

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

Jennifer Lehr: Hello, Dr. Laura.

Dr. Markham: Hello.

Jennifer Lehr: Hi, welcome. This is Jennifer from www.goodjobandotherthings.com, but the full title is actually ***GOOD JOB!*** and ***Other Things You Shouldn't Say or Do***, and in a humorous way, ***Unless You Want to Ruin Your Child's Life***.

And so, I am so delighted to have this discussion with you because I have been drawn to your work on www.ahaparenting.com for a couple of years now and I wanted to talk to you about one of those words that I think does not help our child's life, and this is *discipline*.

I wanted to let everybody know that Dr. Markham has a new book that came out at the end of November; it's called ***Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids: How to Stop Yelling and Start Connecting***. And I was delighted when I received a copy of this book because Chapter Four, the subtitle is *Dare Not to Discipline*. The chapter is *Raising a Child Who Wants to Behave: Dare Not to Discipline*, and that's what we're going to be talking today, about – discipline.

And Dr. Laura, I just wanted to take one moment to say how we initially connected on this topic before we get your thoughts on it.

Dr. Markham: Oh, great.

Jennifer Lehr: In September of this year, I wrote to Dr. Laura because I had noticed on her site that in some older posts, she had been using the term “positive discipline,” and I was struck by this because to me, the meaning – maybe it's not the real meaning of the term *discipline*, but the way that we understand it as a culture is punishment. And if you look it up, it basically says “training to obey rules through punishment to correct disobedience.” I know the origin of the word that has *disciple* and can mean *to guide*; I don't think we use it that way anymore. As a matter of fact, Webster has, that definition of it as obsolete.

So, I had written Dr. Laura and said that I was confused by the term “positive discipline” because to me, it was like saying “white black” which means, it doesn't make any sense because black is always dark and if it was light, it would be something else, which is grey. So, I specifically asked, is there another more accurate word to use? And I was thrilled when she wrote back and she uses a different term now.

And do you want to start off by telling us about that term, Dr. Laura?

Dr. Markham: Sure. The term I use is “loving guidance.” But when people ask me to be specific, I say “empathic limits” because often, when we say we're going to move beyond discipline, people say, “Oh, no, no,

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

&
Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

but don't we ever set limits for kids?" and I say, "Of course, but when you set limits, you set them with empathy."

"No, sweetie, I'm sorry, you can't have cookies for dinner. I know you wish you could. I know you love cookies."

It's a whole different experience. There's zero punishment; there's zero retribution. Punishment is designed to make someone feel bad. So, empathic limits are designed to make someone feel understood; it's a completely different thing.

So, it's nothing to do with the way we think of discipline. It's guidance –

Jennifer Lehr: Because discipline is really to control someone else's behavior and guiding them with empathy is helping them feel understood while setting the limits.

Dr. Markham: Yes.

Jennifer Lehr: Is that right?

Dr. Markham: Yes. Yes, exactly.

Jennifer Lehr: And it really, I think, makes parents think, "What is my goal? Do I just want my child to behave in a way that I want, or do I want to know who they are, why they're acting that way and how I can help?"

Dr. Markham: I actually think that most parents, when push comes to shove, and I'm no exception to this – you want your kid to do what you want. I mean, the truth is, we do want our kids to do what we want, but then when parents think about it, they realize that who their child becomes, long term, is what actually matters. It does not really matter whether your child eats that piece of broccoli or whether your child immediately jumps up and does whatever you've asked her to do. What does matter is whether she's developing whether she develops an appreciation of eating healthy food and keeping her body healthy, or the self-discipline to do what needs to be done.

So, once parents understand that controlling our kids actually backfires, then I think, it's easier to think in terms of, okay, well, long-term, what's going to work best to help my child thrive and grow?

Jennifer Lehr: Because we're not always there to tell them what we want them to do anyway.

Dr. Markham: That's such a good point.

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

Jennifer Lehr: They'll go to school –

Dr. Markham: Right, you'll be the one controlling and what happens when you're not there?

Jennifer Lehr: Right. They go to a playgroup, they go to school; you want them to have the self-discipline, themselves, to make a better choice.

Dr. Markham: Yes, and I think self-discipline is such a misunderstood, I was going to say "idea," but it's not an idea. It's a developmental achievement that, over time, children develop self-discipline. And I think most people *think* that the way children develop self-discipline is by having discipline applied to them in some way.

Jennifer Lehr: Right.

Dr. Markham: Like, oh, if I punish my kid...

Jennifer Lehr: And they're very different terms.

Dr. Markham: Right.

Jennifer Lehr: Yes.

Dr. Markham: Yes, it's very different. In fact, self-discipline is about being able to manage our behavior to meet our own goals and the goal might be not to get a speeding ticket if we're an adult – managing our behavior in that way, or it might be to get a college degree. There are a lot of things we want our child to manage their behavior to do, when they get older. But what gets in the way of kids managing their behavior is, if they can't manage their big feelings. So they end up hitting a class mate or their sister or not being able to get their homework done. If you can't manage your feelings, then you can't manage your behavior.

So, I think when we talk about self-discipline, it opens up a much bigger question of how do we facilitate children learning how to manage themselves.

Jennifer Lehr: Right. I like that we're talking about it.

Dr. Markham: Yes.

Jennifer Lehr: Most parents do ask, "How can I get my child to do A, B, C or D?"

Dr. Markham: Right.

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

Jennifer Lehr: They may not use the word “discipline,” but how can I do it? I don’t want to yell; I don’t want to hit my child. Some people believe in that, but for those who genuinely don’t, but don’t have the skills or the tool set, what would you say to them?

Dr. Markham: Well, I would say, of course, we want our child to cooperate. You know, we have a lot of things that have to happen in the course of a day that we need our child’s cooperation to do. But humans rebel against control – all humans, including small humans, rebel against control.

So, if we’re over controlling, we can expect to have power struggles. And if we’re instead, inviting cooperation, children love to cooperate and to feel good about themselves if they are with someone they feel good about and connected to.

So, I guess I would tell parents:

1. Connect with your child so they want to cooperate with you – that’s the motivation.
2. Help them with their emotions so that they can manage those emotions and manage their behavior, so they can cooperate.
3. Coach, don’t control. Coaching allows the person you’re coaching, to be their best self; to develop their own skills and I think that’s –

Jennifer Lehr: Can you give me an example of coaching.

Dr. Markham: Okay. So, an example of coaching would be two siblings who are playing with each other and start to have a fight. And we could say, “Well, they have to work it out for themselves because then they’ll learn how to do it.”

But, I wonder how are they expected to learn how to do it if they don’t have – you know, kids don’t pile around in a group the way they did in tribal situations where they would actually learn from watching older kids, because they’re not in multi-age groups anymore, usually. And so, how will these kids learn to work this out?

And what we usually do, as parents -- they’re fighting, they’re driving us crazy – So we start yelling or we start making decisions. We play God. We say, “Alright, you had it first. It’s his turn now. Give it to him” or “You get it for ten minutes, then you get it for ten minutes,” or “Leave your brother alone. You’re always....” and of course that’s the worst thing because then we’re putting the kid in a certain role. That’s controlling.

Jennifer Lehr: Right.

Dr. Markham: Because we just want the problem to go away. But if we *coach*, we’d go into the situation. We’d start on the outskirts, to see if they could work it out, but we wouldn’t let it get out of hand, to the point where their emotions are getting very angry, because then it’s hard for them to calm down.

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

So, then, we'd want to let them know we're there and available. So,

"I see you two are having a hard time working this out. You both want the such-and-such."

Then you might say,

"Hmm, wonder how you'll work this out?"

And you can actually give them ideas on how to do this; it might be they would come up with ideas on their own, which would be fantastic. And the more you raise your kids this way, the more likely, first of all, they'll work it out without you stepping in; and secondly, that they'll come up with ideas. But if they don't come up with anything, you could say,

"Hmm, well what do you think? So, I see you have it and I see you want it."

And sooner or later, one of them is going to say,

"Yes, I'm going to use it first. I want to use it first and then she can have it."

And you'd say, "What do you think? Does that work for you?" to your daughter. And she says, "No, he always gets to use it first."

So, they're sort of at an impasse, and then you could say,

"Well, do you think there's a way that one of you could use it and then the other could use it? Would that work?" Or, he could say, "I'll use it and then you could use it." "No, that's not fair because you always get to go first."

And then maybe you'll say something like, "Hmm, I wonder if the person who waits longer for it gets to use it for a longer time." You know, that's a possibility-- and they might like that or they might not like it.

Maybe they're fighting over a cookie and you say, well, maybe Briana divides the cookie in two since there's only one cookie and Georgia gets to decide who gets which piece – she gets the first pick of the pieces.

So, you're giving them little skills for how they can do these kinds of things. That's *coaching*; giving them skills but you're not stepping in and telling them what to do. Does that make sense?

Jennifer Lehr: Yes, absolutely. And you are not letting it get to a point where you're screaming at them, "Shut up! I can't take it anymore."

Dr. Markham: Yes.

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

Jennifer Lehr: And then telling the children how they're going to handle it. If you can jump in earlier – and I don't want to say preemptively, to not let them work it out; but I mean, if you can be aware of your own triggers, being triggered by it. Because often, I think parents get more triggered by children's discipline than the children do –

Dr. Markham: I think that's true, and I think we all –

Jennifer Lehr: – which may lead them to jump in a way that's not helpful.

Dr. Markham: Yes, yes.

Jennifer Lehr: They may see this situation as something that needs to be disciplined, which is getting back to the original point; where it really has nothing to do with it. It's just two people having a different point of view on it, that need some coaching to figure it out so they can become better communicators. Is that right?

Dr. Markham: That's exactly right. And I love the image of the Sherpa, guiding you up the mountain trail. You know, we've been on this mountain trail. We've, hopefully, worked things out with lots of people in our lives and we can be our child's guide. It's nothing to do with discipline.

I find, sometimes, that when people ask me about my own children, they say things like, "But when you discipline your kids" and I can't remember ever disciplining either of my children – my son is now 21 and my daughter is now 17.

Jennifer Lehr: That is nice.

Dr. Markham: They never had a time-out, they never – I don't know what discipline we would have done.

Jennifer Lehr: Right.

Dr. Markham: Now, there were times they spilled something and they cleaned it up, or they broke something and they repaired it or they helped pay for a replacement. Or when they hurt each other's feelings and they found ways to make each other feel better and to re-engage with each other in a way that got them both laughing again. There were many times where they had to admit that something had happened. I'm not saying I forced them to admit, but for instance if they broke something and they had to screw up their courage and say, "Yeah, I broke it. I wish I hadn't but I did break it. I knocked it off the counter" or whatever, you know.

And why would I need discipline then, for that? I want them to tell me the truth. I want them to know that I value the truth and that they also can make repairs. We all mistakes, we're human. I make mistakes all the time and we can repair those mistakes. That's what I want them to know.

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

Jennifer Lehr: Absolutely. But, when you come from a different point of view and I know you enumerate in the book, a number of reasons why we are driven to yell or to punish; one of them being, “That’s the way we were raised.” “That’s what we know and sometimes, we – and you can correct me if I’m wrong – but because it can be painful to think that we weren’t raised in a way by our parents that wasn’t loving, that we perpetuated –

Dr. Markham: Yes.

Jennifer Lehr: – the way we were raised, which can be kind of a vicious cycle. And another reason that we may do it is, just because we can’t stop ourselves. We just feel this need to say, Stop! or yell when later, we may be remorseful about it.

And also, sometimes, a lot of parents I do find who are “yellers,” feel better after; they may or may not feel remorseful but because they’ve let – I don’t know if it’s getting adrenaline out....

Dr. Markham: This is such an interesting thing. Yelling is addictive and spanking is actually addictive for the same reason. So, here’s what happens. When we have feelings that we don’t want to *feel*, we try to keep those feelings down and usually, those feelings fall into the category of fear.

Humans have a lot of fear and it could be fear that your kid is going to grow up to be a psychopath because he’s always tormenting his sister, or it could be fear that he’ll flunk out of school because he won’t do his homework; or it could be fear that these things must mean I’m a bad mom. And if I’m a bad mom, then I’m a worthless human being and I’m going to shrivel up and die (*chuckle*), you know; no one will ever love me.

There is some way in which, if you trace these fears back, they all come back to survival. So, fear is the big thing that we feel that we don’t want to feel.

And the other thing is grief, sadness.

Jennifer Lehr: Right.

Dr. Markham: We find it hard to tolerate sadness, especially if our early sadnesses in life are not listened to or honored or acknowledged. And we’ve stuffed a lot of sadness in our emotional backpacks, which happens for many people. It’s why we sometimes like those movies that we go to, where we cry and cry, because it gets some of those feelings out of the backpack.

So, how do you get those feelings out, when those feelings are coming up to be healed? And they do – they bubble up to be healed. You would need to just sit there and cry or sometimes, just shake if it’s fear coming up or sweat, tremble and just breathe through those feelings. And the amazing thing is, the feelings will then vanish. Human feelings are only there because we fight them, so they stay in the backpack. But, if we don’t feel them, we’re lugging them around.

If we allow ourselves to feel them, they just dissipate, they evaporate. But you'll notice, I'm not mentioning anger. That's because anger is not a primary feeling. Anger is a defense. Anger is a secondary – it's a reaction.

Jennifer Lehr: Underneath it is fear.

Dr. Markham: What?

Jennifer Lehr: Is that what you're saying? Underneath anger is fear, usually?

Dr. Markham: Yes! Always, fear or sadness. My experience -- and my academic learning as well -- I mean, my personal experience too, but I actually mean my experience in working with many, many, many people, is that underneath anger, there is always fear. So a child who lashes out, that's a scared child. We'll come back to that in a minute because I know people always are questioning, well, "How do I discipline? If he hits, I can't let him hit." We'll come back to that in a second.

But where I was going with this was that when we feel these feelings, like our child does something and we're swamped with rage, the rage is actually a secondary response. Because first, we got swamped with fear that we just can't seem to nip this behavior in the bud and stop it. We can't control our child; we've been trying. We can't make things better and maybe we can't protect our daughter who just got clobbered by our son again, for instance.

And so, what happens when those feelings of fear that are in the backpack or now just got added to – we're being swamped by these feelings. What happens when we feel them? It's unbearable. So, when mammals are threatened, and fear is a threat – when mammals feel threatened, they go into *fight, flight* or *freeze*. So, some of us as adults, will sort of go numb – that's *freeze*. Some of us will slam out of the house if you're having a fight with your spouse, for instance, you might be able to do that. But with your kids, you can't slam out of the house and you can't really go numb; you have to respond to the situation. So, we do what's the most common mammalian response – we go into *fight* and at that point, our child looks like the enemy and we start yelling.

So, when I say it's addictive, it's addictive because we actually feel some relief when we yell. The best defense is a good offense – so, what's happening is, those feelings of fear that are so unbearable to us, instead of feeling them, we defend against them by lashing out. That's what your child does when he bites – your toddler – or your six year old when he hits his sister, it's when those unbearable feelings come up, they lash out. And we do it too, when we yell or when we spank our kid.

And so, what happens is, the feelings get stuffed back in the backpack by our act of aggression. We actually are not letting ourselves feel those feelings, so they don't dissipate. They stay in the backpack, so they're there for next time; and that's true for our toddler or our six year old and that's also true for us.

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

Jennifer Lehr: Right.

Dr. Markham: Meanwhile, we've created more problems – the toddler and the six year old have created more problems; they hit someone or bit someone, and we've created more problems because we've yelled at our child or we've hit our child, we've spanked our child. And I know parents say, "Oh, well, now my child has learned a lesson from being yelled at or from being spanked" but actually, what's happened is, we've done this because it makes us feel better. We think we did something. Well, we didn't actually do anything to solve the problem and the real reason we did it was because we couldn't tolerate our own feelings.

If instead, as a practice you make it a commitment that you'll calm down before you talk to your child about whatever his wrongdoing was, you'll find that much of the time, it's not even a wrongdoing; that you will no longer think of it as a wrongdoing, in a sense. But when parents yell, it actually does make them feel better, temporarily, because those unbearable feelings go away and they feel like they're in charge again or in control of the situation. But that's actually illusory because they've just created a worse situation because they've eroded the relationship with the child by yelling or by spanking and then their child is less likely to cooperate.

That's why punishment has been shown – we haven't gotten into why punishment isn't a good thing or why you and I agree that it's not a good thing. But in fact, punishment has been shown to make kids behave worse, not better. And I have not seen any research that says that yelling does that, but I am quite confident it does from all the families that I've talked to, because when they stop yelling, their kids behave better.

Jennifer Lehr: Nobody wants to be yelled at. You don't want to be yelled at by your partner and you don't want to be yelled at by your boss.

Dr. Markham: That's right.

Jennifer Lehr: And it doesn't make you feel better feelings towards your boss or warmer feelings towards your partner because you've been yelled at.

Dr. Markham: And not only that, it doesn't even make you want to act differently.

Jennifer Lehr: Right.

Dr. Markham: So, let's say that it's something in your household that you've done and your partner doesn't like it and yells at you. To me, I would just get defiant. (*chuckle*) I was one of those strong-willed children, so I would get defiant and say "You think you can yell at me like that. I'm going to do this."

I can't imagine that there's a circumstance where yelling actually helps any situation.

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

Jennifer Lehr: The only thing that I can say is, like if a child or toddler is running in the street and you yell, “Stop.”

Dr. Markham: Of course.

Jennifer Lehr: That’s what you would want to reserve that for, is safety issues.

Dr. Markham: Of course, yes.

Jennifer Lehr: Just to clarify.

Dr. Markham. And I couldn’t stop myself if I saw one of my kids about to clobber the other one, I’m quite sure –

Jennifer Lehr: Yes.

Dr. Markham: – I’d be flying at them to intervene, yelling “Stop! Stop!” (*chuckle*).

Jennifer Lehr: Absolutely.

Dr. Markham: So, I’m not saying that parents should feel bad about –

Jennifer Lehr: Right.

Dr. Markham: – the spur of the moment; again, that’s a safety issue, intervening to protect someone. I think it’s the run of the mill yelling that parents engage in on a daily basis that really is sort of insidious because it can just build up until that’s a lot of what’s going on in your house.

Jennifer Lehr: Right. And something that you had said struck me because if you do, or able to calm yourself before you talk to your children about what happened, you’re likely to see it in a different way. And I know when my husband and I, before we got married, we spent three years in couples therapy, really because we did yell at each other and we didn’t have the skills to really just listen and communicate. So, we really spent a lot of time learning those skills.

There was one time we took two hours to really see what had happened from the other person’s point of view and it was really dumb, over a left turn out of an airport or something, that had gotten us so riled up; that when I could break it down and say back to him how he was seeing it, not if I agreed with him or not. By the end of it, I was like, “Oh, my god, I understand it. Oh, I’m so sorry” when I could really see things from his point of view. And that’s what I really endeavor to do with my children is to see what’s happening from their point of view. Because I know they’re not malicious.

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

Dr. Markham: Right.

Jennifer Lehr: And I know some things that they're doing are trying to communicate something; and they're young and they don't have the skill set yet and their brains are still forming. So, their prefrontal cortex is still forming. They don't have as much control as we hope to have, but often don't. So, I do find that it's just so helpful if we can calm ourselves.

Sometimes, I will just sit on the floor if my children are very upset but aren't hurting each other. I'll just sit down and that helps to calm me down before I can help them.

Dr. Markham: I love the "just sitting down."

Jennifer Lehr: Or, if everyone is crying, you know. I just feel, if I feel ill-equipped or don't know what I'm about to say, I just sit there. I will just go from standing to sitting.

Dr. Markham: Yes.

Jennifer Lehr: It's a big help, I have found, for me.

Dr. Markham: It's a big help to you and I bet it's a big help to your kids, because your presence there is so solid. You're not going anywhere. You're not just standing there on your way out of the room. You're sitting with them; you're making your commitment clear – that you're there to be with them. You're fully present; you're not going anywhere.

Jennifer Lehr: Right.

Dr. Markham: And yes, it's a way of just being fully present in the moment for you as well, even if you don't know what the next step is.

Jennifer Lehr: Right and that helps me a tremendous amount. Not saying when I don't want to say.

Dr. Markham: You know what it helps?

Jennifer Lehr: Yes, tell me.

Dr. Markham: Well, no, I'm asking if you. I mean, I also have a suspicion of why it helps.

Jennifer Lehr: Do I know why it helps? One, I think it just grounds me to actually be closer to the ground and more at their level. I hate the feeling of like, towering over my children.

Dr. Markham: Yes.

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

Jennifer Lehr: I don't know if I'm haunted by feeling, having been towered over, but I don't like that. So, I just want to get down to their level but it also just helps me relax from – it gives me something to do that's not – I am not one to yell but to say something maybe, that I don't want to say or in a way I don't want to say it. It just is a good first step, I find.

Dr. Markham: Yes. I think it creates safety. I think that when humans are in an altercation of any kind -- even just mild annoyance – like you're talking to the store clerk or your husband and you're mildly annoyed – any kind of annoyance that we feel, there's usually fear of some sort behind it, whatever it is – did the store clerk charge me too much or whether my husband is actually going to show up for me again or not; is he going to keep to our agreement, let's say. Or with your children, you know, there's fear about whether they're going to get their needs met in the situation.

So, in any altercation, the essential ingredient to be able to resolve it in a healthy way is to remove the fear quotient; to reduce the fear, to create safety in a situation. Because then we can move out of *fight* or *flight*. Then we're not lashing out at each other. Then we can sort out the misunderstanding, whether it's with our husband or the store clerk, or our children.

So, I think when you sit down, you're creating a sense of safety somehow. First of all, you're not towering over your kids. I think that's one of the reasons it works. If your toddler is having a tantrum or your three year old is starting to get upset in the store or whatever, and when you go down to their level and it's partly the eye contact – you're looking them in the eye, but it's also simply that you're down on their level and not towering over them, that it reduces the threat. It actually establishes more safety for them. So, I love the sitting down on the floor.

And I know moms who when they're upset, when they just feel overwhelmed, when they just don't know what to do next, they will lie on the floor – just lie down and sort of try to breathe and –

Jennifer Lehr: And I'll tell them that I felt overwhelmed and that's what I did. So, I think it's a good thing to model for them so, not that they're necessarily doing that but that I'm honest with them about the situation of how I'm feeling, without making it about me. But, I mean, later on, to tell them that.

But what we're basically talking about is ways to approach upsets that have nothing to do with discipline.

Dr. Markham: Yes.

Jennifer Lehr: It's very hard, I think, for some people to understand and I am often asked this, how did I get a shift in my thinking and how can we help someone else, often a partner, bring about a shift in someone else's thinking.

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

Dr. Markham: And what do you think? How did you get to that shift in your own thinking?

Jennifer Lehr: What I was saying earlier, I think it was the three years of couple's therapy, where it was long before I was married and had children, fortunately. I think I had a shift in understanding that I needed to try to see things from someone's point of view, instead of trying to be right. I always wanted to be *right*, but it's not about being *right*, it's about feeling heard and understood and caring about where the other person is coming from. So, I was fortunate to have that.

And then I also know as a child, my parents – this gets a little bit to timeout, my parents didn't use that language. But, if I was very upset and kicking and screaming, they would, probably doing the best they could, say, "You are welcome to feel these feelings but just go up to your room and do it," which really sent the message that "We can't handle you when you're having these big feelings."

Dr. Markham: Yes.

Jennifer Lehr: "Feelings are not good to have." And so, I was totally ill-equipped. I felt bad when I felt anything that wasn't a good girl thing to feel. So, with years of therapy, I realized that and so it was very important for me. I never wanted my children to feel alone when they felt strong feelings. So, then I really wanted to equip myself with how to handle it. We were lucky to find RIE for my daughter, before she was born, which helped to a certain extent but not really with the idea that asocial behaviors are big things that people would think of as misbehaving, that hitting or biting is really an attempt to communicate. And then that gave me a shift in perspective. I don't want to just control that their biting or stop it, but try to understand why they're doing it.

Dr. Markham: That's great to talk about; you know when I said we'll come back to aggression in children because parents often are, of course, concerned if their child is being aggressive and assume that some sort of discipline is essential to teach your child not to bite or hit. And I always say, if a child is being aggressive, it's a red flag, they're asking you for help. And I love the way you just raised it – it's an attempt to communicate. The child is attempting to communicate. So, you know –

Jennifer Lehr: Yes, and people can get so hung up on how they're doing it and I think, gosh, they're just mammals who are alive for eighteen month; of course they're biting or hitting – they don't have any experience.

Dr. Markham: Right.

Jennifer Lehr: And then, to just try to stop it by using violence or some kind of timeout where they feel alone, there's no help. I can just say like, it's not the way to go. So, knowing how painful that can be, I would never want to do that to my child. Bu I do know, other people feel like that was done to me; I'm a good person and I

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

have to do that to my child. I can't quite relate to it. I can, intellectually, understand it but I don't know how to offer to those people a shift, when they say, "I feel this way, my partner doesn't. How can you help me?"

Dr. Markham: For this shift, how do we help someone get to that shift? First of all, I think that kind of change – there is a series of *Aha! Moments* that have to happen. I don't think it probably is going to be one *Aha! Moment*. I think it's going to be a series and I think that as that person, the partner, let's say, sees things begin to shift in the household, then they will go, "Oh, I see it works better. I get it now" because it's a big leap of faith that your child will actually behave better if they are not punished. It's just an article of faith in our society that if you punish kids, you're teaching them a lesson.

So, I guess maybe we should talk briefly about how kids learn appropriate behavior.

Jennifer Lehr: Yes.

Dr. Markham: The way kids learn appropriate behavior is through our modeling. They will not always do what we say but they always, eventually, do what we do. So, if we yell at our kids, we will have a kid who yells back at us by their seven or eight, if not before – maybe well before. And if we spank, they will hit – I mean, you'll watch them; they'll play house and they'll spank their dollies and guess what, they'll spank their little brother too when he's born -- hit him -- because to them, spanking is hitting, so they will just hit.

Jennifer Lehr: Well, to me it is too. I mean, that is another word that I think doesn't help us – spanking.

Dr. Markham: It's a problematic word. It disguises the real action.

Jennifer Lehr: It is problematic because, you know, if you hit a spouse, it's domestic violence and if you hit your kid, it's spanking.

Dr. Markham: Right.

Jennifer Lehr: So, I just like to call a spade a spade. Spanking is hitting your child.

Dr. Markham: I'm with you, yes.

Jennifer Lehr: And they come up with this word to make it part of the discipline that's important in some way. But that's not to say that the reason your toddler is hitting the child is because they were hit. I mean, they may hit them anyway. But I do think that you are teaching by modeling. I mean, I can't tell you how many times I've been at the park where two kids are grabbing at the same toy and then the mother comes over and grabs it out of their hand –

Dr. Markham: Right, right (*chuckle*).

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

Jennifer Lehr: – and tell them not to grab.

Dr. Markham: Yes.

Jennifer Lehr: And the irony is totally lost on everybody.

Dr. Markham: Yes.

Jennifer Lehr: Like, I'm grabbing to teach you not to grab. I'm hitting you to teach you not to hit; it will never work.

Dr. Markham: Yes, yes, of course.

Jennifer Lehr: It doesn't make any sense.

Dr. Markham: Yes, of course. So, I guess that shift -- that we want someone to see a little differently -- comes from seeing things from a child's point of view. Like the shift that you made when you described it in that long conversation with your husband about the left turn at the airport, you began to see his point of view and it's like the light bulb went off for you, an *Aha! Moment* where you said, "Oh, that's how you saw it." I think parents often forget that their child is a separate human being with their own perspective on things and there's a reason for their behavior. It may not be a reason you agree with, but there is a reason for their behavior. And if you address the reason, then you can actually influence the behavior.

But the first thing is to see the communication that's coming from the behavior. Wouldn't it be great if kids would say to us:

“Mom, dad, I'm having a really hard time here, you know. Ever since the baby was born, everything is all about the baby and everyone is telling me to wait a minute. “You have to wait a minute, sweetheart, I'm busy changing the baby's diaper. Wait until I feed the baby.” All I do is wait and nobody seems to care about me. Even my bedtime routine is cut short because the baby cries or something. Like, you know, like I've had it.”

Well, kids don't say that.

Jennifer Lehr: Right.

Dr. Markham: Kids lash out. And I didn't say,

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

“I’m scared. I’m scared that you got that baby because I wasn’t good enough somehow. I read that Hansel and Gretel book and maybe you’re going to leave me in the forest too because you don’t need me anymore.”

And I think that’s a fear of children’s, actually – the being left in the forest, I think that’s why that story has persisted. And I think if we could see from our child’s perspective, the last thing we would want to do would be punish our child for acting out at that point.

Jennifer Lehr: Yes. It’s adding more pain to pain. I always think it’s just adding more pain to pain.

Dr. Markham: Yes.

Jennifer Lehr: And I do find that sometimes when my daughter has done something that she’s lashing out, and I am unhappy with it, I would stop the behavior but I won’t talk about it right away. It’s obvious to me that she needs time but I’ll go on to something else that she is feeling good about; and then circle back to it; so, she knows that I’m not angry at her for it, that we don’t have to discuss it right now.

Dr. Markham: Right.

Jennifer Lehr: But I’d give it time to breathe and let her know that she’s still loved and cared for and then, we will – you know, I’m not just going to ignore it but to be really sensitive to that because she will feel ashamed or bad that she has done something and I don’t want to pour onto it. If it’s not physical, I still think we’re isolating. I still think it can add to it – add more pain to pain that I don’t want to do.

Dr. Markham: I think it’s a really good point that she feels bad about it. Sometimes parents will say to me, “And he doesn’t even feel bad. He hits the baby and he just stares at me, defiantly.” Well, that doesn’t mean he doesn’t feel bad. Or they’ll say, “He just has a blank face.” Well, that’s numbness. It’s *flight* or *freeze*– he’s hiding inside himself, or it’s defiance; which is hardening the heart because what’s behind there is fears and tears and the child can’t even go there.

So, I think it’s really important for parents to realize that even if they don’t see remorse – you know, I always think of this when I’m reading about somebody who is in a courtroom being sentenced and they showed no remorse. And what was seen is a hardened exterior from someone who has maybe done something quite terrible but in that heart, there are so many tears and fears that never got out and there’s such a hardened exterior and they are reenacting the traumas of their childhood.

I’m not excusing their behavior, obviously, but I’m pointing out that when parents look at their child and say, “There’s no remorse” that’s usually not accurate. They’re not actually seeing and if they were better connected to their child and seeing things from their child’s point of view, then first of all they would be seeing more of

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

the feelings because they would see better. But also, their child would be expressing them more. And the reason the child is showing no remorse is that they don't think it's safe to have any feelings.

Jennifer Lehr: Right.

Dr. Markham: Yes.

Jennifer Lehr: Which is tragic, yes.

Dr. Markham: So, you'll notice I keep coming back to feelings. I just think that when kids do things that we think require discipline, those things are driven by big needs that aren't being met or else, big feelings that the child can't express in another way. You know, the term "acting out," you know, "my child is acting out." Acting out is a term that comes from the world of psychology and what it means is that the child is acting out feelings that they can't express in words.

And so most of what we think of as bad behavior, to me it's the child acting out feelings that she/he cannot express in words. And if we could –

Jennifer Lehr: Can I try to –

Dr. Markham: Yes, go ahead.

Jennifer Lehr: I'm sorry to interrupt but it's just kind of my *Aha! Moment*, when I realized that, the shift was "the acting out" is a good thing because I want them to get those feelings out of their body. I don't want them to hit someone else but, you know, kicking and hitting and, you know, kicking the ground and crying and having big feelings – on the other side of it is usually sunshine.

Dr. Markham: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Jennifer Lehr: And I am so relieved once they start it because I'm like, "Oh, we finally got here."

Dr. Markham: Yes.

Jennifer Lehr: They must have had a lot – a lot has been built up for this child and not it's coming out. This is a gift.

Dr. Markham: Yes. And to me, the measure of safety – the way you can tell if your child is feeling safe with you because parents will say to me, "Of course I'm connected to my child" or "How do I know whether I'm connected or not to my child?"

Jennifer Lehr: Good question.

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

Dr. Markham: And here's the answer.

Jennifer Lehr: Yes.

Dr. Markham: When your child begins to act – every child acts out – but when your child begins to like, get those big emotions up, it will often start with anger. Like, “You never understand!” or “I hate you mommy” or whatever, and that's not an indicator of anything except your child is upset and is trying to defend against the upset, so they're attacking, they're lashing out; they're attacking you, verbally.

But, if you can stay compassionate and create safety, your child will very quickly burst into tears. So, if you – I'm sorry, go ahead.

Jennifer Lehr: It's such a good feeling when they finally get to that point when they burst because –

Dr. Markham: Exactly. And what gets them to that point? There's no percentage in having to be angry for longer. I think that the old 1970s notion of you have to beat on the pillow if you're angry, actually is misinformed. When we express anger, it actually makes us angrier, physiologically, now that we've been able to monitor our physiology. When you have people talk about how angry they are, it makes them angrier; it reinforces the anger and makes them feel right and justified in their anger, and you know, hitting the pillow actually makes the body think there's an emergency that we need to be in *fight* or *flight* for; so, it makes us more angry when we do those things.

But, when your child, naturally, does lash out verbally and be upset, if you can avoid getting hooked, avoid taking it personally – “After all I do for this kid.” You know if you can avoid any of that, take a deep breath, don't take it personally and say, “Oh, sweetie, you are so upset.” You're just acknowledging what's going on and you're doing it in a way that makes it clear you really understand and you're really there for him and you're softening your own heart. So, you're showing up with love and compassion and empathy. If you can do that, your child may yell again, like, “Of course I'm upset!”

Jennifer Lehr: Right.

Dr. Markham: But the next thing your child will do is burst into tears, and this is as true for a 15 year old as it is for a five year old if they really trust that there's safety there. And so, when you said that you're so happy when your child gets to that point when they're finally crying, absolutely. And if there's fear coming up – when fear comes up, it looks like struggle because when we're afraid, we're struggling for our lives. And so, I don't know if you've ever had a dream where you have felt terrified. I've had those dreams and I couldn't even scream. It's like your throat is closed down.

Jennifer Lehr: Right.

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

Dr. Markham: I think when we're really terrified, we're constricted and we struggle against it. So, sometimes, especially, young children, will need to run around on the floor and struggle. And if we just stay there and we're compassionate, then they're safe to get that all out. But whether it's tears or fears coming up, behind it is always the sunshine. Kids are able to switch gears; once they are done with it, once in a while they'll fall asleep....

Jennifer Lehr: But they're done with it.

Dr. Markham: They're done with it. It's out of the backpack. It's not there controlling them and then they're back to their usual, cooperative happy self. And when people say to me –

Jennifer Lehr: Oh, I love you mom and let's have dinner and everything is great; and you're like, "What?"

Dr. Markham: Exactly, or, "Can you read me that story?" or whatever. Like, suddenly they've shifted and they're a little embarrassed, usually depending on their age. And they want to make sure you still love them, usually. So, it's important to give them snuggles and hugs and tell them how much you love them so they're not worried about that. And then, you can say something like, "That was hard work, wasn't it sweetie? Yes, let's go get some dinner."

So, though they get this was hard work I did; this is okay. This was courageous work I did. It's a good thing to do. It's fine and it doesn't mean that your kid is going to be having melt downs for the rest of their life; it actually means that they will feel comfortable with their feelings so that they befriend their feelings so when they come up in small amounts, they will be able to notice it and say, "Oh, yes, that's what I'm feeling." "I'm afraid that X, Y, Z, I'll fail this test" but it won't debilitate them.

They won't have to squash that fear down; instead, they will be able to say, "Maybe I should study harder," I'm thinking of teenagers, or even little kids if they feel the fear come up of, there's the baby on mom's lap, then their more likely to be able to come over and say, "I wish you weren't so busy with the baby. I really want you to do X, Y, Z with me," instead of pushing that fear down and then hitting the baby later. They're actually able to befriend their feelings and solve the challenges that come up in their life in a productive way and that's where self-discipline comes from.

Jennifer Lehr: Right. I hope we've given some sense that – because we've really not talked about discipline very much at all, just because it becomes *besides* the point. There are so many other things going on and ways to help your children that it's just not about it. It's, as you said, I mean, you say, *dare not to discipline*, but it becomes, as you said with your own children, that it's just not something that's on the menu. It just wouldn't even come up –

Dr. Markham: Right, right.

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

Jennifer Lehr: – because you’re taking each situation as its own situation. There’s not *one* way you deal with it either. You know what I mean?

Dr. Markham: That’s right.

Jennifer Lehr: It’s not like, this is going to be something that calls for a timeout and this is, you know. There’s so much going on about that day, with that child, with that life. And discipline, in addition to hurting the child, just keeps you from getting to know your child – that’s also a part of the tragedy of it, I think, because you end up not having the discussions that you would have, ultimately.

Dr. Markham: Jennifer, that is a great point because people will say to me, “Of course we have a discussion. After his timeout, I always him what he did wrong and we have a discussion on why it’s wrong.” But by then, your child is not going to open up to you and talk about what happened and what he was feeling that led to this. He just got punished. He’ll parrot back to you, “Yes, it was wrong of me to throw my cup across the room. I won’t do that anymore. It’s wrong because it spilled the milk” you know, or whatever (*slight chuckle*). But that doesn’t mean that he’s dealt with what led him to do that, and in that moment of complete frustration next time, will he have a choice about what to do, actually? No, because his muscle memory is all about throwing the cup when you get to that point, instead of reliving that moment with him that led to the throwing of the cup and what else could he have done in that moment.

So, it’s getting to know your child; what was going on with him? And it’s coaching him for what he could do instead, next time. And people say, “Oh, well, I coach him after the timeout,” but actually, by then, the child is not open to our coaching.

Jennifer Lehr: And one of the ways that it shuts down, like this just reminds me, my son hit my husband with his foot with a shovel while he was in the middle of painting in the garage. And my husband was in so much pain and so angry he picked up the shovel and put it on a high shelf, which is not something he would normally do. I mean, certainly he would take the shovel away and say you can’t hit with the shovel, but he just put it on a high shelf and went on to something else. I kind of attended to my son; he was just too rattled and in too much pain.

Dr. Markham: Right.

Jennifer Lehr: And once he was calmed down and we were in the car, I said – I didn’t tell him he shouldn’t have hit his father, he knows he shouldn’t of. I said, “God, you must have been so upset to have hit dad with that.” “What happened that you were so upset?” and I went to wanting to know why instead of what he shouldn’t do, which was so clear, he was very clear and this is a three year old. He said, “Dad had said he would come up and play with me in my room and he never did.”

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

Dr. Markham: Wow.

Jennifer Lehr: And he kept saying, for him, my husband was just like, “Five more minutes, I can just finish this” painting thing; he just wanted to get it done. But to a three year old, it was just going on forever and he just had, had it.

Dr. Markham: Yes.

Jennifer Lehr: And he could say that. So, hitting him was really about him trying to say, “You’ve let me down. You’ve been away all week and now this is my time and this isn’t happening and you’re a jerk. I’m hurt.”

Dr. Markham: And we want to teach him that hitting someone is not the way that we express that, but how important that you got to the root of it, so that you could help him explore the words to use with his dad. And it also just highlights for us -- often we drive kids to behavior that we think of as bad behavior; by dragging them on to yet another errand or by not coming through when we said we would.

Jennifer Lehr: And that’s really my point because then, I wasn’t condoning the behavior, but it was pointless to even tell him not to hit or one other way he could have handled it without first knowing why he did it.

Dr. Markham: Yes.

Jennifer Lehr: And the only way to get to this is to let him cry, let him be upset, you know, sorry it happened and wait 45 minutes until he’s not triggered by it because he’s so sensitive; he could never talk about something right away. But when he was ready, then he needs to go right to, “You must have been really upset about something to cause that. What was that?” I think it was the probably the only time he’s ever hit his father, so he’s not that kind of a kid that he even does that. So, to me there’s something wrong here.

Dr. Markham: I am going to just for one minute here, talk about aggression and discipline because said I would and we’ve come back to it yet again with the shovel incident. So, parents so often will say to me, “Look, I am not a disciplinarian type parent but when my kid hits somebody else,” when there’s damage to another person “that’s where I draw the line” and then they do have to be punished because they have to learn a lesson.

So, I think if they have to learn it, then we teach it and the way we teach it, is that we talk about how it feels to be hit and we help the child develop empathy. And obviously, by the time a child is three, they already know that it hurt daddy and they know they’re not supposed to do it. So, the teaching part of the equation is actually a very small part. It’s the learning the self-control, not to do it, and managing the emotions. So, the “I’m teaching him a lesson punishing him for hitting” regardless of what the punishment is, whether it’s a timeout or whatever, just isn’t convincing. That’s not teaching the lesson, that’s not how you teach.

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

So, then the question is, “Well, how do you stop the child from hitting?” and I think the answer is, why is the child hitting? In this case, he was hitting because he was so frustrated and his words weren’t working. And when children –

Jennifer Lehr: He had already asked for it.

Dr. Markham: Yes, he’d already tried to use his words. And when children hit, it always is that the feelings are just too big and they don’t know how to use the words to express it, and we can see it before they get to that point. Now, in this case, your husband was busy with a painting project; he wasn’t actually noticing that your son was getting to this point.

If you have a child at a preschool or a playgroup who is always biting the other kids, you know he’s going to bite. We can say, “Oh, we’ll hope he won’t bite today” but the truth is, he’s almost certainly going to bite because he gets overwhelmed in that situation. He doesn’t know what else to do with those feelings and so he bites; that’s what he does.

So, you can actually prevent the aggression. If you have a child who is habitually aggressive, you can actually, usually prevent the aggression by watching and by moving in *before* the child begins to do it. And by helping them vent, as we talked about earlier, get to the feelings behind the aggression.

The crying that needs to happen – the tears and fears that need to come out – and the other tool that you can use to help kids when they have fears, is laughter. When we laugh, it vents anxiety and so, if your child is carrying around fear, well, anxiety is just another word for fear, right? Mild fear; then I actually think that all young children need daily opportunities to rough house so that they start laughing and giggling. And if you did that with your child on a daily basis, you would see much less aggression.

So, the first thing I tell parents is, stop punishing because that’s creating more aggression; instead, try to prevent it. If your child is habitually aggressive, you have owe it to the children around them to prevent it and help your child get out whatever is causing the aggression because once the tears and fears are unloaded, either through crying or through laughing, then you will find that your child doesn’t need to be aggressive anymore.

So, again, no discipline is required. It’s not about teaching a lesson; they know the lesson. What they need is help with the feelings that are driving the aggression.

Jennifer Lehr: And I know it can feel overwhelming to a parent that they just have to stay close; the other moms get to go and talk and get a break. But, I do think, from experience, that before my son was born, my daughter was really kind of scratching people and I feel like it was related to her brother coming. I had to just be very close while she played with the people she’d always played with, and never had a problem with. But this was a new phase and it was kind of a drag for two months, and then it went away and she knew I was there.

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

It's going to be something that's so easy. I know sometimes, people want an easy answer and they don't love to hear that, you just have to stay closer and more on it, but it's not forever.

Dr. Markham: That's a good point, yes. You know, I think parents –

Jennifer Lehr: Because it's been kind of tough and would have been easier just to send someone to a timeout and they feel bad and then it's over. It's an easier, short-term, maybe, solution in some sense.

Dr. Markham: Except that it doesn't then get rid of the behavior.

Jennifer Lehr: It doesn't work and it's not humane.

Dr. Markham: Yes.

Jennifer Lehr: But it may feel that way.

Dr. Markham: Even if it were humane, it doesn't work. It actually doesn't get rid of the behavior so it's not an effective intervention. You know, I think parenting is the hardest thing we do. You know, you described learning to work things out with your husband; it's very hard to have a partnership with somebody. It think it's even harder to be a responsive parent to your child; a compassionate parent. It's the hardest thing we do and parents can't be blamed for wanting to kick back a little bit, with the other moms and have a cup of coffee and not have to be in the sandbox to keep their kid from throwing sand at the other kids.

It's very hard but I think that the kind of parenting that we're describing is actually easier. I know at that moment to stop your daughter from scratching, took more effort on your part – much more than if you had just given her timeout. But because you parented the way you've parented all along, you're going to have an easy – how old is your daughter now and how old is your son?

Jennifer Lehr: Six and four, my son is four.

Dr. Markham: Okay. You probably have easier children now than many people you know; even if they were temperamentally not easy. My kids were not temperamentally easy, but they were easiest kids I knew by the time they were seven years old; and as I say, one is 17 and one is 21, and we never had difficult teen years. They have been delightful, responsible, considerate human beings and just a delight all long because we did the work up front.

So, I do think that this kind parenting raises kids who feel good about themselves and who have the skills to manage themselves, so that that's so much easier when other people are having a hard time with their teenagers, you'll be thanking your lucky stars that you aren't.

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

Jennifer Lehr: Someone had explained to me that it's not an inevitability that the teenage years are rough; it's become that way, largely, because of the way people parent that makes them more rebellious at that age.

Dr. Markham: Exactly, right. No, it's not at all necessary. I will say, I see so many teenagers who are in great distress because of the parenting that they're receiving or did receive in the past. And it's so much harder on parents. You know, it's so much easier to start early. It's never too – your child can be 23 and it's never too late to reconnect with your child but it's so much easier to build the structure of the brain from the ground up, than to renovate it. And even although the brain is somewhat plastic, it's so much easier before the age of 6.

Jennifer Lehr: My husband is a recovering alcoholic who has about 20 spouses that he works with and I just see the slow plotting process of – really, what they're doing is re-wiring their brains as they work these Steps, that can take years and years just to get through one Step. But, they really are rewiring their brains and they're plotting about it, they're very serious about it and it's still so challenging. And I know their alcoholics and it's slightly different, but just that process, it can be done and I've seen such miraculous things so I know; but it takes such a commitment and it is such a gift to not have your child have to do that.

Dr. Markham: Right, right.

Jennifer Lehr: When I see it on a regular basis, all the time. Like, it's a gift for your child and it goes back so much to the way they were raised.

Dr. Markham: Yes. So, we need to wrap up but there is one thing that I realized that we didn't really address that I want to make sure that we talk about in this call because we're talking about moving beyond the word discipline.

You said in the beginning that what sparked this conversation was your noticing the word positive discipline somewhere on my website. And I said, wow, that was an old article and you're right, I don't use that anymore. I just want to address up front, the phrase, "positive discipline."

I am in total agreement with you that if discipline is a negative thing, then "less negative" discipline is what it really means. I think that people use it to mean all kinds of things when they talk about positive discipline. But so often, when the word discipline is in our minds, it starts us thinking about punishment.

So, people then think about consequences. Well, there must be some consequence for doing this...But consequences are punishment. You know, if your child forgets their lunch and then they're hungry at school, that's a natural consequence of their having forgotten their lunch. When your child forgets her jacket and you make her do something – she loses a privilege; she can't watch TV that afternoon because she forgot her jacket at school and made more work for you because you had to go pick it up, let's say, that's not a natural consequence. That is you punishing your daughter for forgetting her jacket at school.

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

Now, I know that the term “positive discipline” is often associated with Jane Nelson who wrote the book, along with a couple of other people, the original book called *Positive Discipline* and I love Jane Nelson. I think she’s a terrific person and I’ve interviewed her and I know that she’s really changed her approach over the years.

I think there was a time she recommended consequences and I know she doesn’t now. So, she uses the phrase “positive discipline” but she doesn’t include punishments. But I still think that it’s a dangerous term because it leads down that path. So, I just think it’s important to not even go there as we think about our children. We don’t need to use a term that means punishment. Instead, how about I guide my child lovingly? I use loving guidance. Yes, I set limits. I set them with empathy.

Jennifer Lehr: It’s an empathy led approach.

Dr. Markham: Yes, an empathy led approach; I like that. You’re not leading with the limits, you’re leading with the empathy and of course, limits is part of what you do; it’s part of guiding. But it’s an empathy led approach. Very nice, yes.

Jennifer Lehr: Well thank you for clarifying that because I do think language is important and I do think a lot of people do use discipline first just to reassure parents who are afraid that nothing is going to happen; that we’re on this in some way.

Dr. Markham: Yes.

Jennifer Lehr: But I don’t even think we need to do that anymore. I’m hoping that in some way, we kind of can grow past that and just to talk about an entirely different thing, which is the substance of our conversation. We didn’t really have to even get into it, why even a timeout or hitting a child. You know, it really becomes besides the point.

Dr. Markham: Do you think that we’ve – Jennifer, do you think we’ve addressed enough in our conversation the question of setting limits because my only fear is that someone might go away from this conversation and say, “Yeah, well they said they set limits but I don’t know how you set limits without discipline.”

Jennifer Lehr: Yes, well what would be an example of a limit being set that hitting is a limit, and you know, that is something you would set. If you want to walk through it how you set the limit.

Dr. Markham: Sure. So, first of all, it’s always good if you can get there on time to intervene and before the first hit happens. And you can say, “I won’t let you hit your sister,” or you’re at the playgroup, “I won’t let you bite Jimmie. I won’t let you.”

Now, if Jimmie has already been bitten, you move in close, you have your arm around your child and your arm around Jimmie. Presumably, Jimmie has a caregiver who’s coming to Jimmie’s aid fast, so you’re not on the

spot with having to take care of Jimmie for long. But you do want to say to Jimmie, “Oh, Jimmie, I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry that Susie bit you, Jimmie.” And you’ve got Susie in your other arm, she’s your daughter. And you’re saying to Jimmie, “I’m so sorry Susie bit you, Jimmie.” And Jimmie is, meanwhile, howling and you say, “That really hurts, I know. I’m so sorry.” And at that point, Jimmie’s caregiver appears and takes care of Jimmie. And you turn to Susie and you remove her.

Moving a child decreases her safety, so if you didn’t have to move her, you wouldn’t move her; but usually, you have to remove her because everybody is staring at you and it puts you on the spot and you feel sort of anxious about how you’re going to handle it and whether you’re a bad mother and whether everybody is judging you.

So, I find that even though it decreases the child’s safety, temporarily, to remove them from the situation, it actually works better than having them have a meltdown right there. So, because I need the privacy to be with the child in the child’s best interest, rather than feeling that I’m being judged in performing for an audience.

So, you remove Susie; you know, you’re out under the tree or you’re in the other room and you say, “Ouch, that hurt Jimmie” you can start with, “You bit Jimmie” and she might say, “Jimmie took the train from me” or she might even have a lot of words if she’s 18 months old; she probably doesn’t even know that. She just looks at you with big eyes and downcast and she’s not really sure what you’re going to now do. And you say, “That hurt Jimmie, ouch. Ouch, biting hurts. You were so mad. Were you scared?”

You know, I’m thinking of an 18 month old – the thing about getting words for feelings is that it’s somewhat intrusive. You wouldn’t say to your husband or your wife or your colleague, you wouldn’t make assumptions about what they’re feeling and label it. Like, they’d respond, “damn right, I’m mad” (*chuckle*).

Jennifer Lehr: Right.

Dr. Markham: But, with your child who is 18 months, it’s actually a great relief for them to hear you say, “You were so mad” and then it’s like, “Yes, mad....Mommy is not thinking I’m a terrible person to do this. In fact, she understands and in fact, other people must have felt this before. There’s even a word for it. MAD. Yes, I am mad.”

So, it’s actually great to give words to little ones for what you’ve seen. By the time they’re three or four, they’ll also correct you. “I’m not scared. I’m mad” and sometimes it won’t be altogether accurate because of course, they’re both scared and mad.

But there’s a point where you want to back off the labeling. I use the word upset. Upset is pretty – even with a spouse or a partner, you can say “You’re so upset about this” and it’s not an intrusive analysis of what they’re feeling.

So, at any rate, you're back at the playgroup with Susie, and you're acknowledging that she's upset. You've removed her from the situation and if Susie bites a lot at the playgroup, it's probably because she gets overwhelmed and this is probably all she can handle. I don't see anything wrong with taking Susie home. If she cries at this moment, if you can create enough safety for Susie to cry at this moment or as an alternative, if she won't just start crying and you can somehow get her laughing – I don't mean tickle her because tickling is a different physiological process, but if you can be silly with her and get her giggling if she hasn't cried, or even after she cries.

Sometimes that anxiety can come pouring out in the laughter or in the tears and Susie is perfectly fine to go back in the playgroup fifteen minutes or a half-an hour later. But if she doesn't cry and she doesn't laugh, you're bringing her back into the playgroup ready to bite again; that's what's happening.

So, I would not only set the limit at the moment, "I won't let you bite Jimmie" and remove her so that clearly, she can't bite Jimmie again. But I would seriously consider taking Susie home at this point because she hasn't cried, she hasn't laughed; she's probably going to bite again unless you can stay right there and stop her from biting. If you really don't want to take her home, it's okay to take her back in the playgroup but you need to be right there with her so that the minute she sees Kevin and she's about to bite him, you can get in between and put your hand on her chest to keep her away from Kevin and say, "Oh, Susie, those bitey teeth are headed for Kevin. I'm not going to let you bite Kevin" and at that point, because the feelings are close to the surface, she may well burst into tears and then the feelings will come out and you can, again, pick her up and take her to a private space to do her crying.

But, as a limit, there's nothing wrong with saying, "I'm going to take you home now. It was too hard for you to handle this today. It was too exciting here, it was too much happening. It was overwhelming, it was a little too much. We'll do it again another time. It was just too hard for you today."

So, there's nothing wrong with removing a child from situation. You're not being mean about it but you are setting the limit of "it was too hard for you to do this." For example, you go shopping at the toy store for a present, and you have a total meltdown on your hands, you just say "It was just too hard for you to do that today." Not, "You're a terrible kid. You kept us from getting the present for your cousin. Can't you ever control yourself? You knew – I warned you there wouldn't be a present for you today." But, "It was just too hard for you."

I mean, after all, these are kids. Sometimes it's too hard. Listen life is hard for me. Life is hard for you. Like is certainly hard for them.

Jennifer Lehr: Well, I mean, that's like in situations like a playgroup is one thing, but to take a young child shopping, you really would need to assess if they've eaten, had enough sleep.

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

Dr. Markham: Yes, yes.

Jennifer Lehr: But that's important I think, just to clarify that you would never want removing them to feel punitive. And I think for my children, it perhaps, may – I mean, I feel I've been successful; that I can either stay close or give them time to recover, that they can go back and engage, which I do think is helpful for them because they can see that they're not so powerful that everything falls apart; that we're leaving because they – had a feeling, you know. I want them to feel confident that people are still welcoming them back into play and –

Dr. Markham: Yes, yes. They're not a pariah. It's okay; here they bit the other kid and yet life goes on and it's fine. It's okay, everybody is going to recover and they can – especially if they've now gone and cried or laughed, they actually are going to go back in, in a whole different place, emotionally. And so really, you can avoid, hopefully, that behavior to begin with if you have a kid who has a hard time in a overwhelming situation. You know, if you're taking them to church and they always have an altercation with the other kids, before you go into the church playgroup, you sit with them outside or you run around with them outside and you get them laughing and roughhouse with them because then, you get out some of that overwhelm that, otherwise, is already building up as they're approaching the building.

The Dalai Lama says “Be kind whenever possible; it is always possible.” And when we talk about limits, that's what I would be guided by. So, when parents are concerned about how to set limits if they're trying to get away from punishment and discipline but they need to set limits -- Be kind. There's never a reason to be punitive. That's not how children learn; if we're punitive, kids go into *fight* or *flight*. If instead we can stay kind, kids know we're on our side and they trust us and they want to cooperate and they're more willing to accept our limits.

Jennifer Lehr: Because they do trust that you have their best interests at heart.

Dr. Markham: Yes.

Jennifer Lehr: And that takes a long time to build that trust, I think, with your child. “Oh, mom says that's not a good idea.” “Oh, she's had a good track record with me. Okay, I'll listen.”

Dr. Markham: I actually think of it a little bit differently. I agree with you, it takes the time but maybe there's another way to look it. When your child is born, right from the beginning, they are born looking for connections and as you respond to your child's cries and you pick your child up and you're there, on their side trying to meet their needs –

Jennifer Lehr: Absolutely.

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

Dr. Markham: – and take care of them, you’re establishing trust right from the beginning and your child looks at you with that adoring gaze.

Jennifer Lehr: And I do, and I mean that in that way, too; but you have built that trust.

Dr. Markham: Yes, and your child is prepared to trust you. Your child is actually completely prepared to trust you unless we erode that trust. So, when you said it takes time to build the trust up, you’re right. You have a great track record.

Jennifer Lehr: Yes. If you have not built it too, if you’re starting now.

Dr. Markham: Yes, I see what you’re saying. If you’re starting now and you’re trying to convert from having to use punishment; you’re totally right. Yes, I’m just thinking that when your baby or your toddler – let’s say your toddler is, you know, you’re trying to correct toddler and you smack his hand when he reaches for something because parents tell me, “Well, he has to learn the word ‘no.’ So, they don’t baby proof and move whatever it is he wants to play with that he’s not allowed to touch; instead, they smack his hand, so he’ll know not to do it. That’s destroying trust.

Jennifer Lehr: Right.

Dr. Markham: So, getting that trust back is hard. So, you’re right, if you’re starting and your child is four or six or ten or even two and he’s already had his hand smacked or in some way been punished with timeouts or whatever. You do have to – you know, there’s no point in feeling guilty about it. People do the best they can. Every parent does the best they can with the information they have –

Jennifer Lehr: And you can repair it.

Dr. Markham. – to be the best parent they can be. So, the guilt is not useful and what I always tell parents is, okay so you punished until now and you now realize you want to do it differently, and you feel so guilty about it and you don’t know what to do. You actually are going to pay the price because your kid has some stored up feelings in the backpack about those times when he was punished. So, he’s got some tears and fears in that backpack and some animosity towards you and some lack of trust towards you; and so, all of that is going to have to come out to get processed now.

So, you can think of that as a parking ticket you’re paying for having done the punishment until now. So, it’s not a matter of you didn’t do it right; it’s more a matter of you did the best you could and your child does have some baggage now to process, so you’re going to work a little harder than somebody who had not done it that way, who right from the beginning, was not punishing, but you can do it. You’ll just have to have extra empathy and extra patience and extra compassion, but you can do it and you will build up that trust again.

Jennifer Lehr: GOOD JOB AND OTHER THINGS

& Dr. Laura Markham: Aha! Moments

TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

Jennifer Lehr: So, thank you so much. It's been such a pleasure to talk to you.

Dr. Markham: Jennifer, thank you so much for having me on and I am so delighted to have you participating in my Blog Tour; I'm a big fan of your Blog – Good Job and Other Things. And I want to tell folks if you're listening to this interview as part of the Blog Tour, that there's a page on my website, www.ahaparenting.com for those *Aha! Moments*. There's a page, if you just put Blog Tour in the search box, you will get to the page and you will see the other stops on the Blog Tour where you will be introduced to other wonderful Bloggers who I'm visiting as I go through the Blog Tour.

Jennifer Lehr: Oh, I look forward to those.

Dr. Markham: So, Jennifer, thanks so much.

Jennifer Lehr: And I want to say just congratulations on your book, *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids* because I find it so practical; that's just one thing I want to emphasize – it's a very practical book, easy to read and you can dive in and dive out. You don't need to read straight through.

Dr. Markham: Yes, yes.

Jennifer Lehr: So, congratulations and thank you.

Dr. Markham: Thank you so much.

Jennifer Lehr: Alright, take care.

Dr. Markham: Pleasure to talk to you. Take care.