

Siblings 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 siblings and how to help brothers and sisters get along. 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.

The Self-Hug Game to teach children who are hitting

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:00:41 In a few of the answers on this audio, I refer to something called the "Self-Hug Game" so I wanted to give you a brief description of it.

This is a great game when kids are struggling to control hitting. When young children get angry, they lash out. In fact, that impulse to lash out is felt by all humans when they get angry. But over time, we learn to control that, and not lash out physically. And eventually, hopefully, we learn to not lash out verbally either.

When a young child is angry, and has the impulse to hit, it's pretty hard to stop that impulse. But what we as adults can do is help the child redirect the impulse, divert the impulse. But that takes heightened support on the parent's part. And always with kids, if you're trying to enroll them to develop a new habit, the best way is to make it into a game. And that's where the "Self-Hug" Game comes in.

So right now, as you're listening to this, clap your arms around your body. Your left hand will end up on your right

shoulder, or maybe your right rib cage. Your right hand on your left shoulder or rib cage. Hold yourself securely. Now, notice what happens.

First, you can no longer use your hands to hit. Second, you feel held and secure. If your child has sensory issues, this will be especially important, this feeling of being held and contained. But feeling held, even by ourselves, makes all of us feel more secure. And when we feel more secure, we're less likely to lash out.

Finally, this becomes a trained response. So when the child feels the impulse to hit, and they know they're not supposed to, but they're swamped with those big feelings, they clap their arms around their body, and they yell for support from their special grown-up. And then they don't hit.

So you can teach your child to do this. You make it a game and get them laughing about it. Maybe you have a game where you both do this together. You can call it the "Hug Yourself" game. And then, you practice it.

So you might say to your child "Let's play the Self-Hug Game! Pretend you're doing something that makes me angry. Just pretend." Of course, kids can't resist an invitation to pretend they're misbehaving. So then you say "I'm mad! I'm really, really mad!" And obviously, you're playing. "My hands feel like hitting! I know! I'm going to do the "Hug Myself" game!" and you clap your arms around yourself and you shout, "No!" Or you call for help. It's great to teach kids to call for you when you play this game, because then it becomes automatic, and also it makes them feel like they have backup. Which, again, makes them feel more secure, so they're less likely to lash out.

So you want your child to clap their arms around themselves and yell "Mom!...Dad!" And you could do that too. You could call your child's name when you practice. This empowers your child to feel like someone more

mature who solves problems and comes to the rescue, rather than always feeling like someone who messes up and does things that get them reprimanded.

So of course, when your child does this, you come running, and scoop them up and spin them around, and say "I'm here to help you! I'm here, what do you need? It's okay, we can solve this!" And you get them laughing. You want this to feel like a game, so they have a positive association with it.

That way, next time their sibling comes after the project they're working on, instead of lashing out physically, they clap their arms around their body and yell for backup. And you come running.

I realize that this puts a lot of responsibility on you. But it's a lot better than leaving your child to solve the problem for themselves, which will often involve violence.

You can even have another part, after the laughter, where you practice Stop Drop and Breathe with them. But don't push it. What you're really doing is diverting the angry impulse. And then you have to stop the problem they're having.

So this is a great habit for your child to get into, because it develops the skill of stopping themselves from lashing out. I've heard from parents over and over that it works. It takes about a month to get the child to actually remember to use this, in the moment. But kids do start using it. And that happens faster if you make it fun, while you're teaching it. So it's a bonding thing. So you can just play with this, with your child throughout the day. And every time, get your child laughing as you respond to their call for help, by running in, hugging them, throwing them around, and getting them laughing.

And that's the "Self-Hug Game."

Question 1:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:05:49

This question is from a parent who says, "Thanks for the brilliant course so far. My five-year-old really resents the three-year-old and shows this through minimal communication and worse, lots of hitting. What are your top tips for sibling harmony?"

Great question. Self-regulation is my first tip. Kids model after us. Second tip, Connection. Research shows that your relationship with each child is the most important thing in how they relate to each other. "I could never love anyone more than I love you. No matter how much your sibling gets, there is always more than enough for you." You have to say that. You also have to demonstrate it, so they believe that it's true, that there's always more than enough for them. That's a hard one because we have limited time.

The third thing is Coaching. You will need to teach them these skills over and over again. You can't expect them to know how to navigate conflict. Most adults don't know how. Of course, if you punish, they will punish each other. You're teaching them that it's a normal way to get what you want. Coaching becomes really important, teaching them to navigate conflict with each other, or when there's an entrenched pattern of the oldest resenting the youngest like you're describing, (where) the older child believes they are the victim. They believe that the younger child stole something from them, something of great value that was essential to their survival. In a way, they did. Not that the youngest asked to be born, but it's not an incorrect perception on the part of the older child. It's one that most of the time has never been validated for them.

You have to allow them to express that, and you have to validate how they feel. In fact, that is part of what happened. Since then, they have probably been

tormenting the younger child, but their anguish was never recognized. If you don't acknowledge their feelings, they'll hang on to them and it will be hard for love to grow. I think fourth, going back and cleaning that relationship out is really critical if you want your kids to have a good relationship with each other.

Number five, set expectations for civility. All feelings are legitimate. You always want to hear about them and, yes, they feel victimized and you understand that. They may not use those words exactly, but actions need to be civil, no hurting, no hurting physically, no hurting emotionally. If there is hurting, there must be repair. That's the family rule. Just part of "We always clean up our own messes".

For the parent, no favoring one child over the other. That means that when you intervene, you never take sides even if you're pretty sure one child is "wrong." You don't take sides. You can read my sibling book to find out why and what to do instead, but basically when you take sides, the other child whose side you're not taking feels like they lost and it's clear you love the other child more. At that point, why should they ever work things out with the other child? It just builds resentment.

Finally, be the bridge between your children. Interpret each person's side in a nonjudgmental way so they can begin to understand each other. Those are my top seven tips, but of course there's lots more in my sibling book.

Question 2:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:09:25

Our next question is from a parent who says, "I realize I've been inadvertently taking my three-year-old's side over his six-year-old sister's many times since he's been born. I want to be more conscious of how I respond to their fights so that I don't create a victim mentality in my son and a bad kid mentality in my daughter. Can you address how to

best support my kids when my sensitive six-year-old hits or pinches or scratches her three-year-old brother when she perceives a wrong from him?"

Well, first, I would always tend to the one who's hurt physically, which would be, in this case, the three-year-old. When a child is hurt, we always spend whatever time is necessary for them to feel better. Lots of love and empathy. You might ask him if there was anything he could have done differently, and it's certainly true that at times he brought it on himself, but regardless, she shouldn't have hit him. Regardless, he deserves your love and your empathy. It doesn't hurt to support him to think about what happened in the interaction and what he might have been able to do differently to avoid the outcome.

At first, of course, you're not going to say a word to your six-year-old. You're going to just attend to the three-year-old because you're probably too mad at the six-year-old. But later, you go talk to her. You don't lecture. You don't admonish. To begin with, you acknowledge that she perceived a wrong. "Wow. You were so mad at your brother. I know you wouldn't hurt him unless you were really upset. Tell me about it." She'll tell you all about the wrong that he did to her and you'll empathize. "Wow, so your brother did this, and then he did that, and then he also did this, and all your art supplies were all messed up. No wonder you were so upset."

Once she gets that all off her chest, you look at her and you say, "Sweetie, I totally understand why you were so upset. That was a big problem. Was scratching your brother the way to solve that problem?" When she agrees that it wasn't -- because she will by now because she (a) Knows better and (b) Feels a little bad that she did it. Although she still thinks he did something wrong, but now that she's gotten it off her chest, she feels a little better about it. She agrees that it wasn't the way to handle it, and then you talk with her about ways to solve the problem

next time, and you make a deal that she's going to solve it differently next time.

You ask if some part of her knew it wasn't the best approach. You ask what kept her from listening to that part of her. You ask what will help her listen to that voice next time, and you give her a big hug. That helps her. That supports her to handle things differently, and it supports her to know that you haven't written her off as a bad kid. It supports him, what you've done already because he was hurt, obviously and also to think about what he might do differently. For instance, if he really did get into her art supplies, then maybe he won't do that next time. It never justifies the hitting or the scratching, but of course he still shouldn't have done it.

There's one more thing to do. When both kids are calm, you get them together. "I think each of you has something to say to the other." They're going to look at you blankly, and you say, "You were both so upset. You were crying, right, Honey, because you were scratched, and you were so upset because your art supplies were messed up. Both of you were so unhappy with what the other one did."

"I think your sister needs to know how you felt about being hurt, about your body being hurt. I think your brother needs to know how you felt about the art supplies." You're coaching them, helping them to say something along the lines of, "I need you to leave my art supplies alone, and I don't like it when you scratch me. Tell me in words."

After that, maybe something like, "I'm sorry I used your art supplies and messed them up," and "I'm sorry I scratched you and hurt you." And then a plan to make things better with each other that they come up with. Maybe she'll give him some of her art supplies that she's done with. Maybe he needs some of his own and he needs to ask for them for his birthday. But they do need a plan to solve the

problem they had, and they need a plan to make things better with each other.

Notice that in this interaction, neither child was blamed for being a perpetrator and neither child was treated as a victim. Each child learned to raise their own voice and expressed what they needed, without attacking the other child, and each child got help from you to solve their problem, the problem that had led to the violence -- so that it won't happen again next time.

Question 3:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:14:16

Here's a question about 11 and seven-year-olds fighting and how to handle that and what to do, because you can't just walk away to calm down. You know, I love this question. You say you're validating their feelings, you're listening, you're showing empathy, but it's like a vicious cycle or a broken record.

The reason it's not getting better is somehow that the 11 and seven-year-old need more preventive maintenance before they get into this situation. You're already in the breakdown lane if it's not working to do this, so what you need to do is to do alone time with each of your children and laughter with each of your children and see if there's a way you can help them so that they're not in this angry place every time they have an interaction. So then it's easier for you to stay calm because they are calmer, right?

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would not suggest walking away if you don't have to, but I do recommend that if you've been trying and you can't make it work, you all sit down. Just sink down on the floor, put an arm around each child, take a deep breath, let out a yawn, and you can say, "Let's all take a minute. We're just going to be quiet for a minute. We're just going to breathe. I hear how angry you are and you want to yell at your brother. I hear how angry you are and it really hurt

your feelings. We're going to talk some more in a minute. We're just going to be quiet for a minute. Both of you close your eyes and we're going to take 10 deep breaths together."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now, if you've actually done what you said — validated the feelings, listened, showed them empathy — this might work. They might actually be quiet and breathe. If not, if one of your kids interrupts and says, "No! I'm not going to breathe! You breathe! I'm too mad at him." You can say, "Okay, I hear you how mad you are. Then in that case, you can go hang out in your room and calm down. Your brother and I are going to breathe a little bit and then we'll come find you." You just do it that way. If he says, "No, I'm not going to go calm down. I'm too mad, I'm going to tell him how mad I am," then you're going to have to rise to the occasion and say, "Okay, sit back down here. I'm going to put my arm around you. You can tell him how mad you are. But first, you must take three deep breaths. Then I expect you to tell your brother what you're mad about without attacking him."

So this is, again, it's the breakdown lane, so this is really the best you can do at this moment. If he keeps attacking his brother, you might have to say to the brother, "Sweetie, I'm going to talk to your brother privately. I'll come back and take care of you in a minute. What are you going to do for a minute while I go talk with your brother?" Then you take away the child who's exploding and you take him into the other room and you talk with him alone and let him blow off steam with you. Maybe he'll get to a point where he cries if you've built enough safety.

Question 4:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:17:06

A parent is asking if there are other books besides my own book on siblings that I recommend for siblings. Yes, there's a wonderful book about siblings. Since you have kids who

are nine and seven and five, this is a good book for you. It's the book by Faber and Mazlish, Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, called *Siblings Without Rivalry*. Anybody who has children over the age of six and more than one child I think should read this book. It's a great book and I think it's a great supplement to my book. My book has, you know, it doesn't duplicate it at all. It's got complementary information including more recent science in it, but it's a wonderful book which will give you a great perspective. It's sort of an old fashioned book, it was written many years ago, but I think it's a great book and it's geared toward parents of kids who are a little older, like nine and seven. I highly recommend it if you have older kids. If you have younger kids, it won't be as useful to you, but there's nothing wrong with reading it. It won't be as useful to you as my book, which is really geared for younger kids.

Question 5:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:18:10

Somebody is asking, "I know my child is not the problem here, but I give more love to one of my children than the other. It's just easier for me to do and the other child is hard on me."

I want to just tell you that that's in the book. (**Peaceful Parent, Happy Siblings**). When you feel like you love one child more than another, please go read it. Please take it really seriously. Please do what it says and work on it and really work on the connection with the child you're having a hard time with. It's not fair to that child. It will ruin the relationship between your children and it will set your child up for a life of grief and you for a life of grief and it's not necessary.

Dr. Laura Markham:

It's not unusual, I'm not blaming you for this at all. Sometimes we get an easy kid and a hard kid and the hard

kid is harder to love. But I'm saying how great that you noticed it, how great you're taking responsibility, and now it's time to do something about it.

Question 6:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:18:57

Here's another question of two boys who are very close, luckily, and have similar interests luckily, but it can be very intense and one of the kids can get aggressive toward his brother. Then reading my sibling book was helpful and reduced the aggression significantly but it can still be problematic and it's so difficult to fill his cup. I've always sensed he needs so much more.

You know what? I hear you. It is so hard when you have a kid who needs a lot. What I would say is the power games from playful parenting that you did and that he really liked, maybe you need more games. That would be something that he can do now that he's six. It sounds like he might need more time with other kids, and not just with his four-year-old brother and that way you can give his four-year-old a little bit more positive experience just with you. Maybe it'll even work for the four-year-old to get some playdates with other people now so that the six-year-old gets time just with you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

It sounds to me like he might need some time just with you to fill his cup. But the other thing about a leaky cup, often what causes the leaky cup is an ongoing stressor of some sort. Like he's highly sensitive or he has sensory issues, and it does sound like your kid has some sensory issues from what you described to me. So I wonder if you can focus more on them with an OT and setting up some sensory stuff at your house so that you can make sure that your child actually gets any ongoing irritation taken care of that might be causing the leaky cup problem.

Question 7:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:20:42

A parent is saying her seven-year-old younger boy hits his older brother, 10-year-old, when the older brother teases him. When she tries to talk to him, he doesn't want to listen to her and he's busy looking at his older brother who's teasing him. "What can I do to get his attention? I

So you know, he's engaged in an angry interaction with his brother, his brother's teasing him. The intervention is to go stand in between them, just the way you would if they were toddlers hurting each other. We do want to coach the seven-year-old to stand up for himself, but in this case, you can't even get the seven-year-old's attention. So you might start with the 10-year-old and say, "It sounds like you're trying to hurt your brother's feelings. The rule in this house is no teasing." Then you turn to the seven-year-old and you say, "You can tell your brother, 'Don't tease me. I don't like it when you say that. Don't try to hurt my feelings.'" So you know, it's the teasing that's causing the seven-year-old to hit. This is not a problem of aggression. This is a problem of teasing, and it's our job to uphold the standards in our house (of no teasing).

Question 8:

Parent: 00:21:42

I have a 10-year-old boy and an eight-year-old boy. The eight-year-old, I would describe as spirited and strong-willed and sensitive. He's extroverted and our 10-year-old is introverted. So we have night and day in children. Their relationship with each other is complicated. I think one of my biggest challenges is setting limits with the younger one related to the older one. So he loves to needle and push the buttons of his big brother and get attention and he just doesn't stop when someone tells him to stop. So I struggle with at what point do I need to intervene with them.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would intervene right away. Be really clear. First of all, I would have a family meeting and talk about how the people in the family feel when someone is needling them. You don't have to use that word, but you know how it feels, like when somebody is trying to get on their nerves and is being provocative. Talk about how it feels and talk about what rule you'd like to have about it and your rule needs to be, be kind. That's the number one rule that every house needs: be kind. Be kind and respectful might be the way you would say it. And I would have that conversation as a family and I would work together to make a nice sign for your house. "Our rule is be kind," or something.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then I would, the first time you hear one of your boys being disrespectful or unkind to the other one, whichever one it is, I would step in and say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. I hear some words that could really hurt. Are you guys both having fun with this? Are you enjoying these words with each other?" Because maybe they're having a good time. If your 10-year-old says "No, I told him to leave me alone, and he keeps needling me," or whatever, you say, "Honey, you can tell him. 'Our rule is be kind. Please don't speak to me that way.' You can tell your brother that." So you're coaching the 10-year-old to stand up for himself and to set the limit with the eight-year-old.

Then you're the backup. If he does that and the eight-year-old, or vice versa, doesn't listen and doesn't back off, I would move right in and say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Sweetie, those words could really hurt somebody's feelings. I heard your brother say he doesn't want you to speak to him that way. Are you mad at your brother about something? You can tell him without attacking him." That's the basic message we're always trying to get across to kids. "You can tell your brother what you need without attacking him." If he says, "I'm not attacking him, I'm not doing anything wrong." You can say, "I think those words were hurting his feelings," or "That tone was hurting his feelings and he told you that. So time to leave your

brother alone then." You know, and just move him out of the situation. This all sound doable?

Parent:

I think that the last part is what I struggle with. It's that it's often not motivated by anger. It's motivated by boredom and wanting someone to fight with. But then you know, the big brother says stop and the little brother doesn't. I try to intervene. For someone who resists boundaries with all of their might, how do you draw a boundary with that person?

Dr. Laura Markham:

First of all, I would say when kids resist boundaries, you need to be using all the peaceful parenting tools, which means you have to really connect with them with empathy, because this is a strong-willed person who will not be intimidated. You can't increase the force of your boundary enough to get him to observe the boundary because he's a strong-willed person who will not let you intimidate him. So you have to do it through the strength of relationship. That means you have to empathize and you have to roughhouse with him and you have to have special time with him. All of those things are going to strengthen the relationship. Then you do need to enforce the limits. So when he's just giving his brother a hard time, I would move in first. By the way, have you read my sibling book?

Parent:

Yes.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You have, okay. Look at the cartoons in the book. There are a couple of cartoons of when a kid is testing another kid or taking their doll and holding it high away from them or you know, just giving them a hard time, and how the parent can move in. One way to move in, to begin, is actually to do what I just described a few minutes ago where you set the limit, but you also can say, "Wait a minute, are you giving your brother a hard time because you're bored? Is that what's going on?" Now he's eight, so you may not be able to pick him up and throw him around, but you certainly could begin a roughhousing session with

him where you say, "We'll see about that, because I'm a big scary monster, I'm going to get you!" and run at him and be silly and crazy and he'll start to laugh and run away from you. Before you know it you'll be, the two of you, on the rug rolling around and you're like, "I'm going to get you!" And you know, he'll be laughing, and at that point, he's over being bored and he's letting out all of whatever that was that he was taking out on his brother. So often, that will work.

Dr. Laura Markham:

There's also something in the *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids* book. It's also on the Aha! parenting website. When a child is stuck in anger and doesn't want to cry:

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/positive-discipline/child-can't-cry>

But when kids are stuck in anger -- which I don't think this sounds angry, it just sounds like he gets stuck in something, annoyance or boredom or whatever. But when they keep coming back to misbehave, like to tease their brother or to torment the dog or whatever, you can start to do this roughhousing and then at some point, often they'll actually begin to cry when you've been roughhousing with them. And at that point, bingo, because that's what they actually needed to do was to let those feelings out.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think the fact is that your son, when you say he resists boundaries and the problem is knowing how to set limits with him, it sounds to me like this is actually the bigger issue and the sibling thing is just part of it. So all of the things I'm suggesting are going to help him to be able to basically cooperate with you more and accept your limits in general more, not just the ones with his brother.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Hopefully that gives you some stuff to work with using the Peaceful Parenting tools. Have you made it all the way through the course yet?

Parent: Not all the way through. I think I'm on Week 9. I'm still working through it.

Dr. Laura Markham: Okay, so you're doing a lot of them. So keep practicing the Peaceful Parenting tools. I would say also, read the article that I suggested. I know you're saying he's not stuck in anger, but I think that will help you actually see how to apply roughhousing and then get him to tears in those situations because even an eight-year-old, that would work for, if you do what's described in that particular article that's on the website.

Question 9:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:29:18 This is a question from a parent who says, "My eight-year-old was highly sensitive as a baby." I know that because you say he was fearful and clingy. "When his sister was born when he was three, it was a really hard thing. When he's enraged, he still freaks out, screaming and kicking, panicking and at bedtime he whines: 'I'm kind to people, but I don't feel kind. I want to be a baby. I'm sad. I hate my sister.'"

Dr. Laura Markham: When he says he hates his sister, first of all, hate is a position we take. It's not a feeling. It's not the same as anger. Anger is a feeling. Hate is a position we take. It says, "I'm so mad at you, I'll never work things out with you." So what you say when he says he hates his sister is, "Right now you feel like you're so angry. You're saying you hate your sister. You feel so angry at her that you never want to be close to her and love her. Is that what you're saying right now? You feel that way? I know, Sweetie. I understand. And you know what? You wish you were a baby yourself and sometimes it seems like she gets things that you wish you had, and you just want to be a baby and be cuddled. You are always my baby." You need to just do

a lot of acknowledging. These are his needs, it's totally reasonable.

Dr. Laura Markham:

He was not ready when she came along and so you just hold him and let him be your baby and snuggle him. By the way, I would initiate the baby game whether he initiates it or not. As often as you can, grab him and let him be your baby. Right? And you know, fill his cup, and over time, he won't need this any longer.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You also mentioned, by the way, he's been in four different schools in four different countries? That's trauma. So of course there's hope for him, but you know, he needs a lot of understanding from you. I'm hearing that you were raised in an authoritarian environment and that you have a hard time being understanding, so I really encourage you to do work on your own feelings so that you can give him what he needs. He'll be fine if you can just give him the understanding that he needs. He really needs to cry and he's only going to do that if he feels safe enough.

Question 10:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:31:33

A parent asks about the older kids who are six-and-a-half and four-and-a-half who are only 20 months apart and they're getting more competitive with each other and they're fighting about who gets to get in the car first and stuff. Okay, this is where you need games about this stuff, about the competition. There's a whole section on competition in *Peaceful Parent, Happy Siblings*; if you haven't read that, please do.

If that's not enough to solve it, I'd say get your hands on Larry Cohen's book, which has a whole lot in it about whether people get to be first and competition and all that. And basically you're playing with it, about who gets to be first and you're always lamenting that you never get

to be first and you're always diffusing the competition between them. There's so many tricks to diffuse competition, but I really can't go into them all here. So I'm going to suggest get your hands on *Peaceful Parent, Happy Siblings*.

Question 11:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:32:31

A parent asks, "How can you stop comparing twins?" I would just say twins are always going to be compared. They're going to spend their whole life with people comparing them. And so I would respond to yourself when you notice yourself comparing them by saying, "Of course they're different, they're different people, they're just siblings who are the same age."

Why would siblings not be different? Right? And if you compare your two children who are siblings of different ages, why would they not be different? They're different people. It's like, "I'm different than my cousin, you know? Why would they not be different than their siblings?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

So even if they're twins, they're just siblings who are the same age. And really embrace that difference, especially with twins. They should be thought of as completely individual people. So use the difference as a signal to yourself. Use when you notice the difference and you're comparing, use that as an opportunity for you to stop seeing them as twins, but to start seeing them as separate people.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Here's the thing about all of these challenges that get in our way. We can use the challenge to grow. So if you're comparing your children to other people's children and you use it to accept, reframe and practice gratitude, that will help you grow the acceptance and gratitude, or paths to wholeness, to health, to happiness, to enlightenment.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And if you have twins and you find yourself comparing, notice that and use it as a red flag to reframe it, that they're separate individual people. Again, it will be a gift to your children for the rest of their lives. Everything that goes on with our children that we know we have a pattern of having a hard time with. Everything can be an opportunity to grow -- and not just to heal that, but to heal ourselves at a deeper level. If we use it as a signal to grow instead of to spiral down. Those are choice points. Those are the points when I say choose love, stop and say, "Okay, well what would fear do?" Fear would look at my twins and say, "Well, one is walking already and the other isn't, is that one okay?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

But love would say, "Oh, I notice I'm afraid. I'm afraid for the one that's not walking. I'm going to stop, drop and breathe. I'm going to talk myself off the cliff. I'm going to use a mantra. I'm going to reassure myself and I'm going to use this as a reminder. Of course, they're in different places developmentally, they're separate people." Isn't it great to have two kids who are separate different people? That's just an example of how you would do it, but you could do it in any problem area of your life.

Question 12:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:35:09

A parent asked, "I struggle with remaining calm when my kids are fighting. It turns into them hitting and kicking each other and it doesn't feel peaceful and I can't self-regulate and I can't remove the item they're fighting over because then they just continue the fight. But if I remove one of the children, then the other child is left with the toy they're fighting over and so they win. So what am I supposed to do?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

Hmm. Grow another hand. We really do need more hands for this work, don't we? First of all, you try to head these things off. Sometimes you can notice when one of them is

in a bad mood. But also if you notice that usually it's your three-year-old who initiates, try to monitor the mood they're in or what they're doing or how they're relating to their sibling that afternoon. But sometimes you can't. I understand you can't prevent every fight, although we can prevent a lot of them. And so at those moments when you can't prevent, really the only possible answer is, do just what you're doing. You get between them and you loudly say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, stop." Now that may not sound peaceful, but if you walk in and say, "Now, now let's all calm down," and they're already hitting each other, it's not going to work.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You do have to use a loud voice. It doesn't mean you're being mean, but you're using a loud voice. You're being very firm, "Whoa, stop, no hitting, hitting hurts." And you've grabbed the three-year-old who is under one arm and you're holding your arm out at the six-year-old and saying, "Whoa, no more hitting, stop." And you use their names. Let's say your six-year-old is Jeremy. "Jeremy, are you fighting with your brother because you want this truck?" Now Jeremy's going to stop hitting his brother and turn his attention to you at this point and say, "Yeah." And you say, "Great. Let's work this out. I'm moving the truck while we figure this out." And you're taking the truck and you're sticking it up on the counter and you're saying, "Okay, we're going to work this out. It's okay."

Now, if you have to walk to get to the counter, you can basically take the hand of whichever kid is going to be most likely to follow you, so you might already have your three-year-old under your arm or he may be squirming so much at this point and try to hit his brother that you can't really put him down. But you might even drop him onto the couch, grab the six-year-old's hand and say, "Come." And you've got the truck in the other hand and you walk to the kitchen counter and you put the truck down on the counter and you walk back toward the three-year-old with you again, the six-year-old is holding your hand the whole time.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then you can do the working out of, "You are so mad at each other. Wow. I want to hear from both of you what happened." And there's a whole scenario you go through here, which is in the sibling book, and there are scenarios on the Aha! Parenting website, about how to intervene in a fight for this kind of problem and for these age groups.

But I want to go back to the foundation here. If this is a common scenario, then this is a symptom of something bigger, not having enough preventive maintenance maybe or a lot of sibling rivalry. So if you haven't read the sibling book, please do. And it may be that you need to step up special time, which is really helpful when siblings are having a lot of rivalry. You've only been doing this kind of parenting for three months probably. So it does take a while for your kids to learn that they really will get a chance to play with this truck or whatever it is. And they really will be heard. And it takes a while to coach them to hear each other.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So it's okay that it's not working perfectly yet. Even though you've been trying hard for three months, it will come together. It does. You'll start to hear your children use the words you're using when you work these things out with them. So be patient with yourself. It's not going to be perfect yet, but it will begin to unfold more peacefully over time. And that brings us back to the original question you asked. Really sort of the underlying question. You said, "How can you stay calm in that situation?" I think it's really hard. I think when you've got two kids hitting each other, it's really hard. But I think at that moment you breathe deeply as you're moving toward them and you remind yourself that it's not actually an emergency.

It's highly unlikely that your three-year-old and six-year-old are going to send each other to the emergency room. It can happen. It has happened, but it's not likely. They're not going to kill each other. So even if one of them hurts the other, it's not the end of the world. And I would remind yourself they're trying as hard as they can to work

out a dispute using the tools they have. And if your three-year-old tends to lash out when he gets upset, naturally it makes sense that your six-year-old responds by getting upset back and yeah, she might get upset when the three-year-old attacks her. Totally understandable. So you can also work with her to give her language to use. And again, there's a section of the sibling book where you can coach older kids to handle aggression from younger kids that might be helpful for her.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And of course with your three-year-old, he's going to outgrow the aggression. Even in a year he's going to be in a lot better shape.

And you know, you mentioned that he will just hit his six-year-old sister when he walks by her. That's a backpack issue. There's no such thing as random hitting. Any kid who's hitting has fear locked up inside and he happens to be walking past her, so he sues the doctor by hitting her. More meltdowns, more crying, more laughter, so that he'll do the crying. And the meltdowns, more empathy preceding his outbursts. If necessary, holding him during those outbursts to prevent hitting you. And back to the same question, "How do you stay calm?" You practice, practice, practice. You do if you can, the daily meditations that were part of this course or a longer meditation would be even better on a regular basis. It really does rewire your brain so that you've got more self control and you talk yourself off the cliff.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Your three-year-old is not going to be like this when he's 16. He's not even going to be like this when he's six. You can stop him from hitting with more empathy upfront, more laughter and more crying. So I would work with that as much as you can and I think you'll find that the sibling stuff will also calm down because he won't be randomly attacking his big sister.

Question 13:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:41:56

“What do you do when siblings get into bugging or needling each other? My five and seven-year-old will sometimes play beautifully and then other times they seem to say or do things to deliberately upset each other, which usually ends in a downward spiral. These don't seem to be full backpack moments per se because in every other way they're each content and agreeable. The only issue is with each other.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Yes. You know, sometimes it's hard to live with other people. Maybe you have one who's loud and the other who's quiet and the loud one gets on the other one's nerves.

But often it's just they're mad at each other, right? They don't like what's going on and that's allowed and we all will have that with other people. You know, conflict is a part of every human relationship, because in every relationship there are two different people with two different sets of needs that won't always match or mesh. So I think you try to articulate what's going on. You see yourself as the interpreter building a bridge between your children, just as it's described in the sibling book. And there's a whole section on bickering in the sibling book and how you avoid it. So if you have that, you can look that up.

But let me just give you a few words to say. So you might say, "Wow, you used some words that could really hurt somebody's feelings. Are you mad at your brother? Or are you just having a hard time today?" And maybe the kid's just grumpy in general and you can say, "Oh, come on over here. Let's see what we can do about that." And then depending on their age and what they need at that moment, maybe they can talk, maybe they just snuggle. Maybe you want to toss them around a little bit, at least after they've snuggled and talked. And you've helped them with their mood in general.

Dr. Laura Markham:

From what you've said in this question, often it's that they're mad at their siblings. So when you say, "Are you mad at your sister, or are you just grumpy in general?" It might be, "I'm mad at her." And maybe the sister is being loud. "She's always singing. I'm trying to read my book." "Oh, you're mad at your sister because she's singing and it seems loud to you because you're trying to read, huh? Well you can tell her that without being unkind. Can you tell your sister?" And at this point the sibling says, "I hate it when you sing like that." And the sister says, "I have a right to sing." And then they get into an altercation and then you can coach them.

You can say, "Hmm. So Sarah wants to sing, and yes, you love to sing, I know. And I love it when you sing," give her a little hug, "and Michael is trying to read his book. So right now singing doesn't work for him. So how can we solve this problem? What could we do?" Now, with the five and seven-year-old, they can actually solve the problem.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Maybe Michael goes in his room to read. In one family I worked with, the kid could only sing on even days, not on odd days. And once she figured how to tell the difference between even and odd number days, she did it. And when she started to sing on the wrong day, her sister always held her toes to the fire, and was like, "Nope, you can't sing today. It's not your singing day." And she would say things like, "But I missed yesterday." "Sorry, your problem." You know? But it worked. It did work for them to work out this feud with each other about singing.

The kids will usually come up with a solution that works for them if you help them and coach them to do it. And often that's what they need. If this isn't a full backpack thing, if this is just one kid being mad at the other, there's a reason for the madness. They don't just get randomly mad if it's not a backpack issue. There's a reason.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And at that point they need your help to sort of coach them through it so it doesn't get to be a bigger reason.

Question 14:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:45:36

This next question is from a parent about a five-year-old who is often good with his little sister but can flip a switch and become upset very quickly if she upsets him, and will snatch things from her and her friends because he wants the item. And even recently when there was a two-year-old in a ball pit with him, started throwing balls at the two-year-old's face, because he thought it was hilarious.

So I know that's upsetting. It's partly a lack of empathy. He doesn't understand that the two-year-old is upset by this, right? And you can start working on that by talking constantly about emotions and how people are feeling. You, him, two-year-olds, everyone. And there's a lot of research on this which shows that the more we talk to kids about emotions and how other people are feeling, never in a shaming way -- In fact, almost in an impersonal way like "Huh, see that baby crying in the stroller. I wonder what he's crying about? -- And let your kid tell you why they think they're crying. And say, "Yeah, maybe. Yeah, I wonder what he needs. I wonder what we could do to help him feel better, or maybe we can't really help, but I wonder what his mom could do to make him feel better," or whatever.

So that kind of discussion has been shown to help kids develop empathy because it develops perspective taking, that they can look at somebody else and see how somebody else might feel. And that would help him to know how the two-year-old is feeling, right? It sort of trains kids to look at other people's faces and conjecture how they feel and what they need.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So that will be helpful. And you know, some people just are born more able to read other people than other people are, right? So your five-year-old may not naturally be able to read people's faces or understand how this other kid in the ball pit felt. Or maybe he was so excited that it just overrode his natural empathy. We don't know.

But that will help, the kinds of discussion I'm talking about. And then the snatching thing and him getting upset at his sister, really it's just that he wants it at that moment, that thing. And at that moment the other kid seems like a threat to him and he goes into fight mode and they look like the enemy. And for that you have to just have constant training, and it does help. Kids learn they can't snatch things. He always has to offer trades with them. It's still the other kid's turn. This is all covered in my sibling book about how you handle trades and turns.

And it also sounds like impulse control might be an issue for him. So you might want to start playing impulse control games with him, like Simon Says kinds of games. I'm betting with these three interventions, you're going to see things start to shift a little bit for him.

Question 15:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:48:14

A parent says, "My five-year-old has been jealous of his brother since day one. Now the three-year-old goes out of the house and is mean to other kids, sort of repeating what his big brother does to him."

Oh, it sounds like you need to protect your three-year-old, and you need to help your five-year-old with his jealousy. Jealousy is about loss. Your five-year-old had a big loss

three years ago. You have to help him heal that, and you do that with basic preventive maintenance -- one on one time -- and talking with iem about it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And you know, you say to him, "You always feel like you want to win with your brother. I understand. You know what? I think sometimes you feel like you have to share too many things with your brother and you always want to make sure there's enough for you. I understand, right?" Those kinds of comments will help him to surface those issues and work through them. And this is all covered in my sibling book.

Question 16:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:49:03

I have a question from a parent about her daughters who are four and seven and they are struggling to get through the day, grabbing things from each other. The seven-year-old will melt down and hurt the four-year-old because the four-year-old goes into her things and takes them or touches them. Your husband thinks your seven-year-old is overreacting and you think that she's not, and that the four-year-old should understand not to touch your sister's stuff.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I do not think that the seven-year-old is overreacting. I do not believe in communal property for kids. This is all covered in my sibling book. If you haven't read it, you need to read it. This is in there. Exactly this issue about the communal property. Your seven-year-old is entitled to have her own stuff, birthday gifts or just things that are hers. She's entitled to know it's safe.

I suggest that, because this is developmentally important to children, they have to know they have their own stuff, that it's safe before they can ever be expected to share. So of course she's lashing out because she doesn't feel she has that. So of course she's getting aggressive with the

four-year-old. And I even think you might have to lock something, because the four-year-old, you can remind her of these limits, you can teach her the limits, but she's only four. She can't be expected to always be able to control herself. So I would put locks, I would give your seven-year-old something that locks where she can put her most special things.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And if you punish or shame, your children will get along worse. And so that's the biggest question. Why are your kids fighting? You want them to get along better. Are you demonstrating in your household kindness and caring to your partner and to your children so that the children learn good negotiation skills to work out conflicts together? This is all covered in my sibling book. And also if you use the preventive maintenance tools, that should really help.

Question 17:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:50:48

A parent is asking, "Why are you saying in your sibling book 'I could never love anyone more than you. There will always be enough for you'? I find it difficult to say that same thing to both kids."

Well, why not? You're not saying, "I love you more than your sibling." You're saying, "I could never love anyone more than I love you."

And you can say that to your six-year-old and then turn to your eight-year-old and say, "I could never love anyone more than I love you." Right? They have to know that no one is higher on the list than they are. They're equal and no matter what your sister gets, there is more than enough for you.

Every kid needs to know that, that you're available to them. Why could you not say that to those kids? I don't get it.

You also said, "What's the difference between encouraging an older kid to help with the younger one versus parentifying? You know, you're encouraging. You're not forcing, you're not making the older child be the babysitter, but you're encouraging them. You're encouraging the bond and that is described in the sibling book how you might do that. "Oh, your baby's waking up. Do you hear that? There's your baby, let's go get her." Right? As opposed to, "I have to go get the baby by myself or you will get the baby, it's your job." Obviously you're not doing that, even if it's an eight-year-old.

Question 18:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:52:00

A parent is saying, "My eight-year-old is always bothering the 10-year-old. I have a difficult relationship with the eight-year-old. The strategies in your sibling book are aimed at younger kids. What do I do?" Well actually they are aimed at younger kids but the principles are exactly the same. You enforce the family rules about kindness and no teasing. You protect each child's space. You find small ways for them to enjoy each other so that you create more and more positive interactions between them because that's where the closeness will come from, even if they fight.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The research findings are going to hold true for your age kids and here's the most important predictor of whether your kids get along: What's your relationship like with each child? That's what the sibling book tells you. And you're telling me that your relationship with your eight-year-old is difficult because of the past. Okay. That's your number

one priority. Healing that relationship with your son is what's going to help him be nicer to his sister. Otherwise you can expect him to continue to bother his sister because he feels like no one loves him. I know that's not what you ever intended, but that's what's going on.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So all of that really is in the sibling book. The examples are of younger kids, but the principles are the same. The research is the same. You can use those ideas. Your number one priority is repairing your relationship with your son.

Question 19:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:53:15

A parent asked about how to empathize when your child's comments and angry words are directed at their sibling, often unfairly. So for example, her seven-year-old will shout at the four-year-old, and really he's feeling sad at having to share mom's attention. And she doesn't want the four-year-old to hear her say, "I understand."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Absolutely. You're not understanding. And he's not allowed to shout at the four-year-old, no matter what. Empathy does not mean we don't set limits. We set limits on shouting at the sibling. So at that point you empathize with the feelings, rather than the opinions being expressed by your seven-year-old.

You would say, "Whoa, Whoa, no shouting. You're shouting at your brother. No shouting. Shouting hurts. Sweetie, you must be feeling very sad that you have to share me. You can tell me that and I will always understand. Sometimes it's hard for brothers to share their mommy. I get it. It's hard for you." You give him a little hug. "And it's hard for your brother." You give the four-year-old a little hug, "No shouting at each other. No, that's that."

Dr. Laura Markham:

So whatever he does towards the four-year-old, if he's actually shouting at the four-year-old on a regular basis, I'm going to recommend my sibling book. I'm going to again recommend preventive maintenance, because he shouldn't still, after 12 weeks of this course, be shouting at the four-year-old. And you might not have gone through the whole course yet, but at this point a seven-year-old should be able to control himself to not do that. And you should be able to help them enough with the preventive maintenance that he doesn't have a big build up of feelings also, to be shouting at his brother, hopefully.

Question 20:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:54:55

A parent had a question about when one child is strong willed and the other's a peacemaker. You know, you would simply say to the child who's the peacemaker, when they give in all the time, you'll say, "You really want your brother to be happy, or you really want your sister to be happy, so you gave her a turn first. Wow, that was really generous of you. You know, you're allowed to say it's your turn if you want. It's okay if you want a turn sometimes too. Just give your child permission so that they know that they can do it if they want to. And if necessary you'll have to play it out with them and let them be the difficult sibling.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You won't call that person by name, but you'll say, "Let's have the two Teddy bears be brother and sister." And have one of them take one role and one have the other, and you say to your child, it's like a puppet show that you're acting out and you say to your child, "What should he say? What should he do? Does he know that he's allowed to have his turn if he wants it? Does he know he doesn't have to give it to his sister?" Or whatever. Just so that the child actually has permission.

Question 21:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:56:03

Onto bossiness. Someone is saying that her five-year-old is very bossy. This is normal. Four and five-year-olds are very bossy and they like to tell their friends and siblings what to do. Six-year-olds too, because they like to do the rules and they like to impose the rules on other people. They're trying to get a handle on the system. So if they can follow the rules, they feel a little less out of control. So when your five-year-old bosses her younger brother around, all you have to do is take a deep breath so you're not attacking her and say, "Sweetie, it's the mom's job and the dad's job to help kids follow the rules. I'll help your brother. It's okay. You don't have to tell him what to do. I can do that. That's my job."

Dr. Laura Markham:

That's all. She's going to be bossy, that's who she is. That's okay. That's her age. She'll outgrow it. Don't worry about it. So I know it's frustrating for us in that moment, but it's really a very minor thing and it's very age appropriate. So just set that limit in as mild a way as you can, that still protects the younger sibling.

Question 22:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:57:08

"What about those situations where an older sibling hurts a younger sibling, and you're not able to get the older sibling to the repair phase? The older sibling may laugh or refuse to engage or just not partner in doing repair with the younger sibling. Do you just move on? You know, it feels inauthentic if a younger child has been hit and is crying, to just move on."

So I agree completely with that. If a younger child has been hit and he's crying, you deal with that first. That's the first order of business. You ignore your older child. Then once the younger child feels better, you get them started doing something. And at that point you go to the child

who did the hurting, privately of course, not in front of the other child. And you don't begin with repair. You don't expect that child to be able to repair initially because you know, that isn't where anybody can start.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Nobody can do repair until they feel heard and understood themselves, and as if their feelings have been validated. So you begin with empathy, how hard it was for the older child. You may feel inauthentic, like, "Why am I empathizing with this kid, who just hit my other kid?"

But if you recognize that you have two children and, yes one was hurt, and your job is to try to keep that from happening again and again, and the way to do that is to help your oldest child who who also was hurting. That's why they hurt the younger child. Then you can more likely be empathic and reach out to your older child. And unless you can authentically feel that empathy, it is going to be hard for your older child to feel heard and validated.

So you begin with the empathy and if you do that, and you're listening to their perspective and you're understanding their experience, they're not likely to laugh. They may resist. "You don't really care about me, you don't really care what I feel or think, you're always on my sibling's side." And so it could take a while, depending on how old the sibling rivalry is that you need to heal. But they're not likely to laugh, when you start that connection process. And that can take awhile as I say.

But once that connection is stronger from your daily connection work, your preventative maintenance techniques and your sibling techniques as well. So this is not a sibling course and many people who take the course only have one child, but if you do have more than one child, I strongly recommend that you use the practices in my sibling book because they're invaluable. So once you're using those kinds of practices daily, you'll find that these things happen less and that you can reconnect more quickly with your child after this kind of an incident.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And at that point when you've listened and understood and you've empathized, then you can point out the rupture between your child and their sibling and you can say, "Your brother was really hurting. I wonder what you could do to make things better with him?"

Now if your child laughs, which as I say is not likely, then you can simply say, "Wow, you're laughing about this. It sounds like you really don't want to make things better with your brother. What do you think about making things better?" Now, the reason I'm asking a clarifying question of the child is that laughter can express anxiety, it can express distancing themselves, all kinds of things.

So we want to ask the questions so that the child can clarify for us what's really going on. He might say, "It's okay to make things better, but he never wants to make things better." And that's just anxiety. He doesn't want to make things better because he doesn't want to take that risk. But as I say, probably he's not going to laugh. He's probably going to say something like, "I don't want to make things better with my sibling. It's all his fault." And then you know you're going to need to redouble your efforts to heal things between your children using the preventive maintenance tools and the siblings tools.

So at that point you just back up, you acknowledge their experience. "You're still angry. I hear you. I want to hear more about why and I want to help you with that." Now, at this point you might be able to hear more right now or you might not be able to. It might've been that you've been here already with your child for half an hour and you can't hear more right now.

And at that point you can say, "You know, I want to hear more about why. I want to help you with this. I'm so sorry you feel so bad about your brother. And you know, in our house when we hurt someone, we make a repair, because that's what a family is. In a family you don't always get along and you will always get mad at people you love.

That's part of every relationship. It's okay to get mad. But when you do something that hurts someone else, you find a way to make it better. So even being angry, you do need to find a way to make it better when you're ready. Do you want to talk now about what you can do to make things better with your brother or do you want to talk later?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now if he's really upset, he'll probably say later. And at that point you can make an agreement about when later is going to be. If your child really refuses to make things better, you set an expectation the same way you're going to set an expectation that he's going to take a bath tonight, or he's going to set the table because that's his chore, or he's going to do his homework. So I don't think children have the right to refuse to make it better. But remember, the more we force them to, it's like forcing an apology. So we really trying not to do that. We try to really leave the ball in their court and say something like, "I know you'll figure out just the right thing to make things better with your brother. I can't wait to see what it is." And then give him a big hug and leave the room and go make dinner or whatever you need to do.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And if you don't see him do anything to make things better, then you raise it up again later in private, "Hey, I didn't see what you did to make things better with your brother. Things do seem a little better, but I wonder what did you do?" If he says, "Well, I was nicer to him," you know, maybe that's enough for this time. And you can say, "Do you think your brother knew you were being nicer to him?" You know? But the less you mandate what they do for repair, the more sincere the repair is going to be.

Question 23:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:03:28

"What do you do when one of your children yells that he wants to kill his brother?" Well, you recognize the feelings. Remember, they don't know what it means to kill the

brother. They just know that they're angry. So you say, "You are so angry at your brother. What's going on? Tell me about it." Right? And maybe you saw it, in which case you can say, "Oh my goodness, you are so angry. Your brother did X, Y, Z. Can you tell your brother (why you are so angry)?" Right?

So you're helping your child develop a way to communicate what they're saying, rather than just focusing on their threat, which is what the "killing" is. They're basically using a threat because he feels powerless. He feels powerless to express his feelings and get his needs met, so he's on the attack. And our job is to help our kids express their needs without going on the attack toward each other.

Question 24:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:04:23

A parent says "My five year old is very sensory and often takes it out on the three-year-old by hitting, hugging, or kicking. What limits can we put in place so we can move away from sending him to the stairs, which happens quite frequently and does not seem to work."

So, sending him to the stairs is a timeout, and, indeed, this does not work. It makes him feel bad about himself. So, I assume that you were asking this because you've continued to use time outs, which might mean you didn't know what else to do, even though you listened to the Week on Discipline, or it might mean you didn't get to that week.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, if you haven't gotten to that week, please do. Make sure to listen to it. And if you don't know what other tools, I would say prevention really helps. So, first, meet his sensory needs for hugs and kisses preemptively. Second,

when he's angry, teach him to hug himself, which we just described how to do. Thirdly, teach him about his space-bubble around himself, and constantly enforce that in a preemptive way. Finally, teach him to make repairs when he hurts his brother. Instead of a punishment, he needs to do repairs. "How could you make things better with your brother now? He doesn't like it when you hurt him." "Ouch, it really hurt him. What can you do to make things better with him?" So, it's a repair, not going to the naughty step.

Question 25:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:05:36

A parent says, "When the nine year old is mean to the seven year old, I rush to protect the seven year old from the hurtful words, but it just reinforces the older one's perception that we favor the young one. The older one seems to randomly pick on the young one and it seems unprovoked."

Well, it's not unprovoked. Even if you don't see the provocation. Nine resents Seven, Nine attacks, or she's unhappy and misuses her power over her sister to help herself feel better temporarily. So, the provocation is Seven existing, right? Either way, special time will help. It's possible Seven is actually provoking her big sister to get you to intervene and choose her.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Have you read my siblings book? This is all covered in there, but the research is that when kids fight and you intervene, if you take sides, you're indeed perpetuating sibling rivalry. The one you protect feels like she's won, and purposely creates repeat incidents by subtly provoking the other one. The one you correct develops resentment, which leads to more unprovoked attacks.

So, try this. Instead of intervening on behalf of the one who was hurt, you could coach her. So, you might start

with, "Ouch, those are words that could hurt." But instead of correcting Nine, say, "Seven, you can tell your sister how those words feel to you." And Seven might say to Nine, "That hurts when you say that." And then you say, "Do you hear that Nine? Seven doesn't like it when you use words like that to her. They hurt her feelings. And Nine, it sounds like you wish your sister would stop humming, right? You can tell your sister what you need with kindness. Can you do that?" And Nine says, "I want you to stop humming," which is still better than using hurtful words to her.

Dr. Laura Markham:

It is possible to reinforce the house rules without taking sides, by empathizing with both kids, and make sure that, when you speak to one kid, you are touching the other one, so that they both feel connected at the same time.

Question 26:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:07:27

A parent says, "When my kids have a fallout and I try to talk to them about it, they often stand behind me and wind each other up and make comments like, 'He's lying.' I try to get them to take turns, but they really struggle with that, and it can get physical."

So, I think you should sit rather than stand, with one child on each side of you. Stay calm yourself, because your calm breathing will help them calm down and breathe more easily. Flip a coin for who gets to talk first, and decide today, in a non-fighting moment, who is tails and who is heads.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Okay, while the first one talks, keep your hand on the other one, so they feel connected. Expect them to interrupt each other. When they do, say warmly, "I hear you don't agree with your brother. Soon, it'll be your turn

to express your side of things. Let's all take a deep breath." Stay patient. You're teaching them emotional regulation. And I want to add that this is all explained in my siblings book, so if you don't have it yet, it has lots of scripts.

Question 27:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:08:27

A parent is asking, "As a single mom with twins and no family nearby, I get so frustrated with them biting and pushing each other. What's the best way to handle this?"

It sounds like your kids have a developmental delay, so talking it out is hard, and that is probably why they're being so difficult with each other.

So, I do encourage you to keep listening to the audios. I think you'll find a lot of helpful tools and solutions that will reduce their fighting in week five, and all the other weeks. But the best way to deal with this, I suppose, is talking it out. You're coaching your kids, and you're giving them the words to express what they need, so they don't have to be violent to get what they need.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And I realize they have language delays. That is, maybe, you're going to be helping them overcome the language delays also by doing this coaching, and the words are simply, "You want X, so you pushed your brother. No pushing. Pushing hurts. Here, say, 'Move, please.' Your brother will move." And then you have them act it out. Right? That's the kind of coaching I'm talking about.

I want to add that twins find it really hard to share you. They find it just as hard to share you as you find it hard to deal with their fighting. Their fighting is a symptom of their need to not always have to fight with each other for your love.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, since you don't have a partner, you are going to have to find a way to get special time alone, one-on-one, with each kid. You're going to have to hire a sitter sometimes to take one of your children, but that's the price you pay for the gift of more than one child, I'm afraid. It will significantly cut down the fighting if you use those preventative maintenance tools, and all of the tools in this course.

And you know what? One last thing, I urge you to get some time for yourself, even if you have to pay for it. You'll be a happier person and you'll be a better mom. We all need that time.

Question 28:

Parent: 01:10:15 My question is basically about validating emotions and the question that I submitted ahead of time was a sibling related question about how you validate emotions that are hurtful to another sibling, while also protecting the sibling. So, if one child is saying they wish that the other sibling was not part of the family, how you don't minimize the actual feeling there, but also coach them into not saying things like, they hate the other, or that are emotionally hurtful.

Parent: And then the second part of that question is also about how to coach about emotions, because it seems like, with respect to all aspects of life, that we are coaching the kid. And one area where I would also like to be able to coach is about being able to... It sounds kind of like stuffing emotions because I think, in some ways, it makes sense also to be told that some emotions maybe shouldn't take as much space. I guess that's hard to say in any way that doesn't sound wrong, but maybe not get so upset about materialistic things, or those kinds of concerns. So, those are two separate questions, but they're both related in my mind.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I'm going to start with your second one first. Do you think that, when someone gets upset about something, that they actually always know what they're upset about and they're upset about that thing? Because I don't. Your kid may get upset because his brother got a better birthday present than he did, but if you went out and grabbed him the same exact toy, would he then not have the same upset?

I submit to you that he feels like his brother gets lots of things that he doesn't. I don't mean about your children, but I do know about your children. I know you have a child who's saying he hates the other kid. So yes, I think that in your case specifically, but in many cases, the child seems to be upset because his brother got a better birthday present, but actually he's really upset because his brother seems to get love that he doesn't get.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, I think you don't want your kid getting upset about material possessions, because you don't want that to rank high in their values. I get it. It's normal. Your oldest is five. It's normal for kids that age to get very invested in material possessions. Do not take that to mean that they will have bad values as they grow up. Really. They will have your values. That's the way it works. Children understand what their parents value and, for the most part, if they love their parents, they end up adopting their parents' values.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And so, I think there are lots of ways to encourage kids to have good values, and there's a lot about that on the Aha! Parenting website for you, but I don't think that you should be worried about the fact that your kids seem to like material possessions. That does not mean they have bad values. They get upset because they don't get a toy, it's because they're upset that they can't tolerate this frustration, that they never get what they want in life.

Dr. Laura Markham:

It's not because of that particular toy, usually. You know, we see it happen all the time, where kids want what their

sibling is playing with at that moment. And if you don't make them share, if you say, "Well, that sibling had it first, and you can have it next, and you can ask your sibling when they'll be ready." And the sibling says, "Not until lunchtime," and they have a total meltdown. And then the sibling's ready to give them the toy an hour later. They're not even interested because once they had the total meltdown, they got that stuff off their chest. They're not even upset anymore. You know? Does that make sense?

Parent: Yeah.

Dr. Laura Markham: And so the way you introduced that question, which was, "Well I'd rather they don't. That some emotions don't seem so appropriate. They shouldn't be getting upset about certain things." You know what? I'm with you. There are many times that you see someone, kids especially, have an emotion that you would rather they not have.

Dr. Laura Markham: I'm thinking about the time when I was playing badminton with my brothers and my big brother won, and I was very competitive with him. I was so angry and I was a total bad sport. I don't know how old I was, probably about eight, and I stormed off the badminton court, and slammed into my room, and I was pouting in my room.

Dr. Laura Markham: My dad came and sat on my bed, and then he said, "You were very disappointed that you didn't win." I said, "I like to win." He said, "Yeah, everybody likes to win. It's true. But you said some mean things to your brother, and you really hurt his feelings. Do you really think he cheated?" And I said, "No, I just wanted to win."

Dr. Laura Markham: And you know, he didn't want those feelings to take up that space. But notice he started, "You really wanted to win. You felt bad." Right? He had to start from where I was, or there's no way I could have admitted that I was actually in the wrong. And I did eventually go and repair with my brother and apologize for my bad behavior. But

my point is that we can't shift from the place we are in emotionally until we feel heard, most of the time.

Parent:

That makes a lot of sense.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, the question about your child expressing what he feels, if he feels, if he says, "I hate my brother," you don't know how to deal with that, because you don't want to invalidate his feelings. But you also don't want him to hurt his brother with this hurtful language.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I address this particular issue in my siblings book, if you haven't read it. The short version is this: hate is not a feeling, hate is not the same thing as anger. Hate is a position you take. It's like you're saying, "I hate you. I'm so angry. We're never going to work things out. I never will. I hate you." It's a position I'm taking.

So, your son can be as angry as he wants at his brother, but attacking his brother is not okay. And a position of hate is an attack. And what you would say is something like, "You're so mad right now that you're using the word hate. That's a powerful word. I hear how upset you must be to say that you hate. You know what, sweetheart? You can be as mad as you want, but words like that can really hurt."

Dr. Laura Markham:

You can say this in front of the brother. "You can say what you're angry about without using hurtful language. Sometimes you and your brother get really mad at each other, so mad that you don't want to work things out. I understand. We've all felt that way. That's what you mean by hate, right? You don't want to work things out. I hear how angry you must be. But you know what? Sometimes we forget we love somebody because we're so angry, but the love is still in there hiding. It's like the sun behind the clouds. It isn't shining, but we know it's there.

So, let's take some time for everyone to calm down, and then I'll help you and your brother talk about what

happened and why you both got so mad. We are a family. We always work things out, no matter what."

What do you think?

Parent: Great. Yeah, that's it. I think that's very helpful to hear. I have a question, about one of my children who is very sort of adverse to verbalizing feelings. So, one of my children is quite loquacious about feelings and the other one just is very afraid of putting words on things, and it's very difficult for me, I guess, because I'm more in the loquacious camp, about how to help him convey that stuff.

Dr. Laura Markham: Every behavior is communication. So you can interpret, and you can give words to it, and you don't have to force him to use words. So, if he's doing something, you can say, "You look really angry." Or, "Wow, your tone of voice sounds really mad." And you can say, "I guess you're really upset about this. What do you need, Sweetheart? How can I help?"

Dr. Laura Markham: Right? So, you're using the language of emotions, even if he's not, by interpreting into the expression. You know, the reason to articulate things in words is that then you don't have to act them out, and it's good to give him the language for it, even if he chooses to use it only minimally. It'll still help him to understand what he's feeling, so he doesn't have to act out so much.

Parent: Okay.

Dr. Laura Markham: Is that it? All right.

Parent: Thanks. Thank you so much for organizing this course in this way.

Dr. Laura Markham: You're so welcome.

Question 29:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:18:46

"My son, when he's upset, will direct his anger toward me or toward his sister. He's five."

And yes, that's right. That's an attack because he can't bear the upset, but don't get hooked by the attack. Just offer your son compassion and understanding, and describe what happened without arguing with him. So, you can say, "You're so mad. You're saying it's all my fault this happened. I see how upset you are, Sweetie. I'm so sorry this is so hard right now."

And he might say, "Of course it's your fault! If you hadn't walked by, my tower wouldn't have fallen down." "Oh, sweetie, I'm so sorry your tower fell down after you worked so hard on it."

Why do you have to prove that it's not your fault the tower fell down at this minute? You don't. You don't have to set him straight. We've all been there, where we feel like blaming when we're upset. It's a very common reaction. In fact, most adults have that reaction.

So, at that moment, you just want to acknowledge how he feels, and hopefully this will create enough safety now, so that you can say, "I know you worked so hard. It was such a beautiful tower. It's such a shame it fell down, Sweetie." And hopefully if he feels safe that way, he doesn't have to keep attacking. Now he can actually feel the feelings. He can cry, and later, when he feels better, you can snuggle him and you can say, "I'm so sorry your tower fell down, Sweetheart. You worked so hard on it."

Dr. Laura Markham:

And if he's feeling better, he'll say something like, "Me, too. I hate when that happens." And you then maybe can say something like, "You were so mad. You wanted to blame me for walking by. Do you really think I made the tower fall down by walking by? Or were you just so mad you wanted to blame somebody?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

And you can let him know that this is a normal human reaction. Even with adults, if we're honest, we all have to guard against lashing out and blaming people. And, you know, as he feels more understood and empties his emotional backpack of old hurts, he'll be less fragile inside, and more able to tolerate the upset. And he won't be as likely to lash out like that.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now, I do want to add, you mentioned his sister. If he lashes out at his sister, you do need to intervene on the spot, because it's not fair to her that he's blaming her. So, you could just say something like, "Oh, your tower fell down. Oh, my goodness, I'm so sorry. You're telling your sister it's her fault? Sweetie, she was just walking by. I know you're angry and you can tell us how upset you are. It's not okay to say hurtful things to your sister."

And then you just turn to the sister. He's not ready to make it better with her, but you can. You say to her something like, "Your brother's so mad about his tower, Honey. This isn't about you. Why don't you go back to your book? We'll talk about this later after your brother calms down."

And she leaves. She goes back. And after he calms down, you get them together, and you acknowledge both of their feelings the same way you would do with any sibling dispute. This is all outlined in my sibling book. You have your arm around both kids, each kid, so that they each feel connected to you, or your hand is on their knee or something so they feel connected.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And you say something like, "You were so upset when your tower fell down, right? Your sister was walking by, and you yelled at her, you were so upset." And then you turn to the sister. "And you were just walking by to get a drink of water, and then the tower fell, and then your brother was yelling at you, right? That must have surprised you and it must have hurt your feelings." And she'll say yes. And you can say, "Do you want to tell your brother how you feel?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

And she'll say something like, "I don't like it when you yell at me. It's not fair. I didn't knock your tower down." And he'll say, "I thought you did. You walked by and it fell. And I was really upset." So, notice the tone. He's still defensive and he's not apologizing, but he's also not blaming her anymore.

So, you might have to clarify that. "I hear you were so upset about it, Sweetie. And you thought it was her fault at the time. And that's why you yelled at her. I know. But you don't think now that it was her fault do you?" And he'll say, "No, I guess not." And you can say, "Did you hear what she said? Did you hear what your sister said about how she felt? Is there something you can say to her about that? Is there some way to make things better between you?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

And he might say, "I'm sorry, I yelled at you. It wasn't your fault." And she might say, "I'm sorry your tower fell. I'm glad you know it wasn't my fault. But next time, could you not yell at me?" You know, it'd be a totally reasonable thing for her to say at that point. I know I make this sound easy, and it's never easy, but it does get easier the more you do it.

But everyone still has feelings. The daughter is still going to say, in this case, "Next time, could you not yell at me?" And that's totally fine, and you can say to her, "You want your brother not to yell at you when things go wrong for him?" And then you turn to him. "What do you think, son? Next time you're really mad, what could you do instead of attacking your sister?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

And maybe he'll say, "I guess I could just yell really loud like, 'No!' Instead of yelling at her, even if I thought it was her fault." Because he did think it was her fault at the moment. And you say, Great! Great idea. Give me five! Let's all shake on this." Or whatever.

Question 30:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:23:58

Our next question is from a parent who says, "Our older son is very violent toward his little brother. We're overwhelmed by his anger. We try to remove him quickly and send him to his room to calm down. He said he wanted to punish his brother for being born, and taking mom and dad away."

So, this is very common in an older child who never forgave the second child for being born. Sometimes even when there's a third child, their anger is reserved for the second child, who they see as having taken away everything they valued in life.

Dr. Laura Markham:

In this case, the kids are eight and four, so I'm taking this very seriously. An eight-year-old is big. He can do damage. He should know by now, not only not to do this, but he should have the inner control not to do this. That doesn't mean an eight-year-old won't hit or shove in anger, especially a sibling, but usually it's not as violent as what you're describing here.

So, first of all, I would set very clear limits about how he treats his brother. This is bullying behavior. It's not allowed, no matter what. Secondly, you're doing great to intervene immediately to protect your four-year-old, but don't send your eight-year-old to his room to calm down, at least not by himself. Go with him.

Dr. Laura Markham:

When we send a child off by themselves to calm down, they will eventually calm down, but no one is helping them get to the upset below the anger, the fear that he's not loved, that has been there stewing, probably since his brother was born. The grief of what he's lost.

And if you don't get to those feelings, you're going to continue having the aggression. So, every time you send him off to his room, you just stuff that again, and you end up with a kid with a full emotional backpack, with the

feelings not under conscious control. So, they're going to burst out in aggression. That's why there's not cognitive control over his aggressiveness, right? Is that he's trying to repress his anger.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, we really want to help him get to the bottom of this. He already has told you why he is so aggressive with his brother. He wants to punish him for being born and taking mom and dad away. So, take that seriously. That's how he sees things. In response, he feels righteously angry. He thinks he's the victim here.

That's always the case when people are aggressive, they think they're the victim. So, your goal is to help him see things differently. No one took you away. You are right here with him, with all the love you ever had for him. Your job is to help him show you those old feelings, but also have the experience in the present moment of being completely loved and adored, his parents being completely present for him, and understanding and accepting him no matter what.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Even understanding and accepting his jealousy and his anger at his brother. That doesn't ever mean he's allowed to hurt his brother, or even say mean things to him. It **does** mean he can tell you how he feels that his brother has ruined his life. But you'll have to prove to him that he doesn't actually have to worry, by having daily special time, by really connecting with him, by telling him, "I could never love anyone more than I love you. I am so sorry if I ever made you feel that you were not loved as you always have been."

Once your son has had a chance to share with you how devastated he's been about his brother's presence, and what he felt happened when his brother was born --which probably had to do with his jealousy and having been disciplined for being unfriendly to his brother, I'm guessing because that's what usually happens -- Once you've given him a chance to share those feelings, which I'm hoping will

include some crying, at least tearing up, as he describes to you the unfairness of life with his brother. Once he has shared those feelings somewhat and done some healing, tell him that you want to brainstorm ways that he can manage himself instead of lashing out in anger. Tell him again, as I'm sure you've told him before, but make sure you're really being clear, that you expect him to express how he feels without attacking, that it is never, ever, ever okay to use his body to hurt another human being, any human being. And, of course, you as parents, will need to be modeling this as well.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now, when you brainstorm with him, make a list of things he can do when he gets angry instead of hitting. Teach him skills to use when he gets angry. For instance, the one of clapping his arms around his body and shouting "No!"

Use laughter to help your son soften a little, so he'll let those feelings in more and he won't have to use aggression to fend off his more vulnerable feelings of tears and fears that always underlie aggression.

Dr. Laura Markham:

This is also a good time to have conversations with him about the fact that he probably feels more than one way about his brother. He may not be able to admit that he likes his brother and, in fact, he may not be in touch with liking his brother at all. That will develop over time once you help him excavate all of those hurt feelings that are leading him to rage against his brother and be defended.

But over time, he will come to like his brother. Right now, though, you can say to him, "When you hurt your brother, is there some part of you that knows better, that doesn't want to do it?" If he says, "No, I totally want to hurt him," in which case you reiterate, "I hear how angry you are at him. You know it's not his fault, right? He just happened to be born. We chose to have him, and you can be as mad at us as you want about that, but you're our son and he's our son, and we love you both. And you know we could never love anyone more."

Dr. Laura Markham:

I suspect, though, that he might not say it that way. He might say that there is some part of him that doesn't want to hurt his brother, that knows better. And then you could ask, "What keeps you from listening to that part of you?" And ask him, "Next time you get really angry, what could I say that would be helpful to you, so you don't lash out? Is it just that you need me to listen to you? What do you need at that moment that would help you? I suspect he won't know the answer to that because what's really happening when he lashes out is that he feels unbearable pain. He's afraid he's no longer loved. He's afraid he's a bad person.

And so, to avoid those feelings, he lashes out. Over time, as you allow your son to say to you how he feels like a bad person, how he hates his brother because he lost so much, how he feels that you don't love him the way you love his brother, or the way you used to love him -- As you work with him to express those feelings, and for you to validate your love, as you show up for him and accept the rage, and accept the tears and fears and vulnerability underneath it - - As he heals, you will see the aggression diminish.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But you'll also have to address anything that's bothering him about his brother in the present moment. You say that the little one likes to hug hard and sit on the eight-year-old's lap, but the big brother hates it. Don't let it happen. Have a discussion with both boys. "Never touch anyone else's body without asking first. Never." Basic consent. Every child needs to learn this.

And parents need to model it. So, the little one must ask the older one before hugging. The older one is also never allowed to touch the little one without asking. Really.

And since this is an entrenched pattern, I would have a family meeting about it. I would brainstorm with all four of you ways to remember this, and when somebody forgets, including mom or dad, who hugs without asking, at the

family meeting, discuss what you can do when somebody breaks that rule.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Should that person have to put money in a jar? Should they owe everybody else in the family some sort of repair? Should they just owe the person they touched some sort of repair, or maybe just simply a do over? "Oops, let's do that over again. Can I ruffle your hair?"

Another family rule that will help you, that every family needs -- The older brother is not allowed to act like a parent. Parents should not be punishing anyway, but you say that he's trying to punish his brother, if his brother breaks a rule. It's never the job of a sibling to enforce the rules.

Dr. Laura Markham:

When an older sibling tries to enforce the rules with the younger sibling, the parents' intervention is always the same. "Hey Sweetie, I got this. I'm the mom." Or, "I'm the dad. You're the brother. I'm glad you care about your brother and our family rules, but it's my job to make sure everybody follows them." That's it. He should never, ever have the responsibility of enforcing rules, because then he wants to be the disciplinarian.

Dr. Laura Markham:

To finish up with this question, I want to add that since this is an entrenched pattern and your oldest is already eight, if you don't see substantial changes in the next month from what we've talked about just now in this audio, I would encourage you to take both children with you to see a family therapist. Your four year old needs protection or he's going to become violent himself, and your eight year old really needs, at this point, help with whatever is driving him to be violent.

So, give it your best shot in the next month, and really, if you don't get pretty immediate results, it's time to take it a step further and do family therapy together. And I want to add, for everyone listening, family therapy is a wonderful opportunity to strengthen communication in your family

system, and to heal anything that's been festering. There's no shame, no blame. It's getting extra support to have the best family you can be. It is a gift to your family.

Question 31:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:35:13 "My older daughter is often very bossy toward her younger brother and attempts to parent him. For instance, she will really tell him off for not saying please or thank you. Sometimes she can be quite mean in her approach, shouting at him. Other times they get on really well."

Dr. Laura Markham: Well, I think you just heard me say in the previous answer that it is never the job of the older child to enforce your family rules, and the minute they do, your job as the parent is to step in and interrupt that pattern. Basically, you say to her just what I said in answer to the previous question. You're the parent. You've got it. You'll handle it. You might say to your child, "Your job is to take care of you. Enforcing the rules in the family, that's my job."

Dr. Laura Markham: Be kind, be pleasant, be firm. And as they begin to start to open their mouth and then stop themselves, be positive. Acknowledge every step in the right direction. "Hey Hon, I saw you starting to tell your brother to say please, and then you remembered. Thank you. I appreciate that. I am the parent. I got this."

Question 32:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:36:23 Our next question is from a parent who says, "Our seven and three year old will be playing, and suddenly the three year old is screaming at the seven year old and crying. The seven year old keeps doing the thing that is clearly upsetting the three year old, and then gets upset when the three year old hits her. I always stop her from hitting. I get

irritated, though, with the seven year old for not stopping whatever is bothering the three-year-old. I'm already triggered by the conflict, and I'm likely to snap at our seven year old, so what should I do?"

I would say at that moment do not try to talk to the seven-year-old about this. At that moment, stop the hitting, soothe the three-year-old, help the three-year-old calm down, and then help the three-year-old advocate for his or herself by having a session where you talk with both the seven-year-old and the three-year-old about what happened, and they both articulate to each other what was upsetting to them. In the course of this, you ask what could have been different and you have the three-year-old establish by your questions that indeed the three-year-old would have stopped hitting the seven-year-old if the seven-year-old had listened, paid attention and honored the request of the three-year-old.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You say to the three-year-old, "So you were very frustrated. You kept telling your sister, and your sister wasn't doing what you were asking. Is that right?"

You ask the seven-year-old, "It sounds like you really didn't want to do what the three-year-old asked. Right? Aha! That's where we have the problem, because if you had stopped doing it, then you (turning to the three year old) wouldn't have hit your sister. Is that right, three-year-old? Aha! This has happened before and it doesn't feel good for you to be so frustrated, right, three-year-old? It doesn't feel good for you to be hit, does it, seven-year-old? What could we do for this to be different next time?"

Of course, what you want to hear is the seven-year-old to say, "All right, even when I don't like what you're asking, I will pay attention. I will validate it. If I don't feel I can do it, I will say why I can't do it."

Dr. Laura Markham:

I want to just say to you, your seven-year-old is still only seven, even though they look huge next to the three-year-

old. They're not a grownup. They don't have that much self-regulation, and it's not their job to be the parent. Of course, the three-year-old shouldn't be hitting, but the three-year-old does deserve to be listened to. They're both learning a skill here. There's no emergency.

I know you're seeing it as a bad situation that the seven-year-old could be avoiding, and you're triggered by it because of that judgment. I see it as a natural process where the three-year-old and the seven-year-old are learning to stick up for themselves and say what they need, and the seven-year-old just needs to be able to say to the three-year-old, "I hear you wanting X, Y, Z, but I don't want to do X, Y, Z. Let's figure something else out." If the seven-year-old could do that, then they wouldn't get hit. That's what you're aiming for.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think your playing referee is what's going to make the difference here. There are scripts in my sibling book that will give you some ideas of how to do this. Of course, in order to do this, you will need to handle your own trigger. The best way I know how to do that is just to remind yourself that they are both learning skills. That's your job, is to teach them those skills. There's nothing wrong with your seven-year-old, even though this behavior can drive you crazy. She's learning a very hard thing, which is to articulate what she wants or needs instead of continuing to do the thing that's bothering the three-year-old. She's still learning too, and you're teaching her a self-regulation skill.

Question 33:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:40:17

Our next question is from a parent who says, "Our boy girl twins, almost 11 years old, are preparing for high school, have been in a small school in the same class for seven years. My daughter is very similar to my son, sporty, etc. so they have similar friends." I can't tell if you mean they

have the same friends or their friend group is the same friend group but they might have different best friends. "We're doing 10 minutes a day of individual time at the moment, but they are currently facing terrible sibling rivalry, arguing over almost everything, fighting, being unkind at every opportunity. Connection with my daughter is good. My son is not interested or only wants to connect with computer games."

Dr. Laura Markham:

This is a big issue with kids this age, especially boys that love computer games. I would have a serious discussion with him, without his sister, about computer games -- that it's an addiction and that the most important thing is of course his family relationships, and secondarily his schoolwork, and that you see the family relationships suffering and that you want to see those improve before he's able to play computer games. If you are going to allow him to play computer games, I would do it only when you're there with him and you're bonding over the computer game, but make sure you have other alone time with him to bond.

I would also say 10 minutes a day of individual time is not nearly enough, when you have the kind of sibling friction that you're describing. They should not have been in the same class for seven years, but I understand it was a small school and you did the best you could. I'm so glad that they're now preparing for a new larger school where they'll be in different classes, and I'm hoping that it means they'll have different friend groups as well. I do think you'll need a lot more than 10 minutes of one-on-one time. Since you only have two children, you can divide and conquer. You can have the entire day Sunday, mom or dad is with one kid and the other partner is with the other kid. I would say go on overnights.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Separate the kids from each other as much as you can. Especially for twins, there's a lot of sibling rivalry often because there is always somebody at the same developmental level demanding attention from the

parents. Really, they often don't get their needs met as well as singletons, because it's so hard to parent two kids anyway, and then to parent two kids at the same developmental level is super hard. Twins often feel they have to fight to carve out an identity, and especially in your case when the kids are interested in the same things and have overlapping or the same friend group and have been in the same class for seven years. That means they really need some time apart to carve out individual identities, and some of the fighting you're seeing is because of that. You really need to separate them, I would say a lot. Don't assume your family should do everything together by any means.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then, I think you should introduce the topic at a family meeting. Talk about how important siblings are, how after you die, the two of you, they will have each other, and that they need to work out a relationship that will be supportive of each other. They don't have to like each other, but they do have to not be mean to each other. That in your family, people treat each other with respect. If you need or want something, you don't have to attack the other person to get it, that no unkindness is allowed. Seriously, no unkindness is allowed, and then confront it (when it happens). I would of course not just lay down the law, but in that family meeting, listen to each of them and feed back what they're saying, "So you get frustrated when your sister does X, Y, Z, and you get frustrated when your brother does X, Y, Z. I can see how those things are frustrating. You two are old enough to treat each other kindly even when you're frustrated. Let's talk about how you could express that in a nicer way."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Of course, since they each have a chip on their shoulder toward the other one, you're going to have to do some work directly with each child on expressing those emotions and acknowledging how they're feeling and helping them to articulate it. They may or may not cry because they are already 10, but I think you'll see that they will tear up as they talk to you about this, if you create

enough safety. Please be sure you listen to the audio from the Sibling Week for pointers on how to help them get to the core of those emotions and melt that chip on the shoulder.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I want to remind you that children do learn what we model. If the parents are fighting or the parents use rude language to a child, kids will absolutely pick that up and use it. If you're listening to this and your kids are fighting with each other, consider if you're appropriately modeling how to resolve conflict in a respectful way. That might not apply to the person who asked this question, but if you're listening to the Sibling Section and your kids are having a hard time with each other, that's a really important thing to remember and to ask yourself. Of course, if you haven't read my Sibling book yet, please do. The whole second section of the book deals with how to create a family culture in which kids learn how to communicate and treat each other with respect.

Question 34:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:46:00

Our next question is from a parent who says, "In the last month, we moved home from overseas so that the children have a new school, town and house. Dad is working overseas though, and not due back for another four weeks. The girls' behavior has become increasingly challenging. The eight-year-old teases and winds up her younger sister and won't listen. The youngest hits, shouts and gets extremely angry when she's not heard or doesn't get what she wants."

Dr. Laura Markham:

I'm going to suggest that your girls are showing you how stressed they are by all these changes and about dad being gone. I imagine you're stressed by all the changes and by your partner being gone as well. Your ability to foster a calmer, happier home will help your kids to de-stress and give them a foundation that they can start to feel secure

and start to adjust. When kids move, it always stresses them out. We know this. It makes them feel unsafe. If you are overseas and this is a new language, even more so. Kids having to function with a new language find that very stressful. It's stressful for the brain. It exhausts us, makes us crabby, and certainly could stress your kids out more. Maybe it's the same language, I don't know, but even just a move overseas to a new home, a new school, is super stressful.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You may also want to give your kids a way to understand the move and to process it. I don't know if you made a book about the move before you left but maybe you want to work with them to create a book now, a family book about it. There is an article on the Aha! Parenting website about how to move with kids. That includes information on making a book about moving.

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/family-life/moving-help-child-adjust>

At eight and six, we expect them to understand better, but a book can still really help them to process it, especially when they're involved in making the book. It sounds to me like that's the trauma you need to address here, and that as you do, your girls will settle down, feel more secure and stop taking their upsets out on each other.

Question 35:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:48:08

Our next question is from a parent who says, "Our 11 and eight-year-olds generally get along, but the older boy regularly interrupts and corrects the younger, making it difficult for the younger to complete thoughts and feel confident. The younger one keeps things inside until they overflow in anger, hitting and sometimes tears. We try to speak to them about listening, the older one, and using

words to express feelings, the younger one, but it feels like our efforts don't change much."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Your older one, your 11-year-old, is doing this to feel better about himself. If he can interrupt and correct the younger, then he gets to feel good about himself. He's in competition with his younger brother, even though they often get along. You need to enroll him to be a supporter of his brother rather than a competitor or a parent.

It might be that he thinks that's the way to parent. Of course, as parents, you want to model for him that you don't interrupt and you don't correct. You listen and you ask questions. If you do need to correct, you've mentioned your boys are both very sensitive and bright, so if you do need to correct and redirect, you can often do that by asking questions or by saying what you do like. "Oh, I really like that you're doing X, Y, Z," and then you express your concern in the form of a concern or a question as opposed to a correction. I wonder about doing this part of it. I wonder if that's going to be a problem because of whatever.

Dr. Laura Markham:

In general, instead of correcting your kids, you're expressing your corrections in the form of a concern that they can address. "I love your idea of building a rocket on the back lawn. I think it is so great that you've taken the initiative to do this and you're using the recycling to do it. My concern about this is I wonder what will happen at the end of the project? Will there be a big contraption on our back lawn of tin cans and paper towel rolls all duct-taped together? It could be really cool, but I don't want it to be out there forever. What's your plan?" That's an example of instead of saying no, or "make sure you clean that up when you're done with it." You've expressed it as a concern and you've asked them their plan.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think this is not just for you, this is for everybody listening. This is a general way to correct kids, and it models for kids how to relate to each other when they

have a concern. Your older one, if he had grown up with you doing this, which by the way most of us didn't grow up with this, I certainly didn't, but when we model this, kids are less likely to correct each other.

Dr. Laura Markham:

That doesn't speak to the heart of your question. Your question is what do we do in this situation to help our younger boy so he can express how he feels about it in the moment and to keep our older boy from doing this?

The reason your older boy is doing it, as we said, is either it's been modeled or he wants to feel better about himself. I would really work on the special time and make sure he feels seen and valued for who he is so that he doesn't have to establish dominance over his brother by interrupting and correcting.

When he does interrupt and correct, you can immediately interrupt the situation. The eight-year-old is talking, and the 11-year-old interrupts him and starts to correct him. You would say, "Whoa, whoa, I was listening to your brother. Can you finish, sweetheart?" Let the eight-year-old finish. If the 11-year-old says, "But he's wrong, blah, blah, blah," you can say, "You know what? Your brother is speaking. In our home, we listen when somebody is speaking. I want to hear what your brother is saying. You can talk when he's done, Sweetheart. I want to hear what you have to say too, but your brother is speaking right now. Go ahead." You coach the eight-year-old to continue.

Dr. Laura Markham:

In that case, you've set the standard in your home. If you do this for a while, then you're going to be able to say to the eight-year-old when he gets interrupted, "It looks like you didn't like that your brother interrupted you," or, "Sweetheart, I noticed your brother just interrupted you. You can tell him, 'Please don't interrupt me when I'm speaking. I need to finish my thought.'" Get him to say it for himself. The more he can do that, the better it will be, and the less likely he's going to end up in tears later, or hitting or anger. In general, our role is to enforce the

family rule. We want to coach kids to speak up for themselves. In this case since speaking up is the issue, you might have to start by setting the standard and encouraging him to speak up and over time, he'll start to do that.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would also have as many discussions with your eight-year-old as you can about emotions, his and other people's, to develop his emotional intelligence and ability to express himself. And, of course, he really needs roughhousing with laughter. I think a kid who bottles up feelings especially needs roughhousing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Finally, a kid who has stuff bottled up inside and who worries about completing thoughts because he feels in the shadow of his older brother, that kid needs one-on-one time with parents who listen very patiently so that he learns to express his thoughts. You really can do that during special time if you make it a point to bite your tongue to never correct him and to acknowledge what he said. Ask his opinion about things and when he expresses them, say, "Huh, so you think X, Y, Z. Huh, I never thought of it that way. Thank you for explaining that to me," or simply, "I like the way you said that. I agree with you."

Question 36:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:02:54

A parent asks, "My four-year-old takes care of the little one when we're around, but as soon as we leave the room, she pushes her sister over or steals her toys. Why? We give her plenty of attention."

Dr. Laura Markham:

This is very common. It happens because your older child has never been able to express her upset about her sister's arrival. She wants to get back at her. She's trying very hard to be a good girl and be nice to her sister. She even

takes care of her when you're in the room, to please you, but she's having to repress all those upset feelings of jealousy about having to share you. Those feelings, since they're repressed are no longer under conscious control -- so they burst out uncontrolled and she's mean to her sister. Of course, only when she thinks no one is watching.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You want to initiate conversations with your daughter about the hard things about having a little sister, and let her express those things and empathize. Once the mean feelings are out of the way, she won't need to act them out and the good feelings will have a chance to grow.

Question 37:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:55:03

This parent describes the rivalry between her boys: "The three-year-old teases his brother, takes the big brother's toys, tries to play in the big brother's room. Then, the five-year-old says, "Please don't touch my stuff. Stop calling me names. Stop bothering me." The three-year-old keeps going and finally, the older one hits him. The three-year-old starts crying. I go to attend to the three-year-old and get angry with the older brother who hit him, but I know the one who started it was the three-year-old. How to handle this multiple times daily situation?"

Your poor five-year-old, he needs and deserves your protection. It's not fair to expect him to handle the situation by himself. Of course, it is completely natural for the three-year-old to want to play with the five-year-old. Every three-year-old in the world will act as you're describing.

But it's not the five-year-old's job to be able to handle that. It's the parent's job to step in and interrupt this negative cycle as soon as it starts. It's the parent's job is to stop the three-year-old from going in his big brother's

room, stop him from touching his stuff, stop him from calling names.

"It looks like you really want to play with your brother. I hear him saying he can't play with you now. I see that makes you sad. Come with me, sweetheart. Let's go do X, Y, Z." Hopefully, he'll cry. He'll sob his heart out. That's great.

If the five-year-old is having to deal with this himself, no wonder he hits. What you want to say is, "When your brother bothers you, the first thing you do is yell "Mom!" and just get in the way between the three-year-old and your stuff. I will come running because I am always here to help. You never need to resort to hitting your brother."

Question 38:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:56:45

A parent asks, "My two oldest boys will fight multiple times a day. The five-year-old ends up hitting the oldest who is seven. It's very loud and both are screaming. Do I jump in and pull them apart and then wait until they're quiet to try to talk about it? I struggle with what to say. I find when I describe my older son's feelings, he gets even more mad."

The answer to your first question, yes, you do jump in and pull them apart if they're physically fighting, then you separate them and wait until everyone calms down before you try to talk about it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now for what to say. Your goal is for your kids to feel understood, but it doesn't mean you have to actually describe your seven-year-old's feelings. Often, that can feel invasive. There's an article on the Aha! Parenting website about that and it can give you more info. It's called "When Empathy Doesn't Work."

https://www.ahaparenting.com/blog/When_Empathy_Doesnt_Work

Instead, echo what he's mad about. "Your brother hit you. No wonder you're mad! You can tell your brother how you feel." Your goal, of course, is to coach them to learn how to talk to each other when they're angry. There's an example of a script from the Aha! website: "How to intervene in a sibling fight", and there are many more scripts in *Peaceful Parent, Happy Siblings*.

https://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/siblings/siblings_fight

Question 39:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:58:01

Our next question is from a parent who says, "Our older girl, 10, is often mean to our seven-year-old. Part of it is her anxiety issues and frequent emotional outbursts, but she's often mean to her at other times as well. She calls our younger daughter fat, tells her she has a big butt and other hurtful comments, which our little girl believes. In a calm moment, we can discuss this with our older daughter, and she gets sad and disappointed with herself, but then she's right back at it later in the day."

I don't know how long your family has been doing peaceful parenting. If you've just begun with this course, so your 10-year-old might get a lot better as you use the tools. My concern is that she's already 10, and that's pretty old, and she's miserable. She's showing you she's miserable, and you've already talked with her many times about this behavior. She wants to do better, but she relapses into this kind of behavior again the very same day. She just can't seem to stop herself from being cruel to her sister. She

needs to make her sister feel bad because she feels so bad inside herself.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think your oldest really needs support with this before she gets any older. 10 is already pretty old to be intervening and, obviously, it's not fair to your seven-year-old to have to endure this. There's research that shows that that kind of treatment, that kind of casual cruelty really, it's bullying. It has really harmful effects on the self-esteem of the recipient. Unless you've just started Peaceful Parenting and you're really seeing things on a positive momentum here, I think you should go to family therapy with both your girls. I know that might seem extreme just for some casually cruel comments, but you've been working on this already with your oldest for a while and it isn't getting better. I think you need some outside support to change the momentum on this and intervene on behalf of your youngest, and also on behalf of your oldest from whom this is a cry for help.

Question 40:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:00:10

Our next question is from a parent who says, "Our four and a half-year-old is constantly tattling on the three-year-old and tries to discipline the younger one for any perceived misbehavior. The older child seems genuinely distressed when the younger one breaks the rules, even for seemingly trivial things like saying it's sunny outside when it's actually raining."

First of all, you just say to your oldest, "Thank you, Sweetheart. You're really trying hard to make sure all the rules in our home are followed, aren't you? That's great that you know the rules and even that you know what the weather is doing. It is the mom and dad's job to make sure the rules are followed. You are not the parent. It's not your job to correct your sibling. I will take care of that,

Sweetheart. I'm in charge of making sure that the little one knows the rules and learns them and listens."

Dr. Laura Markham:

As far as tattling goes, tattling is only going to be an issue if you have the concept in your home of children "getting in trouble." If you get rid of that concept entirely, there won't be any tattling because, well, why would there be? Your oldest doesn't have to get your youngest in trouble, right? And there shouldn't be that concept. There's no such thing as getting in trouble. We all try to follow the rules.

Sometimes we make mistakes and then we do need to make a repair, but I think that's done supportively and it's really different than getting in trouble. But I think if you can change your approach to be supportive of your child when they make a mistake, you'll have a lot less tattling as well.

Question 41:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:01:54

Our next question is from a parent who asks, "We've been doing these practices for years. They work wonders. Our oldest has some impulse control issues. The pattern is often that he will out of nowhere hit a sibling and then his feelings are discharged so there's not much to talk about."

I don't think that's necessarily true. I think there's a lot to talk about, especially because your son is 11, he's not two. Now, his hitting may seem to come out of nowhere, but there is always a reason a kid hits.

Dr. Laura Markham:

It might be he's mad at the sibling, but he can't articulate why, it's just a chip on the shoulder and jealousy, or it might be that it has nothing to do with the sibling. The sibling is just an easy target.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Either way, your son still needs to make a repair. There's a discussion about that, unless he's also saying, "Oh, I'm so sorry I hit you. I'm going to do your chore for you and make things better. I want you to trust me again." If he's doing that, then you're right. There's no need for a discussion.

You give him a hug and you might say, "You must get tired of doing your sibling's chores. I wonder what you could do so you could remember next time and not hit them?" But I'm not hearing from you that this is what's happening.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Absolutely there needs to be a discussion and of course, you start with empathy. "You must have been pretty upset to hit your sibling." Now either, your son says, "Yeah I was, but I'm not upset anymore." Or he says, "Yeah I was, but I don't know why." Or he says, "Well, I wasn't really upset."

If he says he wasn't really upset, that's hard, because something was bothering him and I would just say that (to him.) "Well, something must have been bothering you, Sweetheart because you did hit your sibling, and it hurt your sibling. It's never okay to hit, no matter what, right?"

If he does say, "Yeah, I was mad. My sibling did X, Y, Z," you commiserate with that. "Yeah, boy, siblings can be a total pain. I can see why it would upset you that your sibling did X, Y, Z, and no matter what, hitting is never okay. I know it can be hard to stop yourself, but it's really not okay. It hurt your sibling's body and it hurt your relationship. I wonder what you could do now to make things better and restore trust and and fix things with your sister or brother?" There's **always** a discussion about repair.

Question 42:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:04:19 This parent asks, "When my kids hurt each other, I try to get to the heart of the matter either in the moment or later when they're calm, but it seems they hurt each other out of nowhere.

The sister trips brother as he walks past, et cetera. I love the problem solving strategies in your sibling book, but my kids can't tell me why they hurt each other so how can we engage in the process?"

Dr. Laura Markham: When your boy walks by and his sister trips him, you say to her, "Whoa, Whoa, Whoa, that could really hurt somebody." And then say to your son, "You can tell your sister that you don't like that." And he says, "Don't trip me. That's not kind. Our family rule is be kind."

At that point, you've just had a process. She doesn't have to know why she tripped him. I think what you say then is, "Were you mad at your brother? Because you can tell him you're mad without hurting him."

Dr. Laura Markham: She might say, "No, I just wanted to see what it would be like if I tripped him." And you say, well, I guess she's six, right? You say, "You know what? Power is very seductive, but hitting somebody, hurting somebody, tripping somebody is never okay no matter what. Next time you feel like seeing what would happen if you trip your brother, what could you do?" Right?

Dr. Laura Markham: There's a whole process that you go through and then you say, "Well, I see why it was seductive to trip him. You thought it'd be funny to see what would happen. I get it Honey." Right? And I'm assuming by the way, there was no actual anger, as you're saying.

If that's true, you can still have the conversation I've just outlined. And then you say, "Sweetheart, you need to make this up to your brother. You need to fix things. If he

thinks you're just going to attack him out of nowhere, he's not going to want to be close to you. And I know when you're mad, you forget how much you like each other, but I also see you have so much fun together sometimes. So I wonder what you could do to make things better so you can fix your relationship with your brother again?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

That should be your expectation. That after a child hurts someone else or hurts property belonging to someone else, they do have to make a repair, and make things better. It's not punishment and they're allowed to come up with it, but of course, the other person is sort of the arbiter of whether it's enough, right?

If she says, "All right, I'll smile at him like this. Sorry." And her brother says, "That doesn't make me feel better." Then you can say, "It doesn't look like that really did the job for a repair, Honey, you're going to have to think about that one a little harder. I know you'll come up with something to make things better, and I look forward to seeing what it is."

Question 43:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:07:05

Our next question is from a parent who says, "At age five, my daughter began having fits for the first time. I think it was resentment from years of letting the baby, who's very strong-willed, get his way.

I no longer do that and I do stick up for her, but she feels he constantly gets bigger, better things even when it's actually fair. She's not flexible. She gives him a turn, but demands things back quickly. When he doesn't, she has a fit. Also, she has fits when she's told "No."

First of all, this sounds hard, and it does sound like your daughter has a lot of feelings from years of feeling like she was treated unfairly compared to her brother, that he got

to have his way, and it's true. That's not fair. And naturally, she feels bad about it and she has some old wounds that need to get healed.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would use that during your special time with her to do play with her about who gets to have their way. For instance, there are two stuffed animals where they're both kids, sibling kids, and one of them wants his way because he's the baby and the other one says, "But you always get your way." And play games with her and let her be in charge of how those things turn out. And do not stick up for anybody in those games.

She's the director of those games. And you'll see over and over again, she will insist on winning, if she's the stuffed animal girl, older child and that's great. She gets to express how she feels about the fact that the other sibling always wins and always gets what he wants and it's not fair.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Help her work that through, and get her laughing about it by being really silly in those games. Do puppet shows that address this theme and be really silly about it. The more she laughs about it, the more she gets that worked through.

Now, the not fair thing. I would talk with her directly about it and about what happened in the past and how sorry you are and how hard you work now to have things be fair and I would do your best to make things fair, but as you know, that's a hard thing to do.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If you haven't read my sibling book yet, it has a lot of information on this specific thing, when kids think something's not fair and how you can try to work with them on that and what kinds of strategies to use.

Also, I don't know if you've listened to the sibling week yet, week 11, but it's designed for kids who have a chip on their shoulder about the sibling and your daughter's chip on the shoulder may be more understandable and more

excusable, but she still has one and she still needs your help to work it out.

Dr. Laura Markham:

All of that is in that week. Make sure to listen to it and use that guidance. As far as sharing goes, I would not have her share with him ever. You say that she gives him a turn with things so that's great and then she demands it back quickly.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would talk about the house rule that self-regulated turns mean she can't get it back. When she gives it to him, it's then his turn and he gets to decide how long to use it. I would write that down. Everybody sign it or initial it or whatever and that's the rule, and you remind her of it and you enforce it. And she will cry and wail and say it's not fair and that's fine. That's good, even, that she gets those feelings out because as I say, these are old wounds. As long as your children understand the sharing rule, which is the self-regulated turns rule, you'll find that even though initially they might do some crying about it, pretty soon it will settle back into a routine that's really much easier for everybody to handle.

And for the fits when she's told No and the fact that the strong-willed, younger brother triggers her, I mean that's just feeling fragile, like nobody's looking out for her, because that's how she felt for so long. I think you're going to give her a very different experience of that now and you're also going to help her cry about the times when that was true. And you're going to apologize to her about it. And I think you'll see some real change in the way she relates to her brother after that.

Question 44:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:11:36

Our next question is from a parent who says, "In the past year before we started learning about peaceful parenting,

our family meetings and fun time ended with major sibling rivalry and us as parents getting upset about it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Lately, our oldest child refuses to participate in family meetings and family game night. She says she knows she'll end up fighting with her sister and it won't be fun. She sulks outside the room looking like she wants to come and join us, but refuses. What can we do to help her be more willing to join us?"

Well, I would say that you need to heal what happened before when there was major sibling rivalry, when she got mad at her sister and fought with her sister and when you as parents got upset about that, which I assume means that she got in trouble, that you didn't know how to handle it when she was mean to her sister or mad at her sister and therefore mean to her sister.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You probably yelled at her and told her she was wrong and maybe punished her, and no, it was not fun. What she's saying is, "Hey mom, dad, that was really traumatizing to me. I don't want to have anything to do with anything that might cause that situation again."

I would say work out the trauma. Talk to her about how you didn't know how to handle it and how you shouldn't have punished her for that and you're so sorry and there was a reason she was angry at her sister -- which was family games where her sister won or whatever -- and that she won't always be able to win, but you will always help her, and you won't blame her.

Get her talking about what happened, empathize with how hard it was for her and how she felt so trapped that here she was angry at her sister, but couldn't do anything about it and her parents didn't understand and blamed her if that's indeed what happened.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Apologize and understand now. I think you'll see that it will go a long way toward healing what happened. And

then make a plan with her for things to be different on family game night. Go online, you can look on my website in the section that has recommended gifts for children.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Just put the word recommended and it should show you that section.

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/recommended/school-age>

There are many wonderful cooperative games that would help your five-year-old and your eight-year-old team up and be partners, rather than being at odds with each other which will indeed provoke rivalry and make them fight.

Work with your daughter to find such a game, buy that game as a family present for everybody, but you might even think of buying it as a present from your daughter to the rest of the family -- and she can learn with your help, behind the scenes, secretly, to play the game -- and then when she gives it to the family, she can explain to everybody and teach them how to play the game and be like the team leader. And there's no rivalry because everyone works together.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I'm betting in such a situation, your daughter would be willing to participate in family game night to lead that game, and that having a warm, good experience will help her to, in the future, want to do family games.

Now, family meeting, I'm not sure why the family meeting got out of hand. It might have been because someone in your family brought up something, maybe the five-year-old or maybe the eight-year-old, that was a source of tension between the two of them and it didn't get handled well and she got really angry and stormed off and then you got angry at her.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think what you can say to her is, you would love her to come to a family meeting and in this family meeting, there

will be zero criticism of her and zero issues having to do with her, but you have an important job for her to do. You need a family secretary to write down the agreements of what happens, or to write down the appreciations that happen, in your family appreciations book.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If you want more information about how to have an excellent family meeting, there is an article on the Aha! Parenting website. Just put in family meetings and you'll find it. It talks about how to make sure that family meetings are happy and productive and leave everyone with good feelings instead of there being fighting.

There's zero reason for there to ever be fighting at a family meeting. Family meetings are not a place for discipline to ever happen, that happens outside of a family meeting. Family meetings are a time for children to solve problems, but even more important than that, they are for the children to develop warm feelings toward each other and toward their parents because they're being listened to and they're being supported to problem solve effectively.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Your daughter is already eight. I wonder if you could enroll her with you to create a house book that is your record of the important decisions that get made at family meetings, including maybe the appreciations.

Take a look at some articles online and work with your daughter to come up with a good framework for meetings so that they're happy. I would make sure dessert is always served, and she can be the one to decide at the first meeting that she is now coming to what that dessert will be, that first meeting with your new format, let's say, your new overhauled format. And of course, the five-year-old can decide the next time and the three-year-old can decide the next time and you'll go around round-robin on it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Maybe even the adults get to decide what the dessert will be some times, but my point is that you now have to work

hard to help her feel like family meetings are a fun thing. Finally, I would help her feel like she can handle it if something happens that's not so fun for her.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If somebody does say, "Well, eight-year-old, you've been dilly-dallying in the morning and it's made us get out of the house late to get everybody to school." If someone says something like that to her -- of course you'll make sure it doesn't happen in the first meeting or two -- how would she handle it?

I think what you're seeing is, she's refusing to let herself get trapped with that kind of a situation that she doesn't know how to handle. I would ask her, "If something happens like that, how will you handle it?" And help her feel empowered that she actually could handle it. And then as you ease her back into the first meeting where she gets to choose the dessert, stay very connected to her so that she knows you're there, you're on her side, you'll stick up for her, she doesn't have to fight this out by herself if things feel hard to her, you're there as her secure person who will help her.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think you also have three younger children, so that could be quite a challenge for you, but you also have a partner who can maybe manage the one-year-old. And before you go into the meeting, do a lot of laughing so she's not anxious going into the meeting. And agree on some sort of secret code or handshake so that she knows that you're there and all she has to do is to make the little signal and you'll help her in whatever situation she feels is too hard for her in the family meeting.

As I talk about this, I want to tell you that I'm seeing you have an eight-year-old, five-year-old, three-year-old and a one-year-old and I'm seeing her feeling that she gets in a position where she doesn't have any support, that you're supporting everybody else.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I want to urge you to read my sibling book so that you know how to handle things when your kids get mad at each other, without the oldest one having to bear the weight of it, because it just creates more resentment and more sibling rivalry and it also estranges the older from you and well obviously, from the siblings and from the family.

I'm wondering if that might be part of what's happening here, if she's feeling like you're somehow aligned with the younger children, but not with her. I could be wrong about this, but if that rings true to you, I invite you to use this opportunity to heal not only family meetings and family game night, but also to deepen your relationship with your oldest.

I hope that works. Family meetings are a wonderful thing. They really do bring your family closer, but listening to your experience, I'm reminded that families do need to know some basic ground rules about how to have them, so kids don't end up fighting at them.

Question 45:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:20:50

A parent asks, "When dealing with a spat between my children, for instance, one bashing the other when provoked, while I'm trying to stay empathic and connected and nonjudgmental, and no matter what I say, the bickering carries on in front of me. My oldest puts her hands over her ears whenever I'm trying to say anything empathic or understanding. Maybe she thinks I'm preaching or I'm not fully connected, but I don't even have time to get the words out before the bashing or provoking continues right in front of me."

First of all, if there's bashing that continues in front of you, you step in between them to stop the bashing. Your words

are not going to be successful at this moment. She's still furious and she wants to bash her sibling.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You step in between them to stop the bashing, separate them first, talking happens later after that. If it's just the bickering that continues, that's completely predictable, right? Because they're angry at each other.

She's still angry at her brother and she is not going to listen to what you have to say. She's going to tell him how angry she is and at that point, I would still get between them and I would make a connection with her, in her eyes.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would get between them. You can put your hands on her shoulders and say, "Whoa, Whoa, Whoa. You're mad. We're going to solve this." You're raising your voice, right? Even though you're being empathic in the sense of you're going to acknowledge her perspective, you're not taking a calm, soothing tone at this moment.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You're taking a leadership role. You're saying, "Whoa, Whoa." If she's lashing out at him verbally, you say, "We're going to solve this, I'm right here." And that is soothing in the sense that someone is taking charge, the grownup is taking charge, and that, of course, is your job.

If she continues to try to talk around you to him you say, "Sweetheart, I'm talking to you. Stop yelling at your brother, we're going to work this out." And you're making eye contact with her.

You're making her basically respond to you, look at you and if she looks at you and says, "I'm so mad at him, I hate him." This is a win, right? Because actually, she's now relating to you, not continuing to attack him and you say, "I hear you. You are so mad at him. You are furious at him." Right?

Dr. Laura Markham:

She's already now listening to you. She's beginning to get what you're saying. I think when she was putting her

hands over her ears, she saw you as interrupting her important job, which was setting her brother straight. And she didn't see that you could be helpful to her.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Maybe in the past you have come in and corrected her, because he's three years younger. You've been correcting her and she assumes you're going to correct her now, but for whatever reason, she just wants you out of her way so she can continue what she's doing.

Your job is to get in between them, have her relate to you, and then you can acknowledge what she's saying. That's the empathy part, but remember, you're not taking a soft tone. You're matching her level of energy even though you're not being punitive with her, you're acknowledging the passion that she is feeling at this moment about what is wrong. That's how she feels understood.

She feels like, "Yeah, mom gets it. She sees I'm upset." You might even say that you see why she's upset if you do see why, right? Then you may have to separate your kids. She may have to calm down more before you can get the six-year-old and the three-year-old talking.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The dialogues and scripts that I have on my website often have you talking to both kids at once, but that's assuming that they're not continuing to yell at each other at that moment.

It may be that you have to separate them first and you might pick the three-year-old up and take him out of the room and calm him down first and then come back to the six-year-old or you might ignore her for a minute, give him a hug and say, "I'll be right back Sweetie. You go ahead and play with this. I'm just going to help your sister for a minute."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then you might pick the six-year-old up and take her out of the room. The problem with doing that is that then you're increasing her sense that she was somehow bad or

wrong or you're making her bad or wrong and finding fault with her and it makes children feel less safe when we pick them up and move them.

Dr. Laura Markham:

It's not ideal to move the six-year-old if you don't have to, if she's the one who's furious. It's better to move the three-year-old, but of course, you're not making either child bad or wrong, you're reassuring whichever child you move, the problem is if you do pick the three-year-old up and move him, will the six-year-old feel a need to follow you and set you straight about the problem? You're going to have to play that by ear to see which is going to work best, but probably, you'll have to separate them before you can actually help each one of them work out their feelings and then you can bring them back together and do some negotiating between them about whatever's wrong and help them to see each other's point of view.

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 and leave your question as a voice memo. This is Dr. Laura Markham wishing you less drama and more love. Goodbye for now.