

## Siblings with a Baby Q and A with Dr. Markham

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:00:00

Hello, this is Dr. Laura Markham. In this audio, I'll be answering some of the most common questions that parents ask about siblings when the younger child is a baby or up to age two. 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.

### General Notes on Siblings

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:00:43

The biggest question parents usually have is, okay, well, we didn't handle it very well when the baby was born and now we have an angry older child and a toddler. What do we do now? The answer is, you help the older child with their (emotional) backpack, and you give them one-on-one attention, and you help them to believe that you could never love anyone else more than you love them.

If you can do that, they don't need to be jealous of their sibling. But there really is substantial backpack emptying to do.

I guess I would just encourage you, if you've taken this course, and you've really applied the ideas, and you've seen improvement in your home, but you still have sibling issues, they take longer to heal. They do. They take longer to heal because it's a relationship between two other people. So you're influencing each person, but you're one step away from the relationship, one step removed. So don't give up. Keep using what you've learned in this course. Keep applying it every day to each of your children and you will see the sibling issues start to melt away.

### Question 1:

Parent: 00:01:45 I have a six-year-old boy, almost-five-year-old boy, and a one-year-old baby. The oldest two are very spirited, energetic, loud, talkative, emotional. My question is because when they get in a disagreement because I'm trying to go through how that made you feel when your brother hit you and he stole his toy, you know? When we try and work through that, what invariably happens is one kid storms off, or one gets distracted, or they just start talking about something else. I feel like I'm kind of just trying to pull them back to the couch, you know trying to ...

Dr. Laura Markham: Yes, yes. You're not alone in this. I've heard this from other people.

Parent: Okay.

Dr. Laura Markham: So, I get it, that the scripts that I have, like in my sibling book, are long, and they're long for a reason, which is to try to help you deal with different eventualities and work out different things that come up. But mostly in real life you're not actually talking for that long. And mostly, also, you're listening to them.

Dr. Laura Markham: So when they have a fight, one of them might storm off. Then you can't work it out at that point with that kid who just stormed off. What I would do is I would listen to the other kid to start with, right? You don't have to put them together. You can do this separately and help them each separately. So your six-year-old storms off because, once again, the five-year-old has ruined something. And the five-year-old's upset and he's standing there. You're not trying to bring the six-year-old back to talk to him at that moment. You're saying to the five-year-old, "Oh my goodness. You were both so upset. Tell me about it." And then the five-year-old tells you about it. And then you say, "Wow. No wonder you were upset, five-year-old. Wow. You really wanted to X, and your brother did Y. You were

so upset at him, and then he said this, and that really hurt your feelings, huh, five-year-old?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now, at this point, if the five-year-old is feeling really understood, he's not going to get distracted. He's probably going to really want to hear what you're saying. But the six-year-old may burst back into the room saying, "You didn't hear. Listen to me about it," in which case then you will either talk to him by himself or you'll talk to both of them together. But when you're listening to one child, they usually don't get distracted. They're usually totally with you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I would say that's the answer to the first part of your question about the storming off. If both of the kids are there and you're trying to talk to them about it and help them to listen to each other and one of them gets distracted, you can say, "Seems like you're done with this discussion. You really want to talk about X, Y, Z and not talk about this. I hear you. And do you feel finished with the discussion, Sweetheart? Okay. So you both feel better about this now? Is everything good? What can you two do to make this all better between you? Brother hug? Okay." Brother handshake, whatever it is, right? And then they move on, and that's fine. You do not have to have worked the whole thing out if they're done with it, right?

Dr. Laura Markham:

But unless you think there's something important that one of the kids broke or both of the kids broke a house rule, in which case you say, "We're almost done. But first, what are our house rules? That's right. Be kind. My body, my choice." That's the basic consent rule, right? "And mom and dad are in charge. Those are our three house rules, right? Okay. Did this fit the be kind rule? Did this fit the my body, my choice rule? No. That's right. There was a lot of pushing going on. Next time you feel like pushing, what can you do instead?" So you are actually keeping them enrolled to talk about a house rule, and that would be the only reason that you'd need to do it if they're done with the discussion and ready to move on. I hope that's helpful.

## Question 2:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:05:35

“Our four-year-old really seems to struggle with us talking to him when he breaks our limits. He walks away, covers his ears, hums, and sometimes just yells. Usually this is about him hurting his younger sister, who's two. When we encourage her to tell him something that she doesn't like, something he did, he just yells, "Awwkk!" back at her.”

All right, so it sounds awful, right? The kid's being impossible, I hear you. It's because he is ashamed. That's what this is. If you keep doing what you've been doing, you will keep getting the results you're getting. So I think it's time to do something a little bit different. Let's think about how you could respond differently to get different results from him.

let's look at it from his perspective. We don't really know why he's lashing out at his sister, although most of the time he can tell you his reason and he'll think it's a good reason. Even if we don't think it's a good reason, he'll think it's a good reason.

So when you go to talk to him about what he did wrong, let's think about how he's experiencing that. He's showing you all the classic signs of shame, trying to tune you out, because he finds what you're saying to be unbearable. We all think we need to reprimand our kids when they hit so they won't do it again, but he knows that hitting isn't okay. Reprimanding him isn't working. He's just feeling that intense shame, which convinces him that he's a terrible person so he keeps acting like a terrible person and nothing changes.

So we have to change what we're doing as the adults if we want to change what he's doing. Don't assume that any words after the fact will help at all. The only thing that will help is helping him with his feelings.

So you need to do prevention, so you don't end up in the breakdown lane. If you could empty that full backpack, he wouldn't be hurting his sister all the time. That means all the usual tools — laughter, tears, daily special time with the other sister. If you're not doing those, you can't assume that anything you say after the fact would make a difference in his hitting.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But he also needs a lot of talking. The talking is not your telling him not to hit. The talking is **him** talking to you about how much he resents his sister. He's having a hard time with his sister. So does he talk to you about that? And if he does, how do you respond? You want to say something like, "That must be so hard for you when she does that." And then you want to elaborate on, to open the door. Like, "And also it must also be so hard for you when she does this, that, and the other thing. Sometimes it's really hard to have a little sister, especially having to share everything. You're even to have to share your parents, right?"

So notice that you've gone above and beyond to understand him, and he's like, "Wow, they really do get it," and it validates how he's feeling, and he starts to actually offload that stuff and tell you about it. If he does that, bingo, he'll stop hitting her.

If the hitting is a frequent occurrence, you need to assume it's going to keep happening until you help him with the emotions. You can't just feel something you say after the hitting will make a difference, because it won't. It hasn't so far, right? So I would say your daughter deserves to be protected. You can't just hope he's not going to hurt her. He's going to hurt her until you help him with his feelings, and that could take a month. A month of intense talking about how hard his life is for him and helping him to laugh and cry.

You have to really keep the kids separated during this time until you see something different is happening with them. What you'll see is he's less tightly wound and he's more affectionate with her, and you'll see it start to change.

You're still wondering, "Well what do I do in the moment when he hits her?" Okay, well you're already in the breakdown lane. At that moment, there's nothing you can say that's going to teach him not to hit her. Nothing. You're only talking to him to make yourself feel better, so don't do it. It's going to make things worse, because the minute you crack down on him, he is reinforced in his belief that you love her but not him, and you're creating the next hitting incident.

I know parents say, "I just couldn't help yelling at him." Okay, then you couldn't help it that you triggered your child to hit his sister another time next month. That's what it's about. You have to control yourself and not yell at him when he hits her. You absolutely jump in to protect her. You try to keep them apart. If he hits her anyway, it's because we, the adults, fell down on the job and we weren't there to help. So you immediately jump in, and you would help her and you ignore him. That's the first thing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then after you are calm, then you go sit with them and you commiserate about how hard that must've been and you get them talking and crying just like I just described. I guarantee you, he's not going to be covering his ears and humming. He will finally feel seen and heard. He will want to talk to you because he gets to talk and you're saying, "Oh my goodness. Oh, no wonder. Oh, no wonder you're upset. Oh, my poor darling." Rage only dissolves once it feels heard. If you can dissolve the rage, the hitting will stop. I've seen this in hundreds of families. It does stop and it all comes from your connection with him and your helping them work through these feelings.

Now, the first few times you do this, it could take an hour before he feels better. Once he does feel better, when he feels like there's true affection between you, then you ruffle his hair and you say, "You know, your sister really looks up to you. You're the big brother. It's a big brother's job to protect the younger sibling and keep them safe. I think she was scared when you hurt her. I wonder how you can help her feel better and make things better between you."

It's possible he'll still be too angry and he'll say, "I don't care." Then you know you have a lot more work to do and if he says that, you can say, "Oh Sweetheart, I know how much you do care. I think you feel really terrible you hit her and you'd like to make it better but you don't know how. It's okay. You want some ideas on how to make it better? You'll figure something out, I know." He probably will do something nice, so really be watching. And even if he doesn't announce it to you, go over and say, "I saw what you did to make things better with your sister. I saw you go over and pet her hair," or whatever he did, or help her with that thing. "I am so impressed."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now, I don't think he's going to say he doesn't care. I think he's going to come up with ideas. "I could let her play with me, I could hug her, I could read her a story." At that point, whether he tells you what he's going to do or just goes and does it, he has started to redeem himself and he'll have started to turn this around so he doesn't hit her.

You said that when you encourage your little one to say to her big brother that she didn't like it when he hits her, you know that's what I coach and I think that's great you do that. But for right now, it's provoking a verbal attack because you haven't helped him with the feeling. He's not at a place where he can say, "I hear you. I'm sorry I hit you," or whatever. Or, "I won't hit you if you just stop touching my things," or whatever, which is a good response. I think you can't really use this coaching thing right now. You can listen to her, she can tell you how she feels, and you can empathize with her. But I don't think that you can expect him, in the shape he's in now, to actually hear her and it's not fair to her to get a verbal attack when she expresses herself.

### Question 3:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:13:19

This parent has three boys under the age of four. You're a saint. The older two boys, the three-year-old and the two-year-old, fight over everything, even if they have two of the same toy. She also says, "We don't get to spend a lot

of one-on-one time with them." I'm sorry to say, this is a little bit like saying to a doctor your child has an infection but you don't have the ability to do antibiotics because you can't make time for the antibiotics.

Dr. Laura Markham:

When you have the three-year-old and the two-year-old, you can expect sibling rivalry and you can expect fighting over toys. When you add a baby, you can expect more of the same. The single best cure for sibling rivalry is special time. I'm going to say: Sensory bags! Use lots of duct tape. Books on audio. The three-year-old can listen to headphones. I also want to say, connection is never just about special time. Connection is about what you do all day long every day. So, empathizing really, really helps, and validating and recognizing the kids really helps. Roughhousing really helps.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And then finally, this is normal behavior. Two- and three-year-olds are going to fight. They don't yet know how to work things out with each other. You can't stop the fighting. What you can do is coach them so they can work things out in words rather than physically. My sibling book, that's what it's designed to do. That's what it gives you the ammo for. There are a lot of words in my sibling book, it is true, but it will give you the words to begin using with them now so that as time goes on, the kids can less and less rely on their fists and more and more rely on their words. You'll be amazed. I mean, it seems impossible that they would say things like, "I was using that toy. Would you give it back, please?" But they do. When you model and you teach, that's what they learn to do because that's what they think is the way humans relate. Isn't that an amazing world to have them grow up in, and to have them therefore create with everyone they interact with for the rest of their lives?

#### Question 4:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:15:21

There's a question here about a new baby and a three-year-old who is very angry at the mom. That's good. At least he's angry at mom instead of the three-year-old.

That's actually better, believe it or not. It's a step advanced. You're worried about connecting with him because you say that when you try to have connection time with him he thinks you can never do anything right. Great. He's just furious at you. So when you have connection time with him and he shouts at you that you didn't do the right thing in special time, what you say is, "Oh, Sweetie. You are so mad at me. I can't do anything right. You told me to do it this way with the train track, and then I did it the wrong way. Is that what happened? It seems like I'm not doing anything right and you're so upset at me. We're having such a hard time right now. "

Dr. Laura Markham:

You're saying that he won't laugh or do roughhousing with you. He's refusing connection with you. So use the time you have to do something to connect with him, anything, and really if you need to have your partner involved to do special time with him and rough housing, great. You need to find a way to break through with him and get him to let you in emotionally. Don't give up on that. Lovingly hold him if you need to, but lovingly help him to cry. And you say that when you did that, when he cried a lot and finally calmed down and then was a bit more loving afterward and accepted your cuddles. But I do think that you need to start building trust again, and the way to do it is what you say to him and constantly reaching out to him. Then expect a huge meltdown where he starts in anger but he begins to cry.

Don't worry about the way he talks to you, right? Now you said, "When do I tell him he's not allowed to talk to me that way or not to throw things?" I mean, don't worry about it. In the moment, if he throws something, that's a safety issue. You stop it, and you set a limit about throwing. But "talking to you this way", it's as if you had done something that your husband experienced, your partner experienced as a huge betrayal, it's as if you went and had an affair and then your husband yelled at you about it and was rude to you. Well, of course. You're not going to say to your husband, "Don't speak to me rudely." You're going to say, "I see how hurt you are." That's what's happening here.

You went and had another baby. Your three-year-old is really hurt about it. It's like the worst breakup anyone's ever been through by a factor of a thousand because he's only three. So of course he's rude to you, right? Don't worry about that. Once you reconnect with him, that rudeness will melt away.

### Question 5:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:18:01

This parent describes, "My two years and nine month old has my full attention while my 11 month old is off exploring quietly out of sight, but then the older one takes off running, seeking the baby, grabs him by the face, shoves him to the ground, smothering him, poking his eyes, pulling his face. The baby cries and my almost three-year-old walks away. This is the whole reason I started this program and it's only six-eighths better. How is this not an emergency for my little one? How do I empathize if my older child doesn't give me anything to empathize with? The baby didn't even take a toy or make a noise or anything."

Oh, this is so upsetting. Your poor 11 month old! But let's look at it this way. Your two-year-old, and I know you keep referring to him in your note to me as three or almost three, but he is two years and nine months so he's still a two-year-old. I think that's important to recognize because no matter how big he looks next to your 11 month old, he's a pretty little guy himself. He's not a grownup. He's a two-year-old and we need to remember that so we understand, A, What he's going through, and B, What he's capable of.

So let's look at it this way. Your two-year-old is communicating with you very clearly. In that moment you're describing, he has your full attention. That feels so good to him. You're listening to him. You're seeing him. That deep connection with you helps him feel safe enough to feel the truth about how he's been suffering. He feels those waves of grief, of loss for the life he used to have, and for him, it is a tremendous loss. Here is where the

healing could happen. You could say to him, "It looks like you're feeling sad, Sweetie. I'm right here to hold you, my little guy. I love you so much. I could never love anyone more than I love you."

If you could connect with those deep emotions that he's feeling and if he could sob in your arms, his aggression would vanish, but I realize this is hard to do. You might not even know what he's feeling because he doesn't show it. He's tried to numb himself out. Those feelings are unbearable to him, but when you give him your full attention they come up so powerfully to him. So he does what we all do when we're in pain. He lashes out. He goes after the perpetrator and brings him to justice. Clearly, your two-year-old is very jealous of the baby. That's what we need to empathize with here and it isn't because the baby took a toy or made a noise or something. It's because the baby took **you**. Your two-year-old used to have you all to himself. Now he's grieving.

And of course, you can't let your little one get beat up every day. That would be an emergency. You need to be proactive here.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You said this happens five times in a day? Well then, don't just **wish** he wouldn't hurt the baby. You can count on him trying to hurt the baby until you help him with those feelings of devastation and fear that are driving his aggression. He's a toddler. He's feeling lots of big feelings that he doesn't know how to manage, that he doesn't have the impulse control to manage. He needs your help to step in and help him so he doesn't hurt the baby.

I think right now you're just seeing him as the problem. He is doing something terrible, reprehensible, going after the baby and we all can see it that way. Of course he is, and the poor baby needs protection But I think we need to shift that responsibility to you.

Never leave them alone together. Wear the baby or keep the toddler with you while the baby's exploring. Use baby gates, stagger their naps, divide them up so one parent has one child and one has the other. Do whatever you

need to do to keep the baby safe, until you get this resolved.

If this really happens when you have your full attention on your toddler, then of course you would see him when he goes running off in search of the baby. You would go with him. You would narrate what's going on. "We were playing. I loved playing with you. Now you're going somewhere." As he heads for the baby, you head him off. "You're going toward the baby. Not right now, Sweetheart. The baby is busy right now and right now you are busy with me. You're playing with me." Take a deep breath so you're communicating calm and safety. Put your hand on his belly, which will stop his forward momentum.

Dr. Laura Markham:

At that moment, what happens? He's been stopped in his movement toward the baby. There's a reason he's going to the baby, right? All those big feelings came up for him when he was interacting in such an intimate way with you and now he just wants those feelings to go away. He thinks hurting the baby will make them go away, and they will. The best defense is a good offense. But it won't get rid of them for good. It will just get rid of them for that moment, right? So all those emotions have come up for him. He's headed to the baby and you stop him.

What happens? Well, keep your face out of range in case he lashes out against you. Create safety with your voice, soft, soothing. Whisper to him about how much you love him. Connect with him. If you've been using the peaceful parenting tools and you've been working hard to build a strong relationship with him, he will start to cry, because what happened is he's come up against the wall of futility. That will release some of that tight knot of hurt and fear inside him that's been driving him to hit. Soon, he'll be sobbing in your arms.

Now you might have to do this a few times, but you'll notice it really lessens his aggression. What you're doing is helping him resolve the feelings that are driving the aggression. Notice that the basic peaceful parenting tools are designed to help your child process big emotions and clear them out so they stop driving bad behavior.

That's why, since you've been starting to use them in this course, your son's aggression toward the baby is better. You said six-eighths, that's 25%. Obviously that's not enough. We need it to be 85% better, but the first 25% is always the hardest. So it indicates to me that you're doing a good job of starting to use the tools, but I'm betting that there's a lot more improvement that you could make in using special time, daily laughter, et cetera, and that should give you another 25% improvement.

Then when you stop him when he's headed for the baby and he has that scheduled meltdown, that's going to help a lot. That's another 25%.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Soon, you'll be up to 75% improvement. Now let's talk about that last 10%. That's going to come from a change in you, in your own attitude. Right now, you think it's an emergency. You think your son is behaving reprehensibly, going after his brother with violence for no reason. You're feeling pretty negatively toward him. I have heard over and over from parents that when they change their attitude, the hitting of the sibling stopped. That doesn't mean you don't protect the baby in the meantime. Of course you have to do that. But you start delighting in your older child again. You see it from his perspective. You honor his grief. You reassure his fear so he knows that he hasn't lost you. At that point, your son will know that his brother isn't a threat. And the aggression will stop.

I know I'm asking you to do something that's really hard. It's much easier to just stay angry at your oldest and blame him for what he's doing. But that only protects one of your children. In fact, it doesn't even protect that child because the baby, as you say, is getting hurt five times a day by the oldest. And it doesn't serve your other child, your oldest, because he really needs you right now. He needs you to believe in him, he needs you to protect him from his own lack of impulse control, and he needs you to help him work out those tangled feelings which are getting in his way and will ultimately not just hurt his brother, but make him hate himself. He really needs your help now.

So I'm asking you to take your parenting game up a notch and do something harder, which is to see it from the point of view of both your children. I think at that point your baby will be safer because you'll be taking more responsibility to keep him safe, knowing that in fact his older brother really can't control himself and will hurt him. Then at the same time, understand why your oldest feels the way he does. Empathize with him, help him to cry about it, and you will find that your relationship with him will transform and his relationship with his brother will transform. It's hard, but you're mom enough to do this.

### Question 6:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:27:17

Some specific sibling questions: "What do you do when your children need you at the exact same time? Do you help the older child because they'll be more likely to remember the situation than the baby or do you help the baby who is screaming because they're too young to articulate their problem and the screaming actually makes the older child even more upset? So which one do you help?"

Well, first of all, I want to say it's a misconception that the older child will remember and the baby won't. I believe that every baby is born with something like a tape recorder that records everything that they experience. There are people who've gone back to under hypnosis or in therapy, but more likely hypnosis, to their own births and they've seen things that they couldn't possibly have known were going on in the room at the time of their birth. We all record all of our experiences, and they influence us on an unconscious level, because they are not accessible to our consciousness, because the hippocampus, which forms memories, is not online yet. So the tape recorder that's doing the recording functions differently than the hippocampus. We don't know how it functions, but it's there recording and we are controlled by those memories.

Things that are out of conscious control, we have less ability to see operating, and that's what controls us. Later

in life, that's where triggers come from, things that are unconscious that control our behavior. So it's just not true that the baby doesn't know what happened to him or her. Babies know.

So I would never say go to the older child because they're more likely to remember. The baby remembers. I know that didn't solve your problem. It made it worse. Now you have two kids who both remember. They're both upset. I would say you figure out who needs you most at that moment. Obviously if there's a safety thing, you deal with the safety issue. If you have a screamer, your toddler's a screamer, and it just makes the older child more upset, give your older child a quick hug and say, "Let me see if I can help resolve her problem. I'm going to be right back, Honey, so I can really focus on you." And hopefully your older child is going to be able to let you do that.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If they're getting special time, if they feel like you couldn't possibly love anyone else more, they'll probably let you go. And that's most of the time what you're going to end up doing, is you're going to go to the little one first because they need you more. But remember, you're trying to avoid those breakdown moments. Instead, you're setting a preventive maintenance so you don't end up in the breakdown lane.

I would say, also, you need some structure and routines around it. If, for instance, it's always at the same time, like this parent gives the example of bath time and bedtime routine, well, before bath time and bedtime routine, spend one-on-one time with each child. Now, I know they're still tired and they might be out of sorts, but spend one-on-one time and make sure that it's part of the routine. They each have something they can do while you're tending to the other one, right? And hopefully at that point you'll have a lot fewer times when they both need you at exactly the same time. There is, by the way, an article on the Aha Parenting website in the sibling section about how to take care of two kids' emotions at the same time.

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/siblings/big-emotions-with-multiple-upset-children>

### Question 7:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:30:33

“We have a new baby who's no longer a new baby, who's now a toddler, and our older kid is still having a hard time with this. During special time they (the older child) will sometimes want to be the baby, or we play with dolls for him to be the parent,” him or her. I'm not sure what gender this older child is. But, this kid still says, "I wish the family was only the three of us," and “The baby always gets the attention.” Yeah. We would all feel the same way as the older child, right?

Dr. Laura Markham:

This is complicated by the fact that, in this case, the person asking the question said, "My partner is intolerant or impatient about my older child's feelings." This is a backpack issue. So if your child didn't have a full backpack, they wouldn't be blaming the sibling so much. So I would work with your partner. I would work with the backpack, and I would be sure you're doing all the preventive maintenance you can, the one-on-one time every day, the laughter every day, the empathy 24/7.

I assume you've read my sibling book. Again, if you haven't, it's going to help you with this problem. I would also advise, since your child is over age six, read *Siblings Without Rivalry*. It's more for school-aged kids, the examples in it, but it's a great book. It's written by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish. They're sort of grandmothers of the positive parenting movement. There are things they didn't understand because they were writing back in the '60s and '70s. They didn't fully understand emotion, I think. So they were into like “Yeah, let your kid, your older child, beat up on the baby doll instead of hitting the baby. Get their emotions out.” Well, we've learned that when they do that it just makes them more angry.

So there are things we've learned, since they did their writing. We don't agree with everything they said back in the '60s or '70s. But let me tell you, they are wonderful. The reason they're wonderful is that they give great examples of how to handle things and they have drawings in the book which show you the child responding to different ways you can handle the situation, the sort of conventional approach and also the positive parenting approach.

I'm a big fan of theirs. They studied with Haim Ginott, and he really is the person who I consider the grandfather of the kind of parenting I do. There were other people who've contributed, but he was really the first that I know of, chronologically speaking, to treat children as human beings, with great respect, and empathize with them, and see things from their point of view. I love Faber and Mazlish, and I think that if your child is five or six or over, really six or over, that the *Siblings Without Rivalry* book is absolutely worth reading.

#### Question 8:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:33:27

Another parent is asking, "Can it be normal that the older sibling takes so long to adjust, a year and a half since the baby was born? Yes, absolutely. But, it's a red flag. It's a red flag that there's more you can do to allay their upset. Now, if you just started peaceful parenting with this course and you hadn't read my sibling book when the baby came, then maybe you handled things in a way that weren't exactly what your child needed, and so you're making up for lost time. So it makes perfect sense that 18 months later the kid would still be having problems with the sibling.

If you've been doing this parenting all along and you followed my prescriptions before and after the new baby was born from the sibling book, then there's something else happening. And I would, again, get your kid special help because it's not just about the sibling. There's

something else going on that makes your child have a hard time adapting to the birth of the sibling.

### Question 9:

Parent: 00:34:27 I have an almost-three-year-old and a 10-month-old. The three-year-old is constantly trying to pick the baby up, but by the neck, and push the baby down, but playfully. I've tried over and over to model how to pick the baby up, where to hold the baby, where it's safe, where it's not safe, how much pressure. I tried backing off. I've tried lots of different things and the thing is, I don't usually get a cry from her. She's uncomfortable. He's putting a lot of pressure on her, but she's not very hurt. It doesn't seem to be in response to anything that I could say, "Oh, she knocked over your tower." It's out of the blue for me. Obviously for him there is a reason.

Parent: Afterwards, when I try to say, "Oh wow, that was scary. That was hard. What happened?" I get nothing. I get ... Avoiding eye contact, doesn't want to say anything about it. So I say, "Oh, you're feeling upset with your sister," and then nothing. I've tried to get him collapsing and crying in my arms and I never get it. I'm wondering why because I've read both books multiple times. I've been all over the website. I follow all the scripts, and I'm just not getting the results that I'm hoping for.

Dr. Laura Markham: Yes. I know you wrote to me that you do plenty of special time with him, which is great. And that your husband does roughhouse with him, but he doesn't like to roughhouse with you and that you can't get him to laugh very often. He's doesn't laugh with you. You mentioned that you can't get him to look you in the eye when you're trying to get him to ... like if you're reprimanding him, essentially, or if he's done something he knows is wrong. So I agree with you. I'm not hearing signs of autism. You wrote to me that he makes eye contact otherwise when you're interacting. So I agree with you. That's not what that is, not autism. What it is is shame. He's not looking you in the eye because that's shame, and he's ashamed of himself.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Here you have a kid who's locked up with shame. He won't laugh with you, won't cry with you. And that means he's going to keep hurting his sister. Now, thank goodness he's not hurting her badly, right? Either she's a very hearty soul, which she might be, or he's actually not hurting her that badly. Thank goodness. I can see why it still pushes your buttons. But the most important thing here to me is he's not getting a chance to work out those feelings. You know the theory, you know the tools, and you're trying, but you still can't get him to laugh and you can't get him to cry.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I would say I think a couple of coaching sessions would really help. There's some very good coaches who I've trained who do this kind of approach. You can find them on the Aha! Parenting website. I have no financial stake in your working with them. I just want you to get quality coaching, and I think that you would find somebody who could really help you to get him laughing. I think he's tightly wound. When kids have a hard time laughing, it's either an anxiety issue or shame usually, and I'm betting with your son it's a shame issue. If you could get him to laugh, I guarantee you he would start to cry. Because usually, with kids who are more tightly wound, they don't laugh because they're trying to keep the tears back actually. Once they start laughing, the tears come to the surface, too.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You and I could sit here and brainstorm how to get him laughing, but I think that's the kind of thing that takes a while. It would be better done in a coaching session. I am quite sure that he could laugh, and I think he deserves to laugh and he deserves to work this out. Your baby is, how old? Almost one, right? So he's had a little sister for almost a year now, and that's the heartbreak, that he's not working that out. There's something stuck there. You don't have to do this alone. You can get help from somebody who's trained. And it won't be long. I think within a couple of sessions you should be getting traction.

Parent:

Okay, great. Thank you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You're very welcome.

### Question 10:

- Parent: 00:39:07 We have a three-and-a-half-year-old and a one-and-a-half-year-old. My one-and-a-half-year-old is pretty strong-willed. So while I have a pretty good relationship with my older daughter, my son will go and hit her or do things, and he's a little too young to understand. For instance, if he goes and hits her on the head, we'll comfort her and then we'll try to tell him that he's not supposed to hit her. But, it's difficult to communicate that to him, and I'm worried that my daughter is getting the wrong idea about him not really getting ... like we don't treat it the same way when she hits him versus when he hits her.
- Dr. Laura Markham: So your three-year-old hits the one-and-a-half-year-old or the one-and-a-half-year-old is the daughter. The three-year-old's the son.
- Parent: Oh no, sorry. I should've started with that. My three-and-a-half-year-old is my daughter, and my one-and-a-half-year-old is my son.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Okay.
- Parent: So the question is, how do I communicate with my one-and-a-half-year-old son, and how do I do it in a way that my three-and-a-half-year-old daughter doesn't feel like she's getting treated differently?
- Dr. Laura Markham: I think you can just talk about how one-and-a-half-year-olds don't know, don't understand. You need to say, "Oops. Babies don't know. We have to help babies learn." I don't think that's such an unusual thing. Does your three-year-old seem to generally understand when you talk with her about things?
- Parent: Sometimes she does and then sometimes I think that she feels like he's getting special treatment so she becomes more attention hogging.

Dr. Laura Markham: So with special treatment, she should get plenty of attention, so that she doesn't need to worry about attention hogging. You know what I'm saying? She should get more than enough attention. But I guess with a one-year-old in the family maybe she doesn't feel she does.

Dr. Laura Markham: I remember the other question you asked about your three-year-old listening and your concern about your three-year-old not hearing what other people are saying. I'm wondering if she's taking in everything you're telling her. I'm wondering if there's a processing issue. I actually think you should get it checked out. It may be nothing at all, but check and see if it's a processing issue. I think you'd want to know now to be able to do intervention now to help her understand it.

I guess the reason I'm saying that is your other questions to me. But also, even this question about when the one-year-old hits her and she feels like you're handling it differently, well, sure. You can empathize with her and say, "Oh, the one-year-old hit you. Oh, no. Poor darling," to the three-year-old. "Oh my goodness. That must have hurt. Ouch." Of course you would do the same thing with her that you would do if the one-year-old got hit, right? But I've never heard of a three-and-a-half-year-old who didn't understand that the one-year-old didn't see things the same way she did, right? One-year-olds can't really understand what they're doing. Again, I'm wondering if there's a processing issue about perception. I could be completely wrong, but I would get that checked out just in case. Does that make sense?

Parent: Okay.

Dr. Laura Markham: I would just ask your pediatrician and say that I said this, that I thought that there might be verbal processing issues and that you just want to talk to somebody about it and that your pediatrician should be able to send you to somebody to check it out.

Parent: Okay.

Dr. Laura Markham: All right?

Parent:

Thank you.

### Question 11:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:42:53

A parent says there's been a big improvement in her house, but the area that still is an issue is that sometimes her three-and-a-half-year-old is aggressive toward the nine-month-old and that the aggressive incidents often happen immediately following or even during her connection time with her son. Very common. Very common that after they get a chance to connect with us and they feel like they have 110% of our love pouring into them, and then we stop, and we go back to the baby, wow, the need comes pouring out. That sense of losing you all over again comes, overwhelms them, and they lash out. It's very common.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would say be aware that at the end of connection time or special time, stuff is going to come up. Whether you had a little baby or not in the house, stuff is going to come up. And have special time early enough that you have time to deal with the meltdown at the end of it, especially in the beginning as you're starting to do it. In this kind of a case, since you know it's going to happen, acknowledge it. Acknowledge it verbally. Say to your son, "It's so hard when we stop playing. It's so wonderful to have this special time just for you and me. I love having this time with you, and you love having this time with me. When we stop playing together, what can you do so that you feel better? Because right now, it's going to feel bad when we stop playing together. It's going to feel bad for you, and you're going to feel bad, and we need to find a way that you can do something that you'll like doing. You can tell me how you feel. Would you like to draw a picture of how you feel?" Find something that he can do with those feelings instead of pushing his brother.

## Question 12:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:44:40

Somebody's asking about a three-year-old son hitting his siblings, and it's worse since starting nursery school. Well, you know what? Just as you said, he's exhausted afterwards, naturally. I think he may have some fears around nursery. He may just be exhausted. And you say he doesn't get to a place of crying and doesn't say much after he lashes out. He just says he won't do it again. You know, he's three. He's three years old, and so he doesn't know how to handle all these feelings. So you have to do prevention to keep him away from the baby, and also his older sister.

You wondered about this, because I always say respond to the hurt sibling first. So if he hurts his older sister who's not crying, you still can get between the children and pull him back by the arm so he doesn't keep hitting her and say to her, "Ouch. That really hurt. I'm so sorry, Sweetie." Give her a hug with your other hand. See if she needs an ice pack. You're really literally picking him up and holding him under your arm if you need to, so he's not lashing out at her. Then you turn your attention to him. And you can say the scripts that I've basically given you about you're having such a hard time. "You're hitting your sister. No hitting. Ouch. What's going on? I will help you."

Dr. Laura Markham:

And really, this is a kid who needs to cry. The combination of a new baby in the family, having started nursery, and he already was a challenging kid. It's great you're doing more laughing together. It needs to happen daily. It's great you're doing more special time without the baby and that needs to happen daily. It's great you're working on connection.

But it sounds like nursery is really hard for him, and I'm wondering if it's good for him. You say that when he hears he's going to nursery he runs and hits his sister. Well, it sounds to me like nursery isn't necessarily working for him. I would explore that as well because I think this is a child who already has more stress in his life than he can handle. Whether he's highly sensitive or what, I don't

know. But he does have a five-month-old sister and that alone could be it.

I would say reconsider the nursery. I'm not saying he shouldn't go out to nursery, but figure out if it's working for him, or how to make it work better, or how to find a better place, or if he needs a nanny part-time, something instead of the nursery. Also, I don't think there's any replacement for daily laughter and for daily special time.

### Question 13:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:47:11

A parent is asking about a three, almost-four-year-old with a four-month-old baby in the family and that she still breastfeeds and she wants to wean the child when she turns four, which is only two months after she enters preschool. She hasn't attended daycare before.

Don't do it. You've got a new baby brother. The four-year-old is having a really hard time. The relationship has already been eroded by the arrival of the brother. This is the hardest time ever with the new baby, and she's starting preschool, and then you're going to wean her. I think it's just too much for her to do. If you want a lot of acting out, keep to your time table.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But, why would you do this? I don't know why. I'm not understanding from your question why you feel it's so essential. She's not going to nurse forever. You know, it's not going to hurt anything for her to nurse a little longer. Wait until she's adjusted to a preschool before, and really to the baby, and you feel like your relationship is in good shape. Wait for a few more months before you wean her.

And when you do -- and even now -- go to the gentle weaning page of the Aha! Parenting website. You can put that into the search box and you'll find it. And start using

those pointers even now to cut back on your nursing so that you can make it a more gentle process when you do wean her.

#### Question 14:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:48:29

This parent is saying her three-year-old gets so stressed by sharing her with the one-year-old that she feels that she can't interact with the one-year-old in front of him. She does constant silliness and roughhousing, and interacting with him, and daily special time, but he shows signs of big stuffed feelings on an ongoing basis, and he resists silly games, and he doesn't cry when she empathizes.

If you're saying that he resists silly games and he won't cry when you empathize, you're right. He probably does have stuffed feelings and he really needs to cry. It also sounds like he tends to be anxious, which, again, the answer is more laughing so that there's more crying. If he's holding on so tight to his upset that he resists silly games, I guess I'm wondering if he laughs at all. If he does have meltdowns sometimes, and he's easier going afterwards, you can see that that's the answer. You don't need him to admit he's upset. You just need him to laugh a lot so he can then cry a lot.

I think your cure here is laughter, and I'm not hearing that he's doing it, even though you're doing a lot of silly games. I'm going to ask you to figure out, no holds barred, figure out ways to get him laughing, because that's where the crying is going to come from. And I agree with you. This is something you really need to do, because you do need to help him express these feelings and break through his defenses so that he's not such a bundle of unhappiness. And yes, for the one-year-old's benefit, make sure you get some time alone with her, even if that means you have to find a sitter for a couple of hours or enroll your three-year-old in a class because she deserves you too.

### Question 15:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:50:09

This parent says when her four-year-old gets upset, she's loud and it upsets the one-year-old.

Yes, but you also described a situation where your husband was ranting and raving that you're not disciplining the four-year-old right, and of course both the kids were crying. So, it does sound like he (the husband) has a hard time when your four-year-old has big emotions, and that would make her more upset. I mean, if he has a hard time when she has big emotions, that could make her have bigger emotions -- if her dad is ranting when **she** gets upset. So, I think the bonus audio about creating a parenting partnership should really help you.

And it is really hard when the four-year-old's upset and the one-year-old gets upset at the same time. So, this is covered in my sibling book and there's actually an article about it on the website, which is "Multiple Upset Children". If you put multiple upset children into the search box, you will find an article about how to deal with this, and basically the answer is you try to tend to them both at once.

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/siblings/big-emotions-with-multiple-upset-children>

Dr. Laura Markham:

And you talk about what's happening. So, "I have two upset children who are both hurting right now. My four-year-old, Darling, you're yelling, you're so upset and you are crying because your sister's so mad and loud." Right? "Come here my Sweeties. There's always plenty of room in Mama's arms. You can be here on my right. You can be here on my left. I'm going to listen to both of you. Let's all take a deep breath. That's right. You can tell me what you're mad about but take a deep breath. Let's calm down." So, you have to try to help her calm down.

Remember, it's not the loudness that's emptying her backpack. It's the tears. So it's fine to talk her out of her loudness, right? If she doesn't want her sister there, you just acknowledge it. "I know you don't want your sister

here but she's crying because she's scared, because you're yelling. So, she has to be here, and you be on my other side. Don't worry, your sister's just worried about you. I'm right here. I can take care of both of you." So, read the article because it goes into more detail on that, but that's basically the approach you're going to take.

### Question 16:

Parent: 00:52:04 I have two kids, a one-year-old and a three-year-old, and I'm trying to find ways when he pushes him down and smothers him into the ground, I don't feel like there's a reason to be mad.

Dr. Laura Markham: You have an 11-month-old baby. That's his reason to be mad, he doesn't need a reason. It's that he has a sibling. It's so hard because he feels such grief about losing you. He hasn't been able to cry about this, has he?

Parent: He just laughs about it. I mean, he thinks it's funny.

Dr. Laura Markham: Exactly, exactly.

Parent: It's like I'm giving him all of my time, it's all about James, and then all of a sudden he runs in the other room. Or Cole isn't even around and he just pushes him on the ground and it's like, "I just worked with you for an hour."

Dr. Laura Markham: That's why it happens. He's communicating to you really clearly. At that moment, when he has your full attention, it feels so good to him, right? You're finally back the way you used to be, the baby's out of sight. The baby can just be forgotten about, and there's that deep connection with mommy. And as that happens, he feels safe enough to feel all of that grief, and it all comes up. At that moment is when the healing needs to happen and he needs to cry. Instead, what he's doing is he's running over and bashing the baby, right? Because the best defense is a good offense. Right?

Parent: Okay. Thanks.

Dr. Laura Markham: All right.

### Question 17:

Parent: 00:53:31 We have two kids, a four-year-old daughter and a one-and-a-half year-old son. My son is super clingy to my wife that, when she's home alone she can't get anything done. She can barely get away for a second without him running over, wanting to be picked up. Meanwhile, when I'm home, if she leaves, he cries for a little bit but less than a minute, gets over it pretty quick and then he can kind of entertain himself for a long stretch of time without needing to be held or anything like that. I don't think it's for lack of trying to hold him or hug him or anything like that, because that seems like that's all she does. So, I'm just wondering if you have any advice as to how she can try to break that neediness that seems to be practically 24/7.

Dr. Laura Markham: So, let me ask you, did he have any kind of early separation from her?

Parent: No, actually. I mean my wife went back to work after only three months. But with my son we decided she would stay home about five months or so, and then she only went back to work part time, where with my daughter was full time. So, she's actually spent more time at home with him.

Dr. Laura Markham: So, your wife works part time since he was five-months-old and he's now a-year-and-a-half. So, it's not like that's a new thing. He's used to that by now. Yeah. Was there anything else that could have been a challenge for your son? Was there an early hospitalization? Was he in the ICU when he was born? Did your wife have postpartum depression or anxiety?

Parent: No, to most of those actually...those really happened with my daughter.

Dr. Laura Markham: Interesting. So, she must also be a different person. Meaning, I mean obviously she's a different person, but

I'm just saying your daughter had all these risk factors and is not clingy.

Parent:

Not to the same extent I feel like at this age. I mean, I feel like she was kind of able to play a little. Maybe it's a little bit different because now there are two and so it's hard to say exactly. But, I feel like it's just, he's one of those kids you'd say, "Well, you can never put him down," but when I'm home he doesn't need that attention. So yeah, I can't point to any hospitalizations, there's nothing like that. I think my wife had a little bit of postpartum, but not to the extent she did with our first child.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Interesting that he's the one who's responded so strongly. Of course, it's hard to remember back with your daughter when she was a-year-and-a-half old. Maybe she was a little bit more like this than you remember, but it does sound like his personality partly. It doesn't sound like he has an attachment disorder because he is able to be comforted by your wife. It's not like he runs to her and then says, "Oh, put me down," and is ambivalent about her. He just wants to be close to her and he gets his sense of safety from being physically in her arms. And by the way, when kids have high needs that way, it doesn't necessarily mean there's anything wrong with them. It's just he's a high needs kid, so that is who he is. It's not like there's something that is a problem.

Parent:

Yeah. I don't think there's anything wrong. I just, it's driving her a little crazy because with two kids, then my daughter's a little jealous that he is always in arms and then, and she wants to be able to have a meal. She can't even sit down at the table because he wants to sit down at her lap, so she has to literally eat standing up in the kitchen because then he won't be able to climb on her.

Dr. Laura Markham:

That doesn't sound good. I do think that there are ways that she can start to put limits on holding him, but I would make sure she's available to hold him the rest of the time, and I would find easy ways to do it. I assume she must use a backpack or a sling or something?

Parent:

No, mostly just in arms.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The first thing I would say is put him in a backpack or use a sling. A lot of kids his age really like that, and then it also means that he can't get down and get up and get down and get up. He's in it and if he wants to get down and play, she says, "Okay, but you're going to stay down and play for a little bit," so that he's not always climbing back into the backpack. It's easier for her because her hands are free. She has more ability to tend to the four year old, if he's in a backpack, because you know he's not in front of her, in the way, and he can feel secure there.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But if he wants to get down and engage with the world, then he gets down. He isn't being held in a sense. Being in the backpack will help him feel held, but will help her feel a little less chained up, your wife, so that she doesn't resent him being in her arms. My hunch is that he's a little worried about whether she's going to pick him up again, that he has to stay in her arms because she's a little annoyed with him and it gets into this cycle of him craving more from her and her being a little resentful and him sensing that and therefore, can't let go of her and has to cling to her. You know what I mean? That's often a cycle we see. So, I'm betting if he were in a backpack or a sling on her back that you would see she would feel more free, your wife, and that he would feel more held, and then when he gets down he's more able to be down. So, that would be the first recommendation I make.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The second thing I would do is I would make sure that there is time cut out for the four-year old where you've got the little guy no matter what, and the four year old gets her mom every single day, with some time that's one-on-one time. If you need to take the little guy out of the house to go for a walk with him or whatever, even if he cries when you do it, do it at the same time every day. Make it part of the routine, you'll get less resistance. He'll get used to the idea and he won't have to fight like his life depends on it. But that way the four year old gets her needs met, too, and she's not always sharing with this koala bear who's always clinging to her mom.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And then, I would say about the eating, that he can learn that when it's a meal he can sit in his high chair at the

table and be with everybody else, and he can get down and run around if he can't sit in the high chair, but mom doesn't hold him during meals anymore. She'll have to keep the meals short to begin with. It's going to have to really be, "I'm going to eat and you're going to stay down here," and he's going to cling to her knee and cry and cry and she'll say, "I know, you wish you could be in my arms. I'm going to eat my food." Honestly, the first day she does it, she'll be able to handle it for about two minutes and then she'll say, "Okay, I'm done with my dinner."

Dr. Laura Markham:

But it's still better. See, even that two minutes with him shrieking will be better because it'll move her along toward five minutes and then 10 minutes of being able to eat her food in peace without having to stand at the kitchen counter and eat it. I do think that there's a way to put limits on that where he'll learn what the limits are. I wouldn't try to do everything at once, but I think you could start with meals because that's obviously a big thing, where she deserves to sit down and have her dinner without him climbing on her.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Hopefully all of that will help. And he is getting older, so I think you'll also see that he's going to start wanting to get down and run around even if she's his safe haven, that he'll get more and more able when he knows she's there for him to just climb in the backpack. He will get more and more able to let go of her as he gets a little older, I hope.

Parent:

Okay. Thanks.

### Question 18:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:01:59

A parent says, "What do you do when a child pokes or tries to scare the baby sibling when there's been no apparent trigger?" And she says, "You're giving examples about how to set limits with empathy when the baby cries loudly or interrupts the older child's play, but not how to respond when it occurs in a quiet moment." Well, when it occurs in a quiet moment, you're still doing the same thing. The big kid pokes or tries to scare the baby sibling and says, "Boo!"

At that moment, in that quiet moment, you would say, "Oh my goodness, are you trying to startle the baby? Look, it worked. The baby's startled. Oh my goodness, look at that face. If the baby could talk, you know what the baby would say to you? 'Oh no, that scared me. Don't scare me please, you're my big brother. You're supposed to take care of me. Oh, no. Can you make things better and hug me and soothe me now that I'm scared?'"

You're helping the younger child to have a voice that makes the younger child real to the older child in this case. And I would remove your older child if you need to. If they're trying to poke the baby, you say, "Oh Sweetie, he doesn't like being poked. Are you trying to get his attention?" And you divert that impulse into something else and you make a mental note that he's got some sibling rivalry here to deal with and you need to get him laughing as soon as you can.

#### Question 19:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:03:17

"Many of the examples of how to address conflict between siblings, assume two siblings, but how do you handle three of them when they're melting down at the same time? Sometimes I wish I had an extra arm." Yes. I'm so with you on this. Ages six, four and one, wow. So first of all, I just want to say I only have two children. I can't imagine having three or four or five, which I know there are people in this course who have. I admire you so much, if you're able to meet the needs of more than two children. It is a hard enough thing to meet the needs of one child. So, I want to give you my admiration and I want to say, it's going to happen sometimes that they're all going to melt down at the same time.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I do want to add that preventive maintenance is the best way to avoid that, but let's just say that you've done the best preventive maintenance you could and for some reason you couldn't, for some reason. You were sick this week, your husband was out of town. Whatever happened, you were unable to meet everybody's needs

this week and do all the preventive maintenance that works usually, and you've got three kids all melting down at the same time. I would start with the one who is melting down the most, the loudest one. I would start with that one.

Or actually, the most violent, if there's somebody who's using violence on another one. Let's say the six and the four-year-old are fighting and the one-year-old begins to cry. I would go in between the six and four-year-old. I would stop the violence. You're soothing. All you're doing is calming things down. "You're both so upset. We can solve this, don't worry. Do you hear the baby crying? You come with me, let's go get the baby. You can both come with me, we're going to go get the baby. You on my right, you on my left. Let's go get the baby." "No, I'm too mad at ..." "Then you can stay here if you want. We're going to go get the baby. Your sister's coming with me," or, "Your brother's coming with me."

If you can get both of them to come get the one-year-old, pick the one-year-old up, soothe the one-year-old, and then go through this whole thing you would always go through between the six and four-year-old while holding the one-year-old. And maybe you're nursing or feeding the one-year-old and you're doing it on the couch, but you're touching the other ones as much as you can and looking them in the eye and helping them express their point of view and coaching them to talk to each other, so that they don't need to have their meltdown.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I hope that helps. If it's something that's not between them and they all three are having an independent upset at you for some reason, then I'm saying that's probably highly unusual and usually you can prevent that with preventive maintenance.

## Question 20:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:05:47

A parent is asking about a two-year-old who's been hitting since the baby was born five months ago. I love this question because this parent is saying, "I've seen her use these strategies when she's upset, strategies to help her when she wants to hit. She actually will come to me when she's calm and say, 'Mommy, I want to do some repair work.'" I love this. Your two-year-old comes and says, "I want to do repair work." That is wonderful. The fact that you see her use strategies to manage herself when she's upset is pretty advanced for a two-year-old.

I also understand that five months is a long time to deal with hitting, and that that's upsetting. Although, I want to remind you, she's only two. It's sort of classic, it's a classic thing that you see the two-year-old with the dog and the two-year-old is hitting the dog or the two-year-old says, "No, no hit doggy, no," and is hitting the dog at the same time. Because, the impulse control is not quite ... everything's not really aligned where the executive function that's telling the kid what to do is able to actually get control of the emotional function and the physiology of the child.

So, let's think about this. Those days when she hits once a day are her worst days, and that time of day when she hits, she's at her worst. Is there a way to see that coming and give her better support at those times? Does she need more connection on those days? Is there a warning sign? Maybe she didn't get enough sleep, maybe she needs to cry, maybe she needs to laugh. What can you do to help her on those difficult days? You're saying she's goes in phases where she'll try to hit about one time a day, but those phases then stop and then she doesn't hit at all for a while, so that's great news. But during those phases, what's going on with her? How can we figure out when she's going to try to hit that day and intervene, so that that doesn't happen? I guess that's really the question. Again, preventive maintenance and laughter is going to go a long way.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You also will want to pay attention to what kinds of hitting she usually does. Is it at the end of the day when she's tired? Is it when you ask her to do something she doesn't want to do? Is it when she gets mad that you're with the baby? You can probably notice what's going on, and you can probably notice it and head that off at the pass, that would be my hope. She is going to get better, she is only two, and clearly she has a lot of emotional intelligence or she wouldn't be demonstrating the kind of behavior she is, where sometimes she's able to use the strategies you give her.

I assume when you say strategies, one of them might be the one of clapping her arms around herself. If you can teach her to clap her arms around her body when she wants to hit, that's a fantastic resource for kids who tend to otherwise lash out, because it does a few things. One is, it gives them something to do instead of hitting that's a physical energy with their arms. Two, it gives them like a holding environment because they're literally holding themselves. It's a hug, so it's very containing and reassuring.

You can also train them at the same time that they do it to yell for you. "Mom!" or "Dad!" That way they're able to use that tool and alert you that you need to come so they don't hit their sibling, as a for instance.

### Question 21:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:09:17

A parent is asking, "Our son who's four and a half will hurt the one-year-old, who's not bothering him at all, who's playing by herself nearby, immediately after laughter or roughhousing. What's going on here?" So, laughter siphons off the top layer of anxiety in the backpack so the child doesn't have to work so hard to keep the feelings down. It makes kids less rigid. They don't have to work so hard to keep the feelings in. It makes them more relaxed, less rigid. That's great, but it also gives more access to the

other feelings in there, the deeper layer of junk that's in the backpack. That deeper stuff is the deeper fear and the deeper grief.

It's very common after roughhousing for kids to create an excuse to let those feelings out. For instance, they might hurt themselves and stub their toe and sob, even though you're pretty convinced it wasn't a big injury.

It's also very common after kids have our full attention, like in special time or roughhousing, for them to suddenly notice those feelings they have been suppressing about how much they want to be with us. So, when you had lovely one-on-one time with them, roughhousing or special time, and then they have to stop, it can be very hard for them. It's like it just puts it right in their face how they just need you so much all the time, but you're always busy with the one-year-old and they're losing you all over again here at the end of the roughhousing. It puts them in touch with those feelings of anger that they lost you, really of grief and loss. Jealousy is always about loss. It's either loss of self esteem or it's loss of actual connection with you. It's very common for that one on one time to put kids more in touch with their deeper feelings.

So this is completely understandable, for your son to feel this way. You do have to prevent this from happening, prevent the baby from getting hurt. The good news is you know what's happening, you're aware it could happen. Your job is to protect the baby at the end of roughhousing or even during, if he's anywhere near her. I wouldn't roughhouse with him right near her.

Dr. Laura Markham:

It's also good news that you're able to see that your son has some deeper feelings that he's ready to work through. He needs to cry about it. I want to warn you that deeper fear, which this could have been fear about whether he's good enough for you and if you still love him, that fear when it comes out, deeper fear isn't just crying. The grief of losing you will just be tears when it comes out. But the fear can look like a child's tantrum, a two-year-old's tantrum. Fear, when it comes out, is like a nightmare. It's like trying to choke you and you're scrambling for air.

You're just fighting for survival. So, if you think about what a two-year-old tantrum looks like, that's what it looks like.

Terror can come out that way, where the child is just, scrabbling, they're scratching and they're kicking, and they're writhing and sweating. Sweating is really good. It means they're letting out those feelings. Physiologically speaking, yawning is also good. It usually happens toward the end of it. Anytime you're yawning you're letting out feelings, it's a really great thing to have your body do, let out old feelings that you don't need to carry around.

I would do a scheduled meltdown. He's four and a half, he probably doesn't cry that much, but do a scheduled meltdown, you can even do it at the end of roughhousing. Just set aside some time after he's done a lot of laughing with you, at the end of roughhousing or special time where he's heading toward his sister and you scoop him up and you say, "You were headed towards your sister. You know, sometimes at the end of our roughhousing, I think you notice how much you love playing with me and maybe you wish you could always have me all to yourself the way you used to, and maybe that makes you mad at your sister since now you have to share me. You think that might be right?"

Now, he might not know, but you're putting this into words and it's going to help him to start dealing with it. Once he can acknowledge this and say it and you accept it and understand it, he won't have to act it out again. He may not even have to cry, although probably he will. But I'm betting that when you scoop him up and do this, that he's going to sort of get angry at you initially. "No, no, that's not right. That's not right. I hate you." Something really angry, and you know, bingo. You pushed a hot button here.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You just walk away from the little sister and make sure there's another adult to deal with her and take him in the other room to a safe place, holding him and say, "Oh Sweetheart, I think this is so hard for us. I think sometimes you just feel so bad and I want to make it better. I want to help you. Please, please tell me what ..." You don't actually

want to say, "please tell me," because then he has to move into words, which he doesn't really have the words for this. But you can just say, "I know it's so hard when we..."

And I would just stick with what you know, which is, "When we roughhouse, we have such a good time and then at the end of rough housing sometimes, you get so mad at your sister and you just want to hurt her. Right? Yeah. I think you have all those big feelings at the end of roughhousing and you don't know what to do with them. But don't worry, I'm here. I'll help you with them." As you do that, those feelings are going to come up and he's going to start to cry.

## Question 22:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:14:56

A parent says, "My four-year-old will physically just want to play with my one-year-old but will be physically too rough with him. My husband thinks I should punish her. When I tried to set a limit, she couldn't play with him if she couldn't play safely, I separated them. But of course I have to stay with the one-year-old and send her away, so that feels like a timeout." First of all, you put up a baby gate and you go back and forth between the baby gate. You don't stay with the one-year-old and send your three-year-old away. That way it's not a punishment, you're not sending her away. You're putting up the baby gate, one kid's on either side and you're constantly stepping back and forth so you're equally available. That's the first thing.

The second thing is a four-year-old doesn't understand she's being too rough. So yes, she thought that was punishment and abandonment when you did that. If you punish her like your husband suggests, it's just going to make her resentful. She's just trying to play. She doesn't think she's doing something wrong. Of course, you have to protect your little one, but you have to try to help her see the danger to him. You can do that by constantly talking about how he feels, what he thinks about everything, and getting her to help him over and over again with things.

That way she'll begin to see herself as his protector, almost like a third parent, as opposed to seeing herself as just a playmate and being that rough.

### Question 23:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:16:08

This parent says, "Even though we do everything you recommend, I seem to spend all day shielding the one-year-old from aggressive behavior by the three-year-old. It's true that for the 30th time in the morning when I have to pull him away I can use a rough hand, and my partner expresses anger regularly at him for this. Are we causing the problem or is he still adjusting to his brother?"

I think both. You know, if you regularly express anger at a child and you use a rough hand on him, he's going to be aggressive with anyone who's smaller than him. You can just assume that's going to happen. When someone feels pushed around, they push other people around. It's one of the oldest ideas in psychology. You go home and kick the cat when your boss is mean to you.

And he's still adjusting to the one-year-old, because the one-year-old becomes a more formidable competitor every day. I would talk to your partner about the inappropriateness of modeling this angry aggression, and I would work on your own, Stop, drop and breathe, and please read my sibling book. It sounds like you might've read it, you might be using these techniques, but maybe you just need to actually be between them (the kids). There's a writeup in that book from a mom who says that when she had a three-year-old and a one-year-old, she spent most days all day on the floor with them, teaching them to get along. It took her three months and at the end of that time they were best friends. That can happen to you too.

## Question 24:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:17:25

This parent is saying that she has a four-year-old who's bossy and a 21 month old baby, and she notices the older sister leading and directing the play and getting frustrated with little sister. This is very normal and natural and it's one of the ways that siblings learn what to do. But you can help your baby to stand up to her big sister lovingly. So you can say, "Sweetheart, do you hear your sister?" So the 21-month-old, I assume can't say a lot. You can say, "You see your sister's getting frustrated, she doesn't know what to do. She's just a baby. How can you make this work better?"

And also I would add, it may be that you are expecting your kids to play together a little bit too often, because I would say that a 21-month-old, the fact that she can play with a four-year-old at all is amazing and really a testament to her fortitude, the 21 month old. But you're not expecting them to really play together, and you're going to have to run a lot of interference.

You can give them words for that with each other. You can say, "Oh, it's so frustrating. You can tell your sister, 'No, don't take the blocks when I'm trying to build a tower.'" And then you can say to the 21-month-old, who doesn't have a lot of words, "You can tell your sister, 'But I want some blocks too, for me.'" You're essentially building a bridge between them. Even though they both are learning to speak English, you're the interpreter. You're building a bridge between them that helps them to communicate with each other and see each other's perspective.

This is all in my book on siblings. If you haven't read it yet, I urge you to get your hands on it. The whole middle section of the book is about this and you'll find a lot of language to help your kids.

I think it's frustrating now, but by the time your 21-month-old is a year older, you're going to be amazed at how your girls are going to get along and express their needs to each other, again, without attacking each other. I think what you'll see is that as you parent this way and you're the

interpreter and you coach them to express their needs without attacking each other, you're going to see that everything is going to change between them and you're going to be amazed at how they work things out with each other without your constant intervention.

It's a lot of investment upfront, I know, but the more we do that with siblings, whenever we start, the more we do it, the more quickly they get to a point where they can do it with less and less intervention from us.

### Question 25:

- Parent: 01:19:47 So we have a six-year-old, four-year-old, and a 10 month old daughter. Our middle one, he's a lovely boy, but the poor lad has had such a hard time since his sister came on the scene. He's strong, he's physical, he's a bit of a hitter, very strong willed. There are these huge feelings really on display on pretty much a daily basis, and we do many of the things that you recommend. Spend special time with him, we try and charge him up with individual attention in the morning and at nighttime, and whenever we get a chance. But progress is difficult, it's slow.
- Parent: And yeah, we assume that these feelings are kind of coming from basic insecurity and divided attention, not getting a lot of parental time. But, could you comment a bit about what else might be driving his behavior? What sort of feelings might be behind some of this stuff, apart from the basic parental love?
- Dr. Laura Markham: Well, I think that the question isn't what's causing the feelings. I will address that, but I think the real question is, what might make a difference in him working through those feelings? The feelings get caused quite simply by feeling like there's a scarce resource of parental attention and he might not get enough of it to survive. Now, you and I both know he's going to get plenty. There's enough food to go around, there's enough love to go around. I think babies take so much of our time and attention that for the four-year-old it's just hard to feel like there's enough for

you, and it makes sense that he would feel that way. All kids do.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think the question is, how soon can he move through those feelings? The answer is absolutely giving him one-on-one time and recharging his batteries in the morning and at night, as you said. But also, he needs a chance to feel understood about the feelings. He needs to be able to say to you, "I don't like having a baby. I never wanted the baby. Give the baby back, send the baby back, flush the baby down the toilet." Whatever, the things we don't want him to say, "I hate the baby."

Dr. Laura Markham:

But, he needs a chance to be able to say those things and to have us say, "Oh Sweetie, it must be so hard for you to have to share us." In fact, he may not say those things or express his feelings, but you could still say to him, "Honey, it must be so hard to have to share us. It's hard to have a baby, isn't it? Don't worry, you can always tell me how you feel about this and I will always understand and I will always try to make it better." I think that's the key to resolving the feelings. He has to be allowed to have them. And once he's allowed to have them, then love is sort of able to grow.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, have you read my sibling book?

Parent:

Bits of it, yes. I've been working through the course and on the main book. Perhaps that's the-

Dr. Laura Markham:

Right, well that makes perfect sense. The course is a lot, a lot, and you've got three children including the baby. You don't have a lot of time. I would encourage you to get your hands on the sibling book and read the last section. It's three sections. The first is like a rehash of the first book, but it's all about how you apply that to siblings. The second section is all about how you help kids learn to work out conflict. But the last section is how you deal with a new baby, and I think you'll find that there's a lot in there that is very helpful to you in helping your four-year-old.

Because, you know what? It's a hard adjustment and the problem is those feelings don't just go away. If you don't

help the child with them, they go underground and then there's ongoing conflict. But if you can help the child through them, you can work through them and you can move beyond them. So, I think you'll find the answers that you want there. Okay?

Parent: Yeah. You think that it's just a question of time.

Dr. Laura Markham: No, I don't think it's just a question of time. I don't. If you don't deal with the feelings and time passes, the feelings will go underground and get worse. So I don't-

Parent: No, no, we do. I mean, so in the sense that, he's even come out and said it. He was like, "I don't like the baby. I don't, I hate her." He's said these things, feels these things. When that came up, this was the responses. Like, "I know, Sweetheart, it must be so difficult. She takes away our time." I really kind of get it. I totally understand sometimes where it's coming from, but I just wonder if there are, if there are other things that he's feeling as well that ...

Dr. Laura Markham: I think it's enough to just be feeling that, and I think our response matters. I would make sure he's laughing, because when you say, "Is it just about attention?" remember that what's under that need for attention is fear. He's afraid. So, he needs to do a lot of laughing, that releases the fear. That is actually a way that, you talked about special time, which is a wonderful way to connect, but I think laughing will also help him to work through these feelings. And yes, at that point, if you're helping him express the feelings with words, and you're helping him laugh the feelings out, I think you will see that it is just time, and he will be able to move on. But I think he needs help with the feelings.

Parent: That's great. We'll keep-

Dr. Laura Markham: Does that make sense? Yeah.

Parent: Yeah, we'll keep persevering. Thank you.

## Question 26:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:24:59

What to do when you have two kids who are fighting, but it's really coming from the older child who in this case. This child is four and in this case was hurting the baby who is a year and a half. And I think what you're doing when you say "That's not okay", and scoop up the little one and comfort her is exactly the right thing to do.

And then you try and connect with your four-year-old later. You always connect first with a child who's being hurt. I do want to comment though, you said that she's now a year and a half and she's starting to realize that the older sibling often hurts her. In that case, you need to start acknowledging the experience of your year-and-a-half-year old. So you might say, "Ouch, that hurt. You were standing up and now you're on the ground. Yeah, your brother went by and boom, you were on the ground. Are you okay? Okay, you're fine." Or "Ouch, you're crying," Or "You were surprised, weren't you?"

So always you are helping her to understand her experience. And then you're helping her to say that to her brother, even though she can't yet articulate it. So you can say "You're mad. Yeah. You were surprised. Are you telling your brother?" And she's not really telling him because she can't talk yet, probably. But you say "You can tell your brother, you can say no, no pushing."

And then you turn to her brother and you put your arm around him and you say, "Did you hear your sister, what she's saying to you?" And he'll look shamefaced at the ground. You're not trying to shame him but he is going to be shamefaced and he might say "No pushing." Or he might be defensive. "I didn't mean to" or "It was her fault". And you can say, "I hear you. You didn't mean to. Sometimes accidental pushing can still hurt. She's telling you -- No pushing. Can you tell her that you hear her?"

And he hopefully is going to say, "I hear you". And you can say, "Can you tell your sister that she can feel safe with you, that you'll try not to push her?" And if there was a reason he pushed her, you can also set a limit with that

and you can say, "I guess you wanted to get to the truck. She was standing in front of it. So you pushed her. No pushing, Sweetie, pushing hurts, you know that. Can you say to your sister, 'Move please.'" And he might say, "I can say it, but she won't do it. She doesn't understand it." You can say, "Okay, let's teach her."

Dr. Laura Markham:

And then you make it into a game to teach her 'Move please.' Where each of you pretend you're in the way and he says "Move please" to you and you move out of the way and get her to do it too and get them both laughing. The point of all this is that your children already have a relationship.

And so I'm hearing you say that you're worried about what's going to happen as she gets older and starts to fight back. Don't wait. Right now, they have a relationship. Right now, he's pushing her down. Right now, you can help her stand up for herself and not be a victim. And right now you can help him to listen to her.

### Question 27:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:28:10

This parent says that it's when her child is aggressive with her sister. So the big sister is aggressive and she doesn't know what to say.

I don't know that you're saying the wrong thing. I think the hardest thing when our older child is aggressive to the younger child or any child is aggressive to any child, what happens to us is that we flip out because our baby's getting hurt. And so, I think the most important thing is to calm ourselves down and then to ignore the first child doing the hurting, while we take care of the child that's hurt. And that gives us a chance to calm ourselves so we can actually connect. It's not so much a matter of the right words, it's a matter of being able to connect.

But let's say that you might be able to immediately intervene. So you see something about to happen. Your older daughter is about to grab something from your

younger daughter, or is about to push your younger daughter, whatever.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You would breathe deeply move towards them at the same time. You're trying to calm yourself and them down, to calm down the situation, and you might say, "Whoa, Whoa, Whoa. You two are having such a hard time. What's going on? It looks like you want this and (turning to the other child) you want this too. You both want this! And right now you're holding this and right now you want it, huh?"

Notice, I haven't made anybody wrong. I'm stating both of their perspectives, right? So it's not so much the words you're using, it's your goal in that moment. Your goal in that moment is to find a way to make a bridge between your two children without blaming anybody, right?

If there's actually a lashing out happening from one child to another, you would say, "Whoa, Whoa, Whoa!" And I'm just going to pretend your daughter's name is Anna, and you would say, "Whoa, Whoa, Whoa, Anna. Ouch! No hitting, hitting hurts. No pushing, pushing hurts." You're only doing this though, if your other child is not very much hurt.

If you're child is a lot hurt, you're tending to that child. But if it's just beginning or starting or about to happen, you might be moving toward them to get between them, seeing this at the time and then you acknowledge Anna's point of view and you say -- You first make sure that your other child, Samantha is fine --"Samantha, are you okay? Okay, great." You give little Samantha a hug. And then, you're between them remember, you turn to Anna and you say, "Anna, you are pushing Samantha" or "You're about to push Samantha. How can I help? What's going on?"

You're there to help. You're helping her. She has a problem. That's why she's pushing her sister. You're there to help her solve her problem. And so again, it's not so much the words in that moment. It's more your

understanding her perspective and helping her with her problem.

### Question 28:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:30:58

This parent is saying that -- again, I love this -- "I have five and one-year-old girls and a three-year-old boy. On a typical day, the oldest feels threatened by the three-year old, afraid that he'll break something she's doing, which he often has. So she lashes out, preemptively yelling and warning him to stay away.

Then of course he feels left out and moves in anyway. I remind the boy about our rule about personal space, but while I'm doing that, the oldest hits the boy. So now I'm trying to attend to him as you suggested, but then the baby feels left out. So she comes for a snuggle. Oh, I'm taking care of the boy.

So the oldest now feels angry and left out. She was just protecting her thing. So she runs off. The boy hits her on her way by, in retaliation, and she screams at him, "I don't like you!" So I tried to stop her from hitting him and she knocked over the baby who's now screaming." So beautifully said.

So dealing with this three times a day sounds really overwhelming, and I'm delighted that you see great strides from your three-year-old, as you said. And, and I'm not surprised there meltdowns from the five-year-old. That's good. And that will change as she gets these old emotions processed.

But you also need to solve her problem, which is that the three-year-old is destroying her work all the time. Play is children's work and she needs a safe place to do her work so that it doesn't get destroyed. So I would separate the three-year-old from the five-year-old as much as possible. Maybe use a baby gate where you and the baby and the three-year-old are in an adjoining room and the five-year-

old has a table to work on, so the other kids are not in her way.

I just think it's not fair to her to be constantly worried, and it's making her aggressive toward her brother. And also, your three-year-old is fascinated by his big sister, of course. But he needs things he's excited to play with, without her. And if you're in the room with him and the baby, you might be able to engineer that some.

I also think you can begin to reduce the number of times a day this happens by using the peaceful parenting tools of laughter, obviously, which reduces the kids' tension levels. And special time to reduce the level of threat that they feel from each other. Keep helping your daughter with meltdowns. Every time an adult is there, another one, a partner or somebody to take the other kids. And one thing you should know if you haven't grabbed my sibling book, which I'm getting, you probably haven't.

Dr. Laura Markham:

One important tool for siblings is to create positive experiences that outweigh the negative. So remember our magic five to one ratio that we've talked about, our five to one, positive to negative experiences in any relationship? So you want to create five positive experiences between your two oldest, really all your kids, but your two oldest for every negative experience they have together. I know that sounds like a burden. It sounds hard. These don't have to be big things, but look for any opportunity to create positive experiences because it means there'll be a higher trust level. He'll listen to her a little more and not barge into her space and she'll be less likely to attack him without reason at... Just in defensiveness. And then finally, in those moments where all three kids are upset, simply try to calm everyone down and then tell the story about what happened to each of them.

Maybe not all at the same time. You might need to do it a little bit at a time. So you've got the howling baby. I would always turn to the baby first, and you soothe the baby, "Ouch, that hurt, you didn't like getting knocked down." And then once she's calm, you put her on your back or in a play pen. Now during this time, you're right, you have to

keep your three-year-old and five-year-old away from each other. But even if your five-year-old has stormed off and is crying in her room, I would calm the baby first and then put the baby in a play pen, happily playing with a sensory bag that is very well duct-taped, or put her on your back or something like that. Then you go to whichever kid is more upset, your three or five-year-old, and you calm them down and you tell them the story of what happened.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Like "You really wanted to see what your sister was doing but she yelled at you to stay away. She was worried, right? And then you got upset and you hurt her. Then she was crying," or whatever happened. And then again, get him started playing with something else. And then you go to the next child. So you do it one at a time and you help them to understand what happened.

You don't necessarily have to bring them all back together and get them to do repair work. I mean, they all owe each other at this point. But they do need to know that you understand, and they need to reconnect with you.

If you can also practice with the five-year-old what she can do to solve this problem she's having with her brother besides hitting him, it does seem that's the starting point for the pandemonium, and she really needs help with that, just to be able to call you and have you go and intervene to stop things before this is what happens.

When you ask if you can just let some things go, I'm not sure I understand what you mean, because you're obviously not going to let them hurt each other. If you mean do you have to go after your five-year-old while she's crying, you can't do everything. Maybe by the time you get the baby calm downed and the three-year-old, the five-year-old has forgotten about it, in which case, I would still give her a hug and say "That was hard. I'm glad you're okay." So I guess the answer is, you do the best you can. You have three kids. That's the way it is.

### Question 29:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:36:14

This parent is describing that her three-year-old hits the baby and she gets tears in her eyes when talking to him afterwards. But all he says is, "Yeah" when she says, "Oh, you must've felt bad, and that's why you hit the baby." But he doesn't cry, even though she has tears in her eyes and he doesn't laugh with roughhousing. He seems to be on emotional lockdown.

Well first of all, yes he's jealous of the baby. I'm going to encourage you to read my sibling book if you haven't already. The good news is, your empathy is helping already. He does agree when you emphasize with him about how it's hard to have a baby around. So now you need to go a step deeper and get through that emotional lockdown. And he's only three, so you should be able to do this. I think that comes from special time and I think it comes from laughter. You mentioned *The Art of Roughhousing*, that's not a book I like. I know everybody gets it cause it has the title roughhousing. Anthony de Benedet wrote that book and Larry Cohen helped, I guess, but it's really Anthony's book and it's got... It's okay. But to me it's a little scripted. I think we need to follow the kids' laughter and be more in the moment and not doing scripted things as much.

I have not seen that book be as successful as I would've liked (meaning parents have not found it as useful). I'm not trashing the book; if you have it and like it; that's fantastic. I just don't find it as useful as the simple games on my website. In my new book that comes out at the end of February, there's a whole section with lots and lots of games including many games recommended by parents. These are all parents-tested games that I recommend. So I would say you need to put them on your back and play Buckin' Bronco. You need to do pillow fights, you need to just try different games to get him laughing. It's your

highest priority. I've never met a three-year-old who wouldn't laugh eventually.

And you might try *The Opposite of Worry* also, cause it sounds to me like your son is a little anxious. Because kids who don't laugh, it's usually anxiety, they're tightly wound, they're holding on really tight.

So *The Opposite of Worry* is another one of Larry Cohen's books and it does have some ideas there in that book also about getting an anxious kid laughing. Okay.

### Question 30:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:38:25

This parent is saying "Our two-year-old has suddenly started crying at everything. Not listening, not answering, hurting her baby sister. There's been no big changes in our life. What, is this a developmental phase?"

Well your big change is that you have an eight month old. I know that she's been around eight months so it doesn't seem like a new thing to you, but it's often a very difficult phase when the baby becomes a bigger competitor. When they start crawling around or... It becomes apparent they're not going to leave ... They came and they're not leaving again. So I think that this is about having a baby sister. The entire third section of my sibling book was written for you. And the short version is, your two-year-old needs lots of chances to cry.

She's showing you that by crying at everything. Help her cry more, and get mad less by doing daily laughter with her. Daily special time is non-negotiable. And of course never leave her alone with her sister. You need to stay between them if she is hurting her sister often. A two-year-old has no idea that she can actually really hurt an eight month old.

### Question 31:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:39:25

This parent says "Our 11-year-old stepdaughter doesn't want to play with my two-year-old daughter. How can I help them bond?" Well, most 11-year-olds really don't want to play with a two-year-old. And as you mentioned, most act like moms rather than kids because there's a lot of age difference between them. So I would find things they like doing together, like art, where they could each be in charge of their own clay and the 11-year-old doesn't have to interfere with the two-year-old.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would stay close by to model for the 11-year-old how to relate to a two-year-old. She's an only child. She doesn't know how to do that. I would relate to the 11-year-old as you want her to relate to the two-year-old. So you're role modeling. Remember probably no one has related to her that way. So she only understands how to control, not to empathize and enjoy.

And I would talk to her about it. Like "I'm the parent, I'll enforce the rules. You can just enjoy your sister. Don't worry. You're such a great big sister. You're always trying to help her in and be like her parent. But you don't need to be like a parent, Sweetie. I can do that."

### Question 32:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:40:23

This parent is asking about how to bond with a four month old when she has to put all her attention on the almost four-year-old, who of course wants all the attention.

So it is a challenge. It's always a challenge when you have a baby and an older kid. I think you have to integrate the time with them; you're not alone with either one of them. But remember the four month old does not need your constant interaction. So when you're playing with the four-year-old and the baby's on the mat beside you, bring her into the play, talk to her at the same time. Or maybe she's on your body or where she can see you from a bouncy seat or something. Right?

And you're not going to be cooing over her leaving your four-year-old out. You're going to coo over both of them at the same time. And if you are going to play games, bouncy games with your four month old for instance, and the four-year-old comes over, take turns with them doing bouncy games or, let the four-year-old be involved.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And yes, you do have to manage their interaction, but that's a really important investment to make in the relationship they have with each other, right? But remember that babies don't need us to focus on them all the time. They just need us to respond when they do need us. And I'm sure there are plenty of times where she cries and you have to abandon the four-year-old to handle the four month old, right. And you don't.... Remember the four month old loves to watch you play with the four-year-old. She doesn't need you constantly interacting with her. The hardest part is what you mentioned, when the four-year old's having a meltdown. That could distress the baby of course. But remember, she'll take her cues, probably, from you.

So if you stay calm and hand the baby a sensory bag with a lot of duct tape on it, or any toy she hasn't seen before, and you put her down safely in the next room, where she can hear you and you can hear her and if she needs you, you can respond then... And then you go back and help the big girl with her feelings. You know, the four month old is likely to be interested even for a very short time in that new toy. So at least it buys you a little bit of time.

And as you know, this is one reason that many parents choose to put their four-year-olds into part-time school. It actually is really helpful for the four-year-old to have a life outside the home where there's something they don't have to share with the baby. And it keeps them from getting bored at home while you're occupied with the baby. And also gives you a chance to have one on one time with the baby every day, which it sounds like you're really wishing you had more of.

Since you don't have that, maybe you can figure out a one day a week program for her to go to. And finally, if you

have a partner, they should absolutely be in the routine of taking Ms. Four in the evening, at least part of evening. So you can have some one-on-one time with the baby.

### Question 33:

Parent: 01:43:03 I have two sons, one is two, the other one is five years old. And most of the things my two-year-old is using or wearing have been passed on to him from his brother. Today for instance, he was riding a trike from his brother that he used to use and his brother gets quite jealous of this, even though he's got his own bike now. And I'm struggling... It's not a big struggle, but I'm kind of trying to find the best way to help my older son to deal with this because I'm letting my two-year-old to use his old belongings. And I think he's struggling with that.

Dr. Laura Markham: This is a very common reaction from older sibs when younger sibs get stuff that was theirs. So it's like they haven't looked at that thing in two years and then all of a sudden, bam, the little one has it and they want it, right? And it's really, it's really a symbol of everything else that the little one has stolen from them. You know, like you. Right? Your attention.

So you know, it makes sense that they have that reaction. So I would say first of all, if we can, just as a general rule of thumb, it really helps to talk about it. How "you are getting a new bike now, you don't need your old bike anymore because you're getting the new bike now. And that means some time when your brother gets bigger, he'll be using this bike. Huh. Is that going to be okay with you?"

Dr. Laura Markham: "No, I don't want him to have it." "I understand. And as long as you're using it, you've got it. And when you get a new bike, we'll have to be ready to pass it onto your brother. How can we make that okay with you?"

And I would do a little whatever makes it okay with him. Like he has to do a little ceremony with his bike and tell it how special it was to him and how much he loved it and how he will always have a special connection to it. Really whatever needs to happen for him to move on. Right? And the question is, now that it's already been given to his brother, is it too late to do that? So it may be. But notice I'm not suggesting you take it away from the little one and give it back.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I'm more suggesting you honor his loss. And another way of honoring his loss is simply to, instead of saying, "Well you have a new bike, you don't need it", which is what we want to say. You can say, "Oh, it's so hard to watch someone else ride your bike." And I wouldn't focus on the fact that it's his brother. "It's so hard to watch someone else ride your bike when you love that bike so much. And you had so many good times on it. It's so hard. Right? Even though you're big and it doesn't really suit you anymore. Wow. I know."

So empathy really helps. And then I would also say, "You know Sweetheart, you could ask your brother, it's his bike now cause you've got the new bike. But you can ask your brother if he'd give you a turn on it, he might give you a turn on it." Right?

Dr. Laura Markham:

And, I'm almost certain they... don't you think his younger brother would give him a turn on the bike?

Parent:

Yep.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, if he asks his brother and he gives him a turn, he's going to learn that he doesn't really like that bike so much after all in reality. And it's too little for him. And also the generosity of the young one in giving him a chance at the bike will also, I think, make a difference too. I think it should help. What do you think?

Parent:

Yes, good idea. Thank you very much.

### Question 34:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:46:27

A parent says, "My five-year-old is mean to his two-year-old brother."

You have to be there to protect the two-year-old. When he's mean to him, you stop him. You say, "Whoa, Whoa, Whoa. You can tell your brother what you need without being mean to him. No teasing. The rule in this house is no teasing."

And you just interrupt the meanness every time you see it. Never let him be around other children, them together without you there, since he's organizing other kids to pick on his brother.

And most of all, you need to help the five-year-old work through those feelings. As we keep saying about siblings, every sibling issue that's come up on this call, the older child is being mean to the younger because he didn't get the help he needed to work through those feelings. This is all covered in my sibling book.

### Question 35:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:47:11

This parent asked about her five-year-old, who is modeling and encouraging bad behavior from the two-year-old, who idolizes him. So he'll encourage throwing for instance, and his little brother delights in the immature behavior and screeches with laughter. And the five-year-old has impulse control issues, so it's hard for him to stop himself from doing these things.

So I would say of course you're going to do preventive maintenance, so your child feels like he gets enough good attention. Then when he does one of these bad attention things, you're going to try to divert it so that he gets more goodies, attentional goodies, out of the good stuff than out of the inappropriate stuff. So what do I mean by that?

Your five-year-old takes a book and he throws it and your two-year-old grabs the book and he throws it. And you would say, "Oh no, stop. No throwing books. Ouch. It hurts the books. Oh poor book!" And you pick up the book and you're petting the book. "That can hurt the book and you know what? It could hurt a person if they get hurt with a book. See? Bam!" You take the book, like you're hitting yourself; you say "Ouch, no throwing books"

And then you say, "What could we throw?" And your five-year-old... Your two-year-old's going to just look blankly at you. Your five-year-old is either going to say something that's appropriate to throw -- light balls or stuffed animals or he's going to say something inappropriate like glassware or plates. In which case, let's just say something inappropriate. You would say "Plates? Oh my goodness what would happen if we threw a plate? Crash!" Right? "No, no throwing plates. What could we throw?" And you'll get him to tell you finally stuffed animals.

Dr. Laura Markham:

At which point you say "Yes! Stuffed animals are safe to throw. Yay! Stuffed animals love to fly! That is a great idea! Give me five! High fives all around!" So the five-year-old gets a high five from you and then he has one from his brother.

And you say "Quick" and you use their names, both boys' names, and you say "Run and get as many stuffed animals as you can. But where is it safe to throw them? Where can we throw them? Not in the living room where they might hit the light, right? Not in the kitchen where they might hit the stove. Where could we throw them? Yes, over the banister,!" if you have a two story house or "Into the bathtub!" if you have an apartment. Wherever it's safe to throw them that you've decided, like in their bedroom.

And you encourage them. And now you've set up a bonding activity where they're laughing and where the two-year-old is seeing the five-year-old as the hero, but the five-year-old is seeing himself as having saved the day and come up with the appropriate behavior. So hopefully you'll see that that will sort of shift him into doing a little bit different kind of role modeling for his brother.

### Question 36:

Parent: 01:49:48 “My two-and-a-half-year-old twins are boy- girl twins. They're so different in personalities. My little girl, she's very domineering, when she's at home, over her little brother. Oh, I guess he's the little brother cause he's the younger one. But she is so domineering when it comes to him, when they're playing.

And then when we go out in public, she actually is... Just gets really fearful. And if we're at the park or at the bookstore, if other little kids, even so much as look at her, she'll start to scream and she'll tell them to go away to leave them alone. And they're not even interacting with her. They can just be near her.

And so I'm trying to kind of figure out how to help her overcome this fear or anxiety that she has with other children. And she's actually exhibited this behavior since she was really little. She never liked having, I guess, other little people around her. If they were bigger, it was okay. So I'm just not sure how to help her.”

Dr. Laura Markham: Well, we don't really know why she's acting that way. It's sort of a mystery. So it is hard to understand how to help her if we don't know. So, one hypothesis is that it's about her brother. She's a twin, she has to put up with him. But by God she's not going to have any other little kids around. And it's possible that that's all it is. I mean that seems to be the most likely hypothesis since we don't actually know.

So if that's what it is, then the healing from that comes from making sure her needs are met. It's very hard as you know, as a mom of twins, to meet the needs of twins. But the more special time she has with you, the more one-on-one... When I say special time, I mean one-on-one time with mommy, without her brother around.

The more she has that time, I think the easier she'll be about her brother, and the easier she'll be about other

kids. Cause she'll know that her needs are going to get met. So that's one thing I would really put energy into, even if it means really dividing and conquering. On weekends, if that's when you and your partner are both around, to divide the kids up and one of you take one kid and one take the other. And I know she's going to want you and some of the time she's going to have to go to your partner but that's okay, because you're not going to penalize your other twin by spending less time with him. But I am saying divide and conquer so that each twin gets you alone. And I actually recommend this all the time for parents of twins and it's very effective.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Sometimes twins get along really well and they don't want to be separated, but more often they actually really like one-on-one time with the parents. So, that's the first thing I do.

The second thing I would do is when she starts to freak out about some other kid, I would restore safety. I would immediately face her towards you, make eye contact, put your arms around her, pull her to your breasts, whatever is going to comfort her and say, "Don't worry Sweetie, you're safe. I'm right here." And that's what you're really saying to her, is that other child is not going to take me away from you. Because I suspect that's what she thinks is going to happen.

Parent:

You're probably right. Yeah.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Yeah. So try those two things and I bet in three months you're going to... In the three months of doing those two things regularly, I bet you're going to see a difference. I bet she'll stop doing... She'll still have an impulse to scream cause it's now it's a habit, but you want to nip it in the bud now while she's two, instead of it happening for the next three years. So try it.

And I think if she keeps screaming when she sees the other kids, you turn her back around and you say, "Take a breath Sweetheart, I'm right here. You're safe. I'm your mommy. I'm all yours. I'm right here." And she might at some point verbalize, "Well you're not all mine, you're his too." And

you can say, "Yes, I'm all yours and all his but I'm nobody else's mommy, don't you worry. You two, I am your mommy and his mommy and that's it. Not theirs."

Dr. Laura Markham:

So you'll have to experiment with your language and see what reassures her. But I think letting her know that will really help. And I think if you can do that for a few months, I think she'll stop screaming.

Parent:

Okay.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And at some point she might even begin to see other kids as interesting. But that could take another six months after that because many two-year-olds don't actually like other children. It's all parallel play until they're three-and-a-half at least.

Parent:

Right. Well thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

### Question 37:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:54:23

This parent says "Our two-and-a-half-year-old daughter hits us. She also hits her sister and nothing we say makes her hit less. What do we do when she hurts her five-year-old sister?"

Well when she hits her sister, attend to the sister, ignore the two-year-old. Once the five-year-old feels better, then you take the two-year-old to the five-year-old and you say "Gentle, gentle." You have her repair by stroking her sister gently. And as part of this, you would tell her the story of what happened, to help her make the connection. "You wanted a turn, you were upset, you wanted a turn and you hit your sister, didn't you? Ouch! And your sister cried, right? You were so mad. No hitting, hitting hurts. You tell your sister, 'My turn!' when you want it, okay? Let's do this again. Let's try this again."

And then you have her do a do-over, in which you hold her to keep her from actually hitting. And you have her use the

words, "My turn" with her five-year-old sister, instead of doing the hitting.

Because as you see nothing you say will make her hit less. You need to give her a way to express the feeling and solve her problem instead.

And you say you take away the object that she hits with, that's of course great.

You can teach her to use the word "No" instead of lashing out when she's angry. And you can teach her to clap your hands around her body so that one hand is on one shoulder and one's on the other one. And if she yells "Mom!" or "No!" and claps her hands around her body. That kind of containment really helps kids who otherwise will lash out and hit.

### Question 38:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:55:50

This parent says, "My four-year-old never seems ready for repair guidance after she's done something wrong, like hurting her brother. She covers her ears and yells."

Well, that's shame. I would say, don't guide. You say she never seems very for repair guidance. Don't give her guidance. First connect. She's not ready for a repair or guidance until you've connected.

So you start by empathizing. "Wow. That was so hard. Your brother," the two-year-old, "Was crying, wasn't he." Now first you've taken care of the brother obviously, and he's now busy with something else. "And he was crying, right? And you must've been so upset. Yeah, you pushed him down, I know. Cause you were upset, you were worried, right? Did you think he was going to touch your toy? Oh, no wonder you were upset."

So you're empathizing, you're recounting the story of what happened. From her perspective, you're talking about how hard it was for her and that kind of connection has to be

the first step. And as Stephen Covey said, "Seek first to understand." We have to understand them and express that understanding before we can get them to understand. So they have to feel understood. Then after that connection and after that empathy, you could talk about repair. "I wonder what you could do to make things better with your brother," right? And you really don't have to be giving guidance at all. I mean the guidance is "What could you do next time?" but that's after the repair. It's not as important as the repair.

### Question 39:

- Parent: 01:57:17 I have a five-year-old boy and a two-and-a-half-year-old girl. I don't know if it's jealousy. Whenever they're playing together sometimes they're playing nicely, peacefully, but more often, I guess now that his sister is growing, if she touches his toy, "Oh that's my toy." Or he touches her toy and it always gets to be physical. He always wants to hit her and she even started hitting too. I think that's my main trigger, whenever they use physical force. I try to basically treat them equally. If I say "I love you" to one, then I immediately say "I love you" to each other. I don't even know if that's correct, but whatever I give one, then I try to give the other because I know other one's like watching over me, seeing what I'm doing with his sister or what I'm doing with her older brother. So yeah, basically I guess my question is, how do I intervene and not take one side.
- Dr. Laura Markham: First of all, I hear your anxiety about treating them equally and about jealousy and also I hear about the physical aggression. So it sounds to me like your five-year-old has never really gotten past having the sister be born two and a half years ago. Is that true?
- Parent: Yeah, maybe. Maybe once or twice that we actually talked about it that, "Oh, you know, it used to be just me and you

and daddy." I remember one time him saying, "I wish it would go back to that time when it was just us."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Sure. And what did you say when he said that?

Parent:

I think I just said, "Yeah, I know. I understand. That's how it was, but now we have another person added to our family and she loves you." Basically, trying to say that "She loves you and you guys play nicely together." That's it. He doesn't really talk about emotions as much, but when he does, it's very rare, basically. I don't know if I handled that correctly.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Well I think that it's great you said "Yes, I understand." I think every child in the world feels like they wish it would go back to before their sibling was born.

Parent:

Yeah.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Sometimes they can say it and sometimes they can't. It's great he could tell you. I think you probably want to acknowledge it even now and say, "You know, I know you told me that once and I know you must feel that way sometimes still." And then not rush into the "but." And of course there's a big "but" there. "You've got a two-year-old who lives with you, who's wonderful and you adore her and she has every right to be welcomed into your home, including by her big brother. But.... But, right? So both things can be true at once. And he's going to get to the welcoming her part faster if he feels understood about the parts that he wishes were different. He needs to feel understood in that way. So that's the first thing I would say.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The second thing I would ask you is: did you listen to the sibling week audio yet?

Parent:

No, no, I haven't. Sorry. I did not.

Dr. Laura Markham:

That's okay. I think that's really going to help you. I think it's going to help you a lot to help deal with the little chip on his shoulder.

Dr. Laura Markham: The third thing is, I heard you say sometimes he has a good time playing with her, so he does play with her sometimes and they have positive interactions, it sounds like?

Parent: Yes.

Dr. Laura Markham: Great.

Parent: I feel like they adore each other too, you know ...

Dr. Laura Markham: Great. So that's ideal. That's wonderful, obviously. That is what the research shows is what's going to make a big difference. Because they have good interactions that they both enjoy, they will have a good relationship even if there is sometimes negative interaction. That's what the research says, so that's great news. Great.

Dr. Laura Markham: Then about the physical aggression, I think, you know, they're young but the five-year-old should be able to stop himself. You said it's really about toys. Do you use the policy on toys for self-regulated turns?

Parent: I don't think we have a specific rule about toys, but I mean, I feel like if he just buys a new toy that I try to let him play with it. But usually it's just share all the toys.

Dr. Laura Markham: And what does share mean? So sharing all the toys, what does share mean?

Parent: I tell them to take turns, basically. If one has it, then the other one has to ask for his turn and then say, "Okay, when I'm done with it, then I'll give it to you."

Dr. Laura Markham: That sounds great.

Parent: Yeah, but the two-and-a-half-year-old, I think she doesn't really follow the rule. I guess maybe because she's younger. She's always like, "No, I want it right now" and that's when it gets physical.

Dr. Laura Markham: So she's the issue. No wonder he feels like hitting her. I mean, not that he should, but no wonder he feels like it. So do you have my sibling book?

Parent: Yes, I do.

Dr. Laura Markham: I want you to read the information on self-regulated turns in that book. There's something on self-regulated turns, and actually it's on the website too. For anyone listening, on the website, there's an article on self-regulated turns.

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/siblings/Teach-Share-Sharing>

Basically what this parent just described is perfect, and there are just a few tips on how to implement that. In this case, I would say the two-year-old needs help from the parent to wait her turn to use the toy. There needs to be a limit to how long her brother can keep it, like only until lunchtime or whatever. But she is actually in need of developing some self-regulation about waiting. I know that's a lot to expect from a two-year-old, but we find it does work and once children know that their turn with the toy will be protected, once the older brother knows that, then there's a lot less physical aggression. I think that's actually going to be your tool here, to change things, to get rid of the physical aggression, is to implement the rule about self-regulated turns with toys. So take a look at that, I think it'll be really helpful to you.

#### Question 40:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:04:18 A parent asks about competition. Her son is always saying, "I came in the room first, I ate my food first." And that we tell them no one has to win all the time. It's okay if he doesn't win."

I would affirm, "You came in first. You love it when you're first." So that's empathy. I would say, play with it. Let him win whenever he wants to win, let him win so he doesn't have to prove anything about it. That one-and-a-half-year

old is not going to notice when his brother wins. So you can probably, most of the time, let him win. And certainly when it's a game against you. Lose every game that he plays with you. If he gets in the room first and then the toddler is next, moan that you're always last, "I'm always last. You always win. How come I'm always last, I never get to win, oh." And no, you're not modeling poor sportsmanship. You're giving him a chance to feel like he's a winner, which is what he's showing you that he needs. I also think there's some sibling issues here, so let's just make sure you've addressed any sibling issues so that he's not taking them out in this manner.

#### Question 42:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:05:26

Our next question is: " Our four-year-old son is very bright and sweet but doesn't listen to either of us. He's very defiant. At school, he follows the rules, but when he comes he does annoying things like hitting stuff, pretending it's a hammer, kicking toys, screaming to get attention. He doesn't cooperate when we ask him to do simple things. When he's mad, he spits and screams aggressively or even hits. I'm not sure how we got here. Just a year or so ago, he was the sweetest thing."

Well, I see you have a baby who was born 15 months ago. I don't think that this is a discipline problem. I think this is a connection problem. This is a child who has not adjusted to having his sister in the picture. And you're saying that when he gets home he can't entertain himself and starts misbehaving to get attention.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Well that's normal. I know you're working, both of you. And I know he's at school. And when he comes home, he's missed you all day. Now I know your baby's missed you all

day too, and they both need you. And I know it's hard to divide your time between two kids. One is only 15 months old. She doesn't understand. And you do say that you used to give a lot of attention to him before his sister was born, but once his sister was born you couldn't give him as much attention.

But I am impressed to see that you say you give him 20 minutes of undivided attention from you, every day during the week. So, that's great. And you say that he gets at least 40 minutes of undivided attention every day from his dad who's very caring and hands-on with him and does the nighttime routine while you do the nighttime routine with the baby.

So here's the thing. Parents often think when they have a second child that what makes sense is for mom to take care of the baby and dad to take care of the older child. It's common. I mean it's usual. However, the older child terribly misses mom at that point. And it sounds to me like that's what's going on here.

You say that in his first three years of life he was delightful and then in the last year he suddenly become terrible and defiant and disobedient and acting out to get attention. It sounds to me like he needs something from you that he's not getting. I know you both work full time and it's very hard to find the time alone with him, but he needs more than time alone. He needs more than time alone. He needs to work out all of that anger, which is coming from a deep reservoir of pain.

So when the baby was born, or maybe a few months after she was clearly here for good and not going anywhere, he began to get scared. Things might never go back to the way they'd been. In fact, the truth is they wouldn't. They didn't. He might never get his mom back for the bedtime routine, and in fact he didn't. He might never get the kind of attention he used to get, and in fact he doesn't.

I realize that you don't love him any less, but he thinks you do. He feels great pain, a tremendous loss that he has suffered and continues in his mind to suffer, or not just his

mind. His experience is that his life has changed for the worse, and he hurts and he's scared. He's scared that this means he isn't lovable to you anymore.

So you're going to need to give him a chance to work this out. Have you read my sibling book? If not, drop everything else in the course and do that. And if you're behind in the course and you haven't yet listened to the sibling week, please listen to that week. It's critical.

Then use the peaceful parenting tools. It sounds like you're already doing special time with each parent. Wonderful. I didn't hear anything about roughhousing. That's critical for a child who has that much fear going on. This is a kid who needs to cry. He's being totally provocative with you, where he won't follow your rules and he's defiant and he purposely does things that he knows are "bad." He's trying to get your attention and show you that he hurts. He's being provocative because he needs to cry.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The way to get him crying is to create safety, and the way to create safety is of course roughhousing, but also empathy. So when he's having a hard time, your job is not to fight with him when he's defiant, but to say, "You are having a hard time, aren't you? Looks like you're all out of hugs again." This is when he's misbehaving to get attention, right? "Does it seem like you're not getting enough attention from me? It must seem sometimes like your sister gets all the attention and you never get what you need. Is that right? Well, if you're all out of hugs again, let me see what we can do about that."

Dr. Laura Markham:

There's a game on my website where you fight over the child.

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/connection/play-child-emotional-intelligence>

I strongly suggest that you play that game with him and also I strongly suggest that you figure out a way to shake up your routine a little so he gets more of you in the evening, and he doesn't feel like he's being palmed off on dad. I'm hoping from what you've described that he has a

great relationship with his dad, but he also needs a great relationship with his mom, and he's not going to be able to relax and cooperate at home until he has that.

So please focus on connection. Use the peaceful parenting tools to build connection so that he can show you all that pain he's been carrying around for the last year. It won't be pretty, but be accepting. That's what he needs to do, is show you that pain. Not by getting stuck in anger, remember. So read that part of the peaceful parent happy kids book if you haven't already, about getting stuck in anger and how to get past that. I think with the support that he needs, you're going to get your lovely little boy back again.

### Question 43:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:11:41

Our next question is from a parent who says, "Our six-year-old son often has explosive, angry outbursts. His yelling or crying can make our one-year-old daughter really upset. She sometimes starts crying too. If we shift our focus to helping her calm down, the situation with our son often then escalates. At other times she imitates his shouting by screeching herself, which also makes our son more upset because he's very noise sensitive. How can we manage their conflicting needs in the heat of the moment?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

So that sounds so hard for everyone concerned. So first of all, I just want to say your poor six-year-old. Of course he gets upset when he's upset about something and then the one-year-old starts to cry and then all the attention and concern shifts to her and he really doesn't feel heard. That will indeed increase his anger and explosiveness because we know he's going to escalate if he doesn't feel heard, right? The way to de-escalate is for him to feel heard.

So when your six-year-old gets angry about something and the one-year-old starts to cry, when you pick her up, you can say to her that he's the priority. She won't really

understand this, but **he'll** get it. He'll feel like he's the priority even though you're picking her up.

So he's angry, he's yelling, she starts to cry. You keep your eyes on him, you scoop her up and pat her and you say to her, "Oh Sweetheart, you're worried about your brother, aren't you? You're upset. Your brother's upset because of XYZ. He says it's really unfair that XYZ happened, right? And he's so mad and sad about it and him being mad and sad makes you mad and sad too, doesn't it?"

So you're restating his case. You're paying attention to him even while you pick her up and hold her and pat her. She feels secure by the tone of your voice and by your arms around her. She doesn't need your words to focus on her as well. She's only one. But he does. He needs to feel like he still matters in this encounter.

So your words are what are allowing him to de-escalate. That screeching thing must be really hard for him when he's angry. If you can imagine being furious yourself about something and having someone screech imitating you, it would make you more angry.

But your six-year-old is probably reasonable when he's not feeling super angry. So have a discussion with him about how the one-year-old is scared by his anger, doesn't know what to do with it and of course imitates it. He's blaming the one-year-old for screeching and is really irritated by it, understandably, but if he understood more in his calm moments why that might happen, he might be able to be a little calmer in the moment.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You can also, when you have that reasonable discussion with him, ask him if he thinks that when she screeches in imitation of him, it would be smart for you to say to her, "It's okay, your brother's upset. Let's help him. Let's listen to what he has to say." If you tell him in advance that you're going to do that and you've explained why she does this and you've commiserated with how hard it is for him when she does it, I think you'll find him being more patient.

But the most important thing for you is your six-year-old needs some help to get past those explosive angry outbursts. Now you don't say that he's special needs. Maybe he is. Maybe he isn't. A kid who's not special needs, by the age of six, if you can help him with a full backpack, he can get past this.

So preventive maintenance is super important. That's the first thing. The second thing is you have a one-year-old and a six-year-old. I'm betting your six-year-old is already set off by the one-year-old and there's some sibling rivalry there. So again, listen to that audio from the sibling week on how to melt that chip on his shoulder if that's part of what's going on. I'm sure you have thought of this, but if there's more than one adult in the home, immediately separate your kids so he doesn't have to deal with her imitating him by screeching and she's less likely to get upset to the point of tears when he has an explosive, angry outburst.

#### Question 44:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:16:04

The next question is from a parent who says, "My three-year-old bites my 10 month old's fingers, both in front of me and behind my back. I've tried to discuss the issue with no shame and blame. I've tried to comfort the baby, then connect with the toddler to talk about what she needs. She often says she needs more special time or she simply wanted my attention. I have been stepping up the special time, but she thinks it's a great way to get my attention now to bite the baby or that it's funny."

So first of all, when it happens, ignore your toddler. Instead, comfort the baby. Express great dismay and upset that the baby is hurt. Comment that you need to keep all your children safe and you work hard to keep your toddler safe and you will work hard to keep your baby safe and everyone in the family needs to keep everyone else safe. That way she gets that it's a big deal. You're not blaming or

shaming, but it's a big deal that the baby's hurt and it's her job as well as yours to keep the baby safe.

Dr. Laura Markham:

After the baby's okay again, when you go to your three-year-old, you tell her, "Oh, the baby was hurt. We have to keep the baby safe, you and me. What can we do to make sure the baby's safe next time?" And you say to her, "Did you want my attention? Is that why you bit the baby's fingers? But when you bite the baby, the baby hurts. Oh no, poor baby, and then I have to take care of the baby and I can't give you attention. Next time, what could you do to get my attention?" Of course, you want her to come over to you and either use words or give you a hug or in some other way indicate that she wants attention. Probably it would be very effective if she kissed your fingers. Not bite, but kissed your fingers, since this is her impulse now when she wants attention is to bite the baby's fingers. It's easier to redirect an impulse than it is to get rid of it.

So let's just redirect it. Have her come over and kiss your fingers. Then make a big deal of how she remembered to do that and how that means she wants your attention and she gets your attention now. Once you've agreed with her on this new process, this new signal, practice it a bunch. Talk about it a bunch. Make it happen over and over and over again so that it becomes automatic. Until it's automatic, keep your three-year-old away from your 10 month old. Put the 10 month old on your back. If the 10 month old wants to crawl around, keep the three-year-old with you. Don't let them be unsupervised. If you're having to cook, put your 10 month old on your back.

Dr. Laura Markham:

That way when the three-year-old does go after the 10 year old, when that's her impulse, she won't be able to get to the 10 month old. You can say to her, if you notice it, "Were are you trying to kiss my fingers? Did you need hugs? Are you out of hugs again?" and throw her around a bit and get her laughing.

If you don't notice it and she's looking and she comes up and kisses your fingers, all the better. She's taken it upon herself. You do the same thing. You'll have to make it a

priority to give her this attention and if she asks for special time at that moment and you can't do it, you validate how much she wants it and how much you want it and how much you love special time with her and how you're going to do it soon. In the meantime, how many hugs does she want and would she mind terribly if you kissed her on the belly or whatever will get her laughing. I think you'll find that this should break this habit simply by removing the proximity of them and it will also teach your toddler something important about how to express her needs more constructively.

#### Question 45:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:19:52

This parent asks, "Our four-year-old is a very spirited kid who could pick a fight in an empty room. We struggle with how to balance her needs with those of her sweet little sister who's only one. Big sis seems to take all the emotional space."

So you phrased your question as a "we". Obviously when there are two parents present, you each take one child and it's fine to give big sister attention when she needs it. Your younger one is fine unless she's expressing upset, but of course be sure each parent gets special time with the baby alone and be sure you have a way to occupy the baby when you're taking care of the big sister. So sensory bags with lots of duct tape that only come out for times like this are very handy. This is all covered in the sibling book and also there's an article on the website that I think will help you, to help each child with big emotions when you have two upset children.

#### Question 46:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:20:41

A parent asks, "My toddler, 29 months, is high needs. Any tips on ensuring that the seven month old who's not so

high needs is still fulfilled and doesn't suffer because of this?" Now this is the same as the last question. Thank goodness the seven month old is not high needs. The toddler is still very young and needs more. Who knows? When they're teens, the situation could obviously easily be reversed, but for right now the seven month old will let you know if she needs you. Have a safe place to put her with lots of calm reassurance and cool stuff to play with while you deal with her big sister's meltdown.

### Question 47:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:21:15

This parent says, "We tried to teach our daughter to fall asleep with dad from about six months before the little one was born, but she still often needed me and now I'm exhausted with her waking up needing me and the baby feeding. We struggle when I have to help the three-year-old fall asleep as it's the baby's fussy time, and of course the three-year-old resents her feeding between us or me standing to shush her. Our close bond isn't the same even though we play all day and the baby misses my attention."

This is so heartbreaking. Your girls both need you so much and you know, you can do this. You can be the mom they both need you to be. I know it's not easy, but it is possible for you to do that. So six months is a long time for your three-year-old to be put to bed by dad and still resent that and resist it and have a hard time with it.

So no criticism of him, and I don't actually know this, but for everyone listening, dads in this position need to be all about accepting, empathizing, saying, "I am here for you. I'm your dad. I will take care of you. I know it's hard, Sweetheart," and showing up for the child emotionally. The child might be feeling bereft about mom being gone, but she learns that dad is a pretty good substitute.

In this case, it sounds like your three-year-old did not learn that and maybe it's nothing to do with your partner, but it might be that he wasn't there for her fully emotionally. It might be that you just have a very strong willed kid and he

needed to have her to himself and you actually needed to leave the house before she would accept the situation. But somehow she didn't learn to depend on him.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Anyway, now you have a three-year-old who has missed you even before the baby came and wakes up at night looking for you and resents having the baby there feeding, which makes it so hard for all three of you. The cure for this is to spend as much time during the day as you can, laughing and connecting with her, so at bedtime there's not so much pressure on you.

I also want to suggest a game to play with her every single day where you two are separated, but you climb over the obstacles to get to each other. The idea is for her to be empowered to get to you no matter what and to learn that you will get to her no matter what. Get lots of laughter going on, but also real obstacles. Cheer her on, proclaim your love, encourage her as she's coming to you. In fact, I suggest you have a soundtrack, "Ain't no mountain high enough to keep me from getting to you." I'm suggesting this because kids use fantasy to work things through and I think if you repeatedly play versions of this game, you're going to see real changes in her, because she's going to realize that you're still there for her, which she doesn't believe at this point.

#### Question 48:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:24:16

A parent asks, "My five-year-old oscillates between being very adoring and gentle with his nine month old sister and being very rough. I usually talk very gently to him about this, but it's a big trigger and I have yelled. He has at times suggested that she gets more attention. He also hates to be told what to do. 'Everyone tells me what to do,' he says, and he does have a dominating older brother who he plays loads with but also fights with."

Your a poor five-year-old. His older brother dominates him, everyone bosses him around and he no longer has the role of the youngest. His nine month old sister gets

more attention. She's only getting cuter. He himself is a bit anxious and insecure, as you describe it, and then his jealousy gets the better of him and he hurts his sister and his mom, not unreasonably, yells at him.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Of course he already feels terrible because he adores his sister. The answer here, and you know what I'm going to say, is to help your five-year-old with the feelings that are making him rough with his sister. Empathize with his feeling that she's getting all the attention. Make sure he gets so much of your attention that he totally believes that no matter what she gets, there's more than enough for him. I want to suggest that you listen again to what I said earlier about what happens when he's aggressive with her and you yell at him. I said this in response to one of the other questions, or a few of them. It's a natural response but it causes more roughness because it makes him more worried that you love the baby more, So it's not fair to the baby if you can't control your anger.

So I know I'm asking you for heroics here, but just go to the baby and take care of her. Don't yell at him. Try not to let his brother boss him around so much. Coach him to stand up for himself. Also, everything I'm recommending here is covered in the sibling book. Just turn directly to the last section which is about life with the new baby for the first year. So make sure you read that and start working on that right away. I think you'll have more tools to work with and he won't be quite so jealous.

#### Question 49:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:26:19

This question is from a parent who says, "I have a very sensitive and needy six-year-old who has suffered from severe alopecia after the arrival of her little brother from jealousy and stress. When we were on our own, she was better, but still needy and demanding but manageable. Since her brother arrived, it's been a constant battle of competing jealousy and antagonizing behavior."

So I'm going to say the research shows that when you have a high needs child, they have a much harder time adjusting to the birth of a sibling and the reason is obvious. When a baby is born, the older child does get less from the parents. It's harder for their needs to get met. And if you have a high needs child, they have a harder time coping with that because they have more needs and not all their needs are being met.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So when you choose to have another child, you have to be aware that if your child is high needs, it's going to be a much harder adjustment for them. So that is the hard but true answer to your question. You asked how to help her understand that there's enough love from mommy for both her and her brother? Well, the way to help her understand that is to make sure there **is** enough love by making sure she has enough love, and that's not easy to spread yourself around that way, but that is the answer.

Treat each child with as much adoration as you would if they were your only child. So no matter what your sibling gets, there is more than enough for you.

Of course it is probable that she's not able to take your love in because she's developed a chip on her shoulder about her brother. So all the things I've said in response to the other questions about siblings are also important for you to put into practice.

I want to add that most kids, even high needs kids, don't develop severe alopecia when a sibling is born. So your daughter has a tendency to severe anxiety. Really pay attention to getting her laughing and crying. I think you'll see her animosity toward her brother diminish as her alarm system relaxes.

I see how exhausted you are. I hear that. I want to encourage you to replenish your own cup, because otherwise you won't be able to convince your daughter of your wholehearted love. I have a sense that this is really important for you, to make sure you have enough to give her because she's otherwise a bottomless pit. She really

needs you to feel good inside yourself so that you can be fully present for her. I'm sending you hugs.

### Question 50:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:29:06

This parent asks, "What do we do when the toddler, who is three years old, yells at or hits the baby, who is eight months old? We try working through those emotions with him based on the scripts on the website, but none of them evoke a meltdown, crying or tears from the toddler. We've tried asking him to see how the baby might be feeling based on his face and the toddler says, 'I'm sorry,' but two seconds later he's yelling again."

So, I think the reason he's yelling again two seconds later is his feelings haven't been dealt with. You're asking him to see how the baby feels, and that's a great thing to do when nothing bad is happening between them, just when the baby and he are having a nice interaction, but it's not a good idea when he's having a hard time with the baby.

Here's the reason. When we talk to kids about what the baby might be feeling, they do develop more empathy and that's a wonderful thing and you can even start it when you're pregnant. But when the child's upset is activated, when he's just yelled at or hit the baby, his feelings have to get dealt with. We don't want him to talk about how the baby's feeling at that moment. If we're trying to get him crying, which is what you're trying to do, you need to be empathizing with **him**. So you need to be saying, "Oh my goodness, you were so upset at the baby. Yeah? What happened? Was the baby in your way? It's so frustrating when the baby's in your way."

Or other times if he says anything negative about the baby, "Sometimes you have a really hard time with the baby." Even if he doesn't say anything negative, come up with negative things that are obvious, like he had to wait for you because you were feeding the baby or changing the baby and you couldn't help him with his train set.

So your goal is to empathize with the toddler and that's the only way you'll get any tears coming from him. It's not to teach him empathy during those moments. Do that at other times when there's no problem between him and the baby, right? When they're having a bath together or they're having a nice interaction of some sort, then you can wonder how the baby feels and he'll start to develop more empathy for the baby.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The other thing that will help to move him to tears is laughter, roughhousing and laughter. Then when he's done a lot of laughing with you and he's had a lot of empathy from you, then you can set a mild limit, something fair and firm that he's used to. At that point he might move into tears. It won't be about the baby, it'll be about whatever the limit is, but it doesn't really matter. It will still tap into those feelings in the backpack. So you can get him crying about something else and those feelings will still come out.

Of course, have discussions with him. He's three. He can have discussions about how he feels about the baby, about how hard it is to have a baby in the family. So he feels acknowledged and he gets in touch with those upsets, and is able to feel how bad all that stuff feels to him so he can begin to move past those feelings and doesn't have to act on them or lash out at the baby.

### Question 51:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:32:15

This parent says, "Both of my girls are breastfed, ages three and four months. The older one doesn't spend too much time nursing. Only before sleep and not every day. But sometimes when the little one needs to feed, the older one gets very frustrated and sometimes she hits the baby. Sometimes she says that during the night she dreams that she's breastfed as long as she wanted. How can I help her understand that my love for her isn't measured by the time she spends being breastfed?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

So this is really hard. Breastfeeding has become a concrete measure for her of having to share you. This is a challenge that sometimes develops with tandem nursing, but it's especially likely when you limit the older child's time at the breast. So I wonder, now that the baby's nursing is well established, maybe you could not limit your daughter's nursing. Once she knows that she can have the breast whenever she wants it, she won't have to be so angry that her sister gets unlimited access. As far as convincing her that you love her in many other ways, demonstrate them. Talk about it all day, every day as you shower her with love and articulate how much you love her.

Also, that game that I described, "Ain't no mountain high enough to keep me from getting to you," I would play that with her. I think she needs to see that your love for her is boundless and as I said, little kids work this stuff out with fantasy play. It's the perfect game for her.

### Question 52:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:33:44

Our next question is from a parent who asks, "How do I get my four-year-old son to share his toys with his little brother, who's one?" So I think the answer is that kids learn to share when they have the experience of being generous. In other words, handing a toy to the brother or sister and they see the face of the other person. Their sibling's face lights up and it touches something inside them that makes them want to be a generous person again because they love that feeling. We're all designed with that warm, generous feeling when we see that response in another person, that they appreciate what we've done. And that's because we're designed to live communally together, human beings.

So even a four-year-old can feel that feeling, but often they don't. And there are some reasons for that. The most

important and common reason is that we stop kids from feeling that because we're always taking toys away from them and giving them to the sibling. We're always making them share. So as much as possible, you want to avoid that scenario. And you want to instead set up a scenario where your child is allowed to use the toy for as long as they want, a self regulated turn, and then give it to their sibling. So if it's a four-year-old, you don't make them share. He already has to share so much, including his parents. Instead, make a household rule that whoever has the toy gets to continue using it until they're done with it, but they can't have it for the whole year or even the whole month or even the whole week. They can only have it until the next meal, so until lunch or dinner or breakfast, whatever is next. And at that point, they do have to give the toy to their sibling.

Dr. Laura Markham:

This self regulated turn rule has so many benefits, because children do begin to develop generosity, because the child who's waiting for the toy does learn impulse control and self-regulation as they're waiting. And because you, the parent, are less involved in navigating and negotiating with the timer, the amount of time that each child has the toy. I realize this is really hard to think about with a one-year-old because they won't get it. Why can't they have the toy that their sibling has? But the good news is, they learn very quickly as they see that you'll also protect their right to hold onto their toy rather than taking the toy away from them to hand it to their sibling.

So this is really for household toys that don't belong to any one person. I want to add that if there's a special toy that your four-year-old got for his birthday from his grandma, I don't think he should ever have to share that unless he wants to. If he wants to, out of the goodness of his heart, he can share it with the one-year-old. But it's never his job to give his private toys to the one-year-old. But most toys shouldn't be private toys, that's just like a special birthday present. Most toys are household toys and therefore they're governed by the self regulated turns rule.

There's lots more info on this and why it's a good idea. It's in my Peaceful Parent Happy Siblings book. There's also an

article called Teaching Kids to Share. You can just put those words in the search box on the AHA Parenting website. The Atlantic Magazine made a video where they interviewed me about this. I think it's called Helping Kids Learn To Share, and you could just go to the Atlantic Magazine website and watch that video. And I think you'll see if you try it, that it seems crazy, but actually, within a month everything in your house will settle down about sharing because your kids will know the rule and it'll be so much easier to follow it. It won't just be a matter of one kid has to give up the toy when he's got it and then resent the other kid.

### Question 53:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:37:37

This parent asks, "My oldest son is three and a half and he's often aggressive toward our youngest, who's one and a half. If my husband is home, he takes the oldest away and I soothe the youngest. We acknowledge his aggression, we repeat that people are not for hurting. We go towards reconnection with the two brothers and we make an agreement for the future. We look for possible needs behind the aggression and we address them if possible. Often this works."

And I just want to say, this is fabulous. Thank you for describing this so beautifully. This is exactly what you do and I'm glad to hear that often it works. And then the note continues, "Sometimes it doesn't work. It seems our son is not reachable. What can we do in that situation?"

It sounds like those times when your sign is unreachable, when it doesn't work, it's because he has some emotions that he himself can't articulate that are driving him to act out and he needs help with those. He needs to surface those emotions. I would always start with empathy, "You are having such a hard time, it feels so bad inside." And he is old enough at three and a half, that if he really feels your

empathy he probably will begin to cry or talk to you about what's going on.

I want to add when you say, "We make an agreement and address any needs that drove the aggression," I assume you're also including repair in that. That the three-year-old does have to in some way repair with the one-year-old when he's aggressive. That's really important. And I would say during those times when he's unreachable, what will happen if you empathize and then he stays closed down and you say, "And you do need to make things better with your brother, you need to repair with him. I wonder what you could do?" At that point, he'll probably say, "I'm not going to repair with him," because he doesn't feel able to, because there's still anger locked up. And bingo, that's great, because that's your doorway in. Now he's telling you what he's upset about. Now he's showing you his hurt and his anger and his fear.

And at that point, you can empathize and help him work it out and hopefully have a scheduled meltdown, hopefully he can cry about it. And after he feels better from that, he will be ready to repair and he certainly won't be unreachable. So I hope that gives you a game plan going forward.

#### Question 54:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:40:01

Our next question is: "How do I stop my older kids from hurting the baby? My three-year-old hurts the baby all day. I can't take my eyes off her. She bites hard to bruise, gouges eyes, hits and scratches. She got the same when she was a baby. My five-year-old isn't as aggressive but pulls on the baby when I'm holding him or squeezes too tightly when hugging."

Well first of all, I am so sorry, but the baby's only six months old and is really getting pummeled here. So when you say you can't take your eyes off her, you can't take her off your body. You need to wear the six-month-old, not put her down anywhere where the three-year-old can

touch her. It's just not fair to her. And obviously, the reason that the three-year-old is doing this is that this is what was done to the three-year-old when the three-year-old was a baby by the five-year-old. And obviously, your three-year-old needs some help with those feelings that are driving this compulsion to really hurt the baby.

Dr. Laura Markham:

All three-year-olds will have a negative reaction to a sibling being born, or at least virtually all will feel threatened at some point. But most of them won't be as violent and aggressive as you're describing. So this is a child who really has been hurt and who has a full backpack and is now scared because of the baby and needs your help. And that means this three-year-old needs time alone with you without the baby. So you say that your partner works long hours and you don't have another adult there. I think you have to have a babysitter some of the time who can take the six-month-old and even the five-year-old while you're with the three-year-old, so you can spend one on one time.

I think you need one on one time with your three-year-old every single day and I'm hoping the six-month-old naps so that you can spend that time. You can probably set your five-year-old up with something to keep them busy. You've heard me talk a lot about sensory bags or bought special boxes, whatever. And your three-year-old really needs that one on one time. Of course, your five-year-old needs it too, but your three-year-old needs it especially so that you can get past this fear that is driving the aggression because that's what drives aggression.

:

And I'm wondering what happens after the three-year-old tries to hurt the six-month-old or does hurt the six-month-old, what you do in terms of repair? Because the three-year-old probably doesn't really feel much like doing repair with a six-month-old. But anything you can do to foster a positive relationship between them will go a long way to stopping that aggression. So that's really important.

But I think your most important thing is prevention, not just inside the three-year-old, but also between the three-year-old and the six-month-old. The six-month-old cannot

be put down and left anywhere the three month old, sorry, the three-year-old can hurt the baby. And as for your five-year-old's overzealous hugs of the baby, I'm going to answer that in the next question.

### Question 55:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:43:02

Our next question is: "My four-year-old loves her little sister, one year, very much and can be very affectionate, but at the same time she can be very rough. So she'll pull the little one so strongly as to make her fall. This happens all the time, every day. What should I do?"

Well, your child is showing you that they feel two ways at once. They feel affection and they feel jealous. So they're doing their best with some complicated feelings. They're not trying to be mean.

So you intervene by saying, "That's a bit rough. See her face? She's telling you she's scared. Here, I will help you be gentle." And then you intercept your child's hands and show them how to be gentle and lift the baby away and comfort her if you need to.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So remember, aggression comes from fear. Often, giving your child a chance to work through those fears by roughhousing with you will stop not only overt aggression, but also that more subtle aggression. So always work a little preventive maintenance, roughhousing into your day while the baby's asleep, and you will see your older child be more gentle. And in those moments when your child is rough and it's hard to be gentle, redirect that impulse. Say, "Look at your sister's face. She looks frightened. What do you think she's telling you? That's right. That's too wild for her. Are you feeling wild right now? You want to play bucking bronco with me?"

And if you need to, set a clear limit. Just put your hand on your child. The midsection is the place to put your hand so it stops your child from moving any closer to the baby. And you say, "That's too much force for the baby. I know you

really want to connect with her right now, but that's too much force. You can be wild with me, or you can be gentle with the baby." And remember, sometimes when your child is aggressive in this way, even seeming to be loving, they're actually being provocative to get you to help them with their feelings.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So your goal is to be totally loving and kind to your child, but very clear about the limits. And if you can stay compassionate, your child might even burst into tears, especially if you have your hand on their belly and you're keeping them from moving forward, and you just say, "I'm right here to hold you. You're safe. Everybody needs to cry sometimes." And make sure that after that cry, you say to your child, "No matter how much love that baby gets, there is always more than enough for you. I am so lucky to be your mom (or your dad.) I don't know how I got so lucky as to have you for my son or my daughter. I could never love anyone else more than I love you." And I think you'll see that your child will become more relaxed and more gentle with the baby.

### Question 56:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:46:10

The next question is: "My three and a half-year-old won't participate in dialogue about hurting the 15-month-old. I've listened to Dr. Laura's scripts, but the three and a half-year-old won't respond or even acknowledge that I'm speaking most of the time."

I know that's frustrating when you listen to the script and you say all the right things and your child doesn't even respond. But my hunch is that he's ashamed, that he thinks you're judging him. And the only way you're going to get through to him and have him respond, is if you go overboard with empathy initially. So I would not say anything when the baby's hurt. I wouldn't say anything to the three-year-old yet. I would take care of the baby and ignore the three-year-old.

And then later, I would go to the three-year-old and say, "You must have been so upset, Sweetheart." And he won't say anything. And you'll say, "It looked like the baby messed up your stuff or touched your toy or looked at your toy or something." Keep speaking to the fact that your son was wronged, that it's so hard to be a big brother. He has to share everything, he even has to share his parents. Really make it clear that you understand his perspective.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And remember all aggression comes from feeling scared, feeling like we were wronged, feeling like somebody's doing something bad to us. And in this case, the 15-month-old is doing something bad to the three-year-old by existing and taking your attention and time. So really acknowledge all of that.

If you're able to be really aware of how painful your three-year-old's experience is right now, you'll probably tear up as you talk with him. And he'll hear you, he'll hear those tears in your voice. And he'll look at you and you can say, "It must be so hard for you, Sweetheart." And you can give him a hug.

And then you can say, "It's never okay to hurt the baby, but you can always tell me how hard it is." And give him another hug and walk away.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And then continue that at other times, don't just have the conversation after he hurts the baby. You don't want him to have to hurt the baby to feel like you understand him. Make sure you're continuing to raise these issues with him and talk about what it was like before and talk about how hard it is for him and be really understanding. I think you'll find that he'll start to open up and talk with you, once he knows that he'll be really heard.

### Question 57:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:48:57

This question is: "The four-year-old towards the two-year-old for a long time, snatching was a big issue. Better now,

but instead she just follows her brother around whimpering, "Can I please have it?" While either grabbing it out of his hand, or I asked her to wait until he's finished. This often results in tears and lots of going on, mostly for show. How do I teach her to wait her turn without nagging or constantly repeating myself? It feels a little like she'll never learn on her own. How much empathy do I show when it's whiny behavior?

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I know that whining gets on your nerves, on everybody's nerves. And I know we were taught when we were growing up that whining was a bad thing and that parents should have no patience for it. But here's the thing about whiny behavior, if you want the whiny behavior to stop, you need to show empathy for it and meet the needs the child is expressing. If you want the whiny behavior to continue, then you don't need to show any empathy. And really also, if you want her to learn to wait her turn, you need to constantly teach her.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think what happens to us when we have a baby is that suddenly the four-year-old seems so big, but really a four-year-old is still very young. Naturally she feels needy and she whines. I would say you and your daughter have made such progress. She no longer snatches, celebrate that. And when she's crying because she wants something, I don't think that's for show. Yeah, she's definitely doing it so that you'll notice it, it's designed for you. She's communicating to you something very important about her experience. It's not just about this one toy her brother has. It's about having to share everything with her brother, even you. So when you ignore that, she has to escalate it so that you'll see how she feels. Why would you do that to yourself or to her? It can't be good for her relationship with her brother either.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So when she whines, empathize, let her sob her heart out. Hold her, comfort her. It's so hard to wait for what you want. You'll find she's much less grabby and whiny if you can show her a little more empathy.

### Question 58:

- Dr. Laura Markham: 02:51:08 This parent asks, " Our two-year-old frequently grabs her four-year-old's special toys and runs away with them, or destroys the toys like a Lego creation. Our four-year-old gets extremely upset when she does this."
- Dr. Laura Markham: So unfair for your four-year-old, no wonder it's hard for him to calm down when this happens. And of course you're doing the right thing to focus on the four-year-old to help him, and to talk later with a two-year-old. I assume you're also setting a very clear limit with the two-year-old and helping her make a repair, "Oh no, the Lego is broken. Your brother is so sad. He worked so hard on that. Can you make nice with your brother? Hug your brother and make it better."
- Dr. Laura Markham: And then I would coach your four-year-old to say to her, "I need you to stop hurting my Lego's. Will you stop?" Now, she'll probably agree. All she really wanted was to have her brother pay attention to her. Have her shake on it, and the next time she comes near his Legos, remind her about the agreement. You'll have to remind her a lot. But a two-year-old just doesn't have the impulse control to stop herself from grabbing at the Lego. So prevention here is key.
- Dr. Laura Markham: He needs a place to work where they two-year-old can't get to his Legos. Can't he have a room with a baby gate where he could work? And can you start having at least one daily activity that the two-year-old gets to do with the four-year-old? That's really all the two-year-old wants.

### Question 59:

- Dr. Laura Markham: 02:52:29 This parent says, "I have two boys, ages four and two. When one starts acting out the other copies. This generally happens at meal times and bedtime. At meal time, they refuse to eat, bang cutlery on the table, get down from the table, et cetera. It invariably ends with them running around throwing toys and hitting me. At bedtime, they run

around hiding and refusing to listen. When it's just one, I can usually get things back on track, but when it's both, I just can't get them to listen. I've been following your techniques for about three months. There's been some improvement, but in these situations there's been no change."

Dr. Laura Markham:

So this sounds really tough. Your oldest is showing off for your youngest, which gives him the courage to go against you, but he's also not following your lead and not taking you seriously. I know it happens when they're together, but this isn't primarily a sibling issue. I think it's a relationship issue between you and the children. If your relationship with the oldest was stronger, he wouldn't be ring leading the younger brother like this. He would be aligning with you as the grownup and the younger one is just following the older one's lead.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I would say, you need to hulk up here and be alpha mom. I don't mean be mean. I mean you need to meet your children's needs.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So get your oldest to be your baby again and to depend on you. Really work on your connection with him. Lots of special time with him while the two-year-old sleeps. Be very nurturing and babying to your older child. Set aside daily time for rough housing. Put your four-year-old on your back, get him shrieking with laughter at your wildness. Roar like a lion, toss him around and then say, "I will save you," and snuggle him. You're reeling him back in.

Be sure you do a lot of roughhousing every day to reduce the kids' stress hormones so they aren't so wired at bedtime. But the other reason you're doing the rough housing is because you want him to feel connected to you and to start to depend on you again.

Dr. Laura Markham:

In addition to connection, set limits as necessary. When they bang their cutlery, take it away from them -- forks are for eating, not banging. If they want it back, tell them it was too hard for them to handle the fork responsibly. They can try one more time, and if that doesn't work, they can try again tomorrow. If they refuse to eat, don't worry

about it. Don't give them more food, take them down from the table. If they get down from the table themselves, dinner's over. One warning is sufficient for all of these things.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And then, at bedtime when the hi-jinks start, grab your four-year-old and take him in the room where you need him to be. The two-year-old will follow. Just stay calm and kind, but firm. If you need to, separate their rooms. No matter what you need to do, even if one of them has to sleep in your room on a pallet on the floor or in a crib in your room. Remember, you're in charge. Be loving, but firm. Your kids need to follow you, not each other.

#### Question 60:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:55:23

Our next question is: "Our oldest son has been physically rough with his little brother from birth. He's four, and his brother is two. We followed everything in your book and course for aggression, but we have seen little improvement. We don't see signs of jealousy and we work hard to avoid sibling rivalry. He says his brother is his best friend. When he pinches or pokes him, it's rarely in response to anything his brother has done. He doesn't seem angry at him, he's usually laughing. It seems to be an impulse control problem."

Well, sibling rivalry does not require the other child to do anything to provoke it, first of all, it can come out of nowhere. And sibling rivalry is often expressed covertly with jokes or teasing or laughter. So I'm willing to believe this is an impulse control issue, but is your four-year-old also hitting his friends? You don't mention that. If his brother is his only target, then either this is sibling rivalry or it's just that he can get away with hurting his brother since he's bigger, whereas his friends are probably four.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Sometimes hitting can be a way of handling it when he starts to feel bad inside for some reason. So it's not

actually provoked by sibling rivalry, it's more like, well, a form of bullying in a way, but then he wouldn't be laughing, probably. And of course sometimes it's just an abuse of power, and power is something that all four-year-olds are working on and they have a hard time resisting it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I also want to add that laughter is often something we do when we're a little uncomfortable. It's an expression of anxiety often, not just of having fun. So often when kids laugh when they do something wrong, it's because they know it's wrong and they can't really stop from doing it. So they're sort of anxious about it and they offload that by laughing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So regardless of what's causing the issue, let's talk about what you can do to stop it. You're already using all the peaceful parenting tools, you say. You're working hard to avoid sibling rivalry, that's great.

And you have something else big in your favor here. Your son says that his brother is his best friend, so he's motivated to have a positive relationship with his brother. I think the answer here is to coach your two-year-old to advocate for himself. So when his brother pinches him or pokes him, you can say, "It looks like you don't like that, Sweetie. You can tell your brother, 'Don't hurt me.'"

And then back him up. Say to your oldest, "Our family rule is we don't touch other people's bodies without permission. Right? What can you do to make things better with your brother?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

One great outcome would be if he said to the two-year-old, "Sorry, can I kiss your owie to make it better?" Because that gets him in the habit of asking before touching, right? He's asking to heal with his kiss, but he's asking before he just kisses. What you don't want is for him to just jump on his brother and hug him, which is another form of manhandling.

If this is just a matter of impulse control by the way, that's a hard thing to work on directly; it's partly age and it's partly practice. But if you'd like to practice with your four -

year-old, start playing games with him like Mother May I and Simon Says, that do require impulse control. Then you'll also want to play games in which there's physical touching and roughhousing where everybody has to stop when they're told to stop, when somebody yells stop, for instance. And you can rotate who yells stop, but everybody has to freeze. Freeze is another good one where you're playing a game like dancing and you yell, "Freeze," and everybody has to freeze in position.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So there are a lot of ways that you can work with your four-year-old on his physical impulse control. But I think he needs the combination of that, plus to hear how his brother feels about having his body touched in ways that he doesn't like.

#### Question 61:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:59:17

Our next question is: "Our six and a half-year-old has been having a difficult grumpy personality since his brother was born, but it's not getting any better, and his brother's now two. He's hitting, pushing the younger one. He doesn't share 99% of the time and he seems to enjoy teasing and making him cry all the time. How can we teach him to be more empathic, to share, to be more brotherly loving with the two and a half-year-old?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

I am so sorry that your kids are having to go through this and you're having to go through this. It's a normal reaction to be upset when the baby's born. And it sounds like your son never got to work through that and he is still resenting it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I would say, first of all, don't make him... he already has to share his parents. He has a chip on his shoulder that he's never gotten past from when the baby was born. So making him share is the worst thing you can do. It sounds to me like you have not read my sibling book or even the website, which does have an article on how to teach kids

to share. And what it says is, the way you create generosity is not to force them to share. And there's a whole theory about it and a whole set of instructions for how to handle it and the research does support it. So I'm going to suggest you look up sharing on the AHA Parenting website and take a look at that article about how to teach kids to share.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And then your question about his difficult and grumpy personality. Clearly, if that's what happened since his brother was born, he hasn't gotten past those feelings yet. He has what we call a chip on the shoulder toward his brother. I'm so sorry that you didn't find me until now and begin to work on this. Because two and a half years later, it means their relationship is probably not in very good shape, as we can see by the fact that he likes teasing his brother and making him cry. So the week on siblings, it's got a whole thing on how to deal with this. It's a big project. It's going to take you six months of intensive work with your six-year-old and helping him work through these feelings. You'll have to use the peaceful parenting tools. But you're also going to have to be doing a lot of talking and a lot of listening so he can tell you how awful his life has been since his brother was born. But better now than waiting until his brother's five, right?

Dr. Laura Markham:

And you asked, "How do you teach him to be more empathic or loving?" You can't. You can only help him with the angry feelings that are getting in the way of him feeling loving and empathic. There's no way you can teach him to act that way when he feels something so different deep inside. So this is deep work and if necessary, I would even consider getting help. But I think you can do this if you just use the information in the sibling book and on the website and really make a project of it. I'm really sorry, it's hard when kids get that chip on their shoulder, but it is possible to heal it.

## Question 62:

Dr. Laura Markham: 03:02:40

Our next question is from a parent who says, "Our four-year-old daughter frequently makes statements rivaling her two-year-old brother like 'I'm winning, climbing the stairs, my artwork is better, I'm first, ha ha, I slept better than you.' We've always been careful to not make comparisons or inside competition or label the kids' characteristics. How can we shift the tone of our home from this antagonistic climate and instead cultivate love and encouragement?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

The universal nature of human competitiveness -- trying to shore up a defense against your worry that parents might love the two-year-old more or he might encroach on your territory. It is universal for the human mind to compare itself, especially when it feels threatened, I'm sorry to say. So the most important thing is to keep your nearly four-year-old from feeling threatened. Make sure she's got special time every day. Make sure she knows you could never love anybody more than you love her. Make sure she knows that she's the apple of your eye and she doesn't have to be perfect to merit your adoration. And no matter what her 23-month-old brother gets, there is always more than enough for her. You could never love anyone more than you love her.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now that won't be enough, but it's a good start. The next thing you do is you start to talk to her about the person she wants to be. It helps to read books that show people acting in a loving way and she can then see, Oh, I could be like that person. So read to her about good ways to be, right? And talk with her about good ways to be and talk to her about family rules. Our first rule is, be kind. Our second rule, is my body, my choice, we don't hurt people's bodies. It doesn't sound like that's an issue for her, but she needs to feel like her body, her choice. So that's great. And talk about any other family rules that you think are necessary.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Affirm to her that she doesn't have to be perfect, everybody makes mistakes. And sometimes every one of us wants to do things, is tempted to do things that aren't

really the best thing to do. But some part of us knows the right thing to do and some part of us tries to make the right choice. Talk about what those choices might be. As much as possible when you start these discussions, don't have it relate to her sibling. Have it be something like, she wanted to tell you she washed her hands when she didn't. But she chose to tell you the truth, she had not really washed her hands or brushed her teeth or whatever.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So start talking about who she wants to be and really applaud the development of values and the development of love. And how in our home, we really try to love each other and encourage each other, especially when somebody has a hard time.

And then you talk about the 23-month-old and how he has a hard time with certain things because he's just little, and we encourage him because we're the older people in the home.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So you make her not exactly responsible for him, but more like she has a special responsibility because she's older, to be kind and to encourage him and to assist him when he needs it. And she's allowed to be mad at him and she's allowed to say she's mad at him and you will always listen. But no casual unkindness, that's not okay.

But you're not going to start the conversation there, right? You could take two months to get there. You're going to gradually develop her sense of herself as a good person, one who is emotionally generous. Don't ask for physical generosity yet, that might be a little beyond the four-year-old's capacity. But emotional generosity to aspire to, I think she'll like that. Good luck.

### Question 63:

Dr. Laura Markham: 03:06:55

The next question is from a parent who says, "My four and a half year old boy has gone from being gentle and sensitive to constantly hitting his sister for no apparent reason. It's become his way to respond to her about

anything. It seems he has a backpack full of anger and resentment. I'm trying to do more special time, but they're both with me and they both want my attention." This sounds terribly stressful for you and your two-year-old really deserves protection here.

We need to intervene to do something. I would say first of all, you have to protect her. She cannot be with her four year old brother without you there. No matter what, you need to keep them apart from each other when you're not in the room. That's first.

Secondly, it sounds like he does have a full backpack emotionally and the only way he will trust you enough to empty that emotional backpack is for you to empathize with him as much as you can 24/7 and that includes the times he hits his sister.

The times that he gets angry, you can say, "You were upset because she was in your way." Or if you don't know why, you can say, "You must have been mad to hit her." And he might start volunteering to you why he was mad.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now, maybe he won't have a reason, but just because you don't think he has a reason doesn't mean he hasn't had a reason. He probably has reasons which if you empathize enough, he'll share with you about how she looked funny at his toy or something.

Even if you wouldn't have seen it or thought it was a big deal, you empathize. "It scared you when she looked at your toy and you thought she was going to take it."

Another very important factor in increasing his trust in you is special time. I hear you that they both want your time, but isn't there some time that the two-year-old is asleep and the four-year-old is awake during the day? Or if he's at school and then he comes home and the two-year-old is already awake from nap, can you put the two-year-old to bed earlier than the four year old?

If none of that works, then you can make special boxes and use lots of duct tape on sensory bags and create

interesting activities for your two-year-old to do for 10 minutes at a time while you're with the four-year-old.

It's not a lot of time, but it's probably as much as you could expect for the two-year-old to entertain herself and you'll have to make at least five of these so you can rotate through them once a week to keep her interest. But most of the time, a two and a half year old will get interested if you create a sensory bag for her. And of course, then your four-year-old is going to get jealous and he'll want a sensory bag or box for himself and you can make some for him too, so you can get one on one time with your two-year-old -- although you may already have that during the day.

The point is you need to spend time with each child. If your four-year-old always has to share you, he is going to have a chip on his shoulder toward the two-year-old. I would also pay attention to having interactions between your two kids that are positive.

Anything they like to do together that they both enjoy, try to set up those interactions so they can enjoy each other and have fun doing those things. Research shows that the more children have positive interactions, the better their relationship is even if they also have some negative interactions.

That will make him more likely to empathize with her and be kinder to her. Roughhousing is a great way to get your kids interacting with each other and laughing and of course, that releases oxytocin so they're bonding with each other while they're laughing and of course, even if your son is just roughhousing with you or with his other parent, he is going to feel better because roughhousing transforms the body chemistry and lowers the level of fear and what's behind your son's behavior is fear.

Here is a child who was gentle and sensitive who has decided that his sister is a threat to him getting what he needs in life. He's scared of her presence in his life and that's what we have to do something about.

We have to undo that fear, melt it away so it does not become a permanent chip on his shoulder. And the way you do that is by making sure that he really does not have a reason to worry, that he comes to truly believe what you should be telling him every single day, which is “I love you so much. I could never love anyone more than I love you. No matter how much your sister gets, there is always more than enough for you.”

Dr. Laura Markham:

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