

Special Time Q and A with Dr. 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 special time. 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

Parent: [00:00:39](#) My younger daughter's five and she loves playing with her brother who is eight. And when I do special time with her, almost inevitably he asks to play too. And she's excited about it, she does welcome him into it because she's a community gatherer like that. She does love playing together as a group. She appears to want to, but I think I'm always concerned that she will then feel like she didn't get her one-on-one special time.

Laura Markham: [00:01:19](#) Yeah. Let me ask you this. Has she ever said to you at any point later, "But we didn't get any time alone"?

Parent: [00:01:28](#) I almost knew you were going to ask that. And I was thinking she's definitely done that. But I don't know if it was specifically during special time or if it was just when we were playing something and then it shifted to something that was more of a compromise and then later it came up like, "I didn't even get to do what I really wanted to do." Even though it was a choice she made in the moment.

Laura Markham: [00:01:53](#) I think that's the problem with the choice she makes in the moment, is that she gets swept up by the good feelings about her brother in the moment and the excitement and later she realizes she actually made a choice. So maybe what you could do with her is say, "Look honey, I know

you love to have your brother and it's fine with me if he's with us some of the time, but it's important to me, to have some of our special time. Be with just the two of us. Also, I know sometimes later you're disappointed that you didn't get time to do everything you wanted to do just with me. So I want to make sure that we have time just for those things. And you're making a choice every time you include your brother that you're not going to get alone time with me. She's still young. But she's starting to develop some prefrontal cortex there to see that there's a result of her choices. Do you think that would help?

- Parent: [00:03:00](#) Yeah, I really do. And I think, in the moment if she says, "No, no mommy, I want Noam to play Barbies with me. We can always give it a try."
- Laura Markham: [00:03:15](#) I think you warn her. I think you say, "Oh, I see how much you love playing with him. That's so wonderful. I love that you two love to play together. Special time you know is really just supposed to be your special time with me because he gets his own time with me, without you. If you really want him today, that's fine, but why don't we just do it for a while because we only have 20 minutes of special time? Let's play with your brother for five minutes and then let's just reevaluate and make sure that's really the way you want to spend the rest of your time."
- Parent: [00:03:46](#) Perfect. Yeah, I love that. Thank you so much.
- Laura Markham: [00:03:50](#) You're welcome.

Question 2

A parent is asking a question about special time. "What's the difference between quality time and special time? Like if you're building Legos during special time, well, how is that different than just playing with your kid?" You're totally right. It's not intuitively obvious if you're the kind of person who actually spends a lot of time playing with your child, but one difference is that when you're doing special

time, it's one on one time. So when you're having special time playing Legos with your four-year-old, the two-year-old is not there and it allows you to be present in a different way. Another difference is, you focus only on your child. So you turn off the phone, no matter what happens, you're not answering your phone. In daily life, you might have to take a call or return a text or go do the laundry and you leave the Lego game.

Laura Markham: [00:04:37](#)

But you're not going to do that in a special time. You belong 100% to your child for that 15 or 20 minutes. Your only goal is connection. And of course the final difference is that you let your child choose the activity, but also take the lead in it. So when your child wants to build Legos with you and it's not special time, you might be building your own vehicle while he builds his. In fact, many adults, I have seen this far too many times. Adults will jump in and tell their kid how to build the Legos or they have an idea. "Don't you think it'd be cool if you did this? Added wings to it? Hey, I'm building mine to fly. How about yours? Can yours fly?" Which is competitive. I've seen parents do those things. With special time, your goal is to not make your own Lego or drawing or whatever. You're not teaching your child, your only goal is connection.

Laura Markham: [00:05:26](#)

Mostly you notice what your child is doing and you comment on it. Not in a way that evaluates them, but in a way that helps them feel seen. "Oh, you're adding wings to that." And if your child tells you to do something specific, like make your own vehicle, you do it. But you ask for their direction. "Huh, do you want me to put wings on it? What should I do now? I did this, should I add wheels?" Whatever, because they're in charge. So, special time is play time that is completely decided by the child in which you are completely present. You're not attending to anything else. You're not teaching, you're not correcting, your focus is solely on connecting with and appreciating your child.

Question 3

Laura Markham: [00:06:09](#) A parent asks about doing special time and says it's hard to do that with the kids separately during the week. Yes, you're right. You can do longer special time on weekends. But I would say since you're having so many issues with your child, that you want to do it during the week as well. I know your partner is not home during the week, but it sounds like you're living with your in-laws at the moment because you asked me how to deal with their judgments. What you say to your in-laws is, "Emotions aren't dangerous. This is going to take some time, but emotions aren't dangerous. I'm setting limits. They're allowed to have their feelings." But ask your in-laws, "Can you take the kids for one hour a week? First take one of the kids, the five-year-old, and then take the other one, the two-year-old so that I can spend one on one time with them for half an hour." Because that's what special time is. You can roughhouse and connect with both kids at once. That's great. You should do be doing it every day. But you do need time with each one and since you're having so much of a problem and it's a disaster, I think you actually do need to give your child more one on one time. And also, the disaster that you were describing where your child was hitting, kicking, biting, and you say she needed connection. Then it's temporary. If this is a new thing that's happening based on you're taking this course, that's okay. It means she's feeling safer to show you these feelings. You just say you're so upset and you step up the preventive maintenance, which means a lot of special time. But also if you can't do it every day, I get it. Your in-laws are maybe not available every day. That's fine. Then it's time to do more laughter as well. And you can do that with both kids.

Question 4

Laura Markham: [00:08:06](#) This parent is asking about how to fit special time in because she has a one-year-old, a three-year-old and a six-year-old and no other parent around and the little ones need constant supervision. This is a question that lots of people have. The best plan for the six-year-old is while the little ones are sleeping, maybe he can stay up a bit later if there is no time that the three-year-old is asleep while the

six-year-old is home. I think mostly your issue is the three-year-old because the one-year-old probably does get one on one time while you feed him or her. So I'm betting that it's really mostly the three-year-old that you have the issue with when they have special time because the one-year-old is the problem. Right? Most one-year-olds can stay in a playpen once they've been fed and attended to, for 15 minutes if you give them something fascinating to do.

Laura Markham: [00:09:00](#) I am a big fan of pre-prepared things, that you prepare not that you buy, sensory bags and boxes. This is described in my sibling book. It's something to do while you're pregnant. But if you don't have them, make them now, it's invaluable. I recommend you have a box for each child. You have like five different things in it for each child. Keep it high in a closet so you can just pull it down when you need to. If you go on Pinterest, if you're a Pinterest person and put in Dr. Laura Markham, you'll find I have a Pinterest, a set of boards with a lot of interesting stuff on it. Including links to other things on the internet. I've never written on my blog or my website about sensory bags and boxes, but there is a board, a Pinterest board of sensory bags and boxes.

Laura Markham: [00:09:52](#) Use a lot of duct tape if you have a one-year-old, but there's all kinds of wonderful things you can set up that, as I say, once her needs are met or his needs are met, you can put them down in a playpen or a crib for 15 minutes while you deal with the three-year-old. And of course, the six-year-old can be left unsupervised while they listen to an audiobook or something usually. Even three-year-olds can sometimes be left unsupervised while they listen to an audio book. And to entertain them if they're the kind of person who has a hard time just sitting and listening, which many three-year-olds are,

Laura Markham: [00:10:20](#) you can make a book. Just take some three hole punched paper, put it in a simple three ring binder and give them washable markers and have them draw pictures to go along with what's going on in the book as they listen to it. That way, it's great for their creativity. It's great for them to learn independent play. It's great for their

concentration. You're not going to leave them for more than 15 minutes to do it, but often they really love listening to the story.

Question 5

- Laura Markham: [00:10:51](#) This parent has an 11-month-old and a three-year-old and she's worn out and when she finally gets the 11-month-old down for a nap, she's ready for a break and she does not feel like special time. And when she does, it works wonders. But then it's a sacrifice for her and eventually she ends up blowing up because she didn't get any time to herself. And she can't do special time in the evening because everybody's fried. You know what? I get it. I understand the evening has no time to do special time. I think you're just too fried usually by then, most of us are. And so are they. Besides, she probably needs it earlier in the day. It's hard for her probably to make it all day without special time. I understand that being with young children is exhausting. You have to be totally on all the time.
- Laura Markham: [00:11:41](#) But I want to add, I don't think you can afford to skip special time with a three-year-old when they have an 11-month-old sibling. It will make your life much, much harder. I think you have to regard that as non negotiable. Either do the special time when the baby sleeps or you have to have somebody else take the baby later in the day for half an hour or earlier in the day even better so you can do special time. If you don't have that extra help, I would say you have to do the special time during nap time, I don't see another time. But I hasten to add, I agree also that your alone time is not negotiable. I know why you blow eventually, anyone would.
- Laura Markham: [00:12:24](#) Your three-year-old should be sleeping at night about 11 or 12 hours if they're not napping. If she's napping, maybe she naps when you have the 11-month-old and you don't get time for yourself. So maybe she is napping and she's only sleeping 10 hours, but that should still leave you a little time after you get both kids to bed before you have

to go to sleep yourself. I realize you're exhausted at night. But I would say, make sure that the minute your kids go to bed, it's your time. It's not cleaning time, it's not cooking time. You may need to ask for help from your partner for that. You're home raising your children, but that does not mean it's your responsibility automatically to do all the cooking and cleaning. You are your number one responsibility, to keep yourself in good shape, so you can show up for your kids.

Laura Markham: [00:13:19](#)

I would say do whatever you need to do to enroll your partner for help in the evening so you can have some downtime for you, because there is no other way for you to show up for your kids the way you want to show up for your kids. I know it's often hard for women to ask for help from their partners. They feel like if the partner's out earning the money for the bills, that they should be doing everything else. But you're already working long hours and usually up in the night taking care of kids. That does not automatically mean you also have to be the family's housekeeper and cook. I would say, it's really important to take care of yourself here, focusing on taking the time for yourself away from your daughter, but also working this out with your partner.

Laura Markham: [00:14:06](#)

For the single moms and dads who have their children, who are listening to this, I don't have a good answer except to hire help because you matter so much. You staying centered is the only way you can give what you need to to your child. If you don't have a partner to help with things, then it is really hard to do that. I realize life is not perfect and you don't always have that person there to do that. But if you are lucky enough to have a partner, I would really move heaven and earth to get that partner onboard to help you to claim some time for yourself so you can stay centered. And believe me, you'll be a lot easier for your partner to live with as well.

Laura Markham: [00:14:50](#)

Final thing, one of your triggers is when your three-year-old decides to defy you and have a meltdown when the 11-month-old is sleeping. Yes, all parents feel this way. We work so hard to get kids to sleep and they're so cranky

when they're awakened. Sleep is sacred. I get it and I just want to reassure you that if you actually do special time while your 11-month-old is sleeping, your daughter won't do this. This is her trying to get her needs met and you can head this off by laughing with her earlier in the day before you put him down. And certainly if you've put him down already, spending that one on one time with her. If you don't get that moment, you can expect her to act out. I just want to add for you and for everyone listening, there will be times you will end up in the breakdown lane. It just happens. The three-year-old will throw a tantrum and will be screaming and the 11-month-old will wake up and will be screaming. Just take a deep breath. Remind yourself that children act like this because they're children.

Laura Markham: [00:15:55](#)

Actually, if we can do a better job meeting our own needs, we can do a better job meeting their needs and there is a way to avoid the breakdown lane. Not now, not while you're already in it. But it's like when your car breaks down, you didn't take it for an oil change. You didn't give it a tune up and it breaks down. You're in the breakdown lane. The way to avoid it next time, you promise yourself, this afternoon I'm going to get both kids laughing, tonight I'm going to take care of me so I have more inner resources, tomorrow morning I'm going to get both kids laughing again. When he naps tomorrow, special time with her. I guarantee you, if you can do that preventive maintenance, she won't need to express her needs by attacking you this way.

Laura Markham: [00:16:42](#)

I know you want a magic answer that includes more time for you and does not include special time while the baby's napping. Here's the deal, laughter helps, but it's usually not enough by itself. Scheduled meltdowns help, but you're going to have to do that on a weekend when your partner is there so he can take the baby out. But even though I say there's no magic answer, there really is. I'm giving you a magic wand. The magic wand is special time. Parents say to me all the time, when I started doing special time, she acted like there was some essential nutrient she'd been missing. So I'm telling you special time works

and I would do whatever you need to do to find the time to give her that time.

Question 6

- Laura Markham: [00:17:28](#) A parent is saying that her seven-year-old has a hard time transitioning and that they run out of time for special time, because she pushes the boundary. She has other things she's doing. Your seven-year-old doesn't get to set up a schedule for the day. You set up the schedule for the day. You write it out, you type it up, you put pictures. If she's not a reader yet, put pictures of her doing things for each part of the day with the time. You give her a digital clock or there's a digital clock that she can read in your home and you point to it and you say, sweetheart, it's six o'clock. Our special time is at six o'clock because it's set and we start getting ready for bed because it's lights out at 8:00. We have finished dinner and now it's special time at 6:00.
- Laura Markham: [00:18:15](#) When she says, "No, no, I haven't finished cutting out my paper dolls yet." You say, "I hear you. You want to do that, but we're not going to have time for special time if we do this." And you say, "We're having special time, we always have special time. That's the first thing we're going to do, is have special time. Why don't we have special time for half an hour and you can play afterwards for half an hour if you want before we get ready for bed. But six o'clock is always special time." You don't let her say, "No, I want to cut the paper dolls first." Because then she'll keep putting it off. Six o'clock is special time. And remember, it'll make it easier for her to then stop doing the paper dolls when it's time. But you've already had special time.
- Laura Markham: [00:18:56](#) At this point, you're enforcing what special time is. If you want an agreement that special time is always at 6:30, fine. But the problem is, at 6:30 she's going to go into a meltdown probably and not be willing to have special time and you'll never get it. This way she goes, at six o'clock into the meltdown, "No, no, no. I do my paper dolls." And you say, "I know. It's special time." Then you can say, "We can do paper dolls for special time. This is what our special

time is, but we won't be able to do roughhousing too or anything else we planned for special time. I'm setting the timer for this. You wish you had all the time in the world. I know. And when you're grown up, you'll probably never stop playing paper dolls. You'll never go to bed. You'll play paper dolls all night, won't you, every night. But right now sweetie, I'm setting the timer. It's special time now. It's special time, if you want it to be paper dolls, that's fine. But we're going to do it together right now. I'm going to sit with you.”

Laura Markham: [00:19:52](#)

Then you sit and you watch her do paper dolls and you pour your love into her and she tells you to put the dress on a doll, fine. Or cut something out, fine. You do that. And halfway through you say, you know what, I'm noticing the timer's halfway through. In 15 minutes we're going to be out of time for special time. I want to make sure that's okay. Because we're having special time now and this is what we're doing. Do you want to use the rest of the special time? Do you want to keep doing paper dolls or do you want to do something else? “No, do paper dolls,” or whatever. Great.

Laura Markham: [00:20:23](#)

At the end of special time, the buzzer rings and you say, “We had our half hour special time. I love being with you. That was so much fun playing paper dolls with you.” You give her a big hug and you tell her, we'll have special time tomorrow at 6:00 again, and you say, “We're going to stop playing paper dolls in 20 minutes. I'm setting the timer for that and we're going to go upstairs. “No, no, no. I have other things to do. I have a whole list of things too. I know, so you need to start doing them now. If there's something else, because it's 10 minutes to 7:00, we're going upstairs, get ready for bath,” or whatever. When she has a meltdown, that's fine.

Laura Markham: [00:20:58](#)

The way kids learn that time is finite... It's horrible. It's a terrible thing to learn. But we all have to learn it. The way they learn that when you're in the continuum that has time and space in it, the time is finite and that continuum, there's no way around it. They just have to learn it by being subject to it. So you can't have time be ever

expanding. You have to set limits on time and that's how they learn it.

Question 7

- Laura Markham: [00:21:27](#) This parent asks, “How do you fit special time in on work days when everybody's being awakened and moving into the schedule?” Yes, these are really hard questions because there's only one of you to go around and it's a really busy schedule. I would say, when you have multiple children unloading their backpacks, the most important thing is to try to do preventive maintenance. So you try to do a scheduled meltdown on the weekends or some other time if you have a partner around so that the partner can help you with the other child at that time. It's not always going to work, but you know your child's having a hard time that week, trying to do a special time and then a scheduled meltdown on a Saturday or Sunday when you have a partner around can make all the difference in making it through Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday without any meltdowns at all. Then when you do have a meltdown and the other child is having a hard time, then I would try to be prepared in advance.
- Laura Markham: [00:22:37](#) In my sibling book I mentioned that before you have your second child, it's a really good idea to create sensory boxes or sensory bags and just stick a bunch of them in a closet and then when you go to feed your second child, the new baby, you can pull those out for the older sibling to do while you're feeding the baby. I would keep some of those around on an ongoing basis for years and that way when one of your children has a meltdown, you can quickly run to the closet, grab something that's appropriate for the other kid and in this case for the two-year-old. I would give the two-year-old a hug, give her the sensory box or bag that you have there, that she knows is only for special occasions, and say, I'm going to help your sister with her feelings. She's having a hard time right now. I'll be back in a minute to give you another hug, and that's it.

- Laura Markham: [00:23:34](#) You go take care of the other kid and keep your two-year-old in view across the room or in the next room so that if you need to, you can deal with the two-year-old because obviously she can't be unsupervised. If the two-year-old comes to you and tries to get your attention and climb into your lap when you're dealing with the other kid's meltdown, that's really hard. I have heard from parents how they have done this, where basically they have one kid on one side and one kid on the other side. And again, this is in my sibling book. The article from the sibling book is also on the Aha! Parenting website.
- Laura Markham: [00:24:15](#) It's there and it's in the sibling section. "When more than one child needs you at once" -- you can find it. Basically, you've got one kid on one side and one kid on the other side and you're trying to keep them from hitting each other and just saying, "I know, you want me to focus on you right now because you really need me right now because you're having a hard time. Your sister came over because she's worried about you and she wants to make sure you're okay." And then you turn your head to the other one. You're touching both of them. They're both in your arms. You turn your head to the other one and you say, "You came over because you were worried about your sister. It's okay. She's just having a hard time with her feelings. I'm helping her. It's really okay, I'll come see you in a minute. Okay?"
- Laura Markham: [00:25:05](#) It's not ideal, but if the preventive maintenance has only worked on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and now it's Thursday and there's another meltdown, well that's what happens. Another way to avoid it, preventive-maintenance-wise, is to roughhouse with both kids at the same time when you see that one of the kids is going to lose it. That really helps because you siphon off the top layer of anxiety in the backpack. You get them laughing and then they're less likely to have a meltdown at that difficult time when there's only one of you and more than one kid. And the question about how to put special time into the routine, I guess what I would say about that is, when you get home from work, I assume that you pick the kids up at school after daycare or whatever, and you're

coming home and you're eating dinner and you're going to bed. And what you're saying is there's no time for special time in that routine. And it is absolutely true.

Laura Markham: [00:26:06](#)

But I would say that the answer to that is A, have longer special time on Saturday and Sunday. That's A. B is simplify dinner. You should not be spending your time cooking on a weeknight. And I'm a health food nut. So I'm not suggesting that you're just eating frozen dinners or take out food. But I would say, if you can make a soup over the weekend and you can have pasta one night that's very simple, you've got two of your dinners made already and you can make eggs a third night and you could have carrots out of the bag. Keep it very simple so that you're not spending time cooking. That way when you do get home with your kids, hopefully you've given them a snack in the car when you pick them up from daycare, because they're usually starving and you gave them something healthy in the car so that you're not filling them up with cookies before dinner obviously, but something healthy. You get home and you can play with them a little bit and get them laughing and then you can go in and get dinner ready.

Laura Markham: [00:27:12](#)

Then after dinner, if it's two partners, then you can do special time. There's half an hour of special time and it might be that on Mondays mom is with the girl and dad's with the boy and then you reverse on Tuesdays or it might be that each kid just gets 15 minutes so you get each parent every day. You'll have to see what works for your family. I like longer special time myself. I find it works better, but every family's different. Maybe everybody's always fighting over dad, so you have to share him every single night and he gets 15 minutes with each kid, whatever works in your family. But I think doing that, even if it means they don't get a bath every night, they only get a bath every other night and you'd have special time every other night. Whatever you have to do to work this special time in, to me is so worth it and I would absolutely do that if you can.

Question 8

- Laura Markham: [00:28:01](#) I have a question here about special time. And yes, I believe that with special time, the best way to do it is to have the child choose their activity every other day and you choose every other day. And the reason I like that is it gives you a chance to do roughhousing. If you can do roughhousing some other time of the day as part of your routine, great. The kid can decide what to do with special time every day. But the question is, "I didn't like what my kid chose to do. He spent the whole 20 minutes zoned out, pushing trains around and talking to himself and I felt sad and disconnected and that was our only chance for special time that day." I would say, in that kind of a case, the connection doesn't have to look like what you think it should look like, which is that your child looks at you and engages with you. You're the witnessing presence to what he's doing.
- Laura Markham: [00:28:55](#) If he is staying the whole 20 minutes pushing trains around, you can say, now you're pushing the train that way. Now you're pushing the train this way. And you don't have to say much. You sit there and you don't think about your shopping list. You focus your full attention on him. You pour your love into him. You think of yourself as a witness and you might even say, "It seems like maybe you're feeling a little tired today. Maybe you don't have a lot of energy to even do anything." Because you say that he seemed zoned out and tired, and you can just observe what he's doing and you just show up and you let it be okay with you wherever he is. He doesn't have to put on a performance for us, he doesn't have to. It's not about us. He doesn't have to acknowledge us. We just show up and acknowledge him and witness what he's going through and observe and he's okay no matter what.
- Laura Markham: [00:29:56](#) Even when he's zoned out and tired and not connecting and just pushing trains around, that's fine. That's a form of

connection for us to just show up and be present for him. It doesn't have to look like a particular kind of connection. This question went further with asking, "Well, what about projects that we can't do with the baby around and when the baby's napping and we have special time, why can't we do the project?" Well, hopefully the baby naps for more than 20 minutes and a special time is 20 minutes. You can say at the end of special time we're going to do a special project and then you'll have time. You still have time for special time and then you do the special project. And I guess, yeah, if you gave up your chosen special time once a week, you do roughhousing two of the days and then the third day when it's your chance to choose, you want to do your special project, that's okay. But it's not special time.

Laura Markham: [00:30:48](#)

Again, it might be great because you're doing it with your child. But if it's a special craft with pressed flowers and thank you cards, you're going to be worried about what it looks like and when you're worried about what it looks like, you're not just accepting your child and letting him take the lead. So he's having to rise to the occasion and perform. So it's not special time. And honestly, really what's essential to his development is daily laughter and daily feeling like you're pouring your love into him. I don't think making a special card is essential to his development in the same way. I think of it as a nice thing for you to feel good about being a mom, honestly, your kid could care less about the special pressed flowers. You feel good about it.

Laura Markham: [00:31:35](#)

Maybe it isn't reaching to your child, fine. To me, it's so much less important than whether he gets to laugh honestly, that I wouldn't sacrifice special time for it. That's my bias. But maybe today you laughed with him and his brother or sister, whatever the little one is. This is a thing that was really important for you to do. Okay, do it. But don't put that at the top of your list. The things that are essential for your child's needs should go to the top of your list.

Question 9

- Parent: [00:32:01](#) My husband and I have a five and a half year old son. He's our only child. He seems to just need constant attention and can't do anything on his own. And that's a big problem for us. He doesn't want to play by himself. He won't sit and take a break. During the week if it's school, it's a bit more manageable, but on the weekends, it's really rough.
- Laura Markham: [00:32:27](#) It sounds to me like he's a kid who really likes social interaction and that you try to do that, but you need some break time. That does sound like that could be wearing. One thing I want to say and this may not be true for your son, but in this day and age, we do have a situation where parents often feel like they have to be very engaged with their babies every minute and stimulate the babies. I think what ends up happening when parents think they have to entertain their babies all the time, the baby never really learns to entertain themselves. And there's actually a developmental leap that babies make where they're able to be in the same room with you, being nearby so they feel safe, but they're able to focus on what they're doing, like playing with a rattle or whatever they're doing.
- Laura Markham: [00:33:29](#) It's good for us to not get in their faces at that moment. And I know this isn't about your son, but in general, I think it's very good for parents to know about that so they can let their children make that developmental leap. The child doesn't depend on that quite so much. I don't know if that's what happened with your son, but just in case that's what happened, it's good to know. I think it's very common for that to happen and we don't necessarily know that when they're babies, so just for anyone who's listening who has a baby, good to know. But I would say that you could recreate that time. First of all, I would say brainstorm with your son. What are things that he likes to do by himself? Brainstorm. And you can go to the Aha! Parenting website and there's a boredom page, if you put the word boredom into the Search Box, there's something called the boredom jar, which has a hundred and something ideas for what you can do, what your child can do by themselves, what you can do to help them get started on, when you're not going to be able to be

engaged with them. I would brainstorm with them which of these ideas does he like and what ideas does he have?

- Laura Markham: [00:34:47](#) I would start with his own ideas. And I would make a list and save any ideas for the future and not just for this one moment. When you do this, have a boredom buster jar. But then I would say to him, "Okay, we're going to set the timer and then how much time do you think you'd like to play by yourself? Because I need to do X, Y, Z." You can do some paperwork, you can start dinner or whatever you need to do. And see what he says. If he says, "I can play for 10 minutes," you could say, "Okay, let's try 10 minutes." And let him set the timer so he feels more in control of that and say, "Of course, if you really need me, I'll always be here, but this is your 10 minutes to do your work and I'm going to have 10 minutes to do my work." Then you do it.
- Laura Markham: [00:35:27](#) If he comes to you during the 10 minutes because he's stuck, be patient and say, "Oh well, your 10 minutes is still happening, but let me help you with that." And then you will add a minute at the end or whatever. And then see what happens. If he's able to get to the 10 minutes pretty easily, you can start adding time. Over time what will happen is he will start to learn to play by himself as long as he feels like you're really there when he does need you. Does that make sense as a way to begin?
- Parent: [00:35:56](#) Yes.
- Laura Markham: [00:35:57](#) Yeah. And don't feel bad. I just want to say for all parents, don't feel bad about not engaging with your child every minute. It's important that they feel connected to you. It's important they know you're there when they need you, but that doesn't mean you have to be there interacting 24/7. Certainly, it's true that children are not designed to be brought up in nuclear families. They're designed to be brought up in tribes and it would be better for them if there were other children and even other adults around. But since this is the way we raise them, they're going to have to deal with it and it's okay to set up a situation where your child plays by themselves. I think you just have

to do it gradually. So they get used to it and they're not left feeling rejected. Does that make sense?

- Parent: [00:36:42](#) Yes.
- Laura Markham: [00:36:43](#) Yeah. Okay, great.
- Parent: [00:36:45](#) Well, we will give a try. Thank you very much.
- Laura Markham: [00:36:49](#) Okay. Good luck. Take care.
- Parent: [00:36:50](#) Thank you.

Question 10

- Laura Markham: [00:36:52](#) A parent is asking about her four-year-old who started preschool in August and has now brought home a lot of new behaviors that she really doesn't like. She's been following the recommendations in my video about potty talk and that's helped. He's no longer waiving his penis around and doing potty talk. That's great. But he's still doing a lot of gunplay. It's like living in a war movie, "Bang, bang, bang" all the time. So, I want to say that I don't have any problem with gunplay. I understand that many people do, but I think that when we tell kids they can't play with guns, they bite their peanut butter sandwich into the shape of a gun and they use a gun that way. I think that gun play is just something that kids do. We live in a culture in the United States that's very gun oriented. I bet kids don't do it in other cultures. But kids do here.
- Laura Markham: [00:37:53](#) I don't want to give kids the idea that there's something wrong with their interests, that there's something bad about the child for being interested in guns. I want them to feel like it's okay to explore the things they want to explore. As long as all the kids are having fun and nobody's getting hurt and it's an enjoyable activity. Gunplay can even help kids feel safe in the sense of overcoming their fears. Sometimes they're about action, adventure, saving the world from the bad guys. They're often about good

and evil ethics, which is an important thing for kids to do. Kids are very interested, in fact, in playing the role of the bad guy. There's nothing wrong with that.

Laura Markham: [00:38:52](#) Most kids, they go through a period of time where they want to be the bad guy and others where they want to be the good guy and most kids go back and forth. But they like to be heroes, but they also like to be the evil guy and try that on. There's nothing wrong with them doing that. So I have no problem with gunplay. And if you want some more info on this, Heather Schumacher wrote a book called *It's Okay Not to Share*. In that book, which is the best book I know on social skills for kids basically four, five, six year olds, she has a chapter on gunplay. So if you want more info on it, I think it'll be really helpful to you.

Laura Markham: [00:39:36](#) The first thing I would say is there's nothing wrong with your son doing pretend gunplay. The second thing I would say is if he does it with you, you can say, I don't want to do gunplay. I don't like gunplay -- and you don't have to play it. He can play with his friends. That's fine. So if he starts going "Bang, bang, bang" when he's in the bathtub or at the table and you're with him, you can say, "Sweetie, I don't like that game. It's not for me. I understand you like to play guns with your friends and that's okay, but I don't like it. That's not a thing I do, let's do this instead. Whatever it is. If he's trying to actually express aggression, that's different. You can roughhouse then, and if it's about loudness, again, you can set limits on loudness. You can do the same thing if he's going "Kapow kapow," with his gun. You can certainly set limits on it, but it's not the kind of thing that I would look to extinguish. I don't think it's making your son a more violent person.

Question 11

Laura Markham: [00:40:36](#) A parent is asking, is it possible to play with my four-year-old too much? I worry that he's going to think I'm his toy

rather than his mom, who actually has to run the house. I love that question. So, no four-year-old can understand what it means to have to run a house. They don't get that. All your child will ever get is whether you delight in your child and want to spend time with them. And every child should have an affirmative answer to that question. I want to just add to this, moms especially say to me, I do need to work outside the home because I want to model what it's like to be a strong woman for my daughter and for my son and I want them to see that I love my work. I'm with you. I love my work, believe me. I believe I was born to do this work and it is self-affirming for me, but I would never want my children to think I put that work above them or that I value it more than I value them.

Laura Markham: [00:41:38](#) Your child needs to know that you value them more than anything, including their siblings or your partner. There is nothing you put above that child. Every child deserves that from parents, each parent. I would just say, whether it's the house you have to run or whether it's your work outside the home, of course you communicate that you love it or that it's a responsibility you take seriously, but it is never something you value more than your child. I know you weren't saying that. I just thought it was important that I clarify that since we're talking about this idea of children understanding what else we do.

Laura Markham: [00:42:19](#) I want to add that in a tribal society where there would be a lot of kids around and a lot more adults per child, because for better or worse children didn't make it to adulthood in the same numbers, so there were more adults to children. So in a tribal society, children wouldn't just have us. They would have plenty of playmates and many adults who could attend to them. We're living in an artificial culture, so it is hard and we'll talk about independent play, there are questions about it, later, but it's just hard for kids to have to entertain themselves.

Laura Markham: [00:42:57](#) So, you're giving your kid an amazing thing by playing with them for an hour at a time. That is not too much. Naturally, he's going to resist your leaving. He would resist even after you played for four hours. But it doesn't mean

you played too much. It means he loves playing with you and he resists losing something he loves. So your job is to set the limit in a calm, kind way. When you need to leave, give them a warning, obviously, and get him started doing something he enjoys that he can do by himself. And when he's unhappy you're leaving, your job is to accept his unhappiness about it. The same way you would accept any other feeling and hopefully he'll be able to handle the loss because you've met his needs so beautifully.

Question 12

Laura Markham: [00:43:37](#)

A parent is asking, what's the best way to do special time when there are multiple kids involved? It's not special time, it's family time if there are multiple kids involved. And maybe I misinterpreted your question because maybe what you're saying is when you have three kids, how do you have special time every day, because there's just not enough time in the day. I totally get that. You're a working mom, you come home, you're just trying to get them fed and bathed and get into bed. But I would say, think as much outside the box as you can. You're right that 10 minutes isn't long enough for your older kids. She's got a seven-year-old, a four-year-old and a baby. So I would say as much as possible, spend longer time on the weekends if you don't have a partner there. And I don't know if you have a partner even on the weekends, if you don't, you'll have to hire a babysitter for the kids that you're not able to be with at that moment.

Laura Markham: [00:44:22](#)

But I would say in general, you can postpone anything but love. Seriously, peanut butter sandwiches, scrambled eggs, anything for dinner that is simple. Make it that morning, make it over the weekend. When I say make it, do as little cooking as possible, but something that you can heat up when you get home very simply and quickly or where you're spending no more than 10 minutes getting dinner on the table. I'm totally serious about this. And then you luckily have a seven-year-old who probably can be kept

busy doing something else while you're with the four-year-old. And the four-year-old may be able to listen to an audio book while you're busy with the seven-year-old. Your big problem of course is the 11-month-old, but maybe there's a way to get the 11-month-old down for bed early at night and then you can focus on the two older kids so that they get a longer amount of time.

Laura Markham: [00:45:24](#) You said the problem is not enough time in the evening, I don't think that's the only problem. I think the other problem is the 11-month-old. If you have a partner, the partner can take the 11-month-old and the other kid who you're not doing special time with. I hope that's helpful. I do think that it's worth doing. I think you'll find that if you do it, it's totally worth it.

Question 13

Laura Markham: [00:45:44](#) There's a really creative question now about the car. I'm so sorry, it's heartbreaking also. This parent is saying she has to spend two hours a day with her kids in the car going from daycare to work to home. That sounds grueling. It sounds grueling for you. It sounds grueling for them. And I'm really sorry. Before you get in the car, make sure that you get laughter time and you chase them around and they get to run around outside.

Laura Markham: [00:46:12](#) But then when you get in the car, I would routinize what your hour long trip is like. I'm assuming they're in the car at the same time. If it's one kid and then another kid gets added, you spend one on one time with the kid who you get in the car with first, and then when the other kid gets in the car, you put headphones on the first kid so they can listen to their music or their book on tape and you can talk to the second kid. So you get a little bit of one on one connection time with each kid. If they're in the car at the same time, you can't have that.

Laura Markham: [00:46:43](#) I would say, give them a snack when they first get in the car and do something very routine for the conversation.

Like a rose and a thorn, which is “What was the best part of your day? What was the worst part of your day? What are you looking forward to tomorrow? Anything you want to appreciate about your day?” Those kinds of things. Keep them very simple, let each kid talk and I think you don't want to do that much talking. If you think that you could have a good conversation, I don't know how old your kids are, but if you think you could have a good conversation, then make index cards with great questions on them, which you can get right off my website. There are at least 150 questions -- You could find them by inputting “questions” in the search box or go to the communication section under parenting tools -- and the communication section has 150 conversation starters. It's called maybe, “Questions to ask your child to get a conversation started”.

Laura Markham: [00:47:42](#)

Ask questions and listen and laugh. But honestly, at the end of the day when you've got exhausted kids I'm not really expecting that you're going to get a whole lot of great conversations going because they're tired. So I would say snack, some conversation and something you do for fun that the minute the conversation starts falling apart, you can start to say, “Okay, I think it's time for our song.” The kid who is having the hardest time can pick the song and you put on an audio to listen to and you all sing together. And then there's downtime. Maybe you listen to an audio book and again, I don't know how old your kids are, you're not going to be listening to *Harry Potter*. It's too scary for little kids, but you might be listening to the *Wayside School*, which is wonderful, or Greek myths.

Laura Markham: [00:48:41](#)

There are some Greek myth audios that are sold by Chinaberry Books that are really wonderful. They have Bible stories also. They are made for younger kids. In fact, that's a good source. Chinaberry is a good source on audios. But there are other great sources. There's a set of relaxation audios that's done by a woman named Lori Lite, L-I-T-E and she would be a great source for relaxation audios that are interesting that the kids can listen to as you're driving with them. So don't expect a lot of great conversation. Instead, see if you can get downtime and

where they can rest, where they can recharge their batteries, basically where the child can not have to interact but where they can enjoy being in the car. When they get home and walk in the house, they're feeling good instead of overwhelmed. I know that isn't what you were hoping to hear. You were hoping to hear this could be quality time. And it certainly can be a good time, but I think that it's probably more preventive maintenance in nature and it will get your kids in better shape when you finally walk in the house.

Question 14

- Parent: [00:49:56](#) I have multiple kids who crave special time. Plus a little baby that I'm nursing. So I guess I'm just wondering when the kids are going to school, what would be the best thing to do to handle that. Essentially there's never enough time and we tried to do a daily routine and then I feel like I'm just going from one room to another room. And then it drags the bedtime later and obviously they don't want that to end too. But between multiple kids, what would be the best thing to handle that?
- Laura Markham: [00:50:30](#) Do you have a partner in the evenings or not?
- Parent: [00:50:34](#) Yes.
- Laura Markham: [00:50:36](#) Great. Even though you're baby nursing, get your baby nurse up as much as possible and hand the baby over to the partner as much as possible in the evening so you can spend time with the older kids. Are you working during the day or are you with the baby during the day?
- Parent: [00:50:50](#) I do work too. Yeah.
- Laura Markham: [00:50:53](#) That's a little harder because the baby hasn't seen you either in that case. All of your kids need you at the end of the day. And the only way I know to do it is to just round Robin it and have your partner take the other two kids. You have three kids altogether?
- Parent: [00:51:09](#) Yes.

- Laura Markham: [00:51:10](#) Yes. So have the partner take two of the kids and you take one and just round Robin it. If you can put the baby to bed, maybe give the baby everything early on and then put the baby to bed and then you have more energy for the other two, or not more energy but more bandwidth. Also do longer special time on weekends. That will help.
- Parent: [00:51:30](#) Okay.
- Laura Markham: [00:51:31](#) It's hard to have enough time for everybody when you have three kids and also when you're working, it is the hardest thing in the world. We're not really designed to do this -- to parent in our spare time after work. You know what I mean? But the kids can be fine. They really can. It's just a matter of figuring out how to connect as much as we can throughout the evening routine and also then have the special time on weekends. But in the evening routine, maybe you can't really do much special time or maybe there's only special time with one kid on Monday and a different kid Tuesday and a different kid Wednesday. But if you can empathize with all of them and build that into the routine, you'll find that you still can keep your relationship strong.
- Parent: [00:52:15](#) Okay, great. Thank you so, so much.
- Laura Markham: [00:52:15](#) You're so welcome.

Question 15

- Parent: [00:52:19](#) We have three boys. One's five, one is three and one is 19 months. When my wife tries to do special time with them, with the big ones, with the older boys, they usually want to play with cars or something on a mat or something down on the floor. The 19-month-old can't help getting involved with them. He wants to take their cars or get involved and knock things over and stuff like that. She's tried distracting our youngest son or doing the games up on higher levels, building barriers, all sorts of things like that, but he still really wants to get into the game and

won't be distracted. There's no one else really that we could have around to look after him or one of the boys during the week. We can do on weekends when I'm not at work. But then special time becomes, instead of special, quite stressful.

- Laura Markham: [00:53:10](#) Yeah, of course. The answer to your question is, you're right, you can't do a special time with more than one child at a time, otherwise it's not special time. And you can't even play cars with your two oldest ones while there's a toddler around. The best thing you can do is to wait until he's asleep. Now, does your middle one nap at the same time as the 19-month-old?
- Parent: [00:53:31](#) No, the middle one doesn't nap. The two boys, the two big ones are in kindergarten in the morning. And that's when my 19-month-old sleeps.
- Laura Markham: [00:53:41](#) I see. So it really doesn't work?
- Parent: [00:53:43](#) Yes.
- Laura Markham: [00:53:44](#) I don't see a good solution for weekdays. If you're not able to be around and the 19-month-old is unable to occupy himself, which is because he's 19 months old, he's always going to want to be part of things with the big boys. I don't see how you can do it during the week unless you can find things to distract him and there's nothing that's going to be as appealing to him. Nothing that I can think of, including a birthday cake. Nothing is going to be as distracting. You're not going to be able to distract him from his mom having a great time with his two big brothers. I really think it's going to have to happen on weekends, the special time with the big boys when you're there. I don't see a way around that. Although maybe in the summer, are they out of school for the summer and maybe you can have the time with them in the morning when the 19-month-old is sleeping during the summer? Will that work?
- Parent: [00:54:32](#) Yes, Some holidays will be fine. I'm a teacher, so I'll be home then and it's all right.

- Laura Markham: [00:54:36](#) Great. Well, at least you're okay for the next three months and you never know. Maybe as your little one gets a little older, you might find that he's less entranced or it might be just the same in September. But things might be a little better in September and at least you can postpone the problem for three months. Then also, even when the school year starts, you can at least do it on Saturdays and Sundays. I wish I had a better answer.
- Parent: [00:55:03](#) Okay. Thank you very much.
- Laura Markham: [00:55:03](#) You're welcome. Good luck. Enjoy your boys.

Question 16

- Laura Markham: [00:55:10](#) A parent is asking, "What do you do if your kid is a jerk during special time, if he always has to win and won't share?" Cheer! That's so great that he's doing that. It's a safe place for your kid. It's not supposed to be fun for us. I mean, it's really fun for us. But the point is, we're not doing it to teach them social skills in special time. Special time is to pour your love into your child and give them a chance to express their feelings. And if your child is always needing to win, they're expressing to you that they never feel like they win and they always get pushed around and somebody else always wins, so let them win.
- Laura Markham: [00:55:43](#) If they're not sharing during special time, great. They're showing you how they feel like they always have to share. Maybe they have a sibling, they always have to share you with their sibling. That's fine. That's their job. You're doing something right if your child is expressing those things during special time. It's not the time to teach them skills. You do that the other 24 hours or 23 hours a day. You teach them social skills, but you don't need to do it during special time. That's connection time and time to help your child work out their feelings.

Question 17

- Parent: [00:56:13](#) I have 17-month-old twin girls and I'm finding already that everything is so applicable. I'm just struggling with implementing special time because my husband works very long hours. So by the time he gets home, they're in bed. I'm having a hard time keeping one of them occupied while I could give the other one special time. So I wanted to know if you had any ideas on how I could implement that?
- Laura Markham: [00:56:37](#) Yeah, it is so hard with babies. A 17-month-old cannot keep themselves busy for even two seconds. But for twins, it's especially important. I'm not a twin expert, but I've talked to a lot of parents of twins and had them tell me that they feel that when they connect with one of their children, that they'll be cooing over their 17-month-old daughter, and then it's like the intimacy is being observed by this other person who's going to have a lot of feelings about it. The other twin. It's such a tough thing to be the parent of twins. So I think it is critical the twins do get time with you right from the start, that is really time alone. Not only do they feel it's alone, but you feel it's alone.
- Laura Markham: [00:57:26](#) It's like when you're having sex with your partner, you really don't want other people watching! And when you're having time with your twin, some of that time needs to be alone time. I think you're really on the right track to be trying to do this. Of course, what you're saying is going to happen. Most parents of twins work very hard to get them on the same schedule. But I think it takes more out of the parents, but it's actually preferable, to have them on slightly different schedules so that one goes to sleep for a later nap and then wakes up later. That way you get some time with each twin while the other one sleeps. I don't know if that's possible for you.
- Parent: [00:58:09](#) They're usually used to sleeping together, they talk themselves to sleep. If I ever put them to sleep at different times, they cry.
- Laura Markham: [00:58:19](#) Okay. You know what? I probably wouldn't mess with that because you've got a good thing going on with sleep that most mothers of 17 month olds would be envious of. They

often have a problem putting twin toddlers to bed. So, you're right. I understand why you wouldn't want to mess with that. Maybe when they're two, it's an okay thing to mess with because by then they'll be more able to go to sleep and they might be more willing.

- Laura Markham: [00:58:41](#) I'm wondering if there's a way to get a lot of really good duct tape and some very thick plastic bags and create some sensory bags that they can be fascinated by. You know what a sensory bag is?
- Parent: [00:58:55](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Laura Markham: [00:58:57](#) That they could be fascinated by and play with. But you'd have to make up a bunch of them and keep them in a drawer somewhere and then pull one out, different ones, different days and give it to one and go into the adjoining room with the other one so you can keep an eye on the first one. Obviously you're not going to leave a 17-month-old, completely by herself. And she's not likely to be mouthing it, looking at what's in it for more than five minutes. She 17 months old. But do you think that she would do that for five minutes while you're just showering attention on the other one?
- Parent: [00:59:35](#) Honestly, I feel like the other one who I would be trying to spend special time with would be curious and try to crawl over and see what the sensory bag is at first, that's what usually happens when I try to distract one. I think they're so used to spending time together and playing together, but they're always like, "Oh, what's the other one doing?" I find usually the only way I could successfully play with one by herself is if someone else is there entertaining the other one or distracting her. That's why I feel like I'm a little bit stuck.
- Laura Markham: [01:00:06](#) Right. Well, one thing is, do you have a partner?
- Parent: [01:00:10](#) Yeah, but he gets home after they're in bed.
- Laura Markham: [01:00:13](#) I understand. And in the morning is probably in a rush to get out the door.

- Parent: [01:00:16](#) Yeah, and they're sleeping.
- Laura Markham: [01:00:19](#) They're still asleep in the morning.
- Parent: [01:00:20](#) We do it on the weekends because then we're at home.
- Laura Markham: [01:00:21](#) So the weekend is great. And actually, long periods of time on the weekend is great. You can trade off with the kids as long as you can do it. I would play with it. Because what I'm hearing you say is that your girls are completely focused on each other and not as interested in engaging with you and that's not what you want. I know it's a risk we run with twins and I think by the way, it's so great when they have a playmate who's ready made and they get along well, which it sounds like yours do. I also think it's really important for them to know you are the primary person in their life. Their twin is very close to them and of course their dad, although he spends less time with them, so he's going to be second on the tier for attachment objects.
- Laura Markham: [01:01:12](#) But experiment with having two sensory bags. One goes to one twin on the floor and the other, you're holding the other twin with a bag as you walk out of the room and she's focused on that bag. If you can in any way take her out of eyesight of her twin so she's not really noticing, I know it's hard, it'll get easier as they get older because one of them can even wear headphones and listen to something by the time they're two. But you've got another half a year before that's going to happen easily. So I would say experiment with this, it won't happen seamlessly or easily, but I think you can probably move things just gently in that direction so that they are willing to relate a little bit more to you in special time.
- Parent: [01:01:54](#) Okay, I'll try that. Thank you so much.
- Laura Markham: [01:01:57](#) I do want to say one final thing, which is, don't forget to roughhouse with them together because that's a way you can connect with them even though they're together at the same time. And go ahead and pour your love into each one, even in front of the other child and just go back and forth to each one so that they really get the feeling that,

wow, my mom gives a lot of love to my twin, but no matter how much my twin gets, there's more than enough for me. That's, of course, the real bottom line of what you want your twins to learn.

Question 18

- Laura Markham: [01:02:29](#) This is a question about special time when you have more than two or three young children. She also mentioned having friends with five or seven kids and they think peaceful parenting is just impossible with multiple kids and she wants even more kids than her three. So she's wondering how to make this work. So, obviously if some of your kids go to school or if some of your kids nap, you're going to make good use of those times to connect with your other kids. Obviously, if it's hard to find 20 minutes of special time for each child daily, and it will be if all three are young and home with you, which it sounds like you're going to find as many moments to connect with each child as you can even if you don't call it special time.
- Laura Markham: [01:03:07](#) Sometimes two of your kids are busy with something and even your third one is busy with something. You can go over to that child if they're a little away from the other children and just crouch down beside them and just look at what they're doing, what they're working on, and just pour your love into your child and just let them bask in your love for a minute. If you're changing a diaper, use that as a moment to let that child bask in your love. Or if you're helping your child with homework or washing their hair, use that moment. It's not as good as special time. It isn't special time, but it is absolutely using your routines for connection and that's really important. And of course, if you have a partner, you can trade off your partner on the weekend so your partner watches all the kids while you go to do special time with one of them at a time. If you have kids who are old enough, you can set them up with an audio book and headphones.
- Laura Markham: [01:04:02](#) I like to give them drawing paper so they can illustrate at the same time what they're listening to-audio books

because that way they have their headphones blocking out you laughing with the other kid and it is very good for their development to listen to stories and to visualize what's happening. And as they hear the audio, the brain research shows that's really good for them. Very different than watching TV where they're watching what's happening on the screen. But you know what, even if you're not a TV family, even if you don't like giving your kids screen-time to watch things, I would say that's a really good reason to use it, to have special time with a different child because special time is very helpful to your kid's wellbeing.

Laura Markham: [01:04:44](#)

I also hear a background question, which is, "Is peaceful parenting really going to work with a big family?" I guess I would ask you, well, okay, what else are you going to use? Are you going to use a conventional, punishing, controlling approach? Which we know if you understand child development, if you've read the research, the relationship between the parent and child is always what matters most for the child to thrive. I'm not so sure that this is about whether you can use a particular parenting style with a big family. I really think the question is, can you create a strong enough connection with each child when you have a big family? Those parents who have five to seven kids, and there may be some listening today and I know you have three, many people have three children who are listening today. Can you create a strong enough connection with each child when you have many other children? That's the real question. And my answer is, it's hard. It puts so much more responsibility and pressure on you.

Laura Markham: [01:05:48](#)

It depends on many factors, obviously. It depends on the involvement of your partner. It depends on how high needs your children are. It depends on if you have a child with extreme health challenges, you wouldn't probably choose to have lots of children because you can see there being no way to meet all those needs. So what about a child with less visible extreme needs, like sensory issues or anxiety? Would you choose to have a lot of kids then? Personally I wouldn't. What about twins? Twins are always competing to get their needs met. So how many kids

would you have in addition to a set of twins? I think it depends on your internal resources more than anything else. It's not about using a particular parenting style. It's about can you create a strong enough relationship with each child? This parenting style helps you create that relationship. If you're telling me, "Oh well, with five or seven kids, we can't use the peaceful parent approach because it doesn't work to do it with that many kids."

Laura Markham: [01:06:49](#)

Well, what you're really telling me is we can't have a strong enough relationship with each of our children because we have five to seven kids. And if you're saying that, then you probably shouldn't have five to seven kids. Now, I do know a few parents who have had seven kids and have been amazing parents and raise amazing kids. Usually what they do, is they space the kids out because children can share you better as they get older, developmentally speaking. There are benefits to having older siblings who can actually help with the younger kids. I was 12 when my brother was born. I consider him my first child even though he's now a wonderful grown man and he's my brother. I practiced on him and I think that I happened to be the kind of 12-year-old who loves children. Not every 12-year-old probably does, but when you do have a spacing between your children, then you can often make that work.

Laura Markham: [01:07:45](#)

On the other hand, you might have a 12-year-old who's like, "Oh my God, why do I have this responsibility?" You can't count on your 12-year-old obviously to be your nanny. I guess the bottom line is, you make the trade-offs when you choose to have a large family, since the most important factor in this child's development is your responsiveness to that child. I would say, really think about how you're going to create the ability to be responsive to all your kids. I love children, I would love 20 children, but I could not be a responsive mom to 20 children. I know that. Most people couldn't. So where's the line? For me it would be something between one and 20; everybody has a different line. I know many people who stop at one child because that's where they feel comfortable that they can be the parents they want to be.

Laura Markham: [01:08:40](#) If you love children, there are other ways to express your love for children other than adding a child to your family. I would think carefully about it and ask yourself what you gain and what you lose every time you add a child. I'm not trying to discourage you from having another child. I just suggest to be realistic in evaluating how close a relationship you'll be able to have with each of your children every time you have another child. That's all.

Question 19

Laura Markham: [01:09:04](#) “What do you do when kids are having a really hard time with you moving on from special time with them to have special time with the other child? They both get mad about this.” That's a symptom that they have not had enough of you and they really desperately need you. Absolutely, that's what's going to happen in the beginning when you first start special time. Watching you go into the room with their sibling, I think that's how you might feel if you watched your partner walk into a bedroom with another person who they were holding hands with. You probably would go ballistic. Well, that's how they feel when they're watching you having special time with their sibling. I guess I would say, first of all, to talk with them about it. I would always schedule the oldest ones second, since you have an eight-year-old and four-year-old.

Laura Markham: [01:10:03](#) So, I would schedule your older one always second and let him do something really special while you have special time with the four-year-old. And always schedule enough time between so you have melt down time. Because the four-year-old, when you say it's time for the special time to end, you know what's going to happen to him? All those times that he wanted you and didn't have you, those feelings are going to come up for him. All that jealousy of his brother is going to come up for him. So don't end special time to be with his brother, end special time because the buzzer went off and then when he has a meltdown, be with him for the meltdown. That doesn't mean you continue special time. It means you empathize with how hard it is to lose you and how you love special

time and you know how hard it is to stop. Then have something that he's looking forward to doing after the meltdown so that he can do that. Preferably with headphones, so he can't hear you having special time with his brother. This is a really important thing.

Laura Markham: [01:11:02](#) I strongly advise books on tape, audio books because kids can listen to them with really good noise canceling headphones so they can't hear you giggling with their sibling. But I'm not above TV. Now, my kids didn't watch TV growing up, but when my second was born, there was a time when my four-year-old, with a new baby in the house, watched TV all the time when I had a new baby in the beginning. That's what you have to do. And if you're just trying to get started with special time, maybe they need to watch TV while you have special time with their sibling or watch a movie, not a movie really because you have to keep it to the same amount of time as special time or they won't want to stop. But I do strongly recommend something to get them through this transition. This won't go on forever. Once they know you'll do special time with them every day and they don't have so many pent-up feelings about not having gotten enough of you, you won't have this problem.

Laura Markham: [01:12:00](#) You won't have to do screen time while you're doing special time with the other one. But in the beginning, if that's what you have to do, that's what you have to do. I would say also, don't be afraid to schedule longer sessions in the beginning because they need it more. So if it's a half an hour session with one and then a half an hour session with the other, great. And maybe that doesn't work for you if you're alone with the kids and that's understandable. Do a shorter session, but make sure you have that time in between when you let go of one and before you start with the other because otherwise you can't handle it when they have the transition.

Question 20

Laura Markham: [01:12:41](#) This topic is about older kids who don't want to do connection time, special time, because it's a new concept to them. This is an eight-year-old. I understand that. I would say start by doing what your older child likes, because they're not going to want to do what you want to do. But I bet there's something they like to do. I've heard of eight-year-olds who love to listen to music with their parents and who love to turn their parents on to new songs that they like. If that's what they're excited about, it's just like watching your four-year-old do Legos, no different. So figure out what your eight-year-old loves and be their partner and their junior partner as they do that and just pour your love into them and adore them. That's how you spend special time with the older kids.

Laura Markham: [01:13:35](#) It's harder to get them laughing, but I think there are still ways to get an eight-year-old laughing. Like pillow fights, pushing you across the room, being silly together. I think that the more you practice being silly with your older child, the more quickly you'll be able to get them laughing.

Question 21

Laura Markham: [01:13:56](#) A parent is asking a question about being in the car. "Because of where we live, we spend so much time in the car, two and a half hours a day just to get my oldest to school Monday through Friday. I currently prioritize getting everyone enough sleep and I don't really have time for special time and my children are stressed. How can I maximize usage of car time? Is it better to skip the snuggles and replace them with special time? Is combined special time okay?" Well, special time by definition is with one kid. So special time combined, no. There's no such thing. You can do special time on weekends with your individual kids. I would never give up snuggle time. Not for anything, not for special time, not for anything. So I would have that snuggle time. Your kids are stressed because they're in the car.

Laura Markham: [01:14:41](#) I would maximize the car time by doing two things. One is finding loving ways to connect with each other, talking,

singing, playing fun games that get the kids laughing. That's really good for car time. And the other is to play special meditation tapes that kids can enjoy that will help them to relax in the car. And then finally, listen to books on tape. It's like you're reading them a story except someone else's reading them a story. So listen to them and then have conversations about them and say "Guess what's going to happen next?" and all that, in the same way that you would if you were actually reading them the book, relate around the book. I think that maximizes the use of the car time to be a good time, but it'll take some thought on your part to do that. But I would never give up snuggle time, not for anything.

Question 22

Laura Markham: [01:15:38](#) A parent asks, "My six year old sometimes gets very silly and out of control, bouncing around, climbing on the sofa, and falling. I try to connect with him by saying his name and getting close to him, touching his shoulder, but he gets even more crazy, laughing. I can't even talk to him about stopping or settling down. Finally, I have to yell, stop, to get him to stop. I didn't want to yell. But what do you do when you can't connect? Because he's too out of control to listen." First of all, it's fine to yell stop when you think your child is doing something dangerous, but let's talk about what your son is actually doing. It sounds like his silly behavior really scares you and that you're worried he'll get hurt and it's possible he will.

Laura Markham: [01:16:22](#) But I need to point out that small mammals do get silly and wild. If you've ever had a puppy or a kitten, you know they race around and are just crazy sometimes. And of course, sometimes they do get hurt because of that and probably not badly, but they learn a lesson about their bodies moving through space. So I think that our children are small mammals and do need to learn those lessons. Now obviously, you don't want your child to go to the hospital or get a concussion. But I think that probably bouncing around on the sofa, he's unlikely to really hurt himself as long as he isn't reacting against your limits to

prove that he doesn't have to listen to you. Of course, it sounds like he's not listening to you at all. That's probably not what's happening. So unless he's doing something that would cause stitches, I would stretch your sense of what's okay.

Laura Markham: [01:17:18](#) Of course, you do have to exercise some judgment. You may need to send him to jump on a mattress in the basement instead of on your couch where he could hit his head on the coffee table or something. You might even want to buy a trampoline, but I will say that jumping is great for kids. And so is getting silly even to the point of being out of control. I did read some research at one point that for babies when they got silly and giddy, and these are younger babies who are not verbal yet, if their parents shut that down, that the babies learned that silliness was not appropriate. Mostly these were studies in the context of moms who are depressed. But I do think that we can easily give our children a message about joy and aliveness. They think we're giving them a message that joy and aliveness is off limits.

Laura Markham: [01:18:21](#) But, what we're really saying is, my goodness, stay safe. I would allow your child to be silly, but talk about safety. Again, I would be concerned if your son doesn't feel normal fear. If you see him taking unwarranted physical risks often, if he's one of those kids who is always in the ER, then you absolutely do need to intervene. In that case, he's one of the kids who is seeking sensory stimulation and needs more physical excitement than other kids. I would work hard with him, but the intervention I would do besides talking about safety, is to let him have more extreme physical experiences.

Laura Markham: [01:19:01](#) For instance, in addition to daily trampoline at home, maybe you would enroll him in a rock climbing class or a trapeze class. But presuming that's not the case, that he doesn't take unwarranted risks and this is just your son enjoying the joyful abandon of laughter and silliness, I would talk with him in advance about how that's fine, that's great. But you need to see that he can keep himself to be safe. Agree on basic safety rules including the need

for him to freeze when you say freeze and then practice with him. So he pretends he's being silly and you shout freeze, and make it part of the game and practice it a lot until you can rely on him to freeze when you need him to.

Question 23

- Laura Markham: [01:19:46](#) Another parent has a similar question. How do I help my boys calm down from very silly behavior. I want to promote playfulness, but sometimes they get so silly, it feels out of control. My three-year-old seems to delight in not doing what I ask and that gets my six-year-old acting silly too, and that leads to unsafe behavior, like throwing things or wrestling or running on the stairs and it triggers me because I feel like no one's listening to me, especially when we're trying to leave in the morning or to get ready for bed. So, first of all, I love that you say you want to promote playfulness. That's terrific. You just heard my answer about silliness in general to the person before you, which is that of course silliness is a good thing. But I agree with you that it's a bad thing when you're trying to get your child to do something like get ready to leave in the morning.
- Laura Markham: [01:20:33](#) It's not something we can handle. And of course, it's not a good thing if it's unsafe. You do definitely need ways to interrupt this rambunctiousness at those times. And we're going to talk about that in just a minute. But first, let's talk about prevention. As you know from taking this course, prevention is so much better than waiting until you get in the breakdown lane when your kids are wrestling on the stairs and you have to yell to get their attention. So I would ask, do your kids get to be completely silly at some other time? Tell them your family is going to have a daily silly time. They can be totally silly, but they need to show you they can handle that safely. Ask them for examples of silly behavior that's safe and also silly behavior that's not safe. Tell them you'll use a timer for the beginning and end of silly time and silly time is only when you can be there with them to make sure they're safe.

Laura Markham: [01:21:26](#) Then ask them, when do you think would be a good time for silly time? In the afternoon when they get home from daycare, but not when you're trying to leave the house or get ready for bed. You also practice freeze with them as I just described, where if you think they're not being safe, you're going to yell freeze and they have to freeze right away. So practice that, test them with it over and over. But the way you do that, is you initiate silly time and play with them to make sure that they're actually being safe when they're being silly. Test them with freeze and make that a fun part of the game. By joining their play, you will establish an expectation of safe play and being responsible even when they're engaged in wild play. I think you'll also earn some credit with them for being willing to be silly with them and you will not be frozen out so much when you do try to communicate with them when they're being silly.

Laura Markham: [01:22:26](#) In other words, your three-year-old figured out that he can enroll your six-year-old against you, but this way you become the leader even in the silly game. Then in those moments when they start to get wild, when you're leaving the house, you grab your three-year-old and say "Freeze!" You make eye contact and you say, "This is not silly time, this is shoes time. I know it feels good to be silly and we will have silly time when we get home. Right now, shoes time. You can handle this. Take a deep breath with me --In, Out. Okay. Right foot on, left foot on, let's go." Then you look over at your six-year-old who has not yet been able to be recruited and you say, "Shoes on sweetheart, I need your help. Thank you." And he will, because you've reestablished yourself as the leader.

Question 24

Laura Markham: [01:23:16](#) A parent asks, "Our two year old resists most of what we tell him, like brush his teeth, and instead laughs, screams while he runs jumps, spills, puzzles, climbs into dangerous

situations like jumps on the dining room table. I think he wants attention and to play, but this is sometimes not an option. So I'll be patient, try to connect, be available. But usually this fails. I'll then hold him firmly and tell him to stop and do as he's told. He laughs, kicks, punches, screams. Why does he act like this? How do I make him listen and do as he's told?" Wow. Don't you sometimes wonder why anybody has children? But I'm sure your two-year-old is also wonderful at other moments when he's not driving you crazy. I hear this is really frustrating. It's not unreasonable to expect your child to do as he's told, but children need to feel connected before they can follow your lead.

Laura Markham: [01:24:08](#) If you've been working all day, you have to collect your child emotionally before you can expect him to do as he's told and your son is only two. He's showing you how much he wants to connect with you through his primary language, which is play. So it's great you're being patient and trying to connect with him, but can you also join him and play? When he runs, run after him, make it a game. When he climbs up onto the dining room table, scoop him up and say, Hey, where are you going you climber guy? That table is not for climbing. You feel like climbing? Okay, I wonder if you can climb onto my bed and jump there. Now, I understand that sometimes at those moments you can't really play. You're trying to get him to do something like brush his teeth. But if you begin with some connection following his lead through play and getting him laughing, he'll be a lot more open to your instruction when you then ask him to do something he doesn't really want to do, like brushing his teeth.

Laura Markham: [01:25:04](#) Laughter automatically creates connection because when you're laughing, you're releasing oxytocin into your bloodstream and that's the bonding hormone. It also relaxes your child and calms the wildness because the wildness is partly caused by an activated sympathetic nervous system from a full day of stimulation. So a two-year-old is not capable of settling down and cooperating with you until you've done two things. One, allowed him to get rid of some of that stimulation from the day by

laughing and roughhousing. And two, recollected him into your orbit. So he starts to use you as his north star again, to rotate around you and follow your lead. When you've been apart all day, he stops doing that and he attaches instead to the nanny or the daycare worker or even friends and he needs to be recollected to see you as the leader and follow your lead.

Laura Markham: [01:26:03](#)

Now, I have to admit, it's hard for a child to settle down after roughhousing. So when you're trying to get him to brush his teeth and then get into bed, roughhousing is not the best idea in the world because it will rile him up. So really it's better if you plan on 10 minutes of roughhousing before his bath because the bath naturally soothes him. That way you won't have the problem when you get to brushing teeth. After you've done 10 minutes of roughhousing, scoop him up and start to ratchet down the excitement level by snuggling him. "Hey you wild guy, now it's bath time." And then offer him something he'll like in the bath to help him make the transition. So maybe he wants to turn on the water himself or choose a plastic water pitcher or a food container from your kitchen to take into the tub with him. At this point, he's gotten out some of the wildness and he should be able to play more calmly in the bath and then transition to brushing his teeth and bedtime story much more cooperatively.

Question 25

Laura Markham: [01:27:03](#)

Another parent has a question about play and wildness. "The behavior I find most challenging is that wild out of control behavior. It feels like my child is a wind storm blowing through the house. Apparently with glee. I find it hard to empathize with him because he seems so happy to be causing chaos and destruction." I hear that when your child does this, it's scary. It sounds like he's enjoying wrecking things or maybe just that you're worried he might do that. You've heard the answers I've given to the last few questions, which give you ways to calm your child's wildness by scheduling roughhousing and by practicing the freeze game and by making sure that he

gets plenty of wild time, but you set rules on it so he knows when it's okay to be wild and when it isn't.

Laura Markham: [01:27:49](#) I do want to address your underlying question about distractedness. Some kids who are hands-on learners really enjoy engaging with the world in a way that they see and feel the impact they have. Your son sounds like he might be one of those kids. So, in addition to daily roughhousing with laughter, I would also set up regular sensory experiences for him so he can enjoy his impact. So if he's this kind of kid, I would have a collection of bubble wrap and I would have times when I just let him jump on it until every bubble is popped. I would blow big bubbles for him to pop. I would build towers with him and let him knock them down. I would play with a hose outside and let him build dams and erode them or paint with colored chalk on the sidewalk and then erase it, give him paper to crumble or tear into pieces.

Laura Markham: [01:28:38](#) There are a lot more ideas online for sensory experiences for kids like this, but I think you get the idea. Anything that lets him experience his power and interacting with the world and having an impact. And then of course, to address his need to rush around the house like the wind, make sure he gets that time outside and maybe have some extreme physical experiences also. A child who loves to blow through the house like a wrecking ball is also going to love trampolining and feeling his body twisting through space and feeling the impact when he hits and then bounces up. It sounds like he's got some need there and he doesn't have to use your house as the place for his wrecking ball experiences. You can give him other ways to feel that.

Question 26

Laura Markham: [01:29:32](#) A parent asks about special time. Her twin boys are five years old and they love special time, but they argue about who goes first. So, just set up a schedule which alternates and set up something for the other child to really enjoy while you have special time with a sibling. And when you

talk with them about this idea, tell them that on the very first day you do it, whoever is willing to go second gets five minutes longer. You only do that the first day. Of course, after that they're just alternating.

Laura Markham: [01:30:01](#) That's all our questions for today. Thank you for listening and I hope this was helpful. If you still have a burning question that wasn't answered on this audio, please submit it for possible inclusion on my podcast. Just go to Ahaparenting.com/podcast and leave your question as a voice memo. This is Dr. Laura Markham, wishing you less drama and more love. Goodbye for now.