

## Social Skills and Friendships Q and A with Dr. Laura Markham

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:00:00 Hello, this is Dr. Dr. Laura Markham. In this audio, I'll be answering some of the most common questions that parents ask about social skills and friendships. Remember, we're always applying our three big ideas. We start by regulating our own emotions and behavior. Then, we connect with our child. Finally, instead of trying to control our child, we coach them, to be their best self. Both, by helping them with their emotions, and by creating an environment where the child can thrive. So, let's see how to apply these three big ideas to daily life with children.

### Question 1:

Parent 1: 00:00:41 My question is about my daughter, she's four years old. I've been using your tools, and it's been great in every area of our lives, apart from one, which is her social skills. So, very often she tells me she doesn't like people, which is a bit sad for me to hear that. I'm very social, so I don't know. When I ask her why she says this kind of thing, why she doesn't like people, she usually says because they are angry at her. I don't know what happened, but she has this going on.

Parent 1: A lot of times I feel she's rude to my friends, and to their children. Her father and I are always a bit shocked with the way she's a bit ... Yeah, not very polite to people, because we are very polite to each other, her father and I. I don't think she's ever seen us being rude to people, or to our friends, so we're like, where is this coming from? We are puzzled. Of course, we're not perfect, but I don't think she sees us being rude to people.

Parent 1: To give you a few examples, she says things like, "I don't like you," to a friend of mine. Or, she says, "I don't want to talk to you," or she turns her back on people, which I feel very embarrassed when she does that.

- Dr. Laura Markham: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Parent 1: Yeah, she makes angry faces to people, and she uses angry voices as well. When people come to compliment her, she just says stuff like, " I'm not cute!" Or, "I'm not a princess!" If people say, you're a princess, or you're so cute. She says, "I'm not! I'm not cute."
- Parent 1: I just ... I've been trying to empathize, using the tools and connect with her. She's the only child, I don't know if that makes any difference. We have all this time for her, and we're trying our best, but she's still doing that.
- Parent 1: Another quick example, she learned how to shut her canopy down by herself. So, very often, it's been happening for so long now ... Very often, when people come to say, or to say goodbye to her, or to just talk to her, and she's sitting there in her stroller, she just closes this canopy down on people's faces. At this point, I'm so embarrassed. To be honest, I feel a little bit resentful towards her, because I want to be understanding but, why is she doing that? Why she doesn't like people? I do the peaceful parenting thing, I never correct her, at the moment.
- Parent 1: I just wanted to ask you, is it okay if I set the limit at the moment? I feel a little bit of pressure from my friends, as well.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Mm-hmm (affirmative), Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Parent 1: If I don't say anything, they -
- Dr. Laura Markham: Yes.
- Parent 1: They will think that I'm not raising her properly, not that I worry so much. My main worry is my relationship with my daughter. Is it okay if I tell her, "No, don't close the canopy this way, it's rude?" Usually what I do is, when we are alone, and when she's happier and calm, I talk to her about this canopy thing, or the behavior.

- Dr. Laura Markham: What does she say then?
- Parent 1: She agrees, and she says, "Yes, okay. I'm not going to do this again." Then, she goes ahead and does it again.
- Dr. Laura Markham: But, does she say why she does it?
- Parent 1: Yeah, she just says she doesn't like people.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Mm-hmm. That's all she can...
- Parent 1: Yeah, she can't really explain. She's four, but...
- Dr. Laura Markham: No, I hear you.
- Parent 1: I feel she doesn't have, maybe, the language to explain what she's feeling.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Yeah, she doesn't.
- Dr. Laura Markham: So does she have any other indications of anxiety? What you're describing, actually, is a child who is being aggressive, and aggression comes from fear. Its social anxiety, she feels she can't navigate social situations until she just removes herself. She doesn't know how to handle them.
- Dr. Laura Markham: So, does she have any other anxiety?
- Parent 1: Well, at home, she's totally different. She's not anxious at all, she's not aggressive. She's a very, very good child at home. I don't have any big issues with her.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Does she try new things?
- Parent 1: Not always. She's not really ... Yeah, she hesitates. Yeah.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Right. And in new situations, she probably has a hard time going in if she doesn't know the people?
- Parent 1: She has a hard time. She has a hard time to try climbing up on the playground if it's a new place, yeah.

- Dr. Laura Markham: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Parent 1: If there are people involved, if there are people there ... If she's alone with me, or with her dad, she's fine. She will go ahead and try new things. As long as there are people involved, then she just becomes like a different child. Very miserable, like sad.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Yeah. The way you first talked about this was that she was being rude, and it was embarrassing. I know it comes off as rude, and it is embarrassing. Yes, I think you should set some limits on it. But, the cause of this is not going to be addressed by you setting limits on it.
- Dr. Laura Markham: The cause of this is that your daughter is socially insecure, awkward, worried, afraid. She worries ... I mean, you said, you and your husband are very social. You don't have this, she didn't get this from you. She got it from somebody back, your grandmother, or your mother, who knows who she got it from, on which side of the family? But, she inherited an anxiety about dealing with other people, that says that she can't really trust people, she's a little anxious when they're around. It makes her a little miserable when they're around. She doesn't know the proper way to respond back to them. Even if you try to teach it to her, she's too anxious to remember it in that moment. She just wants to hide, and pull down the cover on her stroller, right? That's what's going on with her.
- Dr. Laura Markham: So, we could set some limits, and we'll talk about how to do that, but it doesn't address the problem. What we really need to do is we need to help her start to feel like she can actually navigate situations.
- Parent 1: Right.
- Dr. Laura Markham: The way to do that is to give her the words to navigate. So, I suggest, instead of a limit, which will just make her feel more anxious, and like she doesn't know what to do, I would talk to her about it -

- Parent 1: Yeah. If I set the limits in front of people, she would scream.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Exactly.
- Parent 1: I think she feels embarrassed.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Yeah, exactly. You can't do that in front of people.
- Dr. Laura Markham: So, I would say, when you're at home with her, and you have a conversation, and she says, "I just don't like them, but I'll try to do what you're saying and not be rude." I think, there's a better way to talk about it. The way to talk about it with her is, "I noticed you wanted to pull the cover down on your stroller, and you didn't really want to talk to our neighbor, when our neighbor was saying hi to you today. Did that feel awkward to you?"
- Dr. Laura Markham: "No, I just don't like our neighbor!"
- Dr. Laura Markham: "You don't even really know our neighbor, Sweetheart, but I guess when our neighbor comes and talks to you, it makes you feel not good inside, right? It makes you feel a little bit anxious. Is that what happens? Well, no wonder you feel like you don't like him coming to talk to you, because it makes you feel anxious, right?" Then, you say, "I understand. Don't worry. Here's what you can say to the neighbor. Hello, Mr. Jones. I'm feeling very quiet today. Nice to see you. Goodbye." You know, whatever.
- Parent 1: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Dr. Laura Markham: You can say to her, "I won't make you stay and talk to him, I'll chat with him." You know, give her the shortest possible thing that she could reasonably say in this situation, that she can use over and over again, in different situations. Like, you know, "Hello," and some way to excuse herself.
- Parent 1: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

- Dr. Laura Markham: She's allowed to say, "I'm feeling quiet today," or something. And say, "Talk to you next time, have a good day." You know, she's allowed to do something like that, she is only four.
- Parent 1: Yeah.
- Dr. Laura Markham: She needs to know that you will ... If she's not in the stroller, if you're walking with her, pick her up, hold her if she's expected to engage with somebody, that increases her sense of security. If she's holding your hand, or if you even pick her up ... I know she's four, so she's big, but even if you pick her up and hold her in your arms while she has to deal with somebody, it will help her feel more secure, so she doesn't have to be so aggressive to try to protect herself.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Really, all she's doing is trying to protect herself, right?
- Parent 1: Right, yeah.
- Dr. Laura Markham: That's really what's going on.
- Dr. Laura Markham: I would also begin to read books with her, about social interaction. Read the book before you read it to her, to make sure you like it. There are a lot of books about social issues on the Aha! Parenting website. Read some books, and discuss them with her. Discuss does she think she could say that? Or, what about when she feels shy? What could she do?
- Parent 1: I'll try those new tips, yeah.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Good luck.
- Parent 1: Thank you very much. I love..
- Dr. Laura Markham: You're welcome.
- Parent 1: It was very, very helpful. Thank you, Laura.

Dr. Laura Markham: I'm so glad.

Parent 1: Bye. Thank you. Bye.

### Question 2:

Parent 2: 00:10:23.5 So, I have a six year old who has various issues with anxiety, mostly separation anxiety. My specific question, though, is when he's a school, he often ... He's got a close group of friends, and he'll come home really upset. He's fallen out with them, and somebody has said something he doesn't like. Because he's rather upset, he lashes out. He does that verbally at school. He'll say, "Oh, I hate you, I'm never going to play with you again." Obviously, being on the receiving end of that is really hard for his friends. So, he, I guess, gets the obvious result of that.

Parent 2: I'm trying to talk to him about how we might handle these conflicts more respectfully, so it doesn't have that consequence. His immediate response is, "I don't want to talk about this, let's put it behind us." I don't know how to get past that barrier?

Dr. Laura Markham: That's a hard one, because, truthfully, no one wants to see their failings, right?

Dr. Laura Markham: I think you have to do it as a puppet show. I don't mean you need a puppet stage or anything. You can just grab some stuffed animals and say, "Hey, let's have a puppet show! Let's pretend they're going to school!"

Have a falling out with the kids. Don't make it too close to home for him, make it a little bit different because you don't want him to get that you're actually trying to teach him something that's a lesson. But, ask him what to do.

Say, "Oh, no! It hurt his feelings, didn't it? What should he say to them?" Have him give advice to the character in the

puppet show. Make sure it's fun. Do these puppet shows more than once, so you have different scenarios. Start with something more innocuous, so he doesn't run in the other direction. Get him laughing with it, so that he thinks they're fun, and he wants to do more of the puppet shows.

But, ask him, what should this character do when these friends hurt his feelings like that? What should he do? I think you'll see that he'll be interested, and he'll pay attention as you do it, a lot more than if you tried to teach him a lesson about it.

- Dr. Laura Markham: I would read him books about friendships, both fiction and non-fiction books, so he can see how to handle these kind of situations. I think that will also help him give him tools, so that he can envision, when somebody says something hurtful, you don't just say I hate you, you say, no, don't say that to me! That hurts my feelings, right? Or whatever. Right?
- Parent 2: Yeah.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Give him some more tools to use.
- Parent 2: Okay.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Okay?
- Parent 2: Yeah.
- Dr. Laura Markham: All right.
- Parent 2: Do you have any suggestions on the books?
- Dr. Laura Markham: Go to the Aha! Parenting website. I don't know, off the top of my head, but there are many, many books on social skills on the Aha! Parenting website.
- Parent 2: Okay.

Dr. Laura Markham: So, I think if you look in the social skills area, there's a page of books, or maybe they're just at the bottom of articles.

Parent 2: Okay. Thank you very much, that's extremely helpful.

### Question 3:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:13:22.5 Moving onto a question here about this daughter's social skills, a six year old, who has a hard time picking up social cues. One thing that she does is, she's very physical with other kids, especially when she wants to connect with them. She touches them, hugs them, picks them up, puts her hands on their heads or their bodies. It sounds like you're doing a great job of giving her reminders before any social connection, but it still happens every time, which I know is frustrating for you, and for her.

Dr. Laura Markham: I love that you're doing roughhousing with her, to get her laughing, and to fill her need for physical contact, that's fantastic. I'm interested that you say that she is very rough with you, and that you really have to set limits as you're doing roughhousing, because she hurts you. Not because she means to hurt, but she doesn't really seem to understand where the boundaries are, and she's impulsive. So, that's a clue, I think, to what's going on with her as well.

Dr. Laura Markham: I would say ... You asked, are you missing a need that you're not filling of hers? I would say, no. That's not what's happening here. She was born this way, this is who she is. She might be on the spectrum, just very mildly so. Some kids who are on the spectrum do have this issue, but other kids who simply have sensory processing issues have this issue. So, it just may be that.

Dr. Laura Markham: I would say she needs an OT. She's already six, unfortunately, and the earlier we intervene with sensory issues, the better, because that's when the brain is wiring up. But, I would say, get her an OT right away. I'd also say

you should get a social skills group for her. She's already six, we don't want her to get older and not have those skills. It's not just the physical boundaries. You mentioned that cues, in general, are an issue for her.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, the thing they do at social skills groups, they'll teach them things like, walking with Frankenstein arms, which are straight out all the way. That's what you use when you're in the grocery store, you don't get closer than that to other people. You don't walk with your arms out, Frankenstein style, at the store, but that's how you learn that's the proper amount of space for someone you don't know very well. Then, you might use robot arms, that's when they're bent from the elbow out, but they're rigidly in front of you. Robot arms are for things like getting in line at school. So, you do need to get in line, you can't have your arms out in a line at school. You need to be closer to the other kids, but robot arms work, with a bent elbow out. That's the space you need to not be in someone else's space, even when you're in line. These kids often end up hanging on the kid in front of them line, or bumping into kids in line, and they're always getting in trouble for that a school.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, that's an example of the kind of thing they teach in a social skills class. There's a website called [SocialThinking.com](http://SocialThinking.com). They have a book called **You are a Social Detective**, which is designed to teach kids social cues, basically. The idea is, every kid is a social detective, trying to figure out the social cues. There's also a website called Model Me Kids, which has videos that are meant to teach kids social skills that will allow them to use appropriate judgment.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Finally, my last idea for her, how about a self defense class? You know, you say that she's really rough when you roughhouse. She may be one of those kids who really needs to use her body in extreme physical ways, and even aggressive ways. My daughter, who is a natural athlete, was completely bored with all of that stuff, no interest in team sports, no interest in dance. You know what she liked to do? She loves martial arts. She actually finds something

about the doing martial arts, which is very physical, where you flip people onto their backs and stuff, to be very rewarding.

Dr. Laura Markham:

There are just people like this, who their engagement is at a high level. It can be affectionate engagement, and it can be, you know, rivalrous engagement, I guess I would say. I would just consider ... She would have to know to follow the rules of the teacher, she couldn't inadvertently just go ballistic and start kicking the other kids because she wanted to. But, it might be that a self defense class would be great for her, because it would give her that outlet. Also, if she was connected to the self defense teacher, and wanted to please them, they are very clear about the self discipline, and when you are allowed to do what with your body, and what's appropriate to do with your body at different times. It might be you'd find that it would really be helpful to her. You know, I would say, give it a try and see what you think.

#### Question 4:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:17:50

This question is about a spirited seven year old who invades other kids' space. Talks too loud, puts his hands on other people's bodies, and other kids get upset at him. He feels ashamed of himself, but he can't really control himself. They've tried lots of ways to read books about boundaries, and talk about it, and roughhouse with him. Those are all great things, keep that up.

I would say, he also needs some sort of a social skills group, or OT, or therapy about this issue. This is something that he isn't understanding, and we don't need that shame to increase, he's seven years old. That's old enough that he really needs to be getting along better with other kids. So,

we want the shame to fade away as he has some success with peers. I'd say, get him some help now, don't wait.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Do, when you talk with him, focus on the good parts of who he is. You know, there's a downside to this quality in himself, but there's an upside. He likes people, he's comfortable being close to people. He has a lot of energy, he's not a shrinking violet. Talk about those things, in a positive way.

Dr. Laura Markham:

In the moment, when he's infringing on somebody else's space, you mention that it doesn't help if you just empathize with him. No, he needs you to really intervene in a firm way, but that doesn't mean you have to raise your voice to him, you don't need to yell at him. Just get in there yourself and say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, Honey. Not so close!" You need a code word with him. "Not so close! You can tell him in a quieter voice...that's loud." So that he knows what you're telling him about how to better navigate the situation.

### Question 5:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:19:24

This parent asks: "I tell my kids that hitting is bad, and we don't hit no matter what, but my husband wants them to hit back at school if somebody hits them or pushes them, so they can defend themselves." Um, No. They should be taught that they should always walk away and get a teacher. Otherwise, you're teaching your kid to hit. There can't be one rule at home and one rule at school. They walk away, and they get an adult, period. No matter what.

### Question 6:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:19:49.5

This parent asks: "Should you do anything to encourage a shy child to interact more with peers? He's shy, and he rarely interacts with other kids at pre-school and birthday parties. At playgrounds, he'll run around the perimeter, he

won't play with other kids. But, if he knows some child better, he will interact and play when they come over to play one on one."

That's wonderful! That's wonderful, that he will play when they come over to play, one on one. And yes, you're asking if I recommend more play dates for practice? Yes.

He says, "He doesn't want anyone over to play." You and your husband, it says here, "My husband and I are both introverts, so we can really relate to him, but should we help him?" Yes, I think you should help him.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think you should do some play dates, but don't bill it as a play date exactly. Get together with, maybe, another family. Give the children something to do, like an art project, or a Lego to play with, or something that they can do, that your child really enjoys doing, but is willing to do with another child, without being worried about sharing it. Help your child just be with another kid, but keep it short. Don't have them over to dinner on Friday night where they're going to stay forever. Have them come over for an ice cream cone and an hour, on a Thursday afternoon. Or, go to the park with them, even, and let the kids play together, one on one, at the playground, without even doing it at home. That way, you can say when it's time to leave.

Dr. Laura Markham:

That way, your child will get some chance, at least, to play with other kids. You know, you could even consider doing some sort of a therapeutic group for him, with other kids. It depends on how uncomfortable he is. If he really, literally, is age five and never plays with other kids, I would really, seriously consider that. I think that might be really helpful to him.

### Question 7:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:21:38

This parent asks what to do when another child is mean to her almost three year old at the park, or at a play date?

I would say, you empathize, and not just with her feelings, but you also stand up for her, and you model for her how to do it. You coach her.

Absolutely, you say something to the aggressor. When another kid pushes her, you say, "Ouch!" You look at your daughter and you say, "That hurt, didn't it? Ouch! You don't like being pushed." Then, you coach your child. "You can say to this child" ... If she knows who the child is, great ... If not, still okay." You can say to this child, "Don't push. Hands off my body. Pushing hurts." You give your daughter the words for it, and you look right at the other child as you say it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If the other parent is there, and says, "What are you saying to my child?" You can say, "I was just helping my daughter learn what to say when someone pushes her, because I guess your child just pushed her. It happens, it's okay. I was helping my child know what to say." Hands off my body, pushing hurts."

### Question 8:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:22:42

This parent asks if it's ever okay to use a small material incentive to encourage positive behavior with peers? This is with a five year old, who has been inappropriately acting with peers. Like, acting like a jerk on purpose.

It's not that it's a terrible idea to do that, but it does seem like there's a reason he's doing it. If he's acting like a jerk with peers, you want to help him not be a jerk with peers. The material incentive is not really getting to the bottom of what the problem is.

I know you told him that he knows how to play nicely with his friends, and that if he used those good skills, he could get a sticker or something, he could choose an item. Then, he did it. That's amazing! He apparently knows how to do it, like you said. He knows how to say, "I don't feel like

playing right now," or, "I need a little space." So, that's great!

Dr. Laura Markham:

"The first time, it was a very fun and successful play date, and he seemed happy and proud of himself." I think that's cool, actually. And, things have much improved since then? I have no problem with your doing this. I think, if it's working, it's working. It sounds like it gave him some extra incentive to do it, and you know what? Thank goodness you stumbled on it. It's not the kind of thing I would normally recommend, but I'm not going to argue with success. I don't think it's a negative thing. If it stops working, obviously, stop doing it.

### Question 9:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:24:02

This parent asks: "We do fine as a family since I started your course, but when my nine year old has a friend visiting, he wants to show off how cool he is by being disrespectful to me. He'll act out with words or aggression." Ooh, ouch. She also says, "You already changed our family life, and it's only week six." So I'm delighted that you're seeing changes in your family already, that's a testament to **your** hard work. Yay for you, and for everyone listening who is seeing changes. I would say, applaud every change, even if you're not yet where you want to be. That's really important. Give yourself credit.

So, about your son's disrespect? It's so interesting to me that he does it only in front of another kid, which signals to me that he desperately needs peer approval. So, I would talk to him about that, when he's alone with you. Like, he's showing off for them, but he's purposely hurting you. He's purposely damaging his relationship with you, to build himself up in the eyes of his friend. Ask him, like, when he goes over to a friend's house, and the friend is disrespectful to their parent, does he admire that? Does he admire the friend, does he actually want to be like that person? Ask him if he actually wants to hurt you.

- Dr. Laura Markham: Again, I would make an agreement with him about behavior. He's already nine. I would tell him, if he is disrespectful, or aggressive, with a friend there, then you're not going to want friends to be there. Make an agreement with him, and tell him in advance. You know, "When your friend comes over, remember our agreement. If you're disrespectful, we're going to need to send your friend home."
- Dr. Laura Markham: So, of course, it's still going to happen, right? If he does act disrespectfully when a friend is over, what you say is, "Ouch. It sounds like you're trying to hurt my feelings, and it worked. Do you think your friend so-and-so needs ..." You're saying this right in front of the friend. "... your friend needs to go home, so you and I can work this out, or can you just come in the other room with me for a minute to work this out?" Of course, he'll go in the other room with you, because he doesn't want his friend to leave. At that point, you keep a light touch. You point out you have an agreement, and if this keeps up, the friend is going to have to go home. You try to laugh a little bit, and you try to have a hug, but you tell him you're going to have to follow through and send the friend home, call the friend's mother, if he keeps up the disrespect.
- Dr. Laura Markham: You know, he's trying to feel good about himself in front of the friend, and there's something going on there that he needs some support with from you. I would say, reading him books about peers and bullying, because if he's doing this to you, he could be doing it to other kids, to show off for his peers. I think you need to do some preventative work on peer relationships. There's a whole page on the Aha! Parenting website, AhaParenting.com. There's a social intelligence section, and there is a section for elementary schoolers within the social intelligence section. There are a lot of book recommendations.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Check them out, read the Amazon reviews, and see if any of them look like they would fit for you. Read them with him, and talk about them with him. Because there's something that's motivating him. I just see it in different kids, I think it's innate, where some kids are highly

motivated by the crowd. Others, really, could care less. Since he seems to be one of those kids, better to start now, developing an understanding of that, and an understanding of who he wants to be. He doesn't want to be that person, who is nasty to other people, and puts them down to build himself up in the eyes of other people.

### Question 10:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:27:30

This parent asks about the three year old, who has a one-year-old brother, and dominates not only his brother, but smaller kids at the playground. So, you have to be there to physically intervene, you can't expect him not to do that. I know that's hard, since you also have a one-year-old to monitor.

Remember that aggression comes from fear. You're doing all the right things with him, the laughter, the special time. I'm wondering how much he cries? Clearly, he's still worried about his brother taking the things he needs, or he wouldn't be acting this way toward his brother, and toward other kids.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think it's all about the tears for him. Remember, the way into the tears is always the laughter. I would also talk with him about this issue. Just explain that when he's aggressive, you need to leave the playground. Then, follow through. Kindly, calmly, but follow through, take him home. Again, I know it's hard, because you have a one-year-old too, who you have to drag out of the playground at the same time.

### Question 11:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:28:22

This parent asks about her 16 month old, who gets upset and cries when she sees another child crying. Her grandparents think it's because she doesn't get enough time with other children. You know what? She's just

empathic. Vitra, this is not uncommon, actually, from really empathic kids. So, the answer is to give her words for what's happening when she sees another kid. You know, I think her grandparents are thinking, if she's around other kids, she'll see lots of crying, and she won't be bothered by it anymore. So, what are they really saying? Let's have her be around other kids so she goes numb to people's pain? I don't think that's the answer.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think the answer is, yes, she should be around other kids, with you there to help her understand her own reaction to other people's pain. You know, do a lot of taking her to the playground, or to little Mommy and Me classes, so you're there. When something happens, when she sees another child upset and she gets upset, say, "Yes, you're upset because he's crying? See, he's crying? I wonder why he's crying? Oh. That happened, this happened, that's why he's crying. It makes you sad, right? Cause he's sad too, I know. He'll be okay, you'll be okay, I'm right here. You're safe. I wonder if we can help him feel better?" You want to teach her that she's not powerless in the situation, there are things she can do, if indeed there is something she can do.

Dr. Laura Markham:

During the time she doesn't get super upset, but she's just a little upset, great. Again, talk with her about it. Remember, her receptive language is a lot more advanced than her expressive language. She is able to understand a lot of what you say, even if it seems like she can't fully understand it yet.

### Question 12:

Parent 3: 00:29:56

I have a six year old son, and I'm not sure if he's socially awkward. I guess I keep thinking to myself that he is, because I have a brother that's a little Asperger-y.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Parent 3:

I'm not sure what I'm supposed to do about that? Then, I feel like maybe I haven't been parenting correctly, so I feel

like maybe it's just because of that. Now, I'm trying, but it takes time.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think you should not be worried about whether you've been parenting him correctly, and whether that's caused his social awkwardness. I think that social proclivity is usually inherited. It's highly unlikely that your son's social awkwardness is caused by your parenting, really, unless he's had no social opportunities to interact with people at all.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I would say parent as well as you can. You've learned a lot about how to parent in this course. You can keep learning in this course, for the rest of your life... Your son is six. You can spend the next 10 years learning how to parent using this course and the resources that are offered in it. I think that that might help your son feel more confident and secure. But honestly, I don't think it would make him less socially awkward really, most of the time. I think that's an innate thing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If your brother is mildly on the spectrum, your son could be too. That's certainly possible. You said, "I don't know if I'm supposed to do something about that." I'd say if he's having a hard time making friends, it is time to do something about that. If he's having a hard time getting along in a group, in a classroom, yes, it's time to do something about that.

That is something that it's a whole project, right? Read some good books on helping kids with social skills. Find social stories. There's something called social stories. They were originally developed for use with kids who are on the spectrum and they basically teach things that come naturally to the rest of us that might not come naturally to a kid who's on a spectrum.

Dr. Laura Markham:

An example would be, and I love this example, that when boys start to go by themselves into the men's restroom to pee and someone's using the urinal, they pretty much know you don't stare at someone's penis when they're using the urinal. I don't know how they know it, but they

learn that pretty quick. Whereas kids who are on the spectrum don't necessarily know that. That's an example of something you have to teach them. I use that because it's such a striking example, but there are a million little examples like that that we take for granted that kids who are on the spectrum, even mildly on the spectrum, might not know and that might cause social awkwardness. But you can teach kids those things when you use social stories.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I'm suggesting that you make a project out of just sort of looking at what your child needs to learn and figuring out social stories to teach him, or even telling him stories, social stories that would teach him. You can go online and Google social stories and you'll see lots of great examples. Also, give him lots of opportunities to play with other kids with you there coaching, so he can learn, even if it doesn't come to him so naturally. But so that he can learn things like how to join a group of kids when they're playing, right? It turns out that that's a thing that's socially awkward kids don't know. They go barging right in the middle of the group or else they sit on the sidelines and they never ask to play. But in fact, the best way to join the group is to watch for a while and to realize that the kids who are playing don't want their game ruined or interrupted, so you have to find a way to fit into the game that's currently happening, not barge in and take it over or derail it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Teaching kids how to do that and enter a game, a really important basic skill, right?

So I don't think you should be blaming yourself about this. I just think you should make it a project to teach your kid the social skills he needs. You might even talk to the teacher because they've seen lots of kids and if they think your son needs some special support they'll be able to direct you to places to get that special support in your community as well, and that should be really helpful.

**Question 13:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:34:00

This parent asks: "When my son was two -- he's now five -- other kids in the nursery snatched things off and he did not protect his boundaries. Now when kids are being unkind at school, he'll get upset about it at home, but he won't tell the teacher despite us encouraging him and the teacher encouraging him to tell her. Sometimes he won't even tell us about the incident even though we can see he's upset. He shows other signs of anxiety, strapping his shoes super tight, which he's done a couple of times, his hand in his mouth, slouching body language, disrupted sleep."

I would say it's definitely worrisome that he can't stand up for himself verbally or physically. It's upsetting that he sometimes won't talk to you about these experiences of being victimized, which often happens when kids are bullied. They're actually afraid to tell their parents because they feel shame about it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

They worry that if they're being taken advantage of and pushed around by other kids, there must be something wrong with them. They worry that if their parents knew it was happening, their parents would think that there was something wrong with them. It's so sad.

So I would say this calls for a full-on program to support your son to develop his own voice. Some of the elements of that program would be role playing around assertiveness, right? What I'm always saying, you can express your needs and wants, of course without attacking the other person. So I'd do a lot of role playing puppet shows, stuffed animals acting it out. I would act out yourself at home about something you want and how to ask for it and I would give him lots of practice at home doing that. I would set up play dates at home to help him develop strong friendships, to help him feel comfortable and supported in the classroom and to give him someone to turn to and play with.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would do daily roughhousing to reduce his anxiety and also explore themes of fear and power. So physical games that let him dance on the edge of his fears. The way physical games work to get kids laughing, like if you play a bucking Bronco and he's on your back and you're tearing around the house like he's going to get thrown off and then you dump him on the couch and he's shrieking with laughter, that laughter is because he's dancing on the edge of his fear. He's almost going to be shrieking with fear. If he does, obviously you've gone too far, but if he's just laughing, but he's shrieking with laughter, that's great because you're tapping into anxiety, and he's emptying the backpack of anxiety. This is a very important thing to do daily with kids who have any kind of anxiety.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Your son has a lot of anxiety, so any physical games that gets him streaking with laughter are really good. But also play power games with him. Let him push you around. Let him win when you're having a pillow fight or physical roughhousing. Play games where he tells you what to do, like he has a fake remote control to tell you what to do. Always give him the chance to be the more powerful one and outsmart or overpower the terrible monster, which is of course you. "How about I get to be a big monster and be in charge like this? Roar!" Just enough to make you look like you're serious and then say, "And now I'm going to catch you." Then as you start toward him, immediately trip over your own feet, which will puncture the fear that you've triggered in him. So now that you've tapped into that fear, he's going to start laughing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

That's really important. I think in general you want to just play games with him that are going to get him laughing, but specifically do power games that will help him feel more powerful.

I mentioned having stuffed animals do role playing around assertiveness. I would also do a puppet show with stuffed animals where one pushes the other one around, bullying a little bit. You're not going for tears by repeating the reality of something he's experienced. You're going for giggles, which release the same tension. So the underdog

in your puppet show stands up to the bully and has fun with it. Whatever makes your son laugh, do more of it. You can ask your son -- You can be holding the two animals and then say, sort of like sotto voce, "All right, so what should this one say now?" You can ask your son and get him to fill in the blanks of what they should say to help him coach the puppet to stand up for itself.

When you do that, if you do puppet shows like that and if you do roughhousing like that, you may find that after a time of playing like that, he will get angry or he'll dissolve in tears. That means you've helped him get to the heart of his hurt. So embrace those feelings so he can cry. "Oh Sweetie, it's okay to cry about this. I'm right here. I will keep you safe. You're doing a great job with those big feelings."

I think that will free him to be a little less passive. Another way to be less passive, I'm a big fan of developing kids' physical confidence with karate or other martial arts training. I don't love all martial arts training, but check it out and see how the other parents feel about it and how the other kids in a class feel about it. But I think quite often it develops kids' physical competence and it's great for them.

Then finally, I am a big fan of the family courage project. I've never written about this, but I recommend it to families all the time. What I mean by this is you just decide your family's going to do a courage project. Actually I think I did mention this in my workbook. There's a part of the workbook that has it, but basically what you're going to do is just say, "Everyone in our family can pick something that they are going to be courageous about. I'm going to pick blah, blah, blah," and you talk about whatever it is that you're going to be courageous about and your kid can pick standing up for himself in some way. And you update each other on a regular basis about how your family courage project is going.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I saw one little girl who was terrified of another girl who had bullied her long before and she was able for the first

time to go and stand up to the girl and tell her to leave her alone and walk off. She had been terrified even being in the same vicinity as this girl for a long time, for over a year. So I think that the courage project where the child knows that yeah, it's scary but you can do this. You can do hard things, we'll do it together. I'm going to work on X. You're going to work on it. We're all going to do something really scary and we're going to celebrate. The whole family's going to celebrate when we all succeed at our courage project by having something, an ice cream party or whatever.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I think that might also help. Then I would say this is a program you can implement yourself and you should get change pretty quickly. If you don't, take him to a child therapist who is experienced in treating child anxiety because this is going to get in his way for a long time and he needs help with it now.

#### Question 14:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:40:49

So this is a question: The child who is five-and-a-half gets really angry and storms off if people don't play the way she wants them to. So first of all, there's a couple of articles on the Aha! Parenting website about this as a letter about a six-year-old who's a bully and I don't know if that's the way it's phrased, but a six-year-old ... Oh, bossy. Bossy is the word you want to search. You'll find at least one and maybe as many as three articles about kids this age being bossy. So first of all I want to reassure you it's very normal for kids this age to be bossy. Actually, I think it's a four-year-old. It's a long letter, but the answers I gave that woman are still going to be applicable to you with your five-and-a-half-year-old.

Okay. The second thing is, this is about anxiety. When we need to control things it's always coming from our own anxiety. So I would say remember, preventive maintenance is what reduces anxiety. Before you take her to the playground get her laughing about control and

who's in charge. In fact, get her laughing about that on a daily basis, but also get her laughing in any way you can before you take her to the playground. The reason for that is, then she's not quite so anxious, and when somebody starts to play with her, she won't be quite as bossy.

The other thing is to get her laughing about games where you don't get to be in charge. Just lament loudly any time and say, "How come you always in charge? I never get to be in charge. You're always the boss. I hate it." Get her laughing about it.

But also find ways to play games where first one person's in charge and then the next person is in charge. So maybe it's "Red Light, Green Light" or "Mother May I" and she's the mother, but then you're the mother. Get her to play both roles so she has to learn to tolerate a little at a time what it's like to have somebody else be in charge.

By the way, I don't think this is going to keep going through the teen years. I hear some worry that you think this is not sustainable and you want to support her to grow here. I think the things I've suggested will support her to grow. I think the most important part of it is not teaching her what to do, it's helping her reflect on the interactions.

So when she loses it and yells at someone because they don't play her way and the other kid refuses to play with her, and she says she never wants to play with them again, later have a conversation with her and say, "Wow, you were so upset at Sarah. You yelled at her that you didn't want to play with her again." Then she tells you everything wrong with Sarah and how Sarah wouldn't play the game properly, and you can say -- because remember, six-year-olds are so into the rules and playing the game right. They think they know what's the right way. You say, "Wow, it sounds like you knew what you thought was right and you really wanted Sarah to play it your way."

She'll tell you yes, she did and why and why that's the right way. You say, "Yeah. So you were so upset at her because

she wouldn't play it that way. No wonder you were upset." You're validating her feelings and then you say, "I wonder how Sarah felt because it seems like she thought there might be a different way to play it."

Your daughter will say, "No, she was just wrong. There's no other way to play. This is the right way." You say, "Yeah, I hear you, but sometimes other people think there are other ways to play it. But it sounds like it was more important to you to play the game this way, than to play it with Sarah. Is that right?"

I would say that kind of thing a lot. "It sounds like it was more important to you to play the game your way than to play with Sarah and it sounds like you got so mad she wouldn't play it this way that you told her you never wanted to play with her again? Do you still feel that way? No, I understand. We say things like that sometimes when we're mad, but we don't even mean it. I wonder how you and Sarah could get to be friends again, because when you say something like that, it hurts the other person's feelings. I wonder what we could do to make things better with Sarah."

So none of this is about shaming her, blaming her, punishing her, lecturing her. It's all about you're being her coach and support person, to help her to reflect on what happened and whether it's what she wants to have happen next time.

### Question 15:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:44:48.5

Okay. "My four-year-old is very easy going, but unfortunately that means that other kids walk on her. Later she gets upset that she didn't get what she wanted, like to go on the swing because she gave them the turn instead."

You can coach her to stand up for what she wants. So when you see her doing that, I would call her to you and

say "You're having such a good time playing with Henry, aren't you? Henry got to have another turn on the swing because he really wanted it, right? You gave him another turn. That's great. You're so generous and it makes you really happy it looks like." I would say "looks like" -- because we don't really know why she did it -- "It looks like it makes you happy when Henry's happy, and he's really happy right now, look, on the swing. That's a generous thing to do. But you know what sweetie? Henry already had a couple of turns, and we're going to have to leave soon, and I want to make sure you get a turn too -- if you want one. Do you want a turn?"

Now at this point this is Truth or Dare. This is decision time and she's going to have to make the call. You can coach her. You can say to her, "Well, you can say to Henry, 'My mom says we have to leave soon, so I need to take my turn now. Sorry Henry. I'm glad you got a little extra time.'"

You can coach her to say that. Now, if she says, "Mom, I can't say that," you can say, "Okay, do you need some help from me?"

If she says yes, you walk over with her and you say, "Henry, you are having such a good time swinging." You join with him. Then you say, "We're going to be leaving soon. I'm sorry. We'll have to see you tomorrow. Meanwhile, Eliza," who's your daughter, "gave you her turn. She hasn't had a chance to swing. So do you think you can wrap up your turn?"

You can even do it differently. "She's wondering, Eliza's wondering if you could wrap up your turn soon, so she can have a little turn before we go. What do you think?" Henry is likely to say yes. First of all, you're an adult, but secondly, he knows he's on borrowed time here.

If he says no, that's a whole different ball game and you can say, "Wow, it's so hard for you to get off the swing. I hear you." You can turn to Eliza and say, "Eliza, Henry doesn't want to give you a turn right now because he's

having such a great time. Henry, are you sure you can't give Eliza a turn? When will you be ready, in one minute or two minutes?"

So you're coaching him to get off the swing. But more likely she's going to say to you, "No Mom, don't go tell Henry. It's okay. I don't need a turn."

You can say to her, "Okay Sweetie, you might feel disappointed later. Is that okay with you if you feel disappointed later?" And she'll probably say yes.

And then later when you get home and she's disappointed and says, "I never got my turn to swing," you say, "Oh Sweetie, I'm so sorry. Now you're thinking back on it, you wish you had had a chance to swing and you gave your turn away. I'm so sorry. You're so disappointed."

You let her cry as much as she wants and when she's done you say, "Now when you think about it, do you wish you had given Henry the turn or not?" She might say she would do it all over again and that's fine.

She might say, "I wish I hadn't given him the turn." You can say, "Yeah, I understand. Did some part of you want to give them the turn and some part of you didn't want to give him the turn?" She's going to look at you with big eyes and you say "Yeah, because sometimes we feel two ways at once. Some part of you wants to give Henry the turn because he wants it so much, but some part of you doesn't want to give Henry the turn because you want it so much, right? Did you feel both ways?"

She might say no. She might say yes. If she says no, you can say, "So you didn't even know that part of you would feel so sad later, but now you notice that part of you. Maybe it'll tell you next time you're on the playground."

If she says, "Yeah, I did notice that part of me, but I still gave him a turn," you can say, "Okay. What do you think kept you from listening to that part of yourself?" So this is what we always want to do when we coach kids. It really

also works very well with older kids like teenagers. “Was there some part of you that knew this was a bad idea? What kept you from listening to that part of yourself?” But you're never doing this in a judgmental manner or they're not going to be able to go there with you.

So the final part of this question is, how do I know when it's the right time to allow them to do certain things and get rid of my own fears?

If they want to do certain things and it's safe, let them do it. I would say if it's your fears that are stopping them, explore your own fears.

Tell yourself fear is normal, but “I'm not going to make my kids anxious. I'm not going to visit my fears on the next generation. I can handle my own fears. It's normal to feel fear on their behalf as a parent. I'm going to do everything in my power to have and be safe. I'm going to teach them to rely on their own inner guidance and I can handle my own feelings without putting them on my kid.”

Because we know from the research that when kids are anxious it's almost always because their parents were anxious. It's not just genetics. Part of it is that we pass that anxiety on through our anxiety.

### Question 16:

Speaker 2:                    00:49:57.5    My four-year-old just says no in response, it's her initial response. It's not just when I ask to do something, but she even does it when her friends ask her to do something. She just says “No!” and that's kind of her initial response. So do you handle it the same way as ... Because it's starting to bleed into her friends and her friends asking her, “Please get off the slide.” “No.” Or “It's my turn.” “No.” Now her friends are starting to not even want to play with her because of her responses.

- Dr. Laura Markham: So that's interesting that she's so wedded to her no. Often that happens with kids who aren't allowed to say no, you know what I'm saying? If their no is not respected when they're two, they're still saying it at four if they're very strong willed kid sometimes.
- So let's talk about those things. So if you're there and she's on the playground with a friend and she's sitting on the slide and the kid says, "Hey, please get off the slide. It's my turn," and she says, "No," you could say ... I'm sorry. What's your daughter's name?
- Speaker 2: Bella.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Bella. Okay. You can say, "Bella, do you hear Emily? She asked you to get off the slide. Emily, are you saying you'd like a turn?" Emily says, "Yes." You say, "It's Emily's turn now, Bella. You could have a turn next."
- So it's true. You're not saying it's hard to get off the slide, but you are making it more palatable in the sense of saying you can have a turn next and you're also being clear about the limit because it's for somebody else's good.
- Dr. Laura Markham: It's not just, you must do this. It's Emily needs this, right?
- Speaker 2: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Dr. Laura Markham: If you did that with her and said, "You just had a turn. Emily wants her turn and you can have a turn next." What would Bella say to that? Would she say no again?
- Speaker 2: Sometimes yes. There's been times that I have done that and honestly, it depends I think on the friend. So I think the friends that have been a little more aggressive towards her and have told her no more often, she'll respond with no again.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Wow. Okay, because she doesn't really care what they want.

- Speaker 2: Whereas the friends have been nicer, then she usually will say, "Okay," and get off the slide.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Okay. That's so great. I love that. So basically the ones with whom she's in a power struggle are the ones she'll say no to.
- Speaker 2: Yeah.
- Dr. Laura Markham: If they've been more accommodating to her and there hasn't been a power struggle, then she's happy to accommodate them. So that's great in that case. But let's say that Emily is somebody, she's in a power struggle with a lot and has not been as nice to her.
- Okay, and four-year-olds by the way, this does not mean she'll be like this at 24. Four-year-olds are famous for trying to navigate power and trying to understand how do they get what they want in the world. They often use their power in ways that are inappropriate, right? I won't invite you over. You can't come to my party, because they are still trying to figure it all out. Four year olds are sort of famous for in a way, what we might even make up is bullying. So -- and I don't think of this as bullying -- but it is the question of her misusing her power. She's on the slide and she doesn't want to move, so at this point she says no.
- Dr. Laura Markham: And you say, "It sounds like you're a little mad at Emily, right? Are you a little mad? You want to tell Emily what you're mad at?" Now would she say, "You always say no to me," or she probably couldn't articulate that, could she?
- Speaker 2: She can't articulate that yet.
- Dr. Laura Markham: She can?
- Speaker 2: No, she can't.
- Dr. Laura Markham: "So right now you feel like you want the slide only for you. You don't even want it for Emily. Well, I wonder what we could do. Do you want to go ..." It depends on Emily and it depends if any other adults are around. If any of the other

adults around like Emily's mother, they will expect you to pick her up and move her off the slide.

If no other adult is around I would even play with this and say, "Wait a minute. I see two girls on one slide, but I wonder if you could climb up this way. You could climb up and Emily could climb behind you and then you could go down the other way and then Emily would be at the top and she could slide down." I'm just thinking off the top of my head here, but something like that where you then spot her. That's exactly distracting enough for her to get off her position, because it's a new creative, fun idea. Before you know it both girls are having fun and you've diffused the tension between them.

Now it's true, that took creative thinking at the moment and most of the time you can't think creatively under stress. None of us can. Also if Emily's mother is watching you can't. So it may be that you'll have to pick her up and move her just as you might have to do if it's bath time where you would say, "I hear you don't want to get off the slide. You wish it were just your slide forever and ever and only for you, don't you? But you know what? It's Emily's turn now. She's at the top. She's ready to slide down. I'm going to whisk you off. And then you can sit there again once Emily's down." I would whisk her off. Now if there's a whole line of kids, she can't sit back down, but if there's no other kid, after Emily goes you can plunk her back down and say, but don't you want to run around and go back up the other side, whatever. If you did whisker off family to come down, would she laugh or would she cry or scream?

Speaker 2:

No, she would scream. Scream and that would probably start a tantrum or a meltdown.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Well, in that case I'm betting this is what we would call "suing the doctor." She's actually got a full backpack. Whether it's because she and Emily had been fighting or because she's tense when she's around Emily who bosses her around or whatever, we don't know. But I would say if being whisked off the slide to let Emily come down, which she knows has to happen, by a parent who's not being

nasty to her, if she takes that as an opportunity for a meltdown, she's ready to have a meltdown. She's actually starting a fight with you sitting on the slide, which she knows she's not allowed to do, because someone else is waiting to come down. I mean she is four, she's not two.

So she actually is purposely starting a fight with you. I would say then she just needs a chance to cry probably. So it's not always a fail when our children then scream and have the meltdown. Sometimes they just need it, and so at those times when they are really wedded to getting what they want, I think sometimes that's just the deal. They do just need to have the opportunity to cry at that point, which I know you don't want to do in public at the playground.

Speaker 2: My main question is how to resolve it with her friends, because like I said, now her friends are starting to not want to play with her because this has happened a few times, of her saying no.

Dr. Laura Markham: I would do some puppet show stuff.

Speaker 2: Is there a way for her to repair that or ...

Dr. Laura Markham: Well, so two things.

Speaker 2: ... just let them figure it out.

Dr. Laura Markham: You can do two things with Bella. First of all, you can, in advance before she sees a friend, or this afternoon, you can do a puppet show with her of two girls, where one says No, like about the slide or whatever, and ask her what they should do. You're doing the puppet show and in an aside you do the voices of the kids who are Teddy bears or something and then you sort of look beyond them to where your daughter is watching. Say, "Bella, what should she do?" Motion to one. "What should she say to her friend?" When the kid says no, don't use Bella's name for the puppet. Use some other name, you could make it even a close name like Ella or whatever, but I probably wouldn't

even do that. I would just call her Susie, whatever. You don't want it to be too close to home.

You'll find that Bella will give you advice for both characters and tell you what they should do. That would be helpful because then you can say to her afterwards, "Oh, so I really like what you told the character Susie to do when Emily was saying no to her and Susie said no about the slide. I really liked what you said. Do you think you could do that sometime? Would you do that?" Just have that conversation, and then before you then go off to see Emily, say, "I know sometimes you have a hard time when you play with Emily." I would stay close when she plays with Emily and I would coach her. "Bella, it sounds like you're mad. You can tell Emily what you want."

Then when she says no to Emily and Emily's at the slide, you can say, "Emily, you can tell Bella what you want." And Emily will say, "I want you to move so I can go down the slide." You can say, "Bella, do you hear Emily? What would you say to Emily?"

Will she just say no? Will she keep just saying no at that point if she hears Emily stating what she needs?

Speaker 2:

I don't know, honestly because we haven't tried it. I don't know how her response would be.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Try it. Try it and see what happens. I think coaching them to say what they need, Bella's going to hear it differently coming from Emily who is saying "please move." You can sort of back it off and put it in a larger context. Like, "Wow, you two girls really want to have fun with each other and now you're having a hard time having fun. What can we do so you can both have fun again?"

Speaker 2:

Okay. Thank you.

**Question 17:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:59:21

So this question is about a three-year-old, Jacob, who often is worried in groups. When he goes to playgroup he stays close to mom or dad and finds a toy he likes and clutches it like he's worried someone's going to take it and he's not even able to play with the toy. So I would say that's not unusual for a sensitive kid who's three who might get a little overwhelmed by all the activity. So I would suggest when he clutches the toy and he can't play, can you move him a bit away from the group with the toy and engage with him, so that he can laugh and relax and enjoy the toy with you? That might help him over time to feel more comfortable in the group setting.

Of course what will help is before you go to the group you can do some roughhousing to get him laughing and relaxed in advance of going to the group. That will also of course reduce his anxiety before he even gets to the group.

I would say for kids like this, this is a very sensitive kid. So now what he needs his words to understand his own feelings and the feelings of others and social dynamics, how people interact. All of that will develop his EQ. I want to say that there was a study done on chimpanzees and they were looking at a large tribe of chimpanzees. I guess a lot of babies were born in the same time of year and they knew which moms were more responsive moms and they noticed which babies cried a lot. The researchers did something you could never do with human babies and probably shouldn't have done with chimps, but they switched the babies around. Apparently what happened is that the babies who were very sensitive, as long as they were with moms who were very nurturing and responsive, those babies became the most emotionally intelligent.

They became leaders in the tribe. The very sensitive babies who were with the more negligent parents, for lack of a better word, the less responsive parents, those babies became the outcasts. So they were highly sensitive, but they didn't have responsive parents so they did not learn

how to regulate their own anxiety and how to interact well with other members of the tribe. So what can we learn from this? It's great to have a sensitive kid and our job is to be responsive as parents and to help them feel safe and to meet their needs, and to help them develop understanding of social dynamics.

So how do you do that? I would start by talking about it. When you're in the playgroup, for instance and you're watching someone or you're watching the interaction between between two kids or a child and a parent, you can wonder aloud what that person is thinking, what they're feeling, what they're wanting, what they're saying to each other. As your child watches that and understands more, it increases his sense of safety and it increases his ability to navigate the world of other people.

Then the other thing you can do is read. There are so many great books about emotions now. A lot of them are linked to on the Aha! Parenting website. If you go in and you look in the emotional intelligence section or just put in "books to teach emotional intelligence to kids," you'll see a lot of links to really good books. Take a look at the reviews on Amazon. See which books sound like they would work for your age child and get your hands on some. You can get a lot of them used for pennies on Amazon. You can also get them at the library and you can ask your library to order them. There are of course many more books that are not even on the Aha! Parenting website because new books like this come out every day. So once you start looking on Amazon, you can sort of start to make a list and use them for birthday presents and holiday presents and stuff. Specifically for social skills there's a series by Cheri Meiners. She has a series that's about the right level for three-year-olds and it has a lot of social skills stuff. So for a child who's feeling uncomfortable with other kids, reading books like that on a regular basis is very helpful to kids just to get a sense of what's appropriate behavior. For every book you read your child, you can point to the character and say, "I wonder what she thinks. I wonder what she feels. I wonder what she wants." When we do that with kids, they develop more of what Dan Seigel the neurologist

calls mindsight. More ability to reflect on what's going on in the minds of other people. Again, that increases the sense of safety that the child has in social situations.

So the parent who asked this, you're doing the perfect thing by responding to his needs. He'll be very different in two years. Like, you mentioned being worried about when he goes to kindergarten. He'll be very different in two years. Like those sensitive chimps who became leaders in the tribe eventually, just keep parenting the way you're parenting and talking with him about emotions and what people are thinking and feeling, and you'll find that by the time he goes to kindergarten, he will be well able to navigate that world.

### Question 18:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:04:11

This parent asks a related question about her six-year-old who doesn't want to play with other kids. This sounds like social anxiety to me. I agree with you that when he's playing the same game with you over and over, that is probably an indication that he's a little stuck. Children's play is how they learn. If it's fluid and evolving, that's normal. If it's exactly the same game, with exactly the same result day after day after day, it's probably that he's stuck. Notice the theme that's coming up in it over and over, and see if you can introduce some laughter around that theme that will help him to not be quite so stuck.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You also mentioned that you had gotten him to do better with other kids by saying that, "Sometimes playing with others means using your ideas and also using their ideas, like some of the each." That's brilliant.

You can build on that by inviting another family over. I know he doesn't want to have play dates, but do some laughter before the other kid comes over. In fact, I would do daily laughter with him, daily laughter. For special time, I would alternate with him. One day, he gets to choose the

game, even if it's the stuck game, whatever it is, and one day you choose.

Get your hands on both of Larry Cohen's books, get your hands on Aletha Solter's book, it's called Attachment Play. It's really for three to six-year-olds, and so he's on the high end of that, but it sounds to me like he could use this because of the things I've seen you write about him. I think it would be perfect for him, especially given the social situation.

If you can do daily play and roughhousing with him and get him laughing, that will, I think, help unstuck him. Then, I would invite another family over with a kid who's a little younger than him. Tell him he has to play with the kid because the family's coming over. Kids have a right to decide about their own play dates, but when another family comes over, they do have to play with the kids in that family, so this is a way to get him to play with another kid, but make sure it's a kid who's younger than him so that he isn't as threatened and he can dominate a little bit.

Try to set them up with a good fun activity, like if you're the yard outside, set up a hose so they can do some water play. If you have a sandbox, mud to dig in, a tarp to do a slip and slide, whatever, something outside is always good. If not, if it's inside, brainstorm with him what will work so he won't be protective of his toys and it'll be something they can do together. Maybe they'll make a rain forest and maybe they'll use blocks to build a zoo and put animals in it, whatever. Something that they can both do together, and that you've decided what the game is, and it's exciting enough that both kids will want to play it so they won't fight about that, so that the disputes will be more about how to do that game. It's a little more open-ended and creative so they can have fun.

Then, you're going to have to say to the other mom or dad, "Sorry, I need to stay a little close. He's still learning to work things out when he has a dispute with another kid about whose idea to use." Then stay close and coach them through, just the way you would if it were siblings.

I want to add that reading the books that I just discussed with him will be really helpful. Also, I want to encourage you. The fact that he is doing well playing with other kids during the school day is fantastic. He does need downtime. He doesn't need to play with other kids all the time, so I would just do these play dates with other families once in a while. I wouldn't plan on doing one on even a weekly basis necessarily, but just to give him practice in playing with other kids.

### Question 19:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:07:47

This parents asked about how her daughter will approach other people, which is fantastic, but when she doesn't get the response she wants, to play, she gets discouraged and goes away.

I would say, it's important to remember that some kids, this doesn't come so easily to them. Some kids have to be taught how to approach a group. Groups of kids who are playing are busy playing, and they don't want you to ruin their play by barging in, I mean "you" meaning another child. It's important to give kids coaching, if they're having a hard time approaching another child, about how to ask, and just to be very up-front with your child about it. Like, "It looks like you'd like to play with that girl. Do you want to ask her? She might say yes, she might say no, but you won't know unless you ask her."

If the other kid says no or seems reluctant, you can say, "I guess she isn't ready to play right now. Maybe you and I can play this game, and then you could come over and join us," you say to the other child, "If you want, when you're ready." Then, in front of the other child, you begin a game with your daughter, so that the other child might feel comfortable joining you after a while. You're basically coaching your child about how to approach other kids.

Also, if the play doesn't go the way she wants and she gets discouraged, notice what's going on there, and when you

get home, use puppets to act it out, and then ask your child what she thinks she should do. Again, for a child like this, it really helps to ask what she thinks the other kid is thinking and feeling. Read books about social dynamics, which will also help her.

The good news on your child is that she's motivated. She is actually asking other kids to play. She just needs some help from you to figure out how to do it and how to read the cues. She's on the right track here in terms of being motivated.

### Question 20:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:09:43.5

Another social question, which I think is really great, which is, her daughter gets anxious socially and about whether she's making a bad impression on people when she doesn't say hi, but just runs off, or doesn't say please or thank you, and her own fears of social exclusion and how much she should make excuses for her daughter, or intervene and make her respond or whatever.

I think what's great about this is, all of us feel this way to some degree. We all do, and so, how important that we acknowledge to ourselves our own issue.

Take a deep breath, notice it, and realize that this is old baggage. Just keep surfacing those issues, notice what goes on your body, what does it feel like, and give yourself a little verbal antidote, a mantra, so that you aren't just hijacked by those feelings. When they start to come up, stop, drop, breathe. Remind yourself, "My daughter is four...My daughter is only X age. She's going to be fine. She's not going to run away from people without saying hello forever. I was socially anxious, she's socially anxious. It's okay. We're all going to live through this." Talk yourself off the cliff.

Once you've done all that, I would say to remember, before you go into a situation with a child who's socially

anxious, always, always, always get them laughing in advance so that they aren't as anxious when they go into the situation, and role play.

Role play what they can expect, what it's going to be like. Have them project what they can do if they feel one way or another. "What if you feel a little worried? What if you miss mom at the sleepover or the birthday party? What if your friend Samantha doesn't want to play with you? Is there somebody else you'd like to play with," whatever. Help them so that they'll feel comfortable going into the situation and role play with them.

Then, you need to ask certain things from her depending on her age, like to say thank you, to say hello, to say please, but try to do it in a way that works for her. I always recommend that you pick your child up, at least hold their hand, but pick them up preferably. You can do this even with a five-year-old, when you know that they always have a hard time.

You can say, "We're going to have to say hello to Mrs. Jones when we get there. Mrs. Jones is Becky's mother, and she's having the party. When we get to the park, you have to say hello to Mrs. Jones before you run off to find Becky. What would be the easiest way for you to say hello?" "No, I won't say hello. I don't want to say hello." "Hmmm.....Are you worried that you're going to feel a little uncomfortable? Okay. How about this? How about I hold your hand while you say hello?" "No." "How about if I pick you up? Could you say hello then?" "Okay."

Dr. Laura Markham:

You pick your child up and you say, "Mrs. Jones, thanks so much for inviting us to Rebecca's party. This is my daughter Sophie." Sophie looks down at the ground and Mrs. Jones says, "Hi, Sophie. Thanks for coming. You want a cupcake?" At this point, of course, Sophie's going to want the cupcake, but she doesn't say anything. She doesn't even say thank you. Again, you step in and say what needs to be said and you role model. "Why, thank you so much for the cupcake, Mrs. Jones. That looks delicious, doesn't it, Sophie?" Sophie's going to nod at you

because she's comfortable with you, even if she can't look Mrs. Jones in the eye. You can say, "Boy, these look like great cupcakes, Mrs. Jones. I see how much Sophie is excited about this cupcake."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now you're saying it for her. Inside your head, you're thinking, "Oh my God, Mrs. Jones thinks I'm a terrible mother and my child is unable to even be polite and look at her," but first of all, Mrs. Jones doesn't care. She has more important things to think about today than judging you. That's the first thing. Secondly, even if she is judging you, again, who cares? Third, Sophie did show her appreciation of the cupcake, and you can turn, so Sophie is more able to see Mrs. Jones, but you don't have to force anything, and as you walk away, you can say, "That looks like a great cupcake. I wonder after you try it, if you can tell Mrs. Jones it was good."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Again, you're giving her another opportunity to connect and say thank you for the cupcake later on, but mostly what you're doing here is you're interfacing between her and the world to show her how it's done, and to make her feel okay in the situation so you're increasing her safety level. Most of the time, when they're in your arms, they do feel safer and they will actually look at the other adult, even if they can't get any words out.

### Question 21:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:14:19

A similar question: "My son is reluctant to play with other children." In your specific case, he's been in this babysitting swap for two years now and he's almost four. If he's recently been upset to go there, key word recent here, he was fine before and now he's recently upset, something's happening. Either there's a new child in the babysitting swap, or I don't know, something's happened, it's different. Maybe before it was always the mom from one family, but now it's the dad, and he doesn't feel connected to the dad. Something's different. When there's a recent change, ask yourself why. I would never force a

child to go into a situation without you where they're suddenly very upset about going. We don't know what's going on there, but we need to support them that they're not going to be forced to go if suddenly there's a change that's making them uncomfortable. Maybe he's being bullied. We don't know what's going on, but I would find out, rather than force him.

### Question 22:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:15:13

This parent is saying that her seven-and-a-half-year old is getting told by another kid at school, "You're fired," and it really upsets him to the point where some mornings he doesn't want to go to school. The worst part is, he wants this kid for a friend, and this kid's mother is her friend.

This is really hard. We just want to protect our kids, and often we can't, but we can do is give them tools to cope that will strengthen them for life. Of course, this other child isn't necessarily a bad person. I'm sure he isn't a bad person. He's doing what many humans do who feel bad about themselves, trying to feel powerful by putting other people down.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would do a puppet show about this, where you can get your son laughing, to help him diffuse this trigger. You and your son can coach the protagonist in the puppet show. You can say to him, "Oh my goodness, he said he's fired. I don't even know what that means. What should he say? What should he respond?" You can come up with a bunch of responses. "You can't fire me. I'm a kid." "You can't fire me, I already quit." " Thank goodness, I hated that job." "Did you say you're tired? Is that what you're saying, tired?" Or even just something like, "Hey, that hurts my feelings. Friends don't tease friends, or friends don't taunt friends."

Dr. Laura Markham:

The other thing I would do with him, besides getting him laughing and giving him some ammo, is I would teach them about bullying. Even otherwise likable kids, like this

seven-year-old, will experiment with abusing power, just as this child is doing. The thing about bullies, bullying behavior, is they want to get a rise out of the other person, the target. There's a whole article on the Aha Parenting website called Empower Your Child Against Bullying that you should take a look at. That will give you some ways to talk to your son about it. I would also read some books about bullying and social issues with him. There are a lot of good ones on that page of my website, a lot of suggested books.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then my last idea, since this woman is your friend, invite them over. Invite them to your house. Observe him with your son. If you don't like what you see, step in and coach both kids without shaming the other boy. Try to be warm instead of blaming. You could say something like, "Jonathan," if that's your son's name, "I just heard Jeremy say 'you're fired' to you. It looks like you don't like that. You can tell Jeremy, friends don't taunt each other."

Then you turn to Jeremy. You say, "Do you guys know what a taunt is? It's when you say something to hurt the other person. 'You're fired,' that's meant to hurt the other person, right?"

Do you guys know what 'You're fired' means?" They might tell you, and you'd say, "That's right. Bosses tell someone that when they take their job away, that's right, but can either of you take each other's job away? Hey, wait a minute. Do either of you have a job? Wait a minute, how could you be fired?" You get them laughing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You're helping your son here, but you're also showing the other child that there's an antidote to this, and to feeling bad like he feels. You say to them, "If anyone ever tells you you were fired, either one of you, what could you say to them?" Then, "Yay, I get to be a kid and not have a job," or whatever they want to come up with. You say, "Yeah, that's right. Give me five. Okay, nobody's fired. Right? Give me five." Then say, "If you feel bad and you wanted to say something to your friend, what would you say? You could

tell him your feelings were hurt, right? You don't have to tell him he's fired."

Dr. Laura Markham:

You can say all of this in front of your friend. In fact, you should. It may be that she'll step in and chime in. It may be that she'll just be astonished, which is what most people do when you do things like this.

But this other kid may or may not respond well. You didn't shame him, so he might accept your limit and get better, and get better in general with your son because he's seen that he can no longer get away with this behavior with your son, but if it keeps up, definitely ask the school to put your son in a class away from this kid next year. Just explain he's developed an aversion to school because of this boy. And long term, it may be that you want to discourage this friendship and not have him over, and not even be friends with his mom, if this is the way the child is going to be behaving and your son is that upset by it.

### Question 23:

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:26:11](#)

This parent asks about her eight-year-old who has friend issues. I hear that you're saying that your daughter is so negative and bossy and having a hard time with her friends lately. I think just empathizing goes a long way, and I think she's probably having a hard time. If you can avoid telling her what to do, but instead just listen, it really helps. And help her think it through. If your daughter says, if she's complaining about her friends and saying, "I'm so mad at her," or, "I hate her, I can't believe her, she's awful," you can say, "Wow, you're so upset at her right now because of X, Y, Z."

Dr. Laura Markham:

When she's done offloading her upset about the friend, you can say, "Hmm, it sounds like you were really upset about that. I wonder how your friend felt." Don't tell her what to do, but that opens it up.

You might also ask at another point, maybe not even in the same discussion, "I wonder what you could do about that." She might say, "I know what I'll do. I'll never speak to her again. I'm going to give her a piece of my mind. I'm going to tell her I hate her," whatever. You could say, "Yeah, you could do that. I can see why you'd want to. What do you think would happen then?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now you're developing the prefrontal cortex, the ability to plan ahead, the ability to see how our actions create an effect in the world, maybe not the effect we actually want. That helps your daughter to really think through, "Well, what do I want?"

Every conversation we have with our children in some way is doing the same thing, where we're helping them to reflect, where we're saying, "What was it you wanted? You wanted to be closer to your friend, or you wanted it to turn out the way you wanted. You wanted to play your game. What did you do to try to get that result?" "Well, I yelled at my friend." "What effect did that have? Hmm, yeah. Your friend doesn't want to talk to you. Well, do you think there's anything you would do differently next time?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

You're not being judgmental. You're only asking the questions in a totally empathic manner, but you're helping her to reflect on how she's participating in these relationships, and what she's getting out of it based on what she's putting into it, what she brings to the situation. That's how kids learn, is by that process of reflecting on their experience.

You know, sometimes that experience leads to really positive learning about what they could do differently in the future, but usually that's only when they have a really helpful parent to help them reflect on what happened, and to not blame themselves, but to see what they might be able to do differently next time.

The only way we can do that for our children, the only way we can really play that role, is when we're positive,

when we bring positivity to it, so we adore our child and we see from her point of view why she got so frustrated with her friend. Even if we wouldn't do the same thing, we see how she did, and we understand, because after all, she's only eight.

#### Question 24:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:22:19

This parent asks: "What do I do to help my eight-year-old make friends? He bursts into tears at home because he can't make friends."

This is not an unusual situation. I urge you to go on my website, go to the page about the Socially worried child. Some people call them shy children, I called them socially worried. Read the article, of course, and follow it, but also look at the books at the bottom of the page and get your hands on some of those books. They're for a wide range of ages, everywhere from 4 to 14, probably, or 12. Figure out, by spending a little time on Amazon, which are the books that are going to be right for your child.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Order some of them and read them with your child, so that he knows what he can do to make friends, because there's a set of skills, and to some of us, these skills are very natural. To others of us, it's really hard to develop those skills. We're all different, so your child needs some help to develop those skills.

It may be that you're going to want to put him in a special social skills group to learn the skills, but start with the books. Start with helping him develop those specific skills. Some of the books on that page are actually for parents, so parents can support kids in developing those skills. I'm suggesting that you would read yourself the books for parents, and actually, you'll see some things you could do differently in talking with your son, to support him when he comes home and bursts into tears about friendships at school. Also, when you read the books to him, it gives you

an opportunity to hear what he has to say about his friends.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Finally, I would advise puppet shows. Even teenagers, strangely enough, love puppet shows. You can do these things, like act out with puppets --by the way, you don't need real puppets if you don't have them, use teddy bears and giraffes and whatever -- and have them act out a social situation. Your child will probably really enjoy watching you act it out and be goofy, and you can stop in the middle of the scene. You're the director, right? You're the one holding these stuffed animals, and you, sotto voce, say beyond the two actors to your child, "What should he say now? What should he say to her when she says that?" Your child will tell you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

It's an opportunity, again, for your child to develop judgment about social situations, by having a chance to reflect out of the immediate pressures, as he's just watching the two stuffed animals interact about it. You'll get ideas about what kinds of social things to act out, because you'll have read these books with your child, and you'll have some idea about different scenarios that come up in the books, and also that your child will share with you hopefully about what goes on in his school situation, or on the playground at his school. That can really help you figure out what kinds of scenarios you want to act out. You can give him words by acting it out, but you can also ask him what to do so he gets to think about it and to give advice.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Whenever possible, always get him laughing as you do these scenarios, because that will reduce the anxiety and help them to take in the social lesson you're teaching. When kids feel anxious, they can't take anything in. He might yell at you, "Stop that, don't do that," and then you know you're hitting too close to home, and what you really need to do is get the laughter going first, and then you can start to do more social teaching.

**Question 25:**

Parent: 01:25:45 My daughter is a beautiful, super sweet seven-year-old. When she was younger, we did our best to find the right preschool, and now that she's in a public elementary school, she's having a really hard time with girls that bully her and obviously use language towards her that she's not really accustomed to, language that we never use at home. I can see her confusion and pain, but I'm not really sure how to guide her through the difficult times. It's been really hard lately to connect with her, because I also have two-year-old twins that require a lot of time. At school, some of the adults have told her that she needs to be more tough, but I certainly don't agree with that assessment of her. What can we do?

Dr. Laura Markham: Hmm. This is tough, because you do have twins. Yet it's even more important, because she has young siblings, it's even more important that she knows she has backup at home.

First of all, I would go to the school and I would advocate for her. I would really try to get the teacher and the adults at the school to intervene. That's important.

Secondly, there's an article on my website, a post, it's a letter and answer about a kid who's been bullied. You can read that for some ideas about how to help her express and talk to her about it and how to play, like using puppets and stuff, to work out that stuff. That will help.

Then finally, I would go to the socially worried child section of the website that I mentioned earlier in this call, and take a look at the books there because some of them are about bullying. Then, also go to the page on the website that's about bullying. There is a page about how to help your child stand up to bullying. That will I think help you to help her, and she needs your help. I really think that, even if it's just language, when a child is feeling unprotected at school, it's our job as the grownups to step in. It becomes really important to do so. Good luck.

Parent: Thank you.

Dr. Laura Markham: You're very welcome.

### Question 26:

Parent: 01:27:45.5 I was at one of your speeches and you were really, really helpful. We had a bullying problem with our preschool son, and you really helped us get through that and I want to thank you so much for that.

Dr. Laura Markham: I'm so glad. I remember you and I'm so glad that-

Parent: Oh, thank you.

Dr. Laura Markham: That worked out. Oh, wonderful. Wonderful news.

Parent: It was quite a rough time, but it worked itself out. He's in kindergarten now, and he is really a strong rule follower. He will tell us how he'll tell the teacher when classmates break rules. We're a little concerned that he might be telling on classmates for minor rule breaking, and that might lead to him being outcast from his classmates. However, telling him to remain silent could be confusing. We're always trying to talk to him about having open communication. He can always tell us anything, and then, we don't quite know how to navigate this nuance of remaining away from that conflict that's going on, and not getting involved in it and being silent about a minor thing where no one is getting hurt. We're kind of confused how to deal with that.

Dr. Laura Markham: Hmm. I would start by having conversations when he brings this up to you about what happened. He says to you, "Yeah, I had to tell the teacher, so-and-so broke X rule." Can you give me an example?

Parent: One was where, they have a bathroom inside of the kindergarten class, and one of the kids was peeking at one of the other kids. He told me that he told the teacher. I

don't know if it was proper, but I reacted positively because I thought that was a privacy thing, as something that shouldn't be broken, and I told him that it was good that he told his teacher and he can always tell me about those things. That went fine.

Parent:

He then told me that certain kids will squirm around when they're supposed to sit down and allow the other kids to be able to see a presentation. They're standing up or jumping around a little bit. It's not directly impeding his view of the presentation, but he knows that it shouldn't be done, so he'll go and tell the teacher.

He also gets this way with his two-year-old sister. When she starts breaking a rule, he'll get really concerned that she's breaking a rule and will try to enforce it, that she needs to comply. Even when we're there and we're telling him, "Don't worry, Mommy and Daddy have this, and we'll talk to your sister."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Okay, great. That's very helpful so I can see what's going on with him. First of all, I do want to say that six-year-olds are really into rules. He's probably not quite six yet?

Parent:

Yeah, he's five and a half. Yeah, he's six in February.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Yeah. Okay. Six-year-olds are really into rules, so you have another year of this ahead of you probably, but don't assume he's going to be this way forever. I think it's partly that he is one of these kids who's very attached to you, he's taking in what you're telling him about the right way to be in the world, and he's trying really hard to be that. When he sees people not being that, he wants to change that and make it better. I think it all comes from a good place, and I think that sometimes it might even be that it's about advancing his needs, like with the presentation, but you said he could see anyway, so it sounds like maybe it wasn't that.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Let's take the presentation one, which you thought was a minor infraction, as of course I do as well. He says to you, "Yeah, they were squirming around and they were

standing up. They're not supposed to do that. I went and told the teacher."

You can say, "Huh. Wow, so you were all watching, and some of the kids were out of their seats and they were in the way. Is that right? First of all, could you see?" He'll probably say, "Yeah, I could actually see."

You say, "Oh, good. I'm glad you could see, because if you can't see, there would be ways to ask them to please move so you could see. Right? Would you feel comfortable doing that?" That's one thing. If he got bullied before, he may have some anxiety about advancing his own needs to get them met. At least, if people follow the rules, he'll get his needs met, if you know what I mean. It makes kids controlling when they're worried about getting their needs met.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would actually at some point, you can dig deep and double-click and double-click forever, you could have hours of conversation about one little incident, but one of the things you might want to talk about an incident like that is, "What would have happened if you couldn't see? What would you have said? What could you have said? Is there a way to say what you need to the other person without hurting their feelings? Do you think the kid would have listened?" That's a whole area of discussion that's really worth coaching him through. It will help him feel less controlling, less needing to be controlling. Okay, but that's a side discussion here.

Dr. Laura Markham:

At the moment, he's saying, "Yeah, I could see fine," and you say, "Okay. It seems like it really bothered you that the kids were moving around, bothered you a lot. Is that right?"

He'll say, "Yeah, of course it bothered me. They weren't supposed to be doing that. Everybody was trying to see." Then you could say, "Yeah, so they were breaking the rules. Why do you think there's a rule that you're supposed to sit down?"

"Well, so everybody could see." "Do you think there were people who couldn't see?" "Well, probably. They were moving around."

This is the kind of discussion, and you say, "Huh, so there might've been people who couldn't see. I wonder what those people could do if they felt that way. Do you think they would be able to stick up for themselves and say, 'Hey, down in front,' or whatever they needed to say? Did you think that you were protecting them by talking to the teacher?"

Because I bet that's not the case. I bet he did not do it to protect somebody. I bet he did it to make someone follow the rules. Right?

Parent:

Right.

Dr. Laura Markham:

That's interesting. He's now seeing, "Huh. Well, in a social situation when somebody breaks the rules, what's the real reason for the rule? How could we make sure that that is honored, i.e., everyone gets to see?"

You could also then talk about the kid who broke the rule. "Who is the kid was out of their seat? Jamie? I wonder why Jamie was having a hard time. Some people just really have a hard time sitting still. I'm like that sometimes. Are you ever like that?"

"Nope, not me. I sit in my seat."

You could say, "Yeah, I know. You're so good at making sure that you follow the agreements, and I love that about you, that when there's a classroom agreement, like we all sit down so everyone can see, that you really follow that. Something must've been pretty important for Jamie, that he broke that classroom agreement." You might reframe the rules as agreements. This one is not really a classroom rule. I bet it's not written down anywhere, but it's an agreement of some sort that they have. Maybe they've discussed it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You can say, "I wonder what was so important to Jamie. Maybe his body, he had the antsy's, the shpilkies," whatever your word for it would be, "That he just couldn't sit still. I wonder if there was a way to help Jamie." Now you're helping him humanize the person. He's not just a rule breaker, he's a person who had competing needs and maybe needed support in order to keep the agreement.

Then, there's the question of, what's the right role? "Do you think the teachers saw this?" Really, you're now trying to get into, well, whose job is it to enforce the agreements in the classroom? Obviously, anyone is allowed to say, "I can't see, please sit down," but then it's a teacher's job to enforce that if the kid still doesn't sit down, but maybe he'll say, "Well, the teacher wasn't there. I had to go tell the teacher. The teacher didn't know."

As you have these unfolding discussions, you're going to be helping him to explore the nuances, and start to develop critical thinking and reflective thinking about this, so that he's not just automatically doing it. I would also ask how he thinks the kid felt. Notice I've never said, "Don't go tell a teacher." "I'm wondering," all I'm doing is wondering aloud about stuff. "I wonder, when you went and told the teacher, and the teacher came and asked Jamie to sit down, I wonder how Jamie felt." That's one question, but even before that I would, "How did the teacher respond?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

The teacher may just say, "Okay, okay, I'll deal with it. Go sit down," and then go over and say, "Jamie, sit down." Maybe it's not worth getting annoyed at your son, but she might be annoyed. He might say, "Well, she said she would come in a minute," or, "She wasn't there. There was just..." whatever, "The presentation people." I mean, who knows what will happen.

It'll be interesting to see, because he might be getting negative feedback from the teacher, in which case you want to say, "It sounds to me like the teacher thinks it's her job to do this, not your job. I don't think you really need to tell the teacher for small things.... But what if Jamie was hurting somebody? What would happen then?"

Then you would need to tell the teacher. How can you decide whether it's a big thing or a small thing?"

I think that's really the question. How can you decide whether it's a big thing or a small thing? Does that makes sense?

Parent:

Yeah, it does, so we can differentiate between those things, but without at all impeding communication that would be my concern because I didn't want him to feel like he had made a mistake because when he feels that way he gets really, you know, tightens up and doesn't want to open up anymore. He'll try to retract something that may have been said to sort of be very righteous about what he did.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Poor baby. Yeah. I wouldn't imply that he's done the wrong thing at all. I don't even know that he has. From his perspective, he hasn't. He's been taught that you follow the rules and that's what you do.

I think the only difference is that -- it's like with the baby sister, it's the parent's job. Oh, Sweetheart, you try so hard to take care of your sister and be a good big brother. I love that about you, and that's one of the reasons your sister loves you so much is you take such good care of her, but you know what?

Enforcing the rules is the parent's job. I think that's really clear and he needs to hear that about the classroom as well, but not that he did a bad thing by telling the teacher, but, huh, I think your teacher probably feels like it's her job to be in charge of the classroom and to enforce the rules. Of course, if you can't see, or if someone's getting hurt, you would always try to help. Does that make sense?

Parent:

Yes, that absolutely makes sense. Thank you so much.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You're welcome so much. Nice to talk to you.

**Question 27:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:39:22.5 This question is, What do we tell our kids to do if another kid hits them?

They need to ask for help from an adult. If they're on the playground, or at school and another kid hits them, or is violent toward them, they immediately turn away, and go to find an adult, and the adult helps them. Now you need to talk to the school about this because sometimes kids will be told by teachers that they're tattling. I don't believe in tattling. I don't even understand this concept.

Dr. Laura Markham: Tattling is the child asking for help with a problem they're having so I would make sure how the school responds. But I would ask your child, we should all be asking our children all the time, do you feel safe at school? Do you feel safe with such and such teacher? Do you feel safe with this teacher? Do you feel safe with that teacher? Uh-huh. So if another child pushed you, what would you do? Yes, you're right. You could go to that teacher you feel safe with. Do you think you could go to this teacher too? What would they say?

If the child is worried about what the teacher would say, then you need to ask the teacher in front of your child, you know, Jeremy was worried about if someone pushed him about whether he could come and talk to you about it to get help?

Dr. Laura Markham: And if the teacher says "Sure, of course!" you'd say, "Oh, good, because Jeremy was a little worried about what to do. Is that what he should do if somebody pushes him?" And if the teacher says, "Oh, we tell kids to tell the other kid, 'Use your words!'" that's fine. I mean, there's nothing wrong with saying to the kid -- "You can stick up for yourself. You can use your words." But it sort of depends on the situation, you know? Is it a place that they have help or not? And is it a kid who's a lot bigger than they are? Right? So it's totally fine to teach kids and to role play with them. Also, "No pushing, pushing hurts. Hands off my body." Right? But if it's actually violent, if the kid is being

aggressive with them, I would just go get an adult. Because you don't need your kid to get bullied.

### Question 28:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:41:06

This question is about the poisoning of school. Those are her words, the effect of peers on kid's behavior. She says, "One afternoon he was playing and making pew, pew, pew sounds. When I asked him what he was doing, he said he was shooting, and that he was going to shoot me and all of his friends. We're working so hard at home; it's demoralizing when new bad behavior or words come home every month."

Dr. Laura Markham:

So it is demoralizing, I understand, but that's what happens when you raise a child. You're supporting them to interact constructively with the world, so they can make good choices and construct a good life even when you're no longer there to run interference.

So you're seeing this from your four-year-old. I'm sorry to tell you this, but you'll be seeing something from your 14-year-old where he is influenced by his peers. It starts now, it continues.

And now is when you have the most influence to make the most difference. So if you're not going to homeschool, take this as an opportunity to explore with your son what the effect is of the various behaviors that he's trying on and help him develop values. That is one of your most important responsibilities as a parent, and this gives you grist for the mill.

You can't protect him from everything in the world, and you wouldn't want to. What you can do is help him to develop a strong inner compass about what behavior contributes to goodness in the world, and what doesn't.

But don't just lecture, or pronounce things as bad. Explore with him, and use it as an opportunity to also explore what

he's expressing with his behavior. Sure, he learned about guns at school, but some kids learn about guns and don't come home and go pew, pew, pew. Maybe he likes the power. Maybe he's actually angry and expressing anger. Whatever it is, this is something you want to know about. So you might say to him, hmm, you might be pretty angry to want to shoot me and all your friends. What are you angry about? Hmm, if you did shoot everyone, what might happen then? You want him to get to the fact that people get hurt and die and that he would feel bad about that. He probably doesn't really understand death, but this is a great opportunity for him to hear a little more about what death is, and how death is caused.

Dr. Laura Markham:

In fact, it's a really important basic safety precaution that you teach kids about guns, and that if a real gun appears they need to immediately leave the room, and find their way to you no matter what. So as you can see, this is a great opportunity for learning. You can ask him, is there a better way to express your anger that wouldn't hurt people? You want him to get to he'd use his words. This is one of the most important lessons for any child to learn. Wouldn't it be a better world if everyone learned this in childhood? When you get angry, use your words. Anyway, I hear you're working hard at home and he's taking things from school and bringing them home and trying them out on you, and you wish he wouldn't, but a really important reframing for us as the parent is to see our child's behavior as an opportunity for them to learn something really important, and instead of just getting annoyed that they're exhibiting the behavior, taking that opportunity.

### Question 29:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:44:49

Our next question is: "How can I provide the best scaffolding for my daughter? She started a new classroom and likes one girl a year older. She said, sadly, 'No one likes me. This girl told me, stop it, every time I wanted to talk to

her. She doesn't like me.' I empathized with her and later I asked the girl's mom and found there was nothing to worry about. I think sometimes kids need adult help in their social interactions. Should I not have contacted the mom?"

Well, I agree with you that kids need adult help, but I don't think you should have contacted the mom. I think you suspect that, or you wouldn't be asking it in this way. That's not scaffolding. Scaffolding is coaching.

In this case the other mother said there's nothing to worry about, but I suspect that's not true. I suspect that the other mother will now tell her daughter to be nice to your daughter and I'm not sure that's going to help. It might just make her resent your daughter.

I know that we get anxious on behalf of our kids, and we always want to step in to protect them and smooth their way. I myself remember doing that in one instance when my daughter was young, and was left out of something, but I think in retrospect it was a mistake. I think, in fact, most of the time it's a mistake.

Our job instead is to manage our own anxiety and coach our kids. So in your case, the other girl said stop for a reason. Somehow when your daughter initiated with her, it irritated the other girl. Your daughter needs to know why that was and to learn how to initiate. So I love that you empathized with your daughter when she expressed this upset to you, that's great. And I love that your daughter trusts you enough to tell you what was upsetting her.

Now what your daughter needs is some hope that she might be able to make this better herself with her own behavior, not by her mother making a call to scold the other girl.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I would do some role plays with your daughter about how she initiates, and help her learn to initiate in a healthy way. I would also take the pressure off of this particular

relationship between your daughter and the girl who's a year older. I would help your daughter find some other kids. Maybe kids her own age that she can form a relationship with so it's not all about this other girl.

And since I presume your daughter has some very tender feelings about what happened with the other girl, get her laughing about it in a way that doesn't put down the other girl, but also doesn't put down your daughter, but helps alleviate some of the tension around it. And probably the best way to start that process is by reading books about kids trying to develop friendships, and by acting out yourself, trying to develop a friendship, and being silly about it in such a way that it gets your daughter laughing.

And by that I would say just beg her to be your friend and be over the top silly and annoying, not so she gets annoyed with you, but so that she is forced to laugh at you, and laugh at yourself as well. And that should take some of the pressure off

But definitely start reading those social skills books. You'll find a lot of them at the bottom of the article. Social intelligence for elementary schoolers on the Aha Parenting website. Lots of great social skills books. Read the descriptions of them that are on the Amazon reviews, and pick out a few that you think would be good to start with for your daughter and read them and discuss them together as you read. And then my final piece of advice is for every parent who's been tempted to pick up the phone in a situation like this, look at your own anxiety level, and think about what would most benefit your child. It isn't running interference in the world. It's helping your child learn a behavior so your child can solve their own problem.

### Question 30:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:49:03.5 Our next question is "Thanks for this fantastic course. Our daughter struggled this year at recess in grade one with

three-way girl friendships. She was both the perpetrator and the receiver of mean behavior, and conditional threats set on friendship. She's a highly sensitive person, feels her feelings deeply, and is expressive in her reactions."

Dr. Laura Markham:

So this is very common with girls, and it's definitely happening by age seven. They're so much more astute about relationships than boys are generally, not always, but generally, and the highly sensitive ones often get hurt more easily, and surprisingly they can hurt other people. They can go right for the juggler because they feel hurt themselves. Unfortunately, you can't prevent your daughter having these experiences, but hopefully you can coach her so that she reflects on the experiences, learns about her own emotions, learns empathy for others coming out of her own pain rather than acting out of her pain to hurt others, notices that that's a tendency, but that her pain could also teach her what someone else is feeling and she could have empathy for them.

And, of course, we'd like her to learn better skills to work things out with other people. So start by reading with her. As I just mentioned, there are a lot of recommendations for books on the social skills for elementary schoolers article on the Aha Parenting website.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Begin reading with her, discussing while you read the dilemmas faced by the people in the books. Resist lecturing. Ask a lot of questions. Ask what she would do in that situation. Ask if she's ever been in such a situation. Ask, well, what might happen then if she handles it this way or that way? Meaning your daughter if your daughter handled it, but you can start by what would happen if the character decided to handle it one way or another. Before you turn the page and find out how the character handles it ask your daughter, what do you think she should do? And then in your daily life with her pose scenarios, ask her advice about what the character should do. So this could be a scenario like, hmm, what if there were three girls who all played together, but sometimes one of them wanted one of the girls all to herself, or two girls were always

ving for the affections of a third girl? So you can pose a scenario that way.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You can also tell a story. So my husband used to tell my daughter stories about a little girl in France, Marie Claire, and all the different things that happened to this girl. Some of them were about friendships. Some of them were about adventure. Most of them were about courage and bravery in some form or other, and about how to live a good life, treat people well, fight to make the world a better place. I think those stories were instrumental in shaping my daughter's approach to the world, her values, her self-image. And, of course, it was great for bonding between father and daughter.

I want to add that this isn't all on you. The school should also be intervening. All schools should have a curriculum about inclusivity, empathy, social skills. This is the foundation of an anti-bullying curriculum. So if your daughter's school has not introduced these ideas ask the teacher, ask the principal, what's their plan for developing social emotional intelligence, and laying the foundation now to prevent bullying behavior as the kids get a little older?

### Question 31:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:52:39.5

Our next question is: "Our son can be verbally mean to others to be top dog, exact revenge, or act out frustration. His teachers describe his unnecessary unpleasantness as baffling and frustrating. Other kids are beginning to reject him. We'd like ways to develop his emotional maturity, social skills, and moral compass."

Dr. Laura Markham:

So you've heard me talk about moral compass and how important that is so I love hearing you say that, and you've heard me give examples of how to develop social skills, read books, discuss as you read. Before you turn the page and find out what happens ask your child what should the kid do? The kid in question in the book. And, of course,

telling stories and posing scenarios yourself. And the way to develop emotional maturity is to talk to kids about emotion.

I've written a lot about how to develop emotional intelligence. As you know, conventional parenting is not how you do that. Empathic limits, empathy in general, and discussing emotions is how you do it. And my workbook, the Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids Workbook has a lot of information on how to help kids develop emotional maturity, but, of course, maturity happens as we mature. And in your son's case, what we're really talking about is he's a bright kid. He's able to go for the juggler, and if he thinks it will make himself feel better, why wouldn't he do that?

Dr. Laura Markham:

In fact, every human behavior that people engage in, they do for a reason and almost always it's to make themselves feel better so he thinks being top dog, or acting out his frustration on someone else, or getting revenge will make him feel better. And maturity would say, oh, I know I think this will make me feel better, but in the end I would feel worse because I made this person feel worse. I'm going to resist the temptation to exact revenge, or to act out my frustration on someone else, or to be top dog by exercising power.

Here's the thing, many adults can't resist that. That takes a lot of emotional maturity and your son is only six, so it's going to take time for him to learn these skills. So the Peaceful Parenting Approach helps kids work out their backlog of upsets, so they are able to be more mature. They're not succumbing to their past emotional baggage because they're laughing it out every day. Because they get daily special time with each parent they don't need to be top dog.

They're top dog in the ways that matter meaning their self-esteem is high. They don't need to put somebody else down so that they feel better. So I don't why your son is feeling the need to do this. And I don't know how long you've been doing this kind of parenting, but most of the

time when kids are parented this way, they don't need to do this with others. So keep using the Peaceful Parenting approach. Keep using the tools, make sure you're really using them every day. In some ways that's more important than the moral compass and social skills work because the feelings that your son has are what are driving him to act this way.

It's baffling, right? For the teachers. Well, it's baffling for you. It's probably baffling for your son as well. He does need to know there are other ways to handle things. That's why you do the reading with him, et cetera, but he also needs help to handle those feelings, and that's why you use the Peaceful Parenting tools.

### Question 32:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:56:25.5

Our next question is: "My seven-year-old is always caught in some pretend play or other. Getting dressed is a game. Brushing teeth is a game. I'm your baby, but I can already talk and you didn't know I can already brush my teeth. And now this is exhausting as she always tries to pull everybody in, but she doesn't want people to really participate. She just wants them to act out the stories, and do and say exactly as she directs."

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I can understand how this might be exhausting. You didn't understand that you were actually signing up to be an actor in an ever-changing play directed by a child, I hear you. I think it's wonderful that your seven-year-old does this and maybe she'll be a novelist, or maybe she'll be a director in the theater who knows? I would give her opportunities to direct as much as possible that don't involve real people, meaning dictate stories, learn to type. She's seven, she can learn to type stories herself.

As far as the play with you goes, I would do as much of it as you have the patience for because it's a great way to bond with her, and she's showing you what's going on in her mind, and play is how children work out their issues.

So she wanted to impress you with how she could already brush her teeth. I mean, as a baby, right? But you would respond to that role by, oh, my baby can already brush her teeth. Oh, I'm so amazed, what an amazing baby I have. She's on the receiving end of that, right? So she's getting you to act out what she needs, which is fantastic. And I do understand that you don't always have time or patience for this and that's fine. So make it part of the routine. Sometimes you do it, sometimes you don't based on the time of day, and what's going on in your routine. Make sure you include it every single day in your routine in small ways, but only at those times.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So if it's during brushing teeth, great, but maybe it's not during pajamas, or maybe it's all of bedtime up until the time you get in the bed for the story. And you can just say to her, we can't play games every minute, only during X times of day or whatever. As long as it's part of the routine and she gets it some that will just have to be enough even though she's disappointed she doesn't get it 100% of the time. But I do encourage you to allow it as much as you have the patience to do that.

Now what about other people when you say she just wants other people to act out what she directs? I assume by that you mean friends, or cousins, playmates. I think you're going to have to have a discussion, and explain to her that other people don't necessarily want to act out exactly what she directs, and does she want to act out exactly what they direct? It will take some collaborating. That's going to be hard for her. She's naturally by nature a director and her creative vision doesn't want to compromise. But sometimes she will make a decision to play alone rather than compromise her creative vision, and other times she'll make a decision to compromise her creative vision and let someone else have some say because she'll want to play with them.

**Question 33:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:59:48.5 This parent asks: “My six-year-old is shy with adults outside our family. She's fine with kids, but with adults, even adults she sees frequently like last year's childcare teacher, or at church, she often won't reply. She won't look up, say anything. She whispers hello after she's walked past them, but only when I prompt her. How can I better respond when other adults call her shy? It's a word I actually hate, and how can I build her social politeness in a positive way? She now calls herself shy.”

Dr. Laura Markham: Well, I don't think it's tragic that she calls herself shy, but I would ask her what she means by that. What does it mean to be shy? What causes someone to be shy? And does someone have to stay shy if they're shy now? Can they change that?

And, of course, the answer is yes. I think what you say is “You're not socially comfortable with adults yet, but I don't think you're really shy because you're not shy with other kids. You're only shy with adults, and by shy you feel uncomfortable with other adults. Is that right sweetheart? Like when we saw last year's childcare teacher, she said hi to you. Right? And you didn't know what to say back. Did you feel uncomfortable? Did you not know what was the right thing to say? Would you like to know what the right thing to say is? Would you like to feel more comfortable because we can work on that. You just don't know yet.”

And then look at it as a skill that you're developing. She doesn't always have to feel uncomfortable, but it's okay to feel uncomfortable. Many people do and they say hello anyway. She's allowed to feel uncomfortable what she does, and she can still respond in a way that doesn't hurt the other person's feelings because, of course, when she doesn't respond, the other person thinks she doesn't care.

So act out some scenarios with stuffed animals, and get her laughing about how someone who is shy and feels uncomfortable ends up not saying anything, and the other person assumes that they're mad at them, or that they

don't like them. And then as you act out scenarios after you've done some that have gotten her laughing, act out scenarios and ask her what the kids should do in her scenario when the childcare teacher from last year says hi, and the kid says sort of sotto voce looking down, I'm nervous, I don't know what to say. I feel uncomfortable.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You can say, "What should she say?" And your kid will know. But is she too nervous to say it? What could she do instead? And, of course, ask her what the parent could do to be helpful in that situation. And then when you find yourself in that situation in the future, do it. But do a lot of acting out scenarios with stuffed animals. And then act out scenarios with just you and her and a teddy bear being the childcare teacher. You're training her subconscious so that next time she's in the situation, it will be a lot easier for her.

And gradually she'll learn to notice that she's uncomfortable, and not freak out about that, and then be able to act in a socially appropriate manner even though she does feel a little uncomfortable.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And, of course, in those moments, social situations when you're with her, be completely supportive that she feels a little uncomfortable and that's okay. Don't force her to say or do anything.

You can speak for her. "Oh, hi, Mrs. Jones (childcare teacher from last year.) We're so glad to see you! Samantha was just saying how much she loved your class last year. Samantha, you're not saying anything. I guess you feel a little uncomfortable, but I know how much you love Mrs. Jones. Mrs. Jones, it was so lovely to see you!"

And then you walk away. You do not put your daughter on the spot. You're her wingman.

And as you continue to do the work at home, she will develop the ability to manage her own social awkwardness, her own discomfort in these social situations, and do the right thing, but in the meantime,

don't put her on the spot because that will just increase her anxiety.

### Question 34:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:04:18

This parent says that they “have a preschooler friend who has some problems in his family, and it shows in the boy's behavior that something's not right at home. There have been several incidents where our children were emotionally hurt by him. It makes me not want my children to hang out with him anymore.”

Well, that is a completely understandable reaction. There are times when kids are forced by circumstance, or family, or some reason to hang out with other kids who are hurtful to them and they can learn from that, especially, if you're there every minute and can coach through it. But if you don't have a reason to impose that on your kids, I'm not sure you need to feel like you need to do it as a learning experience. Every child, unfortunately, will have plenty of learning experiences with people who are emotionally having a hard time and take it out on that child.

Your children are only two and three years old. They do not need this learning experience right now. I personally would minimize the amount of time they spend with this child, and when they do spend time with the child, I would be there observing, and coaching, commenting. So if this friend says something mean, you can intervene right at that time and say, wow, those words could hurt. Are you mad at something? You can tell us what you need without using mean words, without attacking. Who knows, you might be able to really help this other child, but I think your primary responsibility is always protecting your own children.

**Question 35:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:05:57

Our next question is: "If my child experienced something I think is upsetting, but my child says it doesn't bother him, how should I proceed? Should I try and talk about it even when he doesn't want to, or leave him to bring it up?"

This is a great question that all parents have. I think that often kids are ashamed of something that happened and don't want to talk with you about it because they worry that you'll think less of them.

So, for instance, bullying, that often happens with. Of course, children often don't want to go anywhere near an upsetting feeling, so they shut those down. Now we know that it's best if they're willing to talk about something to work it through, and we also want to respect our child so we don't want to insist they talk about it. It leaves us in a quandary. I think I would say all of that to your child, some version of that so they know the door is open.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So you might say, "I hear you that you aren't bothered about the way those boys were calling you names on the playground. I really admire how you can rise above that and not let it bother you. That shows a lot of maturity. I also know that sometimes when things feel scary or hurtful, we want to push them away, and we just insist that they won't bother us, but they do bother us inside so it always helps to talk about those things. You can be strong and still acknowledge that something hurt your feelings or was scary. Talking helps us work them through so they don't keep hurting us inside. So we don't carry those hurting feelings around with us, and worry so it doesn't affect our behavior now. So, for instance, when you go to the park now where those boys were being mean to you, do you notice that you feel any different, or do you feel okay?"

Now he might say he feels okay, or he might say, yeah, he always looks around to make sure they're not there and then he's okay, but, obviously, if you have noticed a difference in your child, that's what you're going to

comment on. I noticed that you don't really want to go to the park anymore. That's a natural reaction to feeling threatened when that happened. It could make you feel pretty unsafe, but you are actually safe at the park. So when that happened, you actually did take care of yourself. You got yourself out of there, and you were able to stay safe. I wonder what you could do now to feel safer again so you can enjoy the park again.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And then as you continue to talk about it, you might even ask, I wonder what you would have liked to have done with those boys? Like maybe he wanted to beat them to a pulp, and he should be allowed to say that. And you agree that sometimes you felt that way too. And it doesn't mean we would actually do it ever. We just need to take care of ourselves and get ourselves out of there, but, of course, he would feel angry, and, of course, he would feel scared, and, of course, he would want to lash out. And that's all understandable.

So I think it's important if he does begin to talk that you allow him to say whatever it is that he might want to say. And if he shuts you down, I would leave it for now, but I would keep doing special time. I would keep doing roughhousing. And I think what you'll see happen, I always see this with special time. Kids bring up what's important to them. They find a way to work it through. And if you let them take the lead, they will start to act the part of the bully and bully you in special time. And that's fine because they're asserting control over a situation, in this instance, the example, a situation that really bothered them.

So the great news about human beings is that when they feel safe, they do begin to work out their old baggage. And that's especially true of children because they don't have years of defenses locking them into a certain identity. So I would trust in special time, and really use the Peaceful Parenting tools because they're therapeutic, and they will help your child work out whatever is bothering them.

**Question 36:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:10:18

Our next question is: "My seven-year-old is overly tolerant of other kids' rough play. He rarely stands up for himself or says stop. And he's been getting taken advantage of socially and physically hurt. He's reluctant to talk about his problems and he downplays what's happened, but I know he's hurting. He's been having huge tantrums. I want to coach him on assertiveness, but when the subject comes up, he shuts down or gets mad even in connected moments."

So this is so hard. It's like a kid being bullied who is embarrassed about them being taken advantage of, and they feel ashamed, and they can't even talk about it. So you have to remove the shame and de-stigmatize it. And I think you do that by acting things out with stuffed animals. Because he is seven, he will still be willing to watch such a puppet show, and you can act out those kinds of incidents.

I would start with very funny things that will keep him watching that he'll feel entertained by and he won't feel threatened by. Gradually you can make them more serious, but I would really start with funny things where other kids try to take advantage of a kid, and his response is somehow smarter, and wiler, and craftier, and funny and he's able to take care of himself and the other kids get their comeuppance in some way.

So over the next few weeks do some puppet shows and you can even ask your seven-year-old, your four-year-old can be there too, and you can ask your seven-year-old and four-year-old, what should he do? Oh, no. And they will shout what he should do.

Make sure, again, that you're a little bit slapstick and silly so that your kids are laughing about it and your son doesn't feel threatened, and shut you down. Right? But I think that will help you to de-stigmatize this, to remove the shame around it. Laughter really does this.

And I would say, if this is happening at school, you need to talk with somebody at school. If it's not happening at school, then where is it happening? Right? Some adult needs to be there to support your son so that he doesn't get physically hurt, or taken advantage of socially, or humiliated even. So if this is happening at school, I urge you to talk to the school about it.

Finally, there are good social skills books now for kids. If you just go online, I think you'll be able to find some, I don't know anything off the top of my head to suggest that is for this issue, but I know they're out there, so that you can help your son develop the ability to stand up for himself. He'll also need to develop that ability at home. In fact, that's where he'll start using this ability. Practice with him at home, practice standing up for yourself at home, not in relation to peers even, but just in things around your house. As he gets those skills he'll be more comfortable using them at school as well. That's why I say reading books will help him to see that role modeled, so that he can gain the skills more quickly.

### Question 37:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:13:36.5

This question is: Her five-year-old has confidence issues. She says, "He does wrestling and karate. We've had issues of him crying prior to and during these activities. He doesn't tell us exactly why, but it seems he's scared of interacting with the other children. Basically, anywhere he needs to interact all the time or he needs to stand up for himself, even just to say, excuse me, when someone is blocking him, he's not comfortable. What can we do to help him?"

I guess my first question is why is your five-year-old in wrestling and karate? Some kids love it at five, some kids don't, and it sounds like that's not necessarily working for him. Those are very out there activities. I'm not saying your son shouldn't do physical activity, but maybe something that is a little less combative. I just think, if we

want to encourage him to stand up for himself, there are all kinds of ways to do that, all kinds of activities that might encourage that, but wrestling and karate seem like more traumatic for someone like him, at least wrestling where you're actually hands on physically with another kid, with their hands on you. Maybe karate as well.

To begin with, I'd give some thought to physical activities that help him overcome fear, like swimming or rock climbing, but that don't necessarily force him into combative situations with other children. That seems important. He should be able to choose what his activities are.

The second thing is, he does need to learn to stand up for himself and he's going to learn that at home where he feels safe. I notice you have four kids and his older sib is only a year older. I don't know what their relationship is like, but sometimes the second child gets very able to stand up for themselves because they sort of have to, and sometimes the second child is really cowed by their older sib. If that's happening, then he needs opportunities to shine where he's not in his older sib's shadow. If that's happening, you'll want to pay attention to that.

Then I advise you to read books with your son about assertiveness. One such book is by Pat Palmer, *The Mouse, The Monster, and Me*. It's really more for eight-year-olds or nine-year-olds, I think, but I think that your five-year-old will get it if you read it with him and talk with him about it. That's a good opportunity then to discuss, well what does it mean? You don't want to be someone who is not getting their needs met, who's getting walked on, which, in the book I just mentioned, would be the mouse. But you also don't want to be a monster putting your will on other people. There is a way always to express what you want and need without hurting someone else. That's what we're trying to teach our children, every child in life. That's what you're focusing on with your five-year-old.

Then I would do some play acting. I would grab two stuffed animals and act something out with him and let

him chime in. Ask your kids -- have all your kids watch the puppet show -- ask them, "What should he do now?" Get them laughing to take some of the sting out of this because I'm sure he has some shame about it, feeling like he's scared and can't stick up for himself.

That gives us another important tip as well for him. He's scared, he needs to laugh, he needs to do rough housing that helps him dance on the edge of his fears. If you have got them on your back and you're running around the house like you're about to drop him and he's shrieking with laughter, that's exactly what we're going for. If he's screaming with terror, you've gone too far., If he's not really laughing then he's not really scared enough.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The idea is to help your child physically encounter fear so that they can laugh about it. That will help him to get over fear in general if he's got a lot of fear that he's carrying around with him. I think these things will take him a long way, but you'll have to do a lot of practicing at home. He may always be someone who is a little bit worried about confrontation, but at least you'll be giving him the skills that he can use to navigate life.

### Question 38:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:18:03

Our next question is: "My four-and-a-half-year-old gets over-excited when with friends. I tried your advice to let him run around and then talk and snuggle, but he won't have any of it". I guess that means he won't have the talking and snuggling. "Also, it is not always possible to go off on our own. He runs around, screams, spits out chewed up food, throws things, et cetera. I've tried holding him calmly and empathizing, but he just tries to break free and ignores me. I don't know what to do to help him shift gears. I do preventive maintenance and connection." I guess she means at home. "But he seems so disconnected in social situations."

Well, this is a sensory issue. It sounds like when he's around his peers, your son gets totally overstimulated and excited. What happens is he shifts from his sympathetic nervous system, which is the part that runs our healthy response to life, it runs digestion and learning and the immune system, and instead he goes into, basically, it's fight or flight.

He feels super excited and excitement verges on fear, right? A lot of that feeling is the same feeling. It's coming from the sympathetic nervous system, which says, "Let's get revved up. We need to be ready for what's about to happen. We need to get mobilized."

It's true, he might not be afraid like fight or flight, but he's on the verge. He's got all that excitement going in his body. It's very hard for him to calm himself down.

Dr. Laura Markham:

When we're in that state, we actually can't learn, we can't listen, we can't even take in anything from the outside, which is why, when you try to connect with him, he won't connect with you, he can't listen to you, he just tries to break free, he ignores you. You said he spits out food that he's chewed up. That makes perfect sense, the digestive system system is not actually working at that point. So he sits down, he tries to eat, and he can't even swallow his food, he spits it out.

The question you're asking is, how do I help him shift gears? It's not always possible to go off on our own. The answer is, in that place, in that state, he's not going to shift gears. You're not going to even be able to get his attention. It's important to remember, he doesn't have control of this. He's not willfully disobeying you because he's having a great time. He's actually in a state physiologically where he can't control it. He's just that revved up. It's like the motor is in overdrive and he can't actually take in from outside.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now, he will, over time, learn the skills to manage that overexcitement on his part. He may always be someone who's overexcited at a party and he'll have to learn to

manage that. You can start teaching him now and having him practice, but I think it's important that you remember, he's not being bad, he's not willfully disobeying you or trying to be a problem. He's overwhelmed and doesn't know how to manage it.

There is something quite enjoyable about the feeling of that revved up overdrive, but also he's ready to crash and burn at any moment. It doesn't feel safe being in that state. Now, that doesn't mean he doesn't want to be there. He's enjoying being there, but he's not choosing to go into that state. That's a physiological thing and it's not so easy for him to just shift out of it either. He needs a lot of help to do that and a lot of practice.

Dr. Laura Markham:

First of all, before he's in a situation like this, I would do a lot of practice. I would practice, I would first talk about, "Well what does it feel like inside you?" Don't be judgmental, accept what he says, validate it, acknowledge it, empathize with it.

"It sounds like it's exciting when all your friends are there, and all you want to do is run around, huh? And your body just doesn't want to calm down.

Then say, "What do you see the other kids doing?" He probably hasn't noticed what the other kids are doing because he's only four-and-a-half, and also, at these moments, he's too revved up to really take in what's happening around him. Ask him about it, ask him what he's seeing, ask him whether it's appropriate for him to run around, scream, throw things, spit out his food, and see what he says. See if you can enroll him in wanting to behave appropriately. If he doesn't, if he's just too excited, then I think what you say is, "I'm not sure we can go because you can't handle it yet, you will be able to, but you can't handle it yet. We might have to skip your friend's party this year and you can go next year."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now, obviously, that sounds like deprivation and punishment, you're going to try not to do that. If it gets to the point where that's what you say and he says, "No, no, I

can handle it," then he's enrolled. You say, "Okay, I'm so glad that you can handle it. We're going to give you some tools to handle it. Let's talk about what you could do." Brainstorm with him a list of things that would help in those moments. Some of them might be that he needs to rough house before he goes to the event so that he's not going in there with a full backpack, but instead goes in there with his body chemistry in a good place and he can handle more of what then happens.

A second thing is, maybe he wants to, after he rough houses, before he goes, maybe he wants to listen to a guided meditation that helps him to be calm. Then, in the event, how can he calm down if he's overexcited? Well, he won't know he's overexcited, so how can you signal to him that he needs to calm down a little bit? Please emphasize to him you really want him to have fun. It's not about calming down, meaning don't have fun. It's about let's behave appropriately so that we get invited back, so that we don't ruin your friend's party. You do need a safe word like a 'freeze', that, when you use it, he freezes. You'll have to do a lot of practicing with "Freeze!" at home.

Dr. Laura Markham:

This is a big project. You'll spend a month having the conversations, developing a repertoire of tools, reviewing them. The challenge is, it can't be done as a lecture, it has to be that this is fun. You're his assistant in helping him develop the skills so he's able to go to parties.

Then, of course, before you go to such a party, you will meditate that morning and listen to a guided meditation and make sure you're calm while he's doing the same thing, after you've done your roughhousing. Then when you go, on the way there, you talk about, "Okay, if you get overexcited and I say, 'freeze', what do we do? You're not going to want to listen to me. Some part of you will want to listen, but some part of you won't. What should we do? How can you manage that?"

You're teaching him self-regulation, you're teaching him impulse control, you're teaching him basic self-management. This is exactly the approach you're going to

use when he's 16 and you say to him, "Was there some part of you that knew that was a bad idea?" But you're giving him the tools up front to make a better choice.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now, he won't be perfect. It's going to be hard for him to pay attention to you at that moment when he's very upset and he's running around screaming. You are going to have to find a way to get in front of him, put your arms around him and say, "Hey, hey, hey, you're really excited. We need to go sit in the car for a few minutes."

He will try to break free, he will try to ignore you, and you say, "Remember what we said? Freeze." He knows what Freeze is, he's practiced it with you at home. He knows he has to go with you. Then when you sit and you breathe, you say, "This has been a really fun party. We might need to just go home now, what do you think?" If he says, "No, no, I want to stay." You say, "Okay, but you have to show me you can handle it."

If you do feel you just need to take him home because he was completely inappropriate, you say, "I'm so sorry Sweetheart, you weren't able to handle it today. You're not quite ready to handle these kinds of big events yet. It's just too overwhelming. You get overexcited, overstimulated, and you can't calm down, but we're going to learn how to do it. It's going to be okay. You just can't do it yet." Then, I'm afraid you'll need to take him home after the tantrum.

### Question 39:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:27:218

This parent asks: "What should I do when another child is being verbally or physically unkind toward my child and the other parent doesn't intervene? How do I teach my child to stand up for themselves longterm and when should I step in?"

I would say, step in immediately. Always be kind to the other child, and your main goal is to role model how to handle the situation.

Dr. Laura Markham:

There is an article called How Do I Stand Up For My Toddler at the Playground? If you put those terms in that sentence into the Aha Parenting website, you'll get an article that gives you the actual words to say and how to intervene.

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/ask-the-doctor-1/how-do-i-stand-up-for-my-toddler-at-the-playground>

You stay very kind to the other child, and it's a good time to remind ourselves that this other child is not a bad person. He's not going to grow up to be a criminal. He just really wanted our kid's shovel at the moment and he doesn't yet have the self-regulation to stop himself.

There will be times when our child is unkind to another child, either knowingly or unknowingly, and our job is to dispense of the judgments and model better ways for humans to relate to each other for both children.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You describe the situation so you're not just jumping in and grabbing back whatever they've taken from your child or whatever, you're describing the situation. "Sammy was digging with the shovel, and then you took the shovel and now you're digging with the shovel." It helps if you can say to the child, "You like the shovel, don't you? You love digging," because then you're joining with them and they're more open to listening to the next thing you say.

This is a basic thing that we do with all children, right? We try to see it from their perspective. Then you turn to your child and you describe the situation from their perspective. "You were digging, right? Now he's digging with the shovel. You look surprised and you don't look happy. It looks like maybe you weren't done with your shovel, is that right? You can tell him."

Now what if the child does not give back the shovel? You say to your child, "It looks like he really doesn't want to give back the shovel yet, he's not ready. Let's ask him if he'll give you the shovel when he's done."

Then you and your child engage the other child, "Will you give the shovel back to Sammy when you're done?" Hopefully the child will agree and that reassures your child the shovel's not going home with the other kid. It also keeps that other kid in relationship to you.

But if it's your shovel and your kid really wants it, you can also put your hand on the shovel, smile at the other child and say, "Did you hear what Sammy said? He needs his shovel back now. If you want to play with us, you could use the spoon to do digging. Here you go." Then you trade with them.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If you have to, sure, you can get the other parent involved. Most of the time, other parents have no idea how to do anything constructive. They just shame their child and castigate them for having not shared well or whatever, and it's a negative interaction all around and makes you and your child and the other child cringe. I find it better not to even involve them, better just to role model for them how to deal respectfully with children.

I've had many comments, as you could imagine, in public situations where people say, "Wow, you really listened to the kids," or, "Oh, I didn't know how to do that. That was really great," because, in fact, when we listen respectfully and treat kids respectfully and set clear, kind, firm limits, usually kids respond very well to that.

#### Question 40:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:31:05

The next question is about a five-year-old who has difficulty respecting physical boundaries. Even though mom has spoken to him about safety, consent, social boundaries, a number of instances of him kissing, asking to

show other kids privates, et cetera, have come to light and he continues to do these things and, when caught, calls himself a bad kid and gets angry.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I want to say first of all that it is completely normal behavior for a five-year-old to be interested in bodies and what's different about boys bodies than girls bodies. Children are famous for playing doctor where they look at each other's sexual body parts. By the time they're five years old, most kids have come to you and asked you, "Well where do babies come from," and "How come boys and girls are different?"

As they get into grade school, kids get more aware of the social rules around looking at bodies, talking about sexuality. They also begin to develop a sense of modesty and they don't want you often to see them getting undressed or they don't want you coming in the bathroom while they're in the bathtub by the time they're say seven or eight or nine. They're still sexually curious and they're often very interested in touching themselves and in masturbating, but they're more aware of social norms and they're more secretive about their sexual interest.

Your five-year-old is very interested in kissing and in looking at other kids' private parts and showing them his, and you've told him repeatedly that this isn't okay. Then he gets upset about it and says he's a bad kid.

That concerns me because there's a lot of shame around it, it sounds like. It also sounds like it might be a compulsion. He's compelled to pursue his sexual interest, even though you have told him this is not okay to do, right? Despite the fact that you have said you've been very clear about the limits, he's been trying to engage in sex play with other kids persistently.

That's concerning, and we don't know why he's doing this. It's possible he just doesn't have a lot of self-regulation and he finds sex super exciting. But usually when we see this kind of compulsion where kids continue to act it out with other kids, even though it's been forbidden by the

adults around them and the other kids know it's not okay also, usually when we see this, there's more going on.

Dr. Laura Markham:

We do know that while sex, sexuality, sexual interest, sexual proclivities are innate, expression of sexuality in behavior is often learned, and if a child is compelled to be sexual with other people, it's unusual, right, for a kid who's five years old, it's unusual, especially that he's kissing. That's a learned behavior. He was probably exposed to some kind of media or he's seen kissing or possibly he seen adults kissing, and he got very, very interested in it.

I want to just take a moment to say, I am against kissing children on the mouth. I think we should be kissing our children and we should kiss them on their cheeks and we should hug them. But in the same way that you wouldn't kiss a child to genitals, you wouldn't kiss a child, I think, on the lips. I think it's a bad idea because in our society that's considered sexual behavior.

It sounds like your five-year-old sees kissing as a sexual behavior also, which is why he's asking other kids to do it. If there's kissing on the mouth, I think you want to be really explicit with him that that's not something that children do until they grow up. When they grow up and they're grownups, they can kiss on the mouth and when they grow up and they're grownups, then they'll want to have sex and they can have sex, but it's not appropriate for children to do.

It's fine for him to touch himself in the privacy of his own room, but it's not okay to touch other kids' bodies or to let them touch his or to be showing each other your body parts. I'm delighted that you've talked to him about consent, consent's an ongoing discussion, should be in every child's life. My body, my choice, and everyone else's body, their choice.

But let's not confuse the issue. This isn't really about consent even if another child might agree. It's not okay to engage in sexual behavior with other children. They're not old enough to give consent.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I do think that you'll want to take some action here. Obviously, I've said, you want to make sure he knows exactly what is allowed and what's not allowed. I think you also want to make sure that he supervised when he's around other children.

You say that there have been multiple instances and there shouldn't be multiple instances. Obviously, they happened without your knowledge, but once you have knowledge, you need to, A, Talk to him but, B, Supervise him better. I do think it's important to have these discussions without shame or guilt, but simply, "That's not okay, sweetheart. It's not okay until you're older. Bodies are sacred, these parts of our body are sacred. They're for giving birth to children, which is the most sacred thing human beings can do, and they're for enjoying when you get older." You don't want to give a negative feeling, like never touch somebody. You don't want him to be taking that into his adulthood.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I am also going to suggest that you probably want to consult with a professional who has worked with kids who have been acting out sexually. The reason I suggest this is that your child clearly has some exposure to something sexual. It might just be that he saw a movie where somebody kissed and then started taking their clothes off and he's trying to replicate that because it was very interesting to him, very exciting. It might be that he actually saw something in person that was exciting and stimulating to him. Whatever it was, he needs a chance to work that out, so that he's not trying to live it out with other children, because it's when we can't work out our own sexual stuff that we end up visiting it on other people. Not to alarm you, but I think your son needs support to work out whatever exposure he's had, and it's not the kind of thing that you should have to address alone. It's not a long-term thing, this is a short-term thing, because he's only five and this is not egregious behavior. It's just behavior that you want to intervene with now.

I would talk to a counselor first, make sure that they have experience and training to deal with sexual acting out, this

should be short-term, and let them help you with what you say to your son before you even bring him in there. Because if the way you talk with him about the fact that he's going to go see someone could be in itself shame inducing if you don't get a little support from the counselor about how to do that.

### Question 41:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:38:30

Here's a question about a child who is easy at home, but when other people are around, she becomes anxious, angry, verbally aggressive, and miserable. She's four years old. She's clearly anxious, she's scared of the other kids, she's worried about what it means and having them there and what they're going to touch and how she'll navigate the situation.

This is a child who needs a shadow, an adult shadow, with her to help her navigate these difficult social situations. They wouldn't be difficult for all kids, but they're difficult for her, and probably she has some social anxiety. Anxiety is just another word for fear. What we're really saying is, when she's around other children, she's afraid.

If you're the parent and you're being her shadow, you don't sit on the bench with the other parents, you're with her on the playground and you help her navigate all of those social interactions. For instance, she's in the sandbox and some other kid goes to grab her bucket and you say, "Oops, looks like he wanted to use your bucket. You can say yes or you can say no." When she looks at you upset or when she becomes verbally aggressive to the kid, you say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, you can say no. It's okay, it's your bucket. Let's say to him, 'Excuse me, that's my bucket. I need it back now, please.'" You're constantly modeling that she's not powerless, that she can get her needs met, she does not have to be afraid in these social situations.

I realize this is a lot of work and effort. For some kids, social interactions come really naturally, easily. For other

kids, they don't. They're more socially anxious or awkward and they need our help and our coaching as they learn these skills. You may find that you often don't know what to say in these situations either, that's very common for parents, so I have a book to recommend. It's by Heather Shumaker. It's called *It's Okay not to Share*. She has two books, this is her first one. It's my favorite. It has great examples of how to help kids navigate social situations. It's specifically written for kids about the age of four, although you can use it before and after. I think reading that book will help you know how to help your daughter navigate and will give you the words that you can use and that you can supply to her to empower her because once she feels she can stand up for herself and get what she needs, she won't need to be aggressive and she won't need to be scared.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I'd also like to suggest that you find ways to reduce your daughter's anxiety before she's around other people. The single best way to do that is laughter. Kids who are anxious like this really need to laugh. As she goes into a social situation, if she's been laughing, she won't be carrying as much anxiety with her, her body chemistry will be different, and she'll actually be able to manage her anxiety better because the laughter will have offloaded some of that fear and will have given her more inner resource to cope.

One other idea that I think will help, read books with your daughter about social situations that will help her see what appropriate interaction looks like and that, in fact, humans do run into all kinds of conflicts, that's the nature of human interaction. People have different needs but they can work those out. They can even work them out in friendly ways. If she sees that happen in storybooks, she at least has a blueprint in her mind for how to handle the situation and an idea that there can be a happy ending even when another child goes grabbing for her bucket.

**Question 42:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:42:50

This parent says her pre-K son has a hard time making friends. He gets upset if the other kids won't play with him and says he's lonely. She's also noticed that he befriends kids who are bad influences or are mean to him because those kids will at least play with him. Well, that is distressing.

Obviously, this is this child who is really unhappy and lonely and wants to connect with other children, and if the only kids who will connect with him are the kids who are mean to him, obviously that's a problem. I would start, I would take this very seriously, first of all, and I would start by talking to the teacher. Pre-K is supposed to include a social-emotional component, not just a cognitive component. Many children at the age of four do not have the social skills to navigate, but the problem is, if we don't pick up on that at that point, then they fall further behind socially. The teacher should be noticing if your son is playing by himself, if other kids aren't playing with him, and that he's lonely.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Ask the teacher which kids she thinks your son might get along with and work hard to set up play dates outside of school with those children so that your son can enjoy being with them. Observe the play dates, be really there, be present. I know you also have a six-month-old baby, so maybe do the play date on the weekend and send your partner out with the six-month-old. That will give you the ability to really focus on the play date, not to get in the middle of it, not to control it, but more to observe your son in that situation.

What happens? Why is it that the other kids aren't willing to play with him, if that's indeed the case? If the other kid is playing with him, notice how your son responds, does he have the skills he needs?

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would recommend the Heather Shumaker book for you as well to help your son to coach him, as well as

storybooks about friendship so that he can see how to make friends. It doesn't come easily to everybody.

Regarding the kids who are mean to him, I would ask him how it feels when someone is mean to him like that. Tell him, 'You don't have to play with anyone who is mean to you. You are worth more than that. You can hold out for people who will be real friends.' He might say, "But I don't have any real friends. Nobody plays with me," and that's what you really need to go to the teacher about. Someone needs to take him by the hand and help him integrate into the social life of the kids in his class.

Finally, if you don't see improvement pretty quickly when you speak with a teacher, seek out a social skills training group in your community. There are many of those that are designed for children and designed to teach kids social skills. They also are designed to increase your child's self-esteem, to help them feel better about who they are. Being in such a group for six months, once a week after school can be a really wonderful way to gain the skills he needs. Your child never has to be a social butterfly, but every child needs to have at least one or two friends that they look forward to seeing when they go to school.

### Question 43:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:46:26 This is about a five year old, who used to sleep well but was bullied, terribly bullied it sounds like, in her pre-school class. Then, over the two month Christmas break in Australia, was fine. Then, when she returned to pre-school in February, she started having terrible anxiety. Anxiety about separating from mom to go into the school, anxiety about going to bed at night. She wakes up in the night looking for mom. You know, clearly, going back to pre-school brought back lots of bad memories of this bullying.

You asked if you should take her out of the pre-school? Yes, I would take her out of the pre-school. It's just distressing her, if she's continuing to be distressed every

time she goes. That's just distressing her. I would say, also, this was a trauma. She has PTSD. She's waking up a night for a reason, which is that she has a trauma going on. So, you, I think, really need to get her to some sort of therapy; that's what I would recommend. She needs to work this through.

There is an article on my website, [Helping a Child Who Has Been Bullied at School](https://www.ahaparenting.com/ask-the-doctor-1/how-to-help-4-year-old-who-is-being-bullied-bossed).

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/ask-the-doctor-1/how-to-help-4-year-old-who-is-being-bullied-bossed>

It does talk about things you can do at home, to play with the child, using teddy bears and stuff. This sounds like it was severe enough that she probably ... her response is severe enough. Separation anxiety, anxiety at night, and anxiety about going to the school, it sounds to me like she actually just needs to get some therapy to work this through. She's already five. Do not wait until she's six, because her brain rewires at age six. We want this solved before that time.

Also, I think you're expecting another child. The last thing you need is to have to be up all night with two children, one of whom is five and desperate for your company because she's suffering from trauma, PTSD. The other one, who is a newborn baby, and obviously really needs you in the middle of the night.

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:48:22

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/podcasts](https://www.ahaparenting.com/podcasts), so A-H-A parenting.com/podcast, and leave your question as a voice memo. This is Dr. Dr. Laura Markham, wishing you less drama and more love. Goodbye for now.