybe if his mother held him on his lap when he got the shot, then he wouldn't cry?" We can start to help the child see how this is working.

Children really have very clear insight into this, when you ask them about it. And so, I think the thing we want to do is just ask them, so that it becomes conscious on their part, that they see what's going on. I'm just looking to this question, to see if there's more I should say about this. Grandma was part of the question. "You're a good boy, because you cleaned up." I would just ask your kid, "Well, what do you think about that? Do you think that it makes

you good or bad if you clean up or don't clean up?" And one mom mentioned that her child praised her, and said, "You're good. You get a stamp." And you can say, "I'm good, huh? What does that mean? What did I do? How did you feel about that? So, I said, XYZ and you thought that was good? Do you think I'm bad if I don't do that?"

And you just want to talk about the fact that we are not our behaviors, right? So, I don't think that this is something to worry about overly, because you can always mitigate it. But, I do think it's something you want to bring up and talk with your child about. What you do at home will always be more important than what your child experiences from other people.

#### Question 12:

Dr. Laura M.:

[00:40:32](#)

This dad says, "My seven year old daughter wants a bikini. We feel she's too young. How best to discuss the message about sexualization and self-worth? And she's also started to cover herself in front of us when getting changed. We've never made a fuss about that, if someone comes into the bathroom." Okay, so first of all, completely normal behavior for a seven year old to start covering themselves. They need more privacy at that point. Stop walking into the room where they're having their bath. And start closing the door when you go into the bathroom. So, you don't shame them about it, but respect privacy, okay?

So, about wanting a bikini, I agree with you completely, and I would talk about it being adventure versus sexiness. You could just say, "Bikinis are for sexiness. Sexiness is for

older kids, and someday you can have a bikini. Right now, what you want is adventure. You want to be able to swim in the waves and not have your bathing suit fall off. So, we go with bathing suits that are not bikinis. That's the way it is, period." But, I would also start the discussion early about how we feel, what's important, what are our values. And even talk about, what is sexiness and when does that start to be okay to want to look sexy, and why do people wear bikinis. There are a lot of questions related to this and many other wonderful topics to discuss with your child, under the communication section of the Aha! Parenting website. There are 200 great questions to ask your child, to get conversations started. If you have a hard time finding the article, let me know, but I encourage you to take a look at it.

### Question 13:

- Dr. Laura M.: [00:42:12](#) What's your question?
- Parent: I'm a single parent, just to say first, because that's important probably.
- Dr. Laura M.: Okay.
- Parent: I have a bright, confident eight year old girl, who likes to sort of be in charge, and also one of the things I'm finding challenging is her wanting to be older than her years. So, wanting to dress older. Wanting to ... She's got some play, clip-on earrings, putting them on her nose the other day, trying to be a cool girl. And I hold firm with all of this. I don't let her go out in crop tops or any of those things. But my question really ... I'm also a clinical psychologist working with kids, so I sometimes feel like I should know and don't know.

Dr. Laura M.:

Right.

Parent:

But my challenge, my question really is, how to hold the line on all of that, which I don't struggle with the boundaries, without making her feel that the choices she has are bad, or that she's a bad girl because she's wanting to do some of those things? Does that makes sense? If I don't struggle to say, "You're not wearing that. Those tops are for grown up girls and when you're older, if you decide to..." so I don't let her do that. But just so that she doesn't feel bad about who she ... does that makes sense? I feel I'm often saying no easily, that's ...

Dr. Laura M.:

Yeah. Yeah, I hear you. So, I think it depends on how you do it, and I think you can say, "Oh, you really like that top, don't you? Are the girls at school wearing tops like this?" "Oh, yes, mom, they are."

Parent:

Yes.

Dr. Laura M.:

And you can say, "Yeah, I can see why you'd want one if the other girls are wearing them, but you know what? This is really for older kids." "No mom. The kids my age are wearing them." "I know, I hear you. And you know what? That's not in my values. We're not going to wear those tops at age eight. I'm sorry, when you get older, blah, blah, blah. If you want, blah, blah, blah," just like you say. But to say, "To start with, I can really see why you'd want it." That sounds like you really like that, and -- I would have a lot of discussions with her now, before she gets any older, about being cool. "What does it mean to be cool? Right? And when you're cool, what do people think of you? Why is it a good thing to be cool? Is it ever a bad thing to be cool? Could it ever be a bad thing?"

- Dr. Laura M.: "What if, to be cool, you had to do things that were against your values? And when girls wear these skimpy outfits to be cool, what happens when they wear those skimpy outfits? How do they begin to feel about themselves? How do other people who see them in the skimpy outfits feel about them? How do people react to them when they see them? So you would do it to be cool, but you might get a lot of sexual attention that you might not feel so ready for." You know?
- Parent: Yeah.
- Dr. Laura M.: So, I think those kinds of discussions are really critical. And I love eight year olds because they're ready for those discussions. They're not 12 yet, so they're not as offended. They're not know it alls yet. But they're really interested and open, and they're shaping their identity. Because they're, for better or worse, the way our culture works, they're very influenced by the culture now, because culture is transmitted through media so directly. It didn't happen 50 years ago in quite the same way. Culture was transmitted more gradually, right? So, I think it's a great time to have those kinds of discussions.
- Parent: Okay. That was very helpful.
- Dr. Laura M.: Is that helpful.
- Parent: Thank you. Yeah, that is helpful.
- Dr. Laura M.: Good.
- Parent: Yeah, that is helpful, yeah. Thank you.
- Dr. Laura M.: Okay. Thank you. Thanks for your question.

**Question 14:**

Dr. Laura M.:

[00:45:54](#)

Our next question is asking. "Can you help with ideas to discuss with my seven year old about makeup and appropriate clothing, to give good grounding for the future? She was given some makeup as a gift, and likes to dress up with her natural childhood curiosity. However, I find it triggers a lot of fears for me. I'd like advice on a healthy approach to take when discussing it. I do my best to model modest clothing and simple neutral makeup at home." So that's great that you do that, and I think this is a question about values. Is make-up even necessary? Are you one of those moms who needs to have makeup on to leave the house? If so, she'll consider makeup to be an important part of her identity. So, I would talk about what makeup is.

What makeup is, is a way of women, specifically in our culture, embellishing their face in a way that they think makes them more attractive. Some people choose not to wear makeup at all. Some people wear a little lipstick, some people wear a little eyeliner. Some people put on a lot of makeup, and that's how they feel most comfortable. It's cultural most of the time, meaning you learned it in your family, and from other people in your culture or your cohort in school. And in every culture, there are ideas about it. So, for instance, it's not considered to be in good taste to wear too much makeup, or too gaudy makeup. So that advertisements that sell makeup will really of course have very prominent makeup that they're trying to sell, but you won't see that same makeup most of the time on

women who are on TV or in film. And women who are in professional roles, like a dentist or a doctor, or a politician, rarely wear very much makeup. They wear some, but they don't wear a lot of makeup, because that distracts from the professional role they're playing.

So, like everything else to do with values, this is not one discussion. It's an ongoing discussion where you ask questions, you listen, you ask her what she thinks about things. You observe, you say what you think about things, and you continue to evolve your discussion, so that it's more and more sophisticated, meaning she's able to understand more and more complicated ideas about this. And of course, you can have a similar discussion about clothing, what's considered professional. Would it be appropriate for a school principal to have a very short dress and a very low cut top? No? Then why not? Why would a minister, a woman minister, choose not to dress that way? Why might a movie star decide she wanted to dress that way? And what does your daughter think about all of these ways of dressing, and what do they signal?

So, I think over time, she'll develop her own opinions, I guarantee you that. But, start now with your own values, because you're always the most important foundation for your child's values. I want to add that, there are some related discussions, values discussions that I would advise every parent to have with a girl child. Such as, why this focus on looking pretty? Which is, of course the point of wearing makeup, right? And why is it important to be pretty, or is it actually important to be pretty? Is that the most important thing? What else might be more important? What do you have to do to be pretty? What do you have to look like?

Is prettiness innate, or is it something we can make ourselves? Does it have a cost to it? For instance, sometimes high heeled shoes have a cost to comfort, to fun, to adventure. And what is the difference between the inside and the outside? Is someone pretty who acts ugly? Is someone pretty who's in rags, but acts bravely and with caring? You'll find more examples of questions like that, to ask your child in this article on the Aha! Parenting website, "Is TV Making Three Year Olds Focus On Looking Pretty?" And it also gives you examples of some books to read that might be eye opening for your daughter, and help you get these discussions started.

The final thing I want to say to you is, I'm not sure why this brings up fears for you, your daughter being interested in the makeup and the clothing, but if it's because you think your daughter will be more vulnerable as she heads into young womanhood, you're right. It is a true thing. And that's one of the reasons to have empowering discussions with children early about these issues, including about consent. But, I want to make sure that you're not putting your own fears onto your daughter as you have the discussions. So, as always, do your own work on yourself. That's the most important thing, so that you're not transmitting your fears when you have discussions with her.

And the way to do your work on yourself? Journal about it. Talk to other adults about it. Read about it. You might try Peggy Orenstein's book, **Cinderella Ate My Daughter**. And also look online for support for parents and for girls. GirlsLeadership.org has a lot of resources on their website. Their goal is to give girls the power of their voice, which is an antidote to all those sabotaging messages for girls, that the only thing that matters is what they look like.

**Question 15:**

Dr. Laura M.:

[00:51:50](#)

This parent is asking, "My four year old daughter is becoming more interested in her body, and in playing with her vagina. This has brought me some anxiety, as there was quite a bit of shaming when I was a child around masturbation. I wonder if you have advice on how to talk about body exploration, privacy, masturbation, et cetera?" Well, first of all, Jackie, I'm sorry that happened to you when you were a child. You're not the only one. It's so common that we shame children for completely normal, natural sexual feelings. Good for you for bringing this up. First, I advise you to do some journaling and healing about your own anxiety, because then you're less likely to communicate that to your daughter. Second, use the anatomically correct words. It lessens shame. Like what if we couldn't talk about our elbow, and we called it that place? Or that point? And we didn't have a word for elbow, and we had to talk around it all the time. We would have some shame. We would feel like, "Well, the elbow's an un-namable part of our body." So, use anatomically correct words when you refer to body parts.

So, using the correct terminology not only lessens shame, heaven forbid anyone ever touched your child, you want her to be able to communicate what happened. For girls, that means use the word vulva. The vagina is just the muscular canal that connects the uterus to the vulva. So, you will describe it to your child as the place the baby comes out. But that's in a different discussion, the "where do babies come from" discussion. So, the vulva is the name for the entire visible part of a girl's genitalia.

So, a second way to help your daughter be sex positive and body positive, is to empathize with her enjoyment. "Yes, that feels good when you touch it, doesn't it? That is a wonderful part of your body." And privacy wise, if she spends a lot of time touching herself, suggest that she go to her room to do that. "Honey, it's fine to touch your vulva, but that's something you do in private. Just like you only pee in private in the bathroom, or you only change your clothes in your bedroom in private. If you want to touch your vulva, that's fine, but that happens in private, in your bedroom."

I also think you want to introduce the idea that the body is sacred, especially certain parts of it. So, as part of your discussion with her, explain that boys and girls have different private parts, because they do different jobs in bringing babies into the world. Tell her we consider these body parts private, because they're sacred. Part of the miracle of bringing new life into the world. Kids have to take good care of their bodies and not let anyone else touch these private areas, because when they grow up, these body parts have a big responsibility. That means she has to protect her own body and also respect other people's bodies.

So, there are a lot of body positive resources out there for kids these days. Do some exploring online. Look at some YouTube videos, and see what the books are that you're most interested in. You'll probably feel uncomfortable talking with your daughter, most parents do. But, work through your discomfort and talk to your kids anyway. You'll be very glad someday that you did. It's a wonderful gift for your daughter.

**Question 16:**

Dr. Laura M.:

[00:55:00](#)

This mom is asking "From an early age, my daughter settled herself in her cot by rubbing her comforter between her legs, and she still does it a lot. She now goes to her bed to do it, because I told her she had to do it in private. Sometimes it's triggered by boredom, but never upset. And her mood really improves when she's done it. It could take her 20 or 30 minutes to calm herself down." So, it's such a funny thing. I'm remembering, Debra Haffner, who's a sexuality educator. She wrote this book called, *From Diapers to Dating*, and she has this line in it, about how you call your mom when your toddler, your baby starts to put his toes in his mouth. "Guess what mom? Matthew can put his toes in his mouth." But you never call your mom and say, "Guess what mom? Matthew's touching his penis now." You don't do it.

So, it's fine that children touch themselves. It's 110% normal, and what you say is, "I see you really like doing that. It feels good doesn't it? People don't touch their genitals in front of other people, because those are parts they keep private. You can do it in your room." And it sounds like this is what the person asking the question actually already did, which is great. And it's basically a rhythmic, self-soothing habit. It's a little bit like thumb sucking or hair twirling. I don't even really know that it's sexual in nature. A lot of people say it isn't. It's certainly not something you would ever want her to feel ashamed of. You want her to be body positive and sex positive. So, kids use these physical self-soothing habits often when they're stressed, or when they're falling asleep, or when they're bored.

I don't think it's something to worry about, but I would expand her repertoire so she has more awareness of what she's feeling, and more ways to help herself feel better. So, you could talk about when she feels stressed, or when she feels tired, what does she do that would be a tension releaser? What can help her? Maybe certain music she can put on to calm herself down. Or maybe she could work with you to make a little jar with glitter in it, that she can shake and watch settle. Or, she can ask you for a lullaby and a snuggle, or a back rub. Just come up with a list with her of things that she can do when she notices that she's feeling tense or whatever is sending her off to her room, when she's bored even. What could she do when she's bored, so that she does those things instead of going off to her room.

#### Question 17:

Parent:

[00:57:18](#)

My question is about my son, who's six years old, and he's developed this habit of masturbating frequently. And it's just such a hard thing for us, because we don't want to ... I like hearing all this talk that you've mentioned previously on the call about having agency over your body. And I don't want to shame him, and I don't want to make this punitive, but I also just don't want him to engage in this behavior so frequently. And we also have some religious beliefs against masturbation, which makes it difficult because we want to be able to support him and empathize, but we do really want him to curb this behavior. Especially since my younger son, who is two years old, is starting to imitate his brother's behavior, because he thinks it's funny and he wants to be like his big brother.

Dr. Laura M.:

Okay, I think we have two different questions here. Maybe even three. The first question is masturbation. The second question is masturbating in a place where other people can see you masturbating, including your two year old brother. And the third question is, the two year old copying him. Right? So we really have three questions here.

So, you didn't say this just now, but you did write me a note, when you submitted your question, and say that you've asked your son to refrain from masturbating and that if he feels like it, you want him to come and talk to you about it, and you'll help him with those urges. And that if you do catch him masturbating, you're going to eliminate privileges, you're going to punish him in other words. You're going to give him a consequence or take away privileges. So-

Parent:

So, since starting your course, we have eliminated that punishment aspect and we're just trying to talk through it with him.

Dr. Laura M.:

Okay. Okay, great. That's great, because I think by doing the punishment, you're turning it into a forbidden fruit.

Parent:

Right.

Dr. Laura M.:

Which basically asks him to repress those sexual feelings, and the sexual feelings are 100% normal. If we repress them, like any other feeling, they're no longer under conscious control and you already know what happens from this course, which is that those feelings burst out on their own. So, what happens then is, you have some minister getting arrested in a public bathroom for propositioning people, right, because he's been repressing

those feelings. That's an example of what happens when you try to repress normal sexual feeling. So, I'm really glad that he's not getting punished. So, let me ask you this. Does he come to you and say, "I feel like touching myself. Mom, dad, what do I do?" Has he ever done that?

Parent: He usually talks to us after he's done it, but not before.

Dr. Laura M.: Okay, and after he's done it, what do you say?

Parent: We just try to be non-judgemental and, "What made you feel like doing that?" And kind of open ended type questions, and suggesting things that maybe he could do when he feels that way.

Dr. Laura M.: Okay. So, obviously this is in the realm of your spiritual beliefs. I'm not your spiritual director or guide, but you have initiated a relationship with me in taking this course, and in asking this question on the call, of asking for me to give you the best possible advice as a child development expert. And I am going to give you that advice. And that advice is that, this specific religious belief is in direct opposition to normal human development and mental health. I actually think that when you try to eliminate masturbation, you're still giving your child a sense that there's something shameful and bad about it. If there weren't something shameful or bad, why should he have to try to do something else with those urges? Why should he have to come tell you afterwards, and you talk to him

So, I think even though you're not punishing him, there's still a message there, that there's something bad about masturbation. So, I think what will happen if you focus on this, is that it will become, as I said, forbidden fruit. It will become more and more important to him. It will take on

sort of major mental proportions in his life, and end ... Sometimes we create what we're most afraid of. That's a spiritual truth. And if you're focusing on this, you're ending up ... Your son has so many things to work on, developmentally speaking. He's only six. It's natural and normal for him to sometimes want to touch himself.

It's absolutely fine to talk about it, if he's doing it a lot, to talk about it as, "Huh, it seems like you want to touch yourself when you're feeling anxious. You know there are better ways to work on those feelings of being anxious, like laughing actually changes your body chemistry and makes you feel better. So whenever you feel anxious, and then that makes you want to touch yourself, tell me, 'Hey, I need to laugh,' and we'll laugh. And I think you'll find that you feel differently." So, it's fine to have that kind of a conversation, but if you're saying, "Don't do this, it's bad." Anything but that. You're shaming him, and that shapes his sexuality in a way that it's going to stay with him for the rest of his life.

So, I would say, I said there were two other parts to this. One is, it's not something he should be doing in front of his two year old brother, or anyone else. It's something he should be doing in private, and the way to talk about that is, "You know we've asked you not to touch yourself," and I don't know what words you use, maybe you say masturbate. "We've asked you not to masturbate. But, if you really feel like that's what you need to do, then it needs to be something you do in private with the door closed. Not in front of your brother or anyone else."

My concern is, how you back off from what you've already established with him, which is this shame. I'd love it if you could see your way to saying to him, "Most people try

masturbating sometimes. Most people. It's not such a terrible thing to do. We've talked to you about it, because our faith says that there are better ways to handle those feelings. But, Sweetheart, I don't want you to feel bad about yourself. I just want you to notice, and if there's another way that you can help yourself feel better in that moment, then try another way. And you can always talk to us about it." That will remove some of the shame, if he can always talk to you.

I know I'm asking a lot of you here. This is not what your spiritual teachings tell you, but I myself am a deeply spiritual person and I would just ask you to do some praying on this. Because, I think sometimes, I'll give you an example. Since you're in this course, you know that there are people who are very devout Christians who of course, believe that children should be hit to teach them obedience. There are other people who are very devout Christians who believe in peaceful parenting.

I mentioned Linda Knost, L.R. Knost. She is a great example. She has a big family, lot of children. She has written a number of books, including *Jesus, the Gentle Parent*. I love that book. And so, she doesn't, I don't think, talk about sexuality in her books. I don't think. But, she does have one on through the ages, I think it's called *Whispers Through Time*, where she talks about older kids, like teenagers. So, it may be in there, you could take a look at that book. But, I would just frame your issue about your son's sexual feelings this way. You know that hitting your child is not the best way to teach him, to be the parent, to grow into the man you want him to be. And there are people of faith who have written books about this, like Linda Knost who can help you to put that in the context of faith. I'm assuming you're Christian. If you're not then I

guess we'd have to find somebody in your faith. Are you Christian.

Parent:

Yes.

Dr. Laura M.:

You are, okay good. So, I would put it in those terms that obviously there are Christians who would say to you, "You need to be hitting your son. You need to be spanking your son." And there are other Christians who would say to you, "You don't need to do that. You can be a peaceful parent. That's what Jesus would do." I'm not your spiritual director, but I would say the same thing is true about sexuality. That there are devout Christians who would say to you, "Nobody should ever masturbate, and you need to teach your children it's wrong." But then there are devout Christians who would say, "You want to bring your children up to rejoice in the human body, that the sacredness of the human body, and yes, that does mean, it's a private thing. That does mean we don't let anybody touch us there until we're married. That does mean we wait until we're married." Maybe something that you want to teach your child. But, it doesn't necessarily mean that we teach our child that there's something bad about loving our bodies physically. So, what do you think?

Parent:

I appreciate that, you talking through it like that, and I guess my only followup question would be if you see a behavior as a psychologist, is a behavior like masturbation, can that become addictive?

Dr. Laura M.:

Only if you make a big deal out of it, and the child has already begun to use it as a central thing in their life. So, a six year old masturbating is nothing to be worried about.

Parent:

Okay.

Dr. Laura M.:

I mean, I think there are 15 year old boys who masturbate every day, and it does not become an addiction. You know what I mean? Once they're married, they're having sex. I'm not saying that married men don't masturbate, of course they do and it can be certainly part of a healthy sex life. I'm just saying, if you're worried about your son being addicted, I would not be worried about that at all in this point in his life, and I would say that what causes addiction, sexual addiction as well as other addictions, it's not that they enjoy the feeling. It's that they begin to focus on it inappropriately, and it takes on sort of larger proportions.

And I think, that's what I said about creating what we're most afraid of. If we make a big deal out of it, I think it's much more likely to be something where that's how he asserts his ... And when I say asserts himself, I actually mean asserts his integrity as a human being. It's like, "They're trying to make me not do this, when I feel that it's good for me. It feels good in my body, so I'm going to assert myself, assert my integrity as a human being, not let them push me around," and then it sort of gets all tangled up in this whole thing about being strong willed and asserting yourself, and it's not even really about the sex. But, of course, sex can become addictive, right? So, I think that's what you don't want to do, is to make it such a big thing. Does that makes sense?

Parent:

Thank you, I really appreciate ... Yes, it does make sense, and I just appreciate your perspective, so thank you so much.

Dr. Laura M.:

All right, you're so welcome.

**Question 18:**

Dr. Laura M.:

[01:09:21](#)

This mom says, "My three and a half year old son likes to bounce up and down on us with his clothes on, and what he says he's doing is, he likes how it feels in his penis, only he says, he calls it a pee-pee." So, first of all, I would call it a penis. I want to say this for everybody. It's not a pee-pee, it's a penis. Just like your daughter has a vulva. We need to empower our children by calling their body parts the right name. When we use words like pee-pee, it shames them. It'd be as if your child had the right name for every part of their body, except their elbow. And when they accidentally banged their elbow, they didn't have a word for that part of the body, and it was just your woo-hoo, your woo-woo. Your woo-hoo. If that's what your child thinks, then they would be like, "They don't have a name for that. Boy, there's something wrong with an elbow. It's a shameful part of my body." We don't want that.

So, first of all, let's remove all the shame from those body parts. Okay, that's the first thing. Second thing, empathize that it feels good. "That feels really good when you rub your penis, doesn't it? When you climb on top of me and rub your penis like that, it feels good. Sweetie, not okay to do. Penises are private. They're a very special part of your body. You know why? When you grow up, your penis is going to be how you have special love time with your wife, and you get to be a daddy, because of your penis. Yeah, like that book we read. When you grow up, your penis is going to be how you get to be a daddy, because the special seed for the baby comes out of your penis."

"And the reason it feels good is because, when you're a grown up, it's going to feel good to have that special love time with your wife, so you can be a daddy. That's why it

feels good, so that we'll all want to have that special love time and be daddies and mommies. That's how God," or nature, or whatever you want to say, "Designed us, so that there are all these new babies born and all these people. Isn't that great? But Sweetie, the penis is a very special part of your body that is only okay for you to touch, or someday when you're grown up, for you and your wife to touch. That's when you're going to touch it. So, you can touch it now in your bedroom, but you cannot rub it on other people, no matter what."

And the minute he starts doing it, you say, "Oops, you're rubbing. You want to feel good with us. Sweetie, do you want to go in your room right now to touch your penis, or do you want to play a different kind of roughhousing game with me?" And give him a choice. If he wants to go in his room and rub his penis, let him go for it. But, you're not going to be part of his rubbing himself. And he's only three and a half, so soon he's going to realize that this is not socially acceptable, and you say he doesn't do it in public which is great, that it's only usually when he's playing with you or when he's going to bed. So, I would just say, set the limit, over and over again, but be very open about it. "Oh, it looks like that feels good on your penis. Sweetie, if you want to rub your penis, you can go in your room in private, but we're not going to do that while we're playing. Or, do you want to play the laughing game?" And give him a choice.

Okay, and by the way this is very, very common for three year olds. Boys and girls both. I remember with some of my best friends, their daughter when she was three would be on the back seat when they were driving, and to soothe herself, she would just touch herself and just, it would go on and on and she would, that's what she would do. And

you know what? She grew up to be a perfectly normal, wonderful kid, and no problems around sex, and no obsessions and no issues. And I just want to say, it's fine for children to touch themselves. That to touch their penis or their vulva, that's great. Let them do it. But just be clear about where the boundaries are. They can be empowered to do it on their own.

### Question 19:

Dr. Laura M.:

[01:13:27](#)

This parent says, "My son plays exclusively with girls since her was very young." He might be gender atypical. "But lately," but he's very clear, he's a boy. "But lately, he's been excluded because the girls his age would rather play with the other girls." You know what? My godson was like this. Now, he in fact, is gay, my godson who's now 20 years old. And he in fact grew up to be gay. But, when he was young, he only wanted to play with the girls. And there came a point where they wouldn't play with him, and that was a really hard point. They start playing with them again when they get a little older. Not playing, but when you sit at lunch together and stuff, and he's allowed to sit with them and stuff. But that's a really, and by the way, he was never confused about being a boy. He always knew he was a boy. he simply was a boy who liked to play with girls, and then in the end, he grew up to be a boy who liked to hang out with girls, and also wanted to date boys.

I'm not saying, that your son will be like that, although he may be. And just for anyone else listening to this, children do not choose their gender preference, or even their gender identity. It is innate. From everything we know, it's innate. You can't change it. The only thing you can do is

shame them. It's our job to love our children in all the infinite variety in which they show up in our arms. So, a child who is gender non-conforming, they're our child, and they're not choosing to be that child anymore than they're choosing to have blue or brown eyes. That's just who they are.

So, I also want to say, there are many young children like four year old boys, who love to wear pink, or sparkly things, or high heels who are going to grow up to be perfectly gender conforming boys. Who are going to want to date girls, and who are going to love to hang out with boys. And that's fine, too. There's a wide range of what it's like -- as we relax our societal strictures on this -- There's a wide range of how people express their humanity. Both their identification, am I a boy or a girl, and what does that even mean? "When I'm a boy, then I'm very clear about that, but I want to wear pink and dresses," that's fine. And that'll change as he gets older. Or, gender preference which is, "I want to date boys" or "I want to date girls." But this child, he may not know yet who he wants to date. He just knows who he wants to hang out with, and be friends with. And right now, it's girls.

And so, I would say to his mom two things. One, make sure he has girls to play with. If you have to set up play dates with those girls outside of school, do it. Do whatever you have to do, to make sure he has some girls in his school who are friendly to him. That's the first thing. Secondly, talk to the teacher. Try to find a boy who's more like him. Not all the boys are into ninjas and heroes, and trucks, and whatever. Some of the boys are going to be more into things that he's into. And maybe it's that they're into playing games together, certain kinds of games. Board games and stuff, or card games. Or detective, they want to

be detective. Maybe there's a kid who's into playing pretend. There are boys who will play pretend, even if most of the boys are into heroes and ninjas.

Or maybe they'll play, you know legos is not necessarily a "rough game". Or PLAYMOBIL, and PLAYMOBIL's an example, but there are many ... And I know they're expensive, but there are many games like that, that allow boys to play pretend games without it necessarily being superhero kinds of things. So, I would say, just leave no stone unturned to find him friends, girls and boys. And look online for extra support, if your son is in fact gender atypical. There are a lot of parents working online to support each other, and if your child is not a usual child in this society, you need that kind of support. So, good luck to you.

### Question 19:

Dr. Laura M.:

[01:17:28](#)

Here's a question from a grandparent. "What's your take on that new parenting style that encourages girls to be tough?" I'm not exactly sure what she means. We've had our long standing sexist approach to child raising in the United States, at least where we tried to toughen boys up, and I think that's been terrible for them. I think it closes off their vulnerability and their hearts and when you stuff your vulnerability, it makes you tend to be angry, which a lot of men in our culture are, and it makes you not as able to be compassionate to others. So, I love that parents are, many parents are trying to raise boys who are more compassionate, and who are willing to be vulnerable.

So, about girls, I think it is fantastic that many parents are encouraging girls to claim their power, because when girls are compliant, they end up not being able to defend themselves, or to get what they want in life. So, there's a lot of research on how girls in work situations are not able to stand up for themselves often, and certainly in situations where they had inappropriate pressure put on them by bosses or colleagues, sexual pressure. Or been groped, which of course is a big thing in the news right now. So, I think it's fantastic that we're encouraging all children to both stand up for themselves, and to be in touch with their own integrity and their heart, and to keep their heart open, to not have to shut down. So, I'm not a fan of toughness for girls or for boys. I don't think it serves any of us, and I don't think you have to be tough to be strong and to stand up for yourself. So, I hope that answers your question, and I love that you're so involved in your grandchildren's lives.

#### Question 20:

Dr. Laura M.:

[01:19:20](#)

This mom is asking about respecting boundaries with video games. "Our nine year old does not respect those boundaries, and we're seeing a therapist that says we should do the one, two, three approach." So, one, two, three is a threat that you use, because it's one, two, and then three. And three, something's going to happen. Or, what would be the point of counting. So, I'm not a fan of one, two, three for that reason, and I find that it stops working usually. It might work in the beginning. And the reason it stops working is that you have to follow through, and what you're following through with is punishment, and that erodes your relationship and you're back to all

the same problems as when you use punishment for anything.

So, I would start to talk repair instead of punishment. If you're using one, two, three in your work with his therapist, I would tell the therapist you don't want to use it with punishments, you want to work with repair. That the child then has to do some sort of repair for the thing that they have done wrong, whatever that is. And I want to add about screens, they're addictive. You can't really expect kids to respect boundaries about video games, unless they have a really good support framework. So, I would reframe this. Your children are not observing the agreed upon time limits. That's showing you, they can't handle this responsibility themselves, because screens are addictive.

You need a written agreement about those limits that includes provisions for what you can do if they don't observe the limits, and it may be that if they can't observe the limits during the week, there are no video games during the week. Only from now on, on Saturday mornings, or Sunday mornings, or whatever you want to decide. This will take a lot of discussion but you have a therapist to help you have that discussion, so that's good, and it will take a lot of reminders in the moment, and you're just going to have to keep your sense of humor about that.

#### **Question 21:**

Dr. Laura M.:

[01:21:11](#)

This is a question about how to heal any possible harm that early TV caused, and I would just say, you can't

change their prior brain development, but the brain is still developing, right? So, it will keep developing based on current circumstance, which if it's not including screens, that's great. And addiction is healed by the child finding other ways to entertain themselves, and the experience of being creative on their own, and preventive maintenance clears up the emotional baggage. I don't think you probably have to worry about damage from TV. She's asking if any TV shows are beneficial like Sesame Street. Sesame Street actually has shown to be harmful. It has a lot of quick cuts, which causes children to be more distracted and distractible. It's not good for their brain development. So, Sesame Street's actually bad for kids. Anything that has quick cuts is bad for kids. I think the old Mr. Rogers show, what was his show called? That one, it has no quick cuts, so that's an example of a kind of show that might actually be beneficial. But, I haven't seen research about that.

And she's asking about family movie nights. Well, so family movie nights are not every night. So, you're not getting kids addicted to them. You're not affecting their brain development. Movies can be very scary to kids. I would never take kids to movies, out while they're little. Even if the movies are rated G. G-rated movies can be very scary for a toddler. But when kids get older and they're not scared by it, that's totally fine. And you're not changing their brain development, so then it's totally fine to take them to movies. But, I would wait until the movies are not scary, for sure. And that means longer than you think. That means seven in my book. You don't need to take kids to movies when they're little, unless they're dying to go, and you think they can handle the movie.

### Question 22:

Dr. Laura M.:

[01:22:55](#)

This mom asked how I raised my kids without media, and she asked for specific details. My children didn't really challenge the no media rule. So, I just set the rule when they were little. We didn't watch TV. We did watch movies. We did watch family movies, but we didn't watch TV. And I was lucky. You didn't have screens that they could watch TV on, or play games on, every single place the kid turned around, right? So, if I had children today, young children, I probably would let them ... You have an iPad or a phone in their hands at some points, that would otherwise be difficult. On a car trip, on an airplane. Maybe even at dinner in a restaurant at times, after we had some family time, or maybe before the food came. And then when the food came, they had to put it away or whatever.

So, I wouldn't necessarily do it exactly as I did it in today's world. But I would say, my daughter did at the age of nine come to me and say, "I'm left out at school. Everybody else knows the names of TV shows, or they watch TV shows. During dodge ball, I can say the names of all the presidents and I can say names of any book, all the books. But, I can't say the names of any TV shows so they always get me out." There's some special game they play, where they as they play dodge ball, they throw, they have to yell the name of whatever the category is. So, she could answer everything except TV. So she would lose. So, I said, "No problem. You can watch TV. Anything you want to record during the week you can, that's age appropriate, and you can watch it on the weekend, as much as you want. After your homework's done." She was nine, so that's what she did.

And after a few months she said to me, "This is really boring. It's really not that interesting. I'd rather read a book." And so she did and that was that. Now, she wasn't

screen free throughout high school. She did watch TV during high school, but again, not during the week because she had a lot of homework. She was allowed to watch TV on weekends after homework was done. And I think that could just be a family rule, and there was no pushback about that. This is just what we do in our family. I think our children knew they had a really unusual family where they were treated better than many children they knew and listened to more. And they loved our family dynamic and the great discussions we would have, and the way I would read to them constantly. So, I think they really got that there were trade offs. They didn't get screens, but they got other good things.

But, they weren't completely screen free later. My son actually discovered a particular game, Civilization, that he loved when he was 14. And he actually joined a team, an international team where he was the idea guy. One of the idea guys who came up with modifications for the game. So, most of that was not actually playing the game. It was coming up with modifications for the mod, and he was part of a, sort of an online team that exchanged ideas.

But, I guess what I'm trying to say is, by the time they're teenagers, they're online all the time. They're doing homework, they're online. But because my children had not used screens early, in the first six years not at all, and between six and 12 very moderately. Very moderately. They did not have an addiction in the same way. And reading became very ingrained, so they were kids who got perfect scores on the verbal anything of anything, because they read constantly. And so, I think if you're asking about this, you don't have to do it just like my family. But, I think that's how you get kids to that point where, it's they have to value the reading and the other things they do. I mean,

my son played soccer. My daughter did music. So they have to have other things they do, too, besides screens.

So, I think the other thing I would say about screens is, I talk to my kids about the fact that corporations were trying to use them. I mean, this is true of every online screen. What's the product of Facebook? It's not the Facebook page. It's you, every one of us who's on Facebook gets sold to advertisers who pay billions of dollars for us annually. You're the product. Same thing of every TV ad. We're the real product of TV. And when my children understood that, they were like, "Wow, I don't want corporations to make money off of me." It's the same thing you talk to them about, about junk food. Corporations are manipulating you. That's the most effective way, research shows, to get kids to not be taken in by junk food, right?

And finally you asked how do they get the role modeling to not be into screens? The answer is, they get it from you. It doesn't matter that their peers may be doing something different. I never turned on a TV when my children were young. I actually didn't know how to turn it on. We only used it for movies. And so, my kids didn't see that one of the things you would do is watch TV, as a way to be in the world.

### Question 23:

Dr. Laura M.:

[01:27:49](#)

This mom says "When my child is frustrated because I'm following through on something I said, she'll sometimes

get physical, pinching, hitting, kicking." Okay, so she's six. It sounds like you're saying that you're escalating something, because you're saying, "When you follow through on something." Maybe you're escalating the situation by "following through?" So, the way you do this is you always start by empathizing. You wish you didn't have to turn off the TV, "I understand, it's so hard to stop watching. I feel the same way when I'm watching something. But it is time to turn it off now, sweetie. You have a choice. You can turn it off yourself, or if that's too hard for you, I can turn it off. You can show me. If you're ready, if you can turn it off yourself, go ahead. Otherwise, I'm going to turn it off."

Now, following through and turning it off is escalating the situation, but at least you've offered her a choice, right? And you say to her, "This is going to be really upsetting, because I'm turning off the TV. We're going to start by turning it down. We're going to start by standing up. You're going to stand up and I'm going to stand up, and we're going to jump up in the air with our arms up." Because it really helps to move away from the TV set by having something physical to do. You can notice, getting up and moving helps us shift our attention away from a screen. Kids need a routine to let go of their screens, usually, and if she doesn't have a regular routine that involves something physical that she always does, like run up and down the stairs once, or race you across the room, then she needs that.

I would also, of course, if she does lash out at you, you're verbally acknowledging her upset. So, if she does jump at you to kick you or something, "Ouch. No hurting. You are so upset about this and you can tell me how upset you are, without attacking me. No hurting. Tell me what you want."

And she's going to say, "What I want is to watch the rest of my show." And you'll say, "I know, it is so hard." But by now, the TV is off. When the child is having a very hard time with the TV going off, that's the definitive moment where she's going to lash out, so you want to stand back from her. But also, once you've turned it off and you're empathizing, she's not likely to then lash out at you.

Finally, you talk to her when the TV's off. So, you talk to her about the fact that screens are an addiction. If she can't handle turning it off, then your family might need a break from TV, until her brain gets a little more mature and she can handle this. You're not threatening her, and this isn't about a bribe. She's not the one making the decision here. You say, "I make the decision, daddy and I make the decision," or, "My partner and I make the decision." But if we see that you're not able to handle turning off the TV yet, because that's what TV usage is, you have to be able to turn it off, then we're going to need to make the decision, you're not ready for it." And honestly, in my opinion, that's the right decision.

#### Question 24:

Dr. Laura M.:

[01:30:50](#)

This mom is saying their nine year old, as soon as there's a rule he doesn't like, he lashes out. And in his opinion, he's always the victim. So, that's interesting. It's the behavior of someone who feels he's being unfairly treated. So, it sounds like he needs more connection, so he's motivated to cooperate with these things, but it also sounds like you need to understand why he thinks he's the victim, right? Like what would make him think you're being unfair to him? And I'm wondering if there's something in the past

that he took offense at, that he felt like you were unfair. Something's going on here, that it would be good for you to know about, and to let him talk to you about how he feels like life is unfair because you're asking him to do his homework, or whatever it is. He sounds to me like the profile of the explosive child that Ross Greene talks about in his book.

Ross Greene's book does not really give you great answers about how to deal with the child's upsets. I think the answers I'm giving you are more effective to deal with the child's upsets. But, I like Ross Greene's book a lot because he normalizes the child's explosiveness as a brain delay, that the kid's going to be better, that he's going to get a handle on. And I think that's very useful. What he says is that the kid can't control himself. I would just say, the more you can realize what his triggers are, transitions are really hard for him, it sounds like, and you can really help him through these hard times, and talk to him about it. "Every day when we talk about homework, you don't want to do the homework." See what kinds of solutions you can come up with at a time when he is cooperative, because you said he's cooperative other times. And by the way, it seems like a lot of this is because of the iPad. He doesn't want to do his homework. He wants to play the iPad. Many children, including nine year olds, cannot handle iPads. They just can't.

Victoria Dunckley's book, *Reset Your Child's Brain* is a great resource on this. If your child has a hard time letting go of screens, which most kids do, which most of us do, frankly, there are ways you can help your child put down a screen and do something else. Like always have a little ritual at the end of it that's a physical ritual where she does a physical thing like put on music and dance, or run around

the house three times, or have a hug or a tickle session, or not really tickles but you know what I'm saying, where you are the big bad witch coming to get her or something. So, those kinds of transitions can really help. But, if you have a child that has tantrums often when they have to stop using technology, they should not use technology. It really is not good for children's brains to have that constant hit of dopamine that games has. And so, just be aware that, that could be the answer to your problem.

### Question 25:

Dr. Laura M.:

[01:33:38](#)

This parent asks, "When screen time is over, our son is angry and physically bullies his sister because he's bored, and it's 'fun'. We try to connect over non-screen activities, but he refuses. Says screen time is all he has to live for, all he likes. He throws tantrums if he doesn't get a minimum amount. If we take it away, he'll perceive it as punitive and will bully more often. If we eliminate screens, what should we replace screen time with? Will professional help stigmatize him? He's nine years old." I would tell your son that since he's not able to handle screen time without tantrums and bullying, he's not ready for it yet. And yes, I would take it away. Before that, though, please read the book, *Reset Your Child's Brain* by Victoria Dunckley. She describes this kind of response of aggression and tantrums, and how to talk with your child about taking a break from screens.

What to replace screen time with? Kids who've never done anything but screens do need time to develop other interests before they can keep busy. So, expect to spend much more time interacting with your son. And while he's

angry about losing his screens, don't let him be alone with his sister, so you can protect her. But, there are lots of ideas online, if you google screen-free activities. And if you keep him away from screens for a month, I think you'll see your son change and mature. And even, connect more with his sister. And now is the time to do this. Don't wait until he's older when you really can't control his screen usage. Help him recover a life beyond this addiction while you can. Sure, he will eventually be back on screens again, but before that, you can help him develop a self that is more able to handle screens, without them becoming an addiction.

I don't think your son needs professional help. But, if he does, no it will not stigmatize him to get it. What will stigmatize him is having no social skills, or ability to connect with other people, or being aggressive to people because he feels uncomfortable inside himself. This is an addiction. We are engaged in this experiment in this country, and really much of the world, where we are allowing children whose brains are still developing to engage with technology in an unprecedented way. And it is shaping their brains and causing addiction. So, you're being a responsible parent to recognize that your son can't handle screens, and to help him find a way to learn to manage himself in relationship to them.

#### Question 26:

Dr. Laura M.:

[01:36:14](#)

Our next question says "Dr. Laura, thank you for your work. The peaceful parent philosophy just makes sense.

Unfortunately, not everyone sees it that way. We live in Spain where children are in some ways held in high regard, but when it comes to discipline, it is a traditional punitive culture with threats, rewards, and scare tactics. We are often at odds or stepping in to repair where my in-laws or others, sometimes even strangers on the street treat my kids in ways I wouldn't. Will our peaceful parenting be enough for our children?"

Well, your peaceful parenting will be a lot better than if your children didn't have your peaceful parenting. And yes, what happens at home is always more important than what happens in the world. I guess your in-laws will have a fairly large impact on your kids, but not nearly as large an impact as you will, and your partner. So, I think the important thing is to begin talking with your kids about the way you parent, versus the way they see other people parent. Your child is now four, your oldest, and you can absolutely begin to have those discussions. So, for instance, "That little girl is crying. I wonder why? Her parents are speaking very sternly to her, aren't they? They sound very angry. I wonder how she feels."

Or, closer to home, if it's your own in-laws that have spoken to your children sternly, you can say, "That's the way they grew up. That's the way they were treated. And they assume that's the right way to parent. What do you think? Does it make you feel better when they treat you that way? Would there be a better way for them to have said that to you? It sounds like it hurt your feelings when your abuela said that to you. What could you say to her next time?"

**Question 27:**

Dr. Laura M.:

[01:38:18](#)

And that's a great segue into our next question "At what age is it appropriate for children to politely stand up for themselves to adults, in situations outside our home, where shaming or harsh discipline might be used? For instance, 'Please don't yell at me.' My father was very authoritarian, and if I had the audacity to say that to him, when I was being yelled at as a kid, that would have enraged him further, and made things much worse. I want our boys to grow up with self-confidence and assertiveness, but also calm and diplomatic." I don't think there's a particular age. I think as we raise our children to express what they need and want without attacking the other person, they learn to self-advocate. As we listen to them, they learn to self-advocate. And as we treat them with respect, they learn respect.

And then, as you notice what's going on in situations with adults outside your home, and you talk with your children about it, they learn to articulate how it makes them feel and you can role play with them what they might have said. And at some point, they will feel brave enough to say something like, "Please don't yell at me. I'm not yelling at you. And I can hear you without you yelling at me. I'm listening to everything you're saying." That reassures the adult that they are being heard, so that they don't need to escalate. And it does it without shaming the adult.

But, I think the best way to teach that is to discuss it with your kids and role model, and play out scenarios. What would be appropriate for them to say in a given instance with a grandfather, or a teacher, or a police officer. That's a whole different thing, right? You wouldn't want your child challenging a police officer, I don't think ever. And

that's an important discussion to have. So, I think these are the kinds of discussions we have with kids growing up all the time, where we talk about their feelings, and how people in the world resolve problems.

And what's the best way to do that? And what could they say to advocate for themselves in a peaceful way that accords respect to the other person? And they get better and better at articulating their position, and more and more diplomatic as they get older. But even a four year old can say to an adult, "Please don't yell at me. I'm listening to you." So, it's not so much our giving them permission at a certain age, but teaching them how throughout their childhood and helping them get better at it.

#### Question 28:

Dr. Laura M.:

[01:40:41](#)

Our next question is saying, "My husband and I would like to start to have family meetings, and talk about chores, rules, et cetera. How best to get kids to participate? How many rules? What are good chores for different ages? Our five year old wants everything to be fair, but we expect more from him than his sister, as she's only two." So, first of all, I love that you're going to have family meetings. Secondly, it is not a good place for discipline, and it needs to be fun. If your children think family meetings are all about chores and rules, they won't want to be there. So, I do advise you to read my article on family meetings. It's on the Aha! Parenting website. Just put the words "family meeting" into the search box. That article has a lot of info, including how to introduce the idea to your children.

But, one important idea when you first bring this up, is to talk about how, in this meeting, kids are allowed to bring up things that bother them. Don't start by initiating chores, or even rules. Start by saying, "People are allowed to bring up things that bother them" and you'll either solve them at this meeting, or you'll solve them at future family meetings. Make sure you have something fun, like pizza or ice cream sundaes at the meeting. Make sure you begin with appreciations of each other. Make sure you end with "looking forward tos." You can find all of this on the Aha! Parenting website, in the article on family meetings.

After appreciations, you might say, "Okay, does anybody have anything they want to talk about?" Now maybe one of your kids will say, "I want to talk about why can't we have pizza more often for dinner." And then you'll have a real discussion about it. Or, maybe your son will say, "I think you're not fair. I think you treat my sister better than me." And then you want to really listen to that, and then you can say, "So you think that even though you're different ages, your sister and you should have the same exact bedtime? The same exact toys, the same exact chores, et cetera? I'll tell you what we think. We think that you and your sister are different. Different ages and different people. So, we think you have different responsibilities, but also different privileges. Like, you get to go to bed later, right? And kids usually do appreciate that they get different privileges and that makes it more palatable to have different responsibilities.

What if your kids don't bring anything up at that meeting? That's fine. You say, "We've been thinking that in our family, we should have a family motto. Something like, together we can do hard things, or kindness comes first. Or, we never give up, or we clean up our own messes and

we make the world a better place." So, once you say this to your kids, you then say, "What should our family motto be? Let's write our ideas down." And they love doing this, and you write down a bunch of ideas. Some of them will be totally silly. That's fine. That's great. It gets everybody laughing, which is really great, and this is a bonding exercise. So, laughter is perfect for bonding. You don't have to decide at this first meeting what your family motto is. But, it's a great way to start family meetings.

Then, next time, everybody comes to the meeting with some history of, "We're a family that enjoys each other, and enjoys talking about how we relate to each other." And in that second meeting, you can start talking about your ideas for rules. And again, write them all down in general. I like to encourage people to keep their rules simple, short, and only a few. But, you can talk about how different practices fit into those rules. So, if be kind is your first rule, or "Kindness first always" is your first rule, then under it would be, well, is it kind to tease someone or call them names? No. Is it kind to help someone when they're hurt? Always. So, in our family, we express what we need and want without attacking the other person, and when somebody's hurt or needs help, we always help. Those would be all under that first rule of "Be kind."

So, as you can see, chores are way down on the list, and my feeling about chores is, you don't just assign someone chores. You talk about what it takes to help a family run smoothly. And everybody gives according to their abilities. So, parents have a job, so they bring money in, and the money is used to buy food, so everybody can eat. Parents are strong enough to do things like mow the lawn, or open a window that kids can't do. But, what can kids do to help? Kids can put away their own toys. Kids can bring their

dishes to the sink. Kids can stand at the sink on a stool, and help wash dishes. Kids can also stand on a safety stool and help make dinner. But, only a five year old. A two year old not so much, right? There are things he's able to do, that she's not. It's a privilege, not a burden, and I think that's the most important thing to keep in mind as you're introducing the idea of chores.

Chores sounds awful to all of us. That's not what you want your child to get out of this. You want your child to see it as a way to contribute and have value and meaning. And all kids want to contribute to the family. So, it's fine to introduce the idea of chores at a family meeting. But before you do so, please read up on the Aha! Parenting website about chores. Because, you want this to be a positive thing. You don't want to set up power struggles.

Dr. Laura M.:

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And that's all our questions for today. Thank you for listening, and I hope this was helpful. If you still have a burning question that wasn't answered on this audio, please submit it for possible inclusion on my podcast. Just go to [ahaparenting.com/podcast](http://ahaparenting.com/podcast). So, [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.