

Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids Online Course

Week 1: You CAN Be a Peaceful Parent

Transcript

Welcome to the Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids online course. I'm your sherpa, Dr. Laura Markham.

What's a sherpa? It's a guide to the territory. I've walked this path for many years, and I've guided many people along it. I know where the springs of cool, clear water are, and I know where the cliffs are, too. You're the one who's going to do the hard work, and no one can take these steps for you, but I'm going to be here right beside you every step of the way, guiding you and cheering you on.

So, let's start by considering ... what IS a peaceful parent?

Well, no one is peaceful all the time. Being a peaceful parent just means you commit yourself to self-regulation, regulating your own emotions. The truth is, since no one can stay calm all the time, what that really means is that you're noticing your own state of being, and, you're taking responsibility for your own actions.

So, you notice when you're upset, and you commit that you're not going to act when you're upset, that you're instead going to first return yourself to a state of calm and then take action from a more grounded, centered place.

This is sort of a radical concept because we don't talk much in our society about this. In fact, we often say things like, "He was driving me crazy. I couldn't help it," as if we're not the ones who are in charge of our own feelings. Now, it's true, we're not in charge of what feelings we have. Our feelings just come to us like our arms and legs just come to us. But what we do with them is our responsibility, just like it's our responsibility what we do with our arms and our legs.

If we're honest with ourselves, we all know that the actions we take from a place of anger at our child are going to be very different than the actions we would take from a place of emotional generosity.

Being a peaceful parent means that you commit to regulating your own emotions, to not acting out of your anger, to not having mommy or daddy tantrums, and instead, to maintaining for yourself a high level of well-being, so that you can feel emotional generosity towards your child and also towards yourself. You need to do this, because being a peaceful parent is impossible if you're depriving yourself of emotional well-being.

In our three months together, I am so excited to spend this time with you, because we're not just talking about your child's behavior, we're not even just talking about your behavior and whether you're able to control yourself so you don't yell—we're actually talking about your inner state of well-being.

Over our three months together, I'm going to give you tools to rewire your brain. You'll find that at the end of the three months, you have an easier time regulating yourself, not just so that you don't yell but so that you can notice how you're feeling inside all day, every day. And you'll know what to do to help yourself feel better when you're not feeling so good, and to help yourself work through those big emotions that come up, that sometimes are really hard on us.

No parent is peaceful all the time, but when you commit to noticing your own emotions and returning yourself over and over again to a higher state of well-being, what you notice is that you can regulate your emotions a whole lot better, and you're a whole lot more peaceful, not just on the outside but on the inside.

There are three basic practices that I call peaceful parenting. I've just described the most important one – self-regulation – but there are two more ideas that are an essential part of peaceful parenting, because without them, it's impossible to be a peaceful parent. Those two ideas are staying connected to your child, and coaching instead of controlling.

Connecting is so important that I say connection is 80 or 90% of parenting. Of course, kids need our guidance. We always think most of parenting is guidance and training and teaching. Actually, kids won't accept our guidance without the connection, so really, parenting is at least 80% connection and maybe the other 20% is guidance.

The other reason connection is so important is that it's the only thing that makes parenting worth it for you. Because frankly, parenting is a lot of work, a tremendous amount of work. All that sacrifice and hard work is not worth it unless you feel that sweet, deep connection with your child.

Connection is important to be a peaceful parent, both because it makes it worth it to you to do the hard work, and because it helps your child accept your guidance so that you just don't get pushed to the edge quite as often—because your connection helps your child become more cooperative.

The final big idea of our three big ideas is coaching instead of controlling. We're going to talk a lot about coaching because that's how you help your child, support your child to be his or her best self.

When you try to control another human being, they resist. It's preprogrammed into humans. We have free will. We don't want to be controlled. Think about how you feel when somebody tries to

control you. You rebel. And that's true of children, as well. So, if we want kids to cooperate, we can't come from an authoritarian controlling place, because they will just rebel against that.

There's another reason to coach instead of control. We're not really raising children; we're raising adults. We're raising people who we want to become independent, to go out into the world, and to be able to navigate it, to think for themselves. We don't actually want to control our kids because when we do that, we're preventing them from thinking for themselves.

You know, my daughter is learning to drive right now. It's pretty hard to sit there and keep my mouth shut and – most of all – not grab the steering wheel when I think something bad is about to happen. I could steer it a whole lot better than she can, but if I grab the steering wheel from her, what happens? Does she learn to drive? Of course not.

Consider that all day long, every time we take a decision out of our child's hands, every time we step in and do it for them because it's easier and faster and a lot less messy, it's like my grabbing the steering wheel from my daughter. We'll end up not letting our kids learn to drive their way through life.

Coaching instead of controlling, we do for two reasons. It's best for our child to develop their full skills and capacities and competence. AND it makes them a whole lot easier to live with, because instead of rebelling against us, they actually want to follow our lead. Children do look to their parents for guidance, but they can't feel controlled, or they rebel.

We're going to talk a lot more about that idea, but those are our three big ideas: regulate your own emotions, stay connected to your child or reconnect with your child, and coach instead of control.

Over this 12 weeks together, using these three big ideas will change your life as a parent and will shift your family to less drama and more love. That's our mission—to help you find less drama and more love. It's to help you become more of the parent you want to be.

We'll also be giving you the tools to strengthen and sweeten your relationship with your child and to raise a child who's resilient, who's self-disciplined, who's considerate and responsible, and who's happy, who is able to develop his or her own unique gifts to share them with the world and make the world a better place.

Those are the three big ideas that will guide our work together over the next three months. Each of those ideas has a section of the book **Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids** devoted to it, where we'll go into much more detail.

The first section of *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids* is about self-regulation for the parent, the second is about connecting with your child, and, the third is about coaching instead of controlling – and, that third section is made up of three chapters: emotional intelligence, discipline, and mastery.

Mastery is what we all need to develop to accomplish our goals in life, including the traits of self-discipline, resilience, responsibility, and determination. We'll be talking about how to help your child develop those skills when we talk about mastery. Of course, we have lots of other topics we're going to cover over our time together. So, you can rest assured that we'll be going into much more detail about these three big ideas over the course of our work together.

Today is more of an introduction, just like your assignment for this week is to read the introduction of *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids*. In our introduction today, I'd like to give you some skills and suggest some attitudes that will help you to get the most out of our work together.

Today, we're going to talk about how to be more fully present with your family. We're going to talk about using "Stop, Drop, and Breathe," which is a basic tool. We're going to talk about choosing a mantra to support yourself when the going gets tough.

A mantra is simply something you say over and over to yourself. It's like an antidote to the negative thoughts in your brain. If the negative thought in your brain is "My child is such a brat," then the antidote might be something like "He's having a really hard time. He's showing me he needs help." Or, if the thought in your brain is "Argh! I'm overwhelmed," your mantra might be something like, "I can handle this," or "It's not an emergency." Mantras help you talk yourself through difficulties.

We'll talk today about how to maintain a high level of well-being so you can be more emotionally generous to your child. We're going to talk about our assumption that children are actually trying to do their best, and that their behavior when it's off-track is actually a cry for help. And we're going to talk about using the three- to four-minute daily meditations that I've given you so that you can rewire your brain to help you develop more self-regulation, more empathy, and more emotional generosity.

But first, let's talk about whether these ideas even work. You may be feeling skeptical. I've seen my own children and the children of my clients grow into amazing teenagers and young adults. But don't take my word for it. I receive constant comments from parents about how their lives have changed. Here are just a couple to inspire you.

Erica says, “Your strategies are improving my relationship with my strong-willed four-year-old. The empathy and roughhousing are really making a difference. My husband is now reading your book.”

Now, if you have a special-needs child, you may still be wondering if this will work for you and your family, so here’s a note from the mother of a special-needs child. She says, “When my son was two, we started to have some challenging behaviors, and I started getting advice that he needed more consequences and time outs.

“I knew deep down in my heart that my son was now showing challenging behaviors because something in his world just wasn’t right, not because of a lack of consequences. Finding Aha! Parenting gave me permission, courage, and tools to parent him the way I knew he needed to be parented, despite all the advice I was getting.

“Fast forward a few years and we now know that my son has a rare speech disorder plus autism spectrum disorder and sensory processing challenges. I knew he didn’t need punishment. He needed help navigating his world which is clearly a very difficult and different world from the one you and I are in. Some days it feels like an impossible task to keep calm. Then, I remember how overwhelming his world must be.

“Not everything you advise works perfectly for us because of some of his challenges, but parenting him with love and compassion has fostered in him a sense of confidence in spite of his challenges.

“I’m reaching out because there may be other special-needs parents wondering, ‘Will this work?’ The resounding answer for us has been yes. I feel because empathy is hard for him, because connection is hard for him, because he struggles in social situations, it is even more important that we set loving limits and teach him about emotions and about how to be connected and how to express love. I don’t know where we would be without this loving approach.”

If you have a special-needs child, I do hope you’ll give this a chance. Our basic approach works with all kids, but it may be even more important for special-needs kids. Think about it. There are three big ideas: first, regulate your own emotions; second, connect; and third, coach instead of punishing or controlling.

Regulating your emotions may be even harder with a special-needs child, but they’re often more sensitive than other children. They really need you to do this.

Connect. Yes, often harder with a special-needs child, but even more important—because why else will they follow your lead?

Finally, *Coaching*. Most experts give advice that centers on rewards and punishments. I believe that all humans have the instinct to follow only those who have their best interest at heart, and all humans rebel against being controlled. I believe that all humans deserve the dignity of being coached to be their best selves, rather than punished when they don't behave as we'd like.

Special-needs children have a different experience of the world than we do, and it must often frighten them. When they act out of fear, they deserve our love, not punishment. Of course, we may need to set limits, but we can set those limits with love.

Remember, whether your child is special-needs or not, much of what we'll be doing in this course isn't even about your child; it's more about you. Because you can't control another person, you can't actually control your child, but you can control – potentially – someone who is close to your child who has a great deal of influence with your child. Of course, that person is you. Luckily, when you change, your child changes, too.

Here's one last comment from a parent. Michelle says, "I woke up in a different mindset. Something must have shifted already. I had a peaceful day with only a couple of tiny hiccups and no yelling. It all starts with me in my head."

That's the key, of course. It always starts with us in our own head, and that's what being a peaceful parent is all about. We notice what's going on in our own head, in our own heart. We notice what we're bringing to the situation. In fact, often we're noticing what we're not bringing to the situation, which is our own presence.

How many times have you been with your child and been looking at your phone, or how many times have you been with your child just trying to get something done like get dinner on the table, and your child is telling you a story about their day, and you're saying, "Uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh. Yeah. Uh-huh," but you're not really listening?

We've all done these things. In fact, in a recent study of parents that included respondents from the Aha! Parenting Facebook page, the number one thing that parents said they wanted was to be more calm and present with their child.

It's not surprising to me that those two things – calm and present – are linked. In order to be calm, we actually have to be fully present. If we're rushing, if we're thinking about every place we have to be and everything we have to get done, we're not fully present. We're certainly also not going to be able to be calm, and if we're distracted and not fully present, we're not noticing what's going on with us, so naturally, we can't restore ourselves to a sense of well-being when we're not fully present, we're not really WITH our own Being. Our children sense that.

Children have an unerring instinct for knowing if we're paying attention to them. The reason they have such a developed instinct is that it helped the human race to survive. There was a time when a child whose parents didn't pay a lot of attention to that child could easily be eaten by a wild animal. The children who were really tuned in to whether their parents were paying attention to them, those were the children more likely to get the parents to help them so they were more likely to survive, so they're the ones who passed their genes down to us. Our children notice when we're not paying attention. They notice when we're not fully present.

Now, the good news is, kids do not need attention 24/7. They don't. They don't need us to pay attention to them every minute of every day. What they do need to know is if a tiger jumps out of the bushes, are we available to save them? If they need to know whether this berry is okay to eat, are we available to tell them, to keep them alive? So children are very tuned in to whether we're available. When we're not fully present, they notice it, and, they're programmed so that they don't feel safe when we're not emotionally available to them.

Think about it. All those times when we have our faces in our screens, our kids read that as we're not really available. That's why children start to act up as soon as parents get on the phone or look at their computer. It's because they don't feel safe, and they need to make sure that we're really going to be available, and if they have to hit their sister to do it, that's what they're going to do.

All those things we would like for our children to do – like play with their sister while we call the doctor on the phone and not hit her in the process, or play by themselves without constantly needing us to come into the game with them – those kinds of things are more likely if our child feels safer and more secure and they don't have to constantly make a bid for our attention.

It doesn't mean that you have to focus on them constantly; it means that when you are with them, you're more present. Often, children act out simply to get us to pay more attention to them.

You've probably heard that if your child is acting out to get attention, you shouldn't reward them by giving them attention, but I have to say I disagree with that. If they're actually acting out to get attention, then they need it. If a child is cranky from lack of sleep, you don't withhold sleep, if they're cranky because they're hungry, you don't withhold food, and, if they're cranky because they need to connect with you, then that's what they need. It's an essential nutrient.

Don't deprive them of the attention. Instead, give them extra attention that they can refuel on, at a time when you can do that, and they're much less likely to act out at those times when you need them to play by themselves or to play with their sister without hitting her.

One of the skills we want to develop that will allow us to be calmer with our children, to be more peaceful as parents, is to be more present. But there's another reason to be more present. Life is really short. If we spend it in a state of distraction, we're not focusing on what really matters.

You know, when you get to the end of your life, here's what people say always at the end of their lives. They wish they had just connected more with the people they loved and spent a little more time appreciating the beauty around them and just feeling the joy of being alive.

Isn't that a great prescription for every day? Appreciate the joy of being alive, connect more with the people you love, and appreciate the beauty around us. When I talk about being present, that's what I'm talking about; I'm talking about just noticing what's going on in this present moment. It's a gift. It's a present.

One technique to become more present is simply to pause. You'll hear me talk a lot about this: Stop, Drop, and Breathe. Simply *Stop* what you're doing. *Drop* your agenda. Bring your attention to your *Breathing*. You're breathing all the time, right? But, focus on your breath. Become conscious of your breath. Take a deep breath, or two or three. *Stop, drop, and breathe*.

This brings us into the present moment. What I mean by that is when we pause and bring our attention to our breath, our awareness is increased. We notice what's happening at that moment. We notice, "Oh, my stomach is clenching. My jaw is clenching. I'm getting angry. I'm getting really annoyed at my kid." It's great when we can notice that as it begins to happen rather than when we've already started yelling.

Stop, Drop, and Breathe is a really effective way to notice what's going on and have a choice. When we pause, we have an opportunity to decide what comes next. We're not just getting hijacked by our emotions; instead, we're actually pausing and making a choice, being responsible about what we choose to do with our emotions in that moment.

We only have power in the present moment. No one can go back and change the past, and, the future isn't here yet. All we have is the present moment. So, when we pause and bring ourselves fully into the present moment, we increase our awareness, and we give ourselves choice.

We'll be developing more ability to be fully present using the daily inspirations. The daily inspirations are these three- to four-minute little audios that I've given you for all five days of every week. I suggest you sit down some place where you can close your eyes where you're not driving where you can really practice being fully present.

Research shows that just three or four minutes a day is enough to rewire your brain. You're creating a new habit—you're learning how to shift into a state of calm, you're learning how to be

more present, you're learning how to open your heart, and, you're experiencing more love for yourself and for others.

As you do all these things, even for three or four minutes a day, what happens is that your brain actually changes, and it becomes easier to access that state anytime you want to, including when you're upset.

Some parents have told me they're very excited about this course, to listen to these hour-long lectures that really take the ideas in *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids* into a deeper understanding for them. I'm excited about that, too, but I want to encourage you to not miss the opportunity in the daily inspirations. They're a really important part of this course.

Carol Dweck is one of my favorite researchers. One of the things that she researches is empathy. She says that empathy is a skill that increases as we practice it. As you use empathy, you become more empathic. What is empathy? It's the ability to see things from someone else's point of view or really to feel things from someone else's point of view. In these daily inspirations, you'll be practicing empathy.

You'll also be practicing what I think of as emotional generosity. It has to do with opening your heart and accessing your love for yourself, and therefore for those around you, including your child.

To be a peaceful parent means you have access to that emotional generosity. It also means you have to give it to *yourself*, and that's part of this skill that Dweck says increases with practice. As we practice being emotionally generous, we become more emotionally generous in every area of our daily lives.

You could also think of emotional generosity as unconditional love. In other words, "No matter what, my love is here for you. I will be emotionally generous even when it's not convenient, even when you've done something I didn't like, even when I'm having a hard day."

You will hear me talk about this as unconditional love, but the reason I like emotional generosity as a term is that unconditional love is such a big thing, we don't really know what it is and we don't really know how to do it. But we all know when we're being emotionally generous and when we're not. The truth is that nobody can be emotionally generous all the time. If we don't have our own well-being at a high enough level, we can't give to others. We actually can't be emotionally generous.

I think it's a useful way to think about love because we'd like to be unconditionally loving all the time, but that's probably unrealistic, probably no one can be. That's okay; we don't have to be perfect. I'm certainly not perfect. You're not perfect, either.

That will be a great relief to your children when you explain that to them, because they're worried probably that they're supposed to be perfect, and somehow they're not and they should be. So, let's take the pressure off. Let's give ourselves so much support that we really feel loved and accepted exactly as we are. Then, that is the doorway to unconditional love, that's what allows us to be emotionally generous to our family and to anyone else.

I'm going to suggest a new habit for you. This is about giving yourself a break. This is about self-acceptance. Every time you start to be critical of yourself, from now on, I'm going to ask you to stop and use a mantra that is about love. It could be "You are more than enough exactly as you are," or maybe you'd like to use the motto of Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids: "Choose love."

When I first embarked on this journey, I used "I'm only here for love." I just used it every time I started to get tense or upset. It brought me right back into the moment, into what mattered. Hands-Free Mama Rachel Macy Stafford uses "Only love today."

Whatever mantra works for you, choose one, write it down, post it all over your house, and every time you notice that you're being mean to yourself, that you're being critical or judgmental, or deciding that you would look better if you lost ten pounds or that you were just a really bad mom or dad because you yelled at your kid, just Stop, Drop, Breathe, and *use* your mantra. Whatever you did, it's forgivable. You can't do better if you feel bad. You need to start by replenishing yourself. That is the only way to be the parent you want to be.

The metaphor I use is that there's a fountain – that's you – and you're overflowing with love and well-being, but you can only do that when you're grounded on your source, the spring that feeds that fountain. What happens to all of us is that we get rocked by life, just the pressures of daily life and the distractions. We get pulled off center, and then the fountain doesn't pour through us, and we wonder, "Why am I depleted?"

It's our responsibility to stay on our fountain, our source of well-being, to keep ourselves in balance so that we can handle the pressures of daily life and stay patient with our children and with others.

Your number one responsibility as a parent is actually to manage your own sense of well-being, and that means you start with loving yourself, giving yourself support. It means self-acceptance, appreciation, and giving ourselves a break. We don't have to be perfect.

Just for today, stop tidying yourself up. Stop looking at yourself like somebody who you have to whip into shape. You don't have to be perfect. I give you permission. Forget it. You can make

mistakes. Next time you make a mistake, say, “Laura told me it was okay.” It’s okay. You don’t have to be perfect with your children or in any other way. Just start today. Choose love.

Part of giving yourself a break is not comparing yourself to anyone else. Everyone is beginning this journey in our online parenting course from a different place, and you will see people in our Facebook group who seem to you to have it all together and to be so much further than you on this journey of peaceful parenting. Then, you will see other people and you’ll think, “Oh my goodness. How does she not know that? How can he say such a thing?”

I ask that every time you notice yourself comparing or judging, just say, “It’s okay. Everybody’s learning. We’re all moving in the direction of peaceful parenting. I don’t have to compare myself to anyone else,” because after all, when you compare, I guarantee you we can all find someone who’s better than we are at whatever we’re comparing, and we can find somebody who’s worse than we are at that, whatever that thing is. There’s no point in comparing. We’re all on a journey. We all started in different places. We’re all supporting each other to head in that direction.

Think of it as a pilgrimage. I have a friend who went on a pilgrimage in Spain this summer, and he said, “We were just all walking in the same direction, helping each other along the way.” That’s what we’re doing here together in this course. We’re all helping each other along the way.

Please, use the Facebook page of this group to share your experience, to ask for advice if you’d like advice, and most of all, to support each other and to support yourself and to celebrate what you’re learning.

We’ve been talking about ways you can support yourself in this course to accomplish your goals. Another way I’d like to suggest that you support yourself is by focusing on the positive. It may be that you will yell at your child six times today, and maybe one of those times, you’ll be able to stop yourself either in the middle of when you’re yelling by just closing your mouth -- or maybe even before you raise your voice.

So, here’s your assignment. Don’t focus on the times you lost it. Yes, there’s something to be gained from that, from looking at how you could have supported yourself better or what led up to the yelling, what the situation was. Maybe there’s a certain time of day that’s always hard. There’s a lot to learn from that. But, to begin, your assignment is to focus on what went right. When were you able to stop yourself from yelling?

What was different? Maybe you had paid attention to your own needs, or maybe you were more present in the moment, so you could maintain a sense of humor, or maybe you were noticing your child more, so you realized, “Oh, this isn’t my enemy; this is my beloved child who’s

having a hard time.” What was it in that moment that helped you regain your composure? What helped you choose love?

Now, see a picture of what went well. Show your subconscious that, because what we’re doing here is training, retraining your subconscious. Your subconscious learns through pictures; the subconscious thinks in pictures, not in words. Your subconscious needs to see a picture of what to do to get the positive outcome you want.

Writing in your journal about this will help. Your subconscious won’t understand the words, but research shows that when we read or write, other parts of our brain light up – parts that have to do with pictures. When you read to your child, for instance, your child’s brain lights up in visual areas because your child is actually creating a picture in their mind. That’s why reading is a creative process.

Writing in your journal about what happened when things went well helps you to create that picture, also helps you to give that message to your subconscious. It actually integrates the part of your brain that’s thinking logically and observing what happened, and writing about it, with the part of your brain that is more emotional, that thinks in pictures. Integration is how we heal. Integration is what makes us whole.

Now, maybe you wonder if you *should* just let yourself off the hook. After all, you yelled at your kids six times today, and you only stopped yourself once. Here’s my advice. You can’t do better by feeling worse. Let it go. Move on. Resolve to do better. Sure, if you keep yelling at your kids six times every day, you’re not going to be changing what’s going on with your child and you’re not going to be happy with yourself. But beating up on yourself doesn’t work, either. What we focus on grows. What we pay attention to thrives. Pay attention to those times when you’re able to stop yourself. Learn from those times.

Now, in addition to letting yourself off the hook, I’m going to ask you to apologize to your child. So, you’re not just walking away from this pretending it didn’t happen; you’re actually shouldering the responsibility.

No, apologizing does not make you look weak; apologizing acknowledges that you did something that wasn’t okay, that wasn’t appropriate, that you would like not to have done. What you say to your child is, “You don’t deserve to get yelled at, no matter what.”

Of course, you resist the impulse to say, “If only you wouldn’t misbehave like that.” It’s not your child’s fault. You’re the one who lost control. Even if your kid was completely out of line, they’re the kid, you’re the adult; you’re the one who’s role modeling emotional regulation. So apologize. Your child doesn’t deserve to get yelled at. Tell them you’re working on doing better,

and that you really want to do better, and that you hope that next time, you'll be able to notice before you get so upset.

You're not showing weakness. You're actually modeling for your child how to do something really, really hard. Whatever techniques you use to self-regulate, you'll see your child beginning to use them, too.

You may be worried that you're going to tell your child you're going to do better, and then you're going to yell again tomorrow. You know what the truth is? You probably will. If you do a lot of yelling, you're not going to stop in one day. But you can do better and better and yell less and less if you give yourself enough support to do that.

One important way to support yourself is to maintain your own sense of well-being at a fairly high level. That may seem impossible, but it's mostly a matter of attitude. Are you being good to yourself? Are you being a bully to yourself?

Now, you may be wondering, "Okay, okay. I'll try to maintain a high level of well-being. But, when my kid is acting up, that's what I need help with. When my kids are fighting, that's not about my well-being. How do I handle that?" I hear you, and I will be giving you the words to use when you go into that situation with your children.

But, remember, the words are a small part of it; most of it is the attitude you bring with you. In every situation with your children, you either calm the storm, or you make it worse. The only way that you bring more calm to the situation is if you keep yourself in balance. That means finding ways to stay on your fountain even when your kids are fighting, even when life rocks you -- so that when you *do* intervene, you are making things better—not worse.

Beating yourself up because you didn't stay calm is not supporting yourself. The way you support yourself so that you can self-regulate is to treat yourself with great tenderness, to get yourself through the day as the writer Anne Lamott says, like you would your favorite mental patient relative—with great patience and many tiny treats. Just start by being nice to yourself instead of bullying yourself, which is what so many times we find ourselves doing, if we pay attention.

You can count on childish behavior coming from your children, but if you can support yourself to stay in balance more, you'll be able to intervene constructively, because you'll be able to connect with them, and you'll be able to coach.

If you've been following Aha! Parenting for a while, if you read my free newsletters, or if you've already read *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids* or *Peaceful Parent, Happy Siblings*, or maybe you've heard me speak, then you understand what I'm talking about with these ideas.

You may not always be able to put them into practice, you may lose your temper, you may get impatient, but you do realize that going into that situation with your children when they're fighting with each other is going to work a whole lot better if you're centered and if you can be patient and empathic and compassionate with them.

If you're new to these ideas, if you haven't started reading *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids* yet, or you haven't been following my newsletters or the Aha! Parenting website, then you may be confused about why I'm focusing on so much on you and your ability to regulate your emotions. After all, what about helping your kid regulate his emotions so that he doesn't hit his little brother? I hear you – and we certainly are going to help you coach your child so that he can be his best self.

But if you're new to these ideas, your confusion probably comes from the fact that most of the time in parenting, experts tell you what to do to get your kid to do what you want. There's an assumption there that children need to be controlled and that we as parents are doing a bad job if we aren't controlling them.

When we see our children fighting, we certainly assume that we need to jump in and control them. Yes, your child, both of your children, all of your children deserve your protection. If one kid is hurting the other, you absolutely do have to step in to prevent that, to prevent someone from being hurt. In fact, I would argue that you have to step in even if someone is just being verbally cruel, because it's our job to uphold standards of civility in our house. But that's about setting limits. It's not actually about controlling or punishing our kids.

I come from the perspective that kids want desperately to do a good job, to be good people, to please their parents. If your child is misbehaving, acting out, being rude, not obeying, giving you a very hard time, that's a signal that something is wrong. Your child is upset about something, even if he or she can't articulate it, and your child needs your help with those feelings because the feelings are driving the bad behavior.

You may be wondering, "Well, maybe my kid just wants to do what he wants, and so he's giving me a hard time." Actually, no. Children are programmed to follow their parents' lead as long as they believe the parents have their best interests at heart. So, if you're connected with your child – and I mean really connected in the way that we're going to help you to be in this course – your child will want to follow your lead.

Now, that's not always true for all special-needs kids, and it's not even always true for all strong-willed kids, but with those kids, it's even more important that you're connected. I've raised a strong-willed child, and the connection is everything. That child will not do what you want just

because you have the authority; that child will only do what you ask because of the connection with you.

Of course, most of the time, misbehavior in children doesn't indicate that there's a big rupture in the relationship; it indicates that right now at this moment, they're having a hard time. They might have been having a fine time with you two hours ago. It indicates that they have an immature pre-frontal cortex; that they have a hard time regulating themselves because of that, and they have a hard time understanding the results of their actions. They don't plan. They don't see the future very well. They don't really get "Oh, if I do this, then that will happen."

Of course, your child will get much better at all those things as his or her brain matures, and you can hasten your child's brain maturation process by how you relate to him. Children actually learn emotional regulation from us. Their brains take shape in response to us, and their behavior is modeled on ours. When we make everything an emergency, we raise a drama queen. When we're able to stay calm, they learn over time to stay calm.

If you're an excitable person who's always flying off the handle, does that mean your kid is going to be the same way? Not necessarily. If you can start working on that and model attempts to self-regulate—"All right. I'm pretty upset, Honey. I'm going to stop and do some deep breaths here, and then we'll talk about this,"—when you do that with your child, your child will start doing it, too. So, as you learn, your child will learn, too.

So, bottom line about your child: your child is an immature human being with an immature brain, and she's learning every day. Sure, she's going to test you. She's like a scientist. She will keep trying to figure out where the limits are.

When you have real clarity about the limit, maybe the way you do about wearing a seat belt in the car, after a while, your child stops testing that limit. Your ability to stay calm and just hold the limit is how kids stop testing, and your ability to connect is what gives them the motivation to follow your lead.

Whatever bad behavior your child is exhibiting, it's a sign – not that your child is a bad person or needs to be punished into doing things right—it's a sign that your child is having a hard time with some emotions that are driving bad behavior, or that your child has some needs that are going unmet like a need for sleep or a need for security and connection. It's our job as parents to figure out what those needs are and meet them so that our children stop acting out, because acting out is a symptom.

If these ideas are new to you, I encourage you—I implore you—to try to stay open to these ideas. Give them a chance. Everyone I know who has done that has found that things really change for

the better with their kids. And, I'm not just asking you to take my word for it; in fact, the research completely supports this kind of parenting, and I'll share the research with you as we go along when we talk about specific topics.

The good news is that the research actually shows us how to raise kids who are happy, responsible, resilient, self-disciplined, considerate. We know how to do this. Every child is different, and all of us are overcoming our own issues that we brought with us into our parenting relationship. But anyone can start today, and while we cannot change the past, we can change the future.

Now, maybe you are familiar with these ideas, but as you've listened to me today, you've thought, "Okay, okay. I get it, but I still can't put these ideas into practice. That's why I'm here." I hear you. It is really hard to put these ideas into practice, especially when you begin parenting this way. You're starting from a lot of bad habits, both in yourself and in your child, and a backlog of upset emotions in your child that can drive bad behavior as you make the transition.

No matter what, this kind of parenting is hard because it asks us to regulate our own emotions, which is the hardest thing in the world. But here's the thing. It gets easier. Not only does it get easier to regulate our emotions – because, in fact, every time you do it, you're building self-discipline, you're rewiring your brain, so it gets easier to self-regulate – but it also gets easier because you're clearing up the backlog of emotional upset that your child has been dragging around in a full backpack and that has been causing her to act out. So she acts better!

And, of course, you're creating new habits, new ways of relating. You're helping your children develop new skills to get along with each other and to express their emotions and needs to you, in a way that is more direct and more respectful than yelling at you or hitting you or having a tantrum or a meltdown. And, you're developing your own skills. So, you're going to get better at noticing when your child is upset before he blows up or punches his brother, and you're going to know what to do to diffuse the situation rather than making it worse.

But, there's another reason that parenting is about to get easier for you. It's about connection. You're going to deepen and sweeten your relationship with your child. Now, every parent I know thinks they have a good connection with their child. That's because we love our children. We would do anything for them, even when we want to strangle them. But your child may not be as fully connected to you as you think, or at least as he or she could be.

Over and over, parents come to me and they say, "Oh, now I see. We have such a wonderful relationship now. Our bond is so strong now. It really feels different. My child is so different. He's so cooperative now. He's so loving, he says things to me that he never said before."

But, really, it's not just the child who's different; the parent is different – and the relationship is different. Because parenting is a relationship just like any other relationship, like a friendship, like a marriage. **Parenting is a relationship between two individuals, and it has a life of its own that we can nurture and nourish—or that we can constantly put a strain on by how we act.**

When we see a change in the child, it's because the child is responding to a different parent, someone who shows up differently in the relationship. Your child is about to have a very different home circumstance. Your child is going to be living with a parent who more and more often regulates his or her emotions, who more and more often connects and helps your child feel valued and safe, and who more and more often remembers to coach instead of punishing, controlling, threatening, yelling, or bribing. Don't worry; I'm going to show you how to do all those things.

To close today, I'd like to share with you a note I love from a mom named Jennifer. "If I thought for one minute that your connection-based parenting style was resulting in a bratty, selfish, entitled, walk-all-over-you kid, I would drop it like a hot potato. Thankfully, I find just the opposite. We have a great connection. She's thriving and a pleasure to be around.

"Yesterday, she got upset about something, and she stormed off into her room. Fifteen minutes later, she came out, crawled into my lap, and said, 'Mom, I'm sorry I yelled at you. It's not your fault. I just had a bad day today at school, and I took it out on you. Next time, I'll try to talk to you about it first or hit a pillow when I'm mad, or something. I love you, and that's not how I want to treat someone I love.'"

Jennifer continued in her note, "I about fell over. It took me 40 years to learn how to do that, access my emotions, apologize, take responsibility, and she already does it better than I do at age eight." That's the kind of child you can raise using these practices.

Before we end today, I want to ask you a few questions to help you set your intention for this course, because where we begin and what we want has a lot to do with where we end up and what we get. So, let me ask you, what is your highest and best vision of yourself as a parent? In your homework, I'll ask you to find three words to describe the parent you strive to be.

For now, let me ask you a few more questions that might help you to develop that vision and sharpen that vision of the parent you want to be. What are your strengths as a parent? What do you do well? When are you at your best? What do you love about parenting? What do you want more of in your parenting life? What do you want more of in your family?

What will your child remember about growing up with you? When your child describes his or her childhood, what will your child say? If your child had to pick three words to describe you, what would your child say? And, if your child had to pick three words to describe his or her relationship with you – which is a little different – what would your child say?

All these questions will be in your homework. You don't have to answer them now; they're just to get you thinking. Children don't remember what we taught them, what we said; they remember how we made them feel. So, what would you like your child to feel coming out of growing up with you? Who would you like your child to become as a result of growing up with you?

None of us can be that wonderful parent all the time, but with practice, you'll be amazed at how often you can get very close to that vision. And, I'll tell you a secret. You'll reach that vision of you at your best as a parent more often if you let go of the idea that you should be perfect.

You're learning new skills. You're going to make mistakes. You're going to backslide. You're going to get frustrated. You'll probably lose it and yell at your child. You may have a screaming match or two. It's okay. In fact, most of the parents in this group will have those experiences. It's not a mistake if you learn from it. You don't have to be perfect.

You do have to show up if you want to see change. You do have to read the book. You do have to try to implement these ideas with your child. You do have to commit to trying to regulate your own emotions and use the practices that I'll give you to build your relationship with your child.

As with any course, you're going to get out of this what you put into it. That's why I've given you daily inspiration in the form of the short audios. It's why I've given you a longer audio that you can listen to in pieces or more than once, as well as the reading. This is a wonderful community who are all there to support each other in this hard work.

If you show up and do your best, I guarantee you that you will see a transformation. I won't lie to you. It will be hard work, it might be one of the hardest things you've ever done, but it does work.

Thank you for doing this hard work. Thank you for your commitment to your child and to yourself, for your commitment to being the best parent and the best person that you can be. You're giving yourself a gift, because the changes that you make to be a better parent will also make you a happier person. It's really healing for us when we do this work.

You're also changing your child's life for the better, not just for today, this week, this year, but for the rest of your child's life. You're giving your child an amazing gift. And your grandchildren, as well, will benefit from this. I know you're not doing this to make the world a

better place, but I believe you are making the world a better place. All of us working together are transforming the next generation.

I am honored to work with you, honored to be part of your journey. Today, I want to leave you with permission, permission not to be perfect. You'll need to admit you've been wrong in the past, and you're going to be wrong again because you're not perfect. So, let go of it. Your child does not need you to be perfect. In fact, that makes kids feel worse about themselves because they know they're not.

What your child needs from you is a model of how to be a gracious human. That means admitting when you've been wrong, being willing to grow, and giving yourself support to do better ...and working hard to regulate your emotions no matter what your child does, when you really feel like acting like a crazy person. Not so easy, right? That's why loving your child unconditionally starts with loving yourself unconditionally; it gives you a lot more inner resources to draw on.

Parenting is the hardest work anyone ever does – no matter what your day job is – because it asks us to grow and change. Every one of us has days when we feel like throwing in the towel, but no act of kindness is ever wasted. Every time you're able to choose love, you're giving a tremendous gift to yourself, to your child, and maybe much further than that.

That act of emotional generosity is almost a form of alchemy where you're taking your annoyance, your frustration, your anger, and you're transforming it into love. You're creating love where there wasn't any before. That conscious choice on your part not only changes your child; it changes the world, rippling down through the generations and creating a better future for all of us.

On those tough days, take a deep breath and remind yourself that throwing in the towel just creates more laundry. The answer always is more love – more love for your child definitely, but to begin with, more love for yourself. There is always more love.

This is Dr. Laura Markham. This ends week 1 – Peaceful Parent – of the Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids online course. Have a fantastic week. I can't wait to talk to you again next week.