Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids Online Course

Week 5: **Beyond Discipline**

Transcript

Hello, and welcome to Week 5 of the **Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids** online course. This is Dr. Laura Markham, and today we're talking about discipline.

If you've been waiting for this week to come up, you're not alone. Many parents just want to know how to get their child to pay attention to what they say and do what they say, and they assume there's some magic button we can push that will get kids to listen and cooperate with us.

Unfortunately, I'm here to tell you right at the outset—there's no magic button. But there are many things you can do that will help your child want to cooperate with you. Strangely enough, discipline is not one of those things – at least not discipline as we commonly understand it.

The actual meaning of the word discipline is "to guide." It comes from the same root as the word "disciple." If we're lovingly guiding our child, sure, that will make him or her want to cooperate with us, but that meaning (guiding) is now antiquated. If you look "discipline" up in the dictionary, you'll see that essentially it's understood as punishment. Unfortunately, when we *punish*, kids stop wanting to cooperate with us, and we'll talk today about why that is.

Let's start by defining punishment. Punishment, according to the dictionary, is purposely causing pain to another person – either emotional pain or physical pain – in an attempt to get that person to do things our way, or else for revenge.

Think about that for a minute. When we discipline children, what we are doing is purposely causing them pain. Why would we do such a thing?

If we ask any random sample of people – at least in the United States where I live – whether children need discipline, 99% of them will say, "Of course, children need discipline." If we ask them why children need discipline, they'll say, "To learn how to behave properly and to teach them self-discipline."

But here's the funny paradox. Self-discipline comes from inside. If we're disciplining from outside, how is that helping the child develop discipline inside? One thing we'll be talking about today is how children develop self-discipline, but let's start with the question of whether children really *need* discipline to learn to act right.

How do children learn? Children learn by our modeling. Kids will not always do what we say but they will always eventually do what we do. Our modeling is what teaches our child how to

behave. Of course, if a child really doesn't *know* the proper way to behave, then we wouldn't start with discipline; we would start by *teaching* the child how to behave.

Clearly, we're not really disciplining to *teach* the child how to behave; we're disciplining because we have already taught the child how to behave and he's not following our rules. We think if we cause him some amount of pain, probably a small amount, then he'll decide to follow our rules.

Discipline is meant to be a negative experience for the child. It's meant to cause the child pain. That means there's no such thing as loving discipline. You may be loving from the parent's point of view, but from the child's point of view, someone who's causing him pain is never expressing love toward him. There's no such thing from the child's perspective as loving discipline. There's only a parent who's purposely hurting him, physically or emotionally, to convince the child to do things the parent's way.

In fact, the child doesn't see this as you're doing this to teach him how to be a good person; the child sees it as you're doing it because you want your way. You're hurting him because you're bigger than he is, you can enforce your will, and you want your way. You want him to take his bath, clean up his toys, not hit his brother, whatever it is, so you're causing him pain if he doesn't do these things because this is the way you solve problems. When you want your way, you cause another person pain so you get your way. Obviously, that's not the message we want to give our children.

The whole paradigm of discipline that punishes children when they do something wrong in order to convince them to do it right is teaching children some unintended lessons. The research bears this out. There's a great deal of research now showing that all punishment – all punishment – undermines the child's development of morality. There are a lot of reasons for this.

One, of course, is that the child learns that it's okay to hurt other people to get them to do what you want. Another reason is that the child is not worried about whether what he did, like hitting his brother, hurt his brother; he's only worried about whether he will be punished for it. He's not developing morality in the sense that he's concerned about the effect of his actions on other people; instead, he's just trying not to get caught so he doesn't get punished.

Research also shows that punishment creates anger. That makes perfect sense, right? You've seen it yourself. If you've ever punished your child, you know that your child does not come out of the punishment contrite most of the time, and they certainly don't go into the punishment contrite. Children don't sit there on the naughty step thinking about how they can be better kids; they sit on the naughty step thinking about how it was all their brother's fault and you love their

brother more and they're going to get even. Punishment creates more anger, and anger drives more misbehavior.

Of course, another thing about punishment is that it has to escalate as children get older. I've heard many times from parents whose kids are getting to be six or seven that they've been doing time-outs but they can no longer drag their kid kicking and screaming to time-out, and their kid has only gotten more defiant, so they have no way now to discipline their child since they've been relying on time-outs.

When we rely on yelling at children or speaking harshly to them, the child may seem not to be listening because he hardens his heart to us. But in fact, our harsh voice becomes our child's inner voice. The good news is that our soft nurturing voice becomes the child's inner voice, as well. If you speak to your child in a nurturing, loving way, your child will speak to him or herself in a nurturing, loving way for the rest of their life.

Another thing about punishment, as I mentioned, is that it hardens their hearts. With strong-willed children, once their heart is hardened, they have zero reason to cooperate with you. That's true for all children, but strong-willed kids, they harden their heart faster. Compliant kids are more easily intimidated, they're more willing to do what you say.

When I say "compliant" and "strong-willed," I think every child is on a continuum. There are kids who are definitely more in the strong-willed camp, and there are kids on the other end of the continuum who can be "you raise one eyebrow and they immediately hop to it and do what you say." Most kids are somewhere in between.

But remember that when you have a strong-willed child, they will not do what you say just because you're telling them to do it. Those are the kids who, if you were watching a movie, would be the child who would say, "You can't intimidate me into this. Kill me if you want to, but I'm not going to do that just because you want me to."

I call these the "Cool Hand Luke" kids because if you've ever seen the Paul Newman movie, he was the perfect strong-willed kid. He stood up against injustice, just as your child thinks he's doing with you – standing up against injustice – and, of course, by the end of the movie, Cool Hand Luke is dead.

Strong-willed children see it as a matter of integrity not to bow to pressure, even if that pressure is physical, even if that pressure comes from mom or dad. They see it as a matter of their integrity not to be intimidated. If you punish a strong-willed child, you harden their heart, they build up a wall of resistance, and you stop having any influence at all with them.

Of course, not all discipline is created equal. Physical discipline that hurts the child's body is obviously the most intense discipline. There have been many, many, many studies on spanking. They have all shown the same thing. Spanking has one effect that's considered positive: it stops the bad behavior immediately. Unfortunately, it makes it more likely that the child will repeat the bad behavior.

That's right, if you spank the child, it's actually more likely that they will feel compelled to repeat the bad behavior, whether that's because they're working out the trauma of the spanking, or it's become a power struggle, or they just feel like a bad person, so they might as well act like a bad person. Research shows that's what humans do – when they feel bad, they act bad.

We don't know what the reason is, there's a lot of theory and a lot of conjecture, but from the parent's perspective, just know that when you hit your child, it will not create better behavior.

In fact, I've never found parents who were not spanked themselves who spanked their children. I think this is just something we learn in childhood, that spanking is what you do to solve a problem with your child, and we feel so frustrated as parents, that we don't know what else to do, so we start hitting, but the research is very clear on this: it never helps the child to behave better.

If you'd like more information about spanking, whether for yourself or to share with another person, there is a lot of information on the Aha! Parenting website. Just put the word "spanking" into the search box, and you'll find lots of studies and lots of evidence. You may have heard that there was a study that said that spanking made kids do better in school. Completely untrue. That study only said that the children *wanted* to do better, they were more ambitious to do better. It didn't say they actually did better.

We see this often. When I worked in inner-city Newark with children who didn't have any chances in life, those children compensated for their unhappiness by telling me that they were going to be big basketball stars and movie stars. Of course, they had no chance of being big basketball stars or movie stars, the kids I was working with. But this made them feel better because they felt so bad about themselves inside.

When I see a study when the children who are spanked say that they want to do better in school and they want to go on to accomplish big things in life, I wonder if it's that same compensatory reaction to feeling bad about themselves inside.

By the way, if you're wondering how it could be that this study could have been so misreported in the press as to say that the children did better in school—the press loves to do that, which is to get in the middle of a firestorm, because they get a lot more hits on their website and a lot more attention in the rest of the media.

In fact, don't believe everything you read, but if you go on the Aha! website, you'll see study after study after study that all say the same thing, which is that children who are spanked become more aggressive and worse behaved, and when they grow up, they grow up to have lower self-esteem. There are many more side effects that you can read about on the Aha! Parenting website.

So let's agree that you're not going to spank or hit your child to get him to do what you want. But of course, you still want him to do what you want, so what can you do?

Your pediatrician has probably advised you to do time-outs. A time-out is simply taking the child away from your attention. It's called a time-out from positive reinforcement, and the positive reinforcement is your attention.

Basically, it's a way for you to cut off interaction from your child for a short amount of time. You're usually told to do it for one minute for every age of their life – so if they're three, they have to sit on the naughty step for three minutes – and at the end of that time, you go back and say to your child, "Why did you have a time-out?" Your child tells you, and then you say, "Are you going to do that again?" They say, "No." And then you're done, you live happily ever after.

But if you've ever done time-outs, you know it doesn't quite work that way. First, if you have a strong-willed child, they will fight you every step of the way, they don't go to time-out willingly, so the whole thing turns into a power struggle, and then that power struggle seeps into every area of your life with your child, and they become more and more defiant.

Even if you have a compliant child, you'll still find you send them to time-out over and over again, so time-out does not actually work to create better behavior. If you've read that time-out has been shown by research to be safe and effective, you can ask, "Safe and effective in what way?" Time-out is certainly safer than spanking because you're not hurting your child's body, and it's effective, just as spanking is, in stopping the behavior in that moment. But we don't actually know what happens afterwards.

There's research – actually, several different studies – cited in Alfie Kohn's book *Unconditional Parenting* that indicate that children do not behave better after they get a time-out. They continue the misbehavior. When parents say, "Time-out doesn't work, I have to spank him," There's a reason for that. The time-out is not actually effective. Of course, that doesn't mean that the spanking will be more effective.

Now, if you have a compliant child, the time-out might be effective, but what does the time-out actually do? The child was misbehaving because they were upset about something, and the time-out gives the child the message that it's time to calm down. So far, so good. But when the child is left alone to calm down, what does a young child do? He can't regulate himself, he doesn't yet

have that capacity, and you aren't there to help him regulate, so he stuffs the emotion down. But when we stuff emotions down, they are no longer under conscious control. So the emotions pop out again easily the next time the child is under stress, and then the child misbehaves again.

When we put kids in time-out, we're giving them the message that they're all alone to manage their most difficult emotions, and the child comes to believe that they're bad. They're bad because they couldn't control themselves, they're bad because here they are, yet again, in time-out and you're mad at them.

There's another thing that goes on, and this is something that researchers believe is operative with time-outs. They think this is one of the reasons that kids behave worse when they get time-outs. You're essentially threatening your child with the abandonment. I know you're not – the naughty step is right there in your house, you're a few steps away in the kitchen, and you could hear if your child even said anything. But to your child, he's isolated and he's cut off from you, and you're essentially emotionally abandoning him. You're giving him the message that if he misbehaves, you're going to cut him off from your emotional warmth.

That's not unconditional love; that's very conditional. It says, "My love, my connection with you is conditional on you behaving appropriately, and when you misbehave, I'll cut you off." Children feel that as a withdrawal of love. Now, researchers say that love-withdrawal strategies do not work with children. Love-withdrawal strategies make children anxious, and when children are anxious or fearful, they act out more. What do I mean by "acting out"? Acting out means the child is acting out feelings they can't articulate in words. They act out those feelings by, for instance, hitting their brother.

Wouldn't it be great if your son could articulate to you how he's actually feeling? If he could say to you, "Mom, Dad, ever since the baby was born, you guys don't seem to love me anymore. You're always so cranky and tired and you never have time for me. You're always telling me to wait a minute and to be quiet and to be gentle. Does anybody around here even care about me anymore?" Wouldn't it be great if your son could do that? No, he can't. He's four years old. What does he do instead? He hits the baby.

Acting out is acting out emotions we can't articulate. All acting out, all misbehavior is driven by emotion. Kids act out when their emotions overwhelm them or when their basic needs aren't met, for instance, they're tired or hungry, or sometimes another basic need isn't met: connection.

Children need to feel connected to us, their parents. When they don't get that, they don't feel safe. It is a basic need. When they feel disconnected, they always act out because they don't feel safe. Any time their need for safety and connection is not met – that's a basic need – they will act out.

Finally, children act out when they pick up our stress. We may think that the child doesn't see our stress, but they hear it in our voice, and they worry. They worry that maybe there's something wrong between you and them. They worry that maybe it's their fault, they worry that maybe they've displeased you. They worry that maybe you don't love them anymore. When children are scared, they act out. They often act out when they pick up on our stress.

If you want to change the child's behavior, you have to help them with the feelings that are driving the behavior. Their feelings are okay, there's nothing wrong with their feelings, and you couldn't undo the feelings if you wanted to. If you say to your child, "Don't feel that way," they don't stop feeling that fear. The most they can do is cut off their awareness of the feeling, but that just means they've pushed it out of conscious control where it will pop up again later.

You can't stop your child from feeling something. What you can do is give him help to process those feelings so that he works through them, and once the feelings are worked through, the child's behavior will change.

Emotions and needs are always okay, and we can always help children with them. Yes, behavior has to be limited. No matter how he feels, he can't hit the baby, so we do need to stop our children's behavior and guide their behavior and limit their behavior. All day every day, we end up doing that. But if you want to change behavior at the source, you help the child with the feelings or needs that are driving the behavior.

Here's the thing to write down on an index card and put on your refrigerator today. *All misbehavior is a cry for help.* It's our job to act like the grown-up in the situation and help the child with the emotion or need that's driving the behavior.

You may be wondering, "What if it's not a cry for help? What if my child just wants her own way? I've told her not to jump on the couch a hundred times and she's jumping on the couch. That's not a cry for help. She just wants what she wants." I would say, "Yes. It's not *obviously* a cry for help, but let's look a little deeper."

The cure for that (kind of disobedience) is to strengthen and sweeten the relationship. Kids want to cooperate when they feel connected with us, when they're happy, when they see us as their leader. We talked about this in our week on connection, Week 2. Kids want to cooperate when they feel connected. It doesn't mean you're doing something wrong if your child is not cooperating with you or is being defiant. Lots of temporary disconnections do happen with children. Those negative emotions that children feel, those negative emotions disconnect them from us so they don't follow our lead at those times.

It doesn't mean there's some terrible problem in your relationship, but it does mean that the cure for the child's defiance, or not following your lead, is to stop and reconnect. Of course, sometimes, the reconnection isn't possible because the child has a lot of turbulent emotions going on, so you have to first help the child with emotions, as we discussed last week when we talked about emotion.

Discipline hinges on emotion-coaching. All guidance that we do with our children, all loving guidance, they're not going to follow it unless they feel connected. Remember, parenting is 80% connection and only 20% guidance. They can't hear our guidance unless they feel connected with us, and once they feel connected with us, they will follow our guidance even when they don't want to do what we're asking.

The key to getting a child to cooperate with you is to reconnect with them. That helps them self-regulate. One of my favorite bloggers is Teacher Tom. He's a teacher in a preschool. He says, "When we focus on discipline, we teach the subordinating skill of obedience. When we focus on connection, we teach kids self-regulating skills that they will use for the rest of their lives."

I want to pause here for a moment and acknowledge that you might be feeling uncomfortable. I've just told you that punishment doesn't work and is not good for your child, and that the things that we're usually told to do – like time-outs – also don't work and aren't good for your child. You may feel that your only way of getting your child to cooperate has just been taken away from you.

I promise you that there is a better way. In fact, research is now showing that everything we thought about discipline is wrong. Children who are misbehaving are really not choosing to misbehave. They want to behave if they feel connected to us, and when they can't, it's because their brains have not yet developed to a point where they can behave.

Of course, we have to set limits with them – which we'll talk about a lot more – but punishing them does not make them more likely to behave, mostly because their brains are not there yet, and if we do punish, we erode their reason for wanting to behave.

If we want our children to grow the kind of brain that can be self-disciplined and can help the child to get his emotions under control when he's upset or frustrated so that he can behave in an appropriate way, if we want the child to grow that kind of a brain, then we need to stay connected to him and help him develop the problem-solving skills to grow that kind of a brain.

If he's not doing it, it's either because he feels disconnected from us, or his brain is not there yet and we can help him grow his brain to be able to be there. Or, it's because his emotions are

temporarily getting in his way and we have to help him with his emotions. None of those circumstances are helped by our punishing or "disciplining" the child.

I would like to suggest that you dare not to discipline. That doesn't mean you're a permissive parent – you're going to set limits – but dare not to punish your child when they're having a hard time. Instead, regulate yourself, reconnect with your child, and help them with their emotions so that they can cooperate with you.

Then teach them the problem-solving skills and the ability to reflect on what they've done and what they could do differently next time, and how to repair what they have torn asunder – for instance, a relationship, if they hit their brother, or if they did something else that they can make some kind of repair for – and then take responsibility.

I call those the three R's: Reflect, Repair, and Responsibility. Responsible means they are response-able. Their choices have power. They can always make a better choice or they can always make some choice that will make a difference. We're going to talk about those three things: reflection, repair, and being responsible.

But first, I know some of you are thinking that this sounds awfully like permissive parenting and you don't want to go there, and I totally understand that. Let's talk about permissive parenting.

There's a handout this week that is a chart of different parenting styles. If you can look at that while you're listening, that would be great. If you're listening in your car and you can't look at it right now, that's fine, but make a point of going back later and taking a look at it.

I want to walk you through that chart. Basically, what it shows you is the continuum of strictness to permissiveness. Children who we have low expectations of, we might say we're being permissive with, and children, when we have high expectations, we might say we're being strict. But that's only one continuum. Let's think of that as our horizontal line – from low expectations to high expectations.

Now all parents, basically, wish they could have high expectations of their child. We all wish that children would do what we ask when we ask it. We want our four-year-old to clean up his toys, and wash his hands, and come to dinner, and eat his food, and not throw it at anybody at the table, and not kick his sister under the table, and at the end of the meal, wouldn't it be an amazing thing if he would actually take his plate to the sink or even ask to be excused?

We all have expectations of our child – or we would like to have – that are on the high side for what's appropriate for that age. But some of us can't figure out how we could enforce those expectations without being mean to our kid, so we settle for lower expectations. On this chart, if

you think of low expectations on the far left, and high expectations on the far right, that's the continuum of the expectations.

If we were just looking at it in the terms I've described, some of us who weren't willing to be mean would be on the permissive end, the low end of the expectations, and some would be on the high end because we'll do whatever is necessary to make sure our child performs according to our expectations.

Here's the thing. There's another continuum, it turns out. It's a vertical continuum. If the first is the horizontal one, there's also a vertical axis, and that axis is how much support we give the child. Because it turns out we don't have to settle for the kid to not do what we want. If we weren't willing to be mean, so we settled for him to not meet our expectations, we always think that maybe we'll find the sweet spot halfway in between. What does that mean exactly? Half of the time he doesn't have to wash his hands. Half of the time he's allowed to kick his sister under the table. No, that's ridiculous. Right?

What we're missing here is that vertical continuum, which is about how much support we give our child. If we give our child support every single time it's time to come to dinner, where we wash hands with him, it will become a habit. It takes 30 days, 30 to 90, really, depending on the habit, but for a child, 30 days is usually enough to develop a new habit.

If we wash hands with him for 30 days and after that, we can just stand by the door, we don't even have to wash hands with him, and then after that, we can stand nearby and remind him, and after that, we can ask him to do it, and he will wash his hands because he's developed this habit. We've given him the support to develop the habit.

Now we have a horizontal line and a vertical line, which creates four quadrants. Let's look at each of these quadrants and what happens for these children.

In the right-hand quadrant at the bottom, we have high expectations – that's on the right side of the horizontal line – and then we have low support, that's our vertical line. We're at the bottom of the vertical line, low support. In that quadrant, we have parents who give their child low support but have high expectations for behavior based on the child's age.

Those are the parents who we usually think of as strict. They're not giving the child a lot of support. They're saying, "You need to do what I say, when I say it, and I'm not messing around, and I'm going to enforce this with punishment if I need to." These are the strict or the authoritarian parents.

I need to say that these parents love their children every bit as much as I do or anyone else does. They are parenting this way because they think that's the way to raise great kids. Often, it's the

way they were raised, and they think they came out fine. However, we looked at the research and we know that they're not completely fine. What we know is that often, they have anger management problems, and often they have a harsh inner voice where they can be really mean to themselves. They make a mistake and they say, "You idiot." That harsh inner voice comes out with their children, as well.

It also means they're not that self-disciplined. When you interview these people, they say things like, "I wish I could stick to a diet. I wish I could give up smoking. I'm just not that disciplined. I don't know why." We know why, actually, because we know how kids develop self-discipline, which we're going to talk about in a moment. But suffice it to say that these kids, their opportunity to develop self-discipline was sabotaged when they were young because their parents were so strict and the discipline all came from outside them, instead of them having the opportunity to develop self-discipline.

These people who are raised this way are actually more obedient as children, usually. They're more compliant and obedient when they're very young. If your child is not compliant and obedient, you can maybe feel a little better about that fact because these kids are obedient when they're young because they're afraid.

Then as they get older, and they're less afraid, they become very good liars, and by the time they're teenagers, they're lying to their parents out of habit. Often, they become very rebellious with their parents, very defiant, and there's often a rift between the parent and child.

Sometimes that rift is repaired in their early 20s or their 20s sometime or maybe once they have a child of their own. But later, when we interview them as adults, these people will say things like "I wish I could talk to my dad about that, but he's never been someone you could talk to." They don't feel close to their parents even if there is a rapprochement of sorts as they get older. That's the high expectations, low support.

Let's continue around, going clockwise. Our next quadrant is also low support because we're at the bottom of the vertical line where the low support is. But now we're in the other end of the horizontal line, so we're also at low expectations. These parents do not have high expectations for their child, they have low expectations, but they also don't give their child support. We call this uninvolved or maybe even neglectful.

These are the parents who are just not involved in the child's life. Maybe they have problems of their own, like they have to work two jobs, or they are struggling with drug addiction or alcoholism, or maybe they just work too hard. These are the parents who don't really know what's going on in their child's life. You, by definition, because you're listening to this course,

are not one of these parents, and that's a good thing because these are the kids who have the worst prognosis.

You can imagine, they don't feel cared about. They would rather have a parent who takes an interest in their lives, even punishes them, showing they care, than have a parent who actually doesn't seem to really see who they are or care who they are.

Let's continue, going clockwise. Now we're still on the left end of a horizontal line, low expectations, but we're at the top of the support line, the vertical line, so we're in high support. Now we have kids whose parents have low expectations of them but give them a lot of support. These parents also love their children. They're not the uninvolved parents who don't bother to discipline because they just aren't involved. They're making a choice not to discipline because they don't want their child to suffer. They're not punishing but they're also not necessarily setting limits, and that means their expectations end up very low.

I'm thinking about a mom whose son was at my house playing with a bunch of six-year-olds – there were four boys – and he hauled off and socked one of the other boys in the stomach. When she came to pick up her son, I said to her, "He seems like he's having a hard time today. He socked so-and-so in the stomach," and she said, "Oh, boys will be boys. Aren't they all like that at this age?"

I thought to myself, "Well, no. Actually, they're not. They might hit their sibling, but most six-year-olds on a play date, when they get frustrated with the other kids, they're not hauling off and socking somebody in the stomach hard like this." Something was going on with the boy and his mother didn't even seem curious about it. She had very low expectations for his behavior. She thought this was normal behavior for him.

Sometimes, the expectations just come because the parent thinks that's what's normal or because she has a challenging child. But often, it's because the parent doesn't want the child to suffer. I'll give you an example of that.

The child gets angry, he throws his toy, it breaks. He bursts into tears. The parent says, "Oh, don't cry, don't cry. We'll get you another one." That's permissive parenting. Notice this parent is not buying the toy for the child because that's the best thing for the child; this parent is buying the toy for the child because she can't bear the child's unhappiness.

That's one of the secrets of permissive parenting. We can't bear our child's unhappiness. We're actually not even protecting *them,* in a way. We're protecting *ourselves* from that pain. A permissive parent lowers their expectation of the child and does not enforce rules because she can't bear the child's unhappiness.

One rule would be when you break your toy, we don't replace it. If this is your child's very favorite toy and you want to replace it, it's not going to ruin your child for life. It's a question of repeating such actions over and over again throughout your child's life, so they come to expect that it's perfectly okay to throw things when you get mad, and even if something breaks, it can always be replaced.

The strict parent would say, "You broke your toy. Of course, you're not getting another one. And what's more, I'm going to take away one of your other toys since you obviously can't be responsible with your toys." There's a consequence, there's a punishment involved.

You can see the difference in those two approaches. In the third approach, the uninvolved parent wouldn't even know that was his favorite toy and wouldn't have paid any attention anyway, and probably would just buy him off with some screen time or something.

Now let's move to the last quadrant, because there is another way to handle that broken toy. We're still in the high support at the top of the vertical line, but now we're on the far right, which means the other end of the horizontal line, where there's high expectations. The top of the vertical line is high support and the right hand side of the horizontal line is high expectations.

The parents who have high support and high expectations, these parents would look at the child who just broke his toy and would say, "Oh, Sweetie. That was your favorite toy. I know. That's so upsetting. It's broken now." He cries and the parent says, "I know. I'm sorry. It's so sad. You're sorry it broke. You got so mad, and now it's broken."

They are not punishing the child, they're completely empathizing with the fact that he's so upset about the broken toy, but they're also not rushing out to buy him a toy. He's learning through this experience what happens when he throws his toy.

Next time he's going to be more motivated when he's angry to not throw something, and every time he exercises that self-control, when he wants to throw something, but he chooses not to throw it, when he makes that decision not to throw, he's building neural pathways for self-discipline. He's actually building a more disciplined brain, a self-disciplined brain.

What would happen if he goes to throw it and the parent slaps his hand? Of course, he doesn't throw it because the parent slaps his hand. Has there been any gain in self-discipline? No. He never made a decision not to throw it. That's what I mean when I say that kids with authoritarian parents do not actually develop as much self-discipline as the children who are given an opportunity to make the decision for themselves.

Let's talk about what self-discipline is. Self-discipline is giving up something you want for something you want more. For your child when he's in high school, it might be that he wants to

go drink beer with his buddies but he knows that that could get him kicked off the soccer team. He wants to drink the beer but there's something he wants more. He wants to be on that soccer team, they made a commitment not to drink, they signed a pledge. He knows that if he's caught drinking, he gets kicked off the team. That's enough for him. He gives up something he wants for something he wants more.

When he's little, he might be giving up hitting his sister. I'll give you an example. One family I worked with, the little boy had been angry ever since the daughter was born about this sibling who had arrived in his life and ruined his life, and he used to hit her a lot, and the parents tried everything. They took away his toys, they punished him with time-outs, and finally, they started smacking him – every time he hit his sister, they would smack him – but it didn't help. In fact, it got worse. He hit her more.

When I began to work with his family, I suggested to the mom that she stop hitting him—because that models hitting and was teaching him to hit as a way to solve problems—and instead work on connecting with her son and really make their relationship work.

I told her she needed to take delight in him, she needed to rediscover her delight in her son so that he felt like the apple of her eye, even though she had another apple of her eye, also, the daughter.

She did those things. And then when he would hit his sister, instead of rushing over and smacking him, she would take a deep breath, and instead rush over to protect her daughter, and intervene on the daughter's behalf. She would immediately pay attention to the daughter and ignore her son, who had done the hitting.

We know the son was hurting too, or he wouldn't have hit. But at that point, there was no way for the mom to be nice to him. I said, "Just ignore him if you can't be nice to him." Better no interaction than a mean interaction. Instead, just focus on your daughter. Shift yourself from avenging mama into nurturing mama, nurture her, take care of her, kiss her booboo, let her tell you the story of what happened, and once she feels better and she's able to go and start playing with a toy, then go back to your son.

But instead of smacking him or yelling at him, or even lecturing him, empathize with him. Join with him. You might say something like, "Wow, that was really upsetting, huh? Your sister was really crying. I know you must have been pretty upset to hit her like that. What happened, sweetie?"

Then, since he feels that connection with you because you've been connecting with him every single day, and playing with him and having special time with him, since he trusts you now not

to punish him, he probably will tell you what happened. Probably what happened is that she did something he didn't like. She took his truck, or maybe she looked at his truck. Maybe it's nothing that you would consider an offense, but he reacted, he felt threatened, and so he lashed out at her, and he'll tell you about it.

You listen, and you say, "Oh, so you felt like she was looking at your truck. You were worried she might take it, huh? Yeah, sometimes she takes your things, doesn't she? Yeah. You couldn't figure out anything else to do except to hit her?" At which point he looks at you and he's like, "Well, actually, I'm sure there were other things I could have done." He doesn't say that but you see the sheepish look on his face.

But notice, you're not lecturing him. You're actually acknowledging that he was pretty upset at the time and he couldn't figure out what else to do, and you say that directly, and then you say, "I wonder what you could do next time." Now you're going to help him solve his problem. You're going to help him solve his problem of what to do next time he feels threatened with his sister."

This mom worked really hard with her son, and within a month, the hitting had completely stopped. But then she reached out to me to say that something else had happened that she didn't understand. She told me that she had been doing her dishes and she looked up to see her son standing behind her daughter.

Her daughter was drawing at a low table. Her son was standing behind her with his fist raised over her head about to come down on her head. She froze, she didn't know what to do. Her eyes locked with her son's. He looked at his mother, his little face and his body rigid with tension, his fist poised over his sister's head. Then, slowly, slowly, his hand began to open…. and he petted his sister's head.

"What happened?" his mom asked me.

"What do you think happened?" I asked.

"Well, my husband says I caught him in the act and he was afraid of getting punished."

"What do you think?"

"I think that couldn't be true because he used to get punished all the time and it didn't stop him from hitting his sister."

I said, "I think that for the first time in his life, your son has something he wants more than he wants to hit his sister. He wants this warm relationship that you've created with him through all of this hard work."

That's the definition of self-discipline. It's choosing something we want more. Giving up what we want – hitting our sister – for something we want more—that warm connection with mom. He didn't want to let his mother down. That's an example of loving guidance instead of punishment. It's also an example of how children develop self-discipline through our loving guidance.

Let's review what this mom did. First, she regulated her own emotions, not easy when one of your children is hitting another child of yours. Second, she reconnected with her child. Third, she helped him with his angry emotions. She gave him tools that he could use to handle himself when he was angry. That's called coaching him to be his best self. She did all of this instead of using force and punishment to get him to cooperate with her. And the result? He wanted to cooperate, he wanted to please her. He gave up what he wanted, hitting his sister, for something he wanted more, that connection with his mother.

You're probably wondering about now, "Okay, great. I'm willing to guide. I'm willing not to punish. But what do I do when my kid misbehaves? What can I do?" The answer is you set limits. You do have to stop your child from hitting his sister. You do have to get him into the bathtub. You do have to put him to bed at night. You do have to keep him from running in the street. When your child is doing something you don't want him to do, or when she won't do something you need her to do, it's time for you to set a limit.

Of course, most of us just tell the child what to do and we expect the child to do it, and then we're stuck wondering "How mean do I have to be to get my kid to do this?" We threaten or maybe we bribe, or maybe we just give up and lower expectations. But it is possible to set limits and have your child comply with your limits without being mean and without backing off your expectations.

The secret of setting limits and having your child cooperate is connection. If your child feels connected to you, they will listen to your limit and they'll accommodate you. Now, it's pretty hard sometimes to connect with a child. If your child is having a great time jumping up and down on the couch and being wild with her friend, she's not going to listen to you when you say, "Hey, hey, no jumping on the couch."

You have to move in close and get their attention and say, "Girls, wow, that looks like so much fun." Now you've joined with them, you've connected. Now they can listen to what you have to say and hear you and they're more likely to cooperate with you. Connection is the secret of setting limits.

Jane Nelson, the founder of Positive Discipline, put this very succinctly when she said, "Connect before you correct." Always start with connection, and one of the best ways to connect is empathy.

I call this kind of parenting empathic limits, where the child does need guidance, the child does need limits, but we do it with empathy and understanding of the child's perspective. We do this out of simple respect for another human being – our child is a full-fledged human being in her own right.

We also do it because it works better. When people, humans, feel understood, they're more likely to cooperate. When we ask our child to do something and she feels we understand why she doesn't want to, she's more likely to go along with us, even though she doesn't really want to.

Empathic limits is a respectful way to parent, it's also the most effective way to set limits. It keeps you from having to struggle with your child with power struggles all the time, and it keeps you from having to be a meanie to get your child to do what your child to do. The more connection, the more fun it is to parent.

Empathic limits puts the joy back in parenting. It doesn't mean that you won't have times when your needs and your child's needs differ. Your child will never understand why you think it's so important for them to get on their shoes to get out of the house on time in the morning. But if you can connect with your child, you're much more likely to have a good interaction about it and not have a power struggle over it.

When you're setting the limit – like it's time to get your shoes on and leave the house – the first thing you always do is calm yourself down. If you're frantic, you can't expect your child to cooperate. Your child is getting the message that there's an emergency, and your child begins to get anxious, and that means they won't cooperate with you. Children are not going to follow us when we are frantic, so the first thing is to calm yourself down.

The second thing is to connect with your child, and then use your creativity to coach them. You might say, "Well, you have a choice. Do you want to wear your sneakers, or do you want to wear your boots?" Giving your child a choice is one way to set a limit – yes, you have to wear some kind of shoes – but still give your child some say in the matter, so your child doesn't feel so pushed around.

Giving choices and control is especially important for strong-willed children. Strong-willed children want mastery more than anything. Put a strong-willed child in charge of himself and in charge of his own life as much as possible.

Instead of nagging him in the morning to get ready, work with him to make a chart of the things he has to do in the morning with pictures of what he does. Then, instead of barking orders, you can just look at the chart and say, "Wow. You're already dressed and you have your shoes on. What do you do next?" He won't be able to wait to show you how he can find his backpack and get it ready.

Strong-willed kids want control and want mastery, but really all children want that. That's why it works to give kids choices, and of course, you only give choices that you can live with.

Another way to get your child to cooperate is enroll them as a partner – your junior partner, to be sure – in problem solving. "Sweetie, we have a problem. We have to leave right now, and it's cold outside and wet, and you don't have any shoes on. What should we do?" Most kids can't resist being a problem solver.

Another thing children can't resist is an invitation to play. You might say, "No shoes? How will you skip? I was hoping to skip with you to the car." Or you might say, "Hey, do you want to play that game where we make the lights turn green by counting in the car? Okay. Quick. Let's get your shoes on so we can go." Or you could have a race. "I bet I can get my shoes on faster than you can. Come on. Let's race. One, two, three, go."

If your child doesn't respond to playing, it's probably because he just can't summon up the internal resources to cope at this moment. We've all been there, especially first thing in the morning. And there's nothing wrong with babying him sometimes. "Oh, Sweetie. Sometimes we all just need a little help, even when we know how. Here. Let me help you with those boots. They can be hard to pull on when you aren't quite awake."

Parents are usually told that we should never do something for our child that they can do themselves because it keeps them from developing independence. I'm not totally in agreement with that. Sure, in general, why would we? Children usually *want* to "do it myself." But when they ask us for help, why wouldn't we give them that extra help, which is a way they perceive us as loving them?

I can get my own glass of water – I do know how – but when my husband is up and I'm sitting on the couch, and I say, "Honey, would you mind getting me a glass of water?" it sure makes me feel loved when he brings me that water.

There's nothing wrong with helping your child put on a shoe sometimes. If you're doing it every morning, then you do want to start trying to help him develop his own skills and confidence so that he can do it himself. But there's nothing wrong with saying, "These boots are hard to buckle.

Can you really do that yourself? Hey, have you been practicing secretly? I didn't know you could do that."

Sometimes, kids really don't feel up to whatever we're asking of them until they feel more connection. You might say, "Hmm, those shoes are still not on your feet. I think maybe those toes need kissing before they can go into those shoes. That's the problem. I'm kissing all those toes, one, two, three, four, five. What delicious toes. Oh, they're talking to me, they're saying, 'Put me in my shoe, put me in my shoe.' Okay, in they go. Now the other foot."

If you're thinking that this does not sound like limit setting, you're right. When we think of limits, we think of laying down the law, telling our kid what to do, and they do it. By contrast, this sounds suspiciously like jollying the child along, playing with them, meeting them where they are, so that they're happy to do what we're asking. Yes, that's exactly what it is. We're connecting with them using the language that children use, which is playing, and it makes life so much more fun! You can enjoy the journey instead of just rushing through life with your child.

Because after all, what is life with your child? It's those minutes where you're getting on her shoes in the morning, or driving in the car together, or washing her hair, or eating dinner together. That's most of what our time *is* with our children, moving them through the schedule. Why wouldn't you want that time to be rich with lovely interaction where you enjoy each other and where you take delight in your child?

When you do that, parenting is so much more fun, and your child feels loved and valued and develops high self-esteem, and you and your child have a deep relationship, and your child cooperates with you so much more. Why wouldn't you want to set limits this way if you could, instead of setting limits negatively as most people do, which gets them into power struggles?

Sometimes, you won't have the energy for this. Of course. Nobody can do this all the time, and some people can't even do it most of the time, and certainly, some people can't do it first thing in the morning. I get it. No problem. You don't have to do this all the time.

What I'm asking you to do is to consider how to connect with your child before you correct or guide them, and ask them to do something. Connection can actually be very simple. "You're having such a great time playing, but it's bath time now. We do need to clean up." You empathized and you've set a very clear limit.

All children will resist, it's part of their job description, they have to test and make sure that's really where the limit is, and say, "Oh, just five more minutes. Oh, just let me finish this." You can do five more minutes if you want, but if you extend it more than once, then you can expect your child to not be sure where the limits are and to always test.

I would say give one warning, make an agreement. “It’s bath time. Do you want to go now or in five minutes? Five minutes. Okay. Five minutes but no argument then, right? You’ll be ready? Okay. Talk to you in five minutes.” Then in five minutes, you go back and your child, of course, says, “Oh, Dad, just five more minutes,” and you say, “I know, buddy, it’s so hard to stop playing. I get it. It’s time to go now. We said five minutes. We have an agreement. We always keep our promises. Let’s go.”

The first time you do this, your child might have a meltdown, but if this is the way things always go in your house, your child will be used to it and your child will know that when Dad says this, he means it; there’s no point in fighting with him about it. And if you stay in a good mood, your child is much more likely to cooperate with you instead of falling apart.

Another approach is to simply tell your child what you need. Marshall Rosenberg, who invented nonviolent communication, suggests that you say to another person what you observe, how you feel, what you need, and make a request of them. My adaptation of this for children is “I see you don’t have your shoes on, and we need to leave the house in five minutes. I feel a little worried about getting there on time. I need you to put your shoes on right now so that we’re ready to leave.”

Rosenberg’s approach includes a request. “Would you be willing to do that?” Of course, that works with adults. With most children, I would not ask if they’re willing to put their shoes on to leave because most children will simply say no. If it’s not negotiable, then you don’t give your child a choice; you simply ask for their cooperation.

Again, this approach of expressing what we need to the child only works if we’re also acknowledging their feelings first. “I know it’s hard to stop playing. We need to go. Please put on your shoes.”

Most parents who are used to using bribes or threats or punishment to get kids to cooperate, just don’t believe when I describe this that it’s possible. “What incentive does the child have to cooperate?” The answer is, the emotional incentive of the connection with you is always a much better incentive than any bribe or threat you could come up with.

Notice that we’re also paying attention to how the child feels. “I know, it’s so hard to stop playing and take your bath. I bet when you grow up, you’ll play all night, every night, won’t you? You’ll never go to bed.” Or maybe “You sound so disappointed. I guess you really wanted to go to the playground today.”

Being understood takes the sting out of the child's constant experience of feeling pushed around and disappointed and not in charge of his own life. That's why empathy is your magic wand when it comes to helping your child *want* to cooperate with your limits.

But what happens when you set a limit and your child refuses to cooperate, and you've tried to connect and your child still won't cooperate? Or maybe you're in a public situation, like the playground, and your child is doing something unsafe, and you really don't have time to empathize or connect much; you just need to get them to cooperate with you. Sometimes, you just need to enforce your limits.

Let's say your son Jack is in the sandbox and he's exploring the velocity of sand as he throws it. Unfortunately, it's getting in the faces of other children. You say, "Jack, stop. Sand is not for throwing. It's hurting their eyes." Jack looks right at you, picks up more sand, and throws it. You hop into the sandbox, pick him up, and take him out of the sandbox. Of course, Jack begins to howl. You say, "Jack, the rule in the sandbox is no throwing sand. Sand hurts. Can you stop throwing sand?"

He looks at you. He doesn't say yes, he doesn't say no. So you say, "Jack, if you want to go back in the sandbox, we need a deal that you can follow the rule. Can you follow the rule and not throw the sand? Can we shake on it?"

If he shakes on it, he'll probably follow that rule because he's actually committing himself. If he can't shake on it, he can't go back in the sandbox, no matter how much he cries or begs, in which case, you say, "You know what? It's just too hard for you today. You're having a hard time. We're going to go home now." Or you might decide, "We're going to go to the swings now. We'll try again some other time with the sandbox."

Jack might have a complete meltdown. That's okay. Until he can agree not to throw the sand, he can't go back in the sandbox. That's the rule under which all of us are allowed to be in the sandbox.

What if he says, "Okay, I won't throw any more sand, I won't," and he gets into the sandbox and then he plays a little bit, and then he begins throwing sand again? That's it. There's only one warning. You take him out of the sandbox and you say, "Jack, it was just too hard for you today. We'll try again tomorrow. Now we need to go home. The rule is no throwing sand." That's it. That's your limit.

You may be wondering whether this is a limit or a consequence, the consequence of throwing sand is you can't be in the sandbox. But because consequences have come to mean punishment

in our culture, I don't use the word consequence. When parents hear "consequence," they think of it as a punitive, unpleasant thing that they impose on their child when their child breaks a rule.

I'm not looking at this as anything punitive; this is just that the rule to be in the sandbox is, we have to not throw sand. If we throw sand, we can't be in the sandbox. It's that simple. Is it a consequence of throwing sand? Sure. But it's not because the parent has decided that the child needs to leave; it's because the rule is there's no throwing sand.

It's sort of like if you turn off the light, it's dark. That's a consequence of turning off the light, but it's nothing punitive; it's just a result. So the result of not being able to follow the rules in the sandbox is, you can't be in the sandbox. It's that simple.

If you're used to using consequences to influence your child's behavior, I would just ask that you observe yourself doing it. Do you find yourself in the car screaming at the top of your lungs, "If I have to stop this car and come back there, there will be consequences!"? Obviously, that's a punishment.

I would actually suggest that you probably want the word "consequences" out of your vocabulary altogether, but the rule of thumb to distinguish a limit from a consequence is just the structure of things. When we follow the rules in the library, we're allowed to be in the library. When we scream and run around, we're not allowed to be in a library.

By contrast, if you're imposing a punishment on your child because he disrupted story time or because he threw sand at someone in the sandbox, if you're imposing an additional consequence besides having to leave the sandbox or the library, then that would be a punishment.

There is another kind of consequence that the parent has nothing to do with. If you forget your lunch at home and don't bring it to school, you'll be hungry. That's the consequence of forgetting your lunch. That's a natural consequence; the parent has nothing to do with it.

A natural consequence is great. That's how the child learns. You wouldn't let your child ride his bike without a helmet, you wouldn't let her ride in the car without a seatbelt. Those things could be life-threatening, so we don't let the child learn from natural consequences in those instances. But if it's going to school without a lunch and your child forgets their lunch, I suggest that's great. They'll learn not to forget their lunch.

Natural consequences that you have nothing to do with are terrific. But if your child thinks that you're orchestrating the consequence, then they will perceive it as something unpleasant that you're making happen to them so that they'll do things your way. And that, of course, is the definition of punishment.

You may be wondering how your child will learn a lesson if there's no negative result of their behavior. Obviously, if the child is throwing sand in the sandbox and you take him home, he learns a lesson. But if he hits his sister and nothing happens, how does he learn a lesson from that? The answer is that we absolutely set the limit.

First of all, we try to intervene before hitting starts, and I know you think it just comes out of the blue, but if you pay attention, most of the time, kids hit for a reason. They hit because they're in a bad mood, they're hungry, they're cranky, they're tired, there's something going on with their mood, or they hit because the sister did something to them or they think she did something to them, or they hit because they have some bottled-up feelings and then it really does seem to come out of the blue.

But if we've been watching our child, we can see that he's been cranky and in a bad mood, so it comes back to the bad mood again. It's just not physically caused; it's because he has some feelings bottled up.

In any of these cases, if we notice our child is in a bad mood, we try to intervene prior to the time he hits his sister. How would you intervene? You would meet his needs. You would start by feeding him or giving him a little snuggle time to reconnect and recharge his batteries, or throwing him around to get him laughing, which empties some of the emotional load in his backpack, and if nothing else works and he's being really difficult, then you know he might just need to cry, and you might have a scheduled meltdown. I'll talk about that next week when we discuss preventive maintenance.

So, often you can prevent the hitting. But what if your child does hit your other child, despite your efforts to prevent it? Let's say you're making dinner, your two-year-old and your four-year-old are building towers out of blocks in the next room. Suddenly, there's a huge crash and you hear your two-year-old sobbing. You run into the other room, the four-year-old looks sheepish, the tower the two-year-old was building is now all around him on the floor, and he's nursing his owie on his foot.

Most of us would want to run over to the four-year-old and scream at him, "You know better than that! How could you do that to your brother?" He looks pretty sheepish; clearly he did something. We might drag him to a time-out so he can think about what he did, and then we would finally turn our attention to the sobbing toddler.

I'm going to suggest that your four-year-old is going to learn a lot more if instead of doing that, you go straight to the toddler. You get down on the floor with him, you pull him on to your lap, and you say, "Oh, my. What happened?" He shows you his foot, "Ouch, ouch," and he's pointing to his brother. Clearly, something happened that the brother had something to do with.

You say, “Oh, ouch. Your foot hurts. Your tower came down. It looks like it fell on your foot, huh?” Your little toddler is sobbing and pointing to his foot. You say, “Let me kiss that. Can I kiss that? Oh, ouch. It hurts when the blocks fall on your foot, doesn’t it?” You hug him, you hold him, and maybe you take him to the bathroom and run his foot under cold water, if he’d like that.

After a while, he’s done crying, and you take him back, and by now, he’s not really thinking about the blocks. You get him started doing something else. Maybe you give him the fire truck, and he’s making big noises and dashing around the living room with a fire truck.

Then you go over to your four-year-old, and you say, “Hey, that was hard, huh?” Notice that you’re opening the discussion by acknowledging that something hard happened, but you’re not blaming. There’s no shame or blame here.

He looks at you, not sure what you’re going to do, still a little apprehensive, and you say, “Your brother was really crying, right? His foot really hurt. I know you wouldn’t hurt your brother on purpose. I know you didn’t mean to hurt him. I think he’s okay now. But sweetheart, what happened?”

Your son sees that he’s not getting attacked, but he’s on the spot to tell you what happened. Again, no shame or blame. Your son knows what he did hurt his brother, and he does feel guilty about it. He feels a little defensive. What does he do when he feels guilty and defensive? He does what we all do; he tries to defend himself even in his own mind. He lashes out, he tries to place the blame elsewhere. He says, “It was his fault.”

Now, most of us would want to say, “He’s only two. It couldn’t have been his fault.” But instead, we take a deep breath, and we say, “It was his fault, huh? What happened?” Notice no blame, no shame in my voice. That might take your son off the defensive.

Now he says, “He took my block. He took my favorite block, the one I always put on top of my towers. He took it and he wouldn’t give it back, Mom. I asked him nicely, I did, I tried, I tried to get it back nicely, but he wouldn’t give it back. And then when I went to take it, then he fought with me and then the whole tower got knocked down.”

Now you see what happened. The only way he’s able to actually tell you is that he’s not feeling blamed and on the defensive. You start by empathizing. “Oh, your favorite block? The one you love so much that’s shaped like the triangle? Oh, I know. That’s the one you always put on top, isn’t it?”

“Yeah.”

“And he took it? He was using it? It’s hard when somebody has the block you want.”

“Hard? Mom, it’s my block.”

“I hear you, sweetie. It’s the block you always use, isn’t it? And you didn’t know how to get your brother to give it to you?”

“Well I tried, mom. I tried. I asked him for it, but he wouldn’t give it to me.”

“I can see you didn’t know what to do. So you grabbed it and then his tower fell down?”

“Yeah, but I didn’t mean to hurt him Mom, I didn’t.”

Now you give him a hug and you say, “I know you didn’t mean to hurt him, Sweetie, but it did hurt him when the tower came down, and it’s not okay to hurt your brother, no matter what. I wonder what you could do next time instead of grabbing the block.”

He says, “I could call you?” and you say, “Yeah. You know I’m always here to help. You could call me and I would help you…..Maybe you could have done something else, too, yourself, like ….what do you think?”

He can’t think of anything and you say, “Well, maybe your brother would have traded you for a different block.”

“I guess so,” he says.

“He really likes the round block, the one that’s shaped like a half moon,” you say. “So that’s two good ideas. You can always call me for help and you could trade your brother for a different block. But it’s hard to remember those good ideas when you’re mad isn’t it? I know. When I get mad, I have a hard time, too, remembering the good ideas to solve problems….

“You know what I find works for me? If I take a deep, deep breath and I let it out. Then I feel better and I can think better, and sometimes I can solve the problem better and think of a good idea, like maybe trading for the block. Have you ever tried that? Have you seen me do it?”

Your son thinks about it and he thinks he might be willing to try it, and you do it right there with him. “Come on. Let’s do it together. Deep breath in, deep breath out. See? Do you feel a little better now? Me, too.” You give him a big hug.

So far, you’ve done two of your three R’s. You’ve helped your son to tell you the story, to Reflect on his behavior, and to take Responsibility for what he did. He realizes that his choices are powerful. He’s response-able. He sees that he can do things differently next time. That’s two of the three R’s. Now he’s ready for the third one.

The third one is to Repair, to make amends. Instead of punishing him by saying, "Now you go over and you apologize to your brother," we help him learn that his behavior had a cost, and we empower him to figure out how he could repair what he's torn asunder – in this case, his relationship with his brother.

He's not angry anymore because of the loving way in which we engaged with him. By telling us the story, he got his anger off his chest, he isn't angry anymore, and he isn't defensive, either, because we didn't blame him. We loved him through this and he feels a lot better about himself.

By contrast, if he had felt bad, he would now be acting bad. Imagine if he'd been on the naughty step all this time. Would he be thinking, "Oh, I want to be a better person. Oh, I want to apologize to my brother. I'd like to do things differently next time"? No, he'd be thinking, "It's all my brother's fault. Mom always takes his side. She loves him more."

Now that we've helped him with his emotions, there can be a sincere apology, and a sincere apology can be very restorative to a relationship. I've never seen any research on apologies between children, but I have seen research by John Gottman of the Love Lab that shows that when couples apologize to each other under pressure because they feel they should, but they're not quite ready to, it does not actually improve the quality of the relationship. Neither person feels good about that apology.

The same thing is almost certainly true for children. But now your son *feels* like apologizing or at least making things better with his brother. Now you're hugging him, you say to him, "Sweetie, you know, that really hurt your brother. He was really scared, I think, also, when the tower came down. I wonder what you could do to make things better with him."

There's an expectation that he will make better what he's done, just in exactly the same way that if he spilled the milk, you would say to him, "Well, milk spills, it's okay. Here, let's get the paper towels; we always clean up our own messes." In that exact same tone, you say, "It hurt your brother, it scared him. I wonder what you could do to make things better." You're implying "We always clean up our own messes."

Your son says, "Well, I guess I could give him a hug, and I guess I could help him build another tower. But Mom, I just don't want him to use that block. Can we put that block away and then we won't fight over it anymore, and maybe for his birthday, we can get him another block just like that, and then we wouldn't have problems with it?"

Look at that repair. "I want to hug him, I want to help him rebuild the tower I knocked down, and I want to solve this problem for the future by giving my brother access to a block of his own."

Do you think that this child would be able to make that kind of repair, would be able to find that emotional generosity inside of his own heart, if he had been sitting on the naughty step stewing about how you love the other brother more?

To wrap up today, I'd like to share with you a note I got from a mom named Kristen. She wrote, "The biggest challenge to my patience has always been when my daughter seems to be willfully refusing to cooperate. Inspired by something in your newsletter, I did an experiment.

"When she became defiant, I kept myself from getting angry by breathing deeply. Then I simply went over and gave her a big hug and told her how much I love. Then I repeated my original request in a soft voice.

"My idea was that this would, one, remind me not to be angry; two, remind her of our connection; and three, remind her that she really did want to be helpful and not hurtful. The effect of doing this had on my blood pressure was impressive. But the effect it had on her behavior was beyond belief. She went from defiant to eager to please in a single hug."

Now I know what you're thinking. In your house, when your child is having a hard time and giving you a hard time, it takes a lot more than a hug to get him back on track. But remember, this wasn't just a hug.

What did Kristen do? She regulated her own emotions. None of this works if we're being angry at the child. We have to calm down first. Second, she reconnected with her daughter. That was what the hug was – even while she was setting the limit. And what was the limit? She repeated her request in a soft voice. So she wasn't really empathizing, she was simply repeating it, but she was doing it in a gentle way rather than a way that made her child feel pushed around. What happened? She had the expectation that her daughter would cooperate if she could, and her daughter did.

Yes, there will be times when your child simply can't cooperate, and those are the times when emotion is simply overwhelming him at that moment. That happens to all of us sometimes and we're usually not at our best at those moments. To keep those times with your child to a minimum, the best practice is preventive maintenance, so you don't end up in the breakdown lane so often—which is what we'll be talking about next week.

Thanks so much for joining me today and for your commitment to your child and to your own growth. This ends week five, *Beyond Discipline*, of the **Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids** Online Course. This is Dr. Laura Markham of AhaParenting.com.