

## Preteens and Older Kids Q and A with Dr. 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 kids as they get a little older. Second graders, third graders, fourth graders, right into the preteen years. Remember, we're always applying our three big ideas. We start by regulating our own emotions and behavior. Then we connect with our child. Finally, instead of trying to control our child, we coach them to be their best self, both by helping them with their emotions and by creating an environment where the child can thrive. So let's see how to apply these three big ideas to daily life with children.

### Question 1:

Parent: 00:00:44 I have a question that is possibly out of the box, because it's an age question related to children that are a little bit older. I have four children, and I have two that are above the magic number, age nine. So my question is, how can you best implement the parenting approaches of emotional regulation, connection, and emotion coaching when these children haven't necessarily been entirely raised this way?

Parent: Sure, there's bits and pieces, but some of it is new. I laughed when you quoted Jane Nelsen's "when and then" because I find we're using a lot of the "if and then" so the consequences, and the threats, and the punishment, per se, but consequences are where we're struggling with the older kids. We try to show more empathy. Clearly there's been more regulating, more connection, and they're more willing to cooperate.

Parent: There's definitely been more crying, but there are still times when we even empathize with them -- "I know you want to yell at your sister. I know you want to hit your brother. I see how you're so mad at him," and we say

regulated, we set the very clear, empathetic limit --  
However, they still don't comply. Then what?

Dr. Laura Markham: Great question.

Parent: Yeah.

Dr. Laura Markham: You're not alone in this question, because there are many people participating in the course who have kids over the age of nine, and the truth is seven-year-olds can have this issue. What we see -- and you can see this on the Facebook forum, is that parents who have three-year-olds say, "Oh gosh, my three year old turned around like that, right away. But my six-year-old took a lot longer, really had a chip on his shoulder, and my nine year old, forget it, I'm still working on that."

So we do see that the older the kids are, the harder it is, obviously, just as you're saying. But I don't think it's, by any means, too late, over nine. I don't think it's too late over 13. The reason it's harder when they get older is partly that their brain has sort of settled into a pattern. It's partly that they have built up a lot of hurt feelings, right? It's partly that they've learned the way the world works, and they think of the world in a certain way.

And you know, it's a funny thing about human beings. Even when things aren't working for us, we defend our limitations. We defend our limitations, and we fight for the right to say, "Yeah, the world is this way, even though it's mistreating me," when you see it in that way, right? So it's a funny thing, and that's true even for kids over the age of nine.

But here's how you turn it around. I would say that the things you just described to me, where "I know you're so mad at your brother, and you want to hit your sister," or whatever, those things are happening when they are dysregulated, when they're really upset about something,

So when kids have a lot of emotions, it's a lot harder. So I would say the first thing is laughing and crying. It's a lot harder to get a nine-year-old or a 10- or 11-year-old

laughing than it is a three year old, because you can't just pick them up and toss them around. But laughter really matters.

Dr. Laura Markham:

It doesn't matter what you're laughing at. You could be having a pillow fight with them. I find that's always good, as long as they laugh instead of getting really cut throat about it, pillow fights help. But you could be watching YouTube videos together. But find a way to get your kids laughing every single day, because it takes the edge off of the feelings that they're lugging around with them in the emotional backpack. And that's really what's getting in their way when they get mad at their siblings, is the old angers, the old fear that you love somebody else more, that somebody else is getting something they're not.

So if you can get them laughing, that helps a lot. And it also makes it more likely that they will cry. The more they cry, the better. I know people sometimes wonder -- should my 10-year-old boy be sobbing like this about a little thing? But it's not about that little thing. It's about something that happened a long time ago, and he doesn't know what. And you don't need to know what, it's just getting out those feelings. And it's not just like plumbing where you get it out. It's really more like a witnessing, where he can show you the pain and you can say, "Oh Sweetie, I'm so sorry it hurts," or, "I'm right here with a hug when you're ready." And I think when we have them laugh and cry like that, it helps enormously.

But the advantage to older kids -- 9, 10, 11, 12 year-olds is that they can also talk to us.

So it's a lot like the conversation you'd have with an adult child. Where you say, "When you were a little one, I didn't really know about how to be a great parent. I did the best I could, and I loved you so much, but I made some mistakes. And I think sometimes you're still mad about those mistakes, because it meant I expected you to be so grown up when the baby was born, and you were really still so very little, and you needed me so much, and I didn't know that," as an example of something you might say.

And even if they don't really know how to acknowledge it verbally, I think that kind of acknowledgement from you can make a tremendous difference to your child, so that they feel heard and understood. So I think you'll have to do some cleaning up of the spilled milk. You have to have some conversations.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But I think that you might find yourself in these conversations really listening a lot, while your child says, "But it wasn't fair, and then you did this and that, and the other thing." It's hard to listen to those accusations, but just remind yourself (that now) your child is trusting you with their pain. You did the best you could. Now you're playing cleanup for the things that you didn't know how to handle then.

Parent:

Sure. So just giving it more time, more connection, more coaching. And in the very moment, just let them...?

Dr. Laura Markham:

Yes, in a conversation, yes. But in the very moment when they want to hit their sibling, or even yell at their sibling, I would absolutely set a limit. They're old enough to know that that's the limit, and you do it with any age child, because you have to protect your other children.

So you say, "Wow, you are mad. Words like that can really hurt, Sweetheart. You can tell your brother or sister what you need without attacking. Let's all calm down and then we'll talk about it. We will work this out. Come on, Sweetheart. I know you're having a hard time."

"No, I don't want your help. You don't even care about me. You only care about them."

And you say, "Oh Sweetie, I'm so sorry that you could ever feel that way. I'm going to help you work this out. But I do expect you to tell your sibling what you need without attacking them. Let's all calm down and we'll figure it out." So you're setting a limit. Even while you're being very understanding, so everyone feels protected, everyone feels heard.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Does that make sense?

Parent: Right. It does. I just think it continues even after that, and that's when I say, "If you continue acting like this, then you will need to go to your room, because we don't speak like that around the little ones, especially."

Dr. Laura Markham: And you know what? So I don't think you should say, "If you continue, I'm going to punish you by sending you to your room," but more like, "I understand you're so angry about this, and it's very hard to calm down. I'm going to help you calm down. Come on, let's go over here. Let's go take a minute. I know you feel an urgent need to set your siblings straight. You know what? They're not going anywhere. They live here. It's okay. You'll find them later. Come on with me. We're going to go calm down, and it's going to be okay. We're going to figure it out."

And you remove them from the situation, literally. Now you may not be able to leave your little ones unattended, but maybe you can go into an adjoining room or something, or go to their room, it really doesn't matter. As long as they're willing to disengage enough to go into the adjoining room, that's enough. They don't have to go as far away as their own room.

And you do want to keep them from feeling ostracized, because that's just going to add to the chip on the shoulder.

Parent: Right, right. Well, I'm so grateful for you. Thank you so much.

Dr. Laura Markham: You're so welcome. Good luck.

### Question 2:

Parent: 00:09:30 My original Aha! Parenting babies are now eight years old. I have twins. I've also got a four-year-old. I found both the website and the book really useful, but we were wondering if you have a top parenting book, recommendations for kids that are getting older, preteen-

type feelings. What would your go to book be? *We love Playful Parenting* by Lawrence Cohen, but we are starting to get into that grungy adolescent stage.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So there are a couple of books that I would recommend. One is *Your Last Best Shot*, or maybe it's *Our Last Best Shot*. It's about parenting tweens, preteens. And another book that I recommend would be Gordon Neufeld's book *Hold Onto Your Kids*, because it's written, really, for that age group, as kids start to shift away from us.

There's another book that you're a little early for. I'm going to throw it in here, because I love it and it's for anybody who has older kids. It's by Michael Riera, R-I-E-R-A. And it's *Connecting With Your Teen* or *Staying Connected to Your Teen*, something like that. And I know you don't have teens yet, but I recommend it for the teen years. And one of the things that I learned from Michael Riera, is that kids have a sense of integrity. They know when they're out of integrity and they do something wrong.

And so as they get into those grungy years, where they're looking outside the family for their cues, and their inner compass is still taking shape, it's really helpful to talk to them about, "Well, did you know? Did any part of you know what you were doing was a bad idea? And why didn't you listen to that part of you? And what do you have to do to make it better now?" And so those kinds of questions, I really learned from Mike Riera years ago. And so I highly recommend him for anybody with really, eight, nine, 10 and up, even though he writes about teenagers.

Parent:

Thank you so much.

### Question 3:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:11:34

This parent is asking about applying these principles to her 12-year-old daughter, her 17-year-old son, and even her husband. And you're right, you're completely right. These

principles can be applied to older kids. The principles are universal. The difference is, that as kids get older, as I've said, it's harder for them to empty the emotional backpack. It's harder to rewire the brain. You can't schedule meltdowns, and it can be harder to connect, because they shut you out, right? They're defended, and their brains are already wired to go in a state of emergency more easily, right?

Dr. Laura Markham:

So just remember the basic principles. You always calm yourself before talking to your teenager or your husband or your wife. You prioritize the connection, the relationship, and instead of trying to control them through rewards and punishment, you respond to the needs and feelings that are driving their behavior.

If you do those three things, prioritize the connection, calm yourself and notice the needs and feelings driving their behavior and try to meet those needs, and help with those feelings, I think you'll see things turn around with any human being, no matter what age they are.

#### Question 4:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:12:43

“Things are really happily, slowly, but steadily getting better in our house since we started Peaceful Parenting, but my oldest is seven, and maybe you could give us more resources for kids who are nine and up, because your work is only up to age nine.”

So let me just clarify that my work is beyond age nine, in the sense that these principles are universal. The things that I suggest work with teenagers and they work with parents, your own parents, and they work with your partner, and they work with your colleagues and your boss and your subordinates. They work with everybody.

However, yes, the specifics of it, I give examples for kids nine and under, and really, if people have been conventionally parenting, by the time their kids get to the

teen years, I think they need something that is much more than what I can give them in my course. They need to go to family therapy together, and rebuild their bond, because if they've conventionally parented, and their child is 13, there's 13 years of baggage there, and the child's brain is basically already formed. It's already rewired twice at age six and age 12.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And it's not that things can't change. It's never too late to build a relationship. But they need hands-on help from a skilled person who's in the room with the two people, and can gain the trust of the teenager. That's not something I can do, or that you can do, just by taking my course, or reading my book. That's why I don't really deal with teens. But there is a teen section on my website, and a preteen section. In fact, the teen section is broken into early teen and late teen. And the principles do work.

So if you've started this kind of parenting now, and your oldest is seven, you don't have a problem. Your child is going to change dramatically over the next year, as you continue to use these ideas, and you're going to change and grow. So by the teen years, you're going to be having a blast. I loved the teen years.

I loved every age with my kids, but I will tell you, the teen years are so exciting because they really come into their own, and age 12 and 13's a little volatile, really 11, 12, 13, but after that, the hormones settle down, and your kid is like a grown-up, and they're capable of conceptual thought, and they're delightful. And you've established a relationship of trust, so that they're not sneaking around lying to you. It's phenomenal to have teenagers. It's the best thing ever.

I do not have teenagers. I have a 21-year-old and a 25-year-old, and nothing makes me happier than spending time with them. And the happy news is they still like to spend time with me, and they still ask my advice on things. They mostly make their own decisions, but they still ask me for advice sometimes, which makes me really happy that I still have their trust in that way. I guess I would say, that came because of the teen years, because we went

through them in a partnership. And you'll find that's what you do when you parent this way. The teen years are great. I was afraid of the teen years, too. People used to say to me about my girl, who's now 21, "Well, she's a spicy one. I pity you when she's a teenager."

Dr. Laura Markham:

And you know what? She was the easiest teen ever. Well, except maybe for her brother. So I don't think you have to worry about this. If you parent this way, they are delightful teens. You don't have to worry. But you asked about books and resources. Go to the teen section on my website. In the teen section, there's an entire page, best books on parenting teens. There are a dozen books on it. Start reading. They're great books, but if your oldest is seven, you don't really need them yet, and there will be more good books written by then, and maybe by then I'll even get my teen book together.

People have asked me for it for a long time, but as I say, you don't need it. You really don't. The only reason for a teen book would be for people who haven't parented this way until now, and truthfully, those people, they need more than I can give them in a book.

#### Question 5:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:16:24

My next question is about a seven-year-old whose first response to everything is no, and it gets very frustrating for both parent and child, and tears get shed, because she just wants to do the opposite of whatever the parents are suggesting.

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Well, your daughter is the kind of person who wants to be in charge of herself. She also sounds like she's not very flexible by nature, since she gets so intense about it. I'm wondering if this is an expression of anxiety. Like she's afraid of being forced to do something that she isn't sure she wants to do, somehow she's very threatened. She's very rigid, which is a sign of anxiety. She has to have things go the way she thought they were going to go. So let me

ask you, what do you think, given this, is the most effective way when she gets upset to help her calm down and return to a state of balance?

Well, obviously create some safety for her. If she's reacting this way because she's threatened, that the world is falling apart because she didn't get what she expected to have happen here. Then you want to create a sense of safety, and it sounds like exactly the opposite is happening. You say, "Oh, as a family we're going to go do X, Y, Z." Like you mentioned a dog sledding excursion, and you thought she'd love it, and she was very resistant, and then she went and did it and loved it.

So you say, "Let's do this." And she's like, "No, no." The minute she throws down that gauntlet, and you pick it up, you're in a power struggle. You've accepted the invitation to war. And so she has to keep fighting. She can't give in. Especially, strong-willed people, they can't bow to pressure, it's a matter of their own integrity. That would be letting herself be intimidated, which strong-willed people can't do. They have too much integrity to let themselves be intimidated.

So what they can do is respond to the request of someone they love in a cooperative way. My daughter's very strong-willed, and I would just say, "Could you do this for me?" And then she's like, "Oh, okay, I can do this for *you*." Because then it's an act of love and generosity, and then she would love it. When she tried the new thing, whatever it was. So I think you have to realize that it takes two people to have a power struggle, and you have to step out of the power struggle.

I know it's frustrating to have a kid like this who's reactive, and says no to everything, but it sounds like the parents are escalating the drama. That's why many tears are shed. Your job is not to escalate the drama, it's to calm the drama. So you want to calm your child in the immediate moment.

Now, longer term, you do want to keep your child from automatically shifting into being threatened, right? And

you could call this shifting from sort of that knee jerk “no” reaction to a more flexible open “yes” orientation to life. Tamar Chansky's book *Negative Thinking* -- It'd be a good one for you to read.

I'm also going to mention the book by Tina Bryson and Dan Siegel, *The Yes Brain*. It's great, it's great. And it's about exactly this. How can you help kids move toward being more flexible and open? But you'll hear them talk a lot about creating safety for the child. So you have to start there.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Until you change, your daughter's not going to change. But she needs you to do this, because this is going to be a really important life skill for her, since she goes on the defensive so automatically. So it's a big shift for her to make.

And to help her make that shift, you're going to have to use all the peaceful parenting tools. The empathy so she feels understood, routines to help her feel safe, get her laughing, get her crying. And luckily, at seven, you can also get her talking. So you can say, "Hey, remember when your mind got really worried about going dog sledding? I wonder why your mind said such a loud “no” to that. Do you remember what it was worried about?"

Now you can't be saying, "I told you so. I told you you'd like it," right? Or she'll need to defend her position.

Instead just listen, and say, "Huh, so you just wanted to stay home and be cozy," or whatever she says, and then say, "Well, do you think it was worth it in the end? Yeah? Would you like to do it again? Yeah, give me five."

"Our minds try to take care of us by saying no when things are new to us, but the mind's not always right, is it? Thank you so much for trying dog sledding when you weren't sure about it. I really appreciate that you were willing to try it," because I know you had to force her into it, but she did do it, you didn't have to tie her up and put her on the sled. She did get on the sled. "I'm so glad, Sweetheart, it worked out for you, and you discovered something you

love doing. You were really brave to stand up to your mind when it said no."

And again, you could do a courage project, you could do something at the dinner table. Talk about choosing to make the leap from no to yes. "Today, at first, I was afraid to do X, Y, Z, and my mind said no, but then I made the leap from no to yes, I did it."

Or, "I was being really judgmental about the store clerk. I was feeling a loud no. And then, I realized that maybe they were just having a hard day, and I smiled at them. And you know what? We had such a good interaction. I'm so glad I remembered to make that leap to yes."

So you're demonstrating for your child your value system, and you're talking about it, and it will help her be more aware of what she's doing. Luckily she's only seven, so I think you have a lot of time to help her take a different approach to life, so that when her brain does rewire at 12, she's going to rewire it to be a much more positive person.

But don't worry, you don't have to wait till she's 12. The changes that happen from now until then are what's going to create that permanent rewiring at 12.

### Question 6:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:22:12

All right, our next question is from a parent who says she loves the course, and it changed how she deals with her daughter, but still, "after a successful playdate, I picked my eight-year-old up. I greeted her nicely, and she mimics me. I ask her to stop, and she spits raspberries," and tells me she doesn't want to go with me. I asked her to stop again." So that's already a power struggle." She says, 'Oh my goodness, you want to kill me.' And then says, 'Let's go.' And I say, 'Sure, honey, you must be so frustrated,' and then she blocks her ears. I ask her if she wants to talk about it later, but she feigned shivering and says she's afraid of me."

So I'm guessing that she might've been afraid of you at some point, and she's showing you that now. It does sound really, really hard, totally frustrating. She doesn't know how to express her feelings, so she's attacking you.

So let's imagine a scenario going a different way. She gets in the car, you pick her up from the playdate. "Hi Sweetie, I'm so glad to see you," and she may mimic you. "Hi Sweetie, I'm so glad to see you."

Now at that point, of course, you want to ask her to stop, which is what you did in reality, but since that's just going to keep the power struggle going, you instead remind yourself that her obnoxious behavior is communicating something that she wants you to know. So instead, you might say, "Ouch, I guess you aren't glad to see me. I wonder if maybe you weren't ready to leave that playdate?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now notice, you did acknowledge that she attacked you, but you didn't get into a power struggle. Instead, you empathize. That will really take her aback.

But remember this, just because she feels understood, it doesn't mean she won't attack you again. Usually you have to go back and forth about three times, when somebody is on the attack like that, and you just can't take it personally.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And as you do that, they attack less and less. So she'll probably attack you again. And maybe she'll say something like, "Of course I'm not glad to see you. I hate seeing you. I don't want to go with you. It was a terrible playdate," or maybe, "I don't ever want to leave that playdate and go with you." Something like that. And of course, that's going to hurt your feelings. And of course, you're going to want to ask her to stop, and I'm going to suggest you don't take it personally.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Maybe she's showing you her feelings from years of buildup. We don't know. And so what you're going to say is, you're going to come up with something different than what you've done with her for eight years, and you're

going to say something like, "Wow, it sounds like you are really mad at me. You know what? No matter how angry you are at me, I will love you, no matter what."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now at this point, she's likely to stop talking, or she might block her ears. And in that case, just stop talking, and if she does go on with her attacks like, "You want to kill me, I'm afraid of you," then I would definitely address that, because that's a really important message she's giving you. "Sweetheart, that must be terrifying, that you're afraid of your own mom, who's supposed to protect you and keep you safe. I am so sorry if I've ever done anything that has scared you."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now at this point, you might get an earful of what you have done that scared her. "You always scare me. You yell at me all the time," and she'll say it as if it's currently happening, even if you stopped six months ago, by the way. And she will emote about all the things that have scared her, and you should say, "Oh my goodness, I'm so sorry. I can't believe I did that. I didn't know what to do. But that's no excuse. You deserve protection and understanding. No one ever deserves to get yelled at, or hit," or whatever she says that she's scared of.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I know this seems extreme, but she's telling you she needs to tell you all this stuff. And once she does, and she's been understood, you'll find her demeanor towards you will completely change.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Your daughter's already eight, and there's no reason you need to do this alone. I think it could really help to talk to somebody who could help you. Actually, these kinds of hurtful comments, she's making, really, is an effort to help you love her, even though it's a clumsy way to do it.

### Question 7:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:26:12

A parent is asking, "What do I do when my nine-year-old comes home from school, she's in a bad mood and she doesn't want to spend time with me, except in front of a screen. And since she doesn't want to do special time,

later, she wants to do a special time, but then it's time for bed.”

So I think what you need help with is less suggestions for what to do with her for special time, which is your question, but more of what she needs, she needs help with a bad mood. So you're letting your daughter use screens to manage her mood, because that's what she's telling you she needs. But that could lead to addictive behavior.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Instead, I think you want her to know that there are other ways to manage our emotions. So you could point out that it's very common to be in a bad mood when you come home from school. Many kids are, because it's hard. School is just plain hard. You're asked to put your own needs second, to sit down and shut up, to wait to use the bathroom, to self-regulate all the time. Sometimes people are mean to you. It's really hard. You're without your parent. You have to separate.

So naturally she's in a bad mood. And when somebody is in a bad mood, what's the best thing to do with that bad mood? I would brainstorm with her what she could do to handle that bad mood. It could be laughter, it could be drawing. I would definitely have a rule, no screen time until after special time or after resolving the bad mood and you might have no screen time during the week even. I would always start -- if you're going to do special time first -- with an activity that's going to best alleviate her emotional discomfort. So it might be jumping on a trampoline, it might be dancing. Hopefully it's something that includes laughter. I think in general what we're trying to do; we're trying to help children develop emotional intelligence by noticing what they're feeling so they can then learn how to manage it themselves.

### Question 8:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:28:12

I'm going to answer this question about a super sensitive child who takes things personally -- who's nine -- how to handle this with her. She storms off, she says, "Life is unfair. You don't love me", and that stuff. So I think the answer to this is you really try to empathize and obviously if this is a kid with a full backpack, you try to find opportunities for them to empty their backpack. We'll get to that in a moment, the backpack stuff, but it can be harder with older kids. If you can empathize with how hard that is -- you say that you can now see through her anger and you know she's hurting, but you don't know how to respond -- I would respond that she's hurting. I would say, "You are so mad and I think that really hurt your feelings. I can't believe I said that."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Or, "I'm so sorry that your father said that", or, "I'm so sorry that happened," so that she gets that you understand the depth of this. And she'll scream at you, "You don't love me! Nobody loves me! Nothing's fair." And you say, "Boy, it sure doesn't seem fair, does it? It even seems like we don't love you because we're not saying yes to this. I see how upset you are about this, Sweetie." And of course you affirm "I love you no matter what", et cetera. "But I see how this is upsetting to you and you really wish it could be different. This is not what you wanted." So it's really just about the empathy.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now, if she storms off and you follow her and you try to empathize and she just gets angrier at you, keep your mouth shut. Just shut your mouth and say, "Sweetie, I'm so sorry about this. I'm right here when you need a hug." She'll probably let you stay near her. But if she doesn't, if she says, "I don't want you right here, go away!", you can say, "Oh my goodness, okay, you don't even want me here. I will go right outside your room." Now she might come over and slam the door. That's okay. If she slams the door, she slams the door.

And I know life proceeds, but if you can, stay there outside the door. I know one mom who started to put notes under the door for her nine year old, and her nine year old began to write back to her and tell her all of her grievances. The mom basically said, "I understand, I understand" and

listened and, "Oh, that must've been so upsetting to you," and sometimes would lightheartedly try to make a joke if things had gotten far enough that she thought there was an opening for that and the daughter wouldn't take it badly.

Dr. Laura Markham:

What would happen is that the nine year old would pour her heart out to her and then open the door and hug her and come get in her lap, then would end up apologizing to her and say, "Mom, I didn't really want you to go away, but I was just so mad. I didn't think you understood anything, but now I see you did." So she really repaired just by staying on the other side of the door and passing notes. So you can do that even if they shut the door on you. So we think that kids don't really want you to leave. There was, as I said, one study that I mentioned in one of the audios with nine year olds, where they asked the kids if they didn't really want the parent to leave.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But in the moment, you don't want to be disrespectful and stay breathing down their neck. So you do want to move back. But I would also ask your child during the time when she's not upset, I would really just ask her, "Do you want me to leave when you're upset?" If she says yes, say "Okay, I'll go to the other side of your door so I'm there if you want me." I think you might be surprised. She might tell you, "I don't really want you to leave when I'm upset."

### Question 9:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:31:48

A parent is asking about her 10 year old and how she gets enraged when she can't have what she wants, and this can go on for some time. She screams and she sometimes does this in public. So what can she do? This parent says, "I empathize with her. I acknowledge how she might be feeling and that changes her behavior to crying. Then I offer a cuddle and she settles. But this is a long process. What else can I do?" First of all, that's perfect, what you're doing. I know it's hard on you, but remember your daughter's not actually choosing to misbehave. This is about her brain. She's getting fixated and rigid because she gets alarmed when her expectations aren't met. You

could think of it as anxiety that she expects things to be a certain way. She doesn't want to have to have that change because that is a threat. When she gets alarmed, she doesn't feel safe and she lashes out.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So when you're acknowledging her feelings, that makes her feel safe enough that she can then go to those feelings underneath the anger. That's why she begins to cry. So that's why that's exactly the right thing to do.

As she feels safer, she's going to be able to calm down more quickly. I don't know how long you've been doing this process with her and the good news is she's old enough for some insight. She's already 10, so in calm moments I recommend that you start talking with her about the brain. Do some education with her. Talk to her about how her brain works. By that I mean, "Here's the brainstem, here's the frontal cortex, here's the amygdala that gets all freaked out and sounds the alarm."

Dr. Laura Markham:

A good source for that is Tina Bryson and Dan Siegel's book, *The Whole-Brain Child*. It has lots of diagrams for talking with kids about the brain. They use some terminology I don't use, like the upstairs brain and the downstairs brain, but it's all fine. It's all based on brain science and I think they're helpful in how to talk to kids. You can ask her like, "Are you aware, Sweetheart, about that part of yourself that gets so worried and upset when things don't go the way you want them to?" Sometimes kids like to name that part of themselves, that worried part, and that's great. You can refer to that. You can say something like, "Is that Worried Wanda speaking? It's okay honey. You can reassure Worried Wanda that even though she's ...let's say it's after you take a shower and she's freaking out. Even though she (Worried Wanda) hates showers, don't worry. She's not in danger. She can come right back to finish this art project after the shower. Don't worry."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Sometimes kids, once they understand what's happening, they realize that it is possible to control themselves when they get upset. Right now your daughter probably doesn't even realize that. She just feels like she gets swept off her

feet by these big emotions and she doesn't know what to do with them.

But the good news is that once she knows what's happening, she'll have more tools to do it. And of course she still has to be motivated to control herself. That's why connection really matters to motivate a child to do self regulation. So all the tools you know about, 24/7 empathy, special time, laughter. Laughter is really good for a kid like this because we're talking about fear. You can characterize it as anxiety or the alarm system in the brain, but it's basically just fear, and the antidote to fear is laughter.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now really the antidote to fear is love, but in our bodies, when we laugh, the brain chemicals, the neurological chemicals and hormones and neurotransmitters that are making us feel those fear symptoms, they diminish, and the bonding hormones and the safety hormones that make us feel connected and safe, they increase. I don't mean at that moment. You're not going to say, "Oh, let's laugh about the shower you don't want," but in general, if you spend 15 minutes laughing with her every day or even a half an hour or two different times, 15 minutes each, you'll find that she doesn't go through these anxiety reactions quite so often.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The thing about doing it in public.. I would say before you're in public, if you know there's something that may not go her way, to talk with her about it in advance. Even if you don't, just tell her you know how that feels because she probably isn't using it against you in public to embarrass you. She probably actually doesn't know what else to do. She just gets upset. Maybe you and she can come up with some tools that she can use in the moment when she's upset and some code words that she can tell you, "Code nine, code nine. I'm really upset." She doesn't have to say I'm really upset. She can say, "Code nine, code nine", and you can say, "Okay, I hear you're really upset. Let's do ..." whatever your pre-agreed upon thing is that she does to help calm herself down that you help her with.

**Question 10:**

- Parent: 00:36:43 I have two adolescents. I have a 14 year old daughter and I just have a question about some approaches to helping her unpack that emotional backpack. I can't go at it very directly with her often.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Sure, sure.
- Parent: I certainly can't go into problem solving at all with her because she really prides herself on being able to solve a lot of her problems, which she's very good at. But I do notice that as she has started high school, she's just finishing up eighth grade, that she's really buying into the culture of "it's a badge of honor to be stressed out."
- Dr. Laura Markham: Oh, yes.
- Parent: Do you have any ideas about how to approach that with her, without making her friends wrong or society wrong.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Yeah. So first of all, it's natural that they don't want us to solve their problems. Even if we were right about the solution, if we tell them how to solve their problems, what happens is they feel like they're not competent and then they have to push back against that by trying to not tell us things and by trying to keep us out of their life and even make bad decisions so they can assert some control. So it's really important that they have a chance to feel grown up. That's their whole thing. So we don't solve the problems for them and we just listen whenever possible, even though that's really, really hard. It's like you give yourself a piercing, bite your tongue. It's so hard. The second thing about the emotional backpack, does she ever cry?
- Parent: Rarely. Only when she gets extremely dysregulated. There's not a lot of laughter these days either. I mean, I think she laughs with her friends, but not at home so much. She's gotten pretty serious. I mean we enjoy ourselves, but it doesn't seem like there's a lot of shifting like that happening.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Right. So the more you enjoy her and the more you laugh with her, the better. In terms of the emotional backpack, it really helps enormously. When my daughter was that age, we got into a Marx Brothers phase. We watched all the Marx Brothers movies together over a period of months. I think any way you can get her laughing is worth it. So find things you can share that get you laughing, find jokes that are like your in-jokes in your family. Any way you can get her laughing, it's going to be really helpful.

If she does ever cry, milk it for all it's worth. Like, "Oh sweetie. Oh I know, it's so awful. I'm so sorry. This is so hard. No wonder you're stressed out", and just hold her. No one wants to feel manipulated. No one wants to feel like you're making them cry. No one wants to go near their feelings that upset them. So naturally a 14 year old is not going to take kindly to your doing a scheduled meltdown. You can't do it. You can no longer do it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But the good news is, they can do a lot of it with laughter. They can do some of it when they really need to cry, when they get dysregulated about something, if you can be really compassionate. When they get angry at you, if you can hold the compassion, sometimes they'll get to tears.

And then finally, they're almost grown ups. The brain is rewired at age 12 to give them much more conceptual thought. So they actually, like you and me, can do a lot of it verbally. She can tell you verbally what she's upset about and it does actually help with a lot of the emotional backpack. So just like with you and me, when we really need to cry, a good cry is going to be better than anything else. But you can work things out verbally as well. So you can give her those opportunities. The more you connect with her, the more you empathize on a daily basis, the more likely she will be to talk to you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then finally, the badge of honor to be stressed out. It's a travesty what we do to young people today where we sort of make them feel that way and where we just push them beyond their limits in terms of stress. It's just awful. So I would talk about that. I would talk about how you see adults do it. You think it's bad for adults to do it and you

think it's bad for kids to do it and that's a problem in this society and people need to learn to slow down and savor the moment because that's what makes life meaningful. So just talking about those things and not in a lecture-y way, but just a, "Boy, this is my opinion" way. She may not show you that she agrees with you, but you'll see her begin to parrot your view over time. But thank you for your question and good luck with your 14 year old. Enjoy her.

### Question 11:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:41:21

Here is a parent who is saying that her son is nine and has a hard time crying. Yep. The eight year olds and nine year olds are always the hardest ones. Anybody who has more than one child in this course can see that your younger child, you get pretty immediate results with when you start to change your parenting. But your older child, often they're resistant to your empathy. This parent's son doesn't sound like he's resistant. He says, "I need to cry, but I can't." That's so, so heartbreaking. This parent says, "We only recently got back on track with peaceful parenting", and that's your key here. You also say he's stressed at school. So if you only just got back on track with it, it takes time. If he's stressed at school, then he has an ongoing daily, five days a week, stressor in his life.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So you're on the right track. Laughter really helps with the stress from school. Really make a concerted effort for all of the preventative maintenance stuff, but especially the laughter. You'll find kids will find a way to cry if they need to and if they feel safe. You can't make anybody cry. What you can do is create safety and children know how to heal themselves. We all do. Our organism knows what to do with those emotions of healing. So if we feel safe enough, we'll find a way to cry. So your job is to help your child feel safe.

### Question 12:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:42:43

A parent is asking the very common important question, "How can I move my son to a meltdown when he's stuck in anger, when we want him to cry and release emotions?" Well, so the way you get to a scheduled meltdown is you calmly, firmly set the limit while you empathize with how much he wants whatever it is. If he gets that your limit really is firm, he might stop pushing at it and he might actually start to cry, as long as he feels understood and safe. If you just set the limit meanly, he'll be on the defensive and he won't start to cry. If you can really see it from his point of view and have tears in your eyes, then he will often shift to that place as well.

When kids don't cry at that moment, laughter usually helps. Again, not at that moment, but making a point of getting him laughing the rest of the day as much as possible, and then in that moment he's not as tightly strung. You sort of siphon off the top layer of fear in the backpack and he's much more likely then to cry.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If you're on the Facebook group, you might've noticed it can take some months for kids to get to the point of crying, especially kids who are older. It doesn't happen until you've been doing peaceful parenting for a while and there's been a shift in your relationship, so they are willing to really trust you and to let go and to howl out their disappointment to you, instead of lashing out at you, attacking you.

### Question 13:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:44:05

A parent says that her 12 year old son really resists her attempts at empathy, and she's quite sure, since she was in parenting survival mode until quite recently, that he's got a full backpack. He's often mad.

Her son says, "You don't care about me", or he gets mad when he says that they didn't keep their promises. I guess her and her partner. When he says that, he's saying he doesn't trust you. That's a result of conventional parenting. We have to earn our way back into their trust.

So when he says, "You didn't keep your promise", what you say is, "I guess you feel like I didn't keep my promise to you about this, huh? I'm so sorry, sweetheart. I think I did keep this promise. We did have to change our plan about X, Y, Z. So you weren't able to do what you wanted to do and what we thought you'd be able to do. But it wasn't because I broke a promise, but I can understand why that would upset you."

Dr. Laura Markham:

So you acknowledge that and then you say, "Sweetie, I think you think in the old days I often broke my promises to you and I think sometimes you were right. I did. You're right about that happening sometimes and I'm really sorry about it and I'm working very hard to always keep my promises to you." That's how you answer that. The reason he doesn't accept your empathy, I'm sure you figured this out so far on this call, is that it brings up all his old pain. He doesn't want to feel it. So I would recommend for a 12 year old, you apologize for the past with great detail. You acknowledge his experience. Be clear that you're not excusing yourself. Even if you say why you were in parenting survival mode, for instance. You're not excusing yourself.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Do this of course, when he's not already triggered. Also be aware that he's more likely to accept your empathy when he's not already triggered. So remember there are many ways to connect, not just when he's triggered, but the rest of the time, 24/7, you're in empathy mode with him, right? Lots of listening. So it is not too late with a 12 year old, it's just harder on you. That's because it was harder on him, right? Because he has more years of pain that he has to show you. So you said he gets triggered inexplicably. When that happens, it's because all those feelings are bubbling up to get healed. So listen to what he says, reflect it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

When he says, "You don't care about me", what you say is, "Oh Sweetheart, I know I made you feel that way in the past. I was so distracted. I did make you feel not cared about. I am so sorry I made you feel that way. I can really see how I made you feel that way when I wasn't there for you when you were so lonely and you felt like no one cared. I am so sorry. I do care about you. I always cared,

but I do care and I'm working very hard to show that to you and to make it up to you that I wasn't there for you. I am right here now. I promise you that I'm going to show up for you now. You can tell me about anything that hurt in the past and I will always understand."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now when I say that I have tears in my eyes. Every one of us needs to say that to our children if we have hurt them. Some version of that. If you really feel it and you have tears in your eyes, they will too. Your child will too. So if you've had a hard time getting your child to feel this, I don't know if you can expect a 12 year old boy to actually cry, but believe me, he will feel it. The empathy will get through and he will actually start to heal from the past.

#### Question 14:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:47:33

A parent is asking about her nine year old daughter. She says, "Your strategies are working with our seven and five year old sons, but we're still really struggling with our nine year old." So this is very common, by the way. The five year olds, the seven year olds even do okay with this, but the older child is the one who has a hard time, as we've said, when parents begin parent this way. It's just harder for them to make the transition.

So she's saying she hates her seven year old brother. She's mean to him. She hurts him and he's actually scared of her. So luckily she's an angel at school and I'm glad to hear that, but clearly she feels safe enough now to show her jealousy of her brother.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Isn't it interesting how it's always the first born child hating the second born, right? They usually get along fine with the third but it's the first born child that has never gotten over the second child being born. Which is why I wrote my sibling book -- because I see this so often -- the whole last third of that book is about how you introduce

the new baby so you can avoid precisely this scenario. So one thing is, my (Sibling) book will help you with this even though it is really written for seven and under, the principles are universal and the practices will work with your nine year old. But I want to say to start, you have to set limits here. Obviously she can't hurt her sibling. And at the same time you need to listen to her pain and you need to do preventive maintenance with her and she just needs to cry about feeling second best when her brother was born.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If you can talk with her about that, and she can cry about it, I think that's what's going to allow her to stop being mean to him. Remember, children act out what they can't express verbally. Acting out is acting out something you can't express verbally. So she's acting out her feeling of jealousy of her brother, her hatred of him, that he's a threat to her well being, because that's what she experienced but was never able to express to you. That's what you have to get her to express. And this is all outlined in the sibling book, but the preventive maintenance tools will really help you to get her in a place where she can do that.

### Question 15:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:49:39

A parent says her nine-year-old seems to have a lot of fears. Someone's going to break into their house and steal her. She has to sleep with mom in her room. She also has a lot of angry attitude with her family and she's obsessed with the popular girls, but they ignore her. Aw, I hate that. I'm so sorry. And afterschool she demands ways to numb herself, TV and junk food, and then when she is calm she's fine. But then the next day it happens all over again.

So this is a full backpack issue. She's using TV and junk food to numb herself, to stuff the feelings down. But then of course they come back. We can also tell she has this full backpack because she's rude and angry with her family,

that attitude, and also because of the fears. They're coming out as separation fears and fear of the dark.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So this is where all the preventative maintenance stuff really works. Are you spending one on one time with her every day? Is she laughing every day? How much is she crying? How much are you talking with her? How much are you listening to her about her social worries? So this is all essential, especially with a nine year old. A lot of it's going to happen verbally. And then you can begin to teach her to go to sleep by yourself. You do not have to sleep in her room. There are two articles on this, one's in the preschool section and one's in the toddler section. I know she's older than that, but that's okay because just start with those same principles and premises and you will gradually teach her that she can go to sleep by herself and not need you to be with her. But if she cries when you leave, great. That's a great opportunity to unload that backpack. Again, you're not leaving her in a room alone to cry. You're with her so that she can offload those old feelings. Because these are probably very old feelings.

#### Question 16:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:51:16

A parent is asking about her nine year old who's often distraught that, in his words, "I wasted all my time, like screen time or his play time with his brother. It's a huge source of upset for him and leads to meltdowns and really ruins his day. Even though, while he was doing the screen time or the time with his brother or whatever, he seemed to be having fun or even accomplishing something satisfying. We're at a loss to understand this."

So I'm at a loss to understand it too. Let's see what we can come up with here. He's expressing a sense of grief, a loss, a profound loss and as you imply, it's not just the immediate incident that's upsetting him. It's something bigger, so that every time he has a disappointment it triggers the sense of loss that he's carrying, that shadows everything. When he expresses that he wasted something,

I hope you'll be able to respond to that sense of loss with empathy.

Dr. Laura Markham:

"Oh, Sweetheart, you used your screen time on X and now you wish you'd used it on Y. You're so sad that it's over for today, the screen time. I hear you. You wish you would've used it on Y and now it's gone, gone, gone." You're not making fun of him, but you're really echoing this tremendous loss he feels. "You played X with your brother and now play time is over and we have to get ready for bed and you wish you had played something different and now you won't be able to. You wish play time could go on forever. You wish you could play everything you wanted to with your brother. It's so hard to stop playing and wait until next time." I would just honor the loss. Once he has a chance to grieve, he'll probably need to cry, but he'll probably let it go then, and it won't be as powerful when it comes up (again).

Dr. Laura Markham:

You might also give him a tool to help him deal with it. Not to substitute for what I've already said. You have to honor his grief. But a tool that could help him would be something like, "It sounds like next time you want to choose to do X game with your brother. Should we write that down? Write it here and post it up here so you can be reminded next time how much you want to do X?" Because (even) in the moment when you feel that anguish, it is possible. In fact, life is not over yet. Life is not over yet."

He will have time do the X with his brother. It's very hard to accept the loss now, but he could do it later. So if you say this, sometimes it can help him to handle the anguish in the moment, because there in fact will be more play time some other day.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Over time I think doing this little tool with him, writing the things down, will help him to begin to take responsibility for his choices. Because the next time he goes to play with his brother and you say, "Oh, I see the note. You said you wanted to play X", and he goes, "No, no, I'm going to play Y instead", you can say, "Okay, no problem. You are choosing to play Y instead of X. Is that right?"

Then later that night when he says, "Oh, I didn't want to play Y. I wasted my time", you can say, "I know it seems like that now and it's so sad not to have that time back. But then at the time you chose Y."

We don't know what this is for him and it doesn't really matter. I think the tools that we've just described will actually really help him to learn that even though we all wish we had unlimited time, we do choose what to do with the time we get, and it's our responsibility to make the most of that time.

### Question 17:

- Parent: 00:54:56 Is there a difference in the way you help a child who feels emotions of toxic shame versus the way you'd help an adult? When I've had arguments with my eight year old daughter, sometimes she'll say things like, "I'm bad. I don't deserve my toys", and I'm wondering what I can do that's age appropriate to help her.
- Dr. Laura Markham: So great question. I guess I would say that the antidote to shame, toxic shame, is always love. That's true no matter how old you are. So I think ... I'm sorry. Remind me, how old is your daughter?
- Parent: She's eight.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Eight, okay. I thought that's what you said. So she's old enough certainly to have inculcated the shame into her self image. So I would just say, "What a terrible feeling." I mean, you're not minimizing. You're not saying, "Oh no, you're not a bad person, and I love you." You're not just doing that because that's just denying what she's experiencing. What I would say is, "Wow, what a terrible way to feel. I'm so sorry if anything I've ever done has made you feel this way. Because you know what Sweetie? The truth is..." and then you can tell her what the truth is, which is that nobody is perfect, everybody makes mistakes. And she is a wonderful human being who is

wonderful just as she is, and she doesn't have to be perfect to be that way.

But I think it's really about the ongoing love and noticing the way that she talks to herself, the things she says about herself and interrupting the negativity by bringing in positive antidotes to that. Does that make sense?

Parent: Yes, yes. That's good.

Dr. Laura Markham: All right.

Parent: That's helpful, thank you.

Dr. Laura Markham: You're welcome.

### Question 18:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:56:58

This is from a parent who said, "It's so hard to wait when you want my help with something when I'm changing the baby's diaper." But then you also said you don't want to analyze too much. You wouldn't react to your partner by saying, "You seem so sad, mad." And what's the difference?

And thank you for asking this because you're not the only person who asked this question. What we're really talking about is how to acknowledge the feelings in a way that helps the other person feel understood. That's what we're doing. When someone's upset, you're not trying to teach them anything.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You're not even labeling feelings, necessarily. Your most important thing is connecting. That's the tone of voice. You're not standing back and analyzing, you're feeling it with them. With your partner, you would acknowledge the anger and you might well acknowledge the feelings behind the anger, but you wouldn't be distancing and analyzing, you'd be identifying with them. You might say, "Oh my goodness, how embarrassing that your colleague said that right in the meeting, no wonder you're mad." Right?

And with a child you might say the same thing. "Oh, your teacher said that in front of the other kids. That must've been embarrassing, no wonder you're mad at your teacher." Right?

Dr. Laura Markham:

It's the same thing where you're acknowledging the child's feelings. If it's something you're doing that the child is mad about, then it gets into another situation, right? But I'm just trying to come up with a situation that's parallel to what you would do with your partner. I also want to acknowledge that it's different for different aged kids. The parent who has this question has a 16-month-old. And with a 16-month-old you actually are going to label the feeling often because they're still learning the words for it and it's empowering to them to learn a word. You're so mad, you're so sad and that's actually great for the kid to hear that.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But you're probably not going to do that with a five-year-old, because they're going to feel talked down to. They're going to feel like, if they're already mad at you and you say "you're so mad and sad," they're going to get angry at you, right? You would in that case describe the child's experience.

And the example I used, "It must be hard to wait when you want my help and I'm changing the baby's diaper," well, you might still do that, right? You might say to the four-year-old who wants your help with something, "Oh Sweetie, I'm so sorry. It must be so hard for you to wait when I'm busy with the baby." Right? That's in the moment when the child is annoyed at you. If the child's already having a raging meltdown, you're not probably going into that many words. You're just saying, "Oh, I'm so sorry I wasn't there to help." Right?

Dr. Laura Markham:

But again, this isn't so different from what you'd say to your partner. Your partner says, "I just cleaned up the kitchen and now there's more dishes in the sink." And you could say, "Oh my goodness, I know it's so frustrating. That's happened to me too. You cleaned it up so beautifully and then more dishes. I'm sorry I just left them in the sink, I was just rushing." Right? That would be a

completely appropriate thing to do, to acknowledge in words what happened, right? I think that the general thing is to always be looking at your tone and your connection with the other person.

#### Question 19:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:00:00

A parent is asking about her oldest son who is eight coming home out of school every day, rude, aggressive, emotional, and then he comes down in a couple of hours and explains what happened to him. The way to make the transition easier is laughter. When you first pick him up from school on the way home or before you leave the school, if you can play on the playground for a bit with him and the other kids. If you have other kids they can play on the playground too while you focus on your oldest. Hopefully, you've been able to focus on the little ones before that. And that way he gets some connection, which helps and gives him more resources, inner resources to deal with the situation.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You're changing the body chemistry, which is full of hormones and neurotransmitters that are about anxiety. And you're instead creating, you're getting rid of those and you're adding in to the bloodstream hormones and neurotransmitters that are about connection, like oxytocin that comes from laughter, so that he's going to feel better and he won't act out so much. And you can also, since he's already eight, you can talk with him. On the way home once he's laughed and connected with you, he might well be able to explain these things to you before he even has to act them out in a negative way.

#### Question 20:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:01:10

A parent is asking about her seven-year-old, who's had some tough life experiences and wonders why she is so negative. Is it genetic or experience? I'd say half and half, that's what scientists think. If she receives empathy, the

seven-year-old, she'll be more empathic to other people and she'll be able to handle her feelings better. There's an article on optimism on the Aha! Parenting website that'll probably help you with the negativity, but some kids really do seem to be born with a more negative predisposition, but the optimism article will help you with that.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You say she wants to have the last word on everything. Well, that means she wants to be right. It's just that she's really upset at the moment or it means she has fragile self-esteem, that's also possible. In which case, again, your empathy is going to really help.

And then the final question you asked about: She asked to have candy and you said not now, maybe another time. But then you saw her slip the candy into her backpack. You ask, "Should I have ignored it and see if she came back for it later or returned it? No, that's just a trap. You don't ever trap kids. You say, even though you're working with your other child at that moment or whatever you're doing, you say, "I see you put the candy in your backpack. You really want to make sure you have it. I did say you could have it another time, Sweetie. We'll have that piece later when it's time."

Dr. Laura Markham:

That's it. And you could also say later, "You can have the candy, remember we said you could it have another time. You can have that piece of candy you put in your backpack. Sweetie, next time candy needs to stay where we leave it on the shelf and when you want a piece, you and I are going to agree that it's the right time for it."

### Question 21:

Parent:

01:02:44

I have an eight-year-old daughter, and I think she has a lot of bottled up emotions. But I don't think I was, actually, I know I wasn't very good at emotion coaching before with her. And I'm wondering for an eight-year-old if you recommend, because I know you talk a lot about a special time and having them laugh. But I'm wondering for an

eight-year-old, because she can talk a lot. If you have suggestions or if you have a specific thing you would recommend to help her release her emotional backpack.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Right. You said she does talk a lot or she doesn't?

Parent:

She talks but she doesn't talk about her emotions very much.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I just want to say for you and for everybody listening, most of us didn't grow up with parents who emotion-coached and so my admiration to you for interrupting that cycle, changing what you're passing on to your children. And even if your child is eight and you feel like you wish you'd done this when they were two or three, that's okay. It's still so much better than when they are 16. And if you're listening and you have a 16-year-old, you can still start to parent this way and it's a lot harder for them and for you to make the transition, but it will still make a big difference in who they become in the world. Please give yourself credit instead of finding fault with yourself for the past, give yourself credit that you're making a change. Because change is really hard.

So, emotion-coaching an eight-year-old and how to help with the bottled up emotions. Well, for all humans once we get past say, six, talking does help. What we've learned is that adults talking really does help, because it helps them reflect on emotions and connect the right and left sides of the brain. That integration turns out to be really important in helping us to self-regulate and to understand ourselves. Talking is great. With an eight-year-old you would have a lot of discussion about your emotions, about their emotions, about everyone's emotions -- and simple things, not all in-depth things and no lectures.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Just more like, "Your friend seemed really sad this week when she visited. I wonder what's going on with her." Or, "You seem quiet this week, I wonder whether you've got something on your mind." Or, "I'm feeling a little overwhelmed today. I had to rush-rush at work the whole time and it's hard to stop and unwind. Now that I've gotten home, I notice I'm tense, I'm going to sit and

breathe for a few minutes." You're also modeling problem solving.

But I want to also say that there's a limit to what words can do. All of us, all humans, need to cry sometimes and we need to laugh sometimes. The body **is** the subconscious, it's the repository of the feelings. And although words help in the brain, we also need to work with the body that has all these feelings locked up in it.

And that really means laughing and crying, sometimes yawning. Yawning is really helpful. You may have noticed if you have a meditation practice that yawning will come up, that you'll be meditating, and you'll start to yawn. It doesn't necessarily mean that you're tired, it might mean you're releasing emotion. And also you may find yourself tearing up, maybe not sobbing, although you may sob, but maybe just tearing up and having some tears in your eyes. And again, that's a way of releasing emotion.

Dr. Laura Markham:

For an eight-year-old, you would want to encourage anything that gets them laughing. And I know it's not so easy now that you can't just pick them up and toss them around, but have pillow fights. In the summer have fights with the hose, or chase him around the house screaming. Just get silly. You can watch YouTube videos together. Something that gets your child laughing every single day is really important. When your child does cry, you want to encourage that. You want to say, "Oh, everybody has to cry sometimes, it's all right Sweetie, I'm right here. You're safe."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Sometimes children don't want you to be with them while they're crying by the time they're eight and even earlier, and that's fine if your child needs to do that by herself, at least to begin with. And if she'll cry in your arms, all the better. And then I think some sort of a mindfulness practice will help. You can start early with that, but eight is a great time to start, where you introduce your child to audios that are designed to help her relax. Because those will allow the body to begin to surface any stored emotion, i.e. emotion in the emotional backpack.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I recommend, "Stress Free Kids". Lori Lite, L-I-T-E is the woman's name and she'll let you listen to things before you actually buy them, and if you don't like them you can trade them in for something else. And there are, I think at this point so many different audios. The reason I like Lori Lite, is that she had a child with anxiety and she specifically created audios to help kids relax, especially anxious kids. But all children who are stuffing emotions are anxious. That's one of the things that makes us anxious. When those emotions start to try to bubble up to get healed, it causes anxiety. I think her audios are very good and you can probably find lots of others if you look online. How great that you're helping your daughter now because you're going to give her much easier teen years.

#### Question 22:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:08:14

A parent is asking whether a seven-year-old can recover from punishment and cruel words and shaming and yelling that came with authoritarian parenting. And what's the best way to correct that, the child's negative self-talk and the child's anxiety and the negative things the child says?

I'm sorry to say that this is all normal. It's a normal result of authoritarian parenting. And those things that you described do cause the child to, well, at the time to live in fear. Fear is just another word for anxiety, right? It causes the child to be more anxious, it causes a child to not feel safe, so they stuff their feelings, that increases anxiety. Whenever we stuff feelings, it increases anxiety.

Dr. Laura Markham:

We all have a tendency, we're on a continuum, somewhere on a continuum to be more or less anxious, all of us. But when we stuff feelings, it makes us more anxious no matter where we are in the continuum. And the other thing is that authoritarian parenting or, at least, shaming, cruel words, yelling, punishment, all of that causes self-hatred. If you ever have felt like on some level you've said mean things to yourself, you have been filled with shame or self-loathing, that is self-hatred and that's

caused by that kind of parenting. The good news is, the brain rewires at age six and again at age 12. And if you have a four-year-old who acts like this, you can change things between the ages of four and six and when they rewire, things get better.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The seven-year-old has already been through one brain wiring and some of that stuff is now hardwired. But the brain is still plastic and it will rewire at age 12 so it's just harder than with a younger child. I get this direct feedback from people taking this course that the two and three-year-olds change right away, the four and five-year-olds change pretty quickly. The six and seven and eight-year-olds are harder, the nine and 10 and 11-year-olds are really a challenge.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And the ones older than that I usually suggest, even though the same principles work, which we'll talk about, I usually say go to family therapy. Just really intervene on a deep level with good support rather than taking a slow path, which is what you're doing with me, a slower path.

Okay, luckily the brain is somewhat plastic. What can this parent, and everyone else, do with these kids who are a little older, like the seven-year-old? You have to do a lot more listening, you have to do a lot more connection building.

This parent says there are two upsets a day that include yelling and lashing out. I am so sorry and my heart goes out to you. And I want to reaffirm what I said earlier, for this parent and for everyone else who's struggling with this, that the thing about backpack emptying is, it's not about the anger. If the upsets are about lashing out, that's not actually that constructive. What we want is for the child to get to the loneliness, the devastation, the fear, the tears and fears that are under the anger, right? And they are, that's what's happening. Now that the child knows they won't be punished, those feelings are coming up to get healed.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And wouldn't it be great if he could just say to you, "Mom, Dad, remember all those times you hurt my feelings and

even my body? I feel like I must be a worthless person. Sometimes I feel like a piece of garbage. I'm afraid that I might be, I feel terrified inside. I feel like I'm unlovable and I'm so scared and so alone, and so sad." Now, imagine if they could tell us that, but that would be half the healing. When we can put those things into words and someone hears us, it's very healing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Kids can't do that. We're lucky as adults if we can do it. Kids can do it more and more from seven on, but we have to help them do it.

I want to add, if you just listened to that and it broke your heart, yes, it would break any parent's heart to hear that. But so many of our children have felt that way. And if they could have told us at the time, we would have changed how we were, but they couldn't. I hope that you'll really take it to heart now, if that struck a chord with you, because it may be that your child did feel that way at some point and he needs help to work through those feelings so that he can heal.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But remember, they don't feel good, those feelings. He's going to attack you instead, right? And I know for you, when you feel attacked, like every other human, it's hard to feel emotionally generous.

Here's what you do when you feel attacked. You remind yourself (that) he stuffed those feelings because they're unbearable. It's like an infection, it bubbles up to get healed. He notices the emotions, they feel dangerous to him. The human mind cannot tell -- it's unable to tell the difference between the past and the future and the present. It doesn't even know whether it's an external or an internal threat, it just knows there's a threat. He thinks he's in danger from those unbearable emotions, so he wants to run in the other direction. That's freeze, or numbing himself out, begging for screen time, as I said, or treats. And of course, the other option is to fight.

Dr. Laura Markham:

When children need to empty their backpack, it always begins with them picking a fight. That's the thing to remind yourself. And if they stay stuck in the anger, you have to

help them feel safer, right? The only thing that will empty the backpack is the emotions that are under the anger getting felt. If you feel them --if you communicate them, but even if you just feel them -- they will disappear, and the anger isn't needed as a defense, so then the anger vanishes.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If your child is having these meltdowns, your job is always connection. 24/7 empathy, laughter, physical connection, right? That's what creates the safety. And then in the moment, resist the fight, summon up all your compassion. You're not trying to correct your child for being rude or difficult, or whatever. They're yelling, do not correct at that moment. That lessens the safety, it puts them on the defensive. You should have tears in your eyes, that will disarm his aggression. He may not cry, he may just get tears in his eyes or even just soften a little bit, but even that means he's feeling the feelings and that's great. Just feeling the emotions is half the battle. Just acknowledge his perspective.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And you don't have to acknowledge the past, which may send him running in the other direction. Just acknowledge whatever he's riveted on at the moment even if it doesn't seem like the real thing and he's making a mountain out of a molehill. "You wish I would let you, you wish you could, you're so disappointed at that." Just talk about whatever's going on right now. Apologize and reassure. And the more you do this, even though you say no to what he wants, the more he's going to actually work through these emotions and the fewer meltdowns he's going to have.

### Question 23:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:15:21

This is about an eight-year-old who says she wants to die or wants someone to kill her. You said, "You must be very unhappy to say that." That's exactly what you say, that's really important. That she must be very unhappy.

Did she tell you why she's unhappy? There's some unmet need here, big upset feelings and you need to figure out what that is. Let her tell you why she's unhappy. She may

not be able to articulate what's really bothering her, but get her in the habit of talking about it even if you think it's just something that's not that important, like somebody ignored her at school today. Maybe that's the end of the world for her, number one, but maybe even if it isn't the real reason, she thinks it's the real reason right now and you want her to be able to start talking about what makes her unhappy.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I want to add sometimes when children use this kind of language, there's something really big. Like somebody sexually abused her and you don't know about it. Not to frighten you, but when children use language like this you have to take it seriously. I would say it's possible that this is just old feelings left over from your early parenting style, but it also may be something that's a big deal. I was bothered when you said that she feels like she's a burden or a bad girl and sometimes that's when she says it. No child should ever feel like a burden, ever. In fact, feeling like a bad child is a prime source of self-hatred. And feeling like a burden is a reason that people often give when they do kill themselves. I'm not saying that she would do it now, but it is.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You're worried about when she's older, you told me. Well, yes, people should never feel like a burden, so you need to nip that one in the bud immediately. Say to her, "You're never a burden to me, I am so lucky to be your mother." And every child needs to hear every day how lucky we are to be their parents, how grateful we are. How glad we are that they chose to come into our family, into our arms, into our lives, right? Every child needs to hear that daily.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I want to add I don't believe there's such a thing as a drama queen. She needs help with her emotions and there's a lot going on and we don't know what it is. I'm even inclined to say, "Let's get her to a therapist." But I wouldn't just take her to one, I would go with her and tell the therapist that you want to learn how to communicate with your daughter better. Since she's saying she's so unhappy, she wants to die, you want to know what could be making her that unhappy and you want the therapist's help to talk and listen better with your daughter to help

her through these tough emotions and build a closer relationship with her before she gets to the teen years.

#### Question 24:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:17:57

Our next question is about what's normal in terms of backpack emptying. A parent says her seven-year-old has had a hard school year and there's been a lot of emotional offloading. And she wonders whether it's going to be just life as normal now in the future because he is an emotionally sensitive child, or whether in fact, after kids empty their backpack, things get easier. And I understand why you're confused because both things are true. I would say all children as they go through life have a lot to deal with growing up. The things that we think are small potatoes as we're observing our children's lives can be very big for them.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Naturally, they have to rise to those developmental challenges and handle them. And most of the time our kids do great, but sometimes they handle it great at school, but then they come home and they just need to cry. And that's not so different from us. We might handle a meeting with our boss or our team great while we're there, but we might get in our car and burst into tears or go home to our partner and burst into tears. Sometimes all humans just need to cry, that's the first thing. And there will be times when all humans find that life feels overwhelming.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Of course, every child will have those feelings their whole childhood, including their teen years. But they're going to have more of those times than we will, because of a couple of reasons. One is, their brains are immature compared to ours. They don't have the perspective we have, everything seems like a big deal. And we might have a perspective like, "Yes, that's just my boss, he has a temper." But our child doesn't have that perspective, "Oh, that's just my teacher, Mrs. Jones, she has a temper." They're feeling like, "Oh my goodness, Mrs. Jones yelled at me. I must be a bad kid." Or they're thinking, "Mrs. Jones, yelled at my best friend Susan, and tomorrow Mrs. Jones

could yell at me." And they're quaking in their boots about what tomorrow will bring.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Kids don't have perspective, their brains are immature so they can't handle as much. And also remember their experience of life is one of almost unmitigated powerlessness and dependency. You may think your child runs the roost, but your child probably thinks of themselves as completely dependent on you for love and food and rent. And your child may well feel powerless to really get what they want, which is to wave a wand and have their sister go away when she's annoying, or to get cookies when they want them, and to get you and your partner to stop fighting. Kids feel, often, powerless and dependent and so as a result, they're more likely to have hard days and full backpacks.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The other thing of course, is that we adults in their lives, we parents are only human, so we don't handle things perfectly. Again, we think we just had a hard day and raised our voice, no big deal. They feel like we yelled at them and we don't really love them and again, that goes in the backpack. All children will have issues that will happen in life where they don't feel safe at the time, whether it's us yelling at them or Mrs. Jones yelling at them or their best friend being mean to them. Those things at the time they might keep a stiff upper lip, but it goes into the backpack then and they need to let it out later. All kids will have those things.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Sensitive kids are going to have it happen more, because they just pick up on everything and they have bigger reactions, and so they're going to have more things that they end up putting in their backpack. And kids who have special issues happening in their lives, like school issues or learning disabilities, or sensory issues or ADHD. Those kids are going to have, of course, more things that they have to handle, again, more things in the backpack.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Yes, you can help your child do backpack emptying at the beginning of your peaceful parenting work as you make this transition. Or as you learn the tools. Even if you tried to be a peaceful parent in the past, if you learn these tools

and you do all the preventive maintenance, you will see your child doing more releasing, doing more crying, letting go of some old stuff. Great. Your child will be better in between the backpack emptying. But you will still see increased backpack emptying as they feel safer to show you things.

Dr. Laura Markham:

That will be true even after they've let go of the old stuff, that there might be new stuff that's accumulating in the course of the school day. Highly sensitive four-year-olds are going to come home and cry probably once a week. A highly sensitive seven-year-old is probably going to need, well, maybe they'll need to cry. They're becoming more able to express things verbally and you will see less backpack emptying, emotionally, less crying, as kids become more able to express themselves verbally. But they're still going to get angry and lash out and you're going to say, "Oh my goodness, you must be so upset what's going on?" And they're going to say, "Oh, of course I'm upset, Mrs. Jones, yelled at me." And they're going to maybe tear up even if they don't exactly sob.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You will still see that kind of offloading of emotion even once they are able to express things verbally. That's true even into the teen years. You'll see that from 13-year-olds. I find the most volatile teen age to be 13. At 12 years old, 12 and 13 the brain is rewiring and I think kids are more volatile at 12 and 13 than they are at any age except two. That's my observation. I think by the time kids are 15, kids that have been peacefully parented using these tools are very articulate, they're able to tell you what's wrong. If you work to stay connected to them, you will find that they get more and more rational and less and less -- they process stuff as it goes on because they're just more emotionally healthier. If you parent this way, they become more friendly to their emotions.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Even when something happens at school and Mrs. Jones is unfair to them about their chemistry test, your teenager is able to take a deep breath and speak up for herself. Or your teenager is able, when the other kids "dis" her, to go into the bathroom, take a deep breath, breathe their way through it, shake her hands out and say, "I am more than

enough," and walk right back out with their head held high. They're processing as they go through their day, and that's a kid who is emotionally healthy. They're not coming home with that much accumulated stuff.

Dr. Laura Markham:

They may come home and rant and rave to you about the chemistry teacher or their friends, but they're mostly handling it as it comes up instead of coming home with a full backpack. That's sort of the normal results of doing this kind of parenting.

When we say backpack emptying, I'm talking about crying. If your child is not crying but is just angry, that's not backpack emptying. That's actually a defense against the backpack. It's like, if you watched Game of Thrones, Hodor holding that door. It's like, I'm going to hold that door and not let those emotions out. So if your kid is just angry, your job is to increase the safety. You do that with 24/7 empathy, as much as you can, all week long. You do it with laughter all week long as much as you can. You do special time every day. And then in that moment when your child gets angry, you do it by increasing your empathy so that your child doesn't have to keep attacking and can get past the anger into the tears and the fears under it. If you do that, then the kid actually has a chance to do backpack emptying.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So they will sob if they're young enough. But even if they're not young, even a 13-year-old will tear up and tell you how it's so not fair. You always prefer her brother. Or Mrs. Jones did this on the chemistry test. Or "My friend, I've been so nice to Camille and she's not even letting me come to her party just because ..." Whatever. So you're going to hear the whole thing and they're going to have tears in their voice, even if they're not sobbing. And that is still backpack emptying. That's still processing. It's just done in a verbal way as opposed to with tears.

### Question 25:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:26:21 “What to do when being empathic escalates the tantrum?” This is very common. This is somebody who has a seven-year-old. She says, "When I'm empathic, it escalates his tantrum." So it depends what's happening here. If you're empathizing and he thinks you're just paying lip service and you don't actually feel or hear him, it's going to always escalate it. So there's an article, again, on my website what to do when empathy doesn't work or when empathy doesn't work. It's a blog post. Look that up.

[https://www.ahaparenting.com/blog/When\\_Empathy\\_Doesnt\\_Work](https://www.ahaparenting.com/blog/When_Empathy_Doesnt_Work)

I think you'll see that often it's because we're just mouthing the words, and that will always escalate the tantrum. So you have to actually feel it.

Dr. Laura Markham: If instead you actually are being empathic and you're finding that it's awakening his vulnerability behind his anger, then just stop using the words. Just say, “Sweetie, I'm so sorry. This is terribly hard, isn't it? This is not what you wanted.” So you're not actually analyzing him or anything. And if you need to just stop, then close your mouth.

### Question 26:

Parent: 01:27:26 Hi. Firstly, I just wanted to say thank you so much for all you said so far. It's been really super helpful. Thank you. I can't remember the question you were answering at the time, but it's about helping a child empty their emotional backpack. But specifically from the past, I'm trying this with my daughter and definitely things are working but some better than others. She's eight, so there are definitely things from the past, from when she was little, that I'm sure are there in the present. So how do we work with the old past stuff in terms of emotional backpack emptying?

Dr. Laura Markham: Okay. So the good news is that we don't have to know what the old stuff is. Kids can have old stuff that's in their

backpack and express it without us having to know what it is. You don't even have to articulate it. All they have to do is have a chance to show it to us and to cry about it. So even if you don't know what it is, the old stuff, just getting them laughing and allowing the tears when they come and embracing all emotion, will always give kids a chance to empty their backpack, to show us whatever feelings they have.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now, if you do know what the issue is, sometimes we know, we know that they had stitches when they were two or three and we had to help hold them down in the doctor's office or at the hospital. If you do know about something like that or even a difficult birth, it really is helpful to tell them the story of it, to act it out with puppets or stuffed animals, to write a story and make a book about it. Make sure there's a happy ending about how their body was so strong or how they healed and mommy was always there to take care of them or whatever.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So make sure you end up with a happy ending, but give them a chance to hear the story. Because even if they don't consciously remember the incident, like it was a difficult birth, there's somewhere inside them that it'll speak to, something inside them, that feeling, and it will help them to work it out. So I think if you know what it is, talk about it. If you don't know what it is, it's okay. Just help your child to laugh and to cry and those feelings will get resolved. Does that make sense?

Parent:

Yeah. Yeah, it does. I think it's probably going to be finding times to do the scheduled meltdown.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Scheduled meltdown. Yeah.

Parent:

I think that's probably going to be a really important thing. It's such a busy schedule that we're in, it's sometimes hard to find those times. I have a really strong feeling that's probably the most important thing at the moment.

Dr. Laura Markham:

It's very hard to find time in our lives for anything extra. It's not like we have spare time sitting around. But I also

think it can make such a tremendous difference. When we do help our kids with the emotions, they get so much more cooperative that all of a sudden we're having fewer bumpy moments and more lovely moments and more connection and more cooperation and things do get easier. So it's worth making it our highest priority for a period of time, and we usually do see big results.

Parent:

Yeah. Brilliant. Thank you.

### Question 27:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:30:43

A parent is asking, "When my seven-year-old is upset, my empathy and verbalizing how he must be feeling seems to make him angrier. It's like I'm reinforcing the thing that's bothering him." So when we are more understanding, they are punched into those feelings. But don't think your child doesn't want to be understood. Everybody wants to be understood. Often, when kids get angry at our empathy, it's because they don't feel understood. They feel patronized. So sometimes it's because you're hitting the nail on the head. Sometimes it's because they feel patronized. So I already addressed when you're hitting the nail on the head.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Let's address the patronizing thing, because I know a lot of people also end up feeling this way, or feeling this is happening with their kids. Especially if no one empathized with you when you were little, you might find it hard to have real empathy and compassion in your voice with your kid. So that's when we're sort of trying really hard, and we end up being sort of mechanical. We end up saying, I hear you want juice. No more juice. And yes, we do have to maintain our limit of no more juice, but our child didn't feel understood by our repeating that limit. So when you say you're rubbing it in, I wonder if that might be what's happening with you. Where you're rubbing in the limit of no more juice and he doesn't feel understood.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So the key with empathy is that you have to feel the compassion. You're asking for juice, I hear you. You really want juice, don't you? You love juice. And here, I'm saying "No more juice. I know you wish I would say yes, here's a refrigerator full of juice. But right now, no more juice. I know that's so sad." Now, for something small like this, you might not even dwell on the emotions. You might say, "You wish you could have all the juice in the world, what kinds of juice would you have? How much juice would you have?" You can just go into the wish fulfillment, which is a way to help kids deal with the actual upset.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But for bigger things, or even really for a small thing like the juice, sometimes they're going to get angry because they think we could meet their needs, but we're saying no to them. So in that case, you have to still see their perspective. So even if you're still saying no, that you have to protect them or you have to protect someone else, we know how it feels to want something you can't have, even if it's just juice. So the empathy, yes, it makes the feelings more intense, so he might get more sad. But he also does really need to know you understand.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I also want to add, when you're saying that, it seems like it makes him feel worse. Maybe he's just using this opportunity to offload other feelings in his emotional backpack. So he's resisting washing his hands and you acknowledge how much he doesn't want to do it. "I know, you don't want to wash your hands. You wish you didn't have to." And he goes into a meltdown. It probably wasn't about washing his hands. He needed that meltdown. And in that case, you know what, you didn't rub it in. Your empathy succeeded. So I think we have to change our idea of what's a successful interaction. What's a successful interaction is not talking our kid off the cliff. What's a successful interaction is welcoming all of the emotions.

### Question 28:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:34:03

A parent is saying, "At first, I used to hold my four children when they would empty their backpack to keep them from hitting. And now the three older ones scream at me to go

away. So I don't hold them anymore. I try to give them space. But they literally follow me around the house screaming, go away. Is this progress?" Yes, this is progress. That's very funny. But it's progress. You are actually helping your kids get to the point where they want to be with you when they're upset.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So first, don't hold an upset child unless it's necessary to stop them from lashing out. I know you've already discovered that for yourself. But that's just for anyone else who's listening. And only hold them for as long as necessary. No longer. Just to keep them from hitting.

You can transition the child from the holding by saying, I know you like to push against me when you're mad. You can push on my hands. I won't hold you. You can just push on my hands as hard as you can. That pushing, by the way, is a way of getting rid of fear. When they feel fear and they need to fight their way out of the abyss. That's what's going on. Peter Levine, who's a trauma expert, would say that the body needs to be mobilized against the fear. So that's why they need to push.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So the second thing, I think you should ask your children, ask them one-on-one alone when they're not upset, whether you should really stay or go. And this is true for anyone whose child is saying "Leave me alone." Point out that they told you to go away when they were upset, but that you're not sure, maybe you should just go further away, a little bit away. And see what your child says. Say to them, "How far back should I move? Should I move this far? Should I move that far?" And see what they're going to say when they're feeling more calm.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And then finally, in those upset moments, you want to create safety for them, right? When they're following you around yelling, leave me alone. So you have to be in charge of staying calm, but they have to be in charge of how close you are to them. Remember, they're trying to titrate those emotions. Manage how much comes up at once for them. So when they say "Go away!", you say "I'm going to move back. Is this far enough?" And sometimes they yell, "Go further!" But most of them don't yell at you

to leave the room. If they do, you can say, I'm right outside waiting.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But don't shut the door unless you have to. And you say, "Let me know when you're ready for a hug" and then sit outside. Find ways to stay connected. Creep back in one bit at a time once they calm down. Or stay outside and write love notes. And if they're actually going to look at the love notes, like if the door is shut between you, if you have to shut the door with an eight-year-old, write love notes. And you can even progress to writing funny love notes when they write you back an angry love note, you can write another love note.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, I also want to say that you can often prevent an angry meltdown by going right to the tears. First, by acknowledging to your child how unfair life seems, how bad the child feels. It's when they feel understood that those tears get released. So remember, the backpack is full of tears and fears, not of anger. The anger is just a defense. So if the child feels safe enough, they'll get to the tears and fears. You have four children, so I know two are old enough that they're not going to break down sobbing as easily. But you'll notice maybe that they have a catch in their voice. As they hurl an angry barb at you, there will be some plaintiveness to it like, "You don't love me." Right? Hear the tears under there.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So your willingness to sit with that pain and acknowledge it is what helps an older child to empty that emotional backpack. And you just say, "You even feel I don't love you. That must hurt so much. Honey, I do love you. I could never love anyone more than I love you. I am so sorry that I've ever made you feel like I don't love you."

And remember, if you really feel that, you're going to get tears in your eyes when you say it. Your child will be getting to those deep feelings too, even if he doesn't put them into words, and you don't see him crying about them. Just get into the feelings. Feeling them is what's healing, they don't always need to be crying about them.

**Question 29:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:38:19

A parent says, "I've made mistakes with my oldest who's eight. I didn't make them with the younger siblings. I see the difference. Is it too late to help her manage her emotions?" It's definitely not too late. And she will learn to manage her emotions with your help. But you're definitely not going to start with managing her emotions. And actually the question is even framed, "Is it too late to change her behavior?" You can't change her behavior. Only your eight-year-old can change her behavior and manage her emotions and she has to want to. And the only way she's going to want to, is your relationship with her.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I would say her behavior will change, but not until your relationship with her changes. I would focus completely on connection. And when she gets difficult, I would stop, take a deep breath and say, "You are so upset about this Sweetie, I'm so sorry. Let's start over. Tell me what's bothering you. How can I help?"

You say she doesn't like the empathy, often that's the case because she doesn't want to cry with you. She doesn't want to let any chink in her armor. The older kids get, the more they have a wall around their heart to us, they've hardened their hearts against us.

But you can get through there if you really use the 24/7 empathy. And I would say the other thing is use laughter. Laughter really helps. It reduces the backpack. And it also helps by creating bonding hormones between you. Oxytocin is released, and that's the bonding hormone.

**Question 30:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:39:42

There's a question here about seven to nine-year-olds. These kids were told by their father not to cry. So you're going to have to really talk about that, obviously, and encourage them to cry. But that's probably not going to

work. You're probably going to end up taking your kids to family therapy. You may think if you're listening to this, that I'm sort of jumping the gun to say take kids to therapy just because they won't cry. But the person who asked this question is saying that "both kids have full backpacks, both kids have sibling rivalry that is really difficult. There have been some long and violent meltdowns with no crying. How do I get them professional help? How do I help them cry?" So those are the questions.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would say, never take a child to get them "fixed". Always be with them. Say that what you want is to fix the relationship. And as part of that, when you go and you meet with a person who understands family dynamics, they will probably invite your ex-husband to also come to some of those meetings, not all of them. And you can confront head on the question about crying, and should. So I think regardless of whether your ex makes it into those meetings, it's very important for you to be there with your seven and nine-year-olds. Your boys are starting a new phase of their childhoods and you don't want them to go any further without being able to be in touch with the parts of themselves that are wounded, and get some healing there. Because you don't want them self-medicating when they're in the teen years.

### Question 31:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:41:14

Moving on to the next parent's question. "When my 11-year-old escalates in anger and disrespect, I don't yell. I try to stay nearby and say little." Perfect. "She hates my empathy, especially words, at that moment." Yes, of course. And you know why, right? Because it creates safety and that means the feelings come up more strongly. She's trying to titrate those feelings, so she has to keep you at a distance. She doesn't want your empathy. This parent continues, "The slammed door comes next." Ouch. "I wait, I stay available." Okay, that's great. She adds here, "Dad is on a different page and is part of my child's frustration. Later when we talk, I make minimal progress

seeing from her point of view. How can I connect better during this tween stage?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

I didn't read your whole question (aloud), you mentioned that you roughhouse with her, and that really helps you connect. That's wonderful. I would also work on connecting the way she wants to. You said baking, screens, shopping. I think with a child that age, by the time they're 11, then that's appropriate for special time. And it gives you opportunities to listen more to her when she talks and so she can share with you things that she likes. I would ask her to share her songs with you that she likes to listen to, for instance.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But I think the main thing for you to work on is seeing from her point of view. Because even if you don't agree with her, can't you see how passionate she is about something? How much she wants it, how disappointed she is. Can't you see how upsetting it is to her that her dad's on a different page, and she can't be close to him the way she wants? You can empathize with that, without being disrespectful to her dad. Just acknowledge that when he was growing up, things were different. He doesn't see things the way you do.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would suggest also that you do a little meditation yourself and reach out to the 11-year-old who you once were. I wonder if maybe you didn't feel understood when you were 11. And that keeps you from extending understanding to your daughter. It might be that doing some repair work with that 11-year-old inside you is what will help you connect more with your daughter. And finally, I want to suggest that if you're finding empathy is an issue in other relationships, then it's not just with your daughter, and you can develop empathy. And I have an entire section on how to do that in the *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids Workbook*.

### Question 32:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:43:50

Our next question is from a parent who says, "18 months ago, my husband was very ill, and he was left with memory

loss, anxiety and anger. Our issue now is our son who's nine. When he's upset, he controls, especially his younger six-year-old brother. If I acknowledge he's unsettled, it makes the controlling worse and he tries to turn his brother against me. He may hurt me. How do I deal with it at that moment?"

So this is really tough. I'm so sorry for what you're experiencing with your husband. And it sounds like with your kids, because your nine-year-old and probably your other kids, they're carrying a heavy load of fear. The reason I know that is your nine-year-old tries to control that fear by controlling other people. I think when he does that, and you comment on it, he feels analyzed so he feels less safe. So it makes his behavior worse.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I think your magic wand here is going to be laughter. That will help him without putting them on the defensive. And all your kids really need laughter to help them work through their fear about how their dad has changed now.

But honestly, I would urge you not to try to do this all by yourself. I would take your whole family into family therapy. I would get expert help to work through the trauma you're experiencing. Not counseling just for your nine-year-old, but counseling for the entire family. Because this is a very hard thing to cope with, and you really should not have to do it by yourself. You don't have to do by yourself. The kind of family therapy that I would most recommend would be emotion-focused therapy. I don't know where you live, but if you want to send a note to my assistant at [administrator@ahaparenting.com](mailto:administrator@ahaparenting.com), we can try to find a referral for you.

### Question 33:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:45:42

Our next question is from a parent who says, "Our son has recently realized that he can't be made to do anything and he retreats into silence, won't make eye contact, and engages in self-sabotaging behaviors like breaking up his artwork that others are complimenting. He is doing this at school too and is often rude to the teachers. When we try

to engage him around making repairs, he won't take any responsibility and shows no empathy."

So the fact that your son is doing this not just at home but at school means that this is a cry for help. Breaking up his artwork that others are complimenting is a sign of self-loathing and showing you just how upset he is. The fact that he does this at school also is unusual, and actually means something big is going on.

Dr. Laura Markham:

When you say you engage him around making repairs, I'm worried about this child's mental health. I don't see a repair to be made from having broken up his artwork. I think the problem is he's either 10 or 11, since that's the age of your children. And this is pretty old for a child to be breaking up his own artwork. So it sounds to me like this is a child with shame and self-loathing, who's being lectured. When you say you try to engage him with making repairs, you can't ask a child to make repairs until you've helped them with the feelings that are driving whatever that behavior is that you don't like. Sounds to me like this is a child who is refusing to engage, because he feels you're not understanding him. That's most likely.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So it's conceivable to me that some parent coaching will help you master the Peaceful Parenting tools so you can connect with him. But I wouldn't delay on getting counseling for your son, actually. I would go with the entire family, not counseling just for him, because that will make him feel like he's broken. But I would go with the whole family to family therapy. And that should give your child a voice so that he can tell you what he feels.

Right now he feels he's not going to be listened to. The reason he's retreated into silence is that he doesn't think he's going to be listened to. If you go to family therapy, he will absolutely get support from the therapist to be able to tell you what he needs to tell you. And I think you'll be able to listen with the help of a therapist and heal the relationship, which you really want to do before even another year goes by, because he's hitting puberty soon.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So please don't wait. Find a local family therapist that can help you to talk with your son and listen and help him to open up to you. And of course, use the Peaceful Parenting tools to try to connect more when you can. And that means get him laughing if you possibly can. Use empathy when you speak to him about anything and everything. If he'll spend special time with you, do it. But the impression I'm getting from your question is that he just shuts you out and goes into silence. And if that's the case, then it's time to bring in an expert who can help everybody in the family to feel safe together.

### Question 34:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:48:53

A parent is asking, "My nine-year-old finds it difficult to take responsibility for his actions. It's always the other child's fault or the adult was unfair. How important is it for a child to reflect and take responsibility for their behavior, and how do you support that?"

Well, I think it's hard for all of us to accept responsibility when something goes wrong. We always want someone else to blame. And I love that you're focused on helping him repair the upset. And I'm delighted that his school behavior is improving with the core strategies. I would just keep talking with him about these situations, helping him reflect, always beginning with empathy. "No wonder you were cross, I would have felt like shouting too. Was there any part of you that thought it was a bad idea to shout?" That's the reflection part.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So start with the empathy, stay in the empathy for a while, and then move to, "Was there any part of you that thought it was a bad idea to shout?" And then, "What kept you from listening to that part of you?"

There's also an article on the website that I think will help you. Put into the search box, "child blames others for everything." I think that's the name of the article.

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/ask-the-doctor-1/my-child-blames-others-for-everything>

I strongly recommended a no blame household. Because I think when we have a no blame household, kids stop having such a hard time taking responsibility. It doesn't seem like such a big deal. When we are blaming people for the things that they've done wrong, including blaming ourselves, kids often find it harder to accept responsibility.

### Question 35:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:50:24

A parent asks, "My kids are 50/50 with their dad who uses traditional strict punishments. When the kids come home, they usually have a meltdown the first evening. My nine-year-old son often has an aggressive meltdown, and he says he wants to be left alone until he's calmed down. If I go near him during the meltdown, it gets worse. He goes into his room and calms down. But the problem is, he breaks his toys and drawings while in his room. But if I go in, he throws things and tells me to go away. He clearly calms better alone."

So first of all, strict punishment, which you say your husband, your ex uses, is bad for kids. If by strict punishment you mean spanking or even yelling or threats. And if it's true that your children are being punished with yelling or threats or spanking, I would say your ex needs to go to couples counseling with you, so that you can agree on an approach to your kids that is not bad for them.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Of course, they come home and have meltdowns, if that's in fact, the way they're being dealt with at his house. So that will be the first thing.

So your actual question was about your son and letting him calm down alone. So I would discuss with him. It sounds like you've had a discussion with him about whether he wants you to come in or not. And he says, "No, I want you to leave me alone so I can calm down." He's not a three-year-old, right? He's nine years old. So I think it's fine to respect that and let him calm down himself.

You say your concern about this is that he breaks his things. So I would begin a discussion with him about how he feels when he has these meltdowns. How he has these big feelings that feel terrible to him. And it makes him want to break things, even his own things, tear up his drawings and hurt his own things.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If he can articulate that it was a terrible weekend, that he loves his dad, and he was glad to see his dad, but then his dad was unfair or his dad threatened him or his dad hurt him. Or just that he's hurt. That he worries, he not a good enough kid to get his dad to love him. If he can articulate those things to you, he won't have to act them out.

But if he's doing this regularly, then he needs a chance to work those feelings out in a better way. And again, I'm going to recommend counseling, because he should not be coming home and tearing up his things.

It's not so much a question of whether you're with him or not (during his meltdowns). It's more a question of, he's coming home with all this self-loathing that's making him act so angry and tear up his drawings and break his toys and stuff. So clearly he needs help from the grown ups in his life, to work through those feelings, and to stop having those feelings be a result of the way he's being treated every other weekend.

### Question 36:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:53:23

Next, we have a parent who says, "Regulating my emotions when there's a roller coaster of emotions around me is a struggle. My nine-year-old blows up over small things and takes herself to her room, slams the door and then comes out five minutes later as if nothing happened. No matter how much connection and empathy her dad and I give her, it's never enough. She tests us constantly. And we do fill our tank. We want her to feel loved and that we're not walking on eggshells, not being inauthentic to who we are as people."

So I'm not exactly sure what your question is. One question is, why is your nine-year-old blowing up over small things? But it does sound like she takes herself to her room and comes out five minutes later, calmed down. So she's the kind of person who falls apart easily, but then is able to pull herself back together. That's a great thing. She's not having long meltdowns. It is a question why she still blows up over small things. But if you've been doing conventional parenting, that wouldn't be so unusual, to tell you the truth, for a highly sensitive person.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You're also saying she tests you constantly and no matter how much connection and empathy you give her, it's never enough. So that's a chip on the shoulder. That connection and empathy problem, that it's never enough. Again, that's a relic of conventional parenting, where she doesn't feel understood and she has a chip on her shoulder that says, "You don't really love me. You don't really care about me. You don't really understand me." Right?

Dr. Laura Markham:

It does sound as if you're working hard to make a connection with her. You said you fill her tank and it's never enough. So that's a leaky tank. Right? And that means that there are some big emotions that she's still carrying around that need to get healed, and that full backpack would also explain why she's blowing up over small things. It would also explain why she tests you constantly. Right? It sounds like she's being provocative. She's explosive, she tests you. That is a full backpack, so she needs a chance to feel safe enough to let those feelings out.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The problem is she's already nine years old. So where a three or four or five year old might be able to more easily show you the feelings. It's a lot harder for a nine year old to do that, and they are much better at pushing your buttons. The way you opened your question, you're saying, "Regulating my emotions when she does these things, that's a struggle." So I want to say, if it's a struggle for you and you're a grownup, imagine how it is for her with a full backpack. Right?

Dr. Laura Markham: I think you're fed up. You mentioned "inauthentic." You said, "We don't want to be inauthentic to who we are as people." Well, that word inauthentic sounds to me like you're saying, "We would be authentic if we yell back at her and we're being inauthentic and letting her act this way and it's driving us crazy." Right? You sound like you're fed up, but you're still trying hard not to be, which I appreciate.

Dr. Laura Markham: So I think if you can't self-regulate, she's not going to be able to. You have to go first. Right? And the way to help her feel safe enough to work through that full backpack, is for you to recognize, from her perspective, how it feels, which is that she apparently has spent years not feeling understood. And now, even though you're being more understanding, she doesn't completely trust that. And she has a leaky cup, leaky tank, because she has all these feelings that she's carting around with her, the full backpack, that are keeping her from letting your love in. Right?

Dr. Laura Markham: So I would start talking with her about it, about how it felt to her in the past and how she felt not understood. I'd really listen, at times when she's not upset. I'd really acknowledge how it felt to her. I would affirm that you did the best you could, but that sometimes it didn't feel good to her. And I'm hoping that by doing that, she's going to start feeling close enough to you to really trust you and do some crying.

I predict that she will find some excuse to cry. Like hurting herself, that's not really a big deal, and she'll just sob about it. And that's the beginning of the backpack getting emptied. And of course, remember, the best way to open the door to empty the full backpack is laughter. It's harder to get a nine year old laughing, I know.

Dr. Laura Markham: So your nine year old is right in that age bracket. And I think there are ways to get a nine year old laughing and to help her feel connected to you. And I think the more you're able to do that and really use the peaceful parenting tools of laughter and special time and 24/7 empathy, the more you're going to find that she will trust

you. She may get angry, but she'll finally let you in, start crying and start talking to you about what's really upsetting to her. And at that point you'll find that she's not provocative in the way you're describing and that you won't be so angry.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But I would just finish by saying there's nothing inauthentic about not blowing up at your kid. Your daughter was born without this chip on her shoulder. Somehow in her nine years of life, she's developed it. She's developed this distrust that anybody will really care about how she feels. And that's certainly based on who she is. Maybe she was highly sensitive and therefore it was hard to extend enough understanding to her. But it was also based on the parenting that she received. And that doesn't mean that you weren't trying your best. It means you didn't fully understand what she needed.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The good news is now you do. Now you know that to heal, she needs you to sort of go overboard with your empathy. And if you can do that, if you can see it from her point of view, I think you'll be building up enough trust to get through this defensive wall that she's putting up. And you'll see her stop being explosive and you won't have to walk on eggshells. Good luck.

### Question 37:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:00:00

Our next question is from a parent who says, "We're having a hard time dealing with our oldest child's emotional reactions when he accidentally does something, or does something he knows he's not allowed to. In both cases, he has the same shamed and embarrassed reactions, immediately withdraws and becomes despondent. Or becomes incoherently angry when we try to engage him. How do we help him to talk about how he's feeling and how do we help him cope with shame and realize he's not bad when things go wrong? He's seven and a half.

Dr. Laura Markham: So this poor guy. I think, you know, it probably is based on having been correcting him in the past in ways that helped him to internalize shame. And I think that as you change your reaction, he will gradually change his reaction. And so, I don't think talking is the answer. You say, "How do we talk with him about this?" I don't think you talk with him when he's angry. I think for now when he gets upset, your job is to let him off the hook. That this was a learning experience, not a tragedy, and to empathize with him.

Dr. Laura Markham: So for instance, he messes up and he's really upset about it. He's angry and you say, "Oh Sweetie, I know you didn't mean to do that. You didn't realize what would happen when you did that. Right? And then it spilled all over the floor. Right? Oh my goodness. It's not a tragedy, sweetie. It's okay. Next time you'll remember to tighten the lid before you pick the thing up." Whatever. So your attitude is what's going to help him to settle down.

Dr. Laura Markham: Basically you're restoring safety so he doesn't feel like it's an emergency. And then later, like at the end of the day when you're putting him to bed. You might lie in his bed and you might say, "How was your day? What were the good parts? What were the hard parts?"

And if he doesn't bring it up, you could bring it up and say, "I noticed one thing that was hard was when that canister of rice fell all over the floor, right? You were trying to pick it up and then you didn't realize the lid wasn't on it. Right?" And if he starts to get upset about it, like withdraw, you can just say, "You know what? Everybody messes up. Nobody bats a thousand."

Dr. Laura Markham: And then one more thing that might really help him. When **you** mess up, get him laughing about it so that he laughs at you. You can pretend to mess up, even when you don't, and make a big deal of it when you do mess up, even in a little way, and get him laughing at you. It will really help him to be expressing that anxiety about all the ways that he's a failure and bad. Right? And as he laughs about it, he's reducing that load of fear that he carries, that load of anxiety that he's carrying about whether he's good enough. So I think also just using the peaceful parenting

tools, as I've been saying, will really help him to work through this stuff over time, along with these specific suggestions.

### Question 38:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:03:18

Our next question is from a parent who asks about his seven year old son, who wakes up in a bad mood about once a week. He rarely cries. He denies that he has feelings, even though they've always told him it's okay to cry. They try to create a safe environment, but he can't relax and let his feelings out. They say they've tried special time and playfulness, tickling games, and still his bad mood returns.

So I want to say first, what a lucky boy you have, that you're trying to help him feel safe enough to work through that recurring bad mood. And I want to be sure that there's no current stressor.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So is there anything that could be igniting that unhappiness once a week? You know, it could be anything from being embarrassed in gym class to being bullied at school. Kids often don't tell us about these kinds of things because they're embarrassed to. But if you're using the preventive maintenance tools to create connection, and if you're having regular conversations about all kinds of things, I'm hoping that your son will begin to share with you if anything is actually bothering him.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Second, since you say that he almost never cries. I do agree that he's holding on tightly, emotionally, and that's a response to a full backpack, as you're presuming. So don't expect him to begin with crying. Most kids don't. They actually often get stuck in anger. In your son's case it's a bad mood, where he's stuck, but that doesn't mean that they can just let the feelings out. Usually laughing and connecting is what happens first, and then the unhappy feelings come up to be healed. Just an aside, I actually don't recommend tickling. Just look it up on the Aha! Parenting website and you'll see why.

[https://www.ahaparenting.com/blog/Preventive Maintenance to Keep Your Child Out of the Breakdown Lane](https://www.ahaparenting.com/blog/Preventive_Maintenance_to_Keep_Your_Child_Out_of_the_Breakdown_Lane)

Dr. Laura Markham:

So if he's in a bad mood, what I'm going to suggest is that it will escalate into anger most likely. And if you can stay calm and kind when that happens and if you've been doing enough laughing and enough connecting at other times, he might break through to those feelings beneath it. You know, he's seven, so he's probably not going to start sobbing, but I think you'll see his anguish. He might tear up, there might be, you'll hear in his voice sort of a plaintive whining feeling. And that means he's in touch with the feelings. You don't have to cry to let them out physically. If you're just in touch with them, that's enough.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And you'll also know that you made that difference, if afterwards he's in a better mood, if he's grateful, if he's affectionate. One final point I want to make. Most children don't know how to talk about emotions and he doesn't necessarily need to do that to heal those emotions. He just has to feel them. So he might not even know what he's upset about. What matters is that he gets a chance to feel any emotions so he can then move past them. Because once he feels them, they will begin to evaporate.

### Question 39:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:06:11

Our next question is from a parent says, "My daughter, age eight has always been my squeaky wheel child. I've been using connection based parenting for over four years and we've made lots of progress. One remaining difficult behavior though, is she sets up situations in which she is the victim. For example, she'll pick and poke at her brothers until they finally poke back. She sees that as an unprovoked attack and cries that everyone is mean to her. I thought this was limited to her seven year old twin brothers. But we recently had friends over and the play date ended up being a disaster as she found a way to make herself the victim yet again. How can I help her with this?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I hear this is distressing to watch. It sounds like she was a baby when her twin brothers were born and she had to share you -- with twins yet -- and fight to get her needs met. She felt like she lost, and didn't get what she needed. So she does see herself as a victim.

These conclusions that we draw from our experience so early in life, it shapes our worldview of ourselves and of other people and the way the world treats us. And then we spend our whole lives finding evidence to support that worldview and we perpetuate it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And unfortunately we can always create that evidence by how we show up in the world. So you're seeing your daughter do that where she's creating situations where she's the victim, even though she really is in charge of setting that situation up. It's so funny how all of us do this in some way or another. She's just doing it in a very overt way.

Luckily, she's still very young. So we can shift this by giving her different experiences. So if we want to give your eight year old experiences of not being a victim, that will be part of the battle to dismantle that belief system.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But the way to dismantle a belief system is that you have to activate it, so you're feeling it, at the same time that you supply the contradictory experience. So simply providing a contradictory experience, where for instance, she's not a victim, without first activating the belief system, is not sufficient to rewire it, scientists now believe. Because two contradictory beliefs **can** coexist if they're not neurally connected.

So you've probably heard of cognitive dissonance, when we have two contradictory things going on, we change our behavior or our belief so that they're more aligned. We also are perfectly capable of being one way in one situation and totally another way in another situation. So we can feel secure in our academic pursuits but not secure romantically, as a for instance. So the fact that she could feel not a victim in some ways, is not going to dismantle the belief. That when it comes to affairs of the heart,

which is what it was when she was a baby and had to share mom and dad with her seven year old twin brothers -- Those affairs of the heart is where she feels like she's a victim.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So we need to find a way when that belief system is activated, to then give her the contradictory experience. So the next time she cries that everyone is mean to her, instead of getting annoyed at her or frightened, "Oh my goodness, she's going to be this way for life." Stop, drop, breathe, and shift into gratitude. This is your chance, your opportunity to start the process of helping your daughter heal.

So first, empathize with her feeling that she's not getting what she needs, that she's being unfairly treated. I know you see that she set the situation up, so she isn't actually a victim. But go ahead and empathize with the feeling, so that it becomes fully present and live for her and it sort of makes her more aware of it. You can just say things like, "Wow, it doesn't seem fair, does it? And you just wanted what you needed and then you didn't get it." You know, obviously speaking specifically to the situation. "You try so hard and you still don't get what you need and it feels like everybody's mean to you." So be fully present with her holding her, empathizing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Your loving presence is actually the contradictory experience. It's the antidote she needs. Because at this moment, in fact, she **is** getting her needs met. And you can even point this out to her in a loving way, to help her become more aware of it. "You know, even though it seems like everyone is mean to you and you don't get what you need, you always get me. I am right here to love you no matter what. I am always here for you."

But of course you can't rush that. You can't give her that antidote until she's fully feeling how she got victimized by life and didn't get what she needed as a baby, which is what's getting triggered here, those old feelings.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then after you empathize, after you point out the antidote -- which is that you're there for her -- finally, you want to

empower her to turn the situation around to get what she needs. Not by bullying her brothers, but by using her empathy and her other people skills. "It seems like you really wanted a turn with the whatever it is. Your brothers are using it and they wouldn't give you a turn huh? That seemed really unfair to you, but I know you can figure out a solution that will work for you and for your brothers. Let's brainstorm what you might be able to do."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now, the first time you try this, it will not work. She'll reject it. But over time, as you keep repeating this process of these three steps, your daughter will begin to heal the sense of powerlessness and she'll begin to see herself as able to get her needs met in the world. She'll begin to see herself as more capable of standing up for what she needs in a positive way. Instead of setting herself up for disappointment.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Of course, she couldn't really do that as a baby, but she can do it now that she's older. And you can say that to her. I would talk about her original experience, but that now things are different. And you'll notice that the more you work with her in these three ways, she'll begin taking action to repair things with her brothers and to work things out more positively so that she isn't a victim.

#### Question 40:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:12:25

A parent asks, "I feel bombarded by people, including family members, constantly telling me the teen years are so much harder and are going to be terrible. I feel I'm spending my time now worrying about what will happen in the future, with my kids being exposed to social media and peer influence. How can I manage this and feel more positive about what the future will bring? My children are five and nine."

Dr. Laura Markham:

So first of all, I would say how your kids act in the teen years depends completely on how you parent them now. I was actually a little worried about what the teen years would be like when my daughter was five. Because she was very strong willed and still volatile. And it ended up in

the teen years, she was one of the most mature teens I'd ever seen. And now at 23, she is frequently mistaken for being an older person than she is. People are always very surprised to hear she's only 23 because of her level of maturity. And that's because of the way she was parented.

Dr. Laura Markham:

She was a very volatile, challenging, strong-willed, difficult preschooler. And being parented this way allowed her to develop a much better brain. So she's more emotionally regulated and more responsible and more considerate than many kids her age. So I would just say when your family members or other people are telling you the teen years are terrible, that's not true. The teen years will be an extension of what's happening now. If you have a great relationship with your five year old and your nine year old, then you're going to have a great relationship with them when they're 15, when they're 19, when they're 13.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Connection is your superpower. So those conversations people are having with you, just find a phrase that you can use to shut them down. Say something like, "Well, the proof will be in the pudding, won't it? I think my kids are great right now and I think they're going to be great as teenagers."

And then be sure that you're doing preventive maintenance with them to stay connected.

I would finally suggest some mindfulness practice for you. That's because when people say these things and it makes you worried, it's because it is touching on some deeper worry in you or you're vulnerable to anxiety and worry. Either way, preventive maintenance for you in the form of a mindfulness practice would really help with that anxiety.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The human mind, well, it's wonderful, it's given us tremendous gifts. But it loves to live in the future and project the future, to try to have control of the future. So that it doesn't have to worry! But it does that, it solves that problem it faces, by worrying. It worries about the future, thinking that if it controls the future, then it won't have to worry. It sets up this cycle of worry. So what I would suggest to you is that you make it your top priority,

after connecting with your kids and keeping them fed and all of that stuff. Make it your top personal priority to have a mindfulness practice.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I suggest many short practices in my *Peaceful Parent Happy Kids Workbook*, little three minute practices that are really useful. But I would actually suggest for you, that you use the resources suggested in the course, in week one of the course. To begin meditating by listening to guided meditations. You could use Tara Brock. There's some other good suggestions that are on that page, the week one page. Start yourself a practice. Just start with 20 minutes a day. And since meditation is hard, it's best to listen to a guided meditation in the beginning as you're getting a practice going.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Research shows that even a month of meditation will change your brain and stop you from being as anxious. Two months of meditation, even better. 20 minutes is enough to see a difference, half an hour even better. This may be a blessing in disguise, this problem you're having where people are suggesting that the teen years will be bad. It's like anything else that the mind seizes on to worry and gnaw at, it's a signal to us that actually we can rise above that. We can extend our trust in ourselves and in life. We can extend our trust and we can work hard to create a different reality for ourselves. But the first step really is learning to manage the mind, and meditation is the best way to do that.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And that's all our questions for today. Thank you for listening and I hope this was helpful. If you still have a burning question that wasn't answered on this audio, please submit it for possible inclusion on my podcast. Just go to [ahaparenting.com/podcast](http://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.