

Helping Kids with Anger and Aggression Ages 7 and Older 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 helping children with anger and aggression. We'll be focusing on ages seven right into the pre-teen years. 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: 00:00:45 Hi. What's your question?

Parent: Hi. I have a seven year old boy who is sandwiched in between two girls. He's our most sensitive child. He's very creative and energetic, and can be competitive. When he is disappointed or upset, he is really, really difficult to calm down. At bedtime, he has tons of energy. We have a really hard time soothing him when he's in the heat of his anger. It's gotten better since doing this course, but it's not 100%. I've definitely seen more tears than anger more recently. I guess that's maybe a good thing.

Dr. Laura Markham: Wait. It's a really good thing. You do not need anger from any child as a defense. As they get older, it becomes harder to manage. So the great news is -- I know people think that they don't want their child to become a sobbing mess -- But the truth is...

Parent: I want to see his heart. I want to see what's going on.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Yeah, this is his heart showing. I think in particular, I think this is true for boys **and** girls. But I think for boys in this culture, we lay on such a heavy burden of, "You have to stay defended. You can't ever feel what's in your heart because you can't be vulnerable on that level. You have to be tough." I think it makes boys violent. So I think if we can give boys the safety to feel their own hearts and express it to us, I think that's a gift to them and a gift to the world. But go ahead, you had a specific thing. You said, "He cries more, but he's still hard to manage?"

Parent:

Yeah. He gets really angry when something doesn't work out for him. He'll threaten to run away. He never does obviously. He has thrown punches. I've used all of the language, which I think is helping, to tell him that I'm always here for him and that I love him even if he's angry. But he'll say really fierce language. He is seven so I know he's at the end of early childhood. Do you have any specific tools for in the heat of those moments? Because he won't take a hug. When he's really angry, he won't take a hug or touch. He just wants to be alone. It's when he finally does break down and cry that I'm thrilled because then I can access him. But before that, he's just inaccessible.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Right. I want to say two things. When you're in that place where it's all falling apart, and he's angry, you're in the breakdown lane. It's sort of like when your car breaks down and you're in the breakdown lane. There's only so much you can do. I will tell you what to do in a second but just remember, it's mostly prevention. One of the preventions that you do is you get them laughing more, especially for these really sensitive kids. All kids. Getting them laughing more means that they're less likely to go into anger and more likely to go into tears because they're not as rigidly held together because the laughter has sort of siphoned off the top layer of tension that they're carrying around.

Dr. Laura Markham: Tension, anxiety, fear, it's all the same thing. We all carry some of it. Those of us who carry a lot, who've been stuffing it in our backpack a lot, it makes us more tense. So we're more likely to have a short fuse and to get angry more easily. Whereas if there's more laughter, there's more likelihood that he can shift more easily into tears. So that's the first thing, is do your preventive maintenance.

Dr. Laura Markham: Middle children, the research shows they are the ones who are the least close to the parents. They never got the parents all to themselves the way the first child did and they're not the baby. The baby sort of gets some special role in the family and some special dispensation. It can be disempowering to be the baby. They have their own challenges. Honestly, being the oldest, they get more of the parents' neuroses because they really try to please the parents and be what the parents want them to be. But the middle child can't have either of those roles. They're taken.

Dr. Laura Markham: So classically, they're the ones who threaten to run away from home. Classically, they're the ones who are less connected. There is an article on middle children on the ahaparenting.com website, which I encourage you to read. Now, luckily, he's the only boy. Luckily, you don't have an older boy. That is actually a big plus. But he still has a harder place in the family.

Dr. Laura Markham: But using all the tools as you're saying, they do work. But in that moment when he's so angry, and he's threatening to run away and he's ready to punch something, all you really have is understanding. But remember, rage doesn't begin to dissipate until it feels heard. So if he knows you're listening, if he knows you hear, if he knows you see it from his point of view, he doesn't have to escalate. Kids who punch the wall, they're doing it to show you, not just because they can't control themselves. That's true too. But it's that they are trying to show you how unfair everything is. How upset they are, whatever. So if you can say to him, "Oh, Sweetie, I see why you're so upset about this." He'll

be like, "You do? You do? Are you sure?" Then he'll tell you more things he's upset about. But at least he's engaged with you. He's not threatening to run away, and he's not punching the wall or anybody else. Right? So I think really feeling heard is your main tool.

Parent: Okay. So to do that, it's more time with just him?

Dr. Laura Markham: What he does need is time with just him. That is certainly something he needs.

Parent: Yeah. We feel like we give him more time than any of the other kids because he is so demanding.

Dr. Laura Markham: Right. That is a hard thing. I think everybody listening can relate to that, that many people have one child who is more difficult, who takes more. I think it's really hard because you want to make sure your other kids don't feel that just because they're good, they are getting overlooked. Right? I do think he needs one-on-one time. But I think really what he needs is the sense that you see it from his point of view, you know how hard it is to be him and to be in his shoes. You don't have to agree with him when he says, "Oh, the girls get everything." But you can say, "It seems unfair to you, right? It seems like because I went and got manicures with the girls that you didn't get something special." Whatever it is that he feels jealous of. You don't have to agree with him. But you can say, "Yeah, that doesn't seem fair to you. I hear you, Sweetie." Also, every child needs to hear this from every parent often, "I love you so much. I could never love anyone more than I love you."

Parent: Thank you.

Dr. Laura Markham: You're welcome.

Question 2:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:08:07 A parent is asking, "When my kids, age seven, get angry and then physical with me, do I just walk away or do I hold them until they break down and cry?" Well, I don't think those are your only two options. I think you acknowledge their anger in a way that helps them feel understood, and you do that before they get physical. It's okay to use the word "anger", but mostly you're not going to do that. You're going to use the word "upset" and speak to the sadness that's driving the anger. So, "Oh, you're so upset about this. Oh, my goodness. This isn't what you wanted. I see. You really wanted to finish this before dinner. No wonder you're so disappointed, Sweetheart."

Dr. Laura Markham: So, you mention that they get so upset that they're throwing things on the floor? Yes, don't ask them to pick those things up at that time. It's sort of like rudeness, they're showing you how furious they are and that behavior is going to diminish as they feel heard and understood. So, absolutely later, you want to connect and snuggle, and make a repair, which includes them picking up anything they threw on the floor.

Dr. Laura Markham: But I would also discuss the throwing with a sense of humor. How did it feel when they threw that on the floor? Would they do it again? Did they stop to evaluate whether what they threw was breakable, or were they just super mad? How will they pay for something if it breaks when they throw it? And, yes, your child should pay for something that breaks when they throw it. Even a young child should contribute to that. That's part of repair.

Question 3:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:09:33 This question is from a parent who has a 10-year-old who's hitting her and the seven-year-old sister. "We're trying to empathize and connect, but he seems to consciously push

us away. He won't let me do special time, for instance. If I empathize, he sees it as patronizing." Since he's 10 and pushing you away so actively, I think you need to start with a parenting coach. You may even need to go to a therapist, like a family therapist with him. But I would start by writing to Administrator@AhaParenting.com and get a recommendation for a parenting coach, because he's already 10 and he's actively pushing you away and not letting you empathize. That's a pretty big chip on his shoulder. I don't want him to get to be 12 and still have this going on, so let's get it solved now.

Question 4:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:10:14

A parent says, "My 10-year-old is angry and aggressive. Her seven-year-old sister had developmental trauma. We worked with her a lot. Now that she is more stable, the older child is hurt and her lonely feelings are coming out. How can I help her diffuse her big anger? It seems harder with an older kid." You're so right. It is absolutely harder with an older kid. The good news is they don't always have to cry to resolve things. They can put it into words and understand things conceptually. But the bad news is that they have a chip on their shoulder. That's their defense against the pain they're carrying around and they don't want to feel the pain. So they stay angry. The best defense is a good offense.

To help her diffuse the anger, you have to help her feel the pain. I would begin by talking with her about how hard this time period has been, and how unfair it was to her.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Don't make her sister the bad guy. It was really unfair to her. It was such a bad situation. Apologize to her that you weren't there for her, that she's had to come in second. Tell her it breaks your heart, you know it broke her heart. If you really feel this while you say this to her, you're going

to be crying and she's more likely to shift to tears also. She might start off attacking but if you can just stay with the pain and acknowledge how upset she is and how much it must have hurt her. In other words, don't focus on the anger. Focus on the loneliness, the sadness, the fear. She will eventually be able to get in touch with those more vulnerable feelings. As she articulates them or cries about them, they're going to begin to vanish. What you'll see is that the anger will melt away too because it's just a defense against those feelings. Once they (the angry feelings) are not there, the defense is not needed.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If your daughter refuses to talk, try using artwork. Say, "Let's do pictures about the terrible year," or whatever you want to call it. The terrible months. You might draw a heart breaking and tell her about it and using the same kind of discussion we just had. Let her draw whatever she wants and tell you about it. Then, of course, the final piece of this is it's not one conversation. It's many conversations. Don't expect that in just one conversation, you're going to get through it.

Question 5:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:12:23

A parent asks, "My older daughter, almost 11, still becomes aggressive toward us and her sister. How do we find a therapist who follows peaceful parenting?" First, peaceful parenting will help enormously with even a kid with borderline anxiety, ADD, and depression, which you're saying your daughter was diagnosed with. It helps because **you** change. You can self-regulate better, so you don't escalate the dramas that she creates. You can connect with her more, you can strengthen your relationship. She'll feel safer. She'll feel valued. She'll want to cooperate more with you. That would be enough if she were only three years old, maybe, because it's so easy to get a three year old laughing and crying. Her brain would change and her behavior would change. With an 11-year-old, which you have, her brain has shaped itself based on a

previous environment. She almost certainly has a chip on her shoulder that will be more challenging for you to melt away.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You're telling me that she's struggling and aggressive. I would say you need a family therapist who can meet with you and with her at the same time to strengthen your relationship with each other, and help you communicate and help her unload that full backpack towards you, or that chip on her shoulder. So you can work that out. The goal is to teach her to tell you and her sister what she needs without attacking you. The goal is to help the three of you become a team working together to notice emotions and learn tools to regulate the emotions. Of course, you're already doing that with peaceful parenting. I understand. But you need to be in this process of learning with her. So she feels that you are her partner in learning to do this together. So she doesn't feel any more broken than she already is. You never want a child to feel like they're being sent to a therapist to get fixed.

Dr. Laura Markham:

As far as finding a therapist who understands peaceful parenting, that is challenging. I think you need to spend 10 minutes on the phone interviewing the therapist, and asking them questions about their philosophy. There's an article on the Aha! Parenting website called Finding A Therapist. Take a look at that, and it'll give you some good questions that you can ask the therapist.

Question 6:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:14:26

A parent says, "I have issues with my eight year old who hits, kicks, scratches. When he's upset, can even kick or punch the wall. His aggression is directed toward me. There's a reason for that, because I have my own tantrums. How can I best handle his aggressive behavior while letting him work through his anger at me?" First of

all, I want to thank you for your courage in saying, "I know it's because of me." For so many parents, it's hard to admit that, but we model for them. They learn from us. If he had a dad who was getting angry and having tantrums when he was growing up, when he was little, then naturally, he's going to have a reaction where he just feels like he's scared. He's got all that fear locked up and fighting for years now, and he doesn't know what to do with it. So when he gets angry at you, it comes roaring out. So I really appreciate you acknowledging that.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I want to give you a challenge. I want you to stop having your own parental tantrums. Talk to your son and tell him you're going to learn to manage them, even when you're very angry. Because if you want him to learn to manage his, there's no choice. You have to model first. You have to be able to control yourself. And then just do it. Model it until he sees you. It's good for him to see you start to lose control and then regain control. You don't have to be perfect. I know this is going to be really difficult. But it's not something you can put off any longer. Your son's already eight, he needs you to do this for him. Otherwise, there's no way for him not to have his tantrums and maybe even become more aggressive. That's the first thing. If you need help stopping your own parental tantrums, please reach out to a parenting coach or some other counselor and work on your anger management. I really believe it's possible for you to do this. You wouldn't have done it just for you, but do it for your son.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then secondly, use your words to help your son. When he's upset, talk to him about what he's upset about, so he feels understood and he doesn't need to escalate to show you. If you can say, "Wow, no wonder you're upset," that will eliminate a lot of his physical acting out, even though for now, he will still need to express his anger probably loudly and verbally. Third, when he's not angry, talk to him about better ways to handle his anger besides lashing out at other people. So it's a mad hug when you clap your arms around your body that I've talked about earlier in the

course. That's also on the website, and it's also in *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids*. It's also in the workbook. *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids* workbook, the hugs that you give yourself to stop yourself. But you could demonstrate to him. You could make it a project for both of you to do.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Help him make himself a list of things he can do when he gets angry, and agree that you'll both use that list if you get angry. Then you model using that list. Then finally, help him empty that emotional backpack. All that fear doesn't need to come spilling out as aggression. That again is laughter and tears.

Question 7:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:17:40

A parent says, "How can I deal with my seven-year-old who gets angry and kicks and punches her sister and me even though other times she's mostly lovely?" First, find a chill spot for your younger daughter to go to so she doesn't have to be part of the drama, and she's not at risk of being hurt. Get her headphones. Get her a story she can turn on, if she's old enough to do that, right? I don't see how old she is. I'm hoping she's old enough that she can do this. Listen to a story on headphones, and she can set that up for herself. Second, when your daughter falls apart, you're already in the breakdown lane. So look back later at each point where you could have intervened to empathize, and help keep her from building into this rage. Then once she is in fight or attack mode, you can teach her to use the mad hug, but you're going to have to do it in advance, that's the problem.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Have a discussion with her at some point when she's not angry about what she needs to do when she starts forgetting what would she need from you and what would help her at that point? Be really clear. Even if you're completely right to be really mad, it's never okay to hit. Right? Shake on it. What can you do instead? The mad hug. Okay? Do you need a reminder code? What kind of

reminder code would help? How about something that makes her laugh? But then in the moment when she's escalating, get your other daughter to the chill corner, and then give all your attention to your angry seven-year-old. Use the reminder code that you've agreed on. Tell her you want to hear what she's so mad about and you know she can use her words. If she really feels sorry, she's not going to escalate. If she does, and she's already seven, I'm going to suggest you get some parenting coaching just to help you with this because she's old enough. She shouldn't be lashing out and punching you or her little sister.

Question 8:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:19:31 This parent's question is, "My seven-year-old seems to be getting angrier and angrier. Nothing I do including roughhousing, special time, managing my own anger really will help him to cry. How do I get him past his anger so he can heal?"

Dr. Laura Markham: Oh, the million dollar question. I hope you did hear earlier some of the questions that were asked which dealt with this to some degree -- that laughter is important. But let me see how I can answer this better for you. First, I want to say, you're roughhousing, you're doing special time. You're getting better at managing your own anger. You changed the way you praise. You stopped using timeouts. You're doing an amazing job. Congratulations on all your hard work. It's going to pay off. I promise you. Even though your son is still stuck in anger and not able to cry, it's okay. You're doing great and you're taking this in the right direction. You said he's getting angrier now? I'm afraid that this is because he feels safer. All those old emotions are coming up to get healed, but they don't feel good to him. So he gets angry, he lashes out to protect himself. The best defense is a good offense.

Dr. Laura Markham: I know you know this from your question, but just for anyone listening, it's important to remember that anger

doesn't empty the backpack, right? When children get upset and emotions start to come up for them that are in the backpack, those emotions are the tears and fears, the more vulnerable emotions that are in the backpack. So the anger is a **defense** against those emotions. It's the body -- It's the fight, flight, or freeze, the fight response of the body -- saying, "I don't want these emotions to come up." So kids often will start a fight with you rather than being willing to feel the emotions. When kids get stuck in anger, they're trying to **not** go near their backpack. It's not about emptying it. There are three things that can help. The more he laughs, the more it drains off the top layer of fear in the backpack. The laughter is really important so that he can relax more easily and let the tears out more easily.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Another thing that's really helpful is expression of any feeling. When he's not angry, explain to him that you're working hard to be a better parent, but you think in the old days, sometimes he must have felt very sad and alone. That when we feel sad and alone, we carry those feelings with us until we have a chance to show them to someone. They need to be felt. They need to be heard and they need to be felt. Does he want to tell you in words, or would you like to paint a picture of what it felt like? Like a picture of when he felt sad and alone, or maybe he wants to dance it out and show you and dance with you about it. Or maybe, he wants to play music like on a drum. Bang a drum and show you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Any expression of emotion with you as his witness is going to be healing. They may not need to sob to heal if they can talk in words about how they're feeling.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The third thing that's really important is in the moment when your child gets very angry, it is normal for us to feel attacked, if they're verbally or maybe even physically trying to attack us. It's normal for us to get upset, to feel attacked -- of course! I'm going to suggest that you really work on staying calm. That you really work on reminding yourself that he's showing you his pain. He's lashing out

because he's so upset. That rage only dissipates when it feels heard, and that your job is to create safety, and for him to feel heard, so he doesn't have to lash out.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The way you do that is with your compassion. When he gets angry, can you see the pain that he's expressing to you from his perspective? At that moment, his disappointment for some small thing is touching into something old and deep where he feels alone and unloved and not good enough as a human being. You say to him, "Oh, Sweetie, no wonder you're so angry. This isn't what you wanted. You wanted X." If you're really feeling it from his perspective, you're going to have tears in your eyes as you say this. That means he doesn't have to escalate because he's going to see that you're understanding, and he's going to feel safer or willing to feel the tears behind his anger so that he doesn't have to lash out.

Dr. Laura Markham:

When you watch the comments on our Facebook forum, what you'll see is that it can take a long time for an older child to get to the point where they cry like this. Maybe he'll never sob, but he'll begin to sort of tear up and his voice will sort of choke as he says, "Yeah, but then there was the time this happened and you never cared about that. When such and such happened, you didn't care. You didn't do what I needed, and no one ever cared about me." But notice that the tears are in the voice, even if he is not sobbing, he's also not attacking. He's sharing his pain. And your job, again, you're cleaning up the spilled milk that happened from way back when you didn't know how to parent this way. You will see that as you do this, you'll see that in between his upsets, he's so much more loving and connected. You'll see him begin to regulate better and better. You'll see that over time, he has less and less anger because he also has less and less pain.

Question 9:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:25:13 A parent is asking about an eight-year-old who's very competitive and gets into rages when he loses. Directs his anger to his mom and she gets afraid during these rages. Also, other people don't want to play with him because of his poor sportsmanship.

Dr. Laura Markham: Age eight is pretty old to be having these kinds of meltdowns. It's not unusual for an eight-year-old to be very competitive, and to really dislike losing and to have tantrums in the sense of, "I hate it when I lose." And to slam the door to his room and to go and pout. That's not unusual. Directing the rage at mom, that's scary. Also not being able to control it in front of other friends so they don't want to play with him, that's concerning to me. I would say your son is afraid he's not good enough. Losing confirms that feeling. He can't bear that feeling so he lashes out. If this is a frequent thing, then I would tell you not to wait. You want to stop these rages before he gets any older. I'm thinking this is a perfectionist who really needs help, and he might have some anxiety. I would say he certainly at least has fragile self-esteem. I would say find a good child therapist.

Dr. Laura Markham: Don't just take him like you're going to take him to get him fixed. With children, I always say you're going to the therapist to learn how to be a better mom to him, and to learn how you can communicate better with him so that when he gets upset, you will know how to help him. So you're with him at the therapist. I'm not saying the therapist isn't allowed to meet with him without you there. All therapists want to do that at some point in the treatment.

But it **does** mean that you should make sure that your child doesn't see it as him being taken to get fixed. You probably want to pick somebody who has some experience with anxiety just in case that's what's going on

with him because that's what it sounds like to me. There's performance anxiety or some kind of anxiety there. That's a big issue. It could also be a backpack issue. I'm hearing it's just about this one thing about losing, so it's not like just rages in general. Anyway, since he's already eight, I wouldn't wait. I would go get help now.

Question 10:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:27:31

This parent's seven-year-old had a rough life, lots of medical intervention in early life. In fact, the social worker says she shows symptoms of abuse even though it's not from her home life but from the medical situation. They've been able to cut back on her violent episodes. "She's following my advice and working with therapists. She recovers faster from the episodes, but there are still days when things are difficult. Physically restraining her makes it worse. Sometimes as a last resort, we lock her in a room and try to talk her down through the door, which I hate but it works to get sad tears instead of angry tears so then we can go into her."

Dr. Laura Markham:

If that's what you need to do, do it. But the real thing is to help her to cry at that point. How long will she cry when she gets to the sad tears? The other thing is, don't wait. Take your seven-year-old to an EMDR therapist. EMDR. Go to EMDRIA, IA stands for International Association I think. But go to the EMDR website, EMDRIA. Look for somebody in your vicinity who is trained to do and EMDR with children and get her some therapy for her trauma. It's not her fault she had this trauma early in life, but it will only make her life worse if you don't get her treatment right now. It's not enough to just do what you're doing so far, or it would have been working.

Dr. Laura Markham:

It's great that you've gotten to where you've gotten. Talking to her through the door, if that's what you have to do, that's a last resort. Talk to her while she's calm and explain that's what you're doing and ask her what she

wants you to do. But the most important thing, let's meet the real need. Let's get her some EMDR therapy. EMDR by the way is specifically for trauma. That's why I'm recommending it in this case. But it's really good for medical trauma, or any kind of past trauma even when children don't remember it.

Question 11:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:29:20

This parent is asking about a seven-year-old with physical aggression when she's mad. When you say, "I won't let you hit me," and she takes that as a challenge, you can just say, "Ouch, it really hurts. No hitting." You say that when she knows it's hurting you, she wants to do more of it. She's pretty angry at that moment. What you're doing where you hold her by the arms so that she can't hit you is fine if that's what you have to do. If moving back doesn't work to keep yourself safe, then you have to hold her. But I wouldn't do it if you don't have to. If you let her go and she just keeps trying to hurt you, then you do have to say, "Sweetie, I'm just going to hold you. I'm going to keep everybody safe." The interesting thing is from your note, she goes through this angry stage and then she does start to cry. If you just let her go and run away from you, she doesn't ever get to the crying. She stuffs the hurt and it erupts five minutes later.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So you do have to do this, it sounds like, to get her to the point of crying. I'm hoping that if you did more laughter and more special time, she wouldn't need to go through this to cry. She would just cry more easily. That would be great if that were the answer. I just want to say she's already seven. This takes longer with kids who are older, right? The backpack emptying. You need to create more safety to get her to tears more quickly. I guess that would be the case. When you have this time with her alone, the scheduled meltdown, you're not doing roughhousing in the middle of it. You're just helping her to cry by creating

safety. It's not the same as roughhousing and special time. That happens at a different time of day.

Question 12:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:31:03 Your daughter's eight. You're doing great about trying to keep her from wanting to hit you that's working mostly and that's great. Congratulations. But sometimes she still wants to hit you. Your question is, "What do you do? Is that correct?" Okay. I would say that she's eight, or almost eight. She's old enough that you're not going to traumatize her if you take a very firm position about the hitting.

Dr. Laura Markham: First of all, you know. I don't want to spend much time on this because you say you're mostly able to keep her from getting to that place. You're able to do preventive maintenance. But you know rage doesn't dissipate until it feels heard. So the first thing is when she gets really angry, "Oh my goodness, sweetheart, you are so upset about this. Tell me more." Then she doesn't have to escalate. You're taking her anger seriously. Right? Does that all make sense to you?

Parent: It does, but I don't think that would work all the time. But I don't want to interrupt you.

Dr. Laura Markham: Okay. That's fine.

Parent: The reason being if I have to take something away or not let her do something that she wants, that's when she might get angry and hit me. It may be a rule in the house like no more screen time or something like that. "Yes, I know you're upset but I'm not going to give into what you want." So that's why I'm saying I don't know if that would help.

Dr. Laura Markham: It does help to feel understood. Kids don't have to get everything they want. It helps them a lot if they feel

understood. But I hear you that when kids have been immersed in screens and they desperately want that screen, they often are using the screen actually to push down feelings. So they actually get very upset when they lose the screen. Screens are addictive as we know. That's a great example of when kids... Even an eight-year-old might feel like hitting if we take a screen away. It does help to say, "Oh Sweetie, I know. You really want the iPad and no more iPad now. You know that's the rule. No more screens right now."

Then she says, "I hate you. I want a new mom." She comes at you to hit you. I would be very firm about not allowing her to hit you. Put your hands out in front and say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, no hitting. No hitting."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now, people who are taking this course are assuming that you always keep a calm, lovely low voice. I don't think that's true if there's danger. If one kid was hitting the other, you wouldn't allow that to happen. You would say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, no hitting." You would do the same thing if a child is coming to hit you. If you have to, you would hold her. You would grab her wrists that are trying to come to your face and you would say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, I don't want those hitting hands so close to me. No, no hitting. Sweetie, I see you wish you could have your screen. I know it's really hard to stop when you really wanted to watch more. No screens right now and no hitting. Take a breath. You can handle this." What do you think would happen at that moment?

Parent:

She would try kicking me.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Okay.

Parent:

Just when she's in the throes of it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). I hear you.

Parent:

Do I lock myself in my room?

Dr. Laura Markham: No. No, no, no, no, no, no, no. If you do that, you're telling her that you can't handle her emotions and you're also telling her that she can tear your house up, right? If you walk away, do you think she's going to start throwing things at that point? Because she doesn't feel heard at that point. If you go into your room, she feels like you're refusing to engage with her upset. If you need to, you sink down onto the floor, pulling her with you, put her on your lap if you need to. I would really try to avoid holding her because by the time she's eight, unless she has special challenges, probably she is able to control herself. Although screens do bring out the worst in kids. They do.

Dr. Laura Markham: I think when she calms down, I would then have a discussion about it. I know this is not necessarily mostly around screens, but if this happens regularly in response to screen limits, then I would just say, "We're going to change our limits, no screens in our house. Period. I mean, really because if it's that much of an addiction that you have to hit me when I enforce our rules about it, then the rules don't work." I'm not saying that you would do that lightly. Impose that kind of a change in your home environment. But, again, if she can't handle it, then it might be something you would need to do. I guess I would just ask, is this a common occurrence?

Parent: Not too common. No. It's getting less because of the course, so thank you very much. Okay, either I let her hit me, I retreat, or I have to grab her or I run from her. Or I have to grab her feet and arms. So you're basically saying grab her feet and arms, which I have done and it works.

Dr. Laura Markham: I'm not. That's actually not where I started. No, that's actually not quite what I'm saying. I'm saying that's a last resort. I'm saying you do not run. No, that's never what you do. Grabbing her feet and arms is a last resort. I'm saying you start with your full presence. I know you're a petite person because you mentioned that in your question. I am too. I'm five two and a half. And you know what? I don't think anyone has ever thought that I didn't

mean what I said when I said it. Because I'm comfortable with my authority. I'm encouraging you to be really comfortable with your authority with her. It doesn't mean you're unfair. It doesn't mean you're mean. But I would encourage every parent on this phone call, every parent who's listening at any point to this audio to become comfortable with your authority in the sense of, "Whoa, no. Excuse me, no hitting. No."

Dr. Laura Markham:

I'm not saying that this would stop somebody in their tracks who was intent on beating you up, even your own child. But I'm saying it goes a long way. That combined with hearing her rage, and also trying to head it off at the pass. You said it's better since the course, and I'm betting that's because you're doing more preventive maintenance. Also because you become better at giving warnings and heading off at the pass by warning her basically that the screen time is going to change, whatever.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would say, the very next time this happens, immediately before this happens, for you to sit down and have a conversation about it. That if this is going to happen, we're going to need to change the things that are making it happen. Because she's almost eight and she can manage herself now. She can control herself. There's no excuse for hitting. None. That's not how you treat people you love and it's not how you solve problems. I think part of it is the authority with which you go into the interaction as well as you're saying, "I know you wish you could use the screen some more. You can tell me and I will hear. I will listen to you. I'm not going to change it because this is our family rule. But I want to hear about it, and no hitting." What do you think?

Parent:

That's very helpful. Yeah. That's good. Yeah. That's great. Thank you. Thank you so much. I will try that for sure.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You're very welcome. Okay, good luck.

Question 13:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:38:46

A parent is saying, "My oldest who's eight has been lately showing aggression toward people if they upset him, especially his four-year-old sister who he's very aggressive with a few times lately, and is angry at her. He feels like everybody prefers her. I find regulating my own emotions hard." She says, "But it breaks my heart to see him with so much anger. It scares me what he might do if I weren't there." So you say that it's lately that your son has so much anger. I wonder if this is just since you started this course and he's showing you all those upsets he has stored up from the past. Because there's no reason that he suddenly had a lot of anger unless something happened in his life to cause it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Since you say you have had a hard time regulating your own emotions, I'm betting that's what's going on. That he is showing you something from the past. That's the full backpack issue.

So you can get him laughing. You can acknowledge his upset about his sister. When he says, "Everybody loves her more. Everybody lets her have her way. You guys think she's so perfect because she's just little and cute." Whatever he says, you can say, "Wow, it seems like she always gets her way, huh? Wow, it seems like she gets whatever she wants, huh?"

Of course, you make sure that's not true, right? That he's never asked to give things up for her. You're never putting her in the favorite position, of course. You're describing the situation and you're helping them come to a win-win solution for both of them. This is all described in my sibling book.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I totally get that this is hard because this is what happens when we've parented them in a different way. And when they're older than six, it does take time to help them

through these feelings. But I think if you're patient, and you are empathic with them 24/7, and you get him laughing every day, he's going to start crying sooner or later when he feels safe with you to do that. I think what you're going to find is once he does that, things are very different. He doesn't have so much rage at his sister.

Question 14:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:40:59

There's a question about an angry eight year old. When the younger child was born, the then four-year-old felt abandoned. Their dog died at the same time. Dad was doing a lot of yelling and that relationship is damaged. This sounds so sad. Then this child was bullied at school. He's very angry. Well. Yes, his anger is masking great pain. He feels like a victim. We know that he was bullied. He feels he doesn't matter. He has grief in there from a dog who died. I don't know if your son was like this. My daughter used to say when she was upset that the only person who understood her was the dog. If she lost her dog at that time, that would have been her only source of solace when she was upset, she would say.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Of course, I was working very hard to connect with her -- and she still felt that when she was most upset, only her dog really understood. So, the loss of our pets, we often overlook what a tremendous loss that can be for a child. Because children don't necessarily show the grief on an ongoing basis. But it can be a tremendous loss to them. So it sounds like he's never recovered from that stuff and from his father yelling at him, since you say he has a problematic relationship with his dad. I'm really glad to hear he is seeing a psychologist. But I would encourage you and his dad to be in the room with him. Don't send him to a psychologist to fix him. Right? Go in there with him and let him tell you about all that pain with the help of his counselor.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Of course, even with a counselor, you'll still need some help to make that a safe process for him. Since he's already eight years old, I'm sure he's really trying to hide that. You need all the previous things we've talked about. The preventive maintenance tools, special time, laughter, 24/7 empathy. You say he won't cry. So luckily, he's old enough to talk and that's where the healing is going to come from. But I'm betting you that there will be some tears that will come with those words when he does get to the deep pain of this. I really think this is what you need. Now that he is already eight, don't wait. You don't want to wait until he is 11. The walls would be too thick by then. Eight, he still wants you. So get in there into that psychologist's office with him and let the psychologist help you talk with him.

Question 15:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:43:22

A parent is asking about her eight-year-old who's with her 70% of the time and is fine at his dad's house but is rude, angry or violent with her. Hmm. So, I can't tell from your question if this is new behavior, which if it is, then once you started this course and you stopped punishing him, your son started to feel safe enough to show you those feelings. You stopped punishing him so he doesn't really have another reason to behave. So in that case, connection is what you need to do so that he feels connected to you and has a reason to cooperate.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But I'm not liking the idea that an eight-year-old is violent towards you. I'm not sure what you mean by violence, but if he's actually hitting you more than one time, and he's lashing out at you on a regular basis, then I would say that you need extra support to cope with it. You shouldn't have to do it alone. You also say he's always rude and angry to you and not to his father. I'm not sure what's going on there. Again, I'm going to suggest an immediate session with a parenting coach who can help you assess the

situation. Make sure you're using the tools effectively and give you advice about whether you need to find a local counselor to meet with you and your son. So please don't delay looking at coaches and let's get you some help there. This is not something you should have to deal with alone.

Question 16:

Parent: 00:44:46 My question was in relation to how to keep everyone safe when the preventive maintenance hasn't worked, and there is aggressive, destructive behavior?

Dr. Laura Markham: So what I'm hearing is that your seven year old can be really aggressive and really hurt the four year old, and damage some things in the house as well. Let me ask you. Has your seven year old always been like this? Or is this new behavior?

Parent: The level is new. It's never been especially easy.

Dr. Laura Markham: Okay. So she's always been challenging. And there's just the two kids, right?

Parent: Yep.

Dr. Laura Markham: Okay. So she's always been challenging, but she's become more challenging lately, and she's really acting out with aggression, instead of crying. So does she ever cry?

Parent: Yeah, but it's so hard to get to that point. Even when she sobs, she doesn't really like curl into me. She kind of does, but she sometimes, just sobs and I just stay nearby, like on the other side of the door or something. She really pushes me away when she's upset.

Dr. Laura Markham: So that's about trust and safety. So, don't worry. It's still moving in the right direction to sob at all. Even if she's held you at a little bit of a distance, after she sobs, she feels

better and she acts better, so that's what we need. We need sobbing every day.

Dr. Laura Markham:

We don't know what caused her to have all this locked up inside her. It could be the way you parented in the past, it could be that she's a super sensitive kid. She could have special issues, like sensory processing stuff, or diet, or gluten allergies. We don't know, but I've seen all kinds of things behind it when a kid acts like this, but seven is old to be acting out aggressively.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So it often means kids have special challenges, but sometimes it just means they're highly sensitive, and they really need to cry and that will be enough. Since she hasn't yet cried, I'm going to say we start there and that might solve it. If that doesn't solve it, I would say leave no stone unturned here to figure out what's causing this, whether it's a dietary issue or sensory processing issue or whatever, but we're not there yet.

Dr. Laura Markham:

We're at a stage earlier than that, where we just need to help her with the backpack. We know she's probably super sensitive, because she's got all this stuff in the backpack, and when she cries, it gets better, but she won't let you close to cry.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So how do we reestablish that trust to get her to cry? The answer is laughter and 24/7 empathy. Those are your two tools. So no matter what she says, your job is to try to see the situation from her point of view. Just say her name, and say, "You are so upset about that. Tell me about it." And don't try to correct her, and she will be able to start feeling more understood, more often. Even if she slams around the house yelling, she'll settle down faster when she feels understood. Do you find that it works when you do that?

Parent:

Yeah, I do. I guess the thing that she really struggles with is the word "no". So I read a little bit about oppositional things. I think that she feels very hurt by "No" particularly.

- Dr. Laura Markham: So I would try not to use the word "No." I did an exercise when my kids were toddlers. I tried every way I could think of to not use the word "no" because I had read that kids who were told "no" a lot, learn to think inside the box and it lowers their IQ. There was only one study, but I was willing to go there. So I tried not to use the word "no." So there are ways to not use the word "no" and so you can set that limit.
- Parent: Yeah. That's one of the things I did right off the bat with her.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Great!
- Parent: Because she didn't respond to that. And then, on the course, one of the things I've changed is, I avoided setting limits (before the course). It's not that I never set limits, but I was really careful where to set limits, because I saw the effect. It was difficult to hold them. It's like I only set limits I could really, really enforce.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Mm-hmm (affirmative), that's right.
- Parent: And one of the things that maybe I've changed is, I am setting more limits, maybe because of the confidence of the course to do that, and in some ways, I think it's maybe good, because I think the limits maybe help her, let her know that I really care and I'm in charge, but it is really tough to set limits.
- Parent: So I know that I'm setting too many now. I kind of don't know which way. I really avoided a lot, because most people around me think I didn't say "no" enough, but I tried hard, because from a very early age I saw the effect, and I guess I didn't realize, until I had a second child, how much different the response to the word "no" was. You know what I mean? I guess I thought maybe that's how kids were, but she really struggles with limits. But she can do it.

- Dr. Laura Markham: Great. So here's the thing. I don't think you've done anything wrong in only setting the limits that you could enforce and trying to minimize the amount of frustration she experiences, and I don't think you're doing anything wrong in setting more limits now. I think the way we evaluate whether our limits are okay is, how much support can we give the child to observe the limit?
- Dr. Laura Markham: You said she can do it. That's great. Fabulous. So you're setting limits. It's hard for her, but she can rise to the occasion and do it, and it doesn't damage your relationship. She still feels connected to you, and she seems to feel safer by you setting the limits. She feels safer with you and more affectionate, great.
- Dr. Laura Markham: If you're setting the limits and she's able to do it, but there's a festering anger there that's coming out in explosiveness and violence against her sister, that's not good enough. Then I think we've got an issue. Maybe you're setting too many limits, or maybe she's not getting enough support to be able to meet the limits. Does that make sense?
- Parent: Mm-hmm (affirmative). She's extraordinarily well behaved in school. She's lacking more at home. I don't know. Is school teaching the right way because she has the limits that she needs? Sometimes I don't know which way.
- Dr. Laura Markham: So we know she was always difficult. We know that, when your four year old came along, you realized, "Oh my goodness, I've had a very difficult child all this time and I didn't know why." So sometimes that kind of difficulty can be caused by anxiety, and when we see a child who has anxiety, they're difficult at home, where they feel safer to act out maybe, and show their anxiety, but at school, they rein it in and they try really hard to follow all the rules and be the perfect model kid. That might be what you're describing here. Does that sound like her?
- Parent: Yes, very much, yeah. Exactly.

- Dr. Laura Markham: Okay. So my very early hypothesis, without knowing anything more than what we've just talked about, is that this is probably not sensory processing, which would show itself at school also. Right? Or dietary, which would show itself whenever she eats something, no matter what environment she's in. It's probably anxiety, and anxiety does respond to routine and limits and firm boundaries.
- Dr. Laura Markham: But it also responds to a great deal of soothing. So what she needs from you is routines, knowing what to expect at all times, and a great deal of soothing. So when you don't know whether to set a limit, ask yourself how it fits into that picture.
- Parent: That's a very, very accurate description.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Okay, great.
- Parent: So the way I get her to go to sleep at night, she struggles, so she either reads until she falls asleep, or I stroke her back. I actually used some of your things, but I used it years ago. I taught yoga, so I use little imaginary things to help her fall asleep, and she really needs that when she can't doesn't fall asleep.
- Dr. Laura Markham: She has always struggled to fall asleep. That's anxiety. Okay, so here's what I want to do. I just want to say laughter, laughter, laughter, the most important thing you can do, and it will diffuse the rage. You're really asking me, how do you protect your four year old when your seven year old lashes out in rage? And you're worried about whether the rage continues into the future.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Yeah, you're totally right to be concerned if she doesn't learn how to manage this, but it's not the rage we need to manage. That's a response to the fear. She is just in knots inside with her fear. It's all anxiety. She's super sensitive. She's super anxious. That's what she needs help with. So read the book, *The Opposite of Worry* by Larry Cohen.

- Parent: Okay.
- Dr. Laura Markham: And get your hands on the book by Lynn Lyons, *Anxious Kids, Anxious Parents*. Both of those will help a lot. And the final person I would say to read about anxiety and kids is Tamar Chansky. Those books will really help you.
- Dr. Laura Markham: But your basic formula for her, she needs to laugh every single day. She may need to do some crying. Remember that when children cry, they're expressing sadness, but she doesn't just have sadness in her. She has terror. I'm not saying just fear. I'm saying terror. That's what's causing the rage that causes her to tear the house apart.
- Dr. Laura Markham: So to get terror out, it's like a two year old's tantrum. They're on the floor kicking and screaming often, and she's not going to let you near her in that state. But the more she can feel understood and soothed by you, that you're always willing to be there for her and to reassure her, and you can say, "You seem so worried." Right? Or, "Sometimes you get worried about this, but I'll help you handle it," but you're always there to help her.
- Dr. Laura Markham: She's going to see you as in her corner, and the more she laughs with you, the more it reduces the anxiety load she's carrying and increases the bonding hormones. So all of that is going to help her get to more tears, and she really needs to cry every single day, and I think you will see a less anxious child if you can do that.
- Dr. Laura Markham: The good news is, her prognosis is very, very good. It really is very good, and the reason I say that is, she is able to handle it at school. Okay?
- Parent: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay. Thank you.
- Dr. Laura Markham: You're so welcome. And I want to encourage you to reach out to a parenting coach on my website. I can't take new people right now, new clients, but on my website, when you look under coaching, it has the coaches I've trained

and you can get a coach to help you. Talk to them once a month or something to help you with this, because I hear your worry about how she's going to be and she is already seven, so I want to make sure you get the support you need.

Parent: Thank you.

Dr. Laura Markham: You're so welcome, and good for you, for being the parent your daughter needs. I guarantee you that this kind of parenting is going to end up being so much better for her. She would have ended up defiant and difficult if you had tried conventional parenting and fighting with her all the time.

Parent: Thank you. I'm just not funny enough basically.

Dr. Laura Markham: You're not funny enough? Can I just tell you a secret? Neither am I, but I've learned to be. It's been my mission in life to become funny. I even married someone who is funny because I wanted to laugh all the time. Then I realized this is what I need more of in my life, and really I just learned how to do it one tiny step at a time. And you know what? We always have the child we need to help us develop what we need to develop in ourselves. Let's say thank you to them.

Parent: Thank you for my funniness.

Dr. Laura Markham: All right, good luck! You take care.

Parent: Thank you.

Question 17:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:58:05

Our next question is from a parent who says, "Our nine-year-old struggles with personal space, control, and aggression. She can be very sweet and empathic, but she's been aggressive since she was a toddler. She pushes, grabs things, hits, pinches, if she doesn't get her way. We've given alternatives on what to do when she's upset and discuss how the other person feels. She's very hands-on and likes to touch a lot. How can we prevent her from hurting her younger siblings when she's upset? There are three of them.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So this is a very tactile kid. And, yes, she's going to have a hard time, since she is so tactile, not using her hands when she's upset. As you say, she's done it since she was a toddler. It's time she learns differently. So I would enroll her in that. There are techniques that work, but she's going to have to want to use them. So I would have conversations with her, as you've done, about how it hurts the three-year-old or four-year-old or seven-year-old when she hurts them physically, and how that's never ever okay. I would make sure she's doing repairs when she does hurt her siblings. She can't just get away with it. She has to make repairs. That should motivate her a little bit to use her words.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would really just encourage and teach her how to use her words when she's upset. Give her the words to say, "You can tell your sister blah, blah, blah rather than using your hands." Then I would teach her to clap her hands around her body. You've probably heard me give this example. But if you haven't, for anybody listening, what you do is you teach the child to clap their hands around their body to give themselves a hug. That means the right arm ends up on the left shoulder and vice versa. They can also put it on their rib cage underneath their arm if they prefer that. As they clap their arms around themselves, it's good to have them use a loud word like "No!" or "Stop!"

Dr. Laura Markham:

The reason for that is the impulse they have is to stop whoever has done a bad thing to them, in their mind, their sibling. Using the word adds more force. So they don't feel like they're just doing something to themselves, they're putting their forceful request out to the other people in the room for instance. So you teach her how to do that, and you work with her. You practice it and you are very rewarding. I don't mean giving her reward so much as using your warm relationship to be very rewarding to her if she remembers to use this.

Dr. Laura Markham:

There are people who have used rewards to teach kids to use the clapping their arms around themselves instead of to hit somebody. I have not seen that to be any more effective, those rewards, but I'm not against it if you want to try it. I think if your daughter's capable of doing it, she'll do it for the reward of your warm relationship. She probably won't need an external reward. But the point is you're giving her a tool to use when she's angry. The words she can say, first "No" and then the actual words for what she wants and also redirecting what would come out through her hands at the other person. Redirecting it to give herself a hug, which is stabilizing for her when she's feeling threatened. We hurt someone when we feel threatened. I know it's crazy. No one's actually threatening her. But she feels threatened and that's why she's doing it.

Question 18:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:01:53

Our next question is from a parent who says, "When my nine year old unloads his backpack, it can be very physical. He's big. He can get so furious. He hits me or yells shut up or even swear words. I can handle it now, but I worry about when he's a teenager. He intimidates his sister who's seven. He's aggressive when things don't go his way. His defense is he doesn't care about hurting others, but of course he does."

Dr. Laura Markham:

This sounds really scary. I want to reassure you that you can do something about this behavior now so that you aren't dealing with it when your son's older. So first, what you're describing is not actually unloading his emotional backpack. Unloading the emotional backpack means expressing the tears and fears that you're carrying around, that we're too vulnerable to feel at the time. Anger is not in the backpack. Anger is not a vulnerable feeling, right? Anger is a defense against those tears and fears, those vulnerable feelings. Your child is not emptying his backpack. He's actually resisting emptying his backpack, fighting against it. The best defense is a good offense so he lashes out at you and at his sister. Creating safety in all the ways I've described in response to the previous questions, that will help your son actually get to the tears and fears in the backpack rather than getting stuck in aggression as he's doing now.

With a nine-year-old, the most important thing is for him to feel understood.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Describing his perspective. "Oh, so you wanted this? Oh, no wonder you're disappointed." If he yells at you, "I'm not disappointed, I'm mad." Then you say, "Okay, I get it. You're really mad about this. I hear you."

I would set very clear limits about how your son is treating his sister. Bullying behavior is not allowed no matter what. So sometime soon when your son is not angry, and you are having a good time connecting with each other, have a discussion with him. Ask him about those moments when he intimidates his sister, or is aggressive to her. Most of the time when people act like that, they're building themselves up trying to make someone else feel small.

If someone else treated his sister that way, how would he feel? Would he want to protect her? What would he want to do? When he treats his sister that way, is there some part of him that doesn't want to do it?

Dr. Laura Markham:

What keeps him from listening to that part of him? Next time he starts to act like that, what does he want you to say so he doesn't act like that? What would be helpful when you intervene? What could he say to himself? If your son is not open to a discussion like that, that means he's defended, which he may well be because you say already his defense is he doesn't care about hurting others but of course he does. If he's saying that he doesn't care about hurting you or his sister, that does mean he's highly defended. You need to win him back to wanting to follow you and cooperate with you by your clear commitment to him. To listening to him. To seeing things from his point of view.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would challenge his defensiveness directly. I would speak to who he really is inside by saying something like, "I hear you saying you don't care, Hon. But I know you're a good person with a big heart. I know you do care. I think you just feel like things have not been fair and you've been wronged and you don't want to care. Is that true? Have things not been fair for you?" Then be open to him telling you how he feels.

Dr. Laura Markham:

He'll probably reel off a long list of injustices that have been done to him, and all the ways that he has been wronged. Even if you disagree with him, you need to acknowledge how he feels. To whatever degree you can, express your compassion to him for the suffering that he's gone through. Also, to whatever degree you can, apologize. You might say something like, "Oh sweetheart, I hear you saying that you think I always take your sister's side. You must wonder whether I love her more. I want you to know I could never love anyone more than I love you. I am so sorry that I ever made you feel that way."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now I'm focusing on the sibling stuff. Maybe that's not his big issue, sibling rivalry. But since he's aggressive with his sister, I'm betting it's a part of what's going on. Regardless, you do need to hear what he's upset about, and do some healing around that. After he feels understood on a

regular basis -- it's not a one time conversation, it's going to have to happen over and over again -- I think he'll be much more open to following your expectations about how to treat people in the family. Of course, you need to start being really clear about those expectations now, but at the same time in the context of connecting with him more.

Question 19:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:07:09

Okay, the next question is from a parent who says, "My four and seven-year-old fight every day, and often end up lashing out at each other physically. I'm concerned because the seven-year-old is too old to be hitting his sibling. He's not aggressive with friends though, and he's well behaved otherwise. I do see signs of improvement as I'm working through this course and managing my own emotions better. But this is still a huge trigger for me."

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, I just want to reassure you that I see plenty of seven year olds who still hit their siblings. I do agree with you, though, that daily seems like a lot. I'm delighted you see signs of improvement as you work through this course. It's normal that you feel triggered when one of your children gets hurt. But of course, that can also worsen sibling rivalry. The fact that their fighting triggers you is not lost on your kids, especially the seven-year-old who may wonder if that means you love the younger child more. I urge you to read my sibling book, which goes into more detail about that and also how to respond instead so that when one hurts the other, you're not perpetuating the violence.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The most important tip is that you need to be working on connection with your oldest so he's less jealous of his sibling. When there is a fight, you need to avoid placing blame on him. Please go to the sibling section of the

website and read those articles and get your hands on the sibling book. I think that will really help you.

Question 20:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:08:32

Here's a question from a parent who says her seven-year-old kicks and punches her, and her sister who is six and of course she retaliates. I hear that you're offering your daughter understanding. That's great, but since she keeps doing this, what about the limits? Is your limit clear? Are you asking her to make a repair afterwards? It's not unusual for a seven-year-old to hit a sibling. But punching is not the same as hitting. It is worrisome for a seven-year-old to hit a parent because as you say, she's capable of not hitting her father. It sounds like a sign that she's not respecting you, or taking direction from you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

As you've heard me say elsewhere in this call, often when children feel heard, they stop escalating. So I do advise you to empathize when she's disappointed. "Oh, this isn't the snack you wanted." And of course, all the connection tools will help. But if this aggression on your daughter's part has been going on for a while, then I think it's time for you to get some coaching about how to handle it. It might be something that a coach can help you to respond to, so the aggression stops. Or it might be that your daughter needs to be evaluated. Either way, the sooner you intervene, the better.

Question 21:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:09:34

Our next question is from a parent who says, "About a year ago, my seven-year-old boy started snapping in anger and screaming whenever things didn't go his way. He started using words like 'Whatever, I don't care,' and

hitting and raising his voice to screaming. There were no changes in our family or school that I could associate with this change. I tried saying, 'I understand you're upset,' but he screams at me to get out of the room."

So when your son raises his voice to you, instead of saying, "I understand you're upset," try describing his perspective. "My goodness, I didn't know how strongly you felt about this. You're telling me you don't want X, Y, Z, is that right?" His next comment will still be in a raised voice. "Of course I don't want X, Y, Z. Here's why. Don't you know anything?" Which is still an attack on you, but he will at least be engaged in the discussion rather than yelling at you to leave the room.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I think we need to talk about how to empathize. Empathizing by describing the child's perspective usually does not backfire like this. Where children really get upset at us usually is when we're labeling the feeling we think they're having because that feels intrusive to them.

But there's something that bothers me about this question that's more important even. It's a red flag to me that something must have happened in your son's life. A child who's been happy and emotionally regulated most of the time in his life does not suddenly start acting like this when there have been no changes in his life. It's not only the anger, it's also the expressions of, "Whatever, I don't care." He's only seven. He's not 12.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I'm sorry to raise this but I'm worried. The times I've seen children change like this, usually, something was going on. Maybe the child was being bullied, or even heaven forbid sexually abused. I don't want to scare you. But I think a year of this behavior is too long. It's time to find out what's happening. I think it's probably time to take your son to an experienced child therapist.

Question 22:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:11:56

"I'm only now changing parenting styles with my children ages 10 and seven. It's obviously harder, but is it too late to heal the past? I had a traumatic childhood. I get very easily triggered and I have shame. My daughter is expressing her anger through hitting. She can't get past the anger stage to the sadness underneath. Her backpack is full and it spills over a lot. Any more tips to help her feel safe and start to empty her very full backpack would be gratefully received."

So, it is not too late at all. It makes sense that your children after only a few months of you changing your parenting are not yet trusting that and feeling safe. The way to create safety is your (own) self-regulation, which is probably hard for you because you get triggered so easily. You create safety with your self-regulation and with your empathy as much as possible to anything they express, and with laughing with them as much as possible. When they do get angry, don't take the bait. Don't get into a fight with them. Just respond to whatever unhappiness is under there.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Remember, rage only dissipates when it feels heard. So acknowledge whatever it is they're upset about. I just want to reassure you, it is not too late at all. I've seen many seven and 10 year olds change when their parents begin to change. It is not too late. It does take time. It does take so much hard work from you. It's completely unfair that you have to do that. It would have been so great if you had a fabulous childhood and you could so easily be the parent you want to be. Instead, you had to put up with a not so great childhood and now you have to work on yourself to be the parent that you want to be for your children. It's not fair. But you know what? You're a hero. You're a hero to do this work.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I hear you get triggered and I know how hard it is to change yourself when you get triggered. I want to encourage you to keep working with this course over and over again. I want to encourage you if you don't have my workbook, it's designed to heal triggers. If you work your way through the course a bunch of times and you work your way through my workbook a couple of times, I think you'll see a big difference. If it feels like that's too slow, get some help from a parenting coach so that you can work on getting triggered. I would only say it's hard work but it's so worth it. Because every step you take in the direction you want to go makes the next step easier. Also, you'll begin to see the difference in your children. That will really give you the momentum that you need to keep going. Don't give up. There's a whole new beautiful future just waiting for you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

That's all our questions for today. Thank you for listening. 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.