

## Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids Online Course

### Week 2: **Regulating Your Own Emotions**

#### Transcript

Hello, and welcome to week 2 of the Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids online course. Today, we're talking about regulating our own emotions.

Why does this matter? Because I'm sure you're a wonderful parent – when you're not triggered! So there's a way in which this entire course is about how you can notice when you're triggered and calm yourself down enough that you can use the techniques and strategies we're talking about.

Because really, they aren't actually techniques and strategies; there's simply a principle. The principle is to connect with your child, to see it from his or her point of view to meet their needs. When you do that, you're able to address whatever needs are driving the bad behavior -- and your child's behavior changes.

But notice that we can't do those things, we can't parent the way we'd like, when we're angry, when we're triggered.

I know this isn't the way that we usually look at parenting. Most parenting advice is to control the child and to get the child to behave in a certain way. If parents are mad at their child, the assumption is "Of course, the child deserves it. Look at all that misbehavior."

And indeed, you will see misbehavior from your child no matter how wonderful your child is. There is no child in the world who does not exhibit childish behavior, so you can count on childish behavior from your child. That means that you'll get triggered and you'll start to act like a child yourself sometimes. But of course, someone has to act like the grownup, and that's us. That's our job. How can we expect our kids to learn to manage their emotions if we can't do it?

It may never have occurred to you that when you get angry at your child, it's not really about your child's behavior. Of course, in one way it is. If your child were being a perfect angel, you might not be angry at him at this moment. But think about it. When you look really honestly at the times when you really lose it with your child, those times are always loaded with some sort of extra pressure.

You were rushing to get out the door. You were worried about a meeting at work. You're afraid because your child keeps hitting your other child and you don't know what to do. Your kid keeps getting out of bed and you feel powerless.

It's never just the behavior; there's always another feeling there – your powerlessness, your fear – that goes deeper than that behavior, and it's because most of us have prior experiences with powerlessness, with fear, and our child's behavior triggers something deeper in us.

How do we know this? Because not all parents have the same triggers. So what triggers one parent, another parent might burst into laughter or another parent might not like it but would be able to stay patient. We know that the things that we get most upset about, we're bringing baggage.

Now, there are some things that legitimately most of us would get upset about. When one of our children hits the other child, most of us would get upset about it. But if we're bringing the additional baggage of having been hit ourselves as a child by our big brother, then it's going to be a lot harder for us to deal with that issue between our children because of our own baggage, our own triggers.

Everybody has baggage. Everybody has triggers. Most of them were installed in our own childhood; some of them are more recent. Maybe there was a trauma in your life as an adult, when you were younger or even last year, and that's affecting you profoundly.

Sometimes there's no specific trauma; it's just stress. Stress causes anxiety. Anxiety is another word for mild fear. If we're constantly barraged by stressful events, then we're carrying around a load of fear on our shoulders and everything triggers us, including everything our child does.

Your homework for this week is to read the first section of *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids*, which is about regulating your own emotions. That chapter includes **self-care** and also **healing your own triggers**. Those topics are so important that we're going to do a whole week on each of them later in this course. For this week, we're really focusing on regulating your own emotions in general as you go through your week – why is emotional regulation so important, and what can you do to increase your ability to stay regulated?

When you get to self-care, you'll increase your ability to stay regulated even more because you'll develop a plan to keep yourself in balance, and when you get to healing your own triggers, you'll have an opportunity – if you choose to – to go a little deeper and notice the things that usually set you off, because by then, you'll know what those things are because we'll have been working together for most of the course by then. But for this week, we're focusing on why emotional regulation is so important and what you can do to stay regulated.

Why is emotional regulation so important? It's important in general because it helps you accomplish your goals. If you can't get your project for work done because you keep procrastinating, that's a sign that you can't manage your own anxiety. If you can't stick to your

diet or stop smoking because you can't manage your impulse to eat or light up a cigarette, that again is about soothing your own anxiety and managing uncomfortable feelings. Our ability to reach any goal that we set for ourselves depends on our ability to manage our own emotions.

With parenting, it becomes even more important because there's another person involved. Your emotional regulation is what models emotional regulation for your child. They learn how to do it from us. If you're someone who has tantrums and yells and slams the door, that's what your child learns is what to do when you have big feelings. If you're somebody who says, "I am really upset. I'm going to calm myself down and then we can talk about this," your child learns that you don't have to have a tantrum when you're angry.

Anger is a part of every human relationship. Conflict is a part of every human relationship. Our goal is to work through those conflicts in ways that are respectful to both people. I know you might not have been taught this when you were growing up – most of us didn't learn it then – but it's entirely possible to do, and it starts with you being willing to regulate yourself when you get upset.

There's another reason that emotional regulation is important. It restores connection with your child. When you get angry, your child gets scared. After all, you are your child's source of everything that matters – protection, comfort, food, teaching – so when you're angry, your child's existence is actually threatened because if you didn't meet those needs, your child would not survive, and you're a lot bigger than she is.

Let's face it; we're scary when we're mad. We don't acknowledge that, but researchers have done videos of people who are angry and when the person looks at it later, they're shocked by how their face looks so contorted and scary. That's what your child sees when you're angry, so naturally, your child does not feel closely, warmly, fuzzily connected to you when you're in a rage.

As you regulate yourself, you're able to restore the connection, and that connection is essential for your child to want to cooperate with you. Of course, that connection is also essential for your child to feel safe. When you're angry, your child has no choice except to get angry also. Well, they could also run away or they could simply freeze, which some children do. Fight, flight or freeze – those are the only responses that we have in our mammalian toolkit when we're threatened.

When a parent is angry and the child naturally is scared, kids go into "fight, flight, or freeze." That means that their learning shuts down, and if they're in flight, they run away and they can't take in what you're saying. If they're frozen, they still can't take in what you're saying; they glaze over. If they're in fight mode, they'll get angry back at you, and if they've seen a lot of

your anger then that's probably what they'll do. They'll fight back. They get stuck in anger then. So our ability to self-regulate creates the safety our children need, if they're to regulate themselves.

Now, I'm talking about psychology here, but it's also a physiological process. Babies are born with their nervous systems not fully developed. Their brain and their nervous system take shape in response to us. We're still exploring the mechanics of how this happens, but the baby's limbic system tunes into our limbic system and takes shape in response to our limbic system.

The limbic system is just a word for, basically, the emotional parts of our neurology. The limbic system has a lot of different parts. For instance, you've probably heard about the amygdala, which sends us signals when we need to be concerned about something. It says, "Threat, threat, pay attention."

Our child's limbic system takes shape in response to our limbic system, and if we're always getting angry, flying off the handle, thinking that something's an emergency, our child will also respond to the world as if it's an emergency. That's going to be not just a psychological learning but also the way that his physiology responds to life, because his physiology actually takes shape in response to our physiology.

Given that this is physiological, how can you change it? We know that we can actually rewire our brains, and that's what we're doing this week. We're starting off this course with the rewiring of our brains – because that's what you're doing every single time you regulate your emotions. It's what you're doing every single time you exercise self-discipline, actually.

In fact, believe it or not, you're rewiring your brain every time you take any repeated action. If you are constantly playing tennis, you will get better at tennis because your body learns what to do and because your neurology learns what to do. You're laying down the neural pathways with that repeated activity. So anything we do that is repeated over and over again, our brain adapts to. Our brain actually changes to make us better at that thing.

When you stop yourself from yelling, it will be the hardest thing in the world to do, but every time you do it, your prefrontal cortex – the rational part of your brain – is sending a message to your amygdala – the alarm system – and saying, "This isn't an emergency. I know when the three-year-old gets defiant, it seems like an emergency, but it really isn't. We can take a deep breath here, we can calm down and then we can handle it better."

Every time we do that, we're rewiring our brains and building the neural wiring to get better at regulating ourselves. So it actually does get easier. It's so hard to do – to control ourselves when we get mad – but the more you do it, the easier it gets.

I want to stress that I'm not suggesting you ignore when you start to get angry. We're not repressing our anger. We're not denying our anger. We're not pushing our anger out of awareness. Because really, if you're angry about something and I say, "Oh, you shouldn't be angry about that. Don't be angry about that. Your three-year-old is being defiant because he's having a hard time. Don't be angry about that," what's going to happen?

If you just push that anger out of awareness, if you say, "I shouldn't feel it," you're repressing it, and we know what happens to repressed emotions. They're forced out of conscious awareness but we still feel them. We're still lugging them around with us, we're just not aware of them, and they're always knocking on the door of our consciousness saying, "Hey, I'm here. Did you know that?"

Sooner or later they're going to pop out uncontrolled by our conscious mind, and then we're going to let that three-year-old have it because we've actually been mad at him all along; we were just stuffing it down.

Or maybe you were taught as a child that it wasn't okay to be angry, that it was dangerous to get angry in your house, or maybe that good girls don't get mad. If that's the case, and you're repressing anger or denying it, again, you're going to have anger management problems because your rage is either going to come popping out or you're going to turn it inside yourself against yourself and it's going to make you depressed.

I'm not suggesting that you make yourself depressed, give yourself a heart attack, or create anger management problems for yourself. I'm not suggesting you deny or repress your anger or push it out of awareness. I'm suggesting something that is actually much harder to do but very possible and has much more constructive results. That's to be aware of the anger but not act on it. This is called mindfulness.

Being mindful just means you're aware, you're noticing it and you don't necessarily act on it. Because you're aware, because you're fully aware, noticing it, you don't get hijacked by it. Most of the time anger hijacks us and before we know it, we're having a tantrum. But if you're actually mindful, you can observe it, you can say, "Wow, when the three-year-old is defiant like that and tells me I'm not the boss of him or 'I hate you, Mommy!' it just makes me crazy, it makes my blood boil." If you can just notice that, then you already have the ability not to get hijacked by it, because you're now in observer mode.

I'm suggesting that you could begin to be mindful, more observational about what you're feeling, and that as you do that, you're rewiring your brain. The specific brain rewiring that I'm suggesting is about your "pause button." Your pause button is your most powerful parenting tool.

Really. If you forget everything else I say today, this is what I ask you to remember: hit the pause button.

I also call this “stop, drop, and breathe.” Stop whatever you’re doing, Drop your agenda, and take a deep Breath. Do that as many times as you need to during an interaction to calm yourself down. But you could also think of it as hitting the pause button. What that means is, it gives you a chance to reflect. Just don’t go forward, don’t act on the anger, and don’t continue the interaction.

Parents will always say to me, “But what if one child is hitting another?” Sure, when there’s danger involved, then you don’t have time for the pause button, but you aren’t going to even think about this; you’ll be between your kids, running interference.

But most of the time, parenting is not actually an emergency. When your three-year-old looks right at you and dumps his cereal on the floor, it feels like an emergency but it actually isn’t. You can pause at that moment, take a deep breath, turn away from your child, and remind yourself to calm down, that it’s not an emergency, that he’s acting like a three-year-old because he IS a three-year-old, and then turn back to your child. You have the choice of whether to get hijacked or not, because that’s what the pause button does. Mindfulness gives us the choice of how to act at that moment because we’re more aware.

I’m not saying that anger isn’t telling us something important. Anger is. It’s a message. I think you need to listen to your anger, not just let it roll off your back. There’s a message there—but the message is usually not what we think.

We think anger means that we should kill the messenger, our child who’s making us angry! But actually, if we listen to the message later after we’ve calmed down, we realize that in fact it was our exhaustion talking or our fear or our feeling of powerlessness. So there is probably something we need to change in our life, but that thing is probably not our child.

That thing we need to change, maybe we need to start putting the kids to bed earlier before everybody melts down, or maybe the three-year-old is being defiant because we’re doing an awful lot of controlling and he wants to be heard and feels like we’re not listening, or we’ve been on our phone a lot and he feels like he can’t get through to us any other way.

The message will be different every time, but we can’t just take the surface message – which is that the messenger has shown up and poured his cereal on the floor. We have to actually look a little deeper under it to understand what is going on and what needs to be changed.

I would just say that your pause button is your most important tool, and your most important parenting responsibility is being mindful of your own inner state. Every one of us will lose it if

we're pushed to the edge. As the grownup, it's always our responsibility to stay away from the edge, which means mindfully noticing our moods as we go through our day.

Right about now, you're probably wondering "Okay, okay. But what's the magic formula? When I get upset, how can I calm down?" Well, I have some bad news for you. There is no magic formula. This is actually really hard work. It's the hardest work you'll ever do. The hardest part of it is actually being *willing* to switch gears, because when you get triggered, when you're angry, your body goes into a state of emergency and you're flushed with flight-or-fight hormones and you're ready to fight and your kid looks like the enemy.

As you can see, the hardest thing is to turn away from those feelings, because you feel an urgent need to act on them. That's why the magic formula is really to stop – simply stop and take a deep breath. That deep breath gives you a chance to not get hijacked.

Here's your step-by-step plan to calm down. You can write this down and you can post it in your car, on your refrigerator, on your bathroom mirror, wherever you're going to see it, and you can remind yourself of these steps.

**Step one: Stop, drop, and breathe.** That just means stop what you're doing. Drop your agenda for that moment because your agenda is part of the whole fight, right? Drop your agenda and then take a deep breath.

**Step two: Make the choice not to act while you're triggered.** You're making the choice either to turn away from your child, or to move away—to shut your mouth and bite your tongue if you have to. You're making the choice not to act while you're triggered. It is really, really hard to do.

I know the first time you try this, you're going to say, "But this is an exception. I have to set this kid straight. He needs discipline at this moment." But I want to say that this moment is not an exception. The only exception is when someone is hurting someone else. If there's danger, of course, you intervene, you don't stop yourself from intervening.

But presuming there's no danger, it doesn't matter how insolent your child has been, it doesn't matter if they're ignoring you when you've asked them three times to do something. Whatever they're doing, if you're going over the deep end, it's time for you to stop, drop, and breathe and choose not to interact with your child until you calm yourself down. It's very hard to do these first two steps because we think that surely this is an exception and we have to intervene at this moment. But we almost never need to.

**Step three: Take that moment, that brief moment to get re-centered and calm yourself down.** You'll have to develop your own repertoire of how you do that but you're basically going to use a combination of physical – discharging that angry energy from your body – and mental,

meaning reframing the situation. I think of step three as discharging the energy from the *body*, and then step four is reframing *mentally*.

But the reality is that as we work with steps three and four, they happen almost concurrently, and we go back and forth between them as we take each step a little deeper. Let's say we start by shaking out our hands. We're in the car. Our children were just fighting. They're still fighting. We've pulled the car over to the side of the road. They're yelling at each other.

We take a deep breath. Stop, drop, and breathe. We decide we're not going to yell at them. We're not going to storm around to the back of the car and open the doors and start pulling them out of their car seats.

We're instead going to take a moment to breathe – right in the front seat – to shift ourselves. Steps three and four now are to shift our mind, our view of what's going on, and also to shift our body, which is so upset at this moment.

You might start by shaking out your hands. That's a physical thing. Then you might say in your mind, "Wow, they're having a really hard time." Now, we think they're giving us a hard time, but they're actually having a really hard time. Instead of assuming one child is wrong, if we notice that one child is being mean to the other one, we might say, "Wow, he is really having a hard time. He needs my help." You're reframing that. Instead of feeling like you want to strangle him, you start to feel like, "Oh, this is my son. He needs my help."

One fast way to reframe is to use mantras. A mantra that I love is "It's not an emergency." That really helps me calm down. I've heard from other parents that they use things like "Don't take it personally," or "I can handle it. It's okay, I can handle this. It's going to be okay," or "He's acting like a child because he is a child," or "She's not giving me a hard time; she's having a hard time."

Your homework this week will include writing down some possible mantras that you're going to try out and see how they work for you. Then you can put your mantra up all over your house, so you'll remember to use it at those times when you're upset and you need to talk yourself off the cliff.

My young adult daughter will still turn to me if I'm anxious because we're going to be late somewhere, for instance, and she'll say to me, "Mom, it's not an emergency." I love that, because I said it to her through her entire life, and she uses it herself and she's now one of the calmest people I know.

Okay. So you're in your car and you're saying your mantra, "Don't take it personally. I can handle it. It's going to be okay." Stop, drop, breathe. Here's a really good one: "Choose love." You're in your car and you say to yourself, "Choose love." There is always more love.

You feel your heart softening and you start to feel better, or maybe you notice you're still upset and then you start to go back to the physical and work with yourself physically a little bit. You do some more breathing. As I said, you'll have to develop your own repertoire of things.

One of the things that I use is tapping. Tapping is also called EFT, which is short for Emotional Freedom Technique. The originators say that you're tapping on acupuncture points so you're releasing stress. I don't know if that's true. I've seen mixed research on this. There's some research that says it does nothing and other research that says it's very effective in releasing stress. But here's my personal experience. It does release stress for me, and it might simply be because I've trained myself all this time, so when I tap, I take a deep breath, and let out tension. It might be that simple. Or maybe it actually is tapping on acupuncture points that are somehow releasing stress. I'm not a body worker, so I don't know that.

There is a chart on the Aha! Parenting website – if you put "EFT" into the search box – that you can see the places on your body that you can tap. I've taught this to many parents over the years, and I've also used it in my family. My children have used it, for instance, before they had to take a test.

What I notice is that when people use it, they begin to yawn. We know that yawning is a release of emotion. We know that it's shifting us from the sympathetic nervous system to the parasympathetic nervous system. One of the signs of that can be tears, and another sign can be yawning.

Clearly, something does happen when we do this tapping. So I highly recommend it – if you were in the front seat of your car trying to calm down or you have a limited ability to move around and your children are screaming in the backseat. Try this and see if it works for you. Give it a few times. If it doesn't, don't do it. But I have found it very helpful.

All you do is, you take your hand as if you're using it to do a karate chop on a flat surface in front of you. That part of your hand that touches the surface – the karate chop part of your hand – that's where you're going to tap. You're going to take your other hand and you're just going to tap it with your fingers along that karate chop point and you're going to breathe deeply. Then you're going to use some words to help you shift out of where you are. It's very helpful in shifting gears, I find.

Remember, we're trying to shift from the sympathetic nervous system, which is in fight mode, to the parasympathetic, which is going to relax us. You might say something like "Even though I'm upset, I'm safe. Even though I'm upset, I can calm down. Even though I'm upset, I can take a deep breath and I'll be okay," anything that's going to shift you from one place to another. You'll find the more you do this, the faster it works and the more you do it, the more deeply you'll feel yourself relax.

You've now done something mental, you've changed the way you're looking at the situation and at your child, and you've done something physical to release the stress. You've breathed, you've shaken out your hands, you've done some deep breathing, maybe you've done some tapping. So you've done all four steps to shift gears. You may not be exactly calm, but you're a whole lot calmer than you were as you were driving down the road or as you pulled the car off the road.

Now you can turn around and talk to your children. If during the conversation, you notice you're not as calm as you thought, go back to step one. Just stop, drop, and breathe. Decide you're not going to talk to them until you can calm down a little bit. Shift yourself mentally, shift yourself physically.

The first time you do this, it's really, really hard and you'll still feel your heart racing. The more often you do it, the more quickly you'll be able to shift yourself from a state of upset to a state of calm.

Now if it feels like it takes you a long time to calm down and you're sitting on the side of the road for 15 minutes before you can calm down, I understand. We've all been there. As I said, practicing will make this faster for you. But there is something else you can do. You can practice even when you're not upset. For instance, start a meditation practice. Start some sort of mindfulness practice where you get used to calming yourself and centering yourself.

In Week 8 when we talk about self-care, we'll talk about different kinds of mindfulness practices, but for now, just know that researchers now think that virtually every mindfulness practice increases self-regulation and helps us to be able to calm down at times when we're upset even if we're not actually meditating at those times.

You did your four steps, you're a lot calmer, you turn around and look at your kids. Most of the time, by now, they've stopped yelling at each other. They're looking at you apprehensively because they think you're about to yell at them.

Now you're calm enough that you actually can partner with them. You can say, "I need to drive safely so that we can all get where we're going safely. That's my job. What's everybody else's job?" They'll probably look at you blankly, so you point out that they have a job, too.

“Everybody’s job is to make sure that it’s a safe and fun trip for the family,” and you ask each child what they’re going to do to contribute to the safety and the fun factor of the trip.

Your kids have probably forgotten what they were fighting about by now, but if they haven’t, you will have to coach them to solve their problem with each other. But you’ll be able to do that because now you’re calm and things are in a much calmer state inside the car. Your emotional regulation transmits itself to your children, so they draw on that regulation, they feel safer, and they respond more reasonably to you and to each other.

Look at what you’ve been able to do just by taking a moment to calm yourself. You turned the entire situation around, and now that they’re partnering with you to take a role in having a safe and fun trip, maybe there’s a possibility it actually could be a safe and fun trip and that they will play a positive role in it.

This even sets a precedent for the future, so when you get into the car next time, you’ll be able to say to them, “Okay, what are our jobs? How are we all going to work together to have a safe and fun family trip?” This is true whether you’re going on a real trip – a road trip for three days – or whether you’re going to be in the car for five minutes on the way to the drug store.

By contrast, think about what would’ve happened if you had turned around and started screaming at your children. Yes, they might have been quiet for that minute, but they would have still been in a bad mood, and as soon as you started driving again and went one block, they would’ve been at each other again. So you have to actually do something to transform the situation, and you can’t transform it from a place of upset.

Now, what about those times when you can’t calm down? Let’s say you’re at home, it’s the end of a long day, you’ve really had it, you’re just at the end of your rope, and your kids are being really challenging. You really would like to feel positively but you can’t do it. You’re telling yourself “They’re having a hard time, they’re tired,” and all you can think is “I’m having a hard time. I’m tired. I can’t take this anymore.” At those times, go a little extra. Go a little extra mentally on step three and go a little extra physically on step four.

What do I mean by that? Physically, you might take care of yourself. You might just shut your eyes, feel what’s in your body, feel that tightness in your chest and in your shoulders and just give yourself a little wiggle to let some of those feelings go. Notice what’s going on and ask your body what it needs. You’ll be surprised. You’re probably dehydrated. You’re certainly tired and you just need to sit down for a few minutes. Find a way if you can, even if you just sit down in the middle of the floor with your children all over you.

Find a way to take care of yourself and your own needs for a few minutes. That gives you a lot more inner resource to be able to do this switching of gears. Remember, you're switching gears from a state of emergency to a state of calm, and if your body feels like it's depleted, then it's more likely to be in a state of emergency. So do whatever you need to do to take care of your body as part of your taking step four a little deeper.

The other thing you can do is you can put on music and dance. That's a way to move the physical energy of the anger out of your body. Anger is just the body having all this energy that it wants to do something aggressive with.

We know from working with children that it's very hard to stop those impulses. It's hard to stop at toddler from throwing, for instance. What we can do is redirect the impulse. We can get the toddler to throw something that it's safe to throw – like a stuffed animal – in a place where it's safe to throw it, such as into the bathtub. Then he's less likely to throw his car across the room just to see what will happen. Redirection.

If you're angry, you have a lot of energy to divert. Instead of directing that energy towards your child, direct it toward dancing. Put on some music and dance. The beauty of this strategy of self-management is that you can do it when your children are there, and it's good for them. It's good for them to get up and dance, and you can even engage with them in dancing. If all of you do some dancing, everyone will be in a better mood very soon, so it's especially great at those cranky times of day to have a family dance party. If you find it's not enough to shake out your hands or run them under water or do some tapping, take it deeper. Put on some music, really get that energy out and dance.

What happens if you do this dancing and you still feel upset? Then it's not because your body is still wound up. It's because your mind still thinks you have an emergency, so whatever your child did that made you so upset is triggering you deeply. Maybe you're frightened because you don't see how to change your child's behavior and you're worried that if this behavior continues it's going to be a terrible thing, or maybe you're locked in a power struggle and you think your child really needs to be taught a lesson. Whatever the problem is, the anger is a message to you.

But it's like the blinking lights on your dashboard of your car. When you see a blinking light in the dashboard of your car, you don't say, "These lights, they're a terrible problem. I know it's an emergency. I'm going to disconnect the wires that are making these lights go. I'm going to take a baseball bat to my dashboard and get rid of those wires." No. Of course, you don't do that. You go get your oil changed or you have the mechanic look at your car to see what's wrong.

When you're angry at your child, it's like that blinking light on the dashboard. You may feel like getting a baseball bat, but instead, you stop and you consider what the message is, what it's telling you.

Here's a clue. Underneath anger, there is always a more vulnerable emotion. Anger is a way that we protect ourselves. When we feel under threat, we protect ourselves by lashing out. If you can identify what the threat is to you, then you'll be able to shift gears mentally to get rid of that anger.

Let's say that what you're angry about is that your daughter is being defiant, and you've tried to get the anger out physically, and that hasn't worked and you're still angry. Then you know that there is something going on that's driving the anger, some way in which you're feeling afraid or powerless or some other feeling that is scary to you, and so you're lashing out instead.

So you get calm and you go inside and you notice, you notice what's going on in your body. Where does it feel tight? Where does it feel hard? Do you feel a tightness in your chest? Do you feel sort of suffocated in your throat, like you almost can't breathe? Just notice the feelings. Breathe through them. Let them go.

That shifts some of the emotion out of your body simply because you're feeling it. You're feeling the emotion in your body. You're receiving the message. The magic thing about emotion is that when we feel it, the message is delivered and the feelings start to evaporate. Some of it will go away just by your noticing what it is.

If you still feel angry, then notice the thought because there's usually a thought that is driving the feeling. It's a conclusion about the world or about your child or about yourself, or it's a fear. There's some kind of a thought or belief that drives our feelings.

As you notice this, you realize that you're frightened, you're worried – “Wow, if she's like this now, what's she going to be like when she's a teenager?” – or maybe some part of you just feels like “When a child is defiant like this, you have to set them straight. It's a terrible thing.” Then you know it's an old feeling from your childhood and probably you were defiant, and when you were defiant, what happened?

It might well have been an emergency. Maybe your parent responded to you as if it was really a serious infraction – defiance. If that was the case, then some part of you really does believe that defiance is an emergency, and when your daughter is defiant all your alarm bells go off, “Oh no, emergency, emergency. Somebody is about to get hit!” So, of course, you'll do anything to stop your daughter from being defiant so that there isn't a terrible thing happening. But, of course, that makes us do “terrible things” to our children because we have that state of emergency.

I'm not trying to put you back into a state of emergency. Just notice what happens, that feeling in your body, and what's the thought behind it? Is the thought "This is dangerous behavior"? Whatever the thought is, just notice it then take a deep breath and make a choice. Make a choice to shift yourself out of your fear and instead to find a more loving thought.

You may wonder how you can do that if you're angry. When we're angry, we don't feel loving, but you can choose to soften your heart. It's a really hard thing to do. It takes a conscious choice. But every time we choose to move out of fight-or-flight and into more softening of our heart, every time we choose love over fear, we change something inside ourselves profoundly and we give ourselves more access to self-regulation and more access to emotional generosity. Really, we're giving ourselves more access to love every time we choose love in those difficult circumstances.

Maybe she started a new school, or she has a new sibling, or maybe you've been working hard or travelling for your job. Maybe she feels a little disconnected. Whatever it is, even if you can't put your finger on it, you can be sure that your child, if they're being defiant, is telling you they feel a disconnection from you. Because defiance is not a behavior problem, it's not a discipline problem; it's a relationship problem.

Consider this from your child's perspective. What would happen if you gave her what she needs, which in this case turns out to be connection? What would happen if you dropped your thought that there's something dangerous going on in her behavior and instead you chose to see the situation in a different way?

Realizing that she needs some connection is just as true as "It's dangerous!" and in fact, it's more true. The only reason her defiance is dangerous is because of what you do with it, because you can disarm defiance easily. Someone who's defiant just wants to be heard. They want you to listen to them. They want to heal the rift between you, and they're signaling to you, "Hey, I'm over here across the gulf. Take me seriously. I'm trying to tell you it's a serious situation." That's what she's doing.

You actually don't have a dangerous situation on your hands. The only danger would be in how you choose to respond to it!

So it's just as true to say, "She needs me. She needs to connect." That's true in defiance and it's true no matter what the problem is with our child. They're signaling to us with their misbehavior that they need us to help them.

If you can shift gears to soften your heart and find your emotional generosity, you won't need your anger anymore. The anger is to protect yourself from a threat. By shifting gears and seeing the situation differently, there's no longer a threat.

You probably can't do this while you're cooking dinner. It really does take some peace and quiet. So, after you do your dancing, if you notice you're still annoyed at your child, just try to stay calm and as patient as you can, as you go through the evening. Get your kids into bed and then take some time by yourself.

But don't skip this work. Don't go watch a TV show because you've had a hard day. You can do that later if you want. But your commitment to calming yourself down and not acting out of your anger means that you need to clear up your baggage that you accumulated during the day with your child, when you were angry at her.

If you're still angry at her because of her defiance, then make the commitment to go a little deeper into those feelings so that you understand what's going on and you can disarm your anger. Because otherwise, it rolls over into the next day and you find yourself in a power struggle with your child where you're getting angry at them over and over again.

Now, maybe you're wondering if you should still proceed this way if your child does something really bad – like lies to you, or hits his brother – and the answer is yes, of course, you always intervene to stop the hitting – everyone in your home needs to be protected and to feel safe – but regardless of what it is, when you're angry at your child, you're not going to be effective in guiding your child.

When children really act out like lying or hitting, they're showing us that something serious is wrong, and it's our job to intervene effectively by figuring out what they need from us and helping them with their emotions that are driving the bad behavior. If you act out of anger, it will never ever be the most effective thing to do for your child's development long term – and it's usually not even the most effective thing to do short term in the moment.

That brings us to yelling. If you're a yeller, you probably do it out of habit, and if you're a yeller you probably think, "It is the right thing to do short term. It gets results. In fact, it's the only thing that gets results." Many parents say that to me, and I would say of course, it does. It gets results. Your children are cowed for that moment. They're frightened. So it does get results.

But is that actually the best thing for their development long term? Does that actually raise an emotionally intelligent child? Does it raise a child who can regulate his own emotions? Absolutely not. He's going to follow your modeling. He's going to become a yeller. He's going to be yelling back at you. He's going to be yelling at his siblings.

So, does yelling work? Is yelling an effective teacher? Yes; it teaches kids to yell. It does *not* teach them what you're trying to teach them at that moment though, because when you're yelling, you're in fight, flight, or freeze and your child also goes into a state of emergency. When their minds are scared, when their bodies are scared, they're not taking in information.

In fact, when we're in a state of emergency, the reasoning centers of the brain shut down. That's why we say things that we're later really sorry for, because we're just not thinking at that moment. Our children aren't thinking either when we're yelling at them. They're not learning what we're trying to teach them. If we seriously want our children to learn a lesson, you cannot do it by yelling at them.

If you're a yeller, I have a personal challenge for you. Let's work together for this 12-week period and let's stop you from yelling – no matter how ingrained it is. I have seen thousands of parents stop yelling and you can do it, too. It's not rocket science. It's really, really, really hard, but it's not rocket science. Every day you get a little better about not yelling, and you know how you do it? You bite your tongue. You stop, drop, and breathe. Every time you find yourself yelling, you shut your mouth. That's what you do. In the middle of yelling, you shut your mouth, and you turn away.

Yes, I know you'll feel like a fool. You'll feel like you look ridiculous to your child. But you know what? You're actually modeling anger management. There's nothing ridiculous about that. You look like somebody who decided to control herself, and so you turned away and you stopped yelling right in the middle of a yell.

If you do that today, one time, even if you yell three other times, if you do it one time today, then tomorrow you can do it twice, and then you can do it three times. Soon you won't be able to get out a whole tirade without stopping yourself. You'll stop yourself every time, and then you'll find you're stopping yourself earlier and earlier in your little tantrum. Then you'll find you're stopping yourself before you open your mouth, and that means you're stopping yourself from yelling—before you even open your mouth!

Many parents have said to me, “It used to be I would just somehow start yelling. I wouldn't even know I was getting mad. Things would be fine and then all of a sudden, I'd be yelling. But then after I started this practice of stopping myself in the middle of a yell, I started to be more aware of it. I started to notice; I could see it coming, and I would start to notice that I was getting more and more irritated, and often then I could just stop myself before I even started to yell.” This will happen for you also.

You'll start to be able to notice when you're gathering kindling. Do you know what kindling is? Of course, you do; it's wood, with which you start a fire. Emotional kindling is what we gather when we're gathering grievances, when we're saving things up.

If you're mad at your child because he came in this morning while you were sleeping, threw himself on top of you, woke you up and was screaming about something – he was upset that he couldn't find his lost toy – and the next thing you knew he was waking up his sister, and the next thing you knew he was refusing to eat what you made him for breakfast, and then he got into another fight with his sister, and then he wouldn't put his shoes on to go to school... You get the idea. If you've been saving up kindling all morning as he has done one thing after another and you're really angry at him, of course you're going to blow up and yell at him eventually.

So, I encourage you to notice when you're gathering kindling. When your child does something like he's refusing now to eat his breakfast and you want to throw the plate of food at him, that's a signal you're already angry at him in an overreaction to this one infraction, whatever it is. If you keep going, you will gather more kindling and sooner or later, you're going to have a firestorm. You're going to be yelling.

If you want to not yell, you have to intervene now. You have to figure out why he woke up on the wrong side of the bed and help him with that. The best way is usually to get him laughing about something, so that you connect with him and he works off those feelings of... Usually it's anxiety. Anxiety is just another word for fear. But we can get through the anxiety and the fear by helping our child laugh.

If that doesn't work and he still remains really unhappy, the unhappiness goes too deep for your laughter to help him with it and just needs to cry. We'll talk in Week 6 about preventive maintenance, but for now, if he really is miserable and just making everybody else miserable, connect with him. Move in close, take him on your lap, hold him, sing to him, baby him. Often the connection will get him back into equilibrium.

And if it won't, he'll show you. He'll feel safe enough that he'll show you those feelings that are really upsetting him, and he'll begin to cry. He might try to start a fight with you first, but if you can stay calm, if you can remind yourself that he's having a hard time, he will eventually show you all that upset and he'll cry. Afterwards, he'll be able to start the day over again from a much better place. He'll be so much happier and more cooperative.

Notice that rebooting your son's day that way is only possible if you start off emotionally regulated. If instead you give in to all that kindling gathering, you have the firestorm, and you're yelling at him furiously, then what happens? His day does not get any better. He holds it together

for a minute since you've just yelled at him, and then when you get in the car to take him to school, he's picking on his little brother and making it impossible for you to drive.

When we yell at kids, it always ends up making their behavior worse. If we can stay regulated, we have at least some shot at turning things around. The reason that yelling makes children's behavior worse is that it erodes our relationship with our child. The only reason children ever cooperate with us is because of that warm connection between us.

When we yell, our children lose respect for us. They lose affection for us. Children will always love parents – even when parents are abusive to children, children love parents – but that doesn't mean they respect them and it doesn't mean they think the parent is on their side. Children don't cooperate with a parent who they don't think is on their side.

If you're a yeller, how can you support yourself to stop yelling? It would be great if I could give you a magic wand and your children would behave perfectly and your life would go perfectly, and then I'm sure you wouldn't yell. But you're going to get stressed because that's life and your children are going to act childish because that's children.

Given that situation, how can you not yell? In every instance where you feel like yelling, I'm going to ask you to notice it and to stop, drop, and breathe. You'll start by noticing in the middle of a yell, and then soon, you'll be noticing before you're even yelling, and then soon, you'll be noticing as you gather kindling. That's the process you're going to go through.

It takes about three months to stop yelling fully. You can turn around in three months and not remember the last time you yelled. But you do need a plan. That plan has two parts: one is the support that you're going to give yourself to reduce the stress on you, and the second is the monitoring you're going to do to notice if you're yelling. For that you'll need an accountability partner. Who's the best accountability partner to know if you're yelling? Obviously, your child. Your child is your accountability partner.

Make yourself a star chart. I know, I'm not actually a big fan of star charts. I don't think they teach the right lessons to kids. We'll get to that when we talk about mastery later on in the course. But I don't think you're going to get the wrong lesson out of the star chart. Give yourself stars for the days that you don't yell, and when you get enough stars, do something really nice for yourself. Why not give yourself all the support you can?

Of course, you can't give yourself a star without asking your accountability partner, "How did I do today? Did I yell?" Your child actually knows with more accuracy whether you yelled. You're going to find yourself saying, "Well, I didn't really yell. I was just trying to get your attention," but in fact, if your child says you yelled, that's a yell.

Children are not using this for their own ends. They actually want you to get stars. They encourage you. They're very cute about this. "You can do it, Mommy!" But when you think you didn't yell and they think you did, researchers are pretty sure it's because you actually did yell. They're the ones who give the stars; give them the benefit of the doubt.

Even if you go all week and you don't get a single star, then next week just split your star chart up into mornings and afternoons and you have two chances to get a star each day. Sooner or later, you're going to get through a morning or through an afternoon without yelling and you're going to get a star. Then next week, go for two. Just go for two. You'll find you can do this.

As I said, it takes about 12 weeks, is my observation, to completely stop yelling. But you can do it. It's not rocket science. In the beginning, it's much harder, but as you do it, you gain momentum and it gets easier because you've actually built the neural pathways that assist you in self-regulation.

If you're a yeller, I'm asking you right now to please take a vow of "yellibacy." You're just not going to yell anymore. When you're done listening to this, by the end of the day before you go to sleep, print your star chart, then show it to your child and tell them what you're doing. If you don't have any little stars around, that's fine; your child can draw the star and color the star in for you.

Start your new program of "yellibacy" today. Just start it. You will find it's very hard. You will end up yelling. You will feel like you'll never get a star. That's okay. Keep plugging away because sooner or later, you're going to get a star and then you're going to get two, and three, and four, and pretty soon, you'll realize that you don't yell very often and you've gotten really good at regulating yourself.

I'd like to share a quote with you. This is from Haim Ginott. He's the father or maybe the grandfather of positive parenting. I see my work as in direct lineage from him. You may be familiar with Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish who wrote *Siblings Without Rivalry* and *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk*. Faber and Mazlish and Haim Ginott were the first parenting experts I studied when I was in Graduate School. Although my philosophy now is informed by current neurological and biological research and by the science of emotion – in which we've made great strides and understanding over the last 20 years – I still find that my philosophy in the end really comes back to some basic principles that were outlined by Haim Ginott.

Here's a quote that I'd like to share with you from him. He said, "I have come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that makes the climate, my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess tremendous

power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or heal. It is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child is humanized or de-humanized.”

Of course, this is just as true in our homes as it is in the classroom, and it is our self-regulation that allows us to de-escalate the crises and humanize our children when they're having a hard time. You, the parent, always have the power to calm the storm or to blow it up into a tornado.

Thanks so much for joining me today and for your commitment to your child and to your own growth. This ends week 2 – Regulating Your Own Emotions – of the **Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids** class. This is Dr. Laura Markham of AhaParenting.com.