

## Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids Online Course

### Week 7: The Transition to Peaceful Parenting

#### Transcript

Hello, and welcome to Week 7 of the **Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids** Online Course. This is Dr. Laura Markham, and today we're talking about making the transition to peaceful parenting.

If you've been relying on bribes, threats, and punishment to get your child to cooperate with you, you can expect some bumps as you and your kids learn new patterns of relating. You're all learning new habits, and you're healing old hurt feelings so that they stop driving new bad behavior. It's a tough transition for most families to make, and part of that is because you're learning new skills as you go.

This will be a useful week even for people who have been practicing peaceful parenting for a long time, because we'll go over the skills, and I'll give you the words to say to your child so that you can hear the tone of voice and consider what your approach might be in different situations with your child – whether you're an experienced peaceful parenting practitioner or whether this is all really new to you and you just stopped spanking your kids last week and you're trying to figure out, *“Well, what do we do now?”*

One problem that I hear often from parents when they begin peaceful parenting is that they don't know how to explain it to their families or their friends who criticize them and tell them that their children really need a firmer hand and that their kids showing their emotions is disrespectful to the parents.

I thought I would share with you something that showed up on my Facebook page today in a wonderful discussion that was going on. This is from a mom named Hannah. She said, *“If your kids do what you say only because you threatened a grounding or a spanking, I don't see in what world that could be called respecting one's parents. That's obeying to avoid a negative consequence. That's actually the opposite of kids obeying you out of respect, in which case, they choose to obey because they trust your judgment.”*

Another mom, Shaina, talked about her transition to positive parenting. She said, *“Here's what I've learned. It's okay that my kids sometimes don't like my limits. I now welcome crying, tantrums, and all feelings. It won't change my limit, but I no longer try to find ways to stop them from expressing their feelings. Instead, I acknowledge, acknowledge, acknowledge – without fixing. They will learn that they can trust me to be there and to love them no matter what. This is huge in raising kids who talk to you and trust you when they're older and it really matters...”*

*“I’ve also learned that my feelings and needs matter, too, and the only person who can get my needs met is me. It’s not my kids’ job to understand or empathize with me. Their brains aren’t ready for that yet. This means setting limits early and as often as I need to, kindly, firmly, and accepting their reactions as normal and healthy.*

*“The more I understand that children should be allowed to express their feelings, the less ruffled I am when they actually do it. I’ve learned that apologizing and making amends when I make mistakes is hugely important, and it is a sign of strength, not weakness. Do it often and immediately.*

*“I’ve learned that respectful parenting is a life’s work. I’ll always be growing, slipping, changing, regrouping, and trying again. It’s okay that my kids and I are learning together. If I can stay open to change, humble, and forgiving of myself and others, we will reap rewards beyond my wildest dreams. I really believe that.”*

You can see a lot of wisdom on my Facebook page, but you may still be wondering, *“What do I do when my child misbehaves? I can’t just let her get away with misbehavior. If I’m not supposed to punish her, how do I teach her a lesson? Okay, I get that feelings are allowed but when she has a tantrum because she wants something and she won’t take no for an answer, how can that be an okay thing to allow?”*

Naturally, if you’re just beginning peaceful parenting, you’re going to have some questions as you implement it. Today we’re going to talk about setting limits, we’re going to talk about accepting emotions, we’re going to talk about apologizing to your kids, we’re going to talk about compassion and forgiveness for yourself and for your children, and finally, we’re going to talk about how to explain positive parenting to others – your father, your mother-in-law, your babysitter, even your own partner.

But before we do anything else, let’s start by remembering to start with ourselves. The peace in peaceful parenting comes from you. You’ll have a more peaceful family and you’ll have more cooperative children to the degree that you can become more aware of your own emotions, your own moods, your own triggers—and learn to manage those. This is always a work in progress. You will never be perfect at it; I guarantee you. I’m not perfect at it, either. No one is. But every time you do it, you’re rewiring your brain so that it does get easier.

We think that this transition to peaceful parenting is all about our kids. How will we explain it to them? What will we do instead of punishing them when they misbehave? Will they think they can get away with murder now that they’re not going to get punished? Will one child feel that he can beat the other one up, and will the other child feel unprotected? Will they act out like crazy?

We have a lot of fears, usually, and a lot of concern about how we will handle our kids, how we'll manage them. But I think our focus actually needs to be on ourselves. How will we handle our own emotions and reactions? How will we manage ourselves? Because that's the key to making this transition. It's all about how you regulate your emotions, and if you can do that, you'll be able to connect with your child. You'll be able to see it from your child's point of view instead of flying off the handle.

That covers two of the important bases: first, regulating your own emotions, and second, connecting with your child. If you can do those two things, you'll figure out how to coach your child for better behavior, mostly because your child will be willing to cooperate better because he feels understood and connected with. He won't be reacting badly and plunge into a deeper level of fight, flight, or freeze based on your emotional reaction.

It's easy to feel overwhelmed in the beginning. *"What am I supposed to actually do?"* Always start by regulating yourself. That means when you feel upset, Stop, Drop what you're doing, Breathe. Notice the sensations in your body. That helps you be more present so you're not going to get hijacked by anger. Acknowledge your feelings – *"I'm disappointed. I'm frustrated. I had hoped for a nice evening and I feel so let down"* – but refuse to act on that urgent fight or flight feeling that makes your child look like the enemy. Delay taking action whenever possible until you feel more calm.

This takes practice. This is a big part of your transition to positive parenting. It takes practice in that moment with your child and it also takes practice in general every moment as you're becoming more aware of your own moods, thoughts, emotions, and triggers.

It's not easy. In fact, it's really, really, really hard. It's the hardest thing any of us ever do, I believe. But every time you do it, you're developing more impulse control and you're actually excavating your emotional triggers, so you won't get upset so often.

Okay. Let's talk about setting limits. What's the most important thing to know about setting limits? **Connect before you correct.** It's really that simple. Connect before you correct. That means you connect with your child in that moment – *"I know. It's hard to stop playing and get ready for bed"* – but it also means we're connecting the rest of the day. Because if you have been disconnected from your child all day – maybe you've been at work and your child has been at school – then she's not necessarily going to be super open to your empathy at that moment when you're telling her it's time to clean up her toys and get ready for bed.

As Larry Cohen, author of **Playful Parenting**, says, *"We have to be experts as parents at reconnecting with our children throughout our day."* That means we have to do the preventive maintenance that's necessary to build connection.

Positive parenting is not just about not punishing; it doesn't work without connection, because if you don't have the connection your child will still not listen to you and do what you ask your child to do, and you'll end up resorting to threats, so you'll destroy your trust with your child and your child will start acting out again. So before you change anything else with your child, start building up your bond.

Week 6 (Preventive Maintenance) and Week 3 (Connection) give you lots of ideas about how to do this, but think in terms of Empathy 24/7 and of Special Time, which is a concentrated dose of super connection.

I know you probably don't think you have time for Special Time with each child every day and I completely agree that it's a challenge. I think it's worth it, especially during this transitional time. Remember, you've been motivating your child with fear. Now you need to replace that with a deeper motivation: love and understanding.

Your child is used to not really taking responsibility for her own actions. She's used to you manipulating her through fear, and so if suddenly you're not punishing her, what's to stop her from acting out? She has to want to cooperate with you. It's a big transition for her and the only insurance policy you have, to have influence with her, is your connection.

Connection is the only thing that gives us influence with our children ultimately, because fear only lasts for as long as you're bigger than they are, while love becomes a more powerful motivator over time. So don't skimp on connection during this transitional time. You will absolutely see a difference. You will see that your child really wants to cooperate with you.

You're regulating your emotions and you're connecting with your child, but your child is still not a perfect angel. Your child still does things that you ask him not to, or she won't do things you ask her to do. In the old days, you might have gotten her attention by yelling at her or maybe you threatened to withhold a privilege, so now you'd like to know what to do.

I'm going to give you ten specific tools that you can use. I've mentioned all of these before, but I'm reviewing them here so you have them all in one place and you can see how to apply them.

### *#1. Empathize*

First, empathize as you set the limit. *"You wish you never had to stop playing and get ready for bed, don't you? I bet when you grow up, you'll play all night every night. Right now, it's time for your bath."* Acknowledging her perspective is what helps a child want to cooperate with us.

This also works when you want your child to stop behaving in a certain way. If he's jumping on the couch and you walk in the room, instead of saying, *"Get off that couch!"* you can say, *"Wow,*

*that looks like fun,”* and then you grab him up in your arms, swoop him off the couch and say, *“What’s the rule about the couch? No jumping on the couch. It breaks the couch. You know where you can jump.”* You’re redirecting him – which is tool number two.

### *#2. Redirect*

He’s jumping on the couch; you redirect him to where he *can* jump. This works because it’s very hard to stop an impulse. When you have an impulse to eat a muffin or a piece of cake, it’s hard to stop that impulse. It’s much easier if you direct that impulse instead to eat that bag of carrots from the refrigerator.

A toddler loves to throw. You cannot stop a toddler from throwing, but you can show her how to throw her stuffed animals over the banister instead of throwing the TV remote across the room.

### *#3. Can instead of can’t*

Our third tool is telling our child what they CAN do instead of what they CAN’T do. If you’re brushing your daughter’s hair and you say, *“Don’t wriggle, stop wriggling,”* she sees the image of someone wriggling. But if you say, *“Honey, if you can hold still like a statue, I can brush gently,”* that gives her an image that helps her hold still—a statue. It also gives her a win-win solution, so she’s motivated. That brings us to tool number four:

### *#4. Win-win solutions*

When you want your child to do something your way and your child wants to do something his way, sometimes you can get your needs met and he can also get what he wants if you think a little bit outside the box. If you’re having dinner and your son hates kale, which is the vegetable you’re having tonight, maybe he can have some carrots straight out of the fridge. It doesn’t take any work on your part, he still gets a lot of good vitamins, so really, you both win. That’s a win-win solution.

### *#5. Give choices*

We’ve talked about giving choices before in this class. No one likes to feel pushed around. For instance, if your child is resisting having her hair washed, you can say, *“Do you want to do it in the shower and we’ll hold the handheld spigot from the shower, or do you want to get in the tub and we can pour the water over with a cup? What’s going to work better for you, honey?”*

### *#6. When... then...*

This is one of the basic tools of Jane Nelsen of Positive Discipline. *“When we’ve cleaned up all the toys, then we can go to the playground.”*

#7. *When you're ready...*

Another very useful tool is “When you’re ready.” This is for children who might be feeling a little emotional or a little resistant about cooperating with you. For instance, maybe they are really resisting a certain transition.

You set your expectation – *“You do need to wear shoes, sweetheart. It’s very cold out and rainy. I know it has been fun to be barefoot in the house”* – and then you express the assumption that your child will be ready at some point and that you’re willing to be flexible about the timing of this. You say, *“When you’re ready, let me know and I’ll put your shoes on and we’ll go then. In the meantime, I’m going to put my shoes on,”* or whatever.

If you have a child who is strong willed, they’re often perfectly happy to accommodate and put their shoes on because you’ve left the ball in their court – when they’re ready. They’re in control.

A variation of this is to ask the child when they think they’ll be ready. *“Do you think you’ll be ready in one minute or in five minutes?”* Of course, most children will say five minutes. That’s fine. That’s a variation on giving choices that are palatable to you. It’s a way to let the child move forward when they’re ready, when they feel they’re making the decision.

What if you don’t have time to wait until your child is ready to put his shoes on? Don’t use that tool. Use our eighth tool:

#8. *Express your feelings and ask for your child’s help*

You might say, *“Oh my goodness, look how late it is. I’m worried we’ll be late. We need to get ready to go right now. Sweetheart, I need you to get your shoes on. We all have to work together now.”*

You’re asking your child for help and cooperation very directly and you’ve expressed your feelings. Children who feel connected to you care about your feelings, so unless your child has some big emotions going on, they will respond to your direct seeking of help from them to address your problem. That brings us to tool number nine:

#9. *Meet your child’s need to feel valued as a member of the family*

Every child needs to be valued for the contribution they make to a family, and as we value them, they become more responsible. For instance, if you have a child who’s running off from the dining room table to go play, you might put your arm around him and say, *“You know what, Noah. I am so grateful for the way you so carefully take your plate into the kitchen. There are so many things to clear off the table. I love the way in this family everybody clears their own plate. Thank you so much for how you do that.”*

Now, your kid was about to go into the other room to play, but now he looks at you with his big eyes and he says, *“Mommy, I’m going to carry my plate right now. Watch me.”* He takes his plate carefully into the kitchen. In fact, he’ll feel so valued, he’s likely to go back for a second trip. That’s number nine: meet your child’s need for contribution.

#### *#10. Meet the need that’s driving the behavior*

You don’t always know what that need is, but if your child, for instance, is saying to his younger brother, *“You don’t know how to do that right because you’re a baby. I’m big, so I know how to do that right,”* obviously, that’s unkind behavior and we don’t want our child to do that. We need to set a limit.

But we also need to notice that ever since he started first grade, he’s been lording it over his little brother. Maybe when he goes to first grade, he doesn’t feel like such a big guy. Maybe he feels like the little guy who’s always being put down. We need to notice what’s going on with him and see if there’s a way to fill his needs.

In that moment, of course, we set a limit. But we also, if possible, find a way to meet the need. The need in this case that our child seems to be expressing is a need to feel important and capable and like a big kid. We might say, *“Wow, you know just how to do that, don’t you? And you’re showing your brother.”* Then you add, warmly, *“I know you can show your brother without calling names, right?”*

That’s a basic toolkit of ten tools that will help you set limits. But remember, you won’t be creative enough to use any of those tools until you’ve regulated yourself, and your child won’t be open to them until you’ve connected and empathized.

Another secret about setting limits that will come to you over time but that you may struggle with initially as you make the transition to positive parenting is about when to set the limit. As you make this transition, you may think, *“Oh, I need to be patient. I need not to jump in and fly off the handle.”*

Yes, that’s fantastic... *but* it might cause you to delay setting the limit when you need to set a limit, so you might find yourself getting more and more irritated until you finally explode. So I would encourage you to set the limit before you get angry, while you still have a sense of humor and can empathize with your child.

Now you’re probably wondering what to do when you set a limit and your child doesn’t comply with you. What do you do to enforce a limit if you’re not using force anymore? The answer is that your child does know that you’re the boss; your child knows that they do have to comply with you. So if you can stay calm and connect with your child and give your child some control

about how they comply, children will always comply. You'll often have to repeat your limit. You'll often have to do what I call getting in their face in a friendly way, so they realize that you're actually serious and you really do expect them to cooperate with you.

Enforcement does not necessarily mean that you have to use force. It might mean you use your physical body. You'll get in between two kids who were fighting. You'll hold a child's hand while you're crossing the street. You'll pick a child up who's jumping on the couch and move them off the couch if that's your family rule. But you're not using your body in ways that hurt your child, obviously.

If you have set a limit and your child is not cooperating, reframe that and ask yourself, *"Hmm. What does she need?"* rather than *"How can I control her to make her do what I want her to do?"*

You may be wondering what to do if your child has already broken a rule and normally in the past, you would have punished him. You'll feel unfinished if this happens, and if you don't punish, you'll feel like, *"How will he ever learn a lesson?"*

Train yourself to think in terms of repair, instead. After everyone has calmed down and is reconnected, have a private discussion with your child about what happened. Listen to his perspective. Empathize with him. *"You were pretty mad when your brother did that. I hear you."* Give him a chance to really express how he's feeling and empathize.

After he's not feeling as upset, then point out the damage. *"When you said that to your brother, it really hurt his feelings and it made him not feel as close to you."* Ask your child if there's anything he can do to repair the relationship. *"What could you do to make things better with your brother?"*

He might offer to apologize, and you could say, *"Do you feel sorry about what you said to him or what you did?"* If he says yes, you can say, *"Then I think telling him that would mean a lot to him."* If he says, *"No, I'm not sorry,"* and he acts like he's still angry then he's not ready for any kind of a repair. Never force an apology because it won't actually make the relationship better.

Instead, empower him to see that he can repair his mistakes. You can say something like, *"You know we always clean up our own messes and this is just a different kind of mess like spilled milk. I know you'll think of just the right thing to make things better with your brother. I can't wait to see what it is."*

Just as with matter-of-factly cleaning up the spilled milk, the process of cleaning up his messes will teach him that he doesn't want to cause those hurts to begin with. Just remember, this is his

choice; it's not a punishment. If he resists it, he needs more help to resolve his upset before he can move on to reparations.

You might find that your child isn't ready for reparations until you've done some problem-solving together. Maybe you'll say, *"I know your little sister gets on your nerves sometimes and she always wants to play with your things. That's really annoying to you. I hear you. You deserve to be able to keep your treasures safe, but it isn't okay to yell at your sister or hit her, no matter what. Why don't we work together to find a safe place for your treasures where your sister can't get at them?"*

Then if he starts getting annoyed at her, ask: *"What could you do instead of yelling at her?"* After you've had that discussion – and you have some fun with your child coming up with different solutions; you can be really silly about this and act out the different solutions for what he can do instead of yelling at his sister – after that, he's going to feel better and he'll be ready then to come up with a way to make things better with his sister.

If you've been punishing your children when they've been unkind to each other, you have an added complication now as you transition to positive parenting because one kid might well feel like the other child deserves punishment for being mean to her. So when one child is unkind to the other, instead of jumping in to scold him, you can say to the other child, *"You don't look like you like that. You can tell your sister..."* And you might have to actually give her specific words: *"You can tell her: 'I don't like being called names,' or 'That tone of voice hurts my feelings.'"*

You will still have to amplify your child's voice at times if the other child ignores her. You might say, *"Did you hear your sister? Can you stop kicking her?"* And you'll have to restate your house rules and, if necessary, enforce them physically. *"In our house, the rule is no name calling,"* or *"The rule is no kicking. Kicking hurts. Can you stop kicking or do you need to leave the couch?"*

What if you regulate yourself, connect with your child, try these different tools in the toolbox for setting limits, and your child still can't accommodate your limit? In that case, the child has some big emotions driving the bad behavior and needs some help from you, some emotion coaching.

As you remember from Week 4, emotion coaching is helping kids understand their own emotions so that they can begin to express them in healthy ways. But, of course, when they're young, they're not very practiced at expressing their emotions so they often come out in ways that can feel like an attack to the parent.

I'd like to share a story written by Ariadne Brill who blogs at Positive Parenting Connection. She's quite wonderful and you should check out her website. She writes that one morning as they were getting ready to leave the house, her four-year-old looked right at her and yelled, "*Idiot!*"

If your child did that to you, I imagine it might really push your buttons; it certainly would push mine. But what she says is that she realized her daughter was frustrated, overwhelmed and, in fact, she herself – Ariadne – was being careless and disconnected and pushing her daughter to go faster and why didn't she do this right or do that right?

Here I'll quote Ariadne: "*Children have a lot of feelings, big ones – so big they often fumble when trying to find the right words to express those feelings. There are many words our children say when overwhelmed, frustrated, or discouraged that we tend to dislike as parents. 'Idiot. That's stupid. Go away. I hate you.' Would I have preferred to hear, 'Hey, mom, you're rushing me. I'm getting overwhelmed. Could we slow down?' Yes, of course. But my daughter was four when this happened. Actually, most adults I know struggle quite a bit staying cool, calm, and collected under stress.*"

Here's how Ariadne Brill handled it.

"*I'm not listening to you,*" I said.

"*No, you're not,*" she replied wiping her tears away.

"*You aren't listening to me, either,*" I said, and she nodded in agreement. "*You need more time. You need me to look at you and not to rush you.*"

"*Yes, Mama.*"

"*Let's try again,*" Ariadne said to her daughter.

She goes on with her story, and then she says that as she dropped her daughter at school, her daughter whispered, "*Sorry I said 'Idiot.'*"

"*Sorry I rushed you,*" she whispered back.

"*'Idiot' is not your word. 'Love' is your word, Mama. I love you.*"

"*I love you, too,*" I said.

I thought this story was so beautiful, and I'm telling it to you because I think it's a perfect example of what happens to all of us. We get rushed, we get disconnected, we push our kids, our children get overwhelmed, they don't know how to express it, and they attack us. They're not actually trying to attack us; they just don't know what else to do and how to express this tangle

of feelings that they have. I share this wonderful story from Ariadne Brill to encourage you to train yourself to see misbehavior as a cry for help.

When your child looks right at you and calls you an idiot, punishment will not solve the problem. I know that voice in your head says they deserve to be punished. I know that's probably what your parents would have said. But, in fact, your child is crying out for help in the only way he knows. Train yourself to see that kind of misbehavior as a cry for help.

Your child acting out like that is not a personal challenge to you. When your child acts out, he's acting out feelings that he can't express in words; that's why they're being *acted* out. Emotions are never the problem. Humans will always have big emotions, and of course, that doesn't give your child a license to speak hurtfully to you. But if you can remember that when your child does speak hurtfully to you, there's a reason and your child needs your help, what you'll find is it won't happen very often because your child will learn how to express his or her feelings in a more respectful manner.

How do you help your child with emotions? You always start with empathy. Notice that's what Brill did in this example. She said, *"I'm not listening to you, and you're not listening to me, either;"* but she didn't belabor the point. There was no shame or blame. She said, *"You need me to look at you, to listen to you, not to rush you. Is that right?"*

That kind of empathy helps the child feel safe and understood, and the child who a moment ago was calling you an idiot is then wiping away her tears and putting on her shoes and cooperating with you. That's the child who 15 minutes later, as you drop her off at school, is apologizing to you, completely unprompted.

Now, of course, if your child has just called you an idiot, if you're anything like most parents, it's very hard to do what Brill did. It's very hard to stop, take a deep breath, and empathize with your child.

I recommend that when your child is being defiant in any way, that you take a deep breath, you turn away, take another deep breath, and use a little mantra. Remind yourself that your child needs your help. Then when you turn back, describe what's going on. You can simply say, *"You seem so unhappy."* Your child will say, *"Of course, I'm unhappy. You're not listening to me,"* or whatever.

If you can be calm enough to say, *"I'm not listening to you, am I? I'm sorry. Let's reconnect. Let's start over;"* that's fantastic. But if you can't, it's enough to say, *"Sweetie, you are having such a hard time, I'm so sorry. Let's start over."* It's that simple. *"Let's start over."* Usually once

your child feels understood, she will stop defying you, she'll stop resisting whatever your command is, and she'll start cooperating.

What if that doesn't happen? What if your child is still very angry and she says, *"Of course, I'm upset. You never listen to me."* Then you know that it isn't just about this morning when you're in a rush; it's that, in fact, your child has a full backpack that she's now unloading at this moment on you.

That's really hard if you're rushing to get out the door. That's why preventive maintenance is so important, because it removes these moments where you're in a rush and your child just loses it and the full backpack comes emptying out on you.

At those moments, if that should happen to you, immediately take a deep breath, remind yourself *"Tonight, we're working on that full backpack."* That'll make you feel a little better. And then turn to your child and be as understanding as you possibly can. *"Oh sweetie, that must feel terrible to feel like I never listen to you. I'm so sorry."*

Your child will look at you with big eyes and maybe burst into tears or maybe still be angry but be a little calmer, and you can say, *"You know what, I really want to hear this, and I'm sorry we're in such a rush right now that I can't listen. When we get in the car, will you tell me and I promise I'll listen? Right now, we really have to go. Let's work together."*

Usually if you've shown your positive intention this way and your child knows that he can trust you, that when you get in the car you really will listen, at this point, he'll sit down and he'll put on his shoes.

Now, you do know how to help your child empty a full emotional backpack. We talked about this in the preventive maintenance audio in Week 6, and we also talked a lot about emotions in Week 4. You use laughter and you use tears to help heal the full backpack.

I want to remind you, we asked before what happens if you've tried your best to set a limit in a way that is empathic and you've tried all of the ten tools in our toolbox and your child refuses to cooperate.

Especially when you're transitioning from punishment to peaceful parenting, your child might act up like this simply to signal to you that he needs your help to empty the emotional backpack. It's called suing the doctor, if you remember from our conversation on emotions. Your child is basically starting to fight with you because he doesn't like the feeling of all these emotions from the past that are coming up, that are upsetting to him.

You can't deal with the emotional backpack when you're going out the door. But let's say it's now that night. You've come home, you fed everybody dinner, and you have a little bit of time before you have to get your kid in the bathtub to get into bed. This is the time to give your child the opportunity to empty his backpack, and you can review last week's audio for more information about how to do that.

You may wonder why your child has a full backpack, why they're giving you such a hard time. This is something you can actually expect as part of your transition to peaceful parenting. When children have been punished, they've learned that those big emotions that drove them to misbehave get them into trouble, so when those big emotions come up they try very hard to stuff them down. Of course, that doesn't really work. The jealousy, the frustration, and the need are all there in your child's emotional backpack, and the reason they're still there is that they haven't been heard.

Emotions are a message. If your child can hear those emotions, can feel them, can express them, can show them to you, and have you hear them, then they begin to evaporate. They're no longer needed. The message got through. But until then, those emotions are still in there and they're popping up at the slightest provocation. They want to be heard. The only reason your child has kept them under wraps so far is because he's afraid, because those emotions get him into trouble. If he yells at you that you're an idiot, you're going to punish him, or at least you did until you started peaceful parenting. Once you stop punishing, those emotions are bound to bubble up to be healed.

If your child could tell you this, what she would say is, *"All those times you yelled at me and I was so scared, I acted like I didn't care but I was really terrified inside. That fear is still inside me. It eats away at me. It feels so awful. It makes me think you don't even love me, so I lash out to keep those feelings down. I try to start fights with you because I just can't bear these feelings."* Of course, no child could tell you that – most adults couldn't tell you that – so she acts out instead.

What you're doing when you help your child empty her emotional backpack is healing all those old hurt feelings so that they stop driving new bad behavior. When your child acts out, just remind yourself he's showing you feelings from the past and many of those feelings are from when you yelled or spanked or punished. It will take extra compassion from you to be patient in the face of all these emotions, but your empathic response will heal those hurts so that you can all move on.

It doesn't mean it's okay for your child to be disrespectful, but your child knows he's not supposed to be disrespectful. What he's trying to do is get your help to work out the feelings, just

as when Ariadne Brill's daughter called her an idiot. Once you help your child with those feelings, you'll find he's not calling you names anymore; in fact, he's apologizing for having done such a thing.

Parents often ask me whether they should explain to their children what's going on, that they're doing a new kind of parenting. I think you should wait until your child notices a difference. In other words, if you start off by saying, *"Okay, it was bad for me to punish you. I won't be punishing you anymore,"* your child is very confused by this. Those are the rules, right? If he acts up, he gets punished. So he won't know what you mean and he won't have the motivation to act differently, and he'll be testing you to try to figure out what the new rules are.

I suggest that instead of explaining it at the outset, you simply begin connecting more, empathizing more, understanding more, and those times before where you might have punished your child for being rude and calling you an idiot, instead you respond with understanding.

Your child will certainly notice something is different, and if he brings it up, absolutely answer his questions. Even if he doesn't bring it up, once you notice more connection and cooperation, it's fine to initiate a discussion, because your child's cooperation is actually a sign that now she knows you're on her side and she will believe what you have to say to her and she won't feel a need to test you.

You might say something like, *"Yes, you're right. You know how I used to yell at you and send you to your room when you broke the rules? I know sometimes that frightened you or made you really mad at me or made it feel like I didn't understand at all what was happening for you. I'm sorry I did that. I didn't know what else to do. But now things are different, right?"*

*"Now I try really hard to listen to you more. Have you noticed that I've been yelling at lot less? And you're learning ways to show me when you're scared or mad or sad, and we work together to solve problems in our family. You know everyone gets upset sometimes. Feelings are always okay and it's always okay for us to talk about how we feel and what we need."*

*"In our house, we try to say what we need and what we feel without attacking the other person, staying respectful. I'm still learning how to do that, and I see you're learning how to do it, too. I'm so impressed with the way you did this with your sister. Just yesterday I saw you do this,"* (and then you tell her what you saw.) *"We're all learning together, sweetheart. You can always tell me how you feel, no matter what. I always want to hear. We can always make things better between us."*

Of course, you can count on your child losing control sometimes and breaking the kindness rule. That's not a justification for your own yelling. You, after all, are the role model. Of course, you

won't be perfect, either, because you're human. That's okay, too. As long as your child sees that you're really trying to do this and that after you yell, you recover, you apologize, and you try harder.

With a young child, you might help him to make sense of his experience by telling him a story. *"You were little. I was having a hard time. I yelled a lot. I didn't know what else to do. I think that frightened you, so you got very, very, very mad sometimes. But now I work really hard to be kind and not to yell and to understand and to listen.*

*"And you don't get so frightened, right? You're learning better ways to show me when you're scared or when you're mad. Now we work together to solve problems in our family. Everyone gets upset sometimes. It's okay to be upset. We try to listen to each other and be kind, and then we always find a way to make things better between us. There is always more love."*

All children benefit from our using words and stories to help them understand their emotional life. Just be careful that you're telling a story and empathizing, not analyzing him so that he feels invaded or lectured.

You can see that transitioning to peaceful parenting means big changes for your family, and it would be wonderful if we could just wave a magic wand and everything would be smooth. But you can expect some bumps because your child has old feelings that they will need help to heal.

Parents often feel terrible about this. They feel ashamed of having yelled at their children or spanked their children. They worry that maybe they've damaged their children for life. You did not damage your child for life. You did probably wound your child if you were spanking or hitting or even yelling. That's true.

But you know what, you are paying the price now. You're making amends now by dealing with all of the feelings that are left over from the wounds that your child has. The way your child heals from the past is by showing you those hurt feelings and if you're compassionate about those feelings and accepting and you embrace your child now and understand those feelings, you're helping your child heal.

So do not beat yourself up. There's really no reason to. Just ditch the guilt. It doesn't help anyone. Feeling bad does not make you act good any more than it makes your child act good. Your plan here is to simply accept your child's emotions lovingly. Don't let your child misbehave, but when they do misbehave, you set limits and you understand and you listen to those feelings. That will happen for probably a week, it could be a month, it could be three months, but you will find that within six months, everything is different in your house and your child has really worked through all of those old feelings.

Now, I want to warn you right now that this transition is not a straight line. There will be setbacks, there will be days when you can't believe what comes out of your mouth towards your child. Just resolve right now that you're going to forgive yourself for those things. No shame, no blame. Simply acknowledge to yourself what happened, cry if you need to, let it go, and then go to your child and apologize.

Apologizing is important. Some parents don't want to acknowledge that they slipped up because they think that their child will lose faith in them. But believe me, your child noticed already that you lost your temper and yelled, so the only way to make that better is to apologize.

Here's what one of my readers said: *"I apologize to my kids when I make mistakes and slip up. I see that when they accept my apology, they feel empowerment and generosity of spirit. This influences their behavior with each other. There are more kind words and gestures, more 'I'm sorry' and more 'Don't worry, I know it wasn't your fault' that they now extend to each other than they did before."*

One of the ways you teach your children to apologize to each other and to be generous of spirit toward each other is that you apologize to them, and when you make a mistake, you own up to it. You're role modeling.

While we're on the subject of apologies, you've probably noticed I'm not a big fan of making children apologize to anybody – you or each other – when they do something hurtful. I'm not against apologies at all – I think they're a great idea – I just think they can't be mandated because I don't think they help the relationship at that point, and there is research on couples that shows that's true, although I haven't seen research on children.

But here's the way you teach children to apologize. You model apology and your children will follow your example. I even encourage this when you think both your children are wrong and you were yelling for a very good reason, like there was hitting going on. I encourage you to be the one to role model, by taking responsibility for the fact that you were yelling.

I would say something like this: *"I'm so sorry I wasn't here to help you work this out before you both got so upset and started hitting. Then when I came in, I was so worried someone was getting hurt so I started yelling, too. I'm sorry. That was terrible for all of us, wasn't it? Let's all try a do-over. I know you don't want to hit each other. Hitting hurts. And I hear how mad you both are. Let's start over so that you can tell each other what you need without attacking each other. This time I'm here to help."* Over time, modeling like that will help your children step up and take responsibility, too.

Finally, this audio would not be complete without talking about how to explain peaceful parenting to other people. You know that voice in your head that says to you, *“He’s acting like a brat! You can’t raise a spoiled brat,”* or *“How can I let him get away with that? He’ll never learn a lesson.”* That voice is the voice that you’re projecting out around you.

Maybe it’s not all your projection; maybe there are people around you who are telling you that, who actually believe that. But if they told me that, it wouldn’t bother me. I would just say, *“I know. You want this to be a great kid. You want your grandson – for instance – to be a great kid. I’m with you all the way. That’s what I’m trying to do – raise a great kid. You know what, let me tell you what’s great about this child: this, this, and this. And I’m not worried that he’s not going to be okay.”*

My confidence would transmit itself to, for instance, the grandparent. But when we have those nagging doubts in our own mind, it’s a lot harder to be convincing. In the beginning, when you first begin the transition to peaceful parenting, you *are* worried. You see your child act out, you see your child call you an idiot, and you think, *“Oh my goodness. What have I done? What am I doing? Maybe this is wrong.”*

Some part of you, that part of you that doubts, that’s the part that gets triggered when someone outside of you tells you you’re doing it wrong. Yes, there’s work to do to talk to those people but the real work is inside your own head, in building your own confidence.

In just a moment, we’ll talk about how to answer the naysayers around you who think you’re not being a tough enough parent, but let’s start with that voice inside your own head. When you hear that voice, your job is to answer it, to replace it.

When the voice says, *“You can’t let him get away with that, you have to punish him,”* remember that’s just fear talking. Fear is trying hard to keep you safe but it’s not always correct. In fact, in this case, it’s wrong. Whenever we act out of fear with our children, we always end up doing things we regret. When we act out of love, we create more love; we create a more loving child who is more able to regulate her own emotions and therefore, her behavior.

When you hear that voice of fear, you need an answer for it. I would just start always by taking a deep breath and acknowledging it. *“That’s fear talking again. I’m going with love. Choose love. Choose love.”* If that doesn’t work for you as a mantra, find one that does.

Your job is to notice when the fear starts that will undermine you, and remind yourself to choose love. That’s what your child needs from you: unconditional love. It never means you’re indulging your child. It never means you’re letting them get away with whatever they want. It never means you’re not setting limits. Of course, you’re setting limits. It means you’re accepting

your child's emotions, you're loving your child unconditionally no matter what, and you're teaching your child, coaching your child instead of punishing. That's what it means.

Now, what happens when maybe the grandparents accuse you of not being a good parent because you're indulging your child? After all, you didn't punish her and send her to time-out when she had that tantrum.

Just say to them, *"I know. You want your granddaughter to grow up emotionally healthy and to be a well-behaved, wonderful person, considerate of others, responsible, not spoiled. I'm with you 100%. That's what I'm doing. I'm raising an emotionally intelligent child. We'll talk again when she's 15 or 16, and you'll be able to see how she's turning out. For right now, I need you to trust me because I'm in charge of raising my own daughter. After all, you raised me, you had your chance, and now it's my turn to make my own mistakes."*

This is Week 7 of our 12-week course. We're more than halfway through and you have the basic tools to use. There are going to be places where you're going to trip. There are places where you're going to trip over and over again.

Don't worry. I'm still here to support you. I'll still be giving you more tools to use in those places where you're tripping. But I want to ask you to notice the times you're still having a really hard time. Is it a certain situation? Is it a certain time of day? Whatever it is, find the difficult thing and nurture yourself through it. Make a plan.

If bedtime is driving you crazy, make a plan to make it better – whether that's starting earlier or posting a schedule or getting more help from your partner or getting more sleep yourself or nurturing yourself with a cup of tea while you read to your child. Whatever it is, find what's difficult for you now. Use the skills you have that you've learned so far of connection and self-regulation and coaching. Use those skills to make those times of day better.

You might as well take the stones out of your shoe. This isn't a sprint; it's a long walk, and you need to get the stones out of your shoe so that you can enjoy it as you go. Maybe one of the most important things for your child is enjoying them, so it doesn't have to be perfect and you don't have to be perfect for you to enjoy yourself. Just make the commitment that every day, you're going to get up and start fresh and do your best.

I want to share what one of my readers wrote: *"For me, this type of parenting is a daily choice. Every morning, I have to make the commitment not to yell, to stay calm, to choose love – and there is something very empowering about that. There are days when things are a big struggle but I really feel that something is changing deep within our hearts, and I feel us grow closer*

*together when we choose love, and when in the middle of a tantrum, I hug my child and genuinely tell him that I hear his pain and I'll help him work through it."*

You can expect setbacks. You're human. You're not going to be perfect. The secret of making this transition is having compassion for yourself just as you do for your child. Expect to make mistakes. Expect some days to be a huge struggle. Parenting is hard, and this kind of parenting, it's even harder, at least when you start off; it gets easier than other kinds of parenting after you make the transition.

Even while it's hard, while you're healing your child's old wounds and your own, you'll feel the difference. Quite simply, there's more love more often. You're on a path now that leads to a happier, more peaceful family. Two steps forward, one step back; it still gets you where you want to go. Soon you'll find yourself in a whole new landscape. Enjoy the journey.

Thanks so much for joining me today and for your commitment to your child and to your own growth. This ends Week 7 – The Transition to Peaceful Parenting – of the **Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids** Course. This is Dr. Laura Markham of AhaParenting.com.