

Routines 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 routines and moving kids through the schedule. 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. Let's see how to apply these three big ideas to daily life with children.

Question 1:

Parent: 00:00:41 My question is about my seven and a half year old son. We have a one year old son as well, but my seven and a half year old, he is always grumpy or giving us a hard time in the morning. We tried to do a lot of connection and things, giving him time to wake up in the morning to go to school, like, "Okay, five minutes, two minutes, now it's time to wake up and go take a shower. How would you like to go? Should I carry you? Will you go yourself? How will you do it?" but it's a struggle. Everything is a struggle in the morning and even after school. I was wondering what's going on. We give him special time, me and my husband. We play with him and we do things with him but then everything seems like a struggle with him to get out of shower, to get dressed, do his homework or in the evening to just sit and eat. I don't know how to connect with him.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:01:49 First of all, let me ask you a question. When he wakes up in the morning, do you wake him up?

Parent: 00:01:53 Yes.

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:01:55 Okay, I'm wondering if he's tired. This is going to be a shock to most people listening. If you have to wake your child up in the morning, they are not getting enough sleep.

- Parent: 00:02:07 Okay.
- Dr. Laura Markham: 00:02:09 That's the first thing.
- Parent: 00:02:11 He goes to bed around 8:30 and he wakes up around 6:30.
- Dr. Laura Markham: 00:02:15 That's too late. When he wakes up at 6:30, do you wake him up?
- Parent: 00:02:18 Yeah.
- Dr. Laura Markham: 00:02:20 I'm going to say start moving bedtime back by, he has to get up at 6:30, start moving bedtime back by half an hour. I'm going to bet that he's going to start going to bed at 7:00 PM, that your child is difficult because he's getting too little sleep. I'm not sure that's the only thing going on but it's certainly one thing that you can count on going on. That when everything's a struggle and it's worse in the morning but it's not just the morning, he's also very tired at night, just to get him to eat, I would say start by moving bedtime back to 8:00 and then move it back to 7:30 and then move it back to 7:00 until he's waking up for at least a week by himself by 6:30 in the morning and he's in a good mood when he wakes up.
- Parent: 00:03:03 Okay.
- Dr. Laura Markham: 00:03:03 It might take him a little while to wake up if he's a slow waker but he should wake up, you know, that if you snuggle him a little bit then he's in a good mood. I'd say start with that and then you can address other things.
- Parent: Okay. Awesome. Thank you so much.

Question 2:

- Parent: 00:03:19 I'm relatively new to positive parenting in general and all your books and the course is an incredible source and help for me. I have two kids, three and a half and one and a half, and we just moved to Berlin and the whole transition was a bit difficult, especially for the older one. He got into a new daycare and he struggles quite a bit with the new

setup and everything. Now our morning routine got much longer than it used to be, so sometimes one and a half hours. I feel like they just need some more time to snuggle and play and have some time together as a family before they are ready to go to the new daycare, which is much more loud, more kids and it's just a bit more strenuous on both of them.

Parent: I'm currently interviewing for a job and I'm just wondering, do you have any advice on how I can make this transition so that they still feel special and loved? I have to keep the morning routine quite (a bit) shorter. Is there anything that I can do?

Dr. Laura Markham: Yes, it is so hard to go back to work when you've been on parental leave, because you've gotten into patterns that are good for your kids, that were responding to their needs, and now you're in a position where you have to respond to your need to go to work. I hear your concern about whether your kids are going to get their needs met and know how loved they are still, especially with a new daycare and the move to a new city and all of that.

Dr. Laura Markham: I would say first of all, start putting them to bed as early as possible, even if it's 6:00 PM. I don't know what time you'll be getting home. Are you working full time? What time will you be getting home?

Parent: I'm just interviewing for a part time job and just because I know it's going to be hard and my husband is working crazy hours so I'm kind of like a single parent during the week. I am just looking for a part time position.

Dr. Laura Markham: That's a good thing for this transition. First of all, if you don't have to wake your kids up in the morning, then they're getting enough sleep and they will be in a much better mood and much more able to deal with, have the inner resources to deal with going to daycare and letting go of you and everything. You don't want to have to wake them up in the morning. You're going to be back to work in a month so you have to start now moving their bedtime earlier and earlier so that they are waking up earlier and

earlier on their own so that you have that time in the morning. You may not have as much time as you have now because you will have to go to work, but you'll have more time in the morning.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Does that make sense? Just as early as you have to put them to bed to get them well rested, to wake up on their own in the morning, that's what you want to do. You want to start now ratcheting that bedtime as early as possible. That's the first thing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The second thing is to start a routine in the morning that is a clear routine, and start getting ready to leave the house. All of you, because they're going to be going to daycare. They're going to have to leave the house. Right now you're not going to daycare, obviously, and there's no time limit... but you could all go to the market.

Parent:

We are going to daycare. We are just pushing it backwards because it was so difficult, so they are just getting a lot of mom, family time, whatever, before we go to daycare. We go there quite late. By 9:00, 9:30.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Right, I see.

Parent:

Something like that.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Perfect. That's perfect. Set up a very clear routine that involves lots of snuggling and whatever else they need, but move them through the routine to get out the door for daycare. Again, start ratcheting that back so that it gets to be the time that you're going to need. Just do it very gradually, two minutes a day or whatever, right, so it starts to get to that. I would say laughter will really help. Snuggling will really help but also laughter will really help because that way any feelings they have of anxiety about the new daycare, or anxiety about you leaving them, will really help. It will really help to work them through if they're laughing with you. As part of your morning routine, make sure that you're including not just snuggling and reading and hugs and all of that stuff, but also laughter.

Dr. Laura Markham: I would do one more thing. Before you leave the house with them, do a little game where they, once they are totally ready to go with their shoes on and their jackets on or whatever else, where they run to you. Where you hold out your arms and first the one year old and then the three year old run to your arms and you swing them around or something. As the last thing you do, to fill them up with your love before you leave the house. I mean you explicitly say that's what you're doing. If they love that little interaction, then they will be less likely to resist getting ready to go and also they'll laugh during that interaction which means it will be easier at that point to actually leave the house.

Dr. Laura Markham: Then of course once you get to daycare, you need a little routine there to say goodbye to them. But it sounds like you're already taking them to the daycare so you probably are working with that already. Does that make sense?

Parent: Yeah. The routine is kind of set up, it just has to be shifted and compressed quite a bit.

Dr. Laura Markham: Okay, good luck.

Parent: That's really good advice. Thank you very much.

Dr. Laura Markham: Great. You're very welcome.

Question 3:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:08:56 This is from a parent who says, "My son who is six drags his feet getting ready for school. I also have two year old twins." Well yes, that's hard. With twins who are little, your hands are full, so naturally you're expecting him to get himself ready and naturally he's not going to. There's an article about this on the Aha! Parenting web site, "How to Use Connection to Help Your Child Through the Morning Routine," it's called. I would start with that article.

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/family-life/kids-morning-routine>

Dr. Laura Markham:

The foundation is to start with connection with him. Always connect with him first so that he's more motivated to move himself through the routine. Don't think it's something you can get him doing once. You're going to have to intervene with him over and over and over. I know that seems crazy when you have your two year olds who need your help and he shouldn't need your help, I know you think that, but you know what? It's not going to work that way. You're going to have to intervene with him over and over again to keep him on track. Follow the tips, and there are a lot of them in that article, and I think you'll see things improve.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then finally, you have to keep a sense of humor about this and talk to him about it. He's already six. He might not want to walk into the classroom late, and if that's the case, then he's motivated to help solve this problem too and you could have a brainstorming session with him about what might work to help him stay on track. I really encourage that kind of a brainstorming session with any ongoing problem with a child that happens from the age of four on up. Even four year olds like to solve these problems. I think you'll find that if you have the conversation with him, you could come up with a list of solutions and you can try them. What you can't expect is for him to solve the problem. You're going to have to solve it with him.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I just have one other interaction that I want to suggest to you. You say that finally he won't even get his breakfast eaten on time and it's time to get going to school. Don't try to feed him at home. Give him breakfast on the way to school whether he's walking or he's in the car. He can have a smoothie on the way to school or a sandwich on the way to school. You could just have a standard agreement that if he doesn't get the breakfast that you've made for him eaten, he always gets a peanut butter and jelly sandwich on the way to school, that's what it is, and just keep one in the fridge at all times, or something pre-made.

Dr. Laura Markham: I think you have to -- I'm going to say something that applies to every parent in every situation probably -- don't expect them to be able to do this themselves. It's because we expect them do it that we get angry. I saw some research last week that was totally unrelated to parenting. It was about men who hit their wives, and it turned out that the most important thing that has been recently discovered, the most important place to intervene, is that men who hit their wives think that she should be a different way or their life should be a different way and they blame her for it. They feel entitled to be angry.

Dr. Laura Markham: When I read this, I thought, it's just like what happens for us as parents. We look at our child and we think he should be a different way and so we lose it. Naturally when you have two year olds, a six year old seems like he should be able to get himself ready for school. I'm going to encourage you whether that's the situation you're in, or you're in some other situation with your child where you're getting angry at them because they should be able to do something or be different, to just say to yourself, "Well, maybe not. Maybe he shouldn't be able to do it. He's certainly not doing it, and is there some amount of support I can give him that would enable him to do this?"

Dr. Laura Markham: Instead of feeling entitled to our anger, take a deep breath, remind ourselves that we are not here to give anger to our children, we are here to give them support so they can grow and develop and learn more skills and be able to handle things more and more in their lives. What support do they need from us to do whatever it is that we're trying to have them do?

Question 4:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:13:16 Here's a question from a parent about her 10 year old who can't take herself through the morning routine, doesn't have any focus. By the time she's 10, you're not controlling her anymore. It sounds to me like an attention deficit issue actually. You have to make sure you're connected. But I think you need to give her transitions between each thing

she has to do, help her develop charts and transitions that she can (use to) motivate herself through her morning routine. And it's going to take her years to master it, but you're going to have to start helping her so that she's motivated. There's no way you can control her to do it. That's a big thing. It'll be a big project for you, but you can do this and you can do it using the Peaceful Parenting approach.

Question 5:

Parent: 00:13:58 We have a four and a six year old, and my question is about getting ready in the mornings. Sometimes they wake up a little grumpy. We send them to a Montessori preschool. It's all about being independent. I know they can physically put on their clothes but sometimes they, and especially the four year old, he asks for help putting on his clothes when we know he can do it. So that becomes a little difficult. What do you think we should do in that case?

Dr. Laura Markham: First of all, if you have to wake your children up, they're not getting enough sleep. The first thing I would do is I would move bedtime earlier, if you're waking them up in the morning. Usually when kids wake up themselves and you're not waking them up, they're not as grumpy. Sometimes they still are but most of the time when you don't wake kids up, when they wake up naturally, they're not as grumpy. That's the first thing I would do, because then you're ensuring they get enough sleep.

Dr. Laura Markham: The second thing I would say is that I'm in disagreement with the old idea that is shared not only by Montessori but also by Rudolph Dreikurs and the people who come down from that branch of positive parenting. There's this idea that when a child can do something for themselves, you don't do it for them no matter what, because they should learn to do it themselves. I find that to be not really taking child development into account, which is that when a child is feeling fully resourced and happy and well rested and

confident and in a good mood, of course he can dress himself.

Dr. Laura Markham:

When he's grumpy and he didn't get quite enough sleep and someone woke him up and he's feeling a little bit unhappy or anxious or came out of a bad dream, he doesn't really feel like he has access to the impulse control and the ability to override his frustrations in order to get his zipper up on his pants or his buttons buttoned or even to put on his pants without falling over or put a shirt over his head. Because it's a little bit scary to put a shirt over your head and he might get lost in it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I'm actually not a fan of the, "Never do anything for your kids they can do for themselves." I would just say if he's getting enough sleep and he usually doesn't dress himself, I would see that as something to get his enrollment on. I would say, "Wait a minute, you need your shirt on? Hm, where does that shirt go? Does it go here?" and try to put the neck of the shirt on his arm. Get him laughing and he'll show you where it goes and he'll show you how to put it on and he'll start to dress himself, if you can make it a fun interaction between you, and if you can stay positive about it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If he says, "No, just help me," I would say, "Of course. Sometimes I feel that way in the morning too. I wish somebody would just dress me. It's hard. Everybody needs a little help sometimes. Let me help you with that, Sweetie," and that's that. It's not like he's going to be letting you dress him when he's eight, so don't worry about it. There's nothing wrong with a four year old getting some help to dress himself. But the most important thing is probably the sleep. Does that make sense?

Parent:

Yes, perfect sense.

Question 6:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:16:57 A parent says, "My son who is seven has difficult mornings. He'll sit there without eating or just stand in the bathroom without brushing and I have to remind him 10 times to start."

Dr. Laura Markham: I don't think he's purposely misbehaving. I can tell you that personally if I did not get to start my day with a cup of coffee, I would also just stand in the bathroom and stare at my toothbrush. I think he may just need some help to wake up. The first thing is that he should not be awakened by you or with an alarm because when that happens, he's in the fog of deep sleep or in a dream state, so he needs to wake up by himself, when his biorhythms and his brain are at a point to wake up. That means he needs to go to bed early enough that he wakes up on his own no matter what.

Dr. Laura Markham: Second, even when he wakes up on his own, he needs to not feel pushed around. That makes most of us slow down. When we feel pushed around, we dig our heels in because that helps us feel less pushed, harried, and so we slow down on purpose so we feel a little more in control.

Create a schedule with him. Take photos of each thing he does in the morning. Help him create a chart and be in charge of that chart so you're not barking orders.

Dr. Laura Markham: Thirdly, he needs time to wake up. He needs some time before he has to use his executive function, so be sure that the chart has some extra wake up time when he gets to snuggle and connect with you before he has to use his executive function.

Dr. Laura Markham: Finally, he needs to borrow your executive function because he's not accessing his own first thing in the morning because he's not fully awake. Stay near, stay supportive, have a sense of humor and let him, just in a nice way, help him think. "Okay, I see you have your shoes on. What do you need to do next for yourself? What does your chart say?"

Dr. Laura Markham: There's an article on this on the Aha! Parenting website if you haven't seen it yet called, "Getting Your Child Out the Door in the Morning." I would say it's a very common complaint from parents. Please keep your sense of humor about it.

Question 7:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:18:57 "Our son will only complete the morning and bedtime routines when he wants to. He gets very angry and can hit, bite and scream. We have mostly stopped shouting, it's rare now. We've tried playing games, being silly, giving options but it hardly ever works. He does laugh. He's in a good mood when we play with him, but when we have to do something else he's not happy, if we have to take a phone call or go back to work.

He hardly ever cries. He does scream but doesn't really cry. He never cried as a baby because I never let him. I was very responsive. I did have an issue with crying, any child crying, but especially my son. Throughout this course I have understood my anxiety around crying and I feel more comfortable dealing with his emotions and my own than I used to."

Dr. Laura Markham: First of all, how wonderful that you have that insight and that you feel more comfortable now with your son's emotions, so you've done some healing, clearly. Now you need to do some healing for your son, because even though you've healed, he hasn't fully healed. He still has some repressed emotions and they are making him very rigid.

Dr. Laura Markham: Now, he's a strong willed kid anyway probably, and maybe he would have had a hard time with transitions anyway, which many strong willed kids do. Many kids do. But it sounds to me like there is some rigidity here also where he just refuses to do what you want him to do -- leave the house when you want him to, cooperate with anything you want him to do. I think that comes from that rigidity, from some repressed tears, so I think your job here is to

get him to cry. I hasten to say you don't get someone to cry, you make them feel safe enough that they can cry.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The way you make him feel safe is constant laughter, roughhousing. If you can do that, he will start to cry more, I think you'll see. Because laughter really opens up the access to the tears. The other thing that you'll want to do is, after you've done a lot of roughhousing and made it safe for him to cry with your 24/7 empathy and your routines and all the rest of it, you're going to have to set some limits. Those limits will be about the things you need him to cooperate on. I would pick your battles. I wouldn't start with everything, and I would only do it when you have the internal fortitude, internal resources to be able to really listen to his upset.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You're going to have some situations where he's going to be very angry and scream about something and your job is to welcome the tears behind the screaming. Don't get sucked into the fight, don't get into a power struggle. He's 33 months old, right? Your job is to help him feel safe enough when he gets angry and starts screaming, or even before he gets angry and starts screaming. Your job is to increase the safety so he can go beyond those screams, behind the anger and to the tears and fears that are underneath. All that crying that he never did when he was little. For the last three years, right?

Dr. Laura Markham:

The way you do that is you acknowledge his rage and how nothing's going right for him. Because remember, anger doesn't begin to dissipate until it feels heard. Make sure that you have listened to the audio that I have on preventive maintenance as well as read about preventive maintenance. The audio is not just the audio for the week of preventive maintenance in the course, but also in the bonus section there's an audio on preventive maintenance. It'll be very helpful to you to help you do scheduled meltdowns.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I don't think you're going to change that you have a strong willed child who doesn't like transitions. I think you're going to have to get very good at handling transitions and

doing warnings and all those things you're probably already pretty practiced at. I think you'll find that after you welcome your child's tears, you will have healed the part of him that wasn't allowed to cry for the first three years of his life and you'll find that after probably three months of crying, he will be past that. It might be less time than that. He'll be past it and he will be so much sunnier and more cooperative, less demanding and less rigid.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Will he like it then when you have to stop playing and take a phone call? No, of course not. He will hate it. But he will be more flexible than he is now. This is a great example of how it's never too late to do this work. Because you parented the best way you knew when your son was little. You realized in doing this course that you needed to do some healing yourself. You did that. Now you're seeing the healing that you need to do with your son. What an amazing and wonderful thing, that you're going to do that with him now at 33 months, so he doesn't have to carry those tears through the rest of his life -- which would drive all kinds of rigid, uncompromising, problematic behavior. He's going to actually become a different kind of person because of the work that you're about to do with him.

Question 8:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:24:30

There's also a related question about how to get kids to want to tidy up. You just have to make it into a habit like every other habit that children don't see a need for, like brushing their teeth. You sing a song and you make it really, really fun and you help her do it. And eventually she will learn to do it herself, but it will not be an easy process. It will be a process that will take her practicing with you over and over and over again. Children don't see a reason to tidy up, so when you tidy up with them you make it really fun and it's all about the connection.

Dr. Laura Markham:

This is true, by the way, about chores in general. We grew up thinking chores were onerous, so we act like they're these onerous things, and then we are surprised our children don't want to do them? The way to get kids

excited about chores is to make it a project that you and your child do together, and it's really about the bonding time. That's true for cleaning up the toys. If you do enough of that, over time your child will think of cleaning up the toys as an enjoyable process. I'm making it sound easier than it is, but you can jolly your child through the clean up and they can come to consider it just a part of life and not that big a deal, if you help them with it and they're used to doing it with you. They'll eventually take pleasure in the orderly toy room or the orderly bedroom just like we do as adults.

Question 9:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:25:58

A parent wants to know how to get kids tips to tidy up before moving to the next activity or room. I would say you have to just be very proactive about it and work with them. "No, no, no, we can't go outside until we clean up," or, "We can't go into the other room until we clean up in here. We always clean up our messes before we move on." Just have it be fun to get them to do it, and do it with them. That's all.

Question 10:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:26:25

A parent is asking, "How do you get kids to help with chores willingly?" There's an article on my website about this, so I'm not going to go into a long answer. You can just put "chores" into the search box.

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/ask-the-doctor-1/frustration-over-getting-kids-to-do-chores-without-reminding-and-nagging>

[https://www.ahaparenting.com/blog/5 Ways to Get Kids to Help Around the House](https://www.ahaparenting.com/blog/5-Ways-to-Get-Kids-to-Help-Around-the-House)

But I would say if you have a cheerful attitude, it helps a lot. If you have a negative attitude, you can expect them to feel negatively about the chores. If you do the chores with

your children, they will welcome the chores as a way to connect with you. Even though they might rather go read their book or play their game, they're going to like the opportunity to connect with you. I would just say look at it as an opportunity to work as a team with your child and enjoy your child.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Yes, it will take you longer than doing it yourself or longer than having them do it, but you can't really expect kids to do chores themselves for a long time. Instead, you have to do it with them so they start to gain some pleasure in the mastery of it and to feel good about doing it with you and how, "Yeah, I always loved cleaning the mirror with my mom and making faces, so I've come to love cleaning mirrors no matter what." That's how children become willing to do chores. Again, check out the article on my website about that.

Question 11:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:27:33

"We rotate daily chores among the four kids. One of the younger twins, who's seven, balks at the chores and it always becomes a power struggle even though the other twin can easily finish the chores." For these kinds of recurring problems, I would work with the child to find a solution. I would recommend a family meeting so that all the kids are part of the discussion. It affects the whole family if your seven year old refuses to do their chores. If you're not yet having family meetings, read the article on the Aha! Parenting website about them and start having them.

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/family-life/family-meetings>

I highly recommend family meetings to all families because they strengthen the bonds between the children, mostly.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Most of the time you'll just do appreciations and looking forward to's and those are explained in the article on the website, but sometimes of course you'll have an issue to

talk about. Of course ask the family if anyone has anything to bring up. Your first meeting, be sure you have something fun to bring up like what to do on vacation or if that's too far away, what to do over the weekend, but if you've had a couple of meetings that felt good after you've done that then bring this agenda item, the chore question. Tell your kids how much you appreciate that this is a family where everyone helps out. The dog appreciates it too because the dog gets fed and the dishes get done and the table's set up so everyone gets meals, which is really great. We all appreciate that, and you love how everyone in the family contributes.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Ask your kids how they think it's working. Listen, acknowledge whatever anyone says. You might learn something. Or you might find something out that needs addressing actually from your other kids, and at the very least, your kids will feel appreciated. Then if your seven year old doesn't speak up with, "I hate chores," which is what your seven year old might say, you can just ask directly. "So, I notice that sometimes you have a hard time with the chores. What would make it easier for you to do chores? Because it's important to do them, as you know, for everyone in the family, so what would make it easier," and see what your kid says.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Since you're describing a power struggle, don't be surprised if your child tells you that you're too controlling about how the job gets done or maybe something else. If they say, "Well, you're always correcting me, mom, when I try to set the table, that I didn't do it right," then you can say, "Okay, I'm willing to not correct you, but I don't like it when the table is set up ..." whatever, "forks are on the right and the knives are on the left," or whatever you want to say. "If I'm not involved in it and I don't correct you, how do we make sure about how the table gets set? Do you want to have sign off from your sister about it or your brother?" Something about quality control, so you can step out of the role of the bad guy here.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Anyway, make an agreement about quality control and what will happen and make an agreement about what will

happen if your agreement is not kept, if the seven year old doesn't do the chore. Shake on it, write it down. It might be that your other kids will also help solve the problem. That's one reason to work this out in a family meeting instead of one on one. Like your other seven year old might say, "Oh, I have the same problem when mom does that, but I just do XYZ and then she doesn't mind," or whatever.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I also I want to say power struggles take two people. If you're getting into power struggles with your child about this, you're probably getting into power struggles with the same child about other things. So you still have to change here. You have to act with grace toward this child at chore time, and of course other times to avoid those power struggles. I also think you'll probably have to bring this up more than once at a family meeting. Even though the first time will get you on the right track, you might have to do more problem solving. I do think making it a family issue rather than a power struggle between you and one child will really help. Please read the Aha! website about strong willed kids and power struggles because you can practice sidestepping those. They shouldn't need to happen.

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/positive-discipline/Parenting-Strong-Willed-Child>

Question 12:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:31:28

A parent says, "I really like your family rules. It's pretty much what we follow. But could you please help us a little bit more with, 'We always clean up our own messes,' and when is this something that he should do by himself?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

"Clean up your own messes" is just simple. You start when they're toddlers. "Oops, milk spilled, we always clean up our own messes. Come on, here's the sponge. You take that, I'll take the paper towel. Come on, I'll help you." You're always willing to help them. What you're doing

when you say this doesn't mean that they have to clean up their messes alone. It means they're responsible for their mess, and you're there to help, but it's their responsibility. Helping them is how they learn to do it and helping them is also how they learn there's no shame in it. It's not a bad thing to have to do.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If your eight year old still doesn't clean up his own messes and hates doing it, don't worry about it. Help him out. Say, "Okay, I'll help you clean up your own mess, but we always clean up our own messes. It's your responsibility. I'll help. Where should we begin?" and help him take the responsibility.

Question 13:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:32:32

A parent is asking, "How can I get my daughter to be more helpful? She refuses to help me carry things when I'm clearly overburdened and often just watches me clean up the toys without pitching in, no matter if we've just had fun and connection. I try hard not to show it but it makes me resentful. She says, 'Chores are too boring.'"

Dr. Laura Markham:

Anyone would feel resentful. I totally get that. Now you don't say how old your child is. We communicate to kids about chores all the time. If our attitude is that chores are boring, kids will often feel chores are boring, so one thing is to make chores fun. Have fun as you clean up the toys. Like if you're cleaning up the toys yourself, as you pick each toy up, talk to it. Have it talk in a funny voice back to you. Have it go over and snoop around her and get her giggling and beg her. Have the block you're holding say, "Oh please, please throw me into the bin. This parent's daughter, whatever her name is, Stephanie. 'Stephanie, please drop me into the bin,'" till she's laughing and laughing and she throws it into the bin. Make it fun.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The thing about her refusing to help you carry things when you're overburdened. Now if she's three or four and it's the end of the school day and she says, "No, mommy, you carry my backpack, I can't," I totally get that. Three and

four year olds are really not made for those long days at school that we mostly have them in. Their cortisol levels are through the roof if they've been at daycare or school all day. Often it's all that they can do to get home in one piece. If that's where she is, I would first get her laughing. That releases a bunch of anxiety so it mobilizes extra energy. The child is not just stuffing the anxiety down, so they have extra energy then and she might be able to carry her backpack.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If she really can't carry her backpack, put it on yourself, put it over your shoulder and fine. Your briefcase to carry, your purse, a bag of groceries, I get it, but you can still carry her backpack or figure out a different solution like leave your briefcase in the car. Or if you're walking home, have a stroller or something. Have some way to get the stuff home.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think if she's older, if you're talking about a nine year old and she won't carry things even though you're overburdened, I would stop and put the things down right there on the sidewalk and I would say, "You really don't want to help me carry things. I totally understand, but I'm carrying two bags of groceries and you're not carrying anything. I have an idea. Let's go back to the store, let's get another bag and let's put some of these things into a third bag. I'll still carry two bags but you're going to carry a bag too, that's not too heavy for you. Because you know what? In a family, everyone works together and I need your help."

Dr. Laura Markham:

The research shows that when kids help around the house and help in their family, they're more likely to be a person who will help other people. I would do whatever you need to do to make it palatable for her to help a little bit with something when you're overburdened like this, but you always have to keep in mind, how many inner resources does the child have at that moment? Because it's always a question of giving them enough support to meet our expectations.

Question 14:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:35:50

Our next question is from a parent who says, "Whenever we ask our kids to put something away or take a bath or help with chores, we have to repeat multiple times or even get angry before they do it. At times our son says no or back talks or they say, 'Mean papa,' or, 'Mean mom.' What do we say to them in these situations to teach respect? How do we handle this better to avoid getting angry?" Well, let's work backwards on your questions.

Dr. Laura Markham:

First of all, this is completely normal behavior. When you say to avoid getting angry, it's completely reasonable that kids don't want to do things like take a bath or help with chores or put toys away, right? That's the first thing. The way to handle it without getting angry is to tell yourself, "This is actually completely normal behavior." Now I don't mean it's normal for them to back talk and say, "Mean papa," but actually it is. It's well within the range of what a young child would do when they're upset. Your response is not to be hurt by that, but to say, "You think I'm mean because I make you take a bath, huh? All right, well, I'm mean, I'm mean. I'm the mean bath monster and I'm going to get you in the tub." Your kids will laugh and squeal and you've completely transformed the interaction, so instead of them taunting you to try to get your response, to try to provoke you into anger and you falling for it and getting angry, you instead just transform it. It's not an attack unless you make it an attack.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think in general the way to frame this is, it's normal to have to ask kids more than once to do something and the best way to ask kids to do something is to be empathic about it. "I know, you really don't want to help me carry in the groceries, but in a family everybody helps. Time to stop playing with your toys and come with me right now and carry a bag of groceries in as carefully as you can. You're getting so strong. I want to see whether you can actually carry the whole bag or if we have to take some things out of it."

- Dr. Laura Markham: You're doing this partly as a joining, as a connection. "We are the grocery carrying team," so when you're asking them to help with chores, you're doing it with them and they're experiencing that as a way to bond with papa or mom. It's actually a good thing, from their perspective. No, they didn't want to stop playing but they're more willing to stop what they're doing and help you when it becomes not just onerous work but actually a way to bond with mom or dad.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Okay, so you now know that you're going to have to ask a kid more than once to do something and the way to get their attention is to go in their face in a friendly way, look them in the eye, join in what they're doing. "Wow, look how far you've come on this. This is looking so cool. I love how you did XYZ with it! And now it's time for a bath. I know, it's hard to stop playing and get ready for the bath but it's time. Let's go." Or, "Do you want to go now or in five minutes?" But you don't allow more than five minutes.
- Dr. Laura Markham: That brings me to the question of routine. You say you're asking kids to do things. All of the things you list should be part of a routine. Every time you come home from shopping, the kids help bring in the groceries. They won't like it but they'll do it. Putting away toys happens at the same time every day. Mom or dad should be involved in putting away the toys so the child experiences it as a fun thing to do and begins to get joy out of relating to the parent as they do it and out of how orderly everything looks afterwards. And because the parent is with them, they don't feel so overwhelmed. They can borrow our executive function so that they can see the order in which to do things and it becomes a very manageable task to them by the fact that we do it with them every single day.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Now, can a seven year old put away the toys themselves? Yes, to some degree, but unless you've done this with them for a year, putting the toys away with them, cleaning up a scattered playroom, they could still feel pretty overwhelmed by it. I would not ask a seven year old to clean up their room by themselves, for instance, where toys were scattered all over. They wouldn't know where to

begin. That's the kind of thing you do with them. Hopefully you've done it all day long so that there aren't so many things out. They clean up one thing before they bring out the next thing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

My point is if you just bark at kids to clean up toys, of course they're going to resist. If instead it's part of the daily routine that you do with them and you sing a song as you do it and it happens at the same time every single day before lunch, before dinner, then your child will not balk at cleaning up toys. Because it's just part of what you do in the routine at that time of day.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I also think that the back talking and the, "Mean papa," and, "Mean mom," that's just an attempt to manipulate you. If they call you mean, you get upset and they know that. They've got your number. You shouldn't get upset when your kid calls you mean. It's your job to be the parent, who give rules at times that the kid doesn't like or enforces limits the kid doesn't like, like getting ready to take a bath instead of playing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I do want to go back to that question of repeating yourself multiple times to get your child's attention. Please read the article on the Aha! Parenting website, "Getting Your Child to Listen." Just put the word "listen" into the search box and you'll find it.

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/communication/How-get-kid-listen>

You should not have to repeat yourself multiple times. If you get in your child's face in a friendly way, you have not had to repeat yourself multiple times, so there's something about the way you're asking that I think maybe can be improved.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I also want to clarify that I'm not suggesting it's okay for children to be disrespectful to adults. I'm not. If your child says something disrespectful to you -- and I don't think, "Mean mama," or, "Mean papa," -- is disrespectful, by the way. I think that's just a transparent ploy to get you to

reconsider because you don't want to be considered mean. That's just silly. But if they're actually disrespectful I would say, "Excuse me, we don't speak to each other that way in this house. I don't speak to you in that disrespectful way and I don't want you to speak to me in a disrespectful way. Let's try a do over. You were telling me why you shouldn't have to take a bath?" Then the kid will argue like a trained lawyer about why they don't have to take a bath and you will patiently say, "Yep, I hear you, you don't have to take a bath because of XYZ -- and I'm not convinced. Today, we're having a bath just the way we always have a bath. Let's go."

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would really step up the connection, special time, empathy 24/7, roughhousing, so that you build the connection. Use empathy when you give your kids an instruction. When your child does resist and you are using your empathy and they try to counterattack back because they're feeling put upon, and they attack by calling you mean mom or mean papa, and you respond, "Mean? Hey, who are you calling mean," and you don't take it seriously, they're going to drop it. First they have to feel heard before they'll drop it or they'll just escalate. If they don't feel like you're really listening to them that they're upset about it, they will escalate. You do have to empathize. "I know, it's really hard. You really were enjoying playing with that toy, and now it's time to clean up and get ready for bed. I know, it's a drag, and you'll be able to do it in the morning."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Bottom line, connection, the child feeling heard and understood, is what makes the difference in them being responsive and cooperative and wanting to follow your lead.

Question 15:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:44:00

A parent wants to know about how to get her four year old, after drawing, to follow the rules about putting

everything away. Sometimes she does it easily but other times if she hasn't had enough time with her mom or it's late and she's tired, she refuses.

Dr. Laura Markham:

In general, the coaching approach is to notice the feelings and the needs that are driving the behavior and to address them, and that changes the behavior.

In this case, your four year old doesn't want to clean up because it feels hard to her. Maybe it's late, before bedtime, and that might be another reason. No kid wants to cooperate with bedtime prep, right? It always bothers them because they want to stall bedtime.

Maybe she hasn't had enough connection with you. She doesn't have the inner resources to overcome her natural resistance to this unpleasant task. She feels disconnected, so why would she do what you want?

Dr. Laura Markham:

That's what you do. You want to address those needs. Of course, it's best to do it preventively, which I know, you can't really make her untired at the end of the night. You could start clean up earlier if you had enough foresight, which you don't always have. It's hard to repair disconnection on the spot, but laughter often does work to do that, so you could try laughter.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The good news is most of the time she cooperates relatively easily with this task. I would say on the evenings when her needs haven't been met and she doesn't have the inner resources to do it, you could just do it with her. If she refuses to participate, you could maintain your sense of humor and get her laughing to reconnect. Have the drawing pencils talk. Have them be silly, have them be outrageous. Have them beg for her to be the one to put them in the right place. Put the pencils away in her ears or in your ears so she has to show you where they actually go. Just be ridiculous.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If she does even one thing toward clean up, applaud that she's participating. "You were so tired tonight that it was hard for you to clean up, so I helped and you did a little

bit. You did this at least. Tomorrow we'll start earlier. What else will help so we can both do it together?" She might say, "Nothing, I won't help clean up," and then you repeat your family rule about clean up and you tell her that you'll always help and you'll start earlier so that she feels like she can do it, but it is her responsibility to clean up. This is the family rule.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If it's too much for her to do day after day, then you need to take a break from art for a while. The next day when she gets ready to pull out her art supplies, remind her that you'll always help with clean up, but it is her job and you're going to have to remind her at X time. Shake on it and what's going to make it easy for her to clean up at the time. Make sure you have an agreement. You might even write it down and shake on it before she starts drawing.

Question 16:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:46:54

A parent says his four year old son really struggles with transitions. Here's the basic thing on transitions. One, you give warnings. Two, you empathize. "I know, it's hard to do XYZ, right?" They have zero motivation to stop what they're doing and do what we want, so we have to acknowledge that.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Three, you give them what I call a transition bridge. If he's playing with some toys, he can bring that as a bridge, that toy. He can bring it to bath time, he can bring it to school, in the car. Or while you're walking and then you can put it in your bag while he goes into the school. He can bring it to the dinner table and park it nearby, if not at the table. That's a transition bridge.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then make it fun. Why would he want to stop playing and do what you want? Have his shoes talk to him. Don't add to the difficulty by making him put on his own shoes, just do it for him, make it easy for him at that moment. Make it fun, make it easy for him to do what we want him to do to move on with the schedule, because we're spending our entire day pushing our kid through the schedule and his

cerebral cortex is not fully developed. He has a different sense of time. He actually has no idea why it's important to stop and get ready to do something else. He just wants to do what he's doing. So we have to be aware of that and make it easier for him.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then finally of course, routines. It's better if you're not fighting over and over again, if he knows that this is just part of the routine, these transitions. Also, there needs to be something he can look forward to in the schedule when you have a more difficult routine. If he likes the food at dinner, talk about the food. My daughter didn't necessarily like what we were going to eat but she did like food so she was allowed to choose an olive or an anchovy. I know that sounds crazy, but when she was four she loved olives and anchovies. She was allowed to choose either an olive or an anchovy to add to her plate. She didn't want to stop playing but it was sort of a little added momentum to go to the table, to have an anchovy or an olive, so that she could get herself to stop playing and come to the table.

Dr. Laura Markham:

For some kids, it's a non food treat. It's like you get to choose the placemats, you get to say the blessing, but the point is we have to add something into the routine that motivates them, that they like.

Question 17:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:49:12

A parent is saying that her seven year old has a hard time transitioning and that they run out of time for special time because she pushes the boundary, she has other things she's doing.

Your seven year old doesn't get to set up the schedule for the day. You set up the schedule for the day. She gets to have input. You write it out, you type it up. You put pictures, if she's not a good reader, put pictures of her doing things for each part of the day with the time. You give her a digital clock or there's a digital clock that she can read in your home and you point to it.

Dr. Laura Markham: You say, "Sweetheart, it's 6:00. Our special time is at 6:00 because at 7:00, we start getting ready for bed because it's lights out at 8:00. We have finished dinner and now it's special time at 6:00." When she says, "No, no, I haven't finished cutting out my paper doll clothes yet," you say, "I hear you, you want to do that, but we're going to not have time for special time if you do that." You say, "We're having special time, we always have special time. That's the first thing we're going to do, is have special time. Why don't we have special time for half an hour and you can play afterwards for half an hour if you want before we get ready for bed? 6:00 is always special time."

Dr. Laura Markham: You don't let her say, "No, I want to cut the paper dolls first," because then she'll keep putting it off and putting it off. 6:00 is special time. Remember, it will make it easier for her to then stop doing the paper dolls when it's time but you've already had special time. At this point, you're enforcing what special time is. If you want an agreement that special time is always at 6:30, fine, but the problem is at 6:30 she's going to go into a meltdown probably and not be willing to have special time and you'll never get it.

Dr. Laura Markham: This way, if she goes at 6:00 into the meltdown, "No, no, no, I want to do my paper dolls," and you say, "I know. It's special time," then you can say, "We can do paper dolls for special time. This is what our special time is, but we won't be able to do roughhousing too or anything else. We have half an hour for special time. I'm setting the timer for this. You wish you had all the time in the world, I know, and when you're a grown up you'll probably never stop playing paper dolls. You'll never go to bed. You'll play paper dolls all night, won't you, every night, but right now, sweetie, I'm setting the timer. It's special time now. It's special time. If you want it to be paper dolls, that's fine but we're going to do it together. Right now I'm going to sit with you."

Dr. Laura Markham: Then you sit and you watch her do paper dolls and you pour your love into her. If she tells you to put the dress on the doll, fine, or cut something out, fine, and you do that. Halfway through you say, "You know what? I'm noticing

the timer's halfway through. In 15 minutes we're going to be out of time for special time. I want to make sure that's okay because we're having special time now and this is what we're doing. Do you want to keep doing paper dolls or do you want to do something else?" "Nope, I want to do paper dolls," or whatever. Great.

Dr. Laura Markham:

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

Dr. Laura Markham:

When she has a meltdown, that's fine. The way they learn that time is finite. It's horrible, it's a terrible thing to learn, but we all have to learn it. That way they learn that when you're in the continuum that has time and space in it, that time is finite in that continuum, there's no way around it. They just have to learn it by being subject to it and so you can't have time be ever expanding. You have to set limits on time -- and that's how they learn it.

Question 18:

Parent:

00:53:11

When I pick my son up from school, he always wants to stay longer and he's never happy to see me so he always reacts by getting angry or by crying and then it takes me a long time to get him out of the school.

Dr. Laura Markham:

It's probably that he was having fun and you interrupted him and he doesn't really know when it's about to happen. One thing that can really help with that is if the child minder can say to him, "Your mom's going to be here soon." Now maybe that wouldn't help or they just aren't going to take the time, but it might be that that kind of a

warning would help him. If they can't do that, then you can do the warning. Now I know you have a six year old also, so it's harder to do this but you could get there and give him a hug and say, "We have to leave in three minutes. What are you going to do for the next three minutes," and then he has transitional time, or maybe it's five minutes if you can spare that.

Dr. Laura Markham:

He might say, "No, no, I can't leave in five minutes." Then you say, "I know, it's so hard. Tell me what you've been up to," and you admire, you're essentially using that five minutes to pour your love into him and admire what he's been working on. Or he's using it to finish what he's been working on or whatever. It's so hard. It's just hard for some kids to transition and so it's also helpful if you have something for him to transition to. At least for this period of time while he's having a hard time since he is only four, if you can say to him, "Hm, you know what? You know what I've got in the car?" Or if you're walking home, "You know what I've got? I've got this or I've got that." Just something that he can enjoy or a game you can play together that he gets into, a verbal game. Just something that will allow him to make the transition.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Because it's hard for kids who are four to make a transition. He's been having fun, so the last thing he wants is to leave. You can't expect him to just want to leave immediately. He's got to have a moment, even a few minutes of transition time, but having something to look forward to usually really helps.

Question 19:

Parent:

00:55:16

I have a 20 month old baby girl and every time I leave the house or just go through a transition, I don't think that she understands what I'm saying if I tell her, "Oh, I can see that you're upset." If I carry her, she will start scratching me and hitting me and take away my things and pull my hair. I don't know how to deal with her and I find it really not easy to connect with her or do anything with her.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Okay, the 20 month old does understand when you say you're leaving the house, she just doesn't like it. And she's showing you she doesn't like it. You're right that when you say, "Oh, I know you don't like this," that's meaningless to her. I mean some children, it will help, but in your case, your daughter is saying, "You're not listening to me, I don't like that, I'm going to scratch you and pull your hair."

Dr. Laura Markham:

She sounds strong willed, but she also sounds like maybe she needs more connection with you so she's more willing to follow your lead. Because with a 20 month old, she wants what she wants, but what she also wants, more than anything, is your relationship with her. If you can make sure that you're connecting with her, which means playing laughing games with her for half an hour before you have to say no to her about something -- you can't always, but before you know you'll have to leave the house -- play games with her. Chase her around, throw her in the air, get her laughing. And you'll find that you can make leaving the house part of that same game and she will follow your lead.

Dr. Laura Markham:

It's a hard age. It's probably the hardest age. Between 18 and 24 months is the hardest age. She's right in the middle of it, but it gets easier. It does get easier. Part of why it gets easier is because they start to control themselves better. But also part of it is that we hear them better, we understand them better, so they feel more understood. As they can express themselves, we understand and they feel understood -- so they don't have to scratch us to show us.

Dr. Laura Markham:

In the meantime, until she can tell you what she wants, you can give her words. Say, "No, mommy." You can say that to her. "You're telling me no. I know Sweetie, you're telling me no, but we have to wash your face. Here, do you want to do it yourself?" You're giving her more control, you're letting her you know you understand, you're telling her words she can say. But right now most of that won't matter. Most of the time she still will have a hard time with what limits you set. The most important thing of all is getting her laughing and connected to you, and trying to

make things a game so that she's willing to follow you.
Does that make sense?

Parent: Yeah. It makes sense.

Dr. Laura Markham: Hard to do. I get it, it's hard to do, but it is the answer when you have a 20 month old.

Question 20:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:58:18 This is from two parents who say that transitioning out of playtime and into tasks is challenging even when they give their daughter a warning, "Two minutes and then we're going to be done playing horses, we're going to go brush our teeth." She does not want to go brush her teeth.

Dr. Laura Markham: Of course. Every child in the world is going to not want to go brush their teeth. One thing is to find a way to make the onerous things more fun. All children have a hard time with transitions. When you say you're playing horses, if she's riding horseback then horseback ride her over to where you're going to brush teeth. Let her brush her teeth while she's on horseback. If you're playing with horses, take the horses with you, have them gallop into the bathroom. Brush the horse's teeth first. Whatever is necessary to get the transition from the horseplay to the brushing teeth will really help her.

Dr. Laura Markham: Keep the chores and personal grooming stuff to a minimum for a four year old. Do as little of that as possible and make it routinized so that she knows that when the timer goes off, that's when we go brush our teeth. If she has a meltdown, it's okay. Really keep it very routinized so every day it's exactly the same thing, so that you don't have to go through the same battle every single day.

Question 21:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:59:40 A parent is saying, "I do play a lot with my kids. I really love it, but then I can't get anything done. What am I supposed

to do? I can't even take care of myself." I say set up a routine that includes time for you, like a schedule. Set your phone to go off every hour and when it goes off, ask yourself, "What do I need?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

When your kids -- you say that they're having a meltdown because they want your time and you want to go take care of **you** but you've already spent an hour with them? What you say is, "Hm, Brittany wants me to read to her, Michael wants me to play with his castle, and what do I need? What does mommy need? I know, I need to pee. I'm going to do that first, and you know what else I need? I'm getting hungry. We're going to have lunch after that. You know what? I'm willing to read to you, Sweetie. We're going to have a cup of tea and read a little bit later. But first I'm going to pee and then we're going to make lunch."

Dr. Laura Markham:

You're in charge of the schedule. But ask yourself over and over again what you need in addition to what they need. Make a point of saying it so they get used to, that's the equation. In the same way they share you with their sibling, they share you with you. You have to take care of you or you won't have anything to give to them.

Question 22:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:00:49

There's a few questions here about independent play. "How do you encourage independent play? My kid just wants me all the time." Partly it depends on the kind of child you have. There are kids who are the engineers of the world who just want to build things, their train tracks and Legos and stuff and they don't need you to play with them. There are other kids who are going to be the talk show hosts and those kids really want you to hang out with them. They are used to having your attention maybe, and maybe there's a new baby in the family and they can't handle it when you are not with them all the time.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I sympathize with this because this is a kid who really does not know how to play by themselves. Here's the thing. In a tribal society, where we're evolutionary designed, where

we lived for tens of thousands of years before we got to this point -- In a tribal society, there would be other children to play with. You wouldn't be your child's playmate. Parents do teach kids things. They do snuggle with children, they do hang with children, they do enjoy their children in tribal societies and maybe they even play with them a little bit, but that's not their primary thing. They're trying to make sure there's dinner on the table and they're visiting with other grownups or whatever.

Dr. Laura Markham:

It's an unnatural situation in which we find ourselves, where our kid is living in a house or an apartment with you and the baby, let's say, and there's no one to play with except you. I would say if you have a child like this who needs that attention, to make sure that your child gets out of the house and plays with other kids every single day.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If you have a four year old who's not at preschool, then take them to playgroups with you. I think four year olds love part time preschool so that they do get to play with other people. A four year old is just bored being at home with you and the baby most of the time. That way if the four year old goes off to preschool until lunchtime and then comes home and has lunch with you and the baby or maybe if they even go through lunch and then you pick the four year old up after lunch and you put the baby down for a nap at that point, and then you have time with the four year old. That way you can have special time with the four year old, one on one time, and then you've filled the four year old's cup. Then when the baby wakes up, you can do things together, the three of you, like singing and going for walks and stuff like that.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think you can't expect to be your four year old's primary playmate. It's just not usually possible to do. There are ways to encourage kids to play independently. It is a skill that everybody needs to master. It starts in babyhood and it comes from us not interfering. If you have a baby, don't interfere with them if they're busy playing. Let your baby play and let your baby do things and don't feel like you always have to stimulate them.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think all this pressure on parents to stimulate their babies is a huge disservice to the baby and to the parents because parents are always getting in their baby's face to try to stimulate them. Babies don't need that. They do need interaction with you, a fair amount of it, but they don't want to be the center of your universe. That's too much pressure for anybody. They need to be able to stay on your chest or your back while you go about your day and see how you're picking out a grapefruit at the store, watch you building a train track with the four year old or whatever.

Dr. Laura Markham:

It's important to not always be in our child's face when they're babies. That way as they get older, they might say, "Play with me," and you go fill their cup and then you say, "I'm going to cut up the vegetables. You can help me cut up vegetables or you can continue to play with your train." Then you're available but not involved with them, but you've gotten him started playing with his train before you go over to the vegetables. That's how children learn to play independently.

Question 23:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:04:56

A parent asked, "What about a kid who wants to play with you all the time? Our four year old wants to play with us all the time." I would say you don't have to play his games all the time. He may want companionship from you all the time, but involve him in your housework. You said you've got things that you need to do, so if you're cooking dinner, let him cook dinner with you. If you're folding laundry, let him fold laundry with you. It'll be slower and you'll have to find ways to make it fun for him and involve him, but again, it's back to the idea about making him part of the life of the tribe and the work of the household.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If he says, "No, I want to play with my trains, come play with my trains with me," you can say, "After the laundry, we can play with trains. You can either go play with your trains now and I'll stay in here and fold the laundry and watch you, or you can help me fold the laundry and then we'll play together with your trains."

Dr. Laura Markham: I would also say a four year old doesn't nap anymore usually, but if you're home with him, I would definitely do an enforced quiet time after lunch or something so that you have time to do your paperwork. You mentioned doing paperwork, paying your bills or whatever. You can do that stuff while he's having quiet time. If he has a hard time at quiet time, he can listen to a book on tape or he can draw or read books to himself in his room, but I think it is important for kids to have a certain amount of time that is time to work on their own stuff without you there.

Dr. Laura Markham: A lot of kids don't like that. They want to be very connected to you. That's okay, but gradually, you can get him started playing and you could make yourself less and less active as a playmate so if he says, "Here, you drive this train, I'm going to drive that train," you can ask him for direction. You can get him started playing and then you can say, "In 10 minutes when the buzzer goes off, I am going to have to go in to start lunch. Do you want to help me start lunch, or do you want to keep playing train?" and he gets his choice.

Dr. Laura Markham: I think you're not the entertainment center. You're not doing your child any favors to be constantly entertaining him. I know he's an only child and in a more natural situation he would have other children around who he could play with. I would also make sure that he gets enough time to play with other kids since he's an only child.

Question 24:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:07:20 "Parenting is wonderful but it's a nonstop effort. What are the most important things to do to stay on track and what are the most common mistakes to avoid?"

Dr. Laura Markham: I would say the most important things to stay on track --- One, self care. Build it into your routine, because otherwise you won't do it. It's too hard to get yourself

back on the list. Build self care into your routine. Monitor your mood as you go through your day and restore yourself to a sense of wellbeing. That's the most important thing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Secondly, preventive maintenance for your child. Again, build it into your routine. Even if you're not doing special time except once a week, build connection, empathy 24/7 into your day. Build opportunities to connect when the kids wake up in the morning, before bedtime, when you're reconnected after you pick them up at daycare. Make sure that preventive maintenance is just a part of your routine because otherwise you won't be able to fit one more thing in.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If I had to say a third thing to stay on track, it would be meditation. Whatever works for you for meditation. If it's while your kid is napping, if it's during quiet time. If it's after you drop your child at daycare, before you walk into your office, to spend 10 minutes in your car. If you are looking for an easy way to meditate, use a guided meditation, but get yourself into the habit of meditating. Even 10 minutes a day can make a tremendous difference to rewire your brain.

Dr. Laura Markham:

How to avoid the most common mistakes? The most common mistakes are the ones you already know. Not doing self care so you end up yelling, or thinking you don't have time for special time so you're not connecting. Or a lot of moms think, "I don't like to roughhouse. I don't do that. That's my husband's job," but then they don't get their kids laughing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Another common mistake is not working on our own emotions, our own triggers, because those are the things that get us into hot water with our kids. I would just urge you to remember that all behavior from your child is a signal about some emotion. They don't hit their brother out of the blue. There's something going on. It's a full backpack, probably. It might be sibling rivalry, but whatever it is, you can help your child with that to make it better.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would urge you to just appreciate your child right now. Don't worry about the future and what she's going to be like in kindergarten or when she's 17. I guarantee you, most of what is wrong with a child is age appropriate and developmentally they will evolve out of. If you just show up and help them with their emotions and coach them, and keep that relationship strong and resist the urge to punish, most of the time kids will meet the challenge of emerging into their best self.

Question 25:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:10:10

This working parent worries that since they spend the whole evening, she and her husband, in child-led play, giving the kids full attention, and they do it on a weekend, are the kids getting too much attention? How much is too much?

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would say, is it too much because it hurts the kids, or too much because you don't have time for self care? I think we have warped ideas about what children need. Children actually need a great deal from us, because our culture is not set up to support families. If we lived in a village or a tribe where children palled around with the other children and where the ratio was six adults to every child in a tribe, they get much more adult attention if you have that ratio. We don't do that anymore. We're in one dwelling with one parent or two parents and kids. One kid, two kids, three kids, whatever we've got, maybe four or five, and we expect that that's going to be enough for the children. When what we're designed, throughout human development for many, many, many generations, has been maybe six adults to each child in a village situation or a tribal situation. Or there were aunties and uncles and grandparents and lots of people around for each child.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think we have to remember that's actually the way humans have developed, so in a sense that's the way humans are designed. That's the way the human genome says, "Oh, this is what we get, this is the way we flower, this is the way we thrive." If we're not giving that to kids,

it's not as good for them, so kids actually need a lot of attention and they thrive with it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now that doesn't mean we should be directing them. The person who asked this question said "child led," so I think that really matters. As long as we're not taking the lead and it's child led, it's great for kids to have a lot of attention from parents. It is, but that doesn't mean we have to be there 24/7. In fact, that's not good for kids either. What they need is to know we're there if they need us, but to not have to be there 24/7 for them. Once we've spent some time with them we can say, "I need time for me. I need time to make dinner," whatever, and we can step away, but we are there if they need us. That's what's ideal for kids.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If you have a kid who's very dependent, you have to do that very gradually, but there is a way to step away gradually in your child's presence, where they are playing near you and they can have your voice to keep as a bridge between you, even while you're doing something else. I guess the answer to the question is just take your cues from your child if you're worried about what's good for your kid, but of course if you're not getting time for you, that matters. We know if you don't monitor your own wellbeing, then you can't take care of your child's wellbeing, and that is essential. Monitoring your own wellbeing and taking care of you is essential to show up for your child emotionally.

Question 26:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:13:08

How do you get a five year old to play on their own? Oh my goodness, this is hard. It's very hard to do. There are five year olds who play on their own, there are even three year olds who do. I call them the engineers because they're usually playing on their own because they love to see how things work or take them apart or put them together or build structures. Then there are the talk show

host type kids and those kids do not play on their own because all they want to do is talk to other people.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If you have had special time, if you played games with your child and your child says, "No, I can't play by myself, I'm lonely," then I would say you need to have more play dates. This is an only child, so you need to have more time when they're with other kids. It sounds like this kid is not getting enough time with other children. The other thing I would warn you is always, before you start doing something, to make sure that your child is doing something. If you're going to say, "I'm going to need to start dinner. Would you want to work with me?" That'd be the first thing. I would always try to involve them with what you're doing instead of making them play by themselves.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I notice that this parent seems to be using the computer because the son tries to shut down the computer to get her attention. When you're on the phone or on a computer, it raises your child's anxiety level. I'm wondering if this child has an anxiety issue because I'm noticing that the person who asked this question is the same one whose child is having some other issues. I'm thinking this child may have an anxiety issue. When you remove yourself from interaction and you go on the phone or the computer, what happens is your child immediately realizes you're not there to keep him safe. This is just genetically predetermined. All children realize this.

Dr. Laura Markham:

They worry, "Well, if a tiger jumps out of the bushes, who is she going to save," is what they worry if there's a sibling. In this case, an anxious kid is thinking, "If a tiger jumps out of the bushes, is she going to notice me or is she swallowed up by paying attention to her computer?" I think this is stimulating anxiety in him and I would get help for that anxiety. I would have him work with you on things.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I probably would **not** try to work on a computer with a five year old there. I can't actually imagine that working, unless your child has already gotten started doing something that he loves to do by himself next to you. I would move

heaven and earth to find things he likes to do by himself and have things that you don't do with him, that he does by himself. Fill his cup first, and then get him started on the thing. Then you can try working on your computer. But I wouldn't expect more than 15 minutes of it. Honestly, I can't actually imagine being able to do that. It's very hard to actually get work done with kids. If it's housework, if it's cooking dinner, they can do it with you. But if you're working on your computer, that's a whole different challenge.

Question 27:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:16:01

People are asking what to do with all kinds of different routines and how to shift the routine. I would say in general, you're going to shift the routine in a way that is gentle. If your child is co-sleeping and you're trying to figure out how to shift the routine and your child is not settling down, like your 18 month old just wants to play, there's a question about that. Go look on the website. There's a child who's 18 months, who won't settle down for a nap. Go ahead and take a look at the website, it's got the answer on it. If you have a hard time finding that link, just write a note to administrator@AhaParenting.com and we'll send you the link for that but that's covered on the web site. <https://www.ahaparenting.com/ask-the-doctor-1/how-to-get-17-month-old-to-take-a-nap>

Question 28:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:16:48

This parent is asking about routines. Her five year old does not want to eat what she cooks, the five year old insists on eating junk food only, is willing to eat the food if they feed her, and doesn't want to wear specific clothing, hates her clothes, and doesn't want to help with chores.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Well, really I have to say she sounds like a normal five year old, a completely normal kid. We have to acknowledge

this. I'm sure you're a wonderful cook. Corporations spend millions of dollars making junk food taste great. They make it addictive on purpose so they can make money on it, so most five year olds would live on junk food if they could.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You say insists on eating junk food only, but where is she getting the junk food? You can just not have junk food in your house, right? Ever. And so at dinner there's not a possibility of eating junk food. She says she wants junk food and you say, "I know, Sweetie, but that's not food that's going to grow your body. We only have junk food for..." -- and you can call it junk food -- "We only have junk food once in a while for a very special treat. I understand you love french fries, chocolate bars, but that's not what we eat for dinner." You just don't buy that stuff.

Dr. Laura Markham:

When you say she only wants to wear specific clothes, again, who picks out her clothing? This is a little different, my reaction to this one, which is not that you pick out her clothing and make her wear it, but more she needs to be involved in picking her clothing whenever possible. Kids are very opinionated about clothes, especially when they have sensory tendencies, even if they're not super sensory issues, tendencies, would be enough that they'd want to pick certain things. Maybe she wants clothes that look like what her friends are wearing. My daughter hated any clothes I chose. She had to pick the clothes herself, and you know what? That's what you do, you let her pick the clothes herself.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You said you have to feed her the food, she won't eat it by herself but she'll let you feed her. I think by the time a child is five and a half, they should feed themselves the food. You do not have to feed her. I know it's part of many cultures but I don't think it's ever a good idea to shovel food into a child's mouth. She's not going to starve herself.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Finally, chores. Well, she's right. Chores are a lot of hard work. I don't know any five year olds who like chores unless the parents do the chores with them. Really, the way to help kids to want to do chores is using it as connection time with a parent. That's all.

Question 29:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:19:13

A parent says, "What can I do when giving my strong willed child, a four and a half year old, choices and they don't take the choice or do anything? 'You want to brush your teeth or get your PJs on first?' Neither one, and she starts to play with her brothers."

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would say it's about setting limits. She's strong willed. The only reason a strong willed child does what you want instead of what she wants is if you're connected. You've got at least three children, so that means it's hard to do special time every day. I would really work on connection with her, and I would just set the limits over and over again. When she says neither and starts playing with her brothers, I would go over, get in her face in a friendly way, get her laughing and say, "Okay, guess what? Bedtime. Your brothers can't be playing with you. They have to be upstairs too. All of us, come on, we're a team."

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would move everybody upstairs together and I would have a schedule where each child has to be doing certain things at a certain time and they're all in charge of themselves and where everybody works together. It's like, "Rah rah team, go go. Okay, what's Simone supposed to be doing right now? Okay, what's Carlos supposed to be doing right now? Okay, what's Henry supposed to be doing right now?" Everybody has their chart of what they're supposed to be doing and they all help keep each other on track. Over and over again, you have to keep her on track because that's what you have to do.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If choices don't work for her, you can always say, "You have a choice. You can go up the stairs yourself or you can get on my shoulders." This, by the way, is a great trick. You teach your child when they're still a toddler, "Up on my shoulders." You kneel down, let them climb on your shoulders. You put your own arms under their knees so that they're on your back and they're holding on around

your neck and you make it fun for them as you get up and you get them laughing and you take them wherever you want to go. Bath time or whatever. Even when they're older, like four, they will still automatically do it when it's time because they've learned that it's a special and entertaining thing to do.

Dr. Laura Markham:

This is just setting limits. It's setting limits with empathy all day, every day, and that's what she needs. Remember for a strong willed kid she also needs control, which is why I'd set up the schedules (so she knows what to expect and can be in charge of moving herself through the schedule), and she also needs the connection.

Question 30:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:21:34

We have a question about time management. I would just say you have to work. When you have a child like you're describing, you're not going to teach a seven year old time management. You have to help her stay on track. You say that she can sit there and do her homework, she goes so slowly that you never get special time, then you need to work with her to keep her on track. That's what she needs from you. Some kids just need us to help them keep on track and that's how they learn time management. I think we live in a very rushed society and children should be allowed to play more, honestly. That's the way they are, and we don't want to make them wrong about it.

Question 31:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:22:17

How can parents peacefully complete unpleasant but necessary tasks? The person asking this question gave some examples of the unpleasant but necessary tasks such as immobilizing the child to suction a stuffy nose, or if you're asking the child to do therapy exercises, or even diaper changes. I would say that from the child's perspective, these are not unpleasant but necessary tasks.

They're dramatically awful tasks, not just unpleasant for the child. And they're interactions where the child feels immobilized and powerless in the situation.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would also question whether they're necessary. Do you really have to do them? For instance, I owned one of those bulbs to suction stuffy noses. I never used it. I tried it on both my kids and I just stopped. I tried once and maybe twice or three times, I don't remember, but they were little, and you know what? In each case, they resisted and I thought, "Do I really need to do this? I'd rather play the blowing game." In the beginning they had no idea how to blow, that is true. Eventually they learned and they got good at it pretty early. But I didn't suction their noses because they hated it and I thought, "Why do I really need to do this?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

I did diaper changes standing up from a pretty early age with both kids. My experience is that they're willing to work with you on the really messy diaper changes that happen more occasionally, if you have most of the time been changing their diapers standing up. I would just say if you can do that, great. There is a whole article. If you just put "diaper change" into the search box on the Aha! Parenting website, there's a whole article of ideas about how to deal with it when a child is resisting diaper changes.

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/ages-stages/babies/baby-toddler-hates-diaper-change>

I encourage you to read that article. Basically what you'll find is that the article encourages you to, one, slow down; two work with your child; three, be mindful; four, warn them about it; five, give them as much control as possible; and six, distract.

Dr. Laura Markham:

It gives many more specific ideas than that, but those ideas will basically guide you through any of these kinds of things that are, in our mind, non negotiable but that kids actively fight us on. I don't want to act like it's not really a problem, because every single parent sometimes does

have these situations. So I do want to give you an example of one that every parent will face and that's medication.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Sometimes your child might have to take an antibiotic or some other medicine. I guess I would ask you to reframe giving the child the medicine. Instead of an unpleasant but necessary task, see it as a project. It's a lot of work but you're going to build trust and autonomy instead of just overpowering your kid and immobilizing them. As much as possible, work with your child, put them in charge.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Let them fill up the syringe and give it to themselves, and I don't mean giving themselves a shot, I mean to measure the amount of the antibiotic or whatever the medicine is. Maybe make a calendar where they give themselves a sticker for every time they take the meds. Maybe they get to wear their doctor coat and every child, by the way, needs a doctor coat or at least a medicine kit that they can pretend to be a doctor with. Let them be the doctor and pretend they're giving you medicine and whack you with the little hammer on your knee and take your temperature and stuff like that before they have the medicine every time.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If you do a brainstorming session with your child beforehand and you write down these ideas, I have seen it happen more than once that when kids get excited about all these ideas, they stop resisting the medication. Because they actually are sort of excited about all the different things that they're now going to get to do that go along with the medication. This does assume the child can have a brainstorming session with you but even three year olds like to solve problems. Children smaller than that may not understand all of this but you can still act it out with stuffed animals. You can still let them do it to you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

By the way, if it's something like medicine and it's a temporary thing, bribe them. I'm not a big believer in bribes, as you know, because I think you end up in a situation where you dig yourself a hole and then you always have to use the bribe. You're not going to give them antibiotics every day forever, you're going to give it

to them for two weeks or whatever. I am a total apologist for bribing when you have to do something that is unpleasant for the child that is temporary, that there's no valuable payoff in.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Obviously the valuable payoff hopefully is in their health, but eating broccoli, that's a good thing for them to learn how to do so that they eventually develop a taste for vegetables. Developing a taste for antibiotics? No. There's no reason for that. If you need to give them a Popsicle beforehand to numb their taste buds, if you need to put those antibiotics in a smoothie to disguise the taste and they never even know they're taking it or chocolate sauce as the chaser or put it in a soda? My kids never got sodas but you know what? If that's what was going to do it for my kid to take the medicine, I would put it in a soda. That's a special thing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then also afterwards, if it tastes yucky, acknowledge it. Do a little dance to, one of my friends said she did a yuck dance with her kid to shake it off afterwards. Do something that helps them shift gears so they don't feel bad about it afterwards. If these things go on for a long time, the medications, ask your doctor. A lot of prescriptions are available in a chewable version. It still tastes awful but you can mash it up and you can mix it with something delicious and hopefully the child won't notice it and they'll usually eat it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

A final thing about this. There's a wonderful book by Ruth Newton called *The Attachment Connection*. She gives this example in it of a two year old who had to wear an eye patch part of each day. While the eye patch was covering his good eye, his bad eye had to do some visual exercises like "tell mom what color this is" or "pick things out of an I spy picture." The child would have a complete tantrum every time the mom would put this patch on him and of course he would refuse to do these visual exercises.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Ruth Newton describes this in a very beautiful way. How from the child's point of view, the mother didn't have a routine developed for doing this. He was only two, he

didn't really understand. She would be anxious about it, so she would just sort of descend on him to put this patch on him and he would freak out. Ruth helped the mom develop a routine where they explained to him about making his eye strong and developing the muscle and they let him pick out a sticker to put on the patch. She said to the mom, "Don't proceed with putting the patch on his eye unless he picks out the sticker, because that's the way he's giving you permission to put the patch on his eye."

Dr. Laura Markham:

He would pick out a sticker, put it on the patch and within two weeks he was choosing the sticker and putting it on the patch himself and then putting the patch on. Two weeks may seem long to you but this is how this child was able to do the therapy for his eye that was so essential, that really was nonnegotiable. If you have a nonnegotiable health thing like this, if it takes two weeks to get him to do it, then it takes two weeks. but over time he will begin to do it if he feels in control.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think that's the bottom line about these things. If the child feels powerless, which all humans hate, they are not going to cooperate with you. I think it'd be nice if I could say, "Oh, just wave this magic wand and the child will cooperate." Really, children are more complicated than that and what we need to do is respect them and work with them. When we do that, often we find that they do work with us.

Question 32:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:30:26

How do you get a four year old to focus when they're feeling rambunctious? For example, running around instead of brushing their teeth or getting out of bed during bedtime.

Let's consider why a child would be rambunctious at bedtime. First of all, often kids have some pent up anxiety. As soon as you shut your eyes -- we've all had this happen -- all of the anxieties of our day come flooding in and stimulate us. We toss and turn and we can't quite get to

sleep because our minds are busy. That could certainly stimulate a child to get out of bed repeatedly at bedtime.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Another thing that might make a child get out of bed at bedtime would be missing the parents. When parents work outside the home, kids often miss them during the day. Then at bedtime, they still feel like they want to connect. They're driven to connect. It's a basic need. If they haven't really felt enough connection, they'll often get up, even though the parent gets irritated with them. At least they're reassured by seeing the parent, engaging with the parent, knowing the parent cares about them. That's a big need they have.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Another reason kids get out of bed -- this may seem counterintuitive -- they get overtired by the end of the day. If they haven't really gotten enough sleep last night -- and that happens every time you wake a child up, they're not getting enough sleep the night before. That's also true even if the sun wakes them up or a sibling wakes them up or a noise wakes them up from the street. Unless you have blackout curtains and a sound machine and they sleep until they want to wake up, they may not get enough sleep the night before.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then even if they do get enough sleep the night before, a day is a long day for a four year old. If they're not napping anymore, they can get quite exhausted by the end of the day. To keep their eyes open, to eat their dinner, to engage with you, they're running on adrenaline by the end of the day. We all know what it's like to feel coffee'd up and adrenalized. It means they're running on empty, but skittering around, and that absolutely can cause kids to get giddy and rambunctious. That can happen at bedtime and keep them from lying down and relaxing in bed, and of course it can happen any time in the run up to bedtime, so during dinner, when they're supposed to be brushing their teeth, et cetera.

Dr. Laura Markham:

There are a lot of reasons why kids could be rambunctious at the end of the day, but knowing these reasons gives us some tips. First of all, make sure your child goes to bed

early enough. When they start showing signs of tiredness, don't wait for the adrenaline to kick in. Get them to bed, even if that means you need to start moving bedtime sooner by 15 minutes every night. Whatever it takes, you want to get them into bed when they're tired, so they don't rev up into adrenaline.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Secondly, help kids wind down. Have a bedtime routine that is the same every night so they know what to expect and they're not as likely to fight it. Really take them through a routine that will help them unwind. A bath is great. Even if they're not dirty, even a short bath every night. It's not the same as a shower, a shower is stimulating. A shower often wakes you up, so a bath that lulls you into relaxation, maybe a song, a massage. Something that moves you out of the bath, into your room, into dressing with a relaxed feeling, not a revved up feeling.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then of course, a bedtime story and snuggling. A kid who's gone through this is more likely to be relaxed as they get into bed. But very importantly, you need to roughhouse with them earlier in the day, before the bedtime routine begins, because that revs them up. Roughhousing allows the child to vent any anxieties from their day, so they're less likely when they get into bed to be kept awake as they toss and turn and think about that incident at school where they were embarrassed or somebody grabbed their toy at daycare or whatever.

Dr. Laura Markham:

All of this will also help the child focus on brushing teeth and going through the routine. They still won't like brushing teeth. Brushing teeth, like other routines, is best done as part of a routine in exactly the same order every day and preferably with a song because songs move children from one thing to another and actually make them an event of their own. Instead of brushing teeth being this unpleasant thing we have to get through, brushing teeth becomes a little rewarding ritual of its own where we interact in a warm way with our child. That's a way to help them focus. You're not going to expect a four year old to go brush their teeth but you're with the four

year old brushing teeth as something that is nice and a cozy part of the routine rather than an onerous part.

Dr. Laura Markham:

In general, getting a child through a routine, you have to think of the transitions not just as unpleasant things between one thing and another but as moments that have value in themselves as a way for us to connect. When kids experience them that way, these transitional moments, then they enjoy them and they're more likely to shift gears and clean up their toys with us or brush their teeth without a fuss or get into the tub or get out of the tub. All the transitions that otherwise we find children often get stuck in.

Question 33:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:36:42

"What are your recommendations for limits on screen time during the summer break? Our son is 10 years old and participates in a lot of activities but there still is a lot of time available for him to have screens. We all agree that setting limits has been a challenge."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Well, I am sorry to be a stick in the mud here but I think there is no reason for a child to have screens in the summer at all. We know that children play outside about half as much as their parents did. We know that they need much more time outside, that it has all kinds of benefits, that every hour they spend outside has measurable benefits to their physical health and their emotional health, their happiness level. Children need to spend at least three hours a day outside, at least, and they don't. That's a minimum, right? Not a maximum. So I think there is zero reason for kids to have screen time during the summer. It's a perfect opportunity, when they're not stuck at a desk in a classroom, for them to go outside.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Also, why would you want to have constant conflict about screens in the summer? If it's just not part of your routine in the summer then there's no fighting about it. "That's just not something we do at this time of year," so there's no nagging. There's no, "Mom, can I get on the screen?"

Lots less whining, lots fewer power struggles, and summer is a wonderful time for children to expand their horizons, to do things they wouldn't normally do. That's everything from trying to make money, to learning a new skill, to accomplishing something that they've never done before.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I know this is a hard line position, but there really is no reason for childhood to be dominated by screens. The rest of their lives, unfortunately, as adults, will be dominated by screens. So why not give them some time to develop their brains with more attention and more focus? Because we know that during development of the brain, screens reduce the child's ability to focus and attend. Why not give them a chance over the summer to develop a healthier, happier brain that they can take with them into the new school year? That's what happens with fewer screens and more time outside.

Question 34:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:39:17

Here's another question about helping a child focus. "We've come a long way since we've started Peaceful Parenting but we continue to struggle with our daughter's trouble focusing, even with tasks she's interested in doing and especially in social situations. For instance, she ping pongs with the different activities both at home and at school. When walking in line with her classmates she gets distracted to the point of walking into things. During a short library class, instead of listening to the books and directions she points out random things."

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would say that while I've included this question on focus in the routines because it's about taking her through her daily routines, we're really looking at a child who has a different way of perceiving the world. During the library class, she's not attending to the auditory experience of being read the story. She's instead noticing random things that she wants to express, that she's relating to and finding interesting. That could signal an auditory

processing issue, especially if she also has a hard time listening to a story at home, but you don't mention that. I'm wondering if this is the social situation she's in where there are other kids listening to the story as well and that overwhelms her and makes it hard for her to actually focus on listening to the story. That would also explain why, when she walks in a line with her classmates, she gets so distracted she walks into things, if in fact she's busy relating to them.

Dr. Laura Markham:

This could be somebody who in social situations really pays attention to the people around her, rather than what you want her to be doing. It could be she's getting overstimulated in social situations. But you also mention that she ping pongs from activity to activity at home and at school, and has a hard time focusing on the routine. That's about attention. I think what you're describing is a child with some attention challenges, but you can have a loving attitude about it and just repeatedly bring her back to focusing on what you're focusing on. Over time her brain will adapt and will learn to focus a little bit better.

Dr. Laura Markham:

When children have attentional challenges, it's a brain issue. It's not that they're choosing not to pay attention, it's not that they're lazy, it's not that they're lacking intelligence. It's that their brain actually works differently. There are a lot of ideas, if you read books written by experts who specialize in attention deficit disorder, ADD. There are a lot of great ideas about building executive function, which is really what we're talking about here, the ability to attend to something, rather than just having your attention swept this way and that way.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The thing to remember, mostly, is to have a positive attitude about it. Your child is born, probably, with a challenge that makes it harder for her to focus her attention. But the more she does it, the more she's training her brain to do it. If you can look at that as your job as a parent, is to help her just focus her attention on what she was doing over and over again, not in a negative way but in a way that you're being her assistant. You're helping her. There's no judgment there. You're helping her

to do something so that she can accomplish what she wants, like not bumping into things or listening to the story.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If she sees it as something she **wants** to do, developing her attention, then your assistance will be something she welcomes. Every time the brain is used repeatedly for anything, it will adapt to that task and become better at it.

Question 35:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:43:31

"My son has SPD and apraxia. He has a hard time regulating his emotions. Since I started using your techniques, I've seen improvement in his behavior and his overall happiness, but recently we went on a short vacation. Even though he was excited and wanted to be there, he was anxious about doing new things. He was overwhelmed by his emotions so he was difficult and cranky. What can I do to help him regulate his emotions when we're out of the comfort zone of our usual routine?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

Such a great question and I think it's true for all kids that when they're out of the comfort zone of their usual routine, they are more difficult. I think it's true for most people. I would say develop routines that you can do with him even when you're not at home that will help him feel grounded. It's true that routines are very place bound and most of the routines you do, you're used to doing them in a specific place, your home, but maybe there are ways you can do exactly the same routine even when you're traveling. I know that's hard to do because when you're traveling, you have travel schedules, et cetera, but the more you can do that, the easier it'll probably be for him to feel grounded.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Another thing you can do, of course, is manage his anxiety with laughter. Laughter is something you can do any place, any time. Scheduled meltdowns can be a little bit harder.

You don't really want a full meltdown in the hotel room because you'll have people calling the front desk.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would also say, remember, new experiences are stressful but you also can enjoy them and grow from them. I would titrate the new experiences so he can handle them without getting overwhelmed. He can only handle so much that's new all at once, so just take it a very small amount at a time. Don't try to pack too much into any vacation or even any day of your vacation. Just be as slow as possible.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Finally, if there are things that he does to calm himself at home, like maybe he plays with his little stuffed animals and they talk to each other or something, make sure you have them with you and that he gets downtime to do those calming activities that he's used to doing to keep himself centered.

Dr. Laura Markham:

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.