

Emotion Coaching with Children Ages 4 to 6 Q and A with Dr. Laura Markham

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

Hello. This is Dr. Laura Markham. In this audio I'll be answering some of the most common questions that parents ask about emotion coaching with ages four to six year olds. Remember, we're always applying our three big ideas. We start by regulating our own emotions and behavior. Then we connect with our child. Finally, instead of trying to control our child, we coach them to be their best self, both by helping them with their emotions and by creating an environment where the child can thrive. So let's see how to apply these three big ideas to daily life with children.

Question 1:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:00:42](#)

A parent says, "I'm having great results with my spirited twin. She's easier to handle. She responds so much better now that I'm better able to handle myself. However, my normally loving, quiet co-operative twin is now having major meltdowns when I tell her to do anything. I try to empathize, but it backfires and she cries inconsolably and tells me, 'I don't think I'm a good girl anymore.'" Oh boy. Okay. Since this is new behavior from both of your daughters, I think we can trace it to your own new approach. Your ability to handle yourself better is working. It's good, and it's obvious with your spirited twin, you're reducing the drama so she feels safer and she can cooperate better. I think it's also helping your quiet and cooperative twin to feel safer, but it's allowing her to show you all those emotions that she's been stuffing.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:01:35](#)

And that's not unusual at all. First, it's not unusual for one child to try rigidly to be good when you have a more spirited sibling, because that makes them feel like the good kid. Second, when children feel safer they start to show you all the feelings they couldn't express before. In her case, her feelings she couldn't express before would be her old pain or her old upset, but also her fear that she's not actually really good, that there were bad things inside her and she's been pretending all this time to be

good. So she's been getting your love really by being fake. So it sounds to me like when she says, "I'm not a good girl anymore," it's because she was dependent on her sister being the bad girl. And now you're not treating her sister like the bad girl, or she's not seeing her sister as the bad girl.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:02:24](#)

And so she doesn't have a special place in the family. And also she associates big emotions with being bad. Not healthy, but very common, right? So first of all, relax. It's temporary. Your quiet twin just needs to express all those feelings. Talk to both girls about how you're working hard to manage your own emotions. You're sorry you used to yell or whatever. You can't promise to be perfect, but you're trying hard to be more calm. And talk to them about the fact that it can be hard to manage big emotions for all of us. They have to learn. Kids don't really know what being calm means. Most adults don't know. It doesn't mean we tell our emotions to go away. It means we notice them and we express them to other people in a way that doesn't attack the other person, but expresses what we want and need.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:03:13](#)

Now we don't always get the things we want and need, but others can hear us better when we express them in a way that's not an attack. So children need to hear that feelings aren't bad. They're just part of life. We don't choose them. They're just given to us like our arms and legs. But we can always choose what we do with our feelings. That's what people have to work hard at. That's what you're working on and that's what your kids are working on. And you can tell them that you've noticed that twin X used to get more angry, but now that you're calmer she feels safer and she's learning to express her upsets without attacking, and you're very proud of her for this hard work she's doing. And twin Y used to be more quiet and reserved. And now that you're calmer you see she feels safer and she's learning to express her upsets instead of hiding them.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:04:05](#)

And everyone needs to express their sads and mads, and you know that over time she'll learn to express her upsets in words instead of major meltdowns. And you're very proud of her for this hard work that she's doing. And you

want to be sure that both girls know it's always okay to feel upset and you're always there to help them and to listen to them.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:04:26](#)

So your job is to allow their emotions. Use your words to acknowledge their disappointments, comfort them, communicate with your calm voice that emotions aren't an emergency. Let them emote. And I think you're going to see the drama begin to calm down over the next month or so as they get used to the new you that is less dramatic and more loving.

Question 2:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:04:47](#)

The next question is, "Our four and a half year old rarely melts down, but will snap without warning and start running around in a chaotic manner, which could injure himself or cause damage. How can we help him get calm or have safe expression of his feelings during those times?"

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:05:05](#)

So, as you know, it's when he's overtired or he is overstimulated, he's trying to run off those stress hormones, which are making him antsy. Most kids have a lot of stress hormones at the end of the day. And the best way to get rid of the stress hormones -- I know I'm going to sound like a broken record here -- is laughter. Because that changes the body chemistry. So I would say this kid needs roughhousing, not at bedtime because that could wind him up, but before bedtime, like earlier in the afternoon or the evening. I think that could make a big difference and you might not see him run around like this on the days that he gets laughter and physical activity. At those times when he does begin to run, I would try to redirect it so you might scoop him up and speak soothingly.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:05:54](#)

"This train came off the train track, that could be dangerous. Let's chug it right to the bedroom. Chug, chug, chug, chug, chug, chug, chug, chug, chug, chug. So it's a soothing rhythm, there's still movement and it helps him redirect that energy in a calmer manner and

gives him a positive way to see the realignment, that he was off the tracks and now he's back on the tracks the way trains should be. I hope that helps. Let me know whether that works.

Question 3:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:06:22](#)

A parent is asking about her four-and-a-half year old expressing her extreme upset by screaming at the top of her lungs. She's okay with the emotion, but not the way it's being expressed. So she wants to know how to set a limit. So yes, a limit is totally appropriate and her behavior is a communication to you. She doesn't have the internal resources to handle the extreme upsets in another way and more appropriately, so she's screaming. So I guess I would ask you, if you were in a state of extreme upset, what would help you to cope and to settle down? I think probably knowing you're not alone, knowing that you have backup, that someone's there to help you. Maybe that someone understands. So I would talk with your daughter about this issue sometime when she's not upset, empathize with how she must feel when this happens. Point out that this is not okay to do. Like if she did it in class or a social situation, people would really be scandalized. You could figure out the right word to use.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:07:22](#)

What would she think if another kid did that and after that, what would help her at those times so she doesn't need to scream? And then practice with her and make it fun. You're not being critical. Again, see yourself as her partner or assistant, helping her laugh about this issue and practice alternative behavior. And obviously once she has it down and she can do this in other places, like at school or on the playground, then you can extend it to your own kitchen. And when she does scream in your kitchen, you can say, "Whoa, let's practice. Let's do the thing that you usually do to calm down, right?"

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:07:56](#)

So I think the best way to change this behavior, I'm sure you've already set a limit about it and said, "Don't scream. Tell me in words." She knows what that limit is. I think the best way is to notice the positive. So you've given her an alternative way to handle things, which we've already

talked about. But then notice the positive. Every single time you see your daughter pull it together without screaming describe what you see in a positive way. "I saw that you were frustrated when we were out of your favorite ice cream and you know what? I saw you take a deep breath and calm yourself down even though you were totally frustrated. Wow. I'm impressed. You must've been so proud of yourself that you were able to do that. Give me five." Right?

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:08:42](#)

When we notice what they're doing right, they're much more likely to keep doing it. When you think there's nothing they're doing right, it could always be worse. Let me tell you, there are things that are right.

Question 4:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:08:55](#)

A parent says that her four-year-old comes home from school very stressed. And it used to be that she could help him empty his backpack with connection and clear limits. I assume that means scheduled meltdowns, right? Connecting and then setting the limit and he would cry. But now that doesn't work, but he's clearly holding in a lot of stress.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:09:16](#)

So, once they get to be four, they don't cry so easily, especially boys. You can still get them laughing probably, and that should ease the stress. I think laughter is really, really underrated and important. I would also play school with him. Maybe you'll see what the issues are and you can help him with those issues. Like if you play make-believe school, maybe he will indicate what the things are at school that are stressful.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:09:42](#)

And then the third thing, I would help him develop a repertoire of ways to destress, like actively talk about stress and how important it is to find ways to destress every day when you come home from school or work and make a list with him, and then practice those things. Popping bubble wrap, jumping on a trampoline, playing with clay, look into guided meditation, dancing to music, blowing bubbles. Blowing bubbles is great. If you can imagine that as you blow out the bubbles, you're blowing

out stress, you know? That your stress levels are sinking. It actually does lower your heart rate, and your blood pressure and stress hormones.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:10:24](#)

As I was talking about it, it made me yawn, and yawning is also a way that you let out stress. So I think if you work with him on a list like that and practice those things and every day he got to pick one, that would help.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:10:37](#)

You know, emptying the backpack is great when you have a backlog of stuff. Then if kids continue to be angry, even after they've cried on a regular basis, it's because there's new stress coming in. The older they get, the less tears are essential to empty the backpack. There are other ways to empty them and we've just talked about some of those. Laughter is always good, but there are many other ways.

Question 5:

Dr. Laura Markham:

This parent says, "My five-and-a-half-year old always comes home from school in a difficult mood and he will attack me, behave impulsively and destructively. It normally lasts about an hour, I find it really stressful."

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:11:13](#)

Yes, that is stressful -- an hour of it. It's great you're doing special time. I'm wondering if he laughs when you roughhouse with him? That sounds really important even before he comes in the door from school, to get him laughing would be important.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:11:27](#)

I would also be sure he gets food on the way home because he might be hungry. It might be a blood sugar thing. If he does get home without a chance to laugh, put on the music and dance away your day, you know? And if you don't think he'll respond well to that, make sure you practice it at times when he would like it. Like on a weekend, practice dancing, dancing out your day, or dancing away your day.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:11:53](#)

And you know, the answers I just gave to the last parent about her son, should help as well. And I would say when he does get angry, put into words what's going on. "You are so upset and you're very angry at me. I wonder if

school felt really hard today?" And you might find that he will feel understood and start talking about it.

Question 6:

- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:12:16](#) So here's a three child family question from a parent about the middle child having a difficult adjustment to the new baby with meltdowns and screaming and how to work through it. "She's so easily triggered at this point. How do we work through setting limits without causing so much upset? And also the six-year-old is now getting frustrated because the middle child is so upset all the time."
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:12:42](#) So first of all, the six-year-old needs special time. You know, it's too often the older child who's more self-reliant is the one that ends up getting lost in the shuffle, and then they begin to act out. So the six-year-old needs his special time. And just acknowledge how frustrating it is for him when his sister acts out. And the four-year-old is being so sensitive when you correct her because she's terrified of your disapproval right? You did go ahead and get a replacement baby.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:13:06](#) So to her, if you're not approving of her, it might mean you're going to abandon her, which of course means she's going to die. So this is a life or death matter to her. This is all fear that she's carrying around. I know this sounds crazy, but this is where she's coming from. And that fear is making her tense and anxious and reactive. And that's why she's reactive. Even at school, when the kid at school says something she doesn't like. The cure for this is laughing, crying, and yawning. But right now she's not doing those things because she's stuck in anger. So you have to start with creating safety, which starts with laughter, which starts with empathy, 24/7 empathy, all the preventive maintenance stuff. And that way when you set limits, she might start to dissolve into tears instead of screaming at you. And at that point just encourage all crying. She needs to cry as much as she can.

Question 7:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:13:55](#)

A parent says that her son, five-years-old, runs away and picks up the iPad to distract himself from his feelings when he's having a meltdown. That is a smart child. Makes perfect sense. So what I would say is, "Oh, don't use the iPad now. Let's switch it off since you're feeling bad right now." Of course he says no. So the best strategy is to keep the iPad away. I mean, I will just tell you the truth. I think an iPad should not be used by a five-year-old. They're going to use screens for the rest of their lives. I just think it's bad for their brain development. They shouldn't have it. But if you are going to let him use an iPad in a limited scenario, only on weekends or, I mean certainly using on an airplane, fine, who cares, you know?

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:14:39](#)

Even in a car, a long car trip, fine. But if you're going to let him have an iPad on a daily basis, he shouldn't have access to an iPad where he can just grab it when he wants it. It's an addiction. Screens are an addiction. And if we're just letting kids use screens, it is really unfair to them because you wouldn't leave bowls of cookies around your house and then say, "Yeah, when she has a meltdown, she runs and gets a cookie." Well yeah, of course. That's what many of us would do. We reach for the ice cream when things get tough sometimes and we're depressed. Well, we don't want to leave an iPad where he's going to have access to it to distract himself from hard times. I would just say start there.

Question 8:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:15:22](#)

Here's a parent who has an emotional child. And the couple is concerned that we teach and demonstrate that emotions are fine but shouldn't be volatile and disruptive. So I have bad news for you. Emotions **are** volatile and disruptive. That's what they are. So as the child feels the emotions are accepted, the child is better able to manage the emotions, because they can accept them. If we're limiting the emotions, then the child is stuffing the emotions. If they're stuffing the emotions, then they're in the backpack and they're going to burst out uncontrolled, because there's no conscious control over them anymore.

And when there's no conscious control, then the emotions are super volatile. So the best way to **create** volatile emotions is to tell your child they should **control** the emotions.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:16:17](#)

And by the way, I'm not talking about controlling behavior. Your child can still control their behavior, but they're allowed to have volatile emotions. And if you do that when they're young, then they become able to handle their emotions more. Basically they develop the neural pathways for the prefrontal cortex to control, and basically soothe themselves and to control those emotions as they get older.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:16:47](#)

So I would just say, you teach your child from your responses that all emotions are okay, and your child can tell you about them and show you. And you need to be okay with the way that your child lets them out. And you need to model and demonstrate how your child can let them out. And if you follow the things that I'm describing in this course, your child will in fact learn how to do this.

Question 9:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:17:16](#)

A parent is asking about a highly sensitive five-year-old who's very focused on his possessions, has meltdowns because he wants a new toy and has a hard time sharing. So, I think that if a child has a meltdown about wanting a new toy, yes, he wants that toy desperately in the same way that you might want something desperately because you think that's going to make you happy, right? You're going to get over not getting that new pair of shoes or that new car, but your child thinks it's going to make him happy. And it's going to really be hard for him to let that go.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:17:52](#)

So, he just needs to cry. So it's great he's found a way to cry, but he's crying over this thing he wants. Hold him, empathize with how much he wants it, with how sad he is not to have it. It's great that he wants that toy and he's crying about it. Wonderful. Make sure that you're doing preventative maintenance with him so that he can show you the tears instead of just getting angry about not

having it. If he's angry at you for not buying it for him, I would say there needs to be an approach -- I think in every family -- that we don't just get things. We don't just randomly buy things. We buy food every week at the store, but only certain food that's in our budget and that is in our food plan, which is a healthy food plan. And we do buy presents at birthdays or Christmas or Hanukkah or whatever celebrations your family has.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:18:41](#)

But you never buy a child a toy because they want it, never. And if your child knows that's not what happens, they're usually not having a meltdown about wanting it. If that's what you've been doing, have a discussion about how that's not what you're going to do in the future and then be prepared. Warn him over and over again. I'm getting the sense, from the way you've asked the rest of your question, that this is a child who just needs to cry.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:19:17](#)

And the sharing thing. You might ask him, since you're letting him put toys away, but he still has a hard time sharing what he's left out, ask him if he prefers to not have kids at your house for a while. Instead just go to the playground with the other kid. There's no reason you can't take two kids to the playground.

Question 10:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:19:34](#)

A parent says that their six year old has a full backpack from not so great parenting, where there were a lot of explosive outbursts in the house. And he's very sensitive as a result of that. And he has started to be rude and stick out his tongue and stomp and throw and growl when they set a limit with him. But she says his behavior still has improved dramatically since they completely stopped yelling. So first of all, let me just say kudos to you and your partner. How fantastic that you completely stopped yelling. Anyone who's listening to this who's still yelling, you know what? It's possible. It really is possible and I just want to celebrate this parent and her husband and everybody else listening to the call who has been able to stop yelling, and I want to celebrate anyone who's still trying, who hasn't been able to stop yet, but that's your goal. Keep going. You can do this. It will make a

tremendous difference. And just like this parent, you'll see the difference. You'll see that your child's behavior will change dramatically.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:20:36](#)

Now, in his case, he's still struggling with the limits you're setting. I get it. You know, he's showing you how he feels about your limits. And wouldn't it be great if your son could just say, "No! Mom, I don't want to get ready for bed!" But that would be asking a lot from a six year old. Most six year olds will show you they don't like your limit in some way that is not verbal. They might say, "No, mom." Right? That's a whiny voice. Or in your case, your son growls and sticks his tongue out at you, right? Unfortunately, while his brain was wiring up when he was little, he was observing a lot of explosive outbursts from the adults in his life. So he observed that the way you deal with something is with an explosive outburst. That was the modeling he had. And you know, honestly he finds it harder to calm himself. He doesn't have the resilience of some six-year-olds. He has fewer inner resources to calm himself and to communicate respectfully. So it's going to take him longer than some six-year-olds to learn how to communicate respectfully.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:21:35](#)

Now that you're communicating respectfully, he will eventually do this. I guarantee you. So the great news is, his behavior has already changed dramatically since you started modeling emotional regulation, and instead of an explosive outburst, he growls or he stomps, or he sticks out his tongue. That's great news. And he can continue to make progress. And so the way he'll do that is when you receive this as a communication instead of rudeness. When you're labeling it rudeness, he's going to keep doing it.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:22:02](#)

When you say, "I told you it's time for bed and you're growling at me. Why? You're sticking out your tongue at me. You want me to see how mad this makes you? Sweetie, I see you're mad. You wish you could stay up all night. It's so hard to stop playing and get ready for bed. I understand. I wish you didn't have to, but now it's time for bed. You can growl as much as you want; let's go."

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:22:27](#) See that? You're not getting stuck on the rudeness. He's allowed to express this to you. And soon when he learns that he doesn't have to express it in this way -- because he knows you're going to hear him and that you're reflecting back what you're hearing -- he's going to be expressing this in a way that is not so rude.

Question 11:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:22:49](#) “Our daughter is highly sensitive, intense and strong-willed, and my partner and I are also highly sensitive, but we use attachment principles. We don't even yell. She's six-and-a-half and she's always struggled with separation anxiety and lashing out and we're trying to help her feel her feelings” instead of in ... They don't use this word, I would say ‘indulging’ in her anger. They're not saying indulging, but “instead of getting angry and lashing out. How can we create more safety?”

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:23:27](#) And this parent uses the word shame. That her daughter feels a lot of shame when she makes a mistake. So shame is a lack of self-love, right? And we beat ourselves up with shame. And the reason we do it, it's actually a defense against unbearable feelings of not being good enough. So just as I've described that we lash out in anger as a defense against unbearable feelings, that's what shame is. Shame is that we lash out....Shame is really that we beat **ourselves** up or lash out at ourselves. We say to ourselves, "You're not good enough." Shame can run in families and it can be visited from parent to child. So if you see shame in your child, it's a great idea to consider if there's any way in which you've unintentionally shamed your child when they disappointed you; it's very easy to do. We've all done it, I've done it, I've seen myself do it. And it's so eye opening when you see that you've done it.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:24:28](#) So really pay attention if there was any way that you've ever shamed your child. If there's some way you're disappointed in their behavior or you want them to be a certain way. So I don't know if that's true for you, because it's also true that shame is a normal human response that we do to ourselves when we feel not good enough.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:24:51](#) It may have nothing to do with you and your partner and your parenting, but with your daughter and who she is. And I will say, Brené Brown is a writer who specializes in shame. She's really terrific. And so I encourage you, if shame has resonance for you, either for yourself or your partner or your child, to check out her books and what she says. And I completely believe this, I have seen that this is true -- The cure for shame is self-love. That's the cure for shame.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:25:21](#) It helps to get acceptance from outside, because shame makes you feel you're not good enough. So if you can show who you truly are to another person and they accept you, then you can see that you are good enough. That helps with shame. It's sort of the first step. But really the cure for shame is self-love.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:25:41](#) And in the course we do a lot of work on shame indirectly, because we do a lot of work on self-love in the daily inspirations. But you can also do lots more work on self-love for the rest of your life, if you're a normal human who had conventional parenting. So that's shame, for anyone who struggles with that issue. But back to this parent's question. From the previous discussion of backpack emptying, you can see that your daughter is getting aggressive instead of being willing to feel her emotions. You already commented on that. And you've astutely pointed out that she needs more safety and you're asking how to do that. And the answer, I already gave to other people in the call. The answer is always connection. And that means 24/7 empathy. It means physical connection, it means laughter.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:26:35](#) Laughter creates a visceral connection where we trust people because it changes the body chemistry, and it's nature's way of designing us so that we offload anxiety. Laughter offloads anxiety, which means it offloads the top layer of fear in the emotional backpack. And that's what allows us to actually get in touch with the deeper feelings in the backpack. We feel safer, we don't feel quite so tightly wound, I guess is the way to say it.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:27:10](#) And then finally, in the moment when your daughter gets angry, feel compassion. Resist being provoked. I want to

add one more thing, especially for you, and for anyone who's worked hard to be an attachment parent and to be non-yellers. When you see that you've worked so hard to be a peaceful parent and your child is not being peaceful, sometimes when that happens, your child's emotions scare you. That would be completely understandable. All of us probably had a moment where our child's emotion scared us. But it may be that when your child goes into a rage, it really terrifies you on some level. If that happens to you, it's really important to acknowledge it to yourself, because it means you don't feel safe. And it means you can't communicate safety to your child. And your child has to be able to trust you to deal with her emotions if she's going to show them to you.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:28:01](#)

So if you're feeling that your child's emotions are scary to you, and that could be for a number of reasons. It could be because someone in your past was scary to you with their emotions and hurt you emotionally or physically. But if that's the case, it's really time to do some work on your own emotions and your own fears. And then when you do that work on yourself, you can communicate really explicitly to your child that all emotions are okay.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:28:29](#)

You know, I notice over and over again that we somehow get the children we need to grow. Every single one of us get the children we need to grow. I don't know why that is. It's not my divine plan. It's just what we have, and I'm just observing that's the way it seems to work. So maybe this is an opportunity for anyone listening who's having a hard time with their child in any way to look at, "Oh, is there someplace I need to grow?"

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:28:59](#)

I want to mention Shefali Tsabary, who I just love. She actually went to the same graduate school I did and does very similar parenting work. She also places a premium on conscious parenting. I think one of her books is called *Conscious Parenting* and it's on mindfulness. She basically says, "Everything that is wrong with your child is always coming from something you're doing yourself."

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:29:23](#)

I don't take that extreme reaction at all. I think kids are born who they are and some kids are really, really challenging. I work with parents all day, every day and I'm

here to say some kids are really challenging and it's pretty hard to be peaceful with some children. It is true. But I do notice it when Shefali says, "It all comes back to us, the parents." I wouldn't say that even, although there's an old joke in psychology circles, the debate between nature and nurture. Well if it's nurture, it's you. And if it's nature it's you. So it's still you, it all comes back to you.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:29:59](#)

But I will say this, I don't think we cause everything that goes on with our children at all. But I do think that whenever we work on ourselves, and we clean up our own contribution, we clean up a huge part of what's going on with our child. I don't know why it's true, but children do act out what's going on with parents. And there seems to be some invisible, maybe spiritual, maybe psychological, but we don't know how it works, connection where children pick up things from us and they act them out. So I would say in this case, look at your own feelings about big emotions and work with those and help yourself feel safer. And I think you'll be able to create safety for your child better.

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

And I would say for the rest of us, notice anything going on with your child that's bothering you and just ask yourself, "Is there any way in which I could clean up my contribution to this that would then clean up a lot of the problem or even some of the problem?"

Question 12:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:31:04](#)

I'm moving on to the next question. This parent says her six-year-old is extremely emotional and strong willed and has many meltdowns every day and has extreme anger in those outbursts. And it can take 30 minutes to get him calm, but she has two other kids. So what is she supposed to do? And that it's very hard to have special time because there's only so much time in the day and she has three kids. And she says, "I have been connecting and not yelling."

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:31:32](#)

So, I just want to say, congratulations. Everyone listening, let's give this parent a round of applause. Connecting and not yelling. And everybody else who's connecting and not

yelling, you get a round of applause too. And I want to add, anybody who is still yelling but trying hard. You get a round of applause too because it is really hard. But you can do this, and how great that we had this parent's example and the example of many, many other parents who are taking this course now and have taken it in the past, who have stopped yelling completely.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:32:09](#)

So, I don't know where your six-year-old is in the lineup. If he's your first child or your second child, it's especially likely that he needs special time, because he has younger siblings. And I hear you can't do it daily, but maybe you could do it on the weekend for a longer time. And remember there are other ways to create connection. 24/7 empathy, right? All day long. Roughhousing with a whole group of kids, getting laughter going as much as you can. And then in the moment when he has his meltdowns, remember zero correction, be compassionate even when he's yelling, "Stupid Butthead." Just be compassionate with him.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:32:46](#)

Also, you say it takes 30 minutes to get him calm. Honestly, if this is actually backpack emptying, which is what I'm suspecting, he may not be actually emptying it. That's why he's having that many meltdowns daily. He's not actually working through the old emotions. So I think the real goal is not to get him to calm down, it's to help him show you all those tears and fears from the past. So I would actually just urge you on the weekend to do special time every weekend. And after a few weeks of that to have a few scheduled meltdowns on the weekends, where you can really allow the emotions. And I want to warn you, it could go on for an hour or two. But I think you'll see after that, that he can make it through the day without these constant meltdowns.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:33:29](#)

So the reason that he's having them over and over is that they're not actually accomplishing the goal of backpack emptying. So your goal is safety and connection in any way possible. Having time with each child also matters a lot to create that safety.

Question 13:

- Parent: [00:33:55](#) My six-year-old is at summer camp. I work full-time so I don't pick them up from camp. My nanny does and when I get home, he starts yelling at anything. Yesterday it was his blocks. So he just started yelling at them like they're weren't building right. And of course him getting upset upsets my other kids and I'm like, "I can tell you're really upset. Can you talk to me about what's going on?" And he yells and then he cries and then he gets upset and runs away. I want to follow him. I can't leave my other two kids alone. I don't know what to do, but I feel like I need to do something.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:34:41](#) Okay. First of all, if he runs away, you don't have to go after him. That's okay. You can talk to him later when he calms down. Is he six, is that what you're saying?
- Parent: [00:34:49](#) Yeah, he's six.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:34:50](#) I would say you're doing a great job of staying calm yourself and trying to recognize he's upset instead of reprimanding him. I think he's probably not able to explain to you what's wrong and he runs away because he's overcome with feelings. He's sort of plunged into those feelings. I think what you're doing is great. He's getting that -- "Oh, it's because I feel this way that I'm doing this." But you can go in and you can say, "Wow, you are having such a hard time. It seems like nothing is going right for you this afternoon." Right? Or today, or something like that. And instead of saying, "Tell me what's going on," which may be a little demanding and may be hard for him to tell you what's going on, maybe you can say, "It seems like nothing is going right," and then he'll tell you the things that aren't going right. He'll feel heard and he's more likely to actually open up and share with you what's happening. Do you think he might at that point, if you said something more like that?
- Parent: [00:35:52](#) Yeah, that's great. I think that's the problem is that I asked what's going on and he doesn't know how to tell me and I don't know what else to ask.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:36:01](#) Yes, exactly right. So I think just recognize, "Wow, it seems like nothing is going right for you." Right? And I think at that point, remember all of us, every single one of us,

when we're upset, it's because we're feeling somehow victimized by life or another person or the situation or something, like things are not going right for us. We just don't know what to do about it and we're very upset. So, that's what's going on here with him and he's taking it out on his brother. And I think it'll really help if you can not actually ask him a question, but just recognize how he's feeling and that should help you. Good luck.

Question 14:

- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:36:39](#) “My son, age five, often refuses to empty his backpack. He has done so a few times with me, but often he runs away from me after trying to hit me. He yells at me to stop talking, and after I look at him compassionately and say, "Oh, Honey," before I manage to say anything else he'll yell at me.” So I want to say, no one wants to feel those feelings in the emotional backpack, those tears and fears. They're uncomfortable, so it's very common for people to lash out when they feel unhappy. It sounds like your son has been able to just cry with you, which is what empties those feelings. And that's fabulous because it means he trusts you. Those times when he lashes out angrily, to disarm the anger, you have to start by acknowledging it.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:37:25](#) Anger only begins to dissipate when it feels heard, so start by letting him know you hear how angry he is. He probably won't run away at that point in the same way that he runs from your compassion. When you compassionately acknowledge pain, he runs away. He doesn't want to feel that. But the anger, I'm betting if you said, "Wow, you are so mad about this," he'll probably say, "Yes, I'm mad about this," and then he'll go on to tell you why. "For this reason and that reason. It's all your fault and here's why," right? But notice that he's busy talking to you about it, yelling even, but he's not hitting because he feels heard, and he doesn't feel overwhelmed by the pain coming up.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:38:01](#) So as he keeps telling you all the reasons he's angry, keep empathizing. "No wonder you're mad. You wanted this and I said that. Oh, so you felt so hurt and disappointed. You must've thought I didn't even care what you wanted. Oh, Sweetie, you must have thought I wasn't listening."

Notice you've got to the empathy. You're actually empathizing with the pain, but you started with the anger and that probably helps him feel safer. So even though you do get to the same place, the tender ground, it's a little less vulnerable for him. And if he still yells, "Stop talking," just stop. It's okay to let him run away, also. Later when you talk to him, you can resume by starting with the anger so he'll let you talk.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:38:41](#)

Here's another way in. This is really helpful with kids. You can say, "I owe you an apology," as your opening. Most kids cannot resist that and they let you continue and you say, "I am so sorry I hurt your feelings before. Sometimes it can really hurt when it seems like I don't care what you want," and then you can repeat some of the other stuff that we talked about. I think doing this will help him start to tolerate those more vulnerable feelings, and when you talk with him later, you might even see him start to tear up without lashing out.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:39:13](#)

But here's the other thing that is really important for anybody whose kid is getting stuck in anger. Be sure you're doing plenty of laughing. Laughing really reduces the child's anxiety and anxiety is just a form of fear. Fear is what causes anger, so laughter reduces the fear and the anger. So it's critical to do laughing with kids if you want to get them out of the anger.

Question 15:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:39:39](#)

Our next question is from a parent who says, "When my son, age four, has an intense tantrum sometimes he'll shriek at us to go away. We try to do what you suggest, move away a bit if necessary, but not leave the room, and say, 'I can move away and give you space, but I won't leave you alone with these big feelings.' But what about when he's vehemently and hysterically telling us to go away? And how can we help him feel safe enough to cry during his meltdowns?"

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:40:02](#)

So first, let's talk about helping kids feel safe enough to cry. That also means they will feel safe enough with the feelings that they don't have to run away and hide and

they don't have to lash out. So the way to create safety in the moment is softening your tone, using fewer words, getting on their level, if you can do that safely, as opposed to towering over them. We do tower over them, generally.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:40:27](#)

If you're really in resonance with how much pain your child is in, you'll probably get tears in your eyes and your child will feel that resonance and that will help them feel safer and it will help them move into the grief instead of the anger. And you can give him space as requested. Your son is hysterical about demanding that you be on a different floor. "Go upstairs. No. Go downstairs," because when you're close to him the feelings come up with more force. Actually, because he's feeling safer with your closeness to him, so he blames you for the feelings, so he wants you far away. He's trying to control the feelings. So it's fine to go further away from your child, because they're just trying to control how upset they feel. They think they'll feel less upset -- and they will actually if you move further away from them -- so it's fine to move away, which lets him be more in control. But always make sure to say, "I'll be waiting with a hug when you're ready," and make it clear you're not going to just go off and watch TV. You're waiting for him. You're available to him the minute he wants you.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:41:28](#)

I want to add that you can set up the conditions for more safety in advance. One-on-one time, special time, really increases trust. We've talked about how laughter reduces the fear load, so your child's less reactive. And 24/7 empathy -- again, they feel understood -- increases the safety. Also, no yelling. No punishing or threatening them. This is all basic peaceful parenting preventive maintenance, right? And that does create more safety, so it does move your child steadily away from anger and into a place where he can actually express the feelings to you. And also, I would definitely have a conversation with him. Some time when he's not angry, ask him what you should do when he yells at you to go away. Often when they're not angry, kids will say, "Well, I don't really want you to go away," or, "I don't really want you to go far away."

Question 16:

- Parent: [00:42:25](#) My question pertains to my older daughter who's going to be five in October. She hasn't been formally diagnosed, but I think she would be considered a highly sensitive child.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:42:36](#) Okay.
- Parent: [00:42:37](#) And my younger daughter who's three is completely not, and is very flexible and goes with the flow. She is a lot more serious, and cries a lot easier, and is upset by a lot of things and they just have very different personalities. So, she may not be, but I perceive her that way. She gets upset very easily, and we've been letting her cry and listening to her and trying to be empathetic, but when this happens multiple times a day, as it often does, I start to lose my ability to be empathetic.
- Parent: [00:43:15](#) I can stay calm and I sit and breathe, and I can sit with her, but the empathy part after the fifth time of the day that I've dealt with it starts to be very difficult for me. My question is, if I'm unable to feel the empathy in that moment, what is the best way to handle it? I have no problem sitting there and being quiet, but I don't think that my vibe is empathetic. It's kind of like I can feel myself getting a little annoyed or just impatient. I'm not yelling, I'm not doing anything necessarily detrimental, but I'm not really able after a while to empathize and I just want to know, is it best to say that and walk away, to just stay quiet and sit there? What do you recommend?
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:44:03](#) So, first of all, let me ask you a question. How long has it been going on that she has been crying ... getting upset and crying five times a day? Is this a new thing since you started peaceful parenting? Has she always been this way?
- Parent: [00:44:19](#) My husband and I, one day we were talking and thought, "I wonder if there's ever been a day that she hasn't cried," and we couldn't think of a day. We're sort of new to peaceful parenting, but I never believed in timeouts and punishments per se. I might have taken a toy if she was throwing it at her sister, so I guess there were some consequences and punishment. But it wasn't a drastic shift for us. It's been this way since she was born. Only because

I was parented in that way and I know it did not help me, so I was very adamant to parent differently.

- Parent: [00:44:59](#) As a baby, she was pretty easy actually, but as a toddler, she's always been very sensitive to things. She's the type of kid who if she falls even the smallest boobo, she's crying for 20 minutes. Where her sister will fall, get a huge injury and get up and keep going. She's very ... I don't want to say dramatic, but everything is kind of magnified with her and she has a hard time if we say we're going to do something and then we run out of time and we can't. That will result in a meltdown, and she's just very sensitive, I guess.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:45:38](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative). It isn't a question of a full backpack it sounds like. What I was trying to ascertain is, is this a kid who's been bottling everything up and been conventionally parented and now that you're peacefully parenting, her full backpack is coming up to get healed? It sounds like that's not the case. Were you conventionally parenting before or not?
- Parent: [00:46:02](#) I mean, we definitely have changed some things. We didn't really use conventional parenting in terms of timeouts. We never sent her to her room or did timeouts, but we were never the type to say, "Stop crying," but I think doing the course, we shifted more so into the peaceful parenting.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:46:23](#) In the last few months, that shift has happened?
- Parent: [00:46:27](#) Yeah, I would say.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:46:28](#) Is she crying more? Would you say she's crying more now?
- Parent: [00:46:33](#) I think that's about the same. It's kind of always been consistent.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:46:37](#) Okay.
- Parent: [00:46:38](#) And there's also definitely an element of jealousy with the sibling. I mean, they're only 20 months apart and they're both girls, so I know that those are two areas where it creates more conflict. They can get along great but it's limited. For 20 minutes they can play and then all of a

sudden something happens and we have to intervene. A lot of times she does a lot of comparison, so I know some of it is definitely sibling stuff coming up. I guess for me, my main focus is on how I can best handle myself because that's really what it's about.

Parent: [00:47:18](#) I can be empathetic a couple times for an hour or so, and I'm not a stay-at-home parent. When I come home from work, I do take over and parent mostly, and on the weekends and stuff, so I spend enough time with her that I'm usually the one ... I'm better at it than my husband, so I kind of step in when there's a crisis and I run out of empathy at some point and I just can't do it anymore. What is the best thing to do at that point?

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:47:47](#) Okay. I was trying to figure out whether there was something going on that was temporary. Meaning your daughter has had to cry a lot to get that full backpack emptied. I think she probably does have to cry. I think there's going to be more crying now than there will be later. Partly because she's five and by seven she won't be crying as much, but I also think that there will be more crying now because she probably was getting less empathetic parenting before, where she was given the message that her tears weren't okay and therefore, she's now feeling safer to cry. This is, I think, a transitional time period.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:48:27](#) I think the more you can milk the tears, the more you can say, "Oh, my baby, you got a bump, didn't you?" Even though your three-year-old would have gotten that booboos and just moved on, and here's the five-year-old whaling because of the booboos. "Oh, my goodness. A booboos. That really hurt, huh?" The more you can be empathetic, the more she will cry, and then the quicker she gets it out of her system and the less likely she is to do it later in the day, so it's less likely to be five times that day. It might be three times.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:48:58](#) That's the first thing, and also, the less likely this will be going on in six months and the more likely she'll be only crying once a day in six months, so there's that. But then there's also the question that you're asking, which is how can you be empathetic? So your ability to feel empathy

comes completely from your thoughts about what's happening. If your thought about what's happening is, "Oh, my God. This is the fifth time today. This is a little booboo. Your sister would've just picked herself up and gone on. What is your problem?" If that's what your thinking, then it's going to be pretty hard to be empathetic.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:49:39](#) Even if your thinking is less judgmental than that, and it's just, "I am wiped. I worked all day today. This is the third time since I got home that you've had something happen that you're upset by. Get over it already." Or even less judgmental about her and more like, "I just don't have it in me to do this again. I'm trying hard to be empathetic, but I just can't find it."

Parent: [00:50:03](#) Yeah. The third one is definitely my brain. My mindset is just like, "I just have nothing left for you, kid. Sorry."

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:50:09](#) Exactly. "I've got nothing left for you." So if that's the case, one thing you can do is, you can change the way you're thinking. So your thinking could be, "Wow, I was gifted a child who is here to heal the planet and she feels every wound deeply and she can't even explain why she's feeling what. But she is feeling it and channeling it and she's actually doing healing now for everybody, in a sense. You could actually see it that way, that there's a way in which she's going to be for the rest of her life, the empath who's helping heal the planet, and your job as her mom is to simply empathize. You don't have to solve it. You don't have to make it better. You don't have to get rid of her sister. You don't have to undo the bonk. You can just kiss it and say, "Oh, Sweetie, I know it really hurt."

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:51:06](#) I'm thinking of Glennon Doyle Melton, and I think she and her husband are divorced so she might just go by Glennon Doyle now or maybe Glen Melton. I don't remember which. Sorry, Glennon. But anyway, Glennon, if you put that into your search engine if you don't know her, you'll find her. She wrote the book *Carry On, Warrior* and another, at least one more, that are great books. She was an alcoholic and is a recovering alcoholic now. She talks about how she thinks she had a perfectly good upbringing; her parents loved her. The problem was that she herself

was so highly sensitive that the world was just too much for her and she talks about how we so often give children the message that their feelings are too big, that their reactions are too big, especially girls, that their emotions are too much, and when we give them that message they feel like there's something wrong with them. By the time your teens, they self-medicate.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:52:06](#)

I'm not saying your daughter's going to be self-medicating by the time she's a teen. I'm just pointing out that I think that people can just be made this way and they need a lot of understanding from parents and the more understanding you can give your child, the more you'll be able to be empathetic towards her. And then I would just close by adding that, that doesn't mean you're on the hook, that every time your daughter cries you need to sit there with her and breathe and say, "Oh, I'm so sorry it hurts so much." When you do run out of empathy and you're starting to feel annoyed -- because you're human and that's what happens to human beings sometimes -- and you're just at the end of your rope, and you've got nothing left for her, you can say to her, "Sweetheart, I love you very much and I'm here with a hug when you're ready. Right now I need to go and do X," and X can be as simple as wash your hands. "I need to go wash my hands."

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:52:57](#)

I mean, you wouldn't do it like you're washing her out of your system, but more like, "I came in from outside and I need to wash my hands," or, "I came home from work," or, "I need to check on dinner," or, "I need to ask your father something," or, "I need to check the laundry," whatever. I wouldn't go to a phone and I wouldn't mention her sister because then it sets off her sibling rivalry, which I think is already an issue for her. But simply to say, "I'll be back to check on you in a moment." Right? Because I do think there are times when kids just need to cry that it's helpful if we're there, but if you've been there a lot today, I think it's okay as long as you come in and out and check on her. And I think that's better than her perceiving that you're annoyed. Does that answer your question?

Parent: [00:53:40](#)

Yeah. Thank you.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:53:43](#) All right. You're very welcome. Enjoy her. That's a gift she has.

Parent: [00:53:45](#) Yeah.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:53:45](#) I know it doesn't seem like it now, but it will.

Parent: [00:53:48](#) Thank you.

Question 17:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:53:52](#) The next question is from a parent who has a six-year-old girl. She has a hard time regulating her emotions. "She seems to get deeper into the emotions, specifically anger, when I use empathy, and I have a hard time getting her to use a calming tool like breathing." So, I wouldn't try to calm her down with breathing while she's upset. When we do that, children feel controlled and they feel like we're trying to keep them from showing us their emotions. Her emotions are a message. So when she's upset, it naturally intensifies the emotion to use empathy because it sort of opens the door. If I'm crying or if I'm trying not to cry and someone I trust walks in the room and hugs me, I'm probably going to burst into tears. Right? So the presence of empathy will make the emotions intensify for a few minutes and then once the crying is done, they're done.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:54:49](#) But remember about anger. That's a secondary emotion. It's a defense. The reason I would feel the anger is if I don't feel safe enough. If I'm in the presence of someone, and I don't think I can show the tears, then I'm going to get angry instead, and that's what your daughter is doing. So if she felt safe enough to show you the tears and fears under the anger, she wouldn't need to stay on the anger. I would say, don't try to make her breathe. Don't try to calm her down. The deal with the anger is you can empathize with the anger, but then speak to the feelings behind it. I would say, "You're so angry. Tell me about it." And she says, "Of course, I'm angry. You said, I can't do X,Y,Z," or, "You never understand," or, "It's my turn for this or that," or, "You always stick up for my sibling," or whatever she says.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:55:39](#) You're not going to say, "Oh, let's breathe and calm down." You're going to say, "Oh, no wonder you're upset, so you feel X, Y, Z? You feel like I always prefer your sibling? You feel like I shouldn't say no to this? You feel like it's your turn?" I'm not saying you're going to change what you're doing. You might say, "You really want screen time. You really feel like it's okay to have screen time now because you finished your homework, but I said no because it's too close to bedtime. Is that what you're so upset about? Oh, I see. No wonder you're upset. You really want to watch that show. I hear you, Sweetheart. You want to watch it. Sweetie, the answer is still no. It's too close to bedtime. But thank you for telling me. I really hear how much you want to watch it, and Sweetie, maybe we can work out a way to tape it so you could watch it on the weekend," or whatever, if there's a problem-solving thing you can do at this moment.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:56:31](#) The point is you're listening. Even though she's angry, you're helping her solve the problem. And, if there's something behind it, that she's afraid of -- Like she doesn't want you to go out and she'll be left with a babysitter or something she's sad about -- you can say, "Oh, Sweetie, you're so upset about this. You seem worried that ..." Or, "Your face looks all angry, but I'm hearing that you're worried about this too," or, "Your face looks all angry, but it seems like maybe you're sad about this too." Right?

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:57:10](#) If you don't hook into the anger and you can not take it personally, the child feels safer and the tears will start to well up, often -- and **that's** when they get past the anger. I would say if your child is stuck in anger, your job is to increase safety always. And do not help them move past the anger. Don't try to get them to give up the anger. Because they'll get stuck more deeply in anger. Maybe this is true for you, maybe it's not, but for anyone listening who identifies here with this, instead of trying to control the child's emotions just make it safe for them to have the emotions. If you are uncomfortable with their emotions, that's understandable. That's normal. That's okay. Look at your own emotions. Give yourself a hug, keep breathing, calm yourself down. And remember that, of course, you're going to get uncomfortable with emotions if they weren't allowed when you were a child, but that doesn't mean you

can't allow your child to have them. So do the work on your own emotions.

Question 18:

- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:58:24](#) Moving onto this question from a parent who says she's doing more and more empathy, but maybe I could help her with ideas to start a conversation with her kids about their feelings without making them feel like she's interrogating them. It sounds like these are at those moments of bad behavior when you want to know what's going on with them. I think for all of us, when our children behave badly the first thing to do is to calm down yourself, take a breath, stop, drop, and breathe, then connect. Connection is always about seeing it from their point of view.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:59:00](#) So you say, "Oh, Sweetie, you're doing X, Y, Z." Just describe the behavior that you call bad behavior. "You're jumping on the couch." "You're pushing your sister," or, "You just pushed your sister." "You're shouting at me." "You're whining and crying and you just don't want to walk anymore." Whatever the behavior is ... Whining is sort of a judgmental word, so I'm not sure I would use that word, but, "You're telling me that you just can't walk anymore and your voice sounds so unhappy." So you describe the behavior, as nonjudgmentally as possible, that you see them doing. You don't have to know the feeling. You could say, "It looks like maybe you're tired." "It looks like maybe you're angry at your sister." "It looks like you're so excited and full of energy that it's making you jump, jump, jump."
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:59:49](#) After you do that, you may need to set a limit. "No hitting her," or, "We do have to get to the car. Let's figure out how we're going to get you there because my arms are full of groceries," or, " You're jumping on the couch and that's not okay. We're at Grandma's house and Grandma doesn't want us jumping on her couch because she thinks it breaks the couch. Not okay to jump on her couch, Sweetie." So you're setting a limit, but then you tell them what they **can** do instead. "Don't worry, Sweetie. We can jump outside. Let's go jump outside." "Don't worry, sweetie. I'm carrying groceries, but let's see how we can summon up all your

strength so we can get you to the car. I have a special superpower." Now you're trying to help them mobilize to get to the car.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:00:38](#)

Or, "You are so mad. You can tell your sister what you want without attacking her." That's always what you're saying to siblings. "You can tell your sister what you want. I'll help you," and you're getting down on their level. So that's about setting limits in those moments of bad behavior, but it's also about how to ... You say you could start the conversation with them. That's what makes them trust you. That's what starts the conversation. They feel like you're on their side because you're seeing it from their point of view by describing it.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:01:13](#)

That's always what you do. You describe what you see happening from their perspective. It's simply, "Oh, you really didn't want me to say No," or, "This isn't what you wanted for dinner. This day isn't going right for you." Right? When we can do those things, we're not even speaking directly to the emotion, if we don't know what the emotion is, but you can say, "Your face looks so sad," or, "You look worried," or, "You look so angry," or, "You seem angry." It's fine to say that, but a lot of times when kids are very upset they'll say, "I'm not angry," so it's better to just describe what you see happening with the behavior.

Question 19:

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:01:56](#)

Hi, what's your question?

Parent: [01:01:58](#)

We have two children. We have an almost five-year-old and a two-year-old as well. Our five-year-old has really big meltdowns pretty much on a daily basis. I think part of the trouble is that we're sort of learning how to navigate two kids. I'm by myself most of the time with her, but I'm wondering at what point should I be looking into getting some help for some new strategies for her, to help her maintain, because they are getting so large.

- Parent: [01:02:34](#) I think most of it is me and I've been working on it and will continue to, but I'm concerned that maybe there's another piece there. I'm not sure how much backpack unpacking to expect, and at what point should we be looking for outside help to make sure she's getting what she needs.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:02:59](#) Okay, great. Daily meltdowns with a five-year-old are within the range of normal, but it's certainly at one end of the continuum. It's not usual. First, let me ask you, is this different than before you started this course?
- Parent: [01:03:15](#) This is not ... It feels like it's building in intensity, but I don't think it's different than before we started the course.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:03:25](#) Okay, so she always had meltdowns every day, or no?
- Parent: [01:03:30](#) Not every day. I think she's always been sensitive since she was very, very small. I think since her brother has gotten older it's become more apparent just because I think I've got less hands and bodies and minds to go around to help. I think the intensity is just really big from watching other children and I'm not sure whether I'm going to miss a step with her. We went scooting yesterday with my in-laws. They brought a new scooter and she had, I think, two fairly large meltdowns in the course of about four blocks. Yes, she was tired but she didn't like the way we were turning. She was the leader and didn't like the way we were turning. She completely melted down. Our rabbi's wife actually came out and asked if we needed a drink of water or some help. I didn't even notice how loud it was, I guess because I'm used to it, but she came out from her house to offer us help and she did calm down.
- Parent: [01:04:36](#) Eventually, I was able to talk to her and there were three other adults who could watch the two-year-old and pick her up and put her on my back. We started talking about what she would like to happen next time and what we were going to do when we got home, and she was able to calm down. But it was really big and that's not uncommon for her.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:04:55](#) So, the first question I would ask is, is there anything in her background that could be causing this? So first of all, is she adopted?

- Parent: [01:05:05](#) No.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:05:06](#) No, she's not adopted. Any trauma in her background? Any big separations from you? Any hospitalizations?
- Parent: [01:05:12](#) No. The only night we've spent apart was when her brother was born. Her birth was induced, and two days, and challenging, and she was separated then for about six to eight hours. But other than that, no.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:05:33](#) Okay. I have seen difficult births and early incubation, early separation from parents, often lead to kids who are highly reactive, but six to eight hours is probably not going to do it. Especially when afterwards there were no further traumas. It's not like you went to the hospital or she went back to the hospital or anything else, so that's good. We've ruled those things out. That's great.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:05:57](#) The next thing I would ask is about sensory issues. Kids who have sensory issues overreact to things because they perceive the world differently. Everything is more of an overload. It's just that they're under much more pressure than the rest of us, and so when you have a kid who is very reactive like this, I would always get them assessed for sensory issues. With this kind of parenting, I would add the caution that you can miss sensory issues.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:06:24](#) I actually had a client who I was talking to for a while, I'd say two years, over a period of two years. I never met the child. I was only speaking to the mom. I think because the mom was really patient and really great at using these tools, even though she had a daughter who was very challenging, she managed to make things work really well. Then finally, when the girl started school at the age of five, it became apparent that actually, she had some sensory issues. Because of this great parenting, the issues had sort of been camouflaged. The mom just thought, "Well, she's difficult," but the earlier we intervene with sensory issues, the better because it's about trying to change the wiring of the brain.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:07:12](#) I would always say with a child who has frequent meltdowns like this that you want to get a sensory evaluation, for what it's worth. Maybe nothing will come

of it and she won't have that, but I'm hearing that, because the reactivity of this many meltdowns says something. The other thing is you've been doing this kind of parenting for three months now and clearly, there are times when you're able to stay very calm and collected as you did on this scootering trip, and I'm sure sometimes there are times when you lose it, but I'm sure you've gotten better at it over the last three months and your child has not changed over the last three months.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:07:55](#)

Now I'm curious. If it's just backpack emptying, you would've seen a change. She would have emptied the backpack more and there's not something happening where every day she's getting stressed again by going to a school that she hates or by some other things. It's either sensory or, what could be going on? Tell me a little bit more about the meltdowns. When she has this meltdown is she crying? Does she cry? Does she get angry? What happens?

Parent: [01:08:27](#)

She's usually angry. When they start, she starts getting mad and goes from a little irritated to crying, screaming, kicking in a pretty short period of time. We often go to her bed just because it's soft and I don't want her to hurt herself or accidentally whop her brother. When we were outside, I had to just sit on the floor and hold her. She seems overwhelmed, for lack of a better term. Whatever it is, it's completely washing over her, so her rational side seems to be shut down. Ordinarily, she's highly verbal and can talk to you about a black hole collapsing and she can talk to you about theological issues, but when she's like that, she just can't process anything.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:09:22](#)

This kind of overwhelm could be indicative of sensory issues, could be indicative of a highly sensitive kid who has a big intellect and is aware of everything and gets overwhelmed easily. Could just be that. I do want to reassure you that she is going to be different by the time she's seven because at six the brain rewires and kids do get a lot more self-control where they have more access to the frontal cortex, the prefrontal cortex, the thinking part of the brain, even when they're hijacked by emotions, they are more able to think. I'm thinking of Heather Shumaker. I'm a big fan of Heather Shumaker. She wrote the book *It's*

OK Not to Share, and she wrote the new book *It's OK To Go Up the Slide*. I didn't mention her when we were talking about social skills, but she is a great person to read about for social skills for preschoolers.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:10:27](#)

The reason I'm mentioning her is that... I know Heather. I've talked to her about her childhood. I think she says this in her books too. I think it's public information. She would have these huge meltdowns at the age of five or six. Huge meltdowns where she would scream, and yell, and everything. Her mother still remembers them, and she still remembers them because she was old enough to remember. She says her mom would just say, "You're really upset about that. I hear you honey. I'm right here when you need a hug." Eventually, she would be done, and she would go hug her mother.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:11:03](#)

But even kids like that do eventually grow up. With some kids there seems to be a little bit of a delay. I just think of it as the external world and the internal resources to cope. Are they imbalanced? For you and me at the end of a long day, the internal resources are a lot lower and we have to cope with the same external world like our children, right? For her, it may be that the internal resources are always low and that the external world, when there's something new like a scooter, it's a big deal, and so it just stresses her out terribly. She may always be that person.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:11:46](#)

So again, it's great to give her skills to manage her own frustration, teach her to blow. When you blow, you have to take a breath in first, so it's stop, drop, and breathe. And when you blow you're actually reducing your anxiety. It's a self-calming move. You might get your hands on Larry Cohen's book, *The Opposite of Worry*, which is for kids who tend to be a little anxious.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:12:12](#)

So if there's no sensory issue and it's just super sensitivity, it reads like anxiety and it may also be some anxiety. It may just be anxiety and for kids who tend to be more anxious -- There are a lot of ideas in Cohen's book about teaching them self-soothing skills and helping them manage their own anxiety so that they can cope better with frustration. Because she's getting to the age where she could actually take some of that in and do it.

- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:12:38](#) So do you feel like you're able to stay calm when she has a meltdown?
- Parent: [01:12:44](#) I think most of the time we have sort of a hard time at the very end of the day I find. If we're into the second meltdown or the third meltdown. I've been working on it. It's a lot better the last couple of weeks I'd say. I've been going to bed earlier and trying to do what I can with her.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:13:11](#) I'm glad to hear that it's been better the last few weeks and I was going to ask you what's different. It sounds like you're getting more sleep so you're less tired at the end of the day. Makes a tremendous difference. I mean, you've got a very challenging child. You don't have the luxury of going to bed late, you know? You do have to go to bed earlier, right? And any other self-care you can do, you just have to do because for anyone to cope with them, any meltdowns in the course of the day is really hard.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:13:38](#) I would ask you, you say you're able to stay pretty calm, which is wonderful. When she cries and goes through this, are you able to just really welcome those tears and say, "I know it's so frustrating Sweetheart. I know." Does that work for you or do you feel like, "Oh my God, I can't do another meltdown"?
- Parent: [01:14:03](#) I think usually at the point, it feels like it's more about keeping her in a safe space. So we can, but just not when it's revving up or when it's revved up.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:14:22](#) That makes sense because then there's just flailing arms and legs, right? You're trying not to get hurt. You're trying to keep your two-year-old from getting hurt. Yeah. Well, that makes sense. So I'm hearing that you're actually welcoming her emotions. That's another thing that can happen if parents are really resisting the emotion the kid keeps blowing to try to get the parent to show up for those emotions. If you're being her compassionate witness and there's not new stressors getting added, then it could just be that she has a little bit of a regulation delay and she's highly sensitive and she's a little anxious, in which case the things we've talked about will help.

- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:14:59](#) And I would highly recommend laughter because that will reduce the anxiety, if that's contributing here. But I would also get her assessed for sensory stuff because it just seems like it's too far to the edge of what's neuro-typical.
- Parent: [01:15:16](#) I'm reminded that she also gets very excited and you can see her revving up and that's a little easier for me to say, "Honey, you're literally bouncing off the bed onto the wall. So we've got to bring it down a little or you're going to have a meltdown later because you're just really, really happy." She has the other end of that too. And I'm wondering if that sounds closer to sensory issues?
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:15:49](#) Tell me again how old she is.
- Parent: [01:15:50](#) She's four and three quarters. She'll be five in June. Mid June.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:15:55](#) Okay. I think that doesn't necessarily suggest sensory issues. Sensory issues are more like everything is an irritant. So I would say it's about regulation issues. There's something about regulation. She's goes up, she goes down, but they're big. And so if it's regulation issues, then what we've talked about for helping her to self-regulate is important. And I would help her really notice her own moods. When she starts to bounce off the walls, point out that usually there's a crash and you fall apart.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:16:48](#) I would actually teach her, since she's the kind of kid who likes science and black holes, I would put a toy boat in a bathtub. The keel of a boat actually keeps it steady and the boat can go to one side or can go to the other side, but being steady is what allows it to make progress through the water and go toward where it wants to go. And I would just empathize with wherever she is. You're really enjoying jumping around. You're really sad and mad right now.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:17:31](#) But I would also give her the tools before she gets too far in any of those directions to bring herself back to an even keel.
- Parent: [01:17:41](#) Thank you so much.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:17:43](#) You're so welcome.

Question 20:

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:17:46](#) A parent asked about a five-year-old being mean to the pets, pushing the dogs and cats, hitting them. Sounds like sibling rivalry since your kid's an only child. It could also be suing the doctor, meaning a full backpack. So I would say laughing and crying. The minute your kid starts to hurt the animals, I would protect your pets. First of all, they deserve your protection. I would put them in other rooms if you have to, and I would pick your kid up.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:18:11](#) There's actually a section on this that's in *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids* where you basically pick your kid up and you toss them around and say, "We don't hurt the dog. We don't hurt the cat. No, no, no." And you toss them around and you dump them on the couch. And at that point they're either going to have too full a backpack and be angry at you, in which case you can help them with the scheduled meltdown.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:18:34](#) More likely they're going to come racing back to you and say, "Do it again, do it again." And you do it again and you do it again. A five-year-old is a little old for this, but even a five-year-old might go over to the dog, like they're going to hit the dog again to get you to re-initiate the game, in which case you re-initiate the game.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:18:50](#) At some point, if you've done it five times and you're done and you can't throw them around anymore and they're still going over as if they're going to hit the dog. Then you do it as a scheduled meltdown. You grab them, you say, "Okay Sweetheart, I'm not playing anymore. We don't hit the dog no matter what." And because you've just done this good laughing and building the bridge, your child is probably going to get angry or crumpled and either way you're headed into the meltdown.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:19:16](#) And now you have basically gotten to the root of the problem and your child isn't suing the doctor by hitting the dog. So basically any time your child hits the dog, I would see it as a backpack issue almost certainly.

Question 21:

Dr. Laura Markham:

A parent asked about if the kids want to be away from you when they're upset. And I would say, sure, you don't have to stay with them. She says she stays with them. If there's full-on tears and tantrums, she stays nearby. But if they're just sulking, even if it's a full backpack, she might let them go off and sulk. I think that's fine, but I would say then reconnect later and give them a big hug and be aware that you might have some backpack emptying to do later in the day. That's all.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:19:59](#)

And also always ask your child when they're in a good mood, what they want you to do when they're really upset. Do they want you to go away when they yell at you to go away or not? And take your cues from that.

Question 22:

Dr. Laura Markham:

A parent asked about handling booboos, because her son barely grazed his knee and then said he can't even walk on that leg. She said he's playing it up. I would say yes.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:20:25](#)

They're showing you that there's some pain in there. They don't know how to express it. They don't know how to articulate for you. "You know I was really upset when you yelled at me that time" or "when you went through that period of time when you were so stressed out and tired and you yelled at me a lot. Or when you left me at school or left me with the new babysitter, or when the sibling was born." Children won't be able to articulate to you about those times they had a lot of fear inside that they locked up.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:20:51](#)

They're going to instead fall down, hurt their knee, and act like it's the biggest problem in the world. They're not a drama queen. They're showing you real pain. This is the doorway into it. It's all stored in the same place. They're emptying the backpack. So I would say when your child grazed his knee and said he couldn't walk on that leg. I

would say, "Oh my goodness, you can't even walk on it. Oh, your poor leg. Oh my goodness. Kiss, kiss, kiss, kiss, kiss. Hug, hug, hug, hug, hug. Okay. What does your leg need? Do you want to ride on my back? Do you want to hold my hand?" Use it as an opportunity for connection and if your child will actually cry about it, great. Let them cry as much as they will. Always use it as an opportunity to get into the backpack and empty it.

Question 23:

Dr. Laura Markham:

Another backpack question. A child who says, "Mommy, please make me stop crying. I don't want to cry." And when mom says "It's okay to cry," he gets more upset. I would just empathize. "Oh Sweetie, it doesn't feel good to cry, does it? Those feelings don't feel good. You wish I could make them stop. I'm sorry. I don't know how. I can't make them stop, but you know what? When you take a deep breath, you feel the feelings and that's the best way to make them go away.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:22:10](#)

So you can just take a deep breath, feel the feelings, and then soon you'll stop crying, and I'm right here. I will help you no matter what, even if it feels yucky." So you're just empathizing. "You wish I could help you stop crying. Those feelings don't feel good." "Yes, Mommy stopped them." "I know. See, the only way to stop the feelings is to breathe. So just take a deep breath and feel those feelings and sooner or later you'll stop crying. It won't last forever." I think we do have to give our kids the information that it won't last forever because it can feel pretty bad when they're feeling all those feelings.

Question 24:

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:22:48](#)

"We've made a lot of progress in the course, an amazing amount, but my son still seems to fill up his backpack frequently. I feel like he's just more sensitive to everything around him and he needs to unload emotions more often. Is that possible?" Yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes. Absolutely. Right. So there are kids who are more sensitive.

- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:23:05](#) So really the way this works, all people pick up tension in the course of their day that you can't process in the moment. That's you, me and your child. But that tension can be released if you have laughter, if you have a meditation practice, if you're a child and you go and you run around like crazy outside and you're shouting, laughing and rolling down the hill on the playground. The kid works through the stuff that's in the backpack that got picked up that day.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:23:35](#) If that's not enough to do it, hopefully it is enough to get the rigidity out. So the backpack is sort of looser and the child is more able to cry at that point. So as long as there's no ongoing stressor and no full backpack from the past, we all have daily life challenges. We all rise to meet them. Hopefully we learn, we grow.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:24:01](#) This is true if you're four or if you're 40. And we are able to move through life, maybe not always graciously, but we're able to handle our developmental challenges and move on to the next one in a way that is constructive. So when you have past trauma or other things filling up the backpack, that won't necessarily happen. The child will fly off the handle or everything will set them off because there's no room in the backpack for anything else.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:24:30](#) And that's when you need backpack emptying. That's when kids need to laugh and cry and shake and yawn, and physically let the stuff out of the backpack that they have been carrying around. Because of course the backpack is the body. So if you are coming to this course and your kid has been parented conventionally, you will see your child doing a lot of this crying, shaking, yawning. And that's how the backpack gets emptied. You probably also will see your child get angry.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:25:03](#) That's not backpack emptying. Anger is a defense against all those feelings that are coming up. So our job as parents is to disable that anger. And the way we do it is by helping a child feel safe, so they don't need it. You can't attack anger and get rid of it. When someone feels attacked, they attack back. It reinforces the anger. But what you can do is eliminate the need for the anger by helping your child feel safe.

- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:25:25](#) That's why I'm always talking about creating safety. So that's how backpacks get emptied. And so if your child has been doing a lot of crying -- and I've seen kids cry every single day for three months when they start being parented in a peaceful way, or there are other reasons too, like let's say they had some trauma earlier in life -- so those kids, will do more crying. And then it begins to sort of seem like it's not every day, it's every other day.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:25:52](#) It's not an hour, it's a half an hour. Then it's 10 minutes every fourth day. Then it's every few weeks. But here's the thing, sensitive kids will never stop. Kids who are basically in the middle of the continuum of sensitivity, it depends on how old they are, but they're not going to have a big cry more than, I don't know, a couple times a month, depending on their age. Maybe once a month, even if they're six.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:26:22](#) But most kids who don't have a full backpack and are not super sensitive are not going to have big meltdowns that often, and they're going to be pretty cooperative in between. And they might have some times when they fly off the handle, but they're mostly not that volatile. But a kid who's sensitive? They're picking up more stuff than we are, every single day. They're tuning into everyone's emotions around them. When they see somebody's face frowning, they think it's about them. Sensitive kids are on the defensive more often.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:26:53](#) They're more threatened by the world because everything is much more heightened for them. So naturally those kids need to cry more. So yes, you're absolutely right. Those kids feel things more strongly than others. They will always have to cry more and they have a bigger backpack to empty, but it's the same basic principle. The preventive maintenance that you learned in this course, it will always empty the backpack and it will always keep your sensitive child healthy.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:27:24](#) Now, here's the final thing you need to know about this. What if your child doesn't seem to be getting past the rage? What if they get stuck in a rage and they're not actually getting to the tears and fears that are underneath? What if they **aren't** more cooperative in

between the meltdowns? What if they never get to those healing tears and then the snuggle on your lap? They don't have to do that every time, but what if they never get there when they get angry? Your child probably has something bigger going on.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:27:55](#) They can't feel safe. It's either an earlier trauma or there's an ongoing stressor that is making them feel even more unsafe than a normally sensitive child, and that could be a sensory processing disorder. It could be that they have mild Asperger's; are on the autism spectrum. It could be that they have an anxiety disorder, and I say disorder because that's... I just mean extreme anxiety.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:28:21](#) All of us are born with a certain amount of tendency to anxiety. You may notice that you're more anxious yourself. Well, then your kid might be more anxious. It doesn't mean it's a full-blown anxiety disorder. It just means he tends to be more anxious. So those kids are going to feel more threatened and they're going to have a harder time crying. And that's because they have a special challenge.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:28:40](#) So if you're feeling like, "Man, my parenting is good, it's not perfect, but I'm not shouting the way I used to. I really allow the feelings, I really connect. I really do the special time, but my kid is still having a really hard time and going into rages and not crying. It's not seeming like it's working to empty the backpack." Then I would say something's wrong. Leave no stone unturned until you figure out what is going on.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:29:12](#) Check online for a checklist for sensory processing disorder, for instance. If you think there may be a sensory issue. Figure out what it is. Maybe it's a gluten sensitivity. I'm more psychologically oriented, so you don't hear me talk about this so often, but there are absolutely people who have come back to me and said, "You know what? We changed her diet. She's a whole different child." I hear it all the time.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:29:33](#) So if there's something like that going on, don't hesitate. Don't wait. Get your child the help that they need and they deserve. And if you feel like your child is so challenging that you haven't been able to get your parenting to a

really good place, get yourself a parenting coach. Look at the write ups on the different parenting coaches I've trained. Just close your eyes and see if any of them resonate with you. After you read what they've written about themselves, write them an email. Do not wait. Just email them. Pay for one session. See what they say to you.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:30:09](#)

A good parenting coach is going to be able to help you figure out what's going on with your kid and how to get the assessment you need for your child. And it's also going to give you the support **you** need to cope with a child who is especially difficult. Okay, so I think this answered the question, but yes, I think the bottom line on that question is, there **are** kids who are going to have more of a full backpack. It's true. And you know what? They're going to be more likely to be sensitive for the rest of their lives. And I regard that as a blessing to them and to the world. So it's not a bad thing. It's a great thing. They just need help to learn how to handle it.

Question 25:

Dr. Laura Markham:

A parent asked the question, "My five-year-old says I'm being mean when she doesn't get her way. And then when I move in close to empathize, she says, "Stay away. I'm scared of you." Well, that's a sign that she's in fight, flight or freeze. So that's why she's attacking you.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:31:11](#)

She actually thinks you are being mean. So just don't move in too close, because she's scared. Instead, empathize with your voice from further away and really make sure that you're calm as you say, "Oh my goodness, you're scared. You are so upset right now." Remember that's probably old stuff. It's probably not something you just did. Again, backpack emptying. Helping your child cry with scheduled meltdowns. Helping your child laugh with daily laughter.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:31:36](#)

Those are the ways to prevent that kind of interaction with your child when they are scared of you. As long as you're actually self-regulating and you're not losing it. Now, if you're still yelling, then naturally, then she's going to be

scared of you because kids are scared when parents yell. So if that's the case, if you've completed the course -- if you've done the whole course for 12 weeks and you've been doing the respectful voice chart and you've been doing all the other things we've talked about and you've listened to the daily inspirations -- If you're still yelling, then please reach out to a parenting coach to do a few sessions with you to help you stop yelling. It is possible to do.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:32:11](#)

I've seen thousands of parents do it and it's not the way you want to live and it's certainly not fair to your kids. And you can do it. This is something you can change.

Question 26:

Dr. Laura Markham:

This is about backpack emptying and if you have to leave right now, but your child's in the middle of backpack emptying, what do you do if you cannot leave the house? And I would say this is why preventive maintenance is invented! Because if you drive a car and you don't do preventive maintenance, you will end up in the breakdown lane. That's what happens.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:32:44](#)

And so when a child is doing backpack emptying and you're trying to leave the house, that's called the breakdown lane. And if you do preventative maintenance, you will mostly avert it. The problem is you're in a transition right now. If you've started this kind of parenting fairly recently, you may be having a lot of backpack emptying and you're going to have it even when you're trying to walk out the door. In fact, you're going to have it especially then, because kids have a hard time with transitions and that's when they'll get triggered.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:33:12](#)

So I guess I would say this is a temporary situation, it will not last. Step up the preventive maintenance. And you can say, "Sweetheart, I hear how upset you are about this. I really want to listen to you. I can't listen right now. I hear how upset you are. We need to go pick up your sister at school. We're going to go. I know you're really upset. I'm

so sorry. I'm going to have to carry you to the car. I'm going to have to strap you in. I can't leave you here alone. So I'm going to strap you into your car seat. I know you're really upset about it. I love you. I'm sorry we had to do it this way. We do need to leave. When we get home, I promise you that I will listen more to this. I hear how much you're upset about XYZ," whatever it is.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:33:55](#)

That's how you do it. You have to set the limit, but then when you get home later, you do have to follow through on your promise. As with all of your promises to your child. "I always keep my promises to you. In our family. We always keep our promises. I really want to hear this. I know you were upset about it." Now, it might not be when you first walk in the door. And it's also good at this point to go ahead and distract your kid.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:34:18](#)

You're not going to empty the backpack. Now you're going to put a lid on it. So go ahead and use whatever means at your disposal. "Sweetheart. I want to listen right now. I can't. We have to go get your sister. So you tell me what's going to help you to feel better right now?" "Nothing. I hate you." And you say, okay, "I'm going to bring a special treat for you in the car and when you're ready, I will give it to you." Now, if you give them a cookie right now, they're going to throw it at you, but you can bring it in the car and say, "It's here whenever you're ready, sweetie. I'm so sorry we have to do it this way."

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:34:50](#)

And you're putting a lid on her feelings, but you're also going to say, "I'm going to do it later" and then you're going to follow through. That's all.

Question 27:

A parent says, her four-year-old doesn't seem to empty his emotional backpack fully during scheduled meltdowns. He'll beg for TV or something to escape it. And she is also scared of the big feelings herself and after a while she gives in. So, you're not alone. I think that's very common.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:35:13](#)

And when it's too hard for you, stop. When it's too hard for you, you don't have to listen. Just stop and then

resume later. If it's too hard for you, you can say, "I can't listen right now, Sweetie. I'm starting to get upset. I want to hear this. We're going to do it later." And your child won't like having to stop, but if he's already begging you for TV or food, you can do it temporarily and then regroup so that you will be able after the TV or the food is over, you will be able to listen again. And this is important, that you're noticing this is what's happening. That's terrific.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:35:48](#)

You're noticing it's your own discomfort. That's great. Our number one job is always our own well-being, our own emotions. So this is a red flag. You have work to do on your own feelings. Okay, that's fine. We all do. If you can work on your own feelings in between, then you will not be as afraid of your child's feelings. And this is a huge gift to your child and really it's essential, to do this kind of parenting.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:36:17](#)

So, this is terrific that you noticed this about yourself. Just find a way to do the work and you can do the work using my daily inspirations. You can do the work with other guided meditations. You can do the work with the help of a counselor. There are many ways to do the work, but that's your commitment to doing the work yourself so you can handle your child's feelings.

Question 28:

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:36:40](#)

This is a question from a parent who says, "Sometimes my five-year-old has major meltdowns on the surface because he wants something I'm saying no to. Normally buying something or watching more TV. Should I ever agree to his demands in the middle of a meltdown? Sometimes it feels like I'm being too harsh and you know I could easily agree to five minutes more TV, and that would meet whatever need is driving the meltdown."

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:37:02](#)

So, obviously you know this, if you agree mid meltdown, you're training him to melt down to get what he wants. He's five, he's old enough to understand, if you say to him that you can't change your mind once he starts the meltdown. So when you see him starting to fall apart, you can say, "Let's calm down and see if we can find a solution

that works for both of us. You're saying you really want five minutes more TV. Hmm. If we do that, how are you going to be able to stop watching it five minutes?"

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:37:33](#)

So what you're basically doing is you're having the conversation upfront. You're proving that you're willing to negotiate if he can demonstrate to you that he can handle this extra change, this extra flexibility that you're showing, but you're not doing it once he's already begun the meltdown.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:37:54](#)

Also, you say the five minutes more of TV would meet whatever need is driving the meltdown. I would argue with that. Certainly, he may think he needs TV, but you said these are major meltdowns. So I think something else is driving the meltdown, which is that he's been stuffing the feelings while he's watching the TV. And once he stops watching, all those feelings, are going to come up. So in that case, I would just say, why not welcome the feelings and help him through them? I think that's better for him than giving into that upset.

Question 29:

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:38:23](#)

A parent is asking about her five-year-old who is very sensitive and emotional. She has always worried about the meltdowns and felt they were more than the average child should have. And so this course has been amazing in helping me understand. She says that her daughter has a full, easily filled and bursting out backpack, but now she feels bad for how she's dealt with this. What can she expect now?

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:38:45](#)

So highly sensitive kids do have more big emotions than other kids. They pick up emotions from other people. They react with more upset to things that happen. So they often have full backpacks. And what they need is to cry or laugh or yawn to let those feelings out. And most kids who learn how good that feels will actually start to work with you for that release. They'll say, "I just need to cry." Or they'll start a silly game and do a lot of laughing. That's very common.

- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:39:11](#) And they might even end in tears in that silly game, because they actually need to cry, not just laugh. So the amazing and wonderful thing about this is that as children begin to feel safe sharing their tears and fears with us, the body knows what to do to heal. You said, what do I expect now? You can expect her to find times to laugh and cry and yawn. If she gets stuck in anger, expect that too sometimes, and just ramp up your laughing more as we've discussed.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:39:39](#) And otherwise I would just normalize the crying. Since you've given her mixed messages in the past, have a conversation with her where you explain that you didn't really understand how important emotions were before, but now you've learned more and you understand that everyone needs to cry sometimes and it will always help people feel better. And she can always come to you when she feels bad inside and you'll always understand and you want to hear about all the feelings; the good feelings, and the bad feelings. They're all messages to us about things that matter.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:40:07](#) So parents often ask at this point, "Well, what do you mean they are messages? We just have to sort of suffer through them, right? Actually, the message of fear is that you need to find safety, right? The message of sadness is that you've lost something that you valued. The message of anger is you need to make a change -- usually in yourself, sometimes in your situation. The message of guilt is that you need to take action to bring yourself back into integrity.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:40:31](#) So we could keep going, but you get the idea, so anytime she has any emotion, you'll be there to help her with it. The research shows that what's really healthy for kids is when parents can see the big emotions as an opportunity to be there for your child and become closer to your child. That's what's really ends up... that's emotion coaching, and that's what's really healthy for your child.

Question 30:

- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:40:57](#) Okay. Here is a question from a parent who says, "What's the difference between letting the child work the emotions out of his body by say, pillow fighting or screaming into a pillow versus acting on the anger, which studies show only makes us more angry? If I let him hit a pillow when he's mad will that reinforce this tendency to hit his siblings when he's angry?"
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:41:16](#) So first, I don't think pillow fighting is a good idea when you're angry, that should really be about laughter. I love pillow fighting, but it's about laughter. I think if you encourage him to hit a pillow when he's mad, it's not going to make him more likely to hit. I don't think there is any research to show that. It also isn't going to really calm him down though, because as you say, hitting makes you more angry, at least some studies show that.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:41:38](#) So I would really say if he's hitting someone at that moment, the best redirection is clapping your hands around your body. So that your right hand ends up on your left shoulder or just below your left shoulder and your left hand is up on your right shoulder, or just below it. If you're grabbing your shoulders with each hand, that is a redirection of the impulse to hit that I think works much better than a pillow. And honestly, I have never seen a child, well, maybe rarely seen a child who was willing to hit the pillow instead of another person, frankly.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:42:14](#) You talk about screaming into the pillow. We know screaming obscenities **increases** anger. If a kid screams, I think that probably lets off tension. I'm not sure that makes you angry. There is research that ruminating on anger increases anger. So if your child is walking around ruminating on all your faults, screaming: "You're the worst mother and you did this and you did that." And they're screaming at you, but they are ruminating on your faults, that will increase their anger.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:42:44](#) So I think in general, when your child is angry, your job is to listen and acknowledge. "You don't think this is fair. You're so upset that this got ruined. Oh honey, I see how disappointed you are about this. I didn't know how important this was to you." You're speaking to the tears and fears under the anger. That's how you handle anger. I

think that mostly in the moment when your child is angry, the way that you de-escalate is by acknowledging in words what they're upset about so that they don't have to escalate. They see that you get how upset they are.

Question 31:

- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:43:23](#) A parent says, "What about fatigue related tantrums? We arrived late to our grandparents' house. My six-year-old was tired and decided to fight us. We just decided to focus on helping the four-year-old sleep and let the big sister scream for a few minutes. She was better in the morning, but I know she felt unloved and I heard her eventually crying herself to sleep. Is there a better way?"
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:43:42](#) Aww, that is heartbreaking. I think you're asking me because you know there's a better way even though at the time you were probably fatigued yourself, and couldn't deal with it. You said "we decided" so I'm assuming there were two adults. That means there were two adults helping the four-year-old while you were letting big sister scream for a few minutes. So the situation was that the six-year-old watched both parents deal with her four-year-old sister while she screamed and felt unloved, and then cried herself to sleep. Right?
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:44:15](#) So it sounds like you made that choice because you felt that she would feel better in the morning. Her tantrum was fatigue related and you weren't sure how else to calm her down easily. But **most** tantrums are fatigue related in the sense that when we're rested, we have better ego control. So we don't fall apart as easily.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:44:33](#) So I know when I'm fatigued, I am more likely to feel overwhelmed. Of course, we all are. I know you're hearing this. So at the risk of belaboring this, I just want to say for anyone listening, if you're wondering about this, imagine that you're tired and overwhelmed. As I'm imagining that - - and I'm sort of losing it, I hope my husband wouldn't tell me to cry myself to sleep because I'm tired. I hope that he would still take my tears seriously, even though I might not be crying if I weren't tired. Right? So the thing about meltdowns is, we're more likely to have them when we're

tired. But if we were just tired, we would just go to sleep. The reason we cry before going to sleep is because all those feelings are there and we no longer have the ego controls to maintain the defenses against the full backpack. So it may have been a fatigue related tantrum, but it was real feelings.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:45:28](#)

You also said that your six year old “decided to fight us.” When kids fight us, that's a cover for something else. It's a cover for sadness or fear or powerlessness. Those things often come up when kids are tired. So next time when she decides to fight you, I'm just going to suggest that in advance you decide what you're going to do in that moment. You're going to shift into compassion for her and you're going to say in this case, "You really don't want to get ready for bed. Nothing is going right for you tonight. You're so unhappy. I think you're tired and nothing is going right." And if she feels understood, she will cry and you can hold her. She may still cry herself to sleep and not brush her teeth or whatever you were trying to get her to do and that's okay. Her experience will be that she wasn't alone. You were there, you understood. Even when things are hard, you'll be there and you'll help her. You'll show up for her. That's what your kids need to learn from you. All of our kids, not just yours.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:46:27](#)

And, I know I've described her point of view in a pretty heartbreaking way here. I don't think you've damaged your daughter for life at all. I just think in general, if you have two of you, there's no reason to let her cry herself to sleep. One of you can take care of her. If there's only one of you and you have two kids having a hard time, you might well connect with her and give her a big hug and say, "You are having such a hard time. You know what? I need to help your sister get ready for bed because she's only four. But then I'm going to help you. Come with me. I know you feel bad, but come right over here and stay close while I'm helping your sister and then I'm going to take care of you." So even though you can't really be fully there with her, she knows it's not for lack of caring.

Question 32:

- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:47:17](#) A parent is saying when her five-year-old gets overly tired, she descends into tears and screaming. "We try and limit late nights and ensure that she doesn't get to that level of fatigue, but sometimes that's unavoidable. So I try comfort, reassurance, hugs, but it's very difficult to calm her. I'm afraid that she's going to be embarrassed in front of other people when this happens."
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:47:40](#) So kids don't always cry when they're tired. Sometimes they just go to sleep. So this is backpack emptying. So if you do more backpack emptying with her and more laughter, there's less pressure on the emotional system and she's not as likely to lose it. No matter how tired she is. That's the first thing.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:47:57](#) Second thing, your daughter at five and a half is old enough to talk about this at a time when she's calm and rested. Discuss what happened last time she lost it in a nonjudgmental, non-shaming way. Choose a time when a friend was there and empathize about what she was upset about. Observe that it's so hard to stay calm when you're tired. "You were so upset about that because you were disappointed, right? And then you were tired, too. What do you think your friend thought about it?" She may never have thought about what her friends thought about it. And you can say, "I think your friend was a little taken aback when you were screaming and crying. I wonder if there's a better way to handle it when your friends are there. I know it's really hard when you're tired, but maybe I can help you."
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:48:46](#) So basically you're offering to partner with her to help her next time. She's tired and having a hard time in a public setting, including your living room. She is the only one who can control herself. But if you're there to help her, she might stay regulated better. You'll have to do this over and over again, obviously. She will eventually begin working with you in those tough moments when she needs to control herself. And she is five and a half. So I think in a year you're going to find things are going to hopefully be different, too.

Question 33:

- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:49:14](#) A parent is asking, "How can we help my five and a half year old learn to manage her feelings? She has outbursts at trivial things." This is a very similar question. "And when she's content, she can easily recite all the things she could have done, but she can't do it when she's in an upset state."
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:49:29](#) So first it's very common when we're upset that we can't use our cognitive faculties. It's just a different part of the brain. She flipped her lid, if you know what I mean. There's something that Dan Siegel has popularized where you can go on YouTube and you can watch Dan Siegel flip the lid, which he does with his hand and shows you how we lose touch with the thinking part of the brain when we get upset. It's actually something you can show a child and kids get it and say, "Oh, right. That's what I did."
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:49:55](#) So the first question I would ask, is why is this child flipping her lid about trivial things? Even at the age of five and a half her first response to upsets is crying and screaming -- like there are threats to her wellbeing. One reason this happens is when we don't allow the child, as she's growing up, when she was younger than five and a half, to have her emotions. If we instead made her stuff the emotions, then their stuffed, so they're not under conscious control and then they're more likely to burst out. That's what creates drama queens and kids who have a harder time, who are less resilient, and they have a harder time regulating.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:50:29](#) So I wonder. I'm not accusing you of this; there are other reasons this could be. But just consider whether you or anyone has been giving your daughter the message that her feelings are not acceptable and she needs to go off and feel them in private. You did say in your question, she needs to go to her room to have her feelings. So if you're sending her off to her room that's saying those feelings are shameful. You can't really expect a kid to go off to the room by themselves without trying to stuff the feelings. That's one of the problems with sending kids away to calm down, is they stuff the feelings and then they're not under

conscious control and they get less regulated, not more regulated.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:51:05](#)

So I suggest to create a cozy corner of your house that's a special place where she can go when she's upset, but **you** also have to use it when you're upset to model for her. And you have to go with her to the cozy corner, not send her there, or it'll feel like a punishment. You could Google calm down corner or cozy corner or chill corner and see more about how to do that. There's some very good pieces of writing about it online.

(<https://www.ahaparenting.com/Ages-stages/preschoolers/Life-Preschooler/Calm-Down-Cozy-Corner>)

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:51:29](#)

So bottom line, the way kids learn to manage their emotions is to have the emotions accepted and to have good role models. So, think in terms of being with her, even if you remove her from the public setting, be with her when she has the emotions, and I think you're going to see her develop the ability to self-regulate.

Question 34:

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:51:48](#)

"Is empathy walking them through what they're feeling to help them understand it?" Actually, no, that's not what we're doing. Empathy is not that mental, empathy is an emotional thing. So what you're really doing is not walking them through it. You're feeling it with them. So you don't really have to know what's causing it. You can say, "Oh, you're trying to push your sister off my lap. You feel jealous that she's on my lap. You want to be on my lap, too." Then you help them solve the problem. "Don't worry. There's always room on mama's lap for everybody. Here let's move to the couch where we have more room." You stand up carrying your one kid in one arm who's already on your lap and hold the other kid's hand and walk to the couch, plop yourself down in the middle with one kid on your left and one kid on your right, and you're solving the problem, right?

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:52:39](#) But if you don't know what's going on and your kid is having a really hard time and giving you a hard time, you just say, "Oh my goodness Sweetheart, you're so upset. I didn't realize you were so upset about this. This is so hard. I'm so sorry. This is so hard." And if they're really upset, you can say, "It's not going to feel like this forever. I promise. We're going to get through this. It's going to feel better soon." So you're not even trying to understand it. Later, you might do an integration between the left and right side of the brain, because one side handles the logic and the other handles the emotion. And you might tell them the story.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:53:24](#) So later you might say, "You were so upset about this. You threw your toy, right? And it hit Mommy and Mommy screamed, 'Ouch, don't throw that.' And Mommy screamed at you. Right? And you were so scared. And then I put the toy up high and you were crying because you wanted your toy, right? Yeah. That was so hard for both of us. We were both so upset. And then what happened? Then you cried and mommy held you and then you felt better. And then we had a big hug and then we had a drink of water and then Mommy said, 'Are you ready for your toy? Can you handle your toy now without throwing it?' And Mommy gave it back and you hugged your toy."

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:54:08](#) So you're telling them the story. That's not empathy. That's actually something else, which is about emotion coaching. You hopefully did empathy in the beginning of the incident, not really at the beginning, but after you yelled at him and he started to cry and when you hugged him, that's the empathy, feeling it with him. Later, when you're emotion coaching, you might tell the story, and if you don't know what happened, just say you were so upset. You don't have to say why they were upset.

Question 35:

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:54:38](#) I have a question here about empathizing. The person asking it said that her son feels that she's analyzing him or manipulating his feelings or making fun of him when she

tries to empathize and say things like, "Oh, you're upset. You don't like it when that happens. Oh you wished you could have it." And those are the right things to say.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:55:00](#)

So if your child feels you're analyzing or making fun of him, it's probably because you're not actually feeling it. And I actually know this is the case because you went on to say, "Honestly, I don't even believe my own empathy at times. Maybe I was not shown empathy as a child." And this is how kids learn empathy. It's not what we teach them about feelings. It's when we show them empathy. But I will add this. Some people are more genetically inclined to empathy than others and we can all develop empathy. And the way we develop empathy is to imagine what other people are feeling and to try to feel that.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:55:43](#)

So I'm going to suggest to use fewer words and more feeling. So instead of saying "You're upset, you don't like it," you could, just say, "Oh Sweetie, I'm really sorry." And then take a breath and feel it from your child's point of view. I often say that you'll be moved to tears if you really feel it. If you really feel how upset your child is, how disappointed, that your child wished that you could go to the park, but you can't go because it's raining or because you have to go to the grocery store, whatever it is, and you say, "Oh my goodness, it would be so wonderful at the park. I really get it. I wish we could go." As I'm saying that I'm getting tears in my eyes. You could, with your child, do the same thing, but it's work. It's practice. And it's just one step at a time.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:56:36](#)

In the beginning you'll feel like you're faking it. Make it an internal exercise -- instead of something that happens between you and your child -- and over time you'll notice that you actually are able to feel it, from time to time. And the more you feel it, the more your words will come out with meaning in them. There are psychologists who study communication, who say that it's not the words we use most of the time, that the words we use are a very small part of our communication.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:57:08](#)

What really happens is in our tone, is in our body language and is in something that we don't actually fully understand and I think we are beginning to understand it, but we

haven't tested it a lot in older kids, but it's about the way the limbic system connects. So we know that your limbic system is in constant connection with your child's. That system, for your baby, takes shape in response to the parents or the caregiver. That's why you want to be careful who you leave a baby with, because their limbic system will take shape in response to the limbic system of the other person.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:57:45](#)

So even as they get older, the limbic systems resonate. If you and your partner have a good relationship and one of you goes out of town and comes back two days later, you will be out of sync with each other. And if you get into the same space, like if you get into bed, nothing sexual, you just get into bed together and you snuggle up and your hearts and your bodies are against each other, your limbic systems will begin to resonate, your breathing will synchronize, your heartbeat will synchronize.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:58:16](#)

And we know that you can pick up how somebody feels. The way I think of it is we're always broadcasting. We're always broadcasting all the time. And so the more we see things from our child's point of view, the more they feel understood. And even if they can't get what they want, they learn a really important lesson here. "I don't always get what I want. Sometimes I cry about it. Sometimes I'm angry about it, but I get something better. I get a mom or dad who always understands no matter what." That's what we're going for. And it's not about the words, it's about really seeing it from their point of view.

Question 36:

Dr. Laura Markham:

This parent has a child who is poker faced after misbehaving. Poker faced after misbehaving -- that closed-off thing -- is usually their own self judgment, usually their own shame. They're ashamed. And so when you start to talk about it, they're too embarrassed or they're too angry to open up about what happened. So again, this is why the preventive maintenance tools are so useful because you're building trust, you're building safety, you're building connection, really every day using those tools. And so

when something does happen like this, your child's a little more open to you.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:59:34](#)

And again, when you try to talk to them, if you go in and try to talk to the child about "what they did wrong," forget it. It's not going to happen. You have to start, and when I say start, I mean do it for half an hour and it may be all you do in this interaction. You start with, "Oh my goodness, that was so hard for all of us. You were so upset." And I'm saying this even if the kids who throw a toy at your head, right? "You were so upset. Oh my goodness, we were also upset and then I yelled at you when you threw the toy. Wow. I was scared when you threw it. Sweetie. Tell me why you were so upset. What was going on?" Right. So then the child will open up to you. If you're starting from the place of "You cannot throw toys at my head. It's dangerous." then that kid is just going to feel more shame and is going to disconnect more.

Question 37:

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:00:23](#)

A parent asks, "Our six year old is very strong willed and emotional and when things don't go her way she cries loudly. We want to give her some tools to express these big emotions rather than resorting to wailing." So this is interesting. It relates to what I was just saying, which is I think it's fine if they wail, even if they're loud criers. The alternative is shutting down the crying and that just makes kids aggressive and you do not want that. So I think it's terrific that your daughter feels safe enough with you to cry loudly. That says something great to me about the way you've been parenting her.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:00:55](#)

So you're right that you want to give her tools to express emotions in other ways besides wailing, especially if you're out in public. She can't start wailing if you're in a restaurant. But that tool is words. So the way you help a child learn to express things in words is to express what she's expressing in words. So when she starts to wail, you can say, "You're so upset, Sweetie. This isn't what you wanted to have happen. You're showing us how upset you are about that."

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:01:23](#) When we don't do that, and we don't put it into words, kids raise their voices louder. We all raise our voices if we feel we're not being heard. So disapproving of her feelings or not articulating them or not empathizing with them is actually one reason she might be a loud crier. Of course, it may just be who she is, too.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:01:43](#) And the times when she does control her sobbing enough to articulate how she feels, that's great. Repeat what she said so that she feels heard and acknowledge that she was able to do that and how impressed you are, that it's not easy to manage, to put your feelings into words instead of crying loudly, and you're so impressed. Make sure she feels the admiration when she does do it.

Question 38:

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:02:08](#) “My five-year old has a difficult time when guests come to our house. He gets wild, breaks the rules, is very demanding and rude, can't share, tries to wrestle or make physical contact, and gets grumpy.” Well, your five year old is getting excited and dysregulated and the probable causes are: 1. He gets threatened by people being in his space, and touching stops that anxiety for him. 2. He doesn't know what to do with all that extra energy and excitement from people coming into his space. 3. He gets disconnected from you. And when kids get disconnected from us because we're busy talking to someone else, it dysregulates them. And that's especially because in this case we have to clean the house, we have to make food and so during the whole lead up to the guests coming, we're disconnected. And then when the guests do come in, we're disconnected because we're dealing with the guests. And also he can be jealous that you're dealing with the guests.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:02:59](#) So the way you deal with these things, be sure he gets plenty of attention in advance and also during the guest visit, be sure he gets plenty of roughhousing and laughter in advance to channel all that energy and decrease his anxiety. And prepare him in advance by talking about what

will happen, which decreases anxiety. Let him put away things he values. And also do some problem solving. Ask him what he thinks it will be like when they come. What if he gets super excited? What if he wants to go wild? What if he gets upset, what will he do? You need a code word so he can tell you and you can help them with those feelings at the time that they happen, instead of him just getting more and more dysregulated.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:03:36](#)

And of course this is about self regulation in general. So having ongoing discussions with him about how to notice his feelings and be constructive in articulating them or expressing them, that's really important for him. And books help too. Go to my website and look at the books on self regulation and the books on emotional regulation or emotional intelligence and see if any of those look like they might be good for him. And there are a lot of books that are not on my website that are simply on Amazon, that are newer books that have come out that are great. Books help because kids learn best when they're relaxed rather than under pressure from the guests arriving. And it really helps them understand how they could or should be acting with the difficult situation that they're in.

Question 39:

Parent: [02:04:22](#)

So being empathetic is difficult for me when my children, ages three and five, have strong emotions. I grew up in a family that had a tough love mentality and they really looked down on me expressing feelings when I was angry or sad. So, I think I was a highly sensitive child. I'm guessing my daughter, age five is also, and I want my children to grow up emotionally intelligent and feel that it's safe to express feelings.

Parent: [02:04:49](#)

And before Peaceful Parenting I used to get really angry or frustrated and or go into freeze and then just not say anything when my daughter was angry or frustrated. But I've been working on that and I try to empathize, but most of the time I really don't feel anything. I feel like my empathy comes across as fake, so I don't know if that's

going to affect them. I was hoping if I practiced more I would start to feel it. But when the children get frustrated over things, like their pants leg is coming up, I mean I don't know if that's really affecting things, if my empathy doesn't come across as genuine. So I've been working on this.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:05:40](#)

So first of all, congratulations to you for working on this. When you were a kid, your family was well-meaning but they totally stunted your growth with them. They didn't give you a particular vitamin you needed and now you're trying to develop something that you didn't develop then. You're not the only one. Every one of us has areas like that in our history. So it's not just you. Believe it or not, it is possible for empathy to grow, but it takes a lot of effort and attention. First of all, in my new workbook there's a whole section on this. So that's something for you. And if you write me a note, I will send you part of that section. And I would also say that you could look at the things in your life that are a big deal, that bother you.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:06:33](#)

And then think about the fact that your child not getting their pants on properly is similar to that for them. For you it's a big deal. It doesn't seem like a big deal to you, but it is to them. And so if you can start to see it that way, you could maybe make the equation. It's a work around. It's a mental workaround to an emotional thing, but it works.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:06:58](#)

And then another thing would simply be practicing empathy in meditation, imagining someone having a hard time and you feeling with them. And you'll find yourself crying probably, which is good because with a full backpack, we need to cry to release all those feelings. I think you probably have a full backpack that needs some crying and that the more you can melt that defense away - you were a highly sensitive person, you had to put up a major wall when you were a child -- that's what has to be melted a little bit is that big wall.

Parent: [02:07:39](#)

Now, I just was going to say I actually am very empathetic towards adults, but for some reason with my kids it's different because I feel some of the things are not a big deal, but I understand what you said to kind of work

around that and look at myself -- what's the big deal for me?

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:07:58](#)

I also want to suggest that you think about things that were a big deal when you were a kid. Because I'm betting the reason you can relate empathetically to adults but not to kids is that kids trigger for you your feelings of being a kid and having people minimize your feelings. And so you learned, I'm not allowed to have feelings. Kids are not allowed to have big reactions to this. These things are not a big deal. And you adopted that belief and it's a defense against all those feelings that want to pour out about how it **was** a big deal.

Parent: [02:08:29](#)

Okay. Thank you so much. I appreciate it. Dr Laura.

Question 40:

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:08:35](#)

A parent says, "I had a traumatic pregnancy. My husband had depression, anxiety during that time. I was angry. Didn't express my emotions and felt trapped. My five year old son has difficulties expressing his emotions and connecting to others. I sometimes think this is linked to that baggage from my pregnancy with his little brother, who's now five months old. I wonder if I should talk to my son about this or is there something I can do to help relieve him of that emotional baggage?"

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:09:06](#)

I would say absolutely there is something you could do to relieve him of that emotional baggage if indeed he's carrying it, and that's the Peaceful Parenting Tools. Because when kids have emotional baggage, it will surface to be healed. So if you're roughhousing with him every day and getting him laughing, if you're doing special time with him every day and he trusts that he has a time that he can bring things up with you, if during this special time he feels like he's the center of your universe, even though he has a five month old sibling, if you respond to his upsets with empathy, and understanding, even when he can't express his feelings, and you say to him, "It seems like you're sad about this" or "You sound very mad."

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:09:58](#)

So all the things you've learned in this course, roughhousing to help kids with anxiety and to help them feel closer to you, special time to help them feel closer to you, to trust you more, and empathy and emotion coaching, which helps children feel safe, showing you their emotions and trusting you, connecting with you. Your son, you say he has difficulties expressing emotions and connecting to others, will begin to feel safer and will begin to connect more as you use the Peaceful Parenting Tools faithfully. And it could take a while because obviously he may have had a hard time during the nine months of the pregnancy.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:10:38](#)

So yes, that's how you relieve him of the emotional baggage. And yes, he probably did notice that you were having a hard time and were resentful and angry during that nine months. Yes, even if he couldn't express what was actually happening. He may have blamed himself or he may just have felt like it wasn't quite safe, like mommy was in a bad mood. Right? So I think that will really help.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:11:04](#)

And your other part of your question, which is should I speak with him about this? I think you could absolutely speak with him and say, "There were times when you were littler when I was having a hard time. Do you remember? And I would be angry." You say you didn't express your emotions at those times, so I'm not sure quite how he would have experienced it, but maybe there are specific things you could point to where you would get impatient with him or frustrated and you don't do that anymore and you can point out to him that that's what it was like then. And it must've been scary for him. But you're not like that most of the time anymore. Isn't that great? And you're so sorry you were like that then. You were having a really hard time then, but now you're feeling so much better. And now you're able to be more patient and you're so glad that he is your son. And I think that's the bottom line with all of this is that he has to know you love being his mom. And when he really gets that, gets your delight in him, then he can move beyond anything that he took away that was a negative from that time period that was so hard for all of you.

Question 41:

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:12:19](#)

A parent asks, "When my daughter gets upset, she immediately flies off the handle screaming and hitting and not listening. While I try to connect and validate her emotions to settle the situation, she covers her ears and won't listen to me at this point. What should I do?" This is very frustrating. I think the first thing is you should do preventive maintenance. Your daughter gets upset like this because she is not believing anything could be better. She has to show you how upset she is or she's just past the point where she can handle whatever is happening, like she's very tired. So more preventive maintenance means she wouldn't have a full backpack that would push her over the edge so easily. That's the first thing that you do, is more preventive maintenance.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:13:09](#)

The second thing is when she does fly off the handle, screaming and hitting and not listening, don't try to talk to her. She's too upset to hear anything you have to say to validate her emotions at that point. Instead, step back out of the way where she's hitting, right? So she's not hitting you and say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. You are so upset." So notice it's really not the validation of the emotions there. It's the soothing tone of the voice that matters. But if she does pick up any words she gets, "Yeah, I'm upset. Of course I'm upset," she might say, or just continue to act out and scream about whatever it is. And you can say, "It's okay Sweetheart. We're okay. We can solve this. I'm right here." So you're purposely lowering your voice and soothing her just with the sounds you make. You're not trying to have any kind of reasonable discussion, right? Where you describe what she's feeling or anything like that.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:14:11](#)

The connection you're making is really a nonverbal connection. It's more the tone of your voice, your full presence in the interaction. If you can touch her, great. Be soothing in your touch. The nonverbal connection is a great way to connect when someone's upset, because

their thinking brain doesn't have to tend to what you're saying.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:14:40](#)

But mostly you're just trying to create safety, right? Because what's happening here when you're describing this as screaming and hitting, that's anger. What's under the anger is whatever set her off, whatever fear or sadness or disappointment set off that anger. That's what you want to get to. So you have to make it safe enough for that to be expressed and the way you do that is not by talking. The way you do it is by making little soothing sounds, touching her in a soothing way. You're just trying to create safety and provide a safe holding environment. After she settles down, then you can use that opportunity to really have a discussion.

Question 42:

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:15:23](#)

This parent's question is about her six year old. In public situations she's well behaved and mature, but at home she's very emotionally demanding. This can look like disrespectful behavior, lots of lashing out at her younger sister, neediness, misbehavior at bedtime, and a frequently grouchy mood. We try all the Peaceful Parenting strategies, but we also end up giving a lot of corrections for her behavior. I worry that this reinforces her negative feelings and worries.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:15:51](#)

So I guess my question would be how do you correct? You don't need to have correction be a negative thing. For instance, neediness, you don't correct anyway. You fill the need when there's neediness. You said there's neediness at bedtime, so something's going on with that, the neediness at bedtime, which sounds like fear and anxiety to me. If she's lashing out at her younger sister, you need to melt that chip on her shoulder. Although it could be if they get along well the rest of the time that she's just feeling grouchy at that moment, her sister is in the wrong place at the wrong time. Since she's not grouchy out of the house, this would be a relationship issue or a backpack issue, not a food allergy issue, for instance. But it could still

be anxiety. Often kids who are anxious are on their best behavior outside of the house, but at home, all that bottled up fear comes bubbling up. And you did mention worries and neediness. So I'm wondering if she's anxious.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:16:58](#)

So daily special time melts away the chip on the shoulder. Daily roughhousing melts away the fear. And to correct her behavior -- you say it looks like disrespect. So you don't want to be disrespecting her when you correct, right? So are you listening and feeding back to her as you correct. "Sweetheart I hear you saying X. You really want whatever. I know you wish you could do that. That's not going to work right now, honey. I know."

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:17:34](#)

Now you say that it looks like disrespect. So if it's actually looking like disrespect, you can say, "You really want to tell me how upset you are about this and you're using a voice that could really hurt somebody's feelings. Let's try that over again, Sweetie. Tell me what you need here without attacking me." Right? So that she gets clear feedback that she can't be rude to you, but you're really listening to her so she doesn't have to be rude to get you to pay attention to her.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:18:07](#)

So your final question, how to fill her cup. Use the Peaceful Parenting Tools every single day, the special time, the rough housing, the empathy, the connection. And I think you'll see that she does then feel more connected to you. And if it's a backpack issue, you'll see some crying, some serious upset. It will start as disrespectful behavior. And then you create safety instead of correcting her, right? So you know how this works. If she has a full backpack, which is what it sounds like to me, and that could go along with anxiety -- she can have both -- then she'll be disrespectful to you because she's being provocative. And so you respond by setting a limit on the disrespect, but by really listening to her, not getting into a fight with her.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:19:00](#)

So the limit on the disrespect is just "Wow, you're really upset about this, sweetheart. You can tell me without attacking me. You never need to attack me. I will always listen. Right? You're inviting her to tell you. And you're making it safe for her to tell you instead of correcting her, right? If you're correcting, you're reducing the safety. The

whole point is to increase the safety so that she can unload that emotional backpack that's causing her to act like this. I think you'll see a big difference when she does that.

Question 43:

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:19:35](#)

Our next question is from a parent who says, "Our five-year-old has always been very impulsive. He acts before he thinks. For example, he helps himself to something in the pantry despite the rules being that you ask before you take. Time and time again, he gets into the food despite us showing how disappointed we are in repeating the rules of the house. If he sees kids playing with things, he often will walk up and grab something they're playing with as a means of trying to join in. I've seen him in class and he always has to rush to be the first to grab things. If he's told it's important not to touch something, he can't help himself but to touch it. His other trait is to negotiate very strongly."

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:20:12](#)

So it sounds to me like your son thinks he's not going to get what he needs unless he demands it, negotiates it, or grabs it, right? Taking the food is a sign of that also, and I know you're not starving him or keeping him from having the food that he wants. There's more of your note that I didn't read, but that you say that you give him food if he asks for it. So I'm not sure why you go through the whole thing of making him ask for the food if you're going to give it to him anyway, but I do hear that you're giving him the food if he asks, so he has no reason to think he won't get the food, but somehow he still feels that he won't get what he needs unless he grabs it. And that's a sign of something deep.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:20:57](#)

So it's not just about self regulation and impulse control. There's something else there. He is the oldest of three, he's only five years old, so I wonder if while you're tending to the other kids, he has felt like he needs to tend to himself and make sure that his needs get met. So the way to handle that would be to go overboard to meet his

needs, without him having to ask even, and to try whenever possible to give him what he needs explicitly. And when he asks for something, before he even asks, give him something.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:21:36](#)

So you said, for instance, when you say, "We're leaving in five minutes," he'll say, "I want 10 minutes." So the way to handle that is before you announce that you're leaving in five minutes to say, "We're going to have to leave soon. How many minutes do you want?" He'd probably say an hour, right? He won't want to go at all. But what you can say instead is -- you're still in charge -- you can say, "Do you want to leave in five minutes or in 10 minutes?" And he'll say, "10 minutes," and then you've given him what he needs and he didn't even have to fight for it. So I think this negotiating is partly because he feels he has to fight for things.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:22:14](#)

Now, as far as the impulse control goes, he also has an issue with impulse control, right? When he has to be the first to rush in and grab things in class, when you tell him not to touch something and he has to touch it. Now that's partly because he feels like, again, he has to look after number one, but it partly is impulse control and self regulation. So there are some games that you can do to help him develop impulse control, and it's really about brain rewiring, and you have to make it fun or he won't want to do it, and if he doesn't do it then the brain isn't getting the chance to rewire. So it has to be things like Simon Says and Mother May I, games that he'll actually enjoy doing. Any game that gives him practice self-regulating is going to be helpful for a kid like him.

Question 44:

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:23:02](#)

A parent asks, "My four year old can be very difficult to handle. Lately she's having more often and stronger meltdowns. For instance, getting her into the bathtub is a challenge. When she's finally there, she doesn't want to get soap on her either by soaping herself or having me soap her. When I tried to soap her, she started throwing water at me, hitting and screaming at the top of her lungs."

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:23:26](#)

So I think we have two issues here. One issue is about the soap. Sounds like she doesn't want to get into the bathtub because she doesn't want to get soap on her, and she doesn't want you to soap her, and she doesn't want to soap herself. Now, soap is actually bad for kids' skin in general, so you might want to soap her bottom to get germs off her, but in general the water is going to get her clean enough. Maybe she has knees that are very dirty from kneeling in the mud outside, and then a washcloth will do it mostly without soap, and she can have the choice to scrub herself, right? So I don't know why you would make a fetish about soap, to tell you the truth, but if you do need to, there are plenty of soaps that she might love, like soap that comes on a string. Soap that she makes herself. There are plenty of simple recipes to make soap that she could make herself. There is soap that is different colors or has different scents.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:24:26](#)

So I think you can solve the soap problem if that's important to you. I don't think that has to be a big deal. I think there's a much bigger question here, which is that your daughter is having stronger meltdowns. You said "lately." I'm assuming that means since you've started the course three months ago, and if that's the case then she really needs to cry to work through whatever is going on with her. So if she's being provocative with you and belligerent with you, then I would just get through the incident, like the bath that you need to give her, as quickly as possible. But then I would set up some time for a scheduled meltdown, and that means a time when you can really attend to her and help her to feel safe enough to work through her feelings. And of course, before you do that, you'll need to be really getting her laughing a lot so that she's ready to actually be able to cry with you, right?

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:25:25](#)

So I would use the Peaceful Parenting tools, the special time and the roughhousing, very intensively for a few days or a week. And then on the weekend at some point I would set something up where you say no to her, that you know is going to cause a meltdown, and she has the meltdown and you create safety so she can cry, and you say, "I know. This isn't what you wanted. You wish I would say yes to that," or whatever. And she gets a chance to work it through, and makes a breakthrough that allows her

to then be more affectionate, cooperative and happy after she's had a chance to cry, because that's the reason she's having these stronger meltdowns, is she really needs a chance to cry.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:26:12](#)

I would not, however, do a scheduled meltdown in the bathtub. It's too dangerous. Kids can hit their heads. So I would set this up to happen at some time that is not related to the bathtub, and the next time that you do have her in the bathtub and she doesn't want you to get soap on her, and you start to try to do it anyway, I don't think empathy is going to help you. I think even once she has her backpack emptied, if she has a thing about soap, it's like kids who have a thing about sunscreen.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:26:41](#)

I would not just start soaping a child against their will. I would presume that they can take a washcloth and scrub their knees, and that you can say to her, "Okay, you'll need to scrub your bottom with this washcloth, and then we'll wash the washcloth because we're not using soap." And you count on water to do the job or bubble bath to do the job. I'm not a huge fan of bubble bath for little girls because often it irritates the urogenital area, and if your daughter has that reaction, then you're not going to want to use bubble bath, but otherwise you can find that you won't need to soap her at all. Just use a little bubble bath.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:27:17](#)

So I guess I'm saying that it's not a great idea to start soaping a child when they're resistant to it. Soap is not an essential thing. Sunscreen, more so. But even with sunscreen, you can usually use something like a stick sunscreen instead of goop, because nobody, most people don't like the feel of goop on them, and the stick, the child has control of themselves. So I just don't think that empathy saves you when you do trespass on a child's bodily integrity. I guess that's what I'm trying to say.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:27:52](#)

There will be times for safety reasons or even for other reasons where you need to pick a child up and take them somewhere, move them. But in general, I don't think soap is something that I would push the limit on trespassing on your child's body that way. And there is an article on my website about kids who are afraid of shampoos, having their hair washed. You don't mention that as an issue, but

if it is an issue, I would read that, and you might find, you want to read it anyway because your child has something going on about soap, and it may be that the tips about shampoo will also help you to work through whatever your daughter has going on with soap.

Question 45:

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:28:36](#)

Our next question is from a parent who says, "Our four and a half year old son is bright, kind, energetic, loves making new friends when he plays in an unstructured environment at the playground. He's outgoing and friendly, but he doesn't like structured activities like soccer, swimming, or yoga. He'll sometimes attend willingly and be a quiet observer, but other times there are multiple tantrums prior to leaving for the activity that continue when we arrive. We try not to force the expectation of participation, but enforce the limit that he attends even if he doesn't participate. We also try to help him label the emotion."

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:29:12](#)

So that's great, you try to help him label the emotion. But I have to tell you, so far I'm thinking this is a kid who does fine with his peers. That's great. There's something about participating in structured activities, where they regulate his behavior, like soccer, or swimming, or yoga. There's a teacher in charge. If he doesn't have a relationship with that teacher, then he might well be not happy about giving himself under that person's control.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:29:41](#)

So I'm wondering, "Well, why does he have to go to yoga? Why does he have to go to soccer?" I do understand that swimming many parents feel is non-negotiable because it's a safety thing that kids should know how to swim, and I'm in agreement with that actually, but I think parents can teach their child to swim if the child resists swim class. And that's often what I recommend, actually, because swim class, a lot of teachers don't deal well with kids' fears and they just want the kid to get in the water and shut up when the child is quite frightened. So far I'm wondering, well, why do you need to force him to participate in any

kind of class at this point? There's no reason for that, and it's making him anxious quite clearly. The tantrums come from anxiety.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:30:28](#)

And then she gives an example. "He just recently went to a preschool concert. For weeks beforehand, he announced that he didn't want to go." So he clearly knows what these things entail and knows they make him anxious. So when he's announcing he doesn't want to go, your job is to get him laughing about it. There's actually a letter on my website, a child was invited to participate, to give a speech before the school. A child of this age. I recommended that the parents get him laughing about the performance, because he was resisting this performance, and the child worked through it beautifully and was happy to go and perform. So it may be that the preschool is doing this concert and they're expecting all children to participate and he doesn't want to, and you could get him laughing about it and also do puppet shows about it.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:31:23](#)

As you're doing the puppet show, ask him ... He's in the audience of your puppet show, right? Like an audience of one. And you could ask him, "What should the child do?" After the child has articulated that he doesn't want to go to the concert and the preschool is saying, "But everybody's going to be in the concert." You could then break the third wall and speak directly to the audience member and use your child's name. His name is Henry, let's say. "Oh my goodness, Henry, what should the little porcupine do? He doesn't want to be in the concert, he says, but they say everyone's going to be in it." Right?

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:32:01](#)

And another thing you can do is actually act out the concert, but in a way that is silly, where everything goes wrong and it's very funny, not tragic, but funny, and everybody laughs. You, your son, everybody there, the little baby porcupine, whatever. So this should help him in the future with anything like this that he does have to do.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:32:23](#)

I'm just going to finish your question here, though. You're saying that you spent extra time connecting with him that morning of the concert, that's great! But that he was having a tantrum before the concert, and you finally made it and he just sobbed in your arms the whole time and

wasn't willing to participate. And I'm glad you didn't make him participate. He sobbed in your arms because he felt like this was just too scary. If you can empower him to participate, even to stand on the stage with the other kids without singing, great. But he might not be able to get up on the stage, right? This is a kid who can't even be in a yoga class. He's unlikely to be able to get up on a stage if that's what this concert entailed.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:33:04](#)

So the final part of your question is, should you keep encouraging him to participate? I think you should absolutely encourage him, but that doesn't mean force. And I do think it's great you go to the concert, but again, I think what you tell him is, "It's your choice. If you don't want to participate, you don't have to." I think you tell him that, "But I know you're brave." And then you tell him examples of when he was brave on the playground and made a new friend, or when he was brave and hung upside down on the playground, or climbed to the top of the play structure, and say, "This is about courage too. This is about being brave. And sometimes we're scared of things, and that's okay. We can try something new, and you're getting braver every day."

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:33:47](#)

So you're helping him overcome his fear, right? By talking about courage, and that this is something he can develop, courage, and that everybody gets scared sometimes, right? But everybody has the opportunity to develop courage and that makes them braver. So we don't know why he's fixated on this particular thing. And it doesn't sound like it's just about performance. It's also being in a class. But I would back off on some classes. I wouldn't have him be in a lot of them, but I would do some structured activity that he likes and wants to do. I would not enroll him in yoga if he doesn't want to do a yoga class, right? I would enroll him only in something that he's excited about, and preferably something without much control, without much regimentation. So for instance, something where he can run around, not something that he has to do exactly what the teacher says, like swimming, right?

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:34:45](#)

And then I would do puppet shows about it. I would talk about it as a bravery thing, that he's becoming braver every day and developing the courage for these things,

and I would do courage challenges at home. So for instance, maybe over the summer, each person in your family does a courage challenge. Maybe the little sibling is scared to get their hair washed in the tub. Maybe you can say you're worried about speaking in public or giving a talk at your office, let's say. Or you're scared to try a new recipe because you're afraid it won't work out well, or you're afraid to try this new vegetable, kohlrabi, which you've heard of and seen but never tried, or you want to do a hike, but you're afraid you'll get out of breath, but you're going to try it anyway. Whatever. Learn a new skill. Try rollerblading.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:35:37](#)

Everyone in your family takes a new challenge that they're going to try this summer or this month, and make sure your son's is very doable. It should be going to a class that he wants to participate in, for instance, not something where he has to stand on stage if that's something that's very upsetting to him. So have him make a list. Talk at the table even before you do decide on what your courage challenge will be, each of you. Talk about courage at the table for a few dinner times, and you're not lecturing, remember. You're in this with him. You're all talking about how everyone has things they're scared of and everyone can develop courage. And maybe you list, each one of you, three things that scare you, or five things that scare you, and you decide to tackle one of those things, each one of you, right?

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:36:31](#)

And that way he can pick the least scary thing to tackle, and then for his next challenge, and you don't have to mention this now, it can be later, he'll pick something a little scarier, and then you make sure to talk about each person's challenge every day, or week, or whatever, and you also make sure to get everyone in the family laughing about these things that are scary. You don't want dinnertime to become scary because you're talking about scary things. You want it to become a time of empowerment where you're developing the courage to tackle scary things, because that's something we all need to do.

Question 46:

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:37:11](#)

The next question is from a parent who says, "My five year old has meltdowns every day. He's strong-willed and stubborn. I'm very empathetic toward him because I see so much of the kid version of myself in his behavior, but a few times a week I reach my limit and yell at him. That scares him. He cries, I hold him, I tell him it's okay to cry and be upset, and of course I move forward getting him dressed or whatever needs to be done. I don't have that long with my kids because I have to work, so it's just a little time in the morning and in the evening, and my husband only sees the boys for about 10 minutes in the morning and a half an hour at night during bedtime. We do spend more time with the kids on weekends, but given that limited time in order to connect with my five-year-old, I decided to extend the bedtime routine, so we lie in bed together and chat every night. We both love it, but he goes to sleep a bit later than I prefer, but I'm giving and giving of my patience and love and it still never seems like enough."

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:38:05](#)

I hear how hard you're working to be understanding with your son, and I'm going to say something that I think is going to be hard to hear. He's having meltdowns every day. He's a high needs, challenging kid. I'm hoping that this course is having some impact on his behavior, but you're already a patient and understanding mom, and you did read my book a year ago and you changed your behavior at that point, so I don't think you're creating the problem here. I think your son would be difficult for any parent to manage without exploding, but clearly this situation is wearing on you, and you're losing it, and you're exploding at him a few times a week, and that's a lot. So you're demonstrating by your behavior that this (yelling) is the right way to handle upsetting situations.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:38:56](#)

So I'm not blaming you. You're obviously a wonderful mom who's working really hard, both in and outside the home, and your son is very challenging, and you also have a two year old, and the only time off from your job every day, you're spending it with your kids, so you don't get a lot of chance to recharge your batteries. But this is not a sustainable situation. Something does have to give. It's certainly not good for your son to get exploded at, and it's certainly not good for you. You're exhausted, you feel

terrible about yourself as a mother, and I can't imagine it's good for your two year old who witnesses all this and probably has a hard time getting his own needs met.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:39:31](#)

So what's the solution here? Well, one obvious solution is to change your life by quitting your job. I hear you saying that it's not possible, and I understand that it might not be possible, but I do need to tell you that it's a risk factor for your son, this current situation with you exploding at him. He's not an ordinary kid. He needs more than most children do, and I worry about what will happen as he gets older, and I don't think the solution is for you just to try harder. I hear you're really trying hard.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:40:05](#)

We have to find a way to replenish you, which is really what you asked in your question, so I'm going to suggest, since it doesn't seem like you can simply quit your job or wave a magic wand and change anything else in your life, and because, guess what, you're not able to wave a magic wand and change your son either, although he will get easier as he gets older. With this kind of parenting, it'll make him easier. But given that, I'm going to suggest the change is really going to have to come from inside you, and the way to get that change is with a coach or a counselor who can hold your hand, walk you through it, help you develop the habits of talking to yourself in a certain way, doing self care, finding ways to replenish yourself.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:40:50](#)

So I would make some parenting coaching a priority, and I would make anything that refills your own cup a priority. And I would also remind yourself when you deal with your son that he is trying as hard as he can, and the way he's going to change is by you showing up for him and being the kind of mom that you're being at your best moments. Your job is to find ways to be that mom more and more often, and that might seem like a stretch right now, but you don't have to be perfect. Just work on your ratio of more and more good moments and give yourself more support so that you can do that.

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

Remember, it's always a matter of support. With children, it doesn't help to punish them if they don't have the capacity. Our goal is to give them more support so they

can do better, and that's what you're knocking yourself out to do with your son. And of course the same thing is true for you. You need to give yourself support so that you can do better. That's the only way any of us can improve our ratio of good moments, to be the parents we want to be. So please don't wait. Please take the first step and get yourself the support of a good coach.

Question 47:

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:42:07](#)

Our next question is from a parent who says, "Our youngest has epic meltdowns, but when we try to say anything or even look at her, she screams, 'No!' repeatedly and will cry, scream and kick for almost an hour. Afterward, she might want to talk. Sometimes she still won't want to. Her backpack is always full, and talking about feelings makes her upset."

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:42:29](#)

So this sounds grueling. I'm sorry. That's a very long meltdown, almost an hour. And when I see this happening, it's usually a new thing, meaning the child has not felt safe until now to show you her emotions. It sounds like you are doing a great job of being more connected, as you say, empathizing, spending one on one time with her, so she feels safe to let those feelings come up to be healed. So this is not a permanent situation, which I know you'll be glad to hear, but as you say, she has a full backpack and she needs to cry. If she's highly sensitive, she may continue to have meltdowns on a regular basis, but they'll diminish in length and frequency as she offloads. And most important, in between, you should be seeing a more relaxed, cooperative, happier child.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:43:15](#)

So the fact that she's getting a chance to offload the emotions is what allows her to, in between, be happy and cooperative. And if during these meltdowns, these epic meltdowns, she's sobbing, then she is emptying her emotional backpack. It's usual for children to start off with anger because they're trying to defend against those tears surfacing, but if she's mostly stuck in anger and screaming during the meltdowns, then she needs some help to move beyond the anger and into more safety.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:43:45](#) So here are four ways to help her get past the anger. I would say the first is what you do before the meltdown. As she first gets upset, empathize. Rage only begins to dissipate once it feels heard. So if you can say to her, "Oh, Sweetheart, no wonder you're mad. This isn't what you wanted to happen." She'll tell you and give you an earful about what she didn't want to happen and how you're wrong about things, and that's great. That often holds off the meltdown before it begins because she's able to articulate what she's upset about.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:44:17](#) During the meltdown, your goal is to create safety, so don't say much. Certainly don't try to talk to her about her feelings. I would say don't even look at her. That clearly makes her feel less safe. Stay nearby, so when she looks, you're there looking compassionate, but don't stare at her. You might just say every 10 minutes, "Oh, Sweetie, I'm sorry this is so hard. You're safe. I'm right here with a hug when you're ready." But you know, even that might be too much if she screams, "Stop talking!"

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:44:45](#) After the meltdown, you say she sometimes will want to talk, but sometimes talking about feelings makes her upset. Most parents think that after a meltdown, they need to lecture their child that her behavior was unacceptable, but your child already knows that. She was so dysregulated she felt that that behavior was essential to protect herself. So after the meltdown, what parents need to do is to reestablish connection. So you give her a hug as soon as she'll let you, you empathize, you acknowledge, "That was so hard, huh? You really didn't like it when I said no. I understand, Sweetie. You were so mad at me. You did some hard work, all that crying." Notice you're not asking her to say anything. You just say, "I was right there. I'm glad you were safe. And now we're hugging and I'm so glad you feel better." Notice we didn't say she did anything wrong. We just removed all the shame and blame. There's no need for a judgment here. Shame and blame never help anything, and children take them for the rest of their lives and carry them, and that's totally unnecessary.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:45:50](#) So if you could respond that way after her meltdown, you notice you're not asking her to talk, you're not asking her to do anything. You're just acknowledging that that was

hard for her, because it was, and the next time she's going to feel more trusting, less defensive, and that means a lot less anger and more tears, so she's going to get through the meltdown a lot faster. It won't be so epic.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:46:13](#)

And my final tip to reduce the anger that kids express during meltdowns is to get them laughing as often as you can throughout the day. That empties the top layer of fear in the emotional backpack so the child is less tightly wound and they're more pleasant to be around in general when you do that. And then when they do cry, they're less likely to get stuck in anger. They can go to what's under it, the tears and fears under it.

Question 48:

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:46:40](#)

A parent says she's having a similar issue with her five year old who has epic meltdowns, and she says, "We struggle to reconnect with her when she's totally lost it. In that state, she won't let us say anything without her interrupting, telling us to shut up, or running away. She's willfully mean and aggressive. Is it okay to leave her alone for a bit to cool down? Should I stay for a while nearby and do nothing?"

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

It's hard to know, isn't it, exactly what to do when your child is having an epic meltdown? I know it's upsetting. Please listen first, to the answer I just gave to the last parent about his five-year-old. That should help. And I want to add when a child has totally lost it, they're in a state of emergency. Fight or flight takes over. They cannot think. So yes, they will be willfully mean and aggressive, but they do that to keep themselves safe. They're not thinking clearly. Our job at that point is to create safety, as I just described, and you asked if you should do nothing. The answer is yes. Just stay compassionate and available.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:47:39](#)

As far as leaving to let her calm down, well, I would have a conversation with her at some point when she's not upset, and I would ask her what would help her when she's going through this. Would it help her if you left and went outside

her door and you were available? I think the important thing is you're not leaving to go do the dishes. You're available to her when she's ready to come and get a hug and hopefully cry some of those tears out.

Question 49:

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:48:09](#)

Another parent asks, "Is there ever a point where you think it's more harmful than helpful to continue trying to connect and empathize during a child's strong reaction? In our case, very whiny, helpless behavior from our six and a half year old daughter, who at other times is quite competent. It's a struggle not to feel like we're enabling this helplessness if we continue to engage after a certain point." Well, I guess I would say that even competent people sometimes feel helpless. Remember, your daughter's only six. While she can be very competent when she's in a state of wellbeing, she may well fall apart when she feels overwhelmed. That's true for us even as adults. We just have different breaking points. So yes, you can tell her you know she can handle that feeling and overcome it, that helplessness. But during that moment, you definitely don't want to push the overcoming part. That's our own anxiety that makes us do that, but it really doesn't help. It just makes the child ashamed of feeling helpless, and when that happens, the child stuffs those emotions again, so then they're not under conscious control, so then they burst out again.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:49:16](#)

I think what would help in this situation is for you to notice your own reaction to your daughter's whiny helplessness. And it's normal to have a reaction. I'm not judging you for having that reaction. We all have a reaction when our child is whiny. So just notice it, breathe through those feelings, reassure yourself she just needs help with her sense of overwhelm and that's going to help her develop more internal resources to cope when things get stressful. If you can give yourself that reassurance, I think you'll find that your attitude is different, and then you can do your job with her when she's like this. Your job is to be her reassuring backup so she knows she doesn't have to cope alone, and that's what's going to help her brain feel less overwhelmed. That's what's going to help her go ahead

and pull herself back together and develop better coping skills.

Question 50:

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:50:14](#)

A parent asks, "What's the best way to empathize or deal with meltdowns when there is a physical health or well-being issue? For example, our daughter gets chronic constipation, and her threshold for tantrums decreases greatly when she's struggling with it, or when the kids are sick and clingy." So yes, it is so hard when kids are physically suffering, because they are much more likely to fall apart. There's really not a big difference in how you handle the meltdown. You're still empathizing regardless of what caused it. You're trying to see their perspective, and of course if there's a physical problem, you're trying to alleviate it, and if they're just sick and clingy, of course you're trying to soothe them, and, "Oh, Sweetheart, you feel so bad. I'm so sorry you feel so bad." I want to specifically say about constipation, I've seen many children whose moods have improved dramatically when their constipation was solved. So my go to resource for constipation is Dr. Steve Hodges. He's the author of *The M.O.P Book*, which works with you to eliminate constipation. He has a Facebook page, I'm pretty sure. Might be a private group also, and he does consultations. I've sent a lot of clients to him and they've all said he was great.

Question 51:

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:51:34](#)

A parent asks about her five year old who has tantrums in front of other people like at the market or in front of family. "When I start empathy, she increases her voice until I leave her and shouts, making everyone annoyed."

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:51:47](#)

So this is the hardest thing, right? Responding in public when your child is upset. We assume other people are watching. Our own shame kicks in. Our anxiety builds. We hiss threats at our child. They get worse. Or maybe you're working hard to empathize with your kid, and your kid gets more upset -- which makes sense, right? Empathy puts

your child more in touch with their emotions. They don't want to feel those emotions so they try to push you away. So I would say don't empathize in front of other people. In other words, don't talk about the emotion your child is feeling. Simply describe the situation. "You really wanted ice cream. I hear you. You're pretty disappointed, sweetheart. No ice cream today. I'm sorry." And then you take your kid out of the situation.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:52:36](#)

I want to add that there's a long description in the *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids Workbook* about how you can handle it when your child's in public. And one of the things I say is that most of us, when we're in the market and our child starts to lose it, we speed up to try to get them out of there faster, or we hiss threats at them. I would say instead, slow down, take a deep breath, reconnect with your child. And often that's enough to sort of calm them from having their big blowup.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:53:10](#)

But you know what? If they still end up in the breakdown lane, it just means you need to do more preventive maintenance. Your kid is going to have a tantrum in the market or at grandma's house or whatever -- I just encourage you to stop, drop and breathe, to try to stay connected and be warm, and just any onlookers, whether it's grandma or whether it's somebody in the grocery store, just say, "She'll be okay. We just need a little time alone." And if you can, move your child to a more private place so that you don't have to parent in public, feeling like everybody is judging you. And use a little mantra, like, "She's acting like a child because she is a child. She just needs a good cry." And if somebody like Grandma, is saying something to you, you can just say, "Everybody has bad days sometimes." Nobody can disagree with that.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:54:09](#)

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

