

Connection Q and A with Dr. Laura Markham

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 connecting with your child. Remember, we're always applying our three big ideas. We start by regulating our own emotions and behavior. Then, we connect with our child. Finally, instead of trying to control our child, we coach them to be their best self, both by helping them with their emotions and by creating an environment where the child can thrive. So, let's see how to apply these three big ideas to daily life with children.

Question 1

Laura Markham: [00:00:40](#) This parent says her eight year old son has a good life, no trauma. She and her husband are decent parents. They try to do attachment parenting, but their eight year old is quite negative, avoids intimacy. Stonewalls them, gets on best with his older sibling, and prefers him to the parents.

Laura Markham: [00:01:00](#) "Is that normal?" And at school he's cheerful, listens, and is attentive. So the great news is, at school he's fine. So this is something about what's going on at home, but we don't know what it is and yes, this would be dispiriting to have your child reject you all the time.

Laura Markham: [00:01:19](#) I don't think it's usual. Children are designed to look to their parents for connection. Something's different here. I'm not sure what it is, but your son is looking to his older brother, which is not bad. I mean, it gives them a good relationship, but I'm wondering what's going on in his relationship with you. You say you try to do attachment parenting. I wonder if that's an issue? By the way, I am an attachment theorist and did attachment parenting with my kids, but while eight year olds do need connection, they're also trying out their own wings.

Laura Markham: [00:01:51](#) They're developing their own identities. So maybe we just have a difference of the words we would choose. But it

may be that your eight year old feels like the way you're applying connection is too attached for him at this age.

- Laura Markham: [00:02:08](#) I don't know, but I guess I would ask yourself that. The other thing I would wonder, not to scare you, but is there some trauma that you don't know about? Because in that case he certainly could be angry. But then he would probably not be doing so well in school. So I'm betting that's not the case. So you know what I would do? I would ask him, I'd have a conversation. Pick a time when he's not on edge, when he's not already acting angry at you, on a weekend so you have time and ask him. "You know, we love that you're so cheerful and attentive and you listen at school and we're so proud that you're our son and we love that you get along so well with your brother. But we're puzzled why you don't seem to want to hang out with us. We love being with you. Have we done something to offend you? Is there something in your life that's been hard for you that we're not aware of?"
- Laura Markham: [00:03:01](#) I guess I'm curious what he would say and you may not be able to predict what he would say, but he might be negative. You just listen to what he has to say. He might even attack you. He might say something like, "You don't even care about me. You're always asking me how I feel. I hate that." He might say, "I hate the way you badger me; you ask way too many questions about my life." And if he says any of those things, those are great clues as to why he's pushing you away that you can use to change your behavior.
- Laura Markham: [00:03:29](#) But no matter what he says, just reflect it back to him, "Huh? So you really don't like it that I do X, Y, Z? You really feel like we don't care about you? Wow, I'm so sorry you feel like that. We need to make this better, sweetie. How can we hear about what's going on in your life without you feeling badgered, like we're always asking you too many questions?"
- Laura Markham: [00:03:49](#) So see what happens with that discussion because you don't want him getting any older moving toward the teen

years and you not being able to actually have good discussions with him.

Question 2

- Laura Markham: [00:04:04](#) This question is from a parent, who says she's worked really hard with her five-year-old for the last three years and they've made great progress using special time and roughhousing and empathy.
- Laura Markham: [00:04:19](#) And now they have a wonderful relationship, but her daughter is still never able to talk about her feelings no matter what she tries, and she won't share anything about school or anything. And this parent is a little worried that as she gets older she won't come to her with bigger problems. So, I would say some people do process their emotions by talking about them. Other people process things internally more and they don't talk until they feel more settled. Maybe your daughter will never be someone who's going to wear her heart on her sleeve, but you can work on how you talk with her and that might help her to talk to you more.
- Laura Markham: [00:04:55](#) So the best, most important piece of advice is to listen a lot. Don't jump in, don't overreact, be willing to sit in silence after you ask a question. And some little tricks that help, one would be not asking direct questions about feelings, because that puts somebody on the spot, you know? So instead you might say, "Oh, that could be really upsetting."
- Laura Markham: [00:05:18](#) You're not saying, "Were you upset?" Because then she's going to be like, "No, I wasn't upset." But if you said, "That could be really upsetting" right? Or, "I wonder whether you liked that, when that happened, or not."
- Laura Markham: [00:05:32](#) Right? You're giving her the option. "I wonder" is always a great thing to say because kids will often set you straight on "I wonder." I would also say don't badger her with

questions about her day. Make a warm physical connection. Be willing to just have silence or laughter.

- Laura Markham: [00:05:50](#) When you do ask about her day, ask very specific questions. Like, "Who'd you sit with at lunch?" And if she won't answer even those kinds of questions you could ask, "Was it a good play date or a bad play date?"
- Laura Markham: [00:06:11](#) Or you could say, "Was lunch today good or bad?" Often kids are more willing to start with that kind of a global thing and if she still clams up, it's a message. Maybe it makes her feel powerful to withhold info that you obviously want so much. Often kids are that way, and you could just say, "I am so happy to see you and it looks like you're not so interested in talking right now about your play date. That's okay. Do you want some quiet time while we drive or should I tell you something good about my day?"
- Laura Markham: [00:06:40](#) She might like being let off the hook from having to do that verbal processing, basically. I would just finish by saying don't judge your interactions with her by how much info you get. You said you feel like your relationship with her is really good.
- Laura Markham: [00:06:54](#) I would trust that. You know, judging your interactions you have with her by whether she enjoys them -- you're worried about her coming to you when she gets older --
- Laura Markham: [00:07:03](#) If she enjoys the interactions, she will keep coming to you. And so I would say anytime you're interacting with a kid, evaluate that interaction based on, does the kid enjoy it? And if so, they're going to come back for more.

Question 3

- Laura Markham: [00:07:16](#) Next question is from a parent. It's about their six year old who doesn't take criticism well. If she knows she's done something wrong, she often gets angry, sometimes cries. Then almost always clams up and refuses to talk, if we try

to discuss the incident, even if we wait until later. She also finds it really hard to apologize and since apologizing can make her cry, she tries to avoid doing it.

- Laura Markham: [00:07:38](#) I'm glad you asked this question because it's universal. Lots of people have this issue with their kids. What you're describing is shame. I think you can't expect someone who feels ashamed to take in new information. They just feel too bad about themselves. So you're saying she doesn't take criticism well? Well, honestly, nobody really takes criticism well. Who does? I would say if she really feels understood, she won't need to go on the defensive and feel ashamed.
- Laura Markham: [00:08:07](#) Start with empathy. I know that you feel like you need to teach her what she did wrong, we all do. But I'm betting she already knows that whatever she did was wrong, because if she doesn't know it was wrong, you would be teaching her in a nonjudgmental manner right?
- Laura Markham: [00:08:20](#) Like if a kid is three and they say, "That's green," and you say, "Actually, that's blue." You know there's no judgment there. Now your kid may still feel shame if you've made it a big deal that they didn't get their colors right, but most of the time you're teaching them that in a nonjudgmental way and it doesn't make them defensive.
- Laura Markham: [00:08:41](#) If your child doesn't know what she did wrong, then you would be teaching her in that kind of a way and it would not make her defensive. So she clearly knows that what she did was wrong. And when you tell her it was wrong, naturally she's going to get defensive about it.
- Laura Markham: [00:08:54](#) So remember she has a reason. Maybe it wasn't a good enough reason, and maybe she even knows it wasn't a good enough reason. But if you make her wrong, she's going to defend the reason she did this thing and why the world was against her and she had to do this. So instead, if you can start from a place of understanding and say, "Oh my goodness, you must've been so upset." Now, if you're just beginning to parent this way, she'll look at you warily.

Laura Markham: [00:09:21](#) So you have to take it further and say, "I know you wouldn't usually do X, Y, Z. I know you must've been really upset to do that." Or "You must've had a reason." You're sounding like you're totally on her side. If she believes you're on her side, she's going to open up and tell you all about it and all of her upset is going to surface. You certainly don't have to tell her she did the wrong thing. She knows that. But she'll probably suggest a repair. And if she doesn't, after she's worked out her feelings and the two of you are feeling really close, you can say, "When everybody feels mad like that they feel like saying mean things, but I think your words really hurt when you said that to your sibling. I wonder what you could do to make things better between you."

Laura Markham: [00:10:08](#) This actually is a great segue into your comment about apologizing. You know, if she cries when she apologizes, it might be because she feels terrible about what she's done.

Laura Markham: [00:10:17](#) I would just say don't make her apologize. Of course, she has to repair. Let her choose how to repair. There are lots of other ways to repair besides apologizing. She doesn't need to be forced to apologize. It doesn't actually make the relationship any better to be forced.

Question 4

Laura Markham: [00:10:31](#) Here's a question from a parent: "I have difficulty connecting with my seven year old, especially when she's angry about something that does not make sense. I try to empathize, but after 50 minutes I start to get frustrated and I don't know how to get her out of that mood." I totally understand. If you're working hard to be patient and understanding and your child stays angry for 50 minutes, that can seem like a very long time.

Laura Markham: [00:10:55](#) I wonder if one of the reasons that she won't shift out of her upset is that she doesn't actually feel understood because you think it doesn't make sense. Maybe that's communicating itself to her.

- Laura Markham: [00:11:08](#) I'm going to say this probably over and over again today but, anger doesn't begin to dissolve until it feels understood. The single best way to shorten an angry mood is to make sure the person who is angry feels understood. If you have a child who is angry and you want it to not last an hour, make sure they feel understood. And another way to help them move on is to respond to what's under the anger. So, if your kid is angry, that anger is a defense against more upset feelings underneath.
- Laura Markham: [00:11:38](#) And by upset, I mean things that make the person feel more vulnerable than anger. You could say something like, "Oh my goodness, no wonder you're so upset. That could really hurt your feelings to have that happen, right?" It's hard to do this if you don't understand what she's actually angry about, and you think she's making a big deal out of nothing.
- Laura Markham: [00:12:03](#) But remember often people seem to be upset about one thing, but they're actually upset about something else. So even if you think it doesn't make sense, it's enough that they're upset. If you have ever been to a movie where you cried and cried, it probably wasn't just the movie. You probably needed to cry those feelings out and you don't have to know what they were about to have it be an important release for you to have.
- Laura Markham: [00:12:28](#) So, you said you don't know how to get her out of that mood. You don't have to get her out of that mood. Once you've done the stuff that I've already described here, and she's still stuck in her bad mood, you can say to her, "I love you sweetheart. I'm so sorry that you're having such a hard time with this. I'm here with a hug, whenever you're ready."
- Laura Markham: [00:12:51](#) And then you say, "I'm going to get the dishes done now." Or whatever you need to do. And if your kid still needs to talk to you, they will follow you into wherever you're doing the dishes or whatever you're doing, and they'll begin to enumerate again, all the reasons they're angry and you can say, "So let me see if I have this straight." And you just repeat after them so they feel understood.

Laura Markham: [00:13:13](#) But you don't have to convince your child to get out of the bad mood. That's their job, not your job.

Question 5

Laura Markham: [00:13:19](#) This parent's question is about how to connect and redirect older kids. Her daughter is nine and a half, and it's harder to connect with and help her, than the six year old. What are tips for connecting with and guiding older kids? Well, the principles of the peaceful parenting approach are the same whether your child is nine or two, but there are two big differences.

Laura Markham: [00:13:41](#) First, a nine year old has had longer to get locked into emotional habits, which are also brain channels, brain connections, neurological patterns. So they can carry that chip on the shoulder for a lot longer before they melt and let you in, which you can see in the discussions on the Facebook group.

Laura Markham: [00:13:58](#) Second, it's much harder to help them empty their emotional backpacks. They're resistant to crying and you can't just throw them around physically. So it's much harder to get them laughing. So any way you can get her laughing would be really great.

Laura Markham: [00:14:13](#) Start a joke book together where you collect jokes. Tell her jokes, get her to tell you jokes. Here's a great one, freeze in place in a silly position. And when she says, "Mom? Mom?"

Laura Markham: [00:14:28](#) Stay in that silly position and just stay frozen. When she tries to rouse you don't move. Just stay in that silly position. And then, when she gets bored and walks away, follow her. Follow her, and then when she turns around and looks at you freeze into a new silly position. Most of the time kids crack up with this, they can't help it. I think it's funny just to tell it.

- Laura Markham: [00:14:52](#) That's the thing that works with older kids. It won't work forever, but kids often really like that. And pillow fights are a great way to roughhouse to get kids laughing. So you know, a nine year old-- you **can** get her laughing. Remember laughter connects you because it releases oxytocin. When you're laughing with somebody, you're connecting with them. So if you're trying to foster connection, laughter is a great way to do it. Also, at nine, she's at the age where she might really like a shared conversation journal.
- Laura Markham: [00:15:22](#) They can be really effective for kids who don't feel comfortable talking verbally. There's an article on the Aha! Website, if you put the words "conversation journal" into the search bar. And you also asked for help guiding. This is where you renounce shame and you start to empathize and listen and ask questions.
- Laura Markham: [00:15:41](#) So here's some questions, and you can find these questions. I'll just tell you a few of them, but you can find these questions on the Aha! website in the tween section. Tweens and preteens, which really I think it is 10 and up but nine and a half is almost there. There's an article on discipline for pre-teens. that you can find these questions in. Here's some examples of questions.
- Laura Markham: [00:16:04](#) "So what were you wanting to have happen when you chose to do this? Was there some part of you that warned you against doing it? What got in the way of you listening to that part of you? Hmm. How'd that work out? How do you think it worked out for the other people involved? Like for your sister or your classmate or your teacher? I wonder..." This is a good one. "**I wonder** what else you might've done?" And then all of this is a back and forth. It could have taken an hour now to get to this point in the conversation. Just from the beginning of the first question I gave you.
- Laura Markham: [00:16:39](#) So, when she gives you things she could've done, you might say, "All right, yeah, you could have done X." Now part of you is thinking, "No that would have been a terrible thing to do!"

Laura Markham: [00:16:48](#) But what you say is, "How do you think that would have worked out? What might've happened then?" So you're trying to help her develop her prefrontal cortex. That's how you guide a kid this age because soon they're going to have to be doing it without you.

Question 6

Laura Markham: [00:17:03](#) Moving on to this parent's question about a disrespectful nine year old. It's interesting you say she's been this way for about a year, and rolls her eyes at you a lot. And she says, "Fine," and then complies, but not happily.

Laura Markham: [00:17:17](#) First of all, that's what preteens do. They roll their eyes and they comply, but not happily. And they say "Fine." Right? The way that we get past that is by saying, "Wow, that didn't sound so fine. I guess you're pretty mad at me that I asked you to do this sweetheart. I know it's hard to stop reading your book and set the table for dinner when I ask you, I understand." Or whatever it is. There's nothing wrong with acknowledging what your daughter is saying "Fine," about.

Laura Markham: [00:17:59](#) And as you do that, she won't need to escalate. She won't need to roll her eyes because she'll know that you're going to hear her. Rolling eyes and saying fine is what people do when they don't feel powerful enough to say directly to your face what they want and need. You asked if you should introduce a good behavior jar to dissuade her from disrespectful behavior.

Laura Markham: [00:18:22](#) You know, I wouldn't. I would put all of my energy into connection. Because if you connect with her, she won't do this. And that means connection, special time, roughhousing, laughter, and also in that moment connection. Where you offer her understanding and empathy for what she's saying, right? I think you'll see you don't need a rewards jar. Rewards are just a way that parents either bribe kids or substitute for the connection that isn't there.

Laura Markham: [00:18:54](#) I would say you won't need rewards if you do what we're doing in this course. And also, it's okay to do rewards but you're not really teaching her the intrinsic value of how to relate to you. So I'm not sure you'll find that it has lasting effects.

Question 7

Laura Markham: [00:19:12](#) Now we have a question about a five-year-old. This mom has been offered a job, congratulations. It's very exciting to be offered a consultancy with the UN. And she's asking if she should take the job. So I can't answer that for you, but I can tell you this: her relationship is with you. Primarily.

Laura Markham: [00:19:33](#) All kids have a hierarchy of attachment and the main caregiver is at the top of that hierarchy almost always. Because that's who they feel safe with, although sometimes that changes. And you say that her relationship with her dad is good, but he's into old-school parenting with punishment and consequences and you say he travels a lot and spends long hours at work.

Laura Markham: [00:19:56](#) So you're the person who she's used to having be there for her. So taking a new job is always a big question. And the thing is, it's not just a nine to five job that you're talking about, where you could be there with her after work.

Laura Markham: [00:20:10](#) This requires travel. Half of the time you would be gone. Essentially you're saying, "Hi Darling, I'm glad I've been your mom for five years, but now I'm only going to be around half the time." It's sort of like getting a divorce and saying, "I will only be around half the time and the other half of the time, you're with your dad."

- Laura Markham: [00:20:29](#) Now, sometimes we have to do that. And kids do survive. But we know divorce is traumatic for kids for many reasons. I work with divorced parents all the time and I see that you can never repair the fact that they're only with you part of the time, and they're always coming back to you and needing to make up for that lost time.
- Laura Markham: [00:20:50](#) This isn't just like divorce, obviously. It's a very different situation, but if you're going to really be gone half of the time traveling, then the problem is that your daughter is going to be without you half the time. And I guarantee you it will have an impact.
- Laura Markham: [00:21:05](#) I guess the next question is, what kind of a child is this? Is this an easy child who is able to handle whatever you throw at them? No, it turns out she was a very anxious baby, slept badly, and was always agitated. That means she's a highly sensitive person. So, not only would you be gone half the time, but she's not somebody who has the inner resources almost certainly at the age of five to handle that. It's different than if she were 10, right? Or 15. 15 would be tough for you to be gone half the time. I would think twice about such a job if my daughter was 15. I personally, would not take such a job if my daughter is 15, or 10 or five.
- Laura Markham: [00:21:43](#) I realize that, that's easy for me to say. I'm able to do my career. And you're saying that you have not been able to find the work you want to do and you're thrilled to have this opportunity and I don't blame you. I think this would be a very hard thing to turn down.
- Laura Markham: [00:22:01](#) I'm not sure who'd be taking care of your daughter. You're implying that your husband would have some help from his mother? I hope so. Because your husband doesn't sound like he was even going to be there. So it isn't even really that you're gone half the time and she's with daddy half the time. It's like he's not even there. He's at work most of the time from what you described. And his mother would help out.

Laura Markham: [00:22:20](#) I guess I would ask, how close is she to his mother? And when she cries for you, will the mother be able to handle that in a positive way? Or will she shut down the tears? Honestly, I wouldn't do it if it were my daughter. But I understand what a very hard choice this is.

Laura Markham: [00:22:37](#) This is the hardest thing about being a parent, you know? We can't foresee these things. We can't set our lives up to be perfect, but we're not in control of what kind of a child we get. Sometimes we get a sensitive kid and they need a lot from us. It's a very hard situation.

Question 8

Laura Markham: [00:22:56](#) This other parent's question is really along the same lines. Dad is often gone. Travels for a week at a time for work and even goes on annual canoe expeditions. Wow. So dad's an adventurer, that's great. And by the way, as the kids get older, they might have a harder time with that. Most children I know, when dads are gone for a week at a time, actually have a hard time with that. But so far so good. Your kids have been doing okay with that; it sounds like. And the question is, in a year when your daughter will be five and a half, and your son almost four, you have an opportunity to go on a big adventure together. Which is being billed as the trip of a lifetime. You're asking me, is there a way you can do this without traumatizing your kids?

Laura Markham: [00:23:41](#) It's an 18 day trip. I don't see how you can do it without traumatizing your kids. You've got a child who's just turning four. There are kids who have grandparents who are very close to them that the kids often spend time with, and those kids, a four and a five year old, can usually handle something like mom and dad going away for a week.

Laura Markham: [00:24:04](#) But you're talking about three weeks away. That's really different. I personally don't believe there is such a thing as a trip of a lifetime. If you can do it now, you can do it later.

Even if it's going to the North pole. And honestly, even if it were the North pole, or the South pole, or whatever, the trip of a lifetime. I don't think I would do it if they were my kids.

Laura Markham: [00:24:24](#) I just don't think they're old enough to be able to understand that. And I find it interesting that you have a history of separation anxiety as a young child. That says to me that you're still trying to heal that and your decision about this is related to that. So I can't make such a decision for you, but I would just say it's not something I would do.

Question 9

Laura Markham: [00:24:51](#) A parent is saying, my six year old won't let me hug her in public. When I pick her up from school, she shoves her backpack at me and refuses any connection, but when we get in the car, she'll let me hug her, but never if anyone else is around. When we're in public, she doesn't ever look to me for approval. She tries to catch the eye of strangers.

Laura Markham: [00:25:11](#) And so what I'm getting from you is that she is a little bit ashamed of you or of her connection with you. So she's not emphasizing that. She doesn't use you as the one she's turning to in public. I think this is a connection issue. It might be embarrassment about how to handle things in public, but I guess it depends on how close you are at home. And you're working hard on the connection, that's wonderful.

Laura Markham: [00:25:41](#) Because you used to put her in timeouts and she's a challenging kid. I think this will change and ease up, and I think you should work really hard on a connection at home, and you should just verbalize what you see happening.

Laura Markham: [00:25:57](#) So you can say, "I noticed you really don't want me to hug you at school when I pick you up. I'm glad you let me hug you when we get to the car." Or she's showing off in public

and she tries to catch the eye of a stranger, you can say, "Oh, I see you on those monkey bars. Look how high you are. You're looking around for someone to see you. Other people can look too, but you know what? I see you. Look at you way up high!" And don't be personally hurt by it. Just take it as that's what happened in the past and you're going to make things better in the future.

Question 10

- Parent: [00:26:30](#) So my issue is impulse control.
- Laura Markham: [00:26:34](#) Okay.
- Parent: [00:26:35](#) I know I have it too and when my daughter has it, it just doesn't go well. I have my trigger moments and she has her trigger moments and it just keeps building up and it manifests in the form of mood swings and lying by my nine year old twin daughter. I need some practical tips on how to handle those mood swings. For example, I will say goodnight to my kid at night and we'll say, "Okay, we'll have a nice day in the morning." And come morning, she's a totally different person. And I understand most adults are different when they have to wake up at six in the morning.
- Laura Markham: [00:27:15](#) Did you just say you wake your nine year old twins up at six in the morning?
- Parent: [00:27:18](#) Yes, because the school bus leaves early in the morning.
- Laura Markham: [00:27:23](#) Okay.
- Parent: [00:27:23](#) But the bedtime is 7:00 PM so just to let you know. It's not like we're sleeping at ten.
- Laura Markham: [00:27:28](#) Yes. But you know what? If you have to wake a child up, they're not getting enough sleep.

- Laura Markham: [00:27:33](#) I would say even though it's a 7:00 PM bedtime, it might be that your child is not getting enough sleep. It definitely also means, if you're waking someone up, they're being awakened just wherever they are in the sleep cycle. And I don't know about you, but I'm grumpy if I'm awakened at a certain point in my sleep cycle. Other times I wake up naturally, I'm in a great mood. I know it sounds crazy to put a nine year old to bed earlier than seven, but that might solve everything. But it would be worth it if that's what it takes to solve the problem because it's an easy fix.
- Parent: [00:28:08](#) So this is just one manifestation. The mood swing continues throughout the day also. She's wonderful at one time and just a few hours later she has an impulse control issue and then she's a totally different person. Then it's manifesting in the form of lying, which she acknowledges and says she's sorry. She says, "I don't know why I'm doing it. I'm sorry." But it happens again. So what am I missing here?
- Laura Markham: [00:28:48](#) Mm-hmm. And what kinds of things does she lie about?
- Parent: [00:28:53](#) Just like if she packs some toy that she's not supposed to take to school or a pack of cards and she said, "No, I don't have it." And then I would find it in her backpack.
- Parent: [00:29:03](#) Simple things before bedtime. It's a rule in our house, you have to brush before you go to bed. "Did you brush? Yes." And we know she didn't. It's very small things, but then it just culminates and adds a lot of frustration. Why? What am I missing here? Why does she have to lie? Is it laziness that's reflecting in lying? Or what is it that I'm missing?
- Laura Markham: [00:29:35](#) I think she doesn't want to brush her teeth and she's trying to get out of it, or she might think you'll stop loving her if she actually puts her foot down and says she's not going to brush her teeth.
- Laura Markham: [00:29:51](#) And when you say mood swings-
- Parent: [00:29:53](#) It's a snapping issue, like in the morning when we are walking to the school bus, when I'm trying to make a

lighter conversation and her response to me is, Stop." And I'm like, "Oh, my child is talking to me like that?" I just couldn't take it. Where is it coming from?

- Parent: [00:30:11](#) I'm trying to make a lighthearted conversations. Okay, it was a bad morning. That's fine. Let's just forget it and start fresh, and she snapped back. That snapping happens very often throughout the day. But then other times she's wonderful, and she's not the same person. So I get very confused.
- Laura Markham: [00:30:33](#) I think that what you're describing is all about connection and can be fixed with connection. I think the snapping and the lying, are both about connection. And I think when your child snaps at you, you say, "Ouch. Excuse me, let's do a do-over here. I can see you're upset about this. No snapping at me, please. I try to use a warm voice with you, let's try this again. We can fix this. We can solve this problem." Right? So you're setting a limit every time your child snaps at you.
- Laura Markham: [00:31:00](#) But you're not setting a mean limit. You're inviting them to treat you the way you treat them, which is kindly. And for lying you say, "Teeth brushing. Oh, wait a minute. I think you **wish** you brushed your teeth. Come on, let's go brush your teeth." Or, "Excuse me, you really wanted to take this to school with you, but it does not go to school. You can't have it in your backpack. Did you not feel safe enough to talk to me about this, sweetie? That you felt you needed to sneak it?" Usually when kids sneak and lie, it's a question of safety. There's usually a reason that they're sneaking and lying that has to do with not feeling like they can talk to you about whatever it is. So I'm going to suggest that you really work on special time with her and on roughhousing with her. And I want to add that I think with twins often there's a closeness issue, just because it's so hard to raise twins. So I don't know what's going on here, but it might be that putting some extra energy into your relationship will fix it.

Question 11

- Parent: [00:32:14](#) I have a five-and-a-half year old, who is pretty strong-willed and we've made great progress in connecting with her. She's very strong-willed and there have been a lot of power struggles and a lot of the traditional parenting. And I think one really bad thing that I feel very guilty about now is that we did cry-it-out with her to make her sleep through the night. And I think she struggled a lot with that and is still quite traumatized with that. Because there are still nights when she comes out crying, saying we are not around. Now we all co-sleep, so we've solved that. I've been reading a lot about attachments and different types of attachment. And I have this worry that maybe she's not as attached. She's very connected to us. She's very loving and very affectionate. There are all of the issues that come with her age and the fact that there is a sibling in the picture.
- Parent: [00:33:17](#) But one of the things that we've seen to be more or less constant, although the degree has come down over a period of time, is her reliance on outsiders. This could be peers, like kids her age, where she really clings on to them and she wants their acceptance. And she wants to please them. And when they're not inclusive, she feels really upset about it. Or even my brother and his wife, when they're here, she's really attached to them. And she wants to spend every minute that they're here with them. To the extent of ignoring us. Not being disrespectful, necessarily, but really wanting to be with them a lot. Wanting their attention. And we've seen this, I guess, from the time she was about three-and-a-half. And that's one of the things that I wanted to ask you, what we could do about it.
- Laura Markham: [00:34:26](#) I'm not sure if there's anything wrong with that, about her wanting to spend time with the family visitors when they're there. I mean, she sees you all the time. So it's perfectly normal that she would want to see them when they visit.
- Parent: [00:34:44](#) But what about friends? For example, she goes to a couple of classes and, when we pick her up, she wants to hang

around with her friends. And we see all of her friends wanting to hang around with their parents. One instance which really troubled us was when my husband had to go to her school, which was a couple of months back, for a Father's Day event. And then she had a really close friend in school and all she wanted to do is spend time with that friend and not with my husband. There were times when she would go to him, but she gets pretty clingy with friends or people that she likes. And, when she's with them, she's kind of oblivious to everyone else.

- Laura Markham: [00:35:33](#) Again, I think that's her unique personality. I'm betting.
- Parent: [00:35:37](#) Okay.
- Laura Markham: [00:35:37](#) I don't think it's a sign of a problem with you or with your husband or with her relationship with her dad, necessarily. It could be, but I think it's more likely that it's just that she's really interested in the social dynamics. So I'm not sure that this is anything to worry about. If you're worried about it, work with your husband to make sure that he connects with her with laughter and really listens to her so that she feels strongly connected with him. But I wouldn't worry unless you're seeing a problem in their relationship. I don't think what you've described is a problem.
- Parent: [00:36:13](#) Right, okay. They have a good connection as well and they laugh a lot together.
- Laura Markham: [00:36:19](#) Great.
- Parent: [00:36:19](#) So all of that is great. And she is a very social kid. So she is somebody who would go out and make friends with anybody.
- Laura Markham: [00:36:27](#) Wonderful.
- Parent: [00:36:32](#) But this is something we've found very different from other kids. When other kids need their parents, maybe after a big day they want to spend time with them. Whereas our kid still wants to play with her friends.

Laura Markham: [00:36:44](#) Everybody's different. But I don't think that this is a problem. As long as your relationship with her is good, I wouldn't be worried about it. I think it's fine that she's a very social person. And I would talk with her a lot about social dynamics so that she doesn't have to be a people pleaser. I would read books to her about social dynamics and talk with her. But, I'm not hearing anything that's worrisome.

Question 12

Laura Markham: [00:37:07](#) A parent is asking about her two-year-old, who can't seem to get enough of her despite the fact that she co-sleeps and spends most of her time with him. And there's also a baby, a five-month-old, in the family. So I would say, first of all, you have a five-month-old. That will often cause an older sibling to be very clingy. You mentioned that you weaned him three months ago, your older one. So he's been used to that closeness and really valued it and he needs to replace that with new kinds of closeness. And that's what he's trying to do. That's one of the reasons he's so clingy, And, I would add, he's only three. In fact, he's not even three yet. He may look huge compared to his sister, but he's still a baby himself. It's normal for him to want as much time with you as he can get. I understand you're tired, you have a baby and a toddler. So I encourage you to do whatever you have to do to get lots of sleep. If the baby's waking you up at night, you should know that interrupted sleep is not as restful. So you need more than eight hours to get enough sleep. And I do hear that you're exercising, which is great, and eating well, which is great.

Laura Markham: [00:38:18](#) And then, to help your son be less clingy, I would be sure you're not just moving him through the schedule but really connecting with him. Make sure you're getting him laughing, and having intimate moments. And be sure he has plenty of opportunities to cry with you loving him through it. It may be that this is all just the reaction to the baby. And that brings me to my last suggestion, which is if you haven't read my book, *Peaceful Parent, Happy*

Siblings, the whole last third of the book is for you. It's all about how to introduce the new baby and help your older child through that, so that your children can get their relationship off to the right start. And it will really help you with your connection with your son so that he's not so clingy and feels more secure.

Question 13

- Parent: [00:38:59](#) So I just wanted to thank you so much for the book, it's been really helpful.
- Laura Markham: [00:39:03](#) Great.
- Parent: [00:39:04](#) I have a three-year-old daughter and lately she's been regressing a whole lot. Saying that she's a baby again. Saying mama and dada and wanting me to hold her a lot. I mean, I know it is somewhat normal. I've been humoring it. And even really relishing the opportunity, because she was not like this as a baby. She was really hard to hold, didn't want to be held. She was frank breech when I had her, I had a C-section. So, as an infant, I never got the hugs and cuddles that I was expecting and wanted. And now all of a sudden she's three and really wants a lot of this. But my husband sometimes says, "You're a big girl, let's act like a big girl." So I just wanted to get your take on that.
- Laura Markham: [00:39:57](#) Okay. So, has there been a change in your parenting since you started taking this course?
- Parent: [00:40:03](#) Oh, absolutely. Yeah, hugely.
- Laura Markham: [00:40:08](#) Did she start regressing in the last three months since you've been taking this course?
- Parent: [00:40:13](#) It's been maybe about a month.
- Laura Markham: [00:40:14](#) About a month, okay.

- Parent: [00:40:16](#) But the biggest thing is that we've been doing so much play time with her and having her animals talk to her and her stuffed animals and that's been really helpful.
- Laura Markham: [00:40:26](#) Great. Okay. So I would say that what's happening is super healthy. What I'm hearing is you started parenting in a different way about three months ago, or you've been moving in this direction over the last three months. And about a month ago she started feeling safe enough, because you acted out with the stuffed animals or because of the other things that have changed in your parenting. She started feeling safe enough to show you all the needs she had as an infant that didn't get met for whatever reason. Because you had the C-section, because of her being a baby who was hypersensitive and didn't really want to be held. Whatever it was. She didn't get that holding and snuggling. You missed it, I'm betting she missed it too. And maybe there's some people who don't miss it when they're babies and there are people who don't want to be touched.
- Laura Markham: [00:41:17](#) I'm totally willing to believe that there are babies who don't miss it. But I think there are people who feel a little prickly so they don't want to be touched. But, at the same time, they miss that love in tangible form. And I'm hearing that your evolving as a parent has opened the door to that for your daughter, to getting those old needs met and that craving filled. And what a beautiful thing that she feels safe enough with you to ask you for that and to show you those needs. And what a beautiful thing that you are being patient with that and indulging it. And allowing her to have those needs and filling them. I think you will find that, as those needs feel met to her, I mean she is only three. That she will not need those needs met anymore, they'll have been met. And she'll go on and she'll want to be the world's most independent four-year-old, I'm betting. But right now she's got old needs that she's trying to fill.
- Laura Markham: [00:42:20](#) So please play this for your husband. I know that our society really frowns on neediness, in general, and children being too needy or acting babyish. But I think that, in general, we don't understand that the needs that are not

filled, go underground and get acted out in other ways. So how great it is that she's able to put those needs on the table and get them filled. And, once they're filled, she can go on to fill other needs -- as I said -- like independence. She doesn't have to be constantly trying to get these needs filled in some other way. I mean, there are people who never get these needs filled and they grow up and, as teenagers, they're having sex with all the wrong people because they're trying to get held. Right? And they don't really know how to do it. And they think that's the way to do it. And I'm not saying that would happen to your daughter, but the great news is you don't even have to think about that.

- Laura Markham: [00:43:13](#) You don't have to, because your daughter is able to articulate it in such a healthy way right now. And you're able to meet the needs in a healthy way by playing with it. You can say, "Oh, are you my big baby? Come here, my darling baby. Let me snuggle you up." And then, those needs will be met and she'll move on to other interesting things at the next stage.
- Parent: [00:43:36](#) Great. Thank you so much.
- Laura Markham: [00:43:38](#) All right, you're welcome. Enjoy her.

Question 14

- Parent: [00:43:42](#) I have two children. My son is five-and-a-half and my daughter just turned eight. And so they're at the higher end of the age range that your program deals with. And I will admit that I'm behind. It's been a hard Spring and Summer and I haven't had a lot of time to follow this. So we're doing some of it, but we haven't done everything. I'll say that up front.
- Laura Markham: [00:44:09](#) Okay.
- Parent: [00:44:11](#) So we don't get a lot of defiance, but we also don't get a lot of compliance, if that makes any sense.

- Laura Markham: [00:44:24](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Parent: [00:44:24](#) So they're not outwardly defiant. They don't look at us and pour cereal on the floor or anything like that. They say they're going to help. They say they're going to do something and then they don't. Our son is an absolute angel. Our daughter tends to be less amenable and less connected to us. When they are together they set each other off. And lately, it's been laughter. Where they'll make funny faces at each other. And, when they do that, they basically effectively make it so they can't comply. Right? Because they're too busy making faces and laughing at each other. And so, I'm trying to get them to get ready in the morning. And mornings are particularly bad, and have always been. I say, "Put on your shoes." "Oh yes, yes." And then you go look and, of course, there's no shoes on.
- Parent: [00:45:35](#) So this is becoming a real trigger for my husband and I, because it's great that they're laughing but we're trying to talk to them about something. Or we're in the car and trying to make a phone call about something and they're making a lot of noise in the background. They won't stop. We're trying to get ready in the morning and all they do is laugh and make faces. And they just won't engage with us. So I'm wondering if you have any thoughts?
- Laura Markham: [00:46:02](#) This is so cute. I mean, I'm sure it drives you totally crazy.
- Parent: [00:46:08](#) It does.
- Laura Markham: [00:46:08](#) But it's so great that they have a relationship that they have so much fun together and that they're such a team. Unfortunately, they're teaming up to block you out. Even though they're not being defiant, they're, as you say, not being compliant. They're not cooperating with you. You're irrelevant to them. It reminds me of when you're getting a puppy and you know you want two dogs. But you're often advised, "Don't get two puppies together because they will ignore you." They're pack animals and they will ignore you as the leader and they'll play with each other. Whereas, if you get one puppy and raise that puppy and then you get

another puppy three years later, the older dog may break in the younger one. But they will both see you as the leader. And I'm hearing your children are basically a team, a pack, against you. And they're not taking you as the leader. That's what's happening, you and your husband are not the leaders. They're not taking your cues, in a sense. So they're not being defiant, but they're also not following your lead.

- Parent: [00:47:10](#) Exactly.
- Laura Markham: [00:47:11](#) So I would say that's what you need. And it's really interesting, also, that your son is a little angel when his sister is not around because she's his leader.
- Parent: [00:47:20](#) Right.
- Laura Markham: [00:47:20](#) When she's not there to disrupt that bond with you then you're the leader, right?
- Parent: [00:47:27](#) Yeah.
- Laura Markham: [00:47:28](#) We all have a hierarchy in our minds of the people we're close to. And there's an attachment hierarchy for every child. And it's almost like your son has bonded so much with his sister that she's the leader.
- Parent: [00:47:37](#) Right.
- Laura Markham: [00:47:37](#) And, if she's not there, then you become the leader and he'll follow you like a little angel, right?
- Parent: [00:47:42](#) Right.
- Laura Markham: [00:47:42](#) He's totally compliant.
- Parent: [00:47:42](#) Yeah.
- Laura Markham: [00:47:43](#) So she's really the ringleader here. And that's where you need to intervene, I think, to get a different thing to happen. And I would say that your bond with her needs to be strengthened so that she sees you as the leader.

Because she's sort of ignoring you right now. And she's strengthened in that by her little henchman, who follows her around and does whatever she wants and laughs at whatever she does. So she doesn't really feel a need to acknowledge you as the leader because, look, she has her own little follower. She gets to be a leader. So I would say, first of all, move heaven and earth to really strengthen that bond with her. Both you and your husband need to do that. And that doesn't mean that you don't strengthen your bond with your son, but I would say this is the one you really need to put some energy into.

Laura Markham: [00:48:29](#) And you said you were a little behind on the course. Well, I would really focus on connecting with her. That's the most important thing. Empathizing with her. Acknowledging what she says. Acknowledging what she does. Finding opportunities to snuggle her, to give her hugs, to tousle her hair. To just stand behind her and say, "Wow, I love what you're doing with that. You're drawing something that is so cool. I love how you're using the blue because that makes me my heart sing when I look at it." Or whatever. So you're basically acknowledging her and engaging with her a lot. So I wouldn't shortchange your son, but you want to really focus on building that relationship with her. That's the first thing.

Laura Markham: [00:49:13](#) Secondly, use all the tools. Right? So I just mentioned empathy and acknowledgement, but that's just the first tool. The second tool is roughhousing. Roughhouse with them apart from each other, if possible. There's nothing wrong with roughhousing with them together, in general. I recommend that all the time to roughhouse with kids together. But your kids don't need bonding with each other. They need bonding with you. So I would get her away from him for special time. But also some of that special time needs to be roughhousing time where she laughs with you and you do wrestling and stuff with her. And you are bigger than she is, you and your husband both. And you need to do stuff with her where, you're essentially establishing dominance in a totally appropriate parent-child way that is laughable. An example would be

you put her on your back and you're the bucking bronco and you're careening around the house and you throw her off, and buck her off onto the couch. And she's screeching the entire time with laughter, but there's a little tiny hint of, "Oh my God, is mommy going to drop me?"

- Parent: [00:50:25](#) Right.
- Laura Markham: [00:50:25](#) And I realize she's eight, so I don't know how big she is and maybe you can't do this with her, maybe only your husband can do it.
- Parent: [00:50:32](#) Sure.
- Laura Markham: [00:50:33](#) But the more you can do that kind of thing with her. Obviously, she's not terrified you're going to drop her or you've taken it too far. But she is screeching with laughter because some little part of her thinks, oh my gosh, you could drop her. And that's actually a good thing because then you are in charge of the relationship, but you're her protector. And she's laughing about that anxiety, and about the relationship with you being the leader. The relationship that every human being has with a parent when they're born is a relationship of dependence where you're totally dependent on that person. I mean, the sad truth is that parents could kill their children. Luckily, most of the time they don't.
- Laura Markham: [00:51:15](#) Right?
- Parent: [00:51:15](#) Yeah.
- Laura Markham: [00:51:16](#) But children are completely dependent on parents. And acknowledging that dependency with laughter that has a little bit of anxiety, but also acknowledges, "You know what? I realize you have only my best interests at heart. And you're going to be my guide and I'm going to follow you."
- Parent: [00:51:37](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

- Laura Markham: [00:51:38](#) That's the thing you're trying to repair here that seems to be a little awry with her. So that's why I think that kind of roughhousing will be really important. I also think that the special time and the empathy and acknowledgement will be really important. I'm not hearing that she's got a full backpack of emotions that she needs to let out. But you might find that will happen as you roughhouse and do special time with her. You might find that she gets more volatile and that would tell me that she's actually got a little wall up against you, because she has been stockpiling hurt feelings.
- Parent: [00:52:15](#) Okay.
- Laura Markham: [00:52:15](#) A feeling of being overlooked or not listened to. And, if that's the case, if she stockpiled those feelings, that could cause her to be a little angry and have a wall up. Which, again, keeps her from following you as the leader. So I think all of this is going to help you heal that leadership gap.
- Parent: [00:52:36](#) Okay.
- Laura Markham: [00:52:36](#) Does this all help? Does this make sense?
- Parent: [00:52:38](#) It does. It does, thank you. I think, we tend to be harder on her. She's the eldest and she's less of an amenable child, in general. So she probably does have a wall or maybe feelings that she needs to work through. And, since she's older, I think that maybe she's had longer to build that up and it may be harder for her to let go of those things. I mean her brother is the one who starts all the fun and laughter because I think, like you say, he's trying to get her approval. Right?
- Laura Markham: [00:53:13](#) Yes, exactly.
- Parent: [00:53:13](#) He's trying to make her laugh and try to get her to pay attention to him and approve. So I think that makes sense what you're saying about the leadership, that we need to shift that to ourselves.

- Laura Markham: [00:53:24](#) Great.
- Parent: [00:53:25](#) And I suppose also being more consistent with setting limits and following through with them would probably be really important as well.
- Laura Markham: [00:53:33](#) Yes, in a totally empathic way.
- Parent: [00:53:36](#) Right.
- Laura Markham: [00:53:36](#) So absolutely, because you're the leader, right? But also in a way that doesn't drive her against you. But that helps her feel understood even though you are setting a limit.
- Parent: [00:53:45](#) Right.
- Laura Markham: [00:53:45](#) But that is a definite limit.
- Parent: [00:53:46](#) Right. Great. Thank you.
- Laura Markham: [00:53:47](#) Okay, thank you. And I want to just add for everybody listening that everybody's situation is a little different. The conversation we just had, that's a specific issue that's going on with that child. But the tools that I recommend, the peaceful parenting tools, what I've seen is they work in all situations. Because they help the child work through emotions and they help the child feel safe with the parent. They strengthen the parent-child bond. And so the roughhousing, the special time, the welcoming of emotions -- that is basically what a scheduled meltdown is, where you're able to really show up and be fully present and listen and accept your child's emotions. And empathy, 24/7 empathy. And also routines. Routines are part of your leadership. They help kids follow you and they eliminate power struggles. So all of those tools, which are the five basic peaceful parenting tools, along with your own self-regulation work, in every situation will help.

Question 15

- Laura Markham: [00:54:51](#) This is a universal question. "We're finding we just don't have enough time," she says. And that she's grateful for all the wonderful things in the course but she gets annoyed at me, or at least at the course, when she feels like it's impossible to fit everything in. And that's, of course, a normal reaction. And I think everybody has that reaction. So I would say, yes, you already had a full life. So having me tell you that your child is going to benefit from special time and daily laughter and roughhousing, of course, that's frustrating if you can't figure out how to fit it in. And I think that the only thing we can do is start where we are, use what we have, and do what we can. And everybody starts in a different place. Obviously a single parent is starting in a very different place than a parent who has a partner who is around a lot. And some of us have more material resources to hire a sitter. Or maybe our child goes to school or preschool. And maybe some of us work outside the home, some of us don't. So everybody is in a different position.
- Laura Markham: [00:56:05](#) But some general observations that I would make. Usually the hard part is finding the individual time with each child. So often with roughhousing and laughter, you can do it with more than one child. Often, not always, but often. So that's easier. But finding one on one time with each child is harder. But I know many people in the course are not home with their kids, they're working outside the home during the day. But, if you're home during the day with your kids, I suggest mandating quiet time. After lunch it's quiet time and you trade off special time with each child.
- Laura Markham: [00:56:44](#) Now sometimes kids are very little and they couldn't do quiet time just by themselves, but those kids usually nap. So kids who are old enough to not nap, often you can still mandate quiet time and you can set your child up with a book on tape. Or you can set your child up with some sort of sensory box or activity, so that you can spend 10 minutes with the other child. But I know that, if you're coming home from work and there's only one parent at home, it's often impossible to do special time during the week. It just is. It's not like you can send your kids off for

quiet time when you get everybody home from daycare and you're trying to get dinner on the table. You don't have time for special time anyway. And you certainly can't hire a sitter at that point to be with one of the kids while you have special time, because you've got to get dinner on the table. So then I think you do special time on weekends. If you do have two parents in the evening, sometimes you can do that by trading off the kids, one of you with each kid. But you still only have a couple of hours so it's still hard to fit it in.

Laura Markham: [00:57:46](#)

So you were talking about how dinner can easily take you an hour with chatting and eating and singing. That's wonderful. You have a one-year-old and a three-year-old and you're able to sit with them for an hour at dinner? That wonderful connection time. And you know what we're really talking about, with special time, is connection. So there is something very special about one-on-one connection that you get with special time, but it's not the only way to connect. So I would do some of it, I would do it on weekends. But, during the week, maybe that's not what you do. During the week you get your connection in other ways. You do roughhousing with more than one child at once. And, if both kids are in the bath at the same time or both kids are having the same bedtime story, maybe the other parent can go do the washing. Which allows a little more free time then for the parents, you don't always need to have two parents with two kids, for bath time for instance. Or at least not for the whole bath, as a for instance.

Laura Markham: [00:58:53](#)

But I would say this, just do as much as you can. Don't beat yourself up for not getting around to it. And people ask, "Well, how much special time is enough?" I'm going to sound like your dentist here telling you about flossing, daily is best. Daily is best for flossing and for special time. But even once a week is a whole lot better than not at all. So if you're a single parent, you can find a way to do special time on the weekends. Maybe mandating quiet time after lunch or sending one kid on a playdate. If you have an ex that the kids go to every other weekend, let's

say, maybe you can trade off and at least once a month you get a child to yourself. One kid goes to your ex-partner and one kid stays with you and you get the whole weekend with that child. So just find times that you can be one-on-one with your child.

Laura Markham: [00:59:43](#)

One mom wrote to me and said, "I find myself looking forward to the busy time in the morning when we're getting on coats and shoes and leaving for school. Because we've made it now a time for fun and connection. The three children take turns running into my arms to get a big hug from me. Then I help them with their shoes and coats after I catch them. Then we race to get in the car or we bike and we pretend that it's a plane or a boat. We laugh and have so much fun and we start our day happy. That used to be a stressful time of day when I would yell at them. They wouldn't cooperate and I'd get angry and stressed out. What a difference." And that's what we're going for. Right? You wouldn't think of that time when you leave the house as special time, but it can be connection time. So you can use the routines that used to create yelling and disconnection. You can use those times of day as times to create connection.

Laura Markham: [01:00:37](#)

I would just add that this is a transitional period. So there's lots of time going into listening to these audios, participating on the Facebook page, and doing the homework. So right now you're probably even doing some backpack emptying yourself. And you're probably still helping your child do some backpack emptying. That's all going to change over time. And you will find yourself with more time than you used to have. And you'll also notice your child will be able to regulate him or herself emotionally better than he or she used to. And that will mean you have fewer emotional storms, fewer sibling squabbles, less defiance. And the child will have more self-discipline and more resilience. So when kids can manage their emotions, they can manage their behavior.

Laura Markham: [01:01:26](#)

So, again, you're going to find that not only is life more peaceful and pleasant, but you actually have a little bit more time for pleasant connection. And, of course, kids

also get older. So if you have children under the age of three then, by definition, you don't really have time for anything else. So just be as gracious to yourself and your kids as you can and do the best you can. And remember that, when kids get older and they head off to school, everything changes. Obviously, if you're homeschooling that's a different story. And it takes a special setup in your house to homeschool. One of the things is about your own self-care and your own time to yourself. And I think that's critical if you're going to homeschool, but that's a different discussion.

Laura Markham: [01:02:09](#)

And then I would just say there's no magic wand that you can fit everything in. Life is never going to be perfect. It's a series of trade offs. So it's true that this kind of parenting does take extra time when children are small. But, it also raises kids who become easier. Conventional parenting may seem less time consuming, but kids don't necessarily get easier as they get older, they get harder. And the teen years can be really hard. So to me, there's not a choice. It doesn't work to raise a child I want to raise and not do connection. So I think the thing to note here is that you can connect in many ways and you do the best you can. And you do find ways, even if it's just going up to one of your kids and saying, "Hey, step out on the back porch with me and let's look up at the stars together." Just you and that one kid. If you've got six kids, you can still do that once a week with each kid. Something that will allow you to make that one on one connection with your child. I want to just close that question off by saying it isn't your fault you're overwhelmed by parenting. It's the way our culture is set up. Most people parent almost in their spare time in our culture, but that doesn't really work. Children need more connection than that. And when we used to live tribally many generations ago, experts think that children naturally received more connection because parents didn't go off to work. So they were always around.

Laura Markham: [01:03:50](#)

The children were involved in the work of the tribe and the family, so they were always interacting with their parents and with other adults and with other kids. There were

more adults. That was actually for a sad reason, which is that many fewer children made it to adulthood. So there were more adults to children as a ratio. So one couple or one single parent didn't have to parent alone. They always had an extended family, grandparents, aunts and uncles, older sisters from the same family and just friends and neighbors who would lend a hand, who you'd all be around the fire together and hand the baby off to. And of course there were no screens, there was a lot of gathering around the fire. So there was probably a lot of downtime for connection. And I think that's a more natural way to live.

Laura Markham: [01:04:42](#) The way we raise children now is artificial and it creates a lot of problems. It isolates the children from other children so they're not palling around in a group the way they would be in a normal tribe. So they get bored with their siblings and each other, being at home and they fight with each other. They don't learn how to get along by watching the slightly older kids in the tribe, they don't get a chance to do useful work and feel competent. They're just playing with the toys, which is sort of a new invention -- toys.

Laura Markham: [01:05:12](#) And of course it's terrible for parents who are at home with children and isolated and feel lonely. And I think, when they do studies about happiness, parents who stay home with kids often report that they're less happy than parents who work outside the home. Now parents who work outside the home with demanding jobs often report being much more overwhelmed. I think the ideal is part time work outside the home and part time with your children in terms of the happiness level. But I think you can also mitigate some of these problems that develop from our way of life. And so I think it's important to remember that we used to have more support to parent and we have to find ways to get more support to hang out with other families, to have children hanging out with other children, to do more self care for ourselves and to connect more with children in a way that enhances the relationship basically.

Laura Markham: [01:06:14](#) And, you did such a beautiful description in the Q and A list of doing farm chores with your kids. You talked about having your two-year-old help you collect eggs and your six-year-old help you milk the goats. And I just think that is a wonderful way to address some of what's wrong with our lives. I think involving children in family cooking and laundry, you may not have chickens or goats, but involving children in the work of the home when they're very little, I don't mean assigning them chores and sending them off to do chores, which they hate. It sort of sets up a power struggle. Instead, I'm talking about creating opportunities for the child to feel like they make a contribution by working alongside you to do something of value. The two-year-old collecting eggs knows that's a value because she gets eggs for breakfast. And so make the kids a laminated grocery list so you can turn shopping into a fun excursion instead of a dreaded meltdown.

Laura Markham: [01:07:12](#) It becomes an opportunity for connection. Yes, you go much slower but you can connect during that shopping trip. You and your three-year-old can do laundry together. A safety tower in the kitchen I think is one of the best purchases you can ever make. So kids can stand next to you and help cook. And I think children treasure that time and it makes them feel more competent as well as more connected. And over time it does reduce the chores that you're left to do in the evening after the kids go to bed. So just to wrap this up, I would say you'll still want to do some special time. You'll see that if you do special time regularly the children will beg for it, which means to me they need it it's like a vitamin. But if you're home with young children, find other ways to connect and make sure you do roughhousing and laughter with a group. Make sure you use your morning routine for connection and the chores you do for connection and think of connection as something you do all day long. Just like with self care, remember it's not about the spa day, it's about how you care for yourself all day long. Connection is like that. It's how you connect with your child all day long.

Question 16

- Laura Markham: [01:08:32](#) A parent is saying that she seems to have lost her connection with her five-year-old and she can't even find the empathy to reconnect with him. And her two-year old is being very aggressive, punching, slapping, biting, and she just feels like a lousy mom and doesn't know where to start.
- Laura Markham: [01:08:49](#) I just want to tell you, you are not a lousy mother. I know that because even though you feel so lost, you're here, you're showing up, you're trying and you said you need help. You do need help. Don't withhold that help from yourself. You need to give yourself support right now so you are on the right track. Go to the Aha! parenting website, Aparenting.com, go to the about button, go to coaching at the about button. There are a bunch of parenting coaches there who I have trained. Read the descriptions over, write them an email, find one that you resonate with and schedule a session with them. And these coaches all work via Skype so it doesn't matter where you're located. And I want to reassure you that this is not a hopeless situation. Many two-year-olds, many little children are aggressive. And losing your connection with your child, that can be rebuilt. It's never too late. He's only five. I'm sensing that you're feeling like giving up and I totally understand that and I think anyone in your shoes would feel that way, but things will feel different when you have support. And you said you never know what to do or what to say.
- Laura Markham: [01:10:07](#) A coach is going to help you with that. They're going to play out these scenarios with you and help you figure out what to do and say in the different situations and help you to rebuild that connection and help you to deal with your little one's feelings so that she's not so aggressive. So I want to add that anyone listening to this call who's feeling overwhelmed, this is hard work. We all need support. There's no shame in giving yourself that support. In fact, the only shame would be not getting yourself that support. So don't wait. If you feel like it's not working for you for whatever reason, maybe you don't have time to do the

work and you want someone to hold your hand and help you do it, fine. Whatever it is, if you need support to make things better, give yourself that extra help don't wait.

Laura Markham: [01:10:54](#)

Find a coach today who can help you through that hard part, because this is the hardest part and you can turn it around.

Question 17

Laura Markham: [01:11:04](#)

A parent says that daddy took a new job, and he's gone for one to three weeks at a time and he can't always call at a good time. And when he does, sometimes the three-year-old says she doesn't want to talk to him, but then she wants to call him another time when he can't answer. And she's sad. Well this is a hard situation for dad and for you. And really, also of course for the three-year-old, and I know you have a new baby too. So I would first make a book about daddy's job, where he loves his family, loves his daughter, and the baby and the mom. But he has to go away for his job and show a picture of him doing his work at his job. This is going be in a little photograph, just print it out, put them on a word doc and put photographs and put simple captions and read it to her. And remember it has to have a happy ending. Books you give kids have to have a resolution to the trauma or whatever it is. So in the book, talk about how daddy hates to go and misses his little girl and how she misses him. Put her name in the book. You know, how she misses her dad. And then when he comes home, she's so happy and she does this with him and she does that with him. But then he leaves again and she feels so bad and she misses him. And sometimes he calls, but she's busy playing and she doesn't want to talk to him.

Laura Markham: [01:12:23](#)

But sometimes she wants to talk to him at bedtime and he can't talk to her. And she's very sad and she cries and her mommy holds her. But then her daddy always comes back. He always comes back and he loves his girl and he always

plays with her and takes care of her and daddy will always come back to her. That's the end of the book.

Laura Markham: [01:12:41](#) So first of all there's that book. If you have any more questions about making a book, there are examples on my website -- you can type in making a book for your child -- and there are examples about how to make them for siblings, which is a really great thing to do for sibling issues or for medical interventions. But this is a good one for this. I would also have her dad make some videos of him talking to her, even singing songs like lullabies or reading to her and that way you can play those videos for her when she wants to talk to him, but he's not available.

Laura Markham: [01:13:13](#) And I love the idea of her making a mailbox, like a shoe box with you, and when daddy has to leave he can leave a letter for her in the mailbox and you can even put in more letters from dad while he's gone. So she always has something to look forward to and she isn't just missing him. She's always feeling his presence in her life, in a way. It's not an easy thing, it's hard and you'll have to really work on their connection when he is home. But I think those things will help her to understand it better and will help her through it.

Question 18

Laura Markham: [01:13:48](#) A parent is asking, our-eight-year old son doesn't tend to share things related to his friends that happened in school with us. A few quick tips. Don't ask him direct questions, which he may feel put on the spot. So it's better to say things like, "You're very quiet tonight." Then he probably will just smile and not say much. And you could say, "Sometimes I'm in a quiet mood when I have a lot to think about. What's on your mind?" So don't start with the direct question of what happened in school. That's one thing. Another thing is when you do ask questions, be sure they're open ended. "What was the best thing about school today? What did the kids talk about at lunch? How did the soccer game go at recess? Did you feel like that

test was easier or harder than you thought? What made it easier or harder?"

- Laura Markham: [01:14:35](#) So remember that most of the questions you ask won't go anywhere. Don't feel like a failure. Don't just clam up. Don't be hurt. Don't take it personally. Just be warm and show up and make more observations. Verbal observations that give your child an opening. Also, you want to get your child in the habit of chatting about things. So you want to make verbal conversations safe. So talk about your own mistakes. Talk about your reactions to things that happened to you today. Leave openings in the conversation so that there's ways that he can join in. And it's a two way street and you might find him becoming more comfortable talking. When he does share, try not to talk a lot. Don't minimize what he says. Don't try to talk him out of his feelings. Don't overreact. Just say, "Oh, huh. Really? Wow, that's surprising. Were you surprised?" Do things that are minimal in reacting to him.
- Laura Markham: [01:15:33](#) You might also try having conversations in the car. Kids often open up more when we aren't looking directly at them. It also helps if you're walking down the street together, or when you're doing the dishes together. Sometimes when you turn the lights off at night, kids will pour out their soul to you. I love sitting with kids, even kids who are older, 12 and 14 year old, lying down or sitting on the edge of their bed with them. After you turn the lights out, kids will often open up at that point. The trick of talking in the car, I have experienced and heard from clients that it's also very effective with partners who aren't big talkers, that they're more willing to talk to you in the car when you're not looking in their eyes.
- Laura Markham: [01:16:18](#) Anyway, these are my top tips about how to get her to talk to you, but I want to just say there are a few articles on the website that'll really help you to be a brilliant listener, and find strategies for getting kids to talk. Remember that being verbal is not the only way to connect. He may not be a verbal person but he wants to connect with you. So just look at how he likes connecting, and do that. Is it pillow fights? Does he like to come up and bump his head into

your shoulder? Whatever it is. That to him is a connection. So respond to the way he does try to connect with you.

Question 19

- Laura Markham: [01:16:52](#) A parent is saying, her 11 year-old “says that we don't want to spend time with her and when we put her to bed she often asks why she can't get up and spend time with my husband and me. During vacations she seems to think we want to get rid of her and her brother when we enrolled them in camp.”
- Laura Markham: [01:17:07](#) Well, I think she's not attacking you. She's saying that she wants more time with you. So I would say acknowledge her feelings, respond to them. Say, "It sounds like you want to spend more time with us. That sounds great to us. Let's make sure we schedule special time just for you, but right now it's bedtime. It's not that we want to get rid of you and that's why we put you to bed. In fact, children need more sleep than adults do. You need 10 hours of sleep. That's what the scientists say. We only need eight, so just like the baby and the seven-year-olds go to sleep before you do, you go to sleep before we do." Maybe add some traditions for her, like going to brunch with her dad once a month, or a big girl's afternoon out for just the two of you once a month. Things like that, that makes it clear that she's special to you. And really make sure you do the special time. And as far as enrolling your kids in camp while you're on a family vacation, I don't have a good explanation for that because I know if you don't enroll them in something, it's not much of a vacation for you, but clearly she wants that time with you as family time. It is a family vacation, so it makes sense that she thinks you're trying to get rid of her and her brother because the truth is you are.
- Laura Markham: [01:18:16](#) So I would just urge you to reconsider that policy. She's already 11-years-old. She's not going to want to spend vacation time with you a lot longer. You're actually lucky that your 11-year-old wants to spend time with you on

vacations rather than going off to the kids club. And I don't mean to guilt you. Maybe you could do some of the time with you and your husband and some of the time with the kids. But, she's really trying hard to be connected and I would be responsive to that.

Question 20

- Parent: [01:18:49](#) My five-year-old is a very curious little guy, he has a two-year-old little sister. He has always been a very good big brother. He's very much into fairness, but lately he's been asking us to do things for him that I know he can do by himself. I don't know what is a normal amount to actually do for him when I know he can do things for himself. I want him to be independent and I don't know why he's asking us to do things for him all of a sudden. He wants us to carry him, he wants us to get him water, he'll complain if I ask him to put a dish away or throw the trash away. He'll say things like, you're not nice, you don't love me. And things like that. So I just don't know what's normal.
- Laura Markham: [01:19:48](#) Okay. So first of all, this is a new thing. He wasn't like this before and he's fine. Is that right?
- Parent: [01:19:58](#) Yeah.
- Laura Markham: [01:19:58](#) So something's going on that's making him feel overwhelmed. If he wasn't like this before and he suddenly became like this, something is making him regress, this is a regression for him. And I don't know what that is, that could be making him feel overwhelmed. Do you?
- Parent: [01:20:18](#) It might be the new school that he is going to but I don't know. No I don't know. I really don't.
- Laura Markham: [01:20:25](#) So it could be your new school. New schools can do that.
- Parent: [01:20:28](#) He hasn't started yet. We just talk about it, but...

- Laura Markham: [01:20:32](#) So he's a little nervous about it. I've seen this a lot in six-year-olds, is he five and a half?
- Parent: [01:20:42](#) No, he just turned five.
- Laura Markham: [01:20:47](#) Well, so in six-year-olds, I have often seen that they do so many things. They become so much more independent. They're willing to read and ride a bike and tie their shoes and go off to playdates by themselves. And sometimes that's true for five year olds, right? As they do all these things and they're very proud of their new achievements, they also regress some because they start to feel like they're growing up too fast and they're away from us in a way. And will we still be there for them? So I'm not saying this is definitely going on with your son, but I have seen it many times in six-year-olds and he's a little young for it at five. But it's certainly possible that that's part of what's going on. And especially since he's starting a new school.
- Laura Markham: [01:21:31](#) But regardless, let me say this, it's a new thing that he's acting like this. So he's expressing somehow that he feels overwhelmed. So I would say when he asks for help, you help him. He's asking for help because he feels like he can't quite cope. If I felt overwhelmed and I started asking my partner for help and said, "Sweetheart, will you help me with this? I just can't face paying the bills myself. Can we sit down together and do this?" My partner would say, "Of course." Right? And so normally I can pay the bills, but sometimes I feel a little overwhelmed and I want him to do it with me? Right? So we would do that for our partner, why would we not do that for our child who says, "I know I can put on my shoes myself, but please put them on for me." Right?
- Laura Markham: [01:22:17](#) Now If you feel like you do it every single day, you probably want to jolly your child into putting on the shoes themselves by having the shoes talk to them. For instance, the shoe is saying, "Oh no. Please, you put it on, you put it on," to the child or whatever. You can do all kinds of things to get kids to put on their shoes, but I wouldn't start there. I would start with responding to his needing to be babied if that's what it is. And just say to him, "You want me to

put your shoes on huh? You're so good at putting your shoes on, but it seems like today that's just too much for you. Is that right? Oh sweetie, you might need a big hug even more than you need some help with your shoes. If I give you a big hug, do you think that'll help you put on your shoes?" And he'll say no, nothing will help. And you can say, "Okay, you get a hug and shoes." Or he might say, "Yeah, I guess so." You can say, "Great, let me give you a big hug and then you can put on your shoes."

Laura Markham: [01:23:10](#)

But the point is you're dealing with the overwhelm, right? And sometimes kids need us. They need those things that are easy for them at other times, like the bill paying for me, it might be hard for them some other time when they don't have those internal resources. So don't worry that he won't be independent. Believe me, he's going to be pushing you away in ways that will not feel good by the time he's 10. I'm sorry to say it's universal. You'll have to fight like the dickens to stay connected. Right now I'm not saying that you have to coddle him, but I am saying that when he asks you for help with something, it's perfectly okay to give him that.

Question 21

Laura Markham: [01:23:48](#)

What is the best way to explain why we have to choose work first sometimes?

Laura Markham: [01:23:52](#)

So I'm assuming you mean you have to explain to your child why you have to go to work. I think it's really critical that children know in your heart that they come first. It's fine to say you love your work. I've had a lot of women say to me, "As a feminist, I think my child should know that I love my work." Of course there's nothing wrong with loving your work, and I am a feminist, but as a woman or a man, we love our work, right? And I don't have little kids. I have young adult kids now, but when my kids were younger, my answer to them was always, they come first in my heart no matter what. Say "I wish I could stay with you. You are the most important thing to me. I would

always choose to be with you rather than be any place else.” And what you say is working at your job is how you get money to buy food and pay for the place you live and you're going to make it a good day and your child can go and make it a good day doing what they're going to do. What do they have to look forward to today? What you're looking forward to is always joining up with them again at the end of the day, right? You have that conversation be about connection, rather than separation.

Question 22

- Laura Markham: [01:25:06](#) This parent asks, should we adjust our empathy language and actions for a six-year-old, so we don't sound so babyish?
- Laura Markham: [01:25:13](#) Well of course I would always use whatever language works for your child, but I wouldn't do it based on your own judgment. All we need to do to not sound like a baby is to sound grown up. I would adjust it because it's more effective with your child. You mentioned actions and language. Six-year-olds love physical connection. Some of them more than others. And so I would continue to be very physically affectionate with a six year old. And empathy language of course that's going to evolve, but it's always appropriate to describe your child's perspective and acknowledge how they feel. "Oh sweetheart, I'm so sorry your lunch spilled all over the inside of your backpack. No wonder you're upset. Let's work together to repair that." Now that's appropriate for a 14-year-old or a six-year-old. Right? So I'm not sure what's babying about it. I guess with a two-year-old you might say "You are so mad." Right? Whereas you wouldn't do that with a seven-year-old or a six-year-old. You would say, "Oh, no wonder you're upset." And upset is a great word for older kids. So yes, always adjust your language so it's more effective with your child.
- Laura Markham: [01:26:20](#) I'm really not a big fan of “name it to tame it.” I know that Dan Siegel and Tina Bryson, who I love, use “name it to

tame it" a lot. I'm not a big fan of that. I'll tell you why. The research on name it to tame it is done on adults. It turns out that for adults in therapy, if they say, "Wow, I was feeling really mad at that moment," and they can label what it was or, "I guess I was just really jealous of her," then they are able to work through the feeling better. And my personal experience is that it is easier if I know I'm feeling an emotion, if I say the name of the emotion and I do tapping, which is EFT, Emotional Freedom Technique, which you can find on the Aha! Parenting website, references to EFT.

Laura Markham: [01:27:13](#) If I do tapping and I say, "fear," and I breathe through it, it has a way of taking you into the fear, but not getting overwhelmed by it and releasing it. So it's very effective. So name it to tame it is really good, if the person who wants to take control of that emotion for themselves, rather than being swamped by it, they name it. But when we name our children's emotions -- for a two-year-old it's fine. They're really happy to have us help them with naming these big emotions that sweep through them that they don't really understand. But with a six-year-old, no six-year-old, any more than a 16-year-old or a 26-year-old wants us to say to them, "You are so mad and sad." Right? It doesn't make them feel understood. They feel like they're being analyzed. So really your language for empathy is going to be language that makes the other person feel understood. And usually what works best is to describe the incident from their point of view. And if you can say, "No wonder you're upset." Right? So that they get that you understand it. You're not seeing it as an outsider. You're really getting how they feel.

Question 23

Laura Markham: [01:28:26](#) A parent says, "My five-year-old is very sensitive and has trouble with even gentle correction from my husband. My husband will try to connect with her before he corrects her," which is great. "But she gets very upset, screams, hides behind me, tries to get him to give up and go away."

So this is so frustrating for your poor husband and he was trying so hard to connect with her before he corrects her. So from what you're saying, she doesn't really act this way when you correct her. So there's something that's unique about her father and she hides behind you when he corrects her. So she feels safe with you, but not necessarily safe with her dad. In fact, it sounds like when he tries to connect before he corrects and she starts screaming, she believes that the connection isn't real. It's a pre-move to being chastised. So if that's really happening, if she starts to scream the minute he starts to connect, that's showing that she knows that it's a sham, that she's being connected with only to be corrected.

Laura Markham: [01:29:24](#)

So I would suggest a couple of things. One is, I would suggest to your husband that he really back off correction for now. I would say that parenting is 80 to 90% connection, because kids don't take our corrections or our redirections unless they feel connected. And in this case, I would say 99% of your husband's interactions with your daughter need to be warmly connecting to create safety. She has to feel emotionally safe with him and accepted and that he completely adores her. And then when he does need to redirect or correct her, she'll know that there's nothing shameful in it. It doesn't change his adoration of her.

Laura Markham: [01:30:03](#)

And right now she doesn't believe that. So I think he has to start with connection. I'd say for at least a month intensively. And I want to add that in addition to focusing on connecting with her, I think there's something else going on. I wonder if some of this issue is about perfectionism. So I've often seen versions of this in families where the parents are perfectionistic and very proud of their oldest child. And so they ask the child to perform and show off their new knowledge or skill. So that's basically a bad idea. Asking kids to perform and testing them -- it creates a fear in the child of not being good enough. And kids who experience this often become defensive because they think that they're not good enough and they develop shame if they're not perfect.

And since no one's perfect, it means they're always sort of on the defensive.

Laura Markham: [01:30:52](#) So I think if that is true for you, then I would say that the other thing your husband has to do is really help his daughter with those old fears of hers so that she feels completely accepted by him. And I would say in addition to special time and actively beaming his love at her, he needs to be physical with her -- roughhousing, to get her laughing -- and that will help work out those fears. But also no testing, no performing, just enjoy who she is at this moment and do not worry about who you want her to be. And if this is what's operating, then it's really important, to head off problems down the road. to deal with this now.

Laura Markham: [01:31:43](#) I know this doesn't solve your immediate problem like he needs to be able to tell her to sit down and finish dinner. But I think that this issue of her defensiveness is going to go away when you solve it at the source, and in the meantime you can just minimize correcting. And if he finds himself saying, "Sit down and eat your dinner" and she screams and jumps up and gets behind you, I think he should just smile at her to break the tension and close his mouth and you can smile at both of them. Remember, Stop, Drop and Breathe -- both of you. And you can say, "Sweetheart, we need you to sit down and finish your dinner now." And then she will do that because you've said it. And then you can say, as she's eating, "I guess you didn't like it when daddy asked you to finish your dinner, right? You got worried. Sweetie, daddy loves you no matter what. You can always count on that, right honey?" And daddy smiles at her and says, "Right." And you can continue. "So when you get worried like that, when daddy tells you something, sweetie you don't need to worry about that. You know what that is? That's that warrior in your head that's always trying to protect you. So it starts screaming. But there's no danger is there? Do you really need that warrior to start screaming at your own daddy? No that's silly. That's only for when there's danger. So next time that happens, you tell that warrior in your head "He's not dangerous. He's my daddy."

Laura Markham: [01:33:00](#) And let her dad give her a big hug. I think telling her versions of that story on an ongoing basis will help. You can also do that in advance, like when there's nothing happening that's upsetting, you can have that conversation with her. I think getting her language for what's happening will really help her see why she's overreacting in that way.

Laura Markham: [01:33:25](#) And I want to give a shout out here to Karen Young, who wrote the book, *Hey Warrior*. She writes a blog called "Hey Sigmund", and the book is very expensive on Amazon, but she sells it for a reasonable price on her website. She's in Australia though (so, shipping). And I like the idea because it is so simple. There's a warrior in your head, it's trying to keep you safe so it lashes out, sometimes at the wrong time, or it does other things. It's a way of helping kids with understanding their own aggression and screaming in this kind of an instance and also helping them understand their anxiety. The warrior in their head is someone who's trying to keep them safe and won't let them get on the elevator when they have an elevator phobia, for example. So if any of those things apply to your child, you might check out Karen Young's book, *Hey Warrior*. But the gist of the story, I just gave you.

Question 24

Laura Markham: [01:34:16](#) How do you handle an interrupter? Obviously preventive maintenance really helps. That's the answer. So when you have a kid who is interrupting a lot, do preventative maintenance. And then the other thing when your kid interrupts you, put your hand on your child and shift your attention for one minute and say, "Just a minute sweetie, hold my hand here." And you squeeze their hand and you turn back to whatever you're doing, like talking to their teacher or the other parent of some kid you're talking to or whatever, and you say, "We're going to need to wrap this up." It's hard for four year olds to wait, "but thanks so

much," and you wrap it up. And then you turn to your child and you say, "Thank you for waiting, sweetie. I am so impressed you were able to wait while I finished that." If you do that over and over again for a month, you'll find that you can stretch out the conversation just a tiny bit more because your child will be sure that you will turn to them fairly quickly, and then they can tolerate it. So that's how you handle interrupting.

Question 25

This parent is asking something a little different, which is "When I try to have a conversation with dad," with her husband, "what do I do? My daughter wants my attention on her." I would say, kids know when we're attending to them. It's not really that different than if you get on a screen or make a phone call. When our attention shifts to something else, it's not on them and they're suddenly in danger of dying. Now, I know that sounds crazy, but the way our genes are set up, to them, if a tiger jumped out of the bushes, they're tiger meat. Your attention is elsewhere. So they have to work very hard to keep our attention on them.

Laura Markham: [01:35:55](#)

So the minute you get on the phone, they immediately start to act out. The minute you talk to their dad, they immediately start to act out. So the most useful thing to do is to first, before you start an interaction, turn to your child and say, "I'm going to talk with daddy about this for a minute, sweetie. What are you going to do?" "No, no, talk to me." "I know you would love that, but we've just had a lot of time together and now it's time for you to do something yourself. Do you want to play with your doll or do you want to do some drawing? Let's get that out." And you actually take the time to get your child settled doing something, and then you say, "I'm going to talk to daddy for five minutes. I'm going to set the timer right here." Now, if you do things like that on a regular basis, your child is going to learn she can handle five minutes, no problem.

Laura Markham: [01:36:39](#)

In the beginning it might be one minute, and then two, and they work up to it. But it's not age appropriate for kids

to handle, honestly, much more than, you know, if it's a four year old, it's not age appropriate for them to handle much more than five minutes. I'm sorry to say. It might be that as they get engaged with drawing, they can do it for 20 minutes, but honestly we can't expect to have a lot of conversation with an adult that does not include them while they're around, unless they have something else they're engaged in doing. It's that simple.

Question 25

- Laura Markham: [01:37:10](#) A parent says, "My four year old regressed a lot after my husband and I separated about three months ago, but I struggle with her purposefully peeing on the carpet or the bed. I feel I need to get her to experience a negative consequence to learn she shouldn't do this, so I withdraw emotionally." Okay. I don't know whether you've actually taken all 12 weeks of this course. If you have, then I think you already know what I'm going to say here. You say you want to be sure your daughter learns a lesson so you withdraw emotionally. I guarantee you she's learning a lesson, but it is not the lesson you want. Here's the lesson she's learning. Her daddy left, now her mom is emotionally withdrawing. Her mommy is showing her that she could leave, also. She could stop caring, that means she could leave also. Which would mean that your daughter is all alone in the world with no one to take care of her and she's could die.
- Laura Markham: [01:38:02](#) That's what you're teaching here. You're teaching her that mommy could stop loving her because she isn't good enough. So by choosing to withdraw emotionally, you're causing your daughter to be even more anxious. And that keeps her from healing this big upset about her dad leaving. So it makes it much more likely that she'll continue to express her anxiety by peeing where she's not supposed to. So I know this is a frustrating time, but withdrawing your love from your daughter will make this last longer and it will erode your relationship in the future. This is not what you want to do.

Question 26

- Laura Markham: [01:38:36](#) A parent says she's a stay at home mom, she spends most of her day with her daughter, and has tried to get her to play on her own or with a housemaid, but she constantly needs mom and she says, "If I leave her to go to the washroom, she throws a tantrum. Every 20 minutes she needs me. Partly I need her to be independent for my own sanity because my life feels restricted." She also has a two month old daughter. So we've got a three year old and a two month old. So, I would say it is unusual for a three year old to throw a tantrum when you leave her to go to the bathroom. It is a sign that she does not trust that you'll come back to her or she doesn't trust that she can follow you because it's very common for a three year old to follow a mom into the bathroom.
- Laura Markham: [01:39:20](#) So if you're leaving her and she can't follow you, then it makes sense that she might have a tantrum. I'm wondering if this is a sign of insecure attachment, except when a three year old has a two month old sibling, well, it's natural for them to worry they might lose you and want to follow you every minute. And also you say she needs you every 20 minutes. That's not unusual at all. If she's able to play by herself or with a housemaid for 20 minutes, but especially by herself, and only then needs you, that sounds like she's doing great, especially when she has to share you with her sibling. So I don't have a camera in your house. I can't quite tell what's happening here. But I am a little concerned that it's a possibility that there's an attachment issue. I hear that you want your daughter to be more independent because your life feels restricted, but your daughter is really being pretty age appropriate.
- Laura Markham: [01:40:12](#) She needs someone to play with and she really wants connection with her mommy, especially now that she's sharing you with a new sibling. So there are two things you can do if you want her to focus a bit less on you. First, really meet her need for connection with you. Be sure that

you're having special time without the baby, at least a half an hour every single day during which you let her take the lead and completely pour your love into her. At other times during the day, do some roughhousing, get her laughing. Use some of the games in the Peaceful Parent Happy Kids Workbook that are designed to strengthen connection. Secondly, help her learn to play with other kids. Find some other mothers who have three year olds; have some playdates. So she begins to see how much fun it can be with other kids because she's a person who needs playmates, right?

Laura Markham: [01:40:58](#) And while she focuses on her friends, it gives you breathing room, and another adult to talk to, and she learns that this can be a fun thing to do. I'm also going to suggest that you read Dan Siegel's book, *Parenting from the Inside Out*. It has a lot of exercises related to your own attachment history. The more we reflect on our own attachment, the healthier we become in offering age appropriate attachment and bonding to our own children. And the more easily we connect with them, the more easily they can also let us go. I think that will probably help you to work through any contribution you're making to this issue, because it may be that your daughter is actually responding with such clinginess partly because she feels you're sort of chafing to get away from her.

Laura Markham: [01:41:49](#) And, you know, I want to say also, 23you have a new baby. It makes sense that you're chafing for some time alone. So I want to also encourage you to make sure you really get some time alone without either child. You're lucky enough to have household help, so make sure you get some time just for you so that you don't feel quite so restricted by being a mom.

Question 27

Laura Markham: [01:42:11](#) "My husband works three weeks on shore and is home for only a week each month. I single parent my two year old for three weeks continuously and I get exhausted toward

the end of every day. I lose patience and yell. My son is so full of life and happiness with his dad. How can I be more fun and connecting?" Oh. Well, it is tough to single parent, I mean that's the first thing. Right? I think to be fun and connecting, you need to do two things. One, you need to build fun, connecting routines into your life with your son, and, two, you need to find ways to replenish yourself, and replenishing yourself can be challenging to do.

Laura Markham: [01:42:50](#)

I think that sleep is really critical. There's amazing new research on how important it is to get eight hours of sleep. It's what humans are designed to get. Maybe not all at the same time, you can get six and then get two hours later like napping with your child. But really think of that as the minimum and in the evening when your son's asleep, go to sleep. Don't fritter away your time on social media, which does not actually replenish you. Research shows that it will make you feel worse later, afterwards. Instead start experimenting things that actually help you feel replenished. Do some of those every single day. Make yourself a list.

Laura Markham: [01:43:35](#)

There are ideas from parents, about how to do self care while you're with your child that is replenishing. If you look in Week Eight, The Self Care Week, in the bonus, there's a list. It's actually a PDF that's taken from the Peaceful Parent Happy Kids Workbook and it is self care ideas from parents that you can do while you're with your two year old. And so I think replenishing yourself is really important for you to be that fun, connecting parent you want to be. And then the second thing, work some connecting routines and games into your daily routine. You said you have daily singing and daily reading with him? That's great. Also make sure you have daily laughter and roughhousing and find some other routines. Again, you can get these out of the Peaceful Parent Happy Kids Workbook. Find some other things that you can do daily that you can work into your routine so they're just there. Remember everything you do with your son is an opportunity for closeness and connection and fun. Everything. Instead of just moving him through the schedule.

Laura Markham: [01:44:35](#) So stop your fretful, anxious, driven-ness through the schedule, I'm not accusing you of that, but that's how most of us feel about getting the kids through the schedule, and instead look at it as an opportunity for closeness, connection, and fun, and I think you'll find the whole day has a different tone to it and you're a lot less exhausted at the end of the day. And so just to close, you know that tired, stressful time of day that hits all of us. You can actually handle that time of day and the only way to do that is to give yourself support so you don't feel so stressed. So everything I've said so far, it's about how to give yourself support. And I think if you do that and then when you do start to feel stressed and ready to yell at the end of the day, stop, drop and breathe. Use the tools you've learned because you do not need to lose your temper. You can feel stressed and tired, but find ways to support yourself instead of just venting on your son.

Question 28

Laura Markham: [01:45:32](#) Oh, this is so upsetting. A parent has twin girls who are two and they're trying so hard to talk to her but she can't necessarily understand what they say all the time, and then they get very upset and start crying. And she said her daughter was crying and crying, she finally realized that her daughter was trying to say "elephant", because that was on the peanut butter jar in front of them. And when she said "Elephant?", her daughter started to smile through her tears as she was pointing to the elephant. So I want to say, yes, this is so hard, but this is also fantastic. That's a terrific learning experience. She kept trying, even though she was sobbing, and you kept trying and she was ultimately able to make herself understood and there was a repair.

Laura Markham: [01:46:26](#) That kind of repair, that's what creates resilience in children. You know, research shows that we're not in tune with kids all the time. In fact, we're in tune less than half the time. What matters is that we keep trying to be in tune and to be responsive to what they need. And they learn

that if they keep trying, we will eventually get it. We're not so smart all the time, but we keep trying and then we have a breakthrough and the child learns to keep trying. That's what creates resilience. So I would say when she's smiling through her tears, then rejoice, and celebrate. That's fantastic. So don't feel bad about these interactions. They are part of life. I want to add, it's harder because they're twins and you mentioned that the other twin needed soothing to calm down because she was sobbing. So you might also empathize with their sadness and their fear about not being understood.

Laura Markham: [01:47:29](#)

It makes them feel alone in the world. Like "Here we are all alone and the grownup who we love and trust and who cares for us doesn't understand what we're asking." So you could say to the twin, in this case, "Your sister was trying so hard to tell me 'elephant' and I didn't understand, right? That was scary that mommy didn't understand. It made you feel worried. Sweetie, you don't need to worry. Every day you and your sister get better at telling me things. And you know what? I will always listen, I will never stop listening. I will never give up listening and trying to understand. And you know what? We figured it out, all together. Elephant. Yay!"

Laura Markham: [01:48:13](#)

So just remember in the moment, the most important thing is for you to slow everything down and stay calm. So when one of your girls says something that you don't understand, smile, take a breath. You said you were feeding them lunch in this case, sit down with them at the table and say, "You're telling me something so important. I'm listening, sweetie. Tell me again." And she says something that you don't understand and you say, "Hm. I don't understand, but don't worry. We're going to figure this out together. Can you show me?" And she would have pointed to the elephant and then you're done. So it's when they get worried that we're not understanding and our anxiety rises and we get worried, and then the drama gets heightened and it's cyclical, and then the tears start. So the parent's job in any situation is to calm the anxiety

by reassuring the child that together you're going to work out whatever the issue is.

Question 29

- Laura Markham: [01:49:20](#) A parent is describing a situation where her baby, a 17 month old, woke up from her nap and cried for longer than she would normally, like 10 minutes, and cried hysterically and bumped her head on the crib. So she has been angry at her mother ever since and doesn't want her mother to be close to her, be affectionate with her. So I'm so sorry. This is a big trauma for your baby and for you. You know, for a baby, 10 minutes can seem like forever, and she hurt her head so it makes it even worse. So it's not surprising that she's having a hard time trusting you because it's a rupture in your bond with her. But don't worry, she's 17 months old. You're going to be able to get past this and heal this. So I would do a puppet show with her and show her the story of the terrible day when the baby wakes up in the crib and mommy doesn't come when she cries and she calls her mommy, she calls her mommy, and mommy doesn't come and she cries and accidentally hits her head and then she cries more.
- Laura Markham: [01:50:28](#) If you can make this a little slapstick, she might laugh about it and that'll be great. It's more likely she'll cry about it, and that's actually good. That's better because she's getting what happened and why it was so upsetting and you have the mommy puppet hold the baby puppet and say, "Oh, I'm here, I'm here, I will always be there for you. I am here." And you hold her and say, "That was so scary when I didn't come, but I'm here and I will always come for you." And you know what? You just show up and make sure you can hear her when she wakes up from her nap so you go right away. And I think you're going to find that she's fine. She's going to heal from this. It's one of those traumas that our kids do go through but that they can heal from. Kids are resilient.

Question 30

- Laura Markham: [01:51:17](#) "Our little guy is an extremely fussy, nine month old, mostly during times of separation. We do our best to limit separation, but car rides, cooking, tending to other child results in screaming until picked up." Yeah. Well, you know a baby depends on you to self regulate. When he's feeling good, he can enjoy the challenge of navigating the world on his own for a short time, which we think of as playing, right? But many babies this age don't feel safe if they're not being held in your arms. After all his genetic wiring tells him that if you put him down, a tiger is going to eat him. I realize that's not the case, but he doesn't know there are no tigers in your home, I mean his genetic wiring doesn't know that. And also you have to understand that a nine month old makes a huge cognitive leap, which is what causes babies this age to develop separation anxiety, and stranger anxiety.
- Laura Markham: [01:52:08](#) They realize you could put them down and they can't get back to you on their own steam. And that's a terrifying realization and it can make them more easily panicked when you're separated from them, when you put them in a car seat or whatever. So when you put up a baby gate so you can cook without them underfoot or tend to your other child, he feels unsafe. You've got another kid on your lap, what would you do if a tiger jumped out of the bushes, right? He panics, he screams and he can't calm down until he's picked up. So the research on this shows that the faster you pick him up and soothe him, the faster his neural system will release calming hormones and reassure him that there's no emergency. That helps him build a less reactive brain that doesn't launch so quickly into a state of emergency.
- Laura Markham: [01:52:53](#) And if you have a family history of anxiety, soothing him is essential. But even if you don't, it's really important to soothe a baby when they're upset because then they learn that they don't have to raise such an alarm to get what they need. So of course as they get older, you want to help them face the things they fear. But to do that, they need a brain that has a lot of experience with having been

soothed because that's how the brain builds the neural receptors for self-soothing. So picking him up is not giving in. Picking him up is helping him build a better brain. And also I would just, for now, minimize these separations. He's not quite ready for them. So when you cook, put him on your back. If you have to take care of your four year old, put your little one in a wrap on your body. So you have your hands free for the four year old, but your little one also feels secure.

Laura Markham: [01:53:44](#) It's a little harder in the car if you're the driver, but I would say use a routine as you put him in the car seat. Talk to him, sing to him as you drive so he can feel soothed by your presence and obviously minimize your outings at this age. And you know, don't worry, it's not going to last forever. His next important stage is to get you to put him down on the floor so he can get to anything breakable or make a mess in your house. So, that's going to be his next stage pretty quickly, I'm betting.

Question 31

Laura Markham: [01:54:14](#) A parent is asking about her partner who breastfed their son, which is only one of their kids, there's also a six year old, and stopped at 10 months and at that point he transferred his attachment to his other mom, who is Tamsen. And so her partner naturally is hurt by this. So I would say Tamsen that, first of all, there's a hierarchy of attachment, that's what research about attachment tells us. And so children order the people they feel safest with. So if a tiger jumps out of the bushes, they know who they're going to run to first, the person who is usually the one who comforts them when they are hurting and who they feel therefore the most safe with. It may not be the biggest, strongest parent. It's the one who they feel comforted by and therefore safest with. So I know that the parent who isn't number one always feels hurt that they're number two.

- Laura Markham: [01:55:11](#) And you know, this happens in every couple where there's more than one parent because there's always a number one and number two. So I would say first of all, don't take it personally. It's nothing personal. Parents always have to understand they're going to pick one parent who they feel a little safer with for some reason. Now, in this case, I would wonder, you know, is it because the child sees the stay at home mom all day so naturally he misses his other mom? You know, sometimes that happens where the stay at home mom or dad is the preferred parent. Sometimes it's the opposite, where even though they feel very safe with that preferred parent who they're home with, the other parent's more exciting or simply they miss that parent because whether it's a mom or a dad, that parent is gone more and so they miss them.
- Laura Markham: [01:56:01](#) And then finally, I want to add specifically for this situation, this might also be an active rejection of the mom who stopped nursing the child. It might be, since it started right then, that there's a wound to their bond and he felt like she couldn't comfort him anymore and he felt rejected. So I don't know how that weaning happened. It's hard to do a gentle weaning at nine months because kids don't want to give it up, so often it's more sudden and it might be that he felt rejected at that point. I don't know. So specifically in this instance, I would encourage your partner to really work to be closer to your son. You do special time with him, but mostly be the safe place when he hurts.
- Laura Markham: [01:56:54](#) And so for example, if you're leaving to go work and your son is sobbing, you need to have confidence in your partner to be the other partner, I mean, that's his other parent, and to really comfort him. But in order to have that confidence, you probably need to have a discussion with your partner so that your partner knows how to handle it. So when your son is just so devastated that you're leaving, instead of indulging in her own hurt feelings, she can step up and be the grown up and be the comfort object and say, "I know sweetheart right now, you are so sad. I understand. I miss mama, too, when she goes

to work. She'll be back later, but right now I am here for you. I will take care of you. You can be as sad as you want and I will take care of you because I'm your mom too. I'm your other mom." Or in the case of someone else listening to this, "I'm your dad."

Laura Markham: [01:57:55](#)

I think this is an important thing to do for any parent who's not at the top of the hierarchy of attachment. That's how you step up to the plate and you become a trusted comfort object. You may never be number one in the attachment hierarchy, but that's how you become a trusted comfort object. So I hope that helps, for you and your partner. I just want to emphasize, for those of us who are the number one, when we're leaving and the other partner says, "Just go. He'll get over it." I think you have to have a conversation with them in advance, as I said, so that you do have confidence in them, not just to make the kid get over it, but to accept the feelings. And then you do have to walk away. You do have to have confidence that this is your child's other parent who you chose for very good reasons. And who is going to show up for your child so that the child does feel loved by them, and it will strengthen their relationship.

Question 32

Laura Markham: [01:58:57](#)

This question is about the preference for one parent over the other parent. What this parent is saying is that her oldest prefers his dad and in fact when she thinks about it, she realizes that this probably dates back to when her daughter was born, when her son was two. And that it's so hurtful because he rejects her and wants to be with daddy and she feels she's lost him and now they have a new baby, a one year old, and so she's basically dealing with the two younger children and dad deals with the older son and it makes her feel heartbroken. I want to just acknowledge that it is always complicated when a second child is born and even more complicated when a third child is born. And it's very, very common when the second child is born for the parent who is nursing the child or

home with the child, for that parent to become the caregiver of the baby and the other parent to take on the responsibility for the older child.

Laura Markham: [02:00:03](#) And I think it inevitably changes the relationship with the firstborn and we don't talk about it. I can't think of ever having read something about this. I've heard passing references, but I've never seen any serious treatment of this issue in literature and I have to say it's universal. I've never seen it not happen. The grief of the change in the relationship with the older child is, I think, universal. And I think we don't talk much about grief in our culture, we don't allow much space for it and we don't support each other through it. And so I just want to acknowledge that if we're honest about it, there is grief in parenting at every step of the way. There's the grief of losing our old life when we first had our first child, everything changes.

Laura Markham: [02:00:56](#) You can never go back to what it was like before you had a child. And it's a shock and there's a lot of joy in having a child, but there's also a lot of grief in losing what you were before your child. And I think until we grieve, it's hard to be fully present with our child. And then when you have another child, the same thing is true. Your relationship with your firstborn changes and until you grieve that, it's very hard to find your footing with your firstborn and help that relationship be good. And I actually think that this is a source of sibling rivalry, it's not the only source of sibling rivalry, there are many sources, but this is one source of sibling rivalry because what happens is when the first child resents the new one, the new baby, we end up feeling defensive because we know we are not there for our first born the way we used to be, and we're guilty and we're defensive.

Laura Markham: [02:01:52](#) And so we don't allow our older child to have all the feelings they have because of our own issues. And when we do that, that creates sibling rivalry on their part. So I just want to acknowledge, sorry, that you're not alone in this. It's important to look at your own feelings of grief and guilt and really help yourself through them, support yourself through them. And then the way you reclaim a

relationship with your child is you go to that child no matter what and you try to connect. And every time you feel rejected, you don't take it personally. You take a deep breath and you remind yourself that you had that relationship once -- and you're saying you did in his first years of life -- that your child feels that same grief and anger at you, and that's why he's running in the other direction, and that he's letting you know that he still feels some pain there.

Laura Markham: [02:02:49](#)

And this is true even if you didn't ever have that relationship, let's say you had postpartum depression, and you weren't able to bond with your child the way that you, in retrospect, wish you had been able to. I think the answer is you deal with your own grief and any guilt you feel, and then when your child rejects you, you have a mantra to walk yourself through it. A mantra that says, "He's showing me where it hurts, he's showing me that he doesn't know how to be close to me." And you explicitly say some version to your child of this. You say, "You're telling me you want daddy. You can have daddy read you this story, sweetie, or give you the bath, or whatever, hold your hand. But you know what? I am always here ready to read you the story, give you the bath, hold your hand, and I am your mom," or your dad, whichever one you are, "and I love you no matter what. And you can say you want daddy all you want, but I will always love you no matter what."

Laura Markham: [02:04:00](#)

And if possible, you find silly ways to get your child giggling. There's a game that's on my website -- The "You Can't Get to Mommy" game. You could just put "You Can't Get to Mommy" into the search box on the Aha! Parenting website and you will come up with this game. And I have seen this game have a great effect, getting kids laughing about the fact that they actually **can** always get to mommy or daddy. So that's a great game to play. But anything you do to get your child laughing will help.

Laura Markham: [02:04:35](#) So, when my daughter went through a brief period of, "I want daddy." I would just throw myself down and beg her, "Oh please, please, please let me do it, let me do it." And she would laugh and laugh and say, no, no, you can't, daddy gets to do it. And I would beg her and beg her and get her laughing more, and one day, she said, "Okay mommy you can do it," from her queenly vantage point. But what happens is when you get them laughing, you're demonstrating your commitment to them. And that helps tear down that barrier.

Laura Markham: [02:05:12](#) And the other thing, when you get them laughing, that helps tear down the barrier and they start bonding with you. So, usually that's the way in. I think the bottom line here is, it's always a matter of you being willing to work through your own feelings. And if you need to, get some counseling help to do it, it's not easy to work through those feelings, if you feel guilty that you put your first one aside for your second, or if you feel guilty that you were so anxious or depressed when your child was born.

Laura Markham: [02:05:45](#) Many, many people go through those things. It's not your fault, but you might need help to deal with the feelings. And maybe it's just simple grief and you might need help for that. That's okay. Get yourself the help you need and then you'll find that when your child rejects you or you feel rejected, that it's not so disabling to you. And then you're able to still connect. And once you begin to connect, you're on the path to connection, and it's one foot in front of the other. So you're in a whole new landscape of connection where you feel closer.

Question 33

Laura Markham: [02:06:22](#) There are questions from parents about what to do when kids insist on help from one parent but not from the other. Some of these questions are about affection and some are about help. So I'm going to tease those apart. So, this question is about two year old twins. One of them can't stand to have anyone hug or kiss her except mommy and

sometimes even mommy can't give her kisses. How can we help her?

- Laura Markham: [02:06:50](#) I would say we always listen to the child. Affection is always at the child's discretion and that's how we teach consent. So, there's actually research that shows that when parents do a lot of kissing, sometimes that's perceived by the child as intrusive and it's not associated with good results from the child. So kissing is for us, mostly, it's not for the child. So when a child doesn't want to be kissed, even by mommy, don't kiss. Most children do want to be hugged, but if a child turns down hugs, fine. Children have a right to decide who touches their body in any way. That's that.
- Laura Markham: [02:07:24](#) So if they turn down hugs from their seven year old sister or from daddy, they turn down hugs. That's the way it is. And you say, you don't want daddy to hug you right now. Do you? Okay, no hug for daddy right now. Will you be ready to hug daddy later? What do you think? Will you be ready at bath time? Will you be ready at bedtime? So usually when she has a choice, she'll decide when she's ready. And then she's happy to have her daddy hug her, but always no hugging, no kissing, without consent.
- Laura Markham: [02:07:53](#) So that's a little different than when the child won't let daddy do something for them. Like they just prefer mommy and they don't want to let daddy help put their shoes on. So, I would say at that point, you need to improve that relationship and there are a couple of ways to do it.
- Laura Markham: [02:08:14](#) One is to leave that child with daddy or the less preferred parent, so that when the parent who is preferred leaves, that child will cry and the less preferred parent can be the comforter. Now that parent is not allowed to shut down the child's feelings. If they do, the whole thing is sabotaged and won't work. But if the parent can accept those feelings and can say, "Yeah, I miss mommy too when she goes, I know. You're safe, I'll take care of you. Daddy's right here. You can tell me how much you miss mommy." And the child cries and then they do something fun

together when the child's done crying, that solidifies the relationship with dad. And it puts dad more into the safe category of caregiver and it often really improves the relationship.

Laura Markham: [02:09:01](#) There are also ways to play it out. There's a game that was invented by Larry Cohen that's on my website called, The You Can't Get To Mommy Game, which is a great game to help kids play it out. I've seen it work over and over again. So, I find that usually when you do a combination of those two things and you simply set up times for the child to always be with daddy, then it usually works. And you're not just waiting until the connection is stronger. You're actually fostering a stronger connection. You're taking this as a symptom and you're setting up a stronger connection, so that your child is more willing to accept help from daddy.

Question 34

Laura Markham: [02:09:40](#) A parent is asking, "Our four year old is extremely partial to her mom, while we're both home, and will not let me do anything for her and her endless list of play and help requests wears my wife out. And, if I lift a finger my daughter gets mad, which stresses me out too." And I'm sure it makes you feel terrible. So I would say first of all, your wife is only going to be run ragged if she responds to all these requests. I suggest that she do some special time with your daughter like on a Saturday when you're both there and really feel your four year olds need for connection with her and when it ends, when you go back to daily life, you say, "Now we're back to daily life. That means sometimes daddy does stuff for you." And if she has a meltdown, great. Acknowledge how hard it is to stop special time and how that was not enough for her.

Laura Markham: [02:10:33](#) If she gets mad at daddy, "You can be as mad as you want, but I love you sweetie. I'm always here to help you with something and I want to have special time with you, too." That's a limit you set. If she has a meltdown, that's great.

She's expressing all those feelings about how much she needs her mom and doesn't get enough of her mom. It's not really even about her dad. So acknowledge those feelings, without judging or being defensive or taking it personally. And I do think it's important to have routines that are clear, like bedtime, don't change that around. Like, Thursdays you are always with daddy no matter what, so that she doesn't get the idea that by protesting she can change it. There's a game called, The You Can't Get To Mommy Game. If you go to the website and you put that into the search box, you'll find it.

Laura Markham: [02:11:20](#) It's a really helpful game. I hear over and over from families that when they use it and the child is empowered to always get to their preferred parent, whichever one it is, they stop being so hostile, aggressive toward the non-preferred parents. They start to even accept them a little bit more and ask them to put them to bed and stuff, because now they know they can always get to the preferred parent. So The You Can't Get To Mommy Game, I highly recommend.

Question 35

Laura Markham: [02:11:50](#) Another parent has the same question. She's mommy in their house and the other parent is mama, a two mom family and mama is the one who's mostly with the kids. But when mommy's around, the child is so obsessed that she says mean things to her other mom, "I don't want to talk to you today. I only want mommy." We think she's not rejecting one of her moms, it's that she needs more connection with the other one.

Laura Markham: [02:12:15](#) So I agree with your assessment completely and I would handle those mean comments very directly. "Ouch, that you don't want to talk to me at all today hurts. I love talking with you and being with you. Usually we have a great time together. I think what you're saying is that you only want mommy. Is that right? I understand that. Sometimes I only want mommy too, and I miss mommy

too when she's gone. Sweetheart, you know you can tell me that you only want to be with mommy without saying things that hurt my feelings. Right? How about saying I love you, but I want to be with mommy right now. I was missing her. It's okay to say that." So that's such an obvious example of how kids think, that one parent is keeping them from being with the other parent.

Laura Markham: [02:13:00](#)

It's crazy, but it's true. So again, the You Can't Get To Mommy Game, is an important one for her. And you know, when she does say these rude things have a sense of humor about it. I know it hurts the feelings of the parent who's getting rejected, but she's just trying to get time with the other parent. So she's just trying to express what she needs and she's a four year old. And again, four year olds have not yet figured out how to get what they need without attacking. That's what you're trying to teach her. She will learn it. Don't get offended, don't take it personally. It's not an attack to her, it's just a defense to get what she needs.

Question 36

Laura Markham: [02:13:35](#)

"My nearly five year old daughter is very clingy to me and often rejects her dad, but she's very happy with her dad when I'm out." Okay, same thing. This is not about her relationship with her dad since she's happy with him when you're gone, it's about her relationship with you. But I would add something to this one. You said she'll kick him. No, I would not tolerate her kicking her parents ever, either parent. So you acknowledge her feelings and you set a limit. "You loved having mom all to yourself and cuddling her, right? And then dad wanted to join in and you got mad. You wanted mommy all to yourself. You're allowed to have mommy all to yourself sometimes, when we're having special time. You're allowed to say, I just want mommy all to myself. But sweetheart, you are never allowed to kick your father. No, that hurts. Kicking hurts.

Use your words. You can tell your father, I love you daddy. But right now I'm snuggling with mom. Right? But no kicking, use your words. Now, I think your dad feels pretty hurt that you yelled at him and kicked him. We need to make things better with your dad before we can go back to cuddling. What can you do to make things better with your father?"

Question 37

- Parent: [02:14:45](#) So we've been doing lots of the things you've suggested. We have two boys, six and four. They really like to be physical. They really like to be excited about things and I've been doing more rough-housing that kind of stuff, it's great.
- Laura Markham: [02:15:02](#) Great.
- Parent: [02:15:04](#) My question is, how to help them understand that we're coming to the end of something and now we have a different thing we have to do, and we have to calm down. I find it very difficult to get them to calm down. It makes me apprehensive about getting to that state.
- Laura Markham: [02:15:23](#) Yes, I understand and you're not alone in this. So thank you, it's a great question. Before you start rough-housing, I would set a timer and I would say, "What are our ground rules guys? Right. When the timer goes off, we stop. Is there any other time we stop? Right, if anybody says stop, we stop immediately. Right? We never touch anybody's body, if they say stop. And any other things we need to remember, what are other rules? That's right. No hitting, no punching, no kicking, right? We're just roughhousing and having a great time together, but no hurting. Right? Okay, those are our rules. So when the timer goes off, what happens?" And they have to tell you what's going to happen.
- Laura Markham: [02:16:11](#) "We freeze. Now, it's going to be awfully hard to freeze. It's going to be hard to stop rough-housing and get ready

for bed. So what are we going to do to calm down? What's a good idea that'll help us all calm down." And then you actually develop a little routine for it. The best thing to do is to shift gears, to move into a different space, to drink some water, which begins the cooling down process for the body. Maybe to continue laughing, although probably not because your boys are probably so wired up that laughing isn't even really good. So I would say you need to get between them. Hold one boy's hand, and the other boy's hand. And you have a goal, like you're headed toward the kitchen to get a drink of water. And then you're headed toward the bathroom, to move along the bedtime routine. Something like that. It would be great if there was something fun, like you got to sing a certain song together as you went, but it'd be great if your song was a little bit calming.

- Laura Markham: [02:17:08](#) So, more of a lullaby type song instead of a rowdy song, a war song or whatever. Does that all sound like that might help?
- Parent: [02:17:20](#) So preparing a plan up front for how we're going to calm down and telling them in advance.
- Laura Markham: [02:17:28](#) Yes, sign an agreement.
- Parent: [02:17:30](#) Yeah, that sounds good.
- Laura Markham: [02:17:31](#) Yeah. As long as it's an agreement with you. So when the timer goes off, you can say, "I know it's hard to stop, but we've got our plan. We need to sing our song, timer went off. Give me five everybody, that was so fun." And if they fall apart at that point, "No, no we need to keep going," you can say, "I know it's hard to stop," but you have to hold the limit and after a while they learn that the price of doing it, the ticket to enter is that they do have to stop at the right time when the timer goes off. And I think they'll learn the routine once you have some transition planned. I think the transition is the important part.
- Parent: [02:18:11](#) Thank you very much.

Laura Markham: [02:18:11](#) Good luck. You're welcome.

Question 38

A parent is asking, "What do I do when I'm exhausted and I'm trying to get my kids laughing, but I just can't pick them up over and over again and get them laughing?" So my go-to was the piggyback ride or picking them up and throwing them on the couch over and over again. And it does involve a lot of physically picking them up, a lot of physical activity. But there are plenty of things you can do to get kids laughing, that don't involve you picking them up. One of my favorites is roly-poly, where you just lie on the floor and the kids lie on the floor and you roll over on top of them. They roll over on top of you and you try to catch them. But they always get away. So something where you can be lazy and lie on the floor and they will still be laughing.

Laura Markham: [02:19:01](#) And another one is making them into a pizza. You can't just lie on the floor, you do have to kneel over them to make them into a pizza. But kids often love that, where you make them into a pizza and you can search that... Make a Child into a Pizza, into the search engine of Google and I think you'll see examples. There are videos online that will show you how to do that. And there's even a book called, *Pete's a Pizza*. P-E-T- E apostrophe S, Pete's a pizza. Okay. And by the way, there's a book, for your kids, your kids are four, three and one. So they're all young enough for this book. There's a book by Aletha Solter S-O-L-T-E-R called *Attachment Play*, wonderful games to get kids laughing. And then of course if you're listening to this and you don't know Larry Cohen's book, *Playful Parenting*, it's a wonderful book, it also has lots of ideas to get kids laughing. So there are many, many ideas that you don't have to use quite so much energy for.

Question 39

Laura Markham: [02:20:05](#) A parent asked about doing rough-housing with a three year old and a one year old, because the one year old gets hurt. Don't do it with the two of them together in that case, just do it during special time when the one year old's napping. And yes, you can still get your children laughing with silly laughter in other ways other than rough-housing.

Question 40

The next question is about rough-housing and special time. The parent is saying that her four year old daughter is getting too rough. It says, "She will get super mean and wants to lie on top of me or my husband or her little two year brother."

Laura Markham: [02:20:42](#) Well obviously you can't let the four year old lie on her brother, because she'll hurt him. But, there's no reason she can't lie on top of you or on top of her dad, I would assume. What happens during rough-housing is that they learn respect for other people's bodies, because when the other person says stop, they have to stop. So before you rough-house you always do ground rules. "What can we do to make rough-housing fun for everyone and safe? And what about when someone says stop? Let's practice. What do we do? Freeze. And we all stop."

Laura Markham: [02:21:11](#) So you can get your four year old, to practice that and to be responsive to that. And you can practice it during every single rough-housing session, with a positive frame on it. So you're not making her wrong. And she shouldn't rough-house with her brother. You're saying in your question, she often gets her little brother crying. Well she shouldn't roughhouse with him then. That's not okay, because he's two and he's not as strong and big as she is, at least in this case and so he deserves protection. You don't have to rough-house with both kids together, she can rough-house separately without him.

Laura Markham: [02:21:44](#) Remember the goal of rough-housing is laughter and if she's getting difficult, she's not sure what to do with those difficult feelings that are coming up for her, if possible, you want to turn them into laughter. But she's obviously having some big stuff come up right now, so it's not a time to rough-house with her brother. Maybe in the future it'll be fine. By the time he's four and she's six, they'll be more of the same size and he probably can stand up for himself.

Laura Markham: [02:22:11](#) But right now just have her rough-house with you. And when you say stop, she needs to stop and if she cries, that's okay. And if she gets angry, speak to the difficulty under it, "Oh, it's so hard for you to stop when I say stop. You wish you could..." Whatever. And she'll cry and that's part of backpack emptying. If she's been laughing a lot, which is the goal of rough-housing that will usually move children to do more crying. And that's your ultimate goal, for them to be able to experience those feelings that are getting in their way. So, I think you're on the right track with her. It's just that you need to do some tweaks to help her, to actually get to the feelings that are getting in her way.

Question 41

Laura Markham: [02:22:55](#) "Is there an alternative for rough-housing? I don't enjoy it and my son gets over excited and he ends up hurting me?" I would say start with laughter in that case, because it sounds like the rough-housing is not resulting in laughter. It's resulting in something else that's about aggression. So don't go there, just start with anything that gets him laughing and gets you laughing. Like play a dance game that gets you laughing. Play verbal sparring that gets you laughing, because remember he's already seven. You can get him laughing in other ways besides tossing him around. So the real goal you're going for is not rough-housing, it's laughter.

Question 42

- Dr. Laura Markham: [02:23:31](#) “My husband and I have been using the empathy and connecting techniques for a few weeks. We've been very open about our efforts to change the way we parent with her eight year old daughter. Recently, she's begun to reject our empathy and connection efforts, and says, “Stop it mom, I know what you're trying to do and I don't like it.” How do we help our eight year old? She seems to believe she's being manipulated with love and kindness?” Well, first of all, it's only been a few weeks, so this is all new to your daughter. She has spent eight years, I presume, parented with conventional parenting and now all of a sudden when it's time for bed, her parents are saying things like, “I know it's hard to clean up your stuff and get ready for bed. I bet you wish you could play all night or every night, don't you?”
- Dr. Laura Markham: [02:24:16](#) And she's probably thinking, what is going on with them? This is so weird. Usually they just said, “Get ready. This is the third time I've told you go get ready.” Right? So naturally she's trying to figure out what's going on and why you would be doing this. So, I wonder what you said to her when you, you say you were open with her about your efforts to change the way you parent. So what I advise parents to say to kids is, we've been thinking about the way that we are in our family, and our most important rule is be kind, treat everyone with kindness and respect. And we realize that sometimes we get frustrated with you kids and we don't treat you with kindness and respect. We won't always be perfect at it, but we want to do better at it and be good role models for you. We expect you to control your temper, when your little sister or brother gets on your nerves.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [02:25:13](#) And we want to do a good job of controlling our tempers and treat you with kindness and respect. So that's what we're working on. So that's the most important thing to tell kids. I think. The second thing is when kids say, “What's my punishment? Or aren't you going to punish him?” If they're talking about a sibling, for instance. You can say, “Well you know, we think you learn best by

talking about it and by noticing the cost of what you did. When you were using those harsh words with your brother or with your father, it hurt that relationship. It made your brother, your father, not feel as close to you and it made you feel bad inside your own heart also. And we think it's more important for you to notice those things, because then you'll want to be different.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:26:15](#)

Whereas if we just punish you, you get mad at us for punishing you. And it doesn't actually make you want to be nicer to your brother or more polite to your dad, even when you're not annoyed at him. So that's why we're now doing things a little bit differently. So that's the kind of conversation I'd have with your child. I'm not sure what you said. I do notice that you use the word technique. You said, "I've been using the empathy and connecting technique." So, I just want to say connection is the most important thing in raising a child. It is one of my three big ideas, but it's the most important one because until you connect, you can't do emotion coaching. Right? And the third idea, which is about self regulation for the parent, we do that so it's possible to connect.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:27:09](#)

So connection is what everything in parenting is based on. It's 90% of parenting. I would never think of it as a technique. When I think about my relationship with my husband, I don't think of it as a set of techniques. I think of it as love in action, extending my love and understanding to him and supporting him. Those aren't techniques, those are just loving him. And that's the way I think of connecting with my children. I'm just loving them. And so there's no technique there. And if I were using it as a "technique", I could see my kids feeling manipulated, right? So when you use the word technique, you may not have meant anything by it, but it might be that you think of empathy as a technique. So we're not going to punish her. We're going to use empathy to get her to meet our limit.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:28:05](#)

"I know it's hard to get ready for bed sweetheart, and you still have to get ready for bed. That's using empathy, I guess as a technique. But really the reason to use empathy

in that moment, is not just to get your child to cooperate. That's not even your primary goal. Your primary goal is when you set a limit, you want to stay connected to the other person, to your child. So to stay connected, you use your empathy so your child feels understood. They know that even though you can't say yes this time, even though you need to say no to what they want, you do understand and you're on their side. So it's not so much a technique or a strategy, it's more like demonstrating your understanding of your child. So the goal is for your child to feel understood. It's not just to get them to do what you want.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:28:57](#)

It is a more effective way of having children accept our limits, then if we just bark orders at them, right? So it may be, that you're using empathy as a technique because you're new at it and you're still trying to get your mind around this and practice it and make it work for you. And that's getting transmitted to your daughter, who experiences it as you're manipulating her with your empathy. That may be what's happening. Or maybe not at all, maybe you're working hard to actually connect and to help her feel understood and she's still getting used to this new way of being in your family. And if that's the case, no worries at all, because you're only a few weeks into this and over time as she feels more understood, she will relax. She will start to accept the connection from you.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:29:50](#)

And in the meantime, if she says, "Stop it, mom, I know what you're trying to do and I don't like it." What you say is, "Oh sweetie, what I'm trying to do is just let you know I understand. I understand that it's hard to clean up your things, to get ready for bed. It's hard for me to turn off my computer and put myself to bed so that I can get up cheerful in the morning. It's hard for all of us to stop what we're doing. That's all I was saying. Come on, time to get ready for bed now." So you're being clear that you weren't manipulating her. You were expressing understanding. And really that's all you need to do and then demonstrate with your actions and your attitude. I hope that helps.

Question 43

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:30:34](#)

Our next question is from a parent who says, "I love your course. I'm so glad we came upon it when we did. We have an 11 year old and I wonder if you could give several suggestions of how to connect with tweens and teens. It's getting harder and harder to do so." And you know what, you're so right that when they're little you pick them up, you throw them around, they start laughing. And laughter is the magic connection between two people. So how do you do that if you can't create that connection through physical play? So I think the first thing is, warmth through physical touch always works. So even when they're tweens, they like it when you touch them warmly, they may roll their eyes when you run over to hug them before they leave the house. But secretly they love that it matters that much to you, that you get up from whatever you're doing and run over to hug them and that you do the same thing when they come home or when you are reunited.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:31:47](#)

I also think that physical touch works really well at night with tweens. When it's time for bed to go into their room, lie down next to them and chat with them. I've heard wonderful stories from parents about this. And in fact my own husband whose father is long since deceased, tells how when he was young, even when he was in his early teens like 14, 15 his dad would come home and would come into his room and say hi to him and ask how his day was, and lie down next to him on the bed. And that he still remembers that's when they had their closest connections. I think there's something about the darkness, the fact that you're not looking in their eyes, that makes kids really open up more. And there's a rabbi, I think her name is Sandy Sasso, who says, that's when you see children souls, is in the darkness when you chat.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:32:56](#)

So setting up a ritual where you do that every night, can absolutely foster connection with a tween or even a teen. Another ritual that really works, is every single day have some way that you always connect. Maybe you always go for a walk with the dog together. Maybe you always do the dishes together. Maybe you share a cup of tea, when you

get home from work or they get home from school or maybe after dinner, when they finish their homework, you always have a cup of tea together. Some sort of daily ritual that doesn't have to be long and doesn't have to be heavy and you can keep it sort of fun and light and just one-on-one the two of you, so that your child doesn't feel like they're having both parents grilling them, the way they might at the dinner table. And come to those times with your child in as good a mood as you can. Be as present as you can and don't grill them. Just admire something about them.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:34:07](#)

do about

Tell them a joke you heard today. Tell them a problem you have at work, that you're trying to decide what to do about it, and wonder if they have any feedback. Ask them the latest gossip at school and then zip your mouth, so you don't weigh in about how terrible that person is that they're talking about, so that they feel like they can share that kind of gossip with you. Have it be a little different every day so that your child looks forward to it and isn't bored by it. Another thing you can do is once a month or even once a week, have a ritual that you do where you go to brunch together or go out for pizza, just the two of you. And again, don't expect soul-baring discussions every single time or anytime really, but this is so your child knows that they can count on that time to ask you questions. You'll find that they will start to bring things up.

are a little

They'll test you at first by bringing up things that are a little bit dicey to see how you respond. Then if you respond well, they'll bring up more vulnerable things. There are more tips on how to listen without overreacting on the website ("12 Tips to Be a Brilliant Listener with Your Child.")

get your

Also, there are great questions to ask your child to help you get to know your child on a deeper level as they're growing and changing. There are more tips on the Aha! Parenting website in the communication section.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:35:39](#)

I'll also say that in the Teen section (at AhaParenting.com), there's a list of a bunch of things to do with teenagers to

stay close to them. You should take a look at that, because some of those apply to tweens as well. I know I have focused on things other than physical things like hugs, really on talking, but there is one other thing I'd like to suggest. That is, do whatever your tween is interested in. I used to get my daughter to play me her favorite music. I couldn't keep track of the bands. I didn't really care, to tell you the truth. I like my own music that I grew up with. That's what I listened to, or classical music. But I asked her to share her favorite music with me. It became a thing. Not only did I begin to enjoy some of her music, she enjoyed sharing it with me. It became a bond between us.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:36:36](#)

Maybe it's music. Maybe it's doing jump shots with your tween so they can teach you how to do a good jump shot or they practice theirs and you play basketball with them. Whatever it is that your child is interested in, that's the place to start. You may have no interest, but if you listen to them, you will learn so much and they will enjoy teaching you. I have to say, I know more about strategic warfare than I ever wanted to know because that's what my son was interested in. When he was 12 and 13, he would discourse at great length on battlefield decisions. You know what? That brought us closer. It just made it easy for us to have something to talk about so we always felt connected. I could always ask him a question and he'd always want to talk with me. If you create a topic like that, that you're both able to talk about together, then it's an easy way in to a conversation. Because after all, what you're interested in is staying connected to your child. Whatever they're interested in, that gives you a bridge.

Question 44

Dr. Laura Markh: [02:37:52](#)

This parent says "Connecting in a playful way when they get upset, has turned situations that would have ended up in threats, yelling, and crying into peaceful cooperation." Yay. That's great to hear. "However, your tips work better for toddlers. I find it hard with the eight year old. Playfulness doesn't seem to work so well at that age, nor

roughhousing. When he enters an angry mood, I find it harder to connect playfully or make him laugh." You're asking about how to connect, but I think it is different when a toddler is angry then when an eight year old's angry. When an eight year old's angry, you can't make them laugh. It would be disrespectful to try. You want to do general connecting with the eight year old. The best way to do that is Special Time. It's the one-on-one time.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:38:50](#)

One-on-one time with whatever the eight year old wants to do, that's really important. Also, 24/7 empathy is really important with an eight year old. That makes them feel connected to you so they trust you. You're right you can't just pick them up and throw them around at age eight, but you can still get them laughing. For instance, play the elevator game. "I open my arms to let my daughter into the elevator. I start the elevator and do whatever action she chooses. I can be a hugging elevator, a kissing elevator or a broken, shaking, scary elevator." That's from the mom of a seven year old. I think even with an eight year old, something like that could still work if they feel connected to you. Also eight year olds often really like to push you across the room with you saying, "I'm stronger than you," when you put your palms against theirs. Then you end up letting them push you across the room while you resist and lament about how strong they are.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:39:48](#)

Or you can give your eight year old a remote. Pretend that they can make you stop, start, move backward, move forward. Or you can try hard to lift up their arms, threatening to tickle their armpits. Comment about how strong they are and how hard it is to lift their arms. Really it's the anticipation of you getting the arm lifted that's enough to create the infectious laughter. Eight year olds often like to have pillow fights. I have had pillow fights as late as the teen years, or water fights. Or one of my favorites, take off each other's socks. You get on a bed or a soft rug and compete to see who can get each other's socks off first. Or you put on music and you do silly dancing. I think if you're feeling connected and you're in a good mood, you can get an eight year old laughing.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:40:38](#)

That's important for connection. It's important to help kids work out whatever anxieties they're carrying around. I think you should be able to do that for connection. I suspect what you're really asking is, "When he gets angry, I can't just make him laugh the way I would with a toddler." You're right, you can't. With an eight year old, you need to do all of the connecting that I've talked about, the Special Time and the empathy and the roughhousing and laughter. But then as with most kids, not just eight year olds, you're not trying to get them to stop being angry by getting them laughing. That would actually be disrespectful. You're trying to listen to them when they're angry. When they say, "Mom, I'm angry about X, Y, Z." You say, "Oh, my goodness. Tell me about it." Not, "Oh, that's not something to be angry about. Let's laugh."

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:41:35](#)

If you are angry about something, you'd want the other person to listen to you. That's what you do. Anger doesn't begin to dissipate until it feels heard. You listen to your child when they say they're angry. If they say, "It's all your fault. It's because you're a mean mom." You say, "Wow, you really wish I would change my rule on this. It's not what you want. You think other kids have different rules at their houses and you're pretty upset about this. Let's say that "I won't let you get that video game or even play video games at all." You acknowledge how angry your child is about your rule. You don't even need to explain it at that moment when they're angry. It's something you can talk about later, respectfully, in depth, with your reasons.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:42:22](#)

I always cite the research. But you don't do that while they're angry. You asked for examples of how to get them out of their anger. There's no way to get a person out of their anger except to listen to the anger and make it safe for the person to tell you all their feelings about it. Because as they experience the anger and tell you about it, they're going to realize that there's more to it. Maybe they're afraid that the other kids will never want to come to their house and play because they don't have video games the way the other kids do. Or that they won't know

how to play the game so the other kids will make fun of them. Those kinds of more vulnerable feelings are the things driving the anger in that specific example. It's very important that they be able to share these things with you.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:43:08](#)

That's only going to happen if you really listen to them when they're angry instead of trying to change the subject and get them out of their anger. I'm delighted that using playfulness has helped you diffuse things with a toddler. I think for older kids, what works is empathy and understanding. Seeing it from their point of view and listening and making it safe for them to show you the full range of their feelings. Once they can show you the more vulnerable feelings, for instance, an eight-year-old boy who tears up about the fact that he's worried about how the other kids will be his friend if he's not allowed to play video games, then he doesn't need to be angry at you about it. Because he's been able to express the more vulnerable emotions. Because the anger really is just a defense.

Question 45

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:44:07](#)

Our next question is from a parent, who says, "Our five year old has daily episodes of aggression at us and at his two year old brother. We'd like to connect with him more, but because we work, and morning and night he won't cooperate with us, our attempts to connect fail to change his mood and don't get him talking." I would say first of all, you're not going to get him talking when you connect. I think what you want to do to connect with him is get him laughing. Roughhousing absolutely is the most important thing. Even though you work, that means you only have morning and afternoons or evenings to connect with him, you can still get him laughing I would think. You say he won't cooperate, he stalls, he gets angry or giddy. He might get giddy if you try to get him roughhousing with you in the evening when you get home from work. Because he's so happy to see you. He's got a full backpack and when you roughhouse with him, he might get giddy.

- Dr. Laura Markham: [02:45:13](#) You might want to first start by roughhousing on Saturdays and Sundays when you have a little more time to make sure you can work out the kinks in the roughhousing. But you should be able to roughhouse even in the morning. You get ready for work, even if you have to get up earlier than usual, go to bed earlier, whatever. Even if he has to go to bed earlier than usual so that he wakes up without being awakened by you in the morning and has time to get ready to go, you can say to him, "We're going to roughhouse once you're all ready." You say he won't cooperate, but if he knows you're going to roughhouse, he's much more likely to cooperate with getting ready in the morning.
- Dr. Laura Markh: [02:45:56](#) You can roughhouse with two children at once. It's better if it's just the five-year-old if he does have sibling rivalry. But he will still laugh if you can do a roughhousing game with the two of them at once, if that's necessary. Because you've only got one parent still at home, let's say, while the other one has already left to go to work. If possible, divide and conquer. One of you is with the two year old while the other is with a five-year-old. But you should absolutely be able to roughhouse with him. You're not going to be able to get him talking. That's not really your goal. Five-year-olds don't have a lot of insight. They don't feel safe enough to share whatever insight they do have with you until they've worked out the feelings.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [02:46:42](#) Roughhousing will change his mood and will help him be more cooperative. Eventually that will build the relationship up enough that between doing roughhousing morning and night and Special Time at night, I think you'll see him starting to actually talk with you and share with you. Especially if in between all the rest of your interactions, you're working hard to be empathic with him. That's how you build connection, is through the laughter, through the Special Time, and through the empathy that you greet even when they're angry.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [02:47:18](#) If you greet that with empathy, what you find is you're able to build that bridge because they feel understood, even if they're angry. The anger no longer has to be there

because anger is just a defense. If you've connected and they're able to show you what's under the anger, the anger melts away. Then you have a much more cooperative child. You say that your son is aggressive and connection will really help with the aggression because once kids connect on a deeper level and show you their more vulnerable feelings, they don't need the aggression, which is a defense.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:47:56](#)

But I would like to say that anger doesn't dissipate until it feels heard. You also really want to listen to what your child is expressing anger about so he doesn't have to escalate. Because if kids don't feel heard, they escalate and then they get more aggressive. Hopefully the combination of these strategies, using the connection tools and also active listening where you're really empathizing with whatever he's upset about, hopefully the combination of those things will make his aggression unnecessary.

Question 46

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:48:34](#)

"Can a bond be established after the initial years with a child if a narcissistic parent made it harder for you to bond with your child due to the trauma you faced? I feel I've never really bonded with my child due to the anxiety I was left with. It's been two years since I left that situation. I'm still trying to heal, but I feel I haven't bonded healthily with my child." How great that you know this. I would say you need to take yourself and your child to a counselor, a therapist who works on bonding, and get some support to create the close bond you want with your child. And no, it is not too late. Your child is only three. You can do repair work. You will need to do some repair work, because your child will have needs that weren't met.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:49:26](#)

That's what a healthy attachment is. A healthy attachment, a healthy bond is just the child feeling that the parent can be depended on to meet their needs, to keep them safe, to understand when the child is upset or

things go wrong. A healthy parent-child bond makes the child feel that they are seen and understood, that they can count on the parent to soothe them, that they're safe. If your child didn't feel those things, there is some damage there and some hurt and some fear.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:50:02](#)

The work that we've done in this course helps your child surface those feelings and work through them. But from what you're saying, you're still somewhat traumatized. You're still feeling anxious. You don't have to do this yourself. I would go to an expert who can support you to help your child work through those feelings and also help you build that bond you want now, today and going forward. Good for you for recognizing it and for taking action to make things better. Don't wait.

Question 47

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:50:37](#)

"Our oldest daughter, seven and a half, enjoys school but misses home when she's away all day. When she gets home after school, she often implodes because she feels she's been excluded from the rest of the family. I know she needs connection right away when she gets home, but how do I manage that when I have a baby I need to keep a close eye on?" First of all, I'm impressed with your realization that what your daughter needs is to reconnect. I think that's exactly right. I wonder if you can set your four year old and 11 month old up with a sensory bag or a special box.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:51:11](#)

There are many suggestions for those online. Even for the 11 month old. The key seems to be using a lot of duct tape. You will need five of them for each of those children, so that you can rotate them each week. Of course it's not going to work every single day. There will be times when your 11 month old is fussy or whatever. On those days when sensory boxes don't work, I wonder if you could do roughhousing with both the seven year old and her siblings. I know that seems hard with an 11 month old, but what about a game where you and the 11 month old chase

her siblings around. Or you could play ventriloquist and give her a voice to say funny things to her big siblings to get them laughing.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:51:57](#)

What about playing football and running her around her siblings into the end zone? Obviously you have to warn them that they can't tackle you. They have to be gentle with her, but I think they'll love it. There are games where you're not having them touch each other in a sense where you could have each child take a turn to run to you and you swing them around and toss them on the couch. The baby can crawl to you when it's her turn. All of these games I think will get your seven year old laughing. Then later when you do have backup from another adult hopefully, or the baby is already in bed, you can spend one-on-one time with your seven year old as well. But, I hear you. It needs to happen first thing when she gets home. I'm hoping that roughhousing might provide enough connection and sort of integrate her back into the family as well.

Question 48

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:52:48](#)

"My five-year-old is very sensitive to instruction. If he climbs up the back of a chair that might tip over and I gently say, 'Be careful, that chair might fall.' He responds with, 'I hate you. You are being mean to me. I'm not your friend.' I've made lots of progress in staying regulated, empathizing, even doing Special Time. I even make up stories about dinosaurs with similar problems, yet he remains hostile to instruction most of the time. 'You're being mean' is a common reaction." This sounds heartbreaking. I'm sure it's very hard for you. I guess I would start by saying this is not being "sensitive to instruction". This is a big chip on his shoulder. He's very defended against you. He does not want to follow your lead. In fact, as you say, he's downright hostile.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:53:37](#)

As you know from this course, the reason children follow our lead is the relationship. It's the connection with us.

Now, children will follow the direction of a parent of whom they're afraid. If you're doing conventional parenting and they're afraid of punishment, they will do what you say. But then when you stop punishing, they stop doing that. They often begin to feel safe enough to show you all the hurt that they've accumulated. When you say that you've made great progress in staying regulated and empathizing, I'm wondering what things were like before. I'm wondering if maybe this is a strong-willed child who's super sensitive and that may be before you weren't regulated as much, so you were yelling at him. He sounds pretty angry at you. Now that you're not punishing, his response is that he showing you how angry he is. He's being super provocative. Saying, "I hate you," is pretty provocative. He's accusing you of being mean to him.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:54:42](#)

Now you're obviously not being mean to him in the instance that you've described, but maybe he feels you've been mean to him in the past. Saying, "I'm not your friend," is provocative. It's also saying I don't trust you. I would say this is not about limits and discipline. This is about connection. This is about your relationship with your son. That's what needs rebuilding here. Please do continue the hard work you're doing to stay regulated, to empathize with him, to do Special Time. Special Time is really important. I'm glad you're doing Special Time. I love the idea that you're making up stories about dinosaurs with similar problems. I'm hoping that those stories are not perceived by your son as lectures. I'm hoping he perceives them as something that relates to him and that maybe in addition to reacting badly to instruction from you, that he also has moments of connection, of coziness with you, where he's willing to listen to your dinosaur stories and to other things.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:55:49](#)

But I would say that you probably need to do some repair work with him. That you probably need to talk about the past. Say to him, "Wow, you hate me? You think I'm being mean to you and you're not my friend? Those are some pretty serious words. You're letting me know you don't feel like my friend. That you feel like I'm mean to you. That

you don't trust me. You're saying you hate me. You must be pretty mad at me. I wonder, Sweetheart, if this is because of things that have happened between us in the past. I remember that time that I got so angry at you. I yelled and yelled. I think it might really have scared you and made you very sad and it made you very angry. Remember that?"

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:56:42](#)

Let him talk to you. He'll probably start by being angry. "Yes, of course I was angry. No. I wasn't hurt. I wasn't sad. You're always like that." He might get pretty angry at you. Let him be angry and acknowledge how he feels. Don't fight back, but do say to him, "No wonder you were so angry. You were so angry at me because it seemed like I wasn't listening to you," or whatever it is that he's telling you. Your goal here is to give him an opportunity to express the tears and fears. The fear he felt, the sadness he felt, how alone he felt when you were having a hard time and when you were doing conventional parenting. I think that as you do this, you'll start to see changes in his behavior. Especially if you keep doing the Special Time, and you work really hard to stay regulated, and you keep empathizing, and absolutely roughhousing. Kids who've stored up fear, which he has, need to laugh to let that fear out. Laughing is a really important way to bond.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:57:54](#)

You didn't mention roughhousing in your note to me. I'm hoping that you're also doing roughhousing with him. I think what you're going to see is that as you connect more, he's going to be much more open to instruction from you. When you say, "Oh, be careful that chair might fall." He will experience it not as an attack on him, but as you expressing caring for him. Keep up the good work and the good changes. I think that you will see him change. If you don't, then I do encourage you to get some coaching help from a parenting coach. There is a page on the Aha! Parenting website. If you just put the word coaching or coach into the search box, you'll find the whole page of coaches I've trained. You can get in touch with those coaches.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:58:46](#)

Your relationship is just with them. I don't get any financial compensation when you work with them. Although I do supervise a few of them. But most of them, they're just in business for themselves as trained coaches. They work with parents every day. Reach out to them if one of them resonates with you. Get some coaching if you feel like you're stuck with your son after a month or two of working hard in the way I've described. Good luck to you.

Question 49

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:59:20](#)

Here's a parent who asks how to handle a gifted, defiant child. "When asked to pick up toys, look for something, do homework, piano, my child, often whines, purposely moves slowly, claims she can't find it without even looking or pretends not to understand when I know she does. Asking nicely, giving encouragement, repeating back instructions doesn't work. She defiantly mumbles one word or wails, "I can't do it. I did look for it," followed by dramatic crying. I'm trying, but I have very little patience for this type of behavior. She's six, almost seven." First of all, I can see why this would be totally frustrating. After all, you know she can handle the instruction you're giving to her. It must seem to you like she just won't. Thus you're calling her defiant. But this is a child with a full backpack. She can't claim her power. When she doesn't want to cooperate with you, like do the homework or play the piano or follow your instruction to look for something, she doesn't know how to say to you, "Mom, I can't do that right now. I'm doing something else."

Dr. Laura Markham: [03:00:31](#)

Instead, she's passive aggressive. I'm not hearing defiance here. I'm hearing passive aggressive. Where she says she looks and then she collapses and cries. She can't function very well. I'm sure she doesn't like feeling like somebody who can't function, but she needs some help to unload that backpack. I wonder why you mentioned gifted. Any child could do what you're describing. It's not really

defiant. It has nothing to do with being gifted. I'm wondering if you're expecting a great deal of her. Because why else would you use the word gifted except to say, "I know she's capable of this." But a child is only capable of what they're exhibiting. Right now she is not capable of doing what you're asking of her.

Dr. Laura Markham: [03:01:17](#)

The reason I know that she's not capable is because she's not doing it. Children do the best they can. The reason she's not doing it is because of her full backpack, which has a lot of tears obviously, thus the dramatic crying. It really needs to get emptied before she can do anything else. I have a challenge for you. Are you doing Special Time every day where she feels valued just for being herself without having to achieve or perform or show that she's gifted? Are you doing roughhousing every day where she laughs uproariously and collapses with you onto the couch in your arms snuggling? Are you being empathic with her 24/7? I already know the answer to that. No, not yet. Because you're saying that you're trying, but you're having very little patience for this kind of behavior. I get that this kind of behavior is totally annoying, but there's a reason for your daughter's behavior.

Dr. Laura Markham: [03:02:17](#)

She's not just being difficult. There's something wrong here. Your job is to empathize, no matter what. When she says, "I can't do it." Or, "I did look." Your job is to say, "Wow, you are finding this so hard. Sometimes even a simple instruction like go look for X, Y, Z is just hard. It feels overwhelming. You seem to feel totally overwhelmed," which is what she's showing you. You go and you hug her. You snuggle her. You say, "You're having a hard time, aren't you sweetie?" Now at this point, if you're doing all the things that I just challenged you to be doing, the Special Time and the roughhousing and empathy, she might trust you enough that this becomes a scheduled meltdown. That she begins to cry and to show you how upset she is. Bingo.

Dr. Laura Markham: [03:03:17](#)

If you can do that, you've just hit a home run. Because after that, you're going to see, at least for that day, that you have a daughter who no longer feels overwhelmed.

She might fall asleep after she cries, in which case, you know you need to look at her sleep situation. Remember, if you have to wake her up in the morning, she's not getting enough sleep. But if that's not it and she doesn't fall asleep right after she cries, then you'll see a different kid. You'll see a kid who's cooperative. Who goes and looks for it and says, "Mom, I found it." That's the kid you want. Well, this is how you get that kid. You help her with the feelings that are overwhelming her and that make her feel like she can't cope.

Dr. Laura Markham: [03:04:07](#)

Kids are never lazy. Children are not lazy by nature. If you have a child who's not cooperating, they're overwhelmed. They feel like too much is being asked of them. Our job is to really listen to that and to help them cope by helping them with the feelings they're carrying. Also, by looking at what we're asking. Is she not getting enough time outside to play? Is she not getting enough downtime to just chill? I don't know the answer, only you do. But I urge you to listen to the messages your daughter is giving you.

Dr. Laura Markham: [03:04:44](#)

As always, when something is missing from a situation, our job is to notice that and to supply it. In this case, your daughter isn't listening to you and cooperating. Your job is to notice that that listening and cooperating is missing. Your job then is to go overboard in supplying that listening and that cooperating to your daughter, and that empathy. You can end up with a very changed child. I can't wait to hear what happens with this. Good luck with your challenge.

Dr. Laura Markham: [03:05:22](#)

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 Aparenting.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.