

## Parental Self Regulation Q and A with Dr. Markham

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:00:00](#) Hello, this is Dr. Laura Markham. In this audio, I'll be answering some of the most common questions that parents ask about parental self-regulation. Remember, we're always applying our three big ideas. We start by regulating our own emotions and behavior. Then we connect with our child. Finally, instead of trying to control our child, we coach them to be their best self, both by helping them with their emotions and by creating an environment where the child can thrive. So let's see how to apply these three big ideas to daily life with children.

### Question 1:

Parent: [00:00:41](#) So my problem is my seven year old son. He cries very easily and talks back a lot. And what happens is that I get really triggered, and now that I'm more aware of it, I at times can pull myself back or step back from saying something harsh or from yelling at him. But even after I calm down and I tell myself it's okay, it's not an emergency -- It could be the next time it happens -- I experience these feelings all over again. So it's like I'm constantly at the verge of the straw that broke the camel's back and I don't know how to step down from that area.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:01:25](#) So you're saying you're easily triggered all the time, that your child is challenging, your seven year old is challenging, but that you're not feeling resilient. Your own self-regulation is not working as you'd like it to, because you're always feeling on the verge of exploding. Is that right?

Parent: [00:01:50](#) Yes, that's correct.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:01:55](#) Okay. So first of all, thank you. You're not alone in feeling this way. It's great that you're taking this course. Have you been in the course for 12 weeks; have you seen any changes in yourself?

- Parent: [00:02:12](#) I'm more aware of my actions. For instance, if my son is crying, I will just tell him to stop crying. Or if I'm really, really upset, I will tell him to shut up. At least at this stage, I really know I shouldn't be doing this. And that I'm filling his emotional backpack even more. But it's hard for me a lot of times to take the next step, even though I now recognize the behaviors, but I have a hard time controlling or stopping what I'm doing.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:02:46](#) Okay. So you have a vision now of the parent you'd like to be, but it's hard to be that parent because you're still so upset that you want to tell him to stop crying and shut up, even though you know now that you shouldn't. And you're more aware of that. So you feel worse than when you started the course because you feel more guilty. Is that right?
- Parent: [00:03:03](#) Yeah, exactly.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:03:04](#) Okay. Got it. So, first of all, this is the work of a lifetime. This is not about your son, really. It is about your own childhood. And you've started doing the work, which is fantastic. And there's more work to do, obviously. Were you able to listen to the daily inspirations, the little four minute audios?
- Parent: [00:03:30](#) I have not been able to get through all of them.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:03:32](#) Okay. So those are designed to rewire your brain, and I would advise you to listen to one every single morning, just listen to them in order and then start over and keep listening to them in order. And any kind of mindfulness practice that helps you get centered is going to be really helpful to you. And I know you probably don't have a lot of time and I'm not thinking of things that are a lot of time, but I think body scans would be especially good for you because we store things in the body. Have you ever done a body scan, a meditation body scan?
- Parent: [00:04:13](#) I have not, no.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:04:14](#) Okay, body scans are just sitting quietly and you're sort of going through your body and noticing what you feel like. "Oh my foot's going to sleep. Oh my shoulders are tight.

Hard to get a deep breath." That was a body scan I just did at this moment. So you can do a body scan that quickly, as I just did, or you can do a body scan for an hour. And there is a body scan that you can listen to for free and download on my website. If you put in the word "body scan," you should find it. If you can't find it, write an email to my assistant, Beth, and she will write back and tell you where it is. It's a pretty short body scan that I've got on the website. I would suggest that you start with that because it will help you to process stuff. And again, you don't have to know what you're processing. You're just clearing out stuff that's in the backpack because the reason you're always on the brink is that you're carrying around a full emotional backpack.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:05:13](#)

I would also say, anything that makes you cry is a good thing. The reason you tell your son to shut up when he cries is that you have so many tears locked up inside from when you were a kid. So any crying you could do is going to release some of that. But you might not be able to do it alone, because it's from times long ago when it would've been overwhelming if you allowed yourself to cry. So you need someone compassionate to do it with. So I'm going to suggest that you need to see a counselor, not need to, but it would be great for you to see a counselor because then you would have a witness, someone who would love you through this and really just help you. It wouldn't have to be forever. I'm thinking for a few months, but just to go in -- I know people who went into therapy and just sat and cried.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:05:59](#)

I also really highly recommend body therapies. Somatic experiencing is a kind of body therapy that is based on the work of Peter Levine, and it is really just about the fact that everything is stored in the body. And so somatic experiencing therapists -- you can't talk your way out of things. You just go in there and you emote, and you maybe do a lot of crying, and you have a witness to support you. And you feel so much more clear and resilient and not likely to fly off the handle after having a chance to work with that stuff. I can give you books, also. The book *Resilience*, is a great book by Linda Graham. It's a wonderful book. Her first book is called *Bouncing Back*,

that's good too. I think Resilience, which is a workbook, might be even better.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:06:49](#)

And of course my workbook, my Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids workbook. The whole first task is about clearing yourself emotionally so you can be a more grounded, centered, and peaceful parent. So that's also helpful, but I would just say, you don't have to do this yourself. You've been really brave to embark on this work, and you don't have to do it yourself. Find some support that you can use to do your own healing and you'll find that you'll be amazed at how much more patient you are as a mom after that.

Parent: [00:07:23](#)

Okay. That sounds good.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:07:24](#)

All right. Good luck to you.

### Question 2:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:07:28](#)

A parent says, "Everything can be okay. I can handle it when my son's having a hard day. But then when my husband wants something from me, then I explode. And I've heard this from my mom friends as well. My son is 18 months old." So I get it. Our first step of learning to regulate ourselves is that we stop exploding at our children. Great. And maybe you never did, but many parents do. And then the next step, we are still exploding maybe at our partner because this is someone safe we can take this out on. So I actually remember doing this some, and it's how I learned to stop yelling. I never was a yeller at my kids, but I remember doing this to my husband. I would have a meltdown and yell at my husband once every month or so.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:08:16](#)

And I could see even before I got to that point that I was gathering kindling, that I would just be really annoyed at him for asking about this or wanting me to do that or expecting something of me. And I looked at myself and I said, "I don't want to be that person, and I don't want my relationship to have to handle this. So I'm going to stop collecting kindling. I'm going to start taking care of me." And it's really how I learned to do self-care. So when we

get to the self-care week, that will help you. But I would say today, start setting your alarm on your phone to go off every hour. When it goes off, ask yourself what you need. "What do I need right now to take care of me?" And do it. Whatever you need, take care of you.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:09:01](#)

So maybe what you need is, since your husband's home that day, is to hand your 18 month old to your husband. Maybe what you need is to ask your husband for a break. Maybe what you need is to get everybody out of the house for a little while. But if you're taking care of yourself on an ongoing basis, you're a lot less likely to yell at your partner. So I think if you listen to the audios that you'll find this week on how to have a good relationship with a partner, when you're parenting children, I think you'll find a lot of help on how not to do that to your partner. And I think that's a great aspiration. So good for you for asking the question.

### Question 3:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:09:44](#)

A parent is asking a question that lots of other people asked. "I've come to understand how important compassion is, but I don't know how to be compassionate in that tough moment when I'm losing control and I want my kids to take a nap." So I would say nap time and bedtime are the times that parents lose it the most, usually. The only other time is when kids are aggressive to their siblings. That would be the other time parents lose it a lot. And I get it. I get why you're losing your patience at that moment. So what you want to do is you stop, drop and breathe.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:10:27](#)

Just stop what you're doing. Stop engaging, drop your agenda about the nap. Breathe. Take three deep breaths, then you turn back and you look at it from your child's perspective, which means you're connecting. And you say to your kid, "You really don't want to take a nap right now, do you? Sweetie, we always take a rest after lunch. It's rest time now. Come on, time to go. We can go read our books now. That's what we do when it's time for rest." And you just move them back to the schedule. They can resist as

much as they want, but now you're holding a firm calm, kind limit and you're seeing it from their perspective.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:11:19](#)

So in those moments -- it's not so much that I think of it as compassion in those moments. I just think of it as connection. You're just going to reach for seeing it from their point-of-view. And that's what compassion is really. It's feeling it from somebody else's point-of-view. Empathy is feeling from someone else's point-of-view. Compassion means you're really seeing it from their point-of-view. So that's what you're doing.

#### Question 4:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:11:43](#)

A parent is asking about what's considered yelling. When I talk about yelling, I'm really talking about any kind of disrespect to your child. You can be loud and firm without being disrespectful. So you can say, "Whoa, stop. No hitting." Is that yelling? Well, you're certainly raising your voice, but notice there's no disrespect in there, even though you're setting the limit in a loud way. But when you can, you don't have to raise your voice. So I'd say you can be firm without being disrespectful.

#### Question 5:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:12:14](#)

A parent says, "What's the best way to regulate when I'm overwhelmed and highly triggered?" Well, everybody has different things that work for them, and you can experiment. I use stop, drop and breathe. And I've heard from thousands of parents, that it really works for them. You can count backwards from 10. Again, that's breathing. Scientists have found that when we focus on the breath and bring our attention to the breath, it brings us into the present moment. And we're not getting hijacked by our emotions. And the flush of adrenaline from fight, flight or freeze gets interrupted as you breathe calmly.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:12:49](#)

As you do that, it lets go of that adrenaline. So I think that's a very effective technique. Someone told me recently, lean into love. Whatever mantra you need to use, use it. But it usually is a combination, as I say in this

course, of two things. It's using a mantra to talk yourself off the cliff, and it's also something physical to calm yourself down, like breathing and sometimes shaking out your hands, or maybe yawning. That is just another way of letting go of tension. Whatever works for you, try it. Try different things and see what works. And when you do fail to shift from an angry response, what's the best way to avoid criticizing yourself? You just start where you are. As soon as you notice you're yelling, stop, walk away. You'll make slow progress. Give yourself a lot of credit for every bit of slow progress.

### Question 6:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:13:49](#)

I have another question from a parent who says that usually she's extremely calm, but she did lose it and yell at her four year old like she's never done before, and later she talked to him, and asked if it was scary for him. So, I don't know why you asked if it was scary for him. I assume you said, "I'm so sorry I yelled at you. That must've been scary." But if you said, "Was that scary?" You're asking him to be very vulnerable. It's sort of like if you hurt somebody and then you say, "Did that hurt?" I know you don't see it like that because you didn't mean to be scary to him, but you can't expect him to tell you the truth about it being scary. So not surprisingly, he said, "No, it's okay. I liked it." Well of course, he's trying to master a traumatic situation.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:14:41](#)

So he does not want to be treated like that, even though he says this. He's defending against a scary experience. It's like somebody saying, when you say, "Did that hurt your feelings?" If you have a fight with your girlfriend and she says, "I've always felt like you did X, Y, Z," and she says something really hurtful to you. And then the next week she wants to make up with you and you make up. And she says, "I'm sorry I said that. Did that hurt your feelings?" You might say, "Yeah, it devastated me," but that would take great maturity. You might say, "No, I knew you were just mad." But your four year old doesn't even have that kind of maturity. He's going to say whatever. "No, I liked it." Right? So this is not about your authenticity. This is about your son defending himself.

### Question 7:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:15:26](#)

This parent is saying, "Stop, drop and breathe is helpful, but what if we can't calm down and remove ourselves?" You don't have to remove yourself to stop, drop and breathe. With little kids, you often can't remove yourself. So I know that's hard. It's a lot harder to calm yourself down if you can't go somewhere else privately. So the answer is, do a mindfulness practice. Two months of mindfulness practice of meditation, 20 minutes a day, has been shown to rewire your brain and give you more control in those difficult moments. So please, I'm asking everybody listening to please start a mindfulness practice. And if you don't have time because you're doing the course, I understand that, but still do the four minutes a day of the daily inspirations, at least. Do those during the week, five of them during the week, and on weekends, do a longer mindfulness practice.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:16:24](#)

We don't have research yet that says, "Oh, this rewires your brain," because it is only four minutes a day, not 20 and then, you know, half an hour each weekend, let's say, of a guided meditation. So it's not enough that it would definitely fit into the research that's been done, but it's not nothing. And I think what they'll find is, it has some impact. And I think what you'll notice, and this is what I hear from parents anecdotally, is that it has some impact. You become better able to regulate yourself. People who take this course say that even just listening to the four minutes a day, they feel it rewiring their brain and they get calmer.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:16:58](#)

And then the ones who do a mindfulness practice also on the weekends, also find that they end up being calmer in those difficult moments. And then when you're done with the course, you can do the 20 minutes every day to continue your growth. And you'll also start to redo stuff from the course again, probably, because this is an ongoing thing. This isn't a one time deal. That's why I give lifetime access to this course -- because you will, if you're like most human beings, be met with adversity in your life



and you know, maybe you'll, heaven forbid have a health problem, or a divorce, or something else that's traumatic in your life, or somebody loses a job.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:17:42](#)

And you'll find yourself yelling again, and then you'll go back and you'll do the course again, and it will help again and you'll get yourself to a better place. Or even in the face of adversity, you're able to stop yelling. But at this moment where you are now, just do the best you can in the moment and give yourself all the support you can, and that means enough sleep and some sort of mindfulness practice like while your kids are asleep.

### Question 8:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:18:07](#)

A parent is asking, "Why do I treat my child this way? Why do I get so annoyed? I know I love him. I don't know what my issue is." You don't have to know your issue. You just have to notice your annoyance. When you get annoyed and you want to say something mean to him, bite your tongue. Sit with that feeling. Notice the feeling in your body. I've worked with parents who would sit and breathe, and sit on their hands so they wouldn't hit their child, and bite their tongue so they wouldn't say anything to their child. Or they put their hand over their mouth so they wouldn't say anything to their child.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:18:39](#)

And they would breathe and they would feel terrible like they would get hot and cold flashes, and they would feel like they were going to throw up or they suddenly needed to pee. That's great. That's your body offloading old garbage. You don't have to know what it is. But still notice the feelings every time you do that. You're building the neural pathways to **not** lash out at your child. That's really hard work. It's really wonderful work. It will change your life and your child is a very lucky person that you're stopping the cycle.

### Question 9:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:19:14](#)

And this is a question from Bulgaria.

- Parent: [00:19:16](#) My biggest challenge with my kids is my triggers, and I have tried a number of ways to fight with those triggers. I've done the primal therapy, I'm not sure if you're familiar with it?
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:19:37](#) I am.
- Parent: [00:19:38](#) Okay.
- Parent: [00:19:42](#) EST, a body code, emotion code, and it's still very hard for me to stop, drop and breathe when the anger rises. I found the chapter on healing triggers really helpful.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:20:01](#) Oh, you mean the week in the course? You found the week in the course helpful?
- Parent: [00:20:04](#) Week 10. I think it was week 10.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:20:05](#) Yes, it was, yes.
- Parent: [00:20:10](#) Yeah, and I haven't tried it yet, but this was the light at the end of the tunnel for me.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:20:19](#) Yes, oh good. I'm so glad.
- Parent: [00:20:22](#) I feel really hopeful to try that. But I wanted to ask you, what other ways of healing triggers have you encountered in your work? And if you can recommend some more.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:20:39](#) Yes. This is the work that we all spend our whole lives doing, and it is hard work. Right? It is hard work. And I will say that I have seen people make enormous progress in being able to heal their triggers. And really the most important thing is the work you do at the moment when you're angry. So you can go into therapy and that's very helpful for many people. And you can do all the different things that you outlined where you try to work through your anger. But the most important thing is at that moment when you're triggered, what do you do? And the answer is nothing. You do not act on what your trigger is telling you, which is that there is danger.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:21:26](#) So stop, drop and breathe may seem simple, but it is the most important thing you can do, because it rewires your

brain. And I will add, you can support yourself more to walk away. I don't know how old your kids are, but to walk away, to shake out your hands, splash water on your face, sit down, turn on a guided meditation to calm you down. Or if you need to turn on some music and dance it out, whatever you need to do at that moment to not act on your anger. So I realize when your child is acting up, that's hard to do in that moment. It's hard not to relate to the child. Do you have my workbook, The Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids workbook?

Parent: [00:22:15](#)

I don't. I have your two books, but not the workbook.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:22:17](#)

Okay, great. So the reason I wrote the workbook is just what you're asking me. Parents would come to me and say, "I've read your other books. I love them. A lot has changed, but I still get triggered." And so the whole first half of the Workbook is healing your triggers. So that book is really helpful and supportive to you to change what you do in the moment. There's another writer who I love. She's also a therapist. Her name is Linda Graham, G-R-A-H-A-M. She's written two books, *Bouncing Back* and *Resilience*. And I think *Resilience* would be better for what you're saying. *Bouncing Back* is a little more theoretical. And *Resilience* is a more of a workbook, really. It has a lot of exercises to do. So I do also recommend that book along with my workbook.

### Question 10:

Parent: [00:23:22](#)

So my question is about the effect of my childhood onto my kids. I've got two kids and my daughter is six and my son is nine. And until I met you on your website, I was parenting very much like my parents did with me, which is not what I wanted to do. But things were coming out exactly as from the past. So I managed to turn it around a lot, but I still have the fear that my childhood affects the attachment with my kids. And I think you mentioned that at some stage in the course, and I'm also reading through *Parenting From the Inside Out*. And I'm just wondering what can I do? I mean how much can this view that I have of my childhood affect my kids, and how can I make up for that?

- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:24:22](#) Yes. So I'm so glad that you called in, because when I saw your question, I had a question back to you. So do you see that your children are not healthily attached to you? You said that you're afraid it might have damaged your attachment with them. And I understand why you're asking the question, but do you actually see evidence of that or not?
- Parent: [00:24:48](#) I think it's more inside me, because I didn't really attach to my mom especially. So I don't know how much is my fear. I mean I think I have a much better relationship with my kids. I am proud of what I'm doing with them, together with my husband, and the way they are reacting to this. So I think it's mostly coming from my fear, from what happened to me, and also my big resentment towards my mom, especially, because our relationship has always been really hard. I'm afraid that this is actually affecting my kids.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:25:40](#) So here's what I would say. Your children will definitely have a little bit of baggage from your past if you haven't worked through your past. It sounds to me like you **have** worked through your past to some degree. You thought it was sad, and at times you felt resentment towards your parents -- but you have done some work on it, and therefore, you don't have to replay that with your children. You didn't attach to your mom, you didn't feel like you could depend on her -- But it sounds to me like you gave your children a clear message that they could depend on you, that they could attach to you and that they could depend on you, that you gave them that clear message. Because it sounds like, from what you're saying, that your children have attached to you, that they do feel connected to you. Is that true?
- Parent: [00:26:29](#) Yes, I think so. I really think we have a different relationship from what I've experienced in my past with my parents. I'm so proud of what we achieve together. We've been through moments where there was a lot of nervousness, because I was mostly on my own working a lot and it's been hard at times, but I'm fully on the way to recover that, as much as I can. And I talk to, my older kid who is nine, so openly about being in this course and why I want to do this. He surely has a backpack and we can work through that together.

- Parent: [00:27:14](#) I mean with simple words, but just to let him know that I'm really working so hard to change this. Anything from my past that would affect them. I don't want to pass this on. I mean, I also talked openly to them about why I don't really see my mom so happily and what happened in my past. And I don't want to pass this on. And I also said, "My mom wasn't really perfect. And then this can happen, but I want to stop the chain here and this is not going to go to you," which is great.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:27:49](#) So it sounds to me like you're doing some really hard work. You're doing some really hard work to move past your own childhood, and that will always have a positive effect on your children. All the work we do always has a positive effect on our children. And I know you say they're not so little anymore, but your little one is six, that's still pretty little. And you've been doing this work for a while. So yes, you've got more work to do, that is true. But it sounds to me like you've been able to set up the conditions for your children to know they can trust you, that they can depend on you, and that you will be responsive to their needs and emotions. And that is how you create a secure attachment. Being responsive to what your child needs.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:28:46](#) That is the factor, right? So that when you're responsive to a child's needs, they feel safe. They feel secure with you, they feel soothed by you. They feel seen by you. You see who they are. And it sounds like you've been able to do that with your children. And that doesn't mean you're a perfect mother. Nobody's a perfect mother, but it does mean you're doing the hard work to stop what happened to you, in this generation. And that is wonderful. And you have two very lucky children. And just keep doing the work and keep tending to that relationship, the relationship you have with each of your children, and you'll find that it will get better and better.
- Parent: [00:29:34](#) Yeah. I see lots of progress. I'm very positive about that after the course with you. Yeah, I intend to take it again and do it on my own and use the workbook to work out stuff because it's super helpful. I'm also spreading the news over on this side of the continent, the globe. I hear there's not so many people from here.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:29:59](#) Yes, but we're all connected, and you're using great resources. I mean, I love that you're reading Dan Siegal's book. That's all great. You're doing the most important work there is, I think -- your own healing.

Parent: [00:30:13](#) Thank you so much Dr. Laura.

### Question 11:

Parent: [00:30:17](#) I feel it's been a wonderful course. I've gained loads from it. I absolutely loved it and I really want to be able to keep that motivation. I know that I'm in a different place now than I was three months ago. However, I know that time wears us down, and I think my biggest anxiety is that it's all there and it's all fresh in my mind at the moment, but a few months down the line, hey, I can start slipping back into that habit and it's going to get really hard not to. That's my anxiety. How can I keep it going?

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:30:58](#) Yes. So true. And I know you're not the only one. I know you're not the only one who's feeling a little worried about how to maintain the results of all this good work you've done and how to take that into the future. So I guess I would ask you, what do you see ... As you worked on this course, you had audios every week you could listen to. Probably maybe all at once, or maybe in pieces. Is that right?

Parent: [00:31:33](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:31:35](#) Did you listen to the daily inspirations or not?

Parent: [00:31:39](#) Yes. I've been fairly diligent. I've been able to keep up. It's been hard work, but I've been making the effort to.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:31:48](#) Amazing. Great. So obviously you can't keep putting in the same level of time. I mean, if you could, you'd have the regular stimulation, but it's not likely you would because it does take a tremendous amount of time, but you're on a learning curve. So now the question is, what's going to be most effective to put in some time to keep you motivated?

Do you think starting again on the daily inspirations would help you to stay motivated?

- Parent: [00:32:17](#) Possibly. I'm not quite sure how that's going to go because I'm maybe hoping to listen to them every two or three days.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:32:34](#) Uh-huh (affirmative) okay.
- Parent: [00:32:36](#) I'm thinking of putting more of the audios in my car so I can listen to them.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:32:42](#) So that's great, it sounds like a plan might be to put the larger audios onto something that you can listen to in your car. Just pick one that you feel is important to listen to, like connection or self care and listen to it in your car, every time you get in your car for a while until you feel like you've really gotten that and then try a different one. Right? You might have it in your car for a month, the self care one, where you're really getting inspired to do more self care, or the connection one. Would you think that would be helpful?
- Parent: [00:33:23](#) Yes. I think it would. So perhaps do it with a deeper focus on the difficult topics?
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:33:31](#) Yes, you could drill down on one topic and then every time you're in your car just turn it on and that becomes a little ritual. It's like, "My time in my car, when I'm by myself is time that I can support myself, in my parenting, inspire myself in my parenting." And the good news is, as you listen you'll hear new things all the time and eventually you'll get bored. You'll be like, "Okay I really get connection and I feel like I've really gotten it down with my kids and that's good and I'll move on to do something else." Hopefully that will be helpful. And then maybe the daily inspirations you can put on your calendar to do every third day or something. Do you think that's possible? Would that be helpful or not?
- Parent: [00:34:15](#) Yeah. I mean because I've been in the course, I've made time and everything. I know that there is a part of me that's thinking, "Oh I'm not in the course now. Oh, I don't have to go and come downstairs and put it on." So I think I

would probably be less motivated. And also, things come up all the time, so sometimes putting things on the calendar can be a bit tricky.

- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:34:46](#) Yeah. So the calendar doesn't work. I wonder if you want to find one time a week that you could make as part of your routine, like every Saturday morning or every Sunday. Sundays are better because Saturdays are so busy, but maybe every Sunday morning when you wake up, you get a half an hour to yourself where you get to regroup yourself in your self care and your parenting inspiration. What do you think about that?
- Parent: [00:35:20](#) Yeah, I think that could work actually. Yeah, a little bit more time aside.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:35:24](#) I think that it's hard to do. You're talking about changing a habit and finding time in your life to add something new. And it's different when you're in the course because then you sort of have a motivation to keep up and the momentum is with you. So I think your question is so important because otherwise, if you don't give some thought to this it'll just fall by the wayside. Right? So have you looked at the homework yet for this week?
- Parent: [00:36:01](#) No, not yet.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:36:04](#) Great. It only went up yesterday, so most people probably haven't looked at it. When you go look at the homework for this week, what you'll see is that it walks you through how to create a plan for yourself. Basically it asks you, what do you want to keep working on? What has worked for you? Let's celebrate what's worked for you and what do you want to keep working on? What do you think is making a difference for you and as you look at each area, like regulating your emotions, what's already working for you, and then what's the next step for you to keep working on that. And basically I asked you to create a little plan for each area and then to look back at the plan on a regular basis so that you can stay on track. And I think that homework will actually, if you really do it, will be really invaluable. And then if you did make a date for yourself every Sunday morning, it's time to go back and look at that and say, "Okay, well how did I do this week on this stuff?"



Ooh, I really didn't do much self care, or I really didn't do much self regulating, I didn't regulate my own shouting." I think the only way to actually do something big like this is to have a plan and then to check in with that plan on a regular basis. Daily is probably more than you could do, but weekly hopefully would work. Do you think so?

Parent: [00:37:38](#) Mm yeah, I think that's a good idea. I think it's something to keep me on track, I just think there's been moments from the course where if I feel a bit fed up or a bit lazy that I feel myself slipping and I think, "Gosh if I'm doing that now and I haven't got this thing motivating me all the time, what am I going to be like in a few months time?"

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:38:07](#) What's different for you now than before, when you started the course?

Parent: [00:38:14](#) I think I feel a stronger connection particularly with my son. There's been a lot more love and affection from him. I certainly can stop myself a lot more. It feels a lot less of a habit to get into snapping at him. So another thing that I did alongside with the course is keep shouting charts. I've been ticking every day on my calendar. If it's a good day for me or not a good day and I've done that in the past and that's been a real motivator because actually just seeing a load of ticks keeps me motivated, trying to keep me counting the tick's rather than like a cross or something.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:39:11](#) Yes. That's wonderful. I love the ticks on the calendar. So are you going to keep that up I hope?

Parent: [00:39:18](#) Yeah, I hope so. I sometimes forget to do them and then that's when things slide, because I forget to do the ticks, even if the ticks are like rewards because he's had a good week. If I forget to do it then I get out of the habit then that's generally when things slide and get a bit more rubbish.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:39:36](#) Right.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:39:39](#) Well I love it. I think you've just identified two things, two tools that have really worked for you, the shouting chart and the ticking off on the calendar and I would urge you to keep those up for a lot longer, at least a month. I mean,

you may not need to shout after that, but the ticking on the calendar I think, could become a regular habit that really helps you to stay motivated. What do you think?

Parent: [00:40:09](#) Yeah, I think it does, as I say, it's remembering to do it, but it's nice to look back at it and think, "Well yes the day was rubbish but actually look at how many days weren't rubbish."

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:40:25](#) Yes.

Parent: [00:40:27](#) Yeah it can really help.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:40:29](#) Great. And then the other thing I would do is really let it sink in, how your connection with your son has changed. That affection from him and that closeness you feel with him now. That's coming from your being better at regulating yourself and empathizing with him and connecting. And if you make yourself really feel that, I think it's hard to let that go. The next time he starts to be more difficult or the next time you start to realize, "Oh, he's not really been so affectionate lately," it's a great wake up call and it's a great motivator. I think really acknowledging, really celebrating how far you've come in these three months, is also essential to keep on track for the future.

Parent: [00:41:16](#) Mm. Yes, because it feels nice. It's a nice space.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:41:25](#) You know, it does feel nice. It feels like it's such hard work. You've just done really hard work for three months and so how great that you give yourself this credit. Then celebrate it and say, "Yes you did it, wow, okay!" And I think doing that does really help you to take that step forward. I hope so.

Parent: [00:41:49](#) Yes, it's true. And I know a few people have said that, not just with the kids, but just generally you end up feeling like a better person and feeling more generous to people and that's just really nice as well.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:42:04](#) Yes, it is. It absolutely is and that's motivating too, because that's what we all want to be, an emotionally generous

person. So yeah. Wonderful. Thank you. That's such a good point.

Parent: [00:42:17](#) Thank you.

### Question 12:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:42:19](#) A parent is asking, "Dr. Laura, in the week 11 audio, you mentioned that you've healed all your triggers and the only person that triggers you is your mother." So this mother has questions about how a mom ends up being a trigger to her children, how she can avoid that. So I want to clarify this for you and anyone else who wonders. I hope I made this clear in the audio. So a trigger is when you have a reaction to something that is unconscious, right? So you overreact to the current situation because what you're really reacting to is something that is from the past, that's not resolved and it's unconsciously triggering you. That's the definition of a trigger. It's like pushing a button and some old thing starts to play out that is not about the current situation so you overreact, right? And really most of the time you don't need to overreact.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:43:16](#) I mean, if there's a safety issue, of course you're not going to think, you're just going to do it. That's not an overreaction. So, if it's not a safety issue there's probably no reason to react in a way that is less than kind. But most of us do and there's a reason for that, and that's because we get triggered.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:43:33](#) So when I gave this example on the week 11 audio, what I was saying is this. When we're children and that tape recorder in our heads is working and recording everything, we often have things we can't really deal with at the time. And so we push them down into the backpack and then they control us unconsciously for the rest of our lives. And if your parents smacked you and said, "I'll give you something to cry about," when you were three, and now your own three-year-old cries, you're going to want to smack your three-year-old -- because you know it's a dangerous situation! Someone's crying, it's a three year old, someone's about to get hurt. I better control my three year old so nobody gets hurt. And then you control them

by playing out exactly the scenario that you've got recorded in your brain. That's how triggers work.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:44:16](#)

So I will say that as you work on yourself, you peel the layers of an onion, it's sort of like that, and there are some tears, but the layers go away and the onion gets smaller and smaller. And I do believe that eventually there are no more layers there. The more we shine the light of consciousness onto those unconscious experiences and bring them to light, the more they dissipate, or at least we're aware of them and they stop running us. So when I said that my mother still triggers me, it's because my mother's the only person I'm ever tempted to be unkind to.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:44:54](#)

You know, I might be annoyed at somebody, a clerk in a store, and I'm not acting on that annoyance. I'm completely aware that from her point of view, there's a reason for this. Even if I don't understand what the reason is. And I'm able to put up my reasonable boundaries and expectations of the way the world should treat me -- the world doesn't mistreat me. But I'm not responding with annoyance to another person, right? So I'm not actually triggered, even if I do get annoyed at something, it's about the current reaction. I'm not responding by being triggered.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:45:28](#)

My mother, on the other hand, I could get annoyed at, even if she's not doing something in the current moment to trigger me, or even if what she's doing isn't enough to make me annoyed at that moment, right? That's how I know I still have a trigger there around my mother. And because I have enough awareness, I'm able to not act on it. I'm able to say, "Well it is my mother." I have to go into these situations. Just being aware to take a deep breath, stop, drop and breathe, have a sense of humor and not get annoyed at her. Right?

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:45:58](#)

So I think that's what all of us have to do throughout our life with the store clerk, with our three year old, we all have to go into it with a sense of humor, knowing we might get triggered and when we get triggered, just stop, drop and breathe, don't act on it. And every time we do that, we're bringing some awareness to that feeling, that

feeling of being annoyed, of being triggered. And we're not acting on it. And that's how you disable the trigger. So I would say, do I still get triggered by my mother? Yes, somewhat. But do I actually act unkind? No, I don't.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:46:32](#)

Now, I hear that the person who asked this question, is worried that this might happen to her with her own children. I would just say it's not going to happen, you're not like my mother. My mother was not a peaceful parent. It's really not going to happen. You're obviously working hard to be a peaceful parent. You read the book, you listened to the audios, you're doing the daily inspirations, you're working hard to use preventative maintenance, to empathize, to grow yourself. So you're not carrying this baggage with you. You're not going to have children who respond this way.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:47:07](#)

And the parent also asked, "Are you as a mother triggering your own children?" I don't think so. My children say no, I'm not, and I would say that's because I did a lot of work on myself. I did a lot of therapy and I did a lot of meditation. And I would say those are the two ways you get your work done. The first way is your daily awareness, when you get triggered. The second is meditation. And the third would be therapy if you need it. And I've done all three, believe me, a lot. So I think you can have a good relationship with your triggers and not have unconscious stuff getting in the way of your relationship with your children.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:47:45](#)

So I hope that motivates you to continue your own growth. And don't get anxious about how your children are coming out. Instead, just use it as an opportunity to grow yourself. I strongly believe that every time we heal anything in ourselves, there's less baggage for our children to carry. There's a quote from a woman named Lu Hanessian, and it's something like, "Put your baggage down so your children don't have to carry it." And I would just say, "Heal it, heal it now, and then your kids won't have to carry it."

**Question 13:**Dr. Laura Markham: [00:48:21](#)

Another parent tacked onto that question, that she's triggered by her father and she's realized now that her kids get triggered by her father because he goes into rages at them. She says she thinks she needs some therapy for her, so she doesn't get triggered, because she freezes. Yeah, what happens to you is you go right back into your childhood when your father goes into a rage. And you can't protect your children then. So you need some therapy so that you don't freeze, but also your kids need your protection. So you do need some sort of action plan set up with them for when your dad loses it, where they leave the room and you leave with them. That's all you need to do.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:48:56](#)

And she asked also any advice on how to deal with a seriously difficult parent. I would just say if your father won't talk to you about it, which you said he won't, then you just leave the room when he acts like that. And you might have a certain thing you say, even though you're frozen, like, "Dad, we'll talk about it later." And even as he's yelling at you, "Don't you leave the room," you walk right out of the room with your children. You're a grown up now, your job is to protect them and you don't deserve to get yelled at, no matter what.

**Question 14:**Parent: [00:49:26](#)

I think this is a lot more to do with my coping than my daughter's coping, potentially. She's seven, strong willed, so there's a question about mastery, but I think more about me. Sometimes she'll go into doing something and struggle with it and I often step in probably too early to help, and offer an unsolicited suggestion to her about how she could do something better. And it's not my intention, but it unfortunately comes out in tonal words in a critical way. And unsurprisingly she then gets defensive and goes into fight mode. I really don't like it, but it seems to be the way I operate. And I know that this is how I was spoken to as a child and I also know it made me feel terrible. That nothing I could do was good enough. So my question really

is how can I stop myself from being so critical whilst encouraging her?

- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:50:23](#) So how great that you know that this is how you were spoken to as a child and you know you're in touch with how awful it made you feel and you can see what happens for your daughter. How great, that's step one, that's fantastic. Step two, of course, is harder, which is changing your behavior. But let's just close your eyes for a moment and just go into that moment when your daughter is so frustrated trying to master something. How are you feeling as you watch her? What's going on inside you?
- Parent: [00:50:52](#) I want her to succeed and I want to help.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:50:56](#) Okay.
- Parent: [00:50:57](#) Maybe it's a rescuing thing I don't know. Maybe I feel it's like me when I struggled with things.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:51:03](#) So probably all that anxiety you felt, not only when you struggled with things, but when people commented to you that made you feel like you weren't good enough. All that anxiety is coming up and you just want to rescue her. You don't want her to feel it, right?
- Parent: [00:51:17](#) Yeah. I think that's probably true.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:51:20](#) And you also want her to succeed and you can see how she could do it differently, right? You can probably see it.
- Parent: [00:51:26](#) Yep. Absolutely.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:51:28](#) Yes. But if you say anything, what's going to happen?
- Parent: [00:51:33](#) She gets really upset.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:51:35](#) Yes. So there is no way at this point in time, there may be in the future, but there's no way at this point in time that you can comment in a way that she will hear it as anything but critical.
- Parent: [00:51:50](#) Exactly.

- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:51:51](#) First of all, because of the history you bring to it. But also now, because you and your daughter have a history -- that you've been commenting and she's been taking offense, so she's got a history. Even if I went with no history and commented, she would take offense to that because she has that history already, right? So there's no way, unfortunately, that we can comment to her at this point.
- Parent: [00:52:13](#) Okay.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:52:14](#) So what you could do is say absolutely, positively nothing. You bite your tongue, you give yourself a piercing, you take a deep breath and you say to yourself something that's going to reassure you like, "She's going to figure this out, she's going to master it, she's going to be fine." What if you said that to yourself? How would your feelings change at that moment?
- Parent: [00:52:42](#) Feels better, tough but better. Yeah. Absolutely.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:52:47](#) Yes and then imagine you're looking at your seven year old feeling that better feeling, definitely better and she does it. Even if she doesn't fully get it, she starts to get it. You say, "Wow! I knew you would get it!" Right? Do you think she would hear that as unmitigated praise from you? Unmitigated goodness.
- Parent: [00:53:14](#) Yes.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:53:14](#) So I think that's it, you're never showing her how to do it because anytime you do, it's going to be negative. Now you will, a year from now be able to do that because she'll overcome this baggage, but she needs probably a year, unfortunately, of you just being her cheerleader and not trying to teach her how to do it.
- Parent: [00:53:29](#) That's great advice. I was wondering really where to go because there's this helper in me and it's just spilling out and I'm just so aware that it sounds so critical and that it's not positive. So thank you so much for the advice to just keep my opinions to myself and watch and enjoy her progress. I really appreciate that. Thank you.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [00:53:52](#) Wonderful. You're so welcome.



### Question 15:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:53:55](#)

This is a question from a parent who says, “Given that kids pick up our emotions, should we talk about our feelings with them? If so, how can we do that without blaming the child, or without them needing to assume the alpha role as Dr. Neufeld suggests?” The alpha child concept is really gaining more prominence as people are trying to understand how to parent strong-willed kids. And this parent says, “I can't explain the source of my emotions as that involves family conflict.” So yes, you're right. Children do pick up our feelings and children don't have context. So to them they're going to blame themselves for our emotions unless there's some convincing explanation otherwise. That's just developmentally normal. It's not narcissism. You wouldn't call it that unless it was inappropriate. This is just appropriate developmental unfolding that they don't have a context for things so they blame themselves.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:54:49](#)

So, the first thing I would say is, I would work through that family conflict. If it's creating that much big emotion for you, then it's time to resolve it. You may be feeling trapped, you may be feeling like you can't resolve it, but you're bigger than that conflict and it's causing you harm and probably causing your child harm from what you're saying. So it's time to work on that. And if your kids are seeing you crying or upset, I would absolutely reassure them that it's not their fault; everybody needs to cry sometimes and you're going to feel better soon. And if your three year old asks what you're crying about, you can say you're trying to work something out with someone you care about. If you don't blame, your child's not going to blame. If you say it's all so-and-so's fault or it's because of so-and-so, you're right, your child will blame. But if you don't do that, they're not going to blame.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:55:39](#)

And then the final thing is you need to stay clearly in the alpha position when caring for your child, even when you're upset. For those who don't know how to do that, it's when we let kids take care of us, we put them in the alpha role with us. Even if your child says, “Oh mama it's okay here's a Kleenex.” That's great. You say, “Oh thank

you sweetheart,” and you give them a hug. But notice I didn’t say, “Well, thank you for taking care of me.” It was, “Oh thank you sweetheart.” That's a whole different response, right? You're not the victim here. And this is for anyone listening. If you say to your child, “You made mama sad when you did that,” then you're making your child responsible for your feelings. That's another way to put them in the alpha position. So you're always responsible for your own feelings and that's what you want to keep in mind.

### Question 16:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:56:28](#)

This parent’s comment is, “I come from a background of abusive neglect and I've taken a lot of therapy and other parenting classes, but this has been the most helpful in getting me through the problem of how to regulate my own emotions better.” I am so happy about that and I want to tell you something, I have a new book coming out and it's at the end of February. It's going to come out and it's a workbook based on the book that's part of this course, *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids*. And half of the book is about parent’s emotions and self-regulation. So, *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids*, has just one chapter on that, but this new book, half of the book is about that.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:57:09](#)

And so I bring this up because if you found this course to be helpful around emotions, I think you'll find the book to be very helpful. It has a lot of overlap with the course so some of that you'll say, “Oh I did this in the homework,” or “I heard you talk about this before,” but there's also lots more that wouldn't fit in the course and there's much more explanation of how emotions work and how to work with emotions in the book. So watch for that because it sounds like that might be a great tool for you.

### Question 17:

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:57:41](#)

So this parent's question is, “How can I help my six year old who still feels disconnected from me? I feel horrible that I was such a bad mom and I just want to be a person he feels he can trust and talk to. For example, at bedtime,

he was sad and didn't want to tell me why, because he was afraid of making me angry. I promised him I wouldn't get mad and he said, 'Sometimes adults say they won't get mad, but they get mad anyway.'" Oh... And then she's also asking, "He was upset at me another night that he didn't get to play a certain game again, except he did get to play the game again, just not as many times again as he wanted to. I really value facts and truth. Should I be correcting him?"

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:58:23](#)

So when you tell me that you empathize with him about not being able to count on adults, that is great that you were able to not get offended or defensive and you really felt the heartbreaking-ness of what he was saying and yes, that is so great. Just tell him you're so sorry you didn't help him count on you before and you're trying very hard now to be someone he can count on and you're trying to notice before you get mad, so you can manage your anger better just like you ask him to do. It strikes me that when he kept insisting that he didn't get to play the game again, it's the same issue. You promised he could play the game again and you kept that promise. But at bedtime when he wished he could have played more, he essentially said you didn't keep your promise to let him play again and that's why he was mad. So he was accusing you of not keeping a promise to him, which is interesting.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:59:17](#)

There's a big issue here for him about his disappointment and feeling he can't fully trust you to keep your promises. And so even though you kept your promise about that game, there's something more going on for him, where he's telling you the truth for him. The truth for him is that he doesn't know if he can count on you to keep your promises. So even though you value the truth about the game and whether you did come through and what's reality, I think you need to hear and acknowledge **his** truth, instead of insisting on the truth as you see it. You would articulate the feelings as always. And this is true. Anytime we have a difference of opinion with somebody, we can articulate who feels what.

Dr. Laura Markham: [00:59:58](#)

So you could say, "You're so disappointed. You really wanted to play that game again." And he says, "Yes, you promised me we could." Let's say he says that to you. And

you could say, "I did promise you. And you know what, we did play again-- a few times! But that wasn't enough for you, was it? You wanted to play lots more." And he might say, "You didn't keep your promise, you never do." And of course in your view you did keep your promise. But this is a bigger issue about trust and whether he can trust you. So you could just say, "Oh sweetheart, you're saying I didn't keep my promise even though I think I did keep my promise. It must make you so upset at me to feel like you can't trust me." And he'll probably say, "I am upset, you don't keep your promises."

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:00:42](#)

Usually people are trying not to feel the pain of it. So the pain here is that he couldn't trust his mother in the past and he feels that pain and he's getting mad at that and he's attacking you for it. So your job here is to not get offended or defensive. And when he attacks, to just acknowledge the pain that's under it. So he doesn't have to keep attacking and he can instead show you the pain.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:01:13](#)

So you take a deep breath and you acknowledge his reality. You say something like, "This is like when you told me that adults say they won't get mad, and then they get mad anyway, right? You feel so upset when you think I don't keep my promises to you, or I might not. You really need to know you can count on me to be there, because I'm your mom. Sweetheart, I am so sorry there have been times, I think, when I didn't keep my promises to you and you were upset. I'm so sorry about those times. I promise you I'm working so hard to always keep my promises to you." And at this point you're probably going to have tears in your eyes because you feel how heartbreaking this is. And what happens to the other person is they start to resonate with the feeling. You know, you're not attacking back, even though he attacked you. And if you're not attacking back, then that means he doesn't have to keep his defenses up, he can let those feelings come in.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:02:10](#)

At that point, he may tear up. He might also get mad and tell you all the times from the past when you weren't a good mom and he couldn't count on you. Just try to do this as much as you can. Don't let him swear at you or call you names. That's not the way you want him to get used to dealing with you. So if he does, you can say, "You're so

mad. You're showing me by calling me names. No name calling, Sweetie. I am listening to you. You can tell me without name calling.” So you're setting the limit on the expression, but you're not setting a limit on the expression of the pain. And of course in the future, be very clear about any promises you make and be very careful to explicitly acknowledge any promises you make. And then as you keep the promise, point it out and always start using the phrase, “I always keep my promises to you.”

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:03:05](#)

And then finally, get him laughing about this issue to diffuse some of the tension around it because it's clearly a very big issue for him. You can use stuffed animals and play a game about being trustworthy, like can I count on you to keep a promise? Don't step on my toe or something like that, or maybe “Don't jump on my head!” because it's funnier. And then have the teddy bears promise, and then jump on your head, and then howl and have a mock tantrum. And I think what you'll see is that he'll laugh about it and he'll really get into the idea of keeping promises. And whether you keep promises or not, he'll want to break promises to you in the game and that's fine. And then of course you end it with, “We always keep our promises for real.” And give him a hug.

### Question 18:

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:03:52](#)

“We have a code word banana if one of us gets upset, but I still have a hard time not blaming. What do I do when my eight year old walks out the front door, gets in the car and completely forgets his school bag on the way to school?” Well, I hear it's hard not to blame. There is an article on the Aha! Parenting website about having a no-blame family and I think the same article made its way in some form into the book, *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids*. And I love your codeword, banana, by the way. But I would just say you should try seeing it from his point of view because that's when the blame goes away. He had something important he was thinking about that he was engrossed in thinking about. Maybe it was about what's going to happen at school, or maybe it was about what he wants to do when he gets home or maybe it was about soccer, but whatever he's thinking about, he was not thinking about

his backpack, that's true. It's something he's still learning how to do. That's an internal checklist that you and I have learned, but he hasn't learned that yet.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:04:49](#)

So when he gets in the car, you just say, "Okay, let's double check. I have my briefcase. Do you both have your backpacks?"

### Question 19:

Dr. Laura Markham:

"My triggers are my daughter's defiance and her occasional rejection of me, so I withdraw. It feels uncontrollable to me. Interestingly, my mother always still does this." So our earliest relationships are a role model of how to relate. We learn both sides of every relationship. So your mother withdrew from you and you withdraw from your daughter. So it makes perfect sense that, that would be the case and I'm really impressed that you've noticed that you withdraw, that's great. It gives you a chance to actually change this pattern.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:05:32](#)

You asked for an exercise. What you do is stop, drop and breathe. Just when you notice yourself withdrawing, stop, drop, breathe. That keeps you from being on autopilot where you'd have no control. Now notice the sensations in your body. That's what you're running away from when you withdraw. Those sensations probably will include fear. You might be noticing tightness or you can't breathe well. You might notice sadness. You might even want to throw up. That's what you've been defending against.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:06:01](#)

Just breathe into those places in your body. Go slow, hold yourself with great love. That will get you through it. Surround yourself with light and give your mind an antidote. Like, "I'm going to break this pattern. I don't need to withdraw. I can handle this in a positive way." You'll have to practice this over and over, but over time you'll be able to keep yourself from withdrawing.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:06:22](#)

I urge you to get your hands on my new workbook, it has a lot of support for parents about emotions and self-regulation. By the way, a three-year-old occasionally rejecting you or being defiant is perfectly normal and is

best handled by keeping your sense of humor and acknowledging that she's angry at you.

### Question 20:

- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:06:40](#) “What are the key skills that parents need to internalize in order to raise adults who wholeheartedly believe they're enough? What are the obstacles that prevent children from inhabiting this belief?” So this is a fabulous question.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:06:56](#) What keeps children from wholeheartedly inhabiting the belief that they're enough is to experience that they aren't, which comes primarily from not being able to inspire their parents to love them for exactly who they are. Of course, we know we love our children. We would love them and do anything for them. But they don't feel loved unconditionally all the time.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:07:16](#) So when we scold or punish, they feel rejected and judged. When they get put in a crib crying while we walk away, they feel that their needs are wrong and cannot be met. When we give them the message that their anger is unacceptable, they feel like a part of them is bad. Kids don't distinguish their emotions from themselves because emotions are felt as sensations in the body and they totally identify with their bodies in a way that is even more so than us.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:07:42](#) So when children don't feel they're wholly loved with all their inconvenient emotions, then they conclude they're not lovable, not enough, not good enough, right? The skills that parents need to prevent that from happening are all about unconditional love, accepting all emotions, including when your child is angry at you or needy. Responding to all needs. Responsiveness is the number one factor in attachment security. Guiding behavior in a way that understands the child's reasons and helps the child solve their problem.
- Dr. Laura Markham: [01:08:12](#) You probably notice that these are all peaceful parenting skills. Peaceful parenting is designed to heal your ability to love unconditionally and raise a child who can love unconditionally because those are the children who thrive

in life and those are the people we need in the world. I want to add, there are many social beliefs that pile on here that make life harder for parents. Also, educational institutions do it directly to children. Even a trip to the grocery store can put pressure on a parent to reject their child because the child is fussing. If our society supported parents better, they would be able to support children better.

### Question 21:

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:08:49](#)

A parent is asking, "This course has been challenging, but I'm grateful for the small miracles so far." It is really, really hard. This course is asking you to do such a hard thing, to rewire your own brain. And I say, give yourself a round of applause here.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:09:09](#)

So this parent is saying that her two middle kids and the baby are fine, but it's the oldest child, the eight and a half year old who's the difficult one. Well, you know why? Notice your note to me, that you have more baggage with her. You identify with her more. So I would encourage you, to do the work on yourself. Like you're worried about her future, you're worried about her temperament. Well, she's herself. She's not you. She still has time. She's only eight and a half. Her brain rewires at age 12. She has time to become calmer, to change whatever's going on with her temperament that you're worried about. I would allow her to be herself instead of putting you on her.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:09:55](#)

I know that's hard. I have a daughter who's a lot like me in some ways, and I had to work, and still work, on seeing how she's different from me and allowing her to be completely different. So I would say really work on that and it will help you to be less afraid and it will help her to not have to push you away. And it will help you to accept her more. And that will allow her to love herself more and to be less reactive. Right? Then just prioritize connection and do as much listening as you can to repair the relationship.

### Question 22:



Dr. Laura Markham: [01:10:27](#)

I guess this is a fairly universal problem and challenge for us, which is that we sometimes feel envious of other people's children. We are disappointed in our own children and I do think it's fairly universal. In fact, I had the experience yesterday where my husband was at a political meeting all day and he came home after the meeting and he said to me that a colleague has a baby who is nine months old. And this baby sat on this mom's lap for hours at this meeting, sometimes she sat on the lap of the person next to her. Sometimes she got nursed during the meeting. She sucked on something. Mostly she was just cheerful and sat there and I said to him, "Can you imagine if that were one of our children when they were nine months old? They would have been all over the room, crawling, tearing everything up, climbing on things, insisting on getting off our laps. I can't imagine! Boy, why didn't we get a baby like that?"

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:11:28](#)

I was laughing, but I had read these questions, so I was thinking about this exact question. When you hear about other people's children, or you see other people's children, there's a natural part of us it's like, "Wow, that's a different way to live." I think it's true. Everybody's children are different. You get a colicky baby and you look at some calm baby and you think, "Oh my goodness." So I don't know why there are these differences, but I do know that the point is not for all humans to be alike. The point is for all humans to be themselves and all humans are different. Maybe the point isn't to have an easy life. Maybe the point is that as we face challenges in our lives, we grow from them, and even our children as they face challenges, they grow.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:12:17](#)

These challenges are the things that mostly create our resilience and our strength and our abilities as who we are. So I think you can never see into anybody else's life and when you try, when you envy someone else or compare, it always is going to spiral into negativity. You never actually can know what's going on with someone. So maybe that child that we're envious of is going to have other issues. Maybe social anxiety or maybe trouble in school or maybe the kid is fine, but the marriage is strained or the finances are strained or somebody in the family has a health issue. We can never know what rain is going to fall in someone

else's life. There's always going to be somebody who's better off and worse off.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:13:11](#)

If you're talking about brains or beauty or money or children who are easy, there will be somebody out there who's better off than we are and worse off than we are. It's never helpful, it's never the path to happiness to focus there. I think the person who asked this question obviously knows this. She was asking "It's not okay to be envious. So, what can I do to be happier?" One, you have to accept where you are. That's the first thing. So for me it was accepting that I had children who were in constant motion, both of them.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:13:43](#)

I remember when my daughter was about a year old, no maybe a little younger because she was crawling but not really walking and I took her to a local nature center because her big brother wanted to see the snakes. It was on Halloween, they had costumes on and she was in constant motion and I never thought twice about it. But at the end of the event, one of the other moms introduced herself to me and she said, "Is your daughter always that active?" I thought, "Oh, I guess so." It never occurred to me, because that's just the way both of my children were. I think the best way to not compare is really not to be like, "Oh, I wish I had that baby that sat on the lap." The best way is, "This is the child I have. This child who was put into my arms and I am going to fiercely love and protect this child and nurture this child as well as I can."

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:14:41](#)

So sometimes you'll notice the feelings are not all that good. The person who asked the question said sometimes she is wishing she had two girls instead of two boys. So go ahead and cry, grieve. The only way out of those feelings is through them. Sometimes we just have to grieve. That's the only way we can get to acceptance. But after you cry, you might realize, "Oh well I love my boys. I have two wonderful healthy children and this is what's special about them and that's what's special about them. Yeah, they're strong-willed but there'll be impervious to peer pressure." Whatever it is, start with the acceptance and then over time you'll be able to reframe it. As I said, "I have two strong-willed children who will be impervious to peer

pressure,” and then move to gratitude. So it's a three step process. Accept it, reframe it, then be grateful for it.

### Question 23:

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:15:40](#)

Our next question is from a parent who says, “Throughout this course I kept feeling like we were too late. I have constant guilt that we've ruined our almost 11-year-old who has anxiety and ADHD. She's the most difficult of our three kids and I don't know if she would have been able to respond to these techniques even as a toddler, but the techniques work with our four-year-old. So I wish I could have tried them. I wonder if she'd be a happier, less anxious kid with a better connection to me. How can I use these techniques with a tween?”

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:16:10](#)

So, you are asking the right question. How can you use these techniques with a tween? Because you don't know what would've happened if you had started when she was four and it's done. We all do the best we can with the information we have at the time. Clearly you loved her, wanted what was best for her and you did your best. Now you have more information and you'll do better.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:16:35](#)

So the way you use these ideas with a tween is exactly the way you would use them with your four-year-old. You prioritize connection with her, you help her with her emotions and you regulate your own emotions so you can be patient and emotionally generous with her. Obviously a child who has anxiety needs some special coaching and a child who has ADHD needs some special coaching, but the ideas are the same. Yes, it can be harder to connect with an 11 year old, than with a four year old. There's no question about it. So make sure you listen to addendum number one on connection so that you build a good connection with your daughter. That's the most important thing and of course, make sure you're self-regulating.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:17:26](#)

You can't be the parent you want to be unless you're self regulating. But think about how your four-year-old responds after she's had a good laugh session or a good cry session or a good special time session. Your 11-year-old will respond the same way. The problem here is your

11-year-old has a backlog of feelings from being conventionally parented. You'll have to give her a chance to work those feelings out. That means a lot of talking, which will mean a lot of patience on your part because she will tell you how miserable you made her and you will feel bad. So I would say let go of the guilt. Don't worry, you're paying for it now. It actually would have been much easier to parent this way starting when she was little than to parent this way starting now. She has a lot of baggage to work through and you're going to end up helping her do that work and it's not pleasant work.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:18:25](#)

She'll cry, she'll scream, she'll tell you how you messed her up and you will feel guilty. So my suggestion is either work with a parent coach or with another parent who you have as a listening partner and you trade off listening. Don't try to fix each other. Because it takes a lot out of you to show up this way for a child and help them heal their old baggage. It's a wonderful thing to do for your daughter. It's what she needs, and you should support yourself so you're able to do that.

#### Question 24:

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:18:56](#)

Our next parent has three questions. "When will we get over the hurdle of the kids thinking that peaceful parenting is permissive parenting? How do I move on when we revert back because the kids know the limit only when a punishment is being threatened? How do you get through the anger the kids are displaying to the tears underneath? What do you do when your kid is stuck in anger?"

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:19:18](#)

So you are in the thick of this transition. I would say the answer to your first question, "When will we get over the hurdle of the kids thinking this is permissive parenting?" I don't know exactly what you mean by that. If you're setting limits, clearly your kids don't think it's permissive parenting. There's nothing permissive about this kind of parenting. What you're doing is allowing them to express emotions. You're not changing your limit. So there's no reason anyone would ever think that this is permissive parenting. You say, how do I move on when we revert

back? Well, when you revert back because the kids won't listen to your limits unless a punishment is threatened. That's not peaceful parenting. That's authoritarian parenting. You're threatening a punishment, right? You can't move on until you've healed that.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:20:08](#)

So really the important question is, "The kids are not listening to our limits. How can we get them to listen to a limit without threatening a punishment?" That's the question you need answered. The answer to that question is connection. Your child is not going to do what you say without connection to you. You also asked, "How do you get through the anger the kids are displaying to the tears underneath?" Again, connection. You have to build trust. "What do you do when your kid is stuck in anger?" Again you build trust and you give them a chance to show you the anger, you validate the anger, you listen to the anger and you speak to the unhappiness that's under the anger, how painful it was all those years when you were parenting in a different way and they felt like you weren't listening to them, hearing them, seeing how they felt.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:21:01](#)

So, I don't mean to sound cavalier. It can be really hard to make this transition and the older your children are, the harder it is to make the transition. So your kids are eight years old and 15-years-old. 15, it's really late in the game, not because you can't heal what's going on between you, but because your child is no longer as motivated. They get their emotional goodies from their friends often, if they've given up on you. Also when you think about it, their brain is basically formed. Sure, they can learn new habits, you can strengthen a relationship, but the way their brain is set up is to be distrustful of you, over-reactive and very emotional, if they have been conventionally parented. Of course you can change a brain even in adult life, any repeated experience will change the brain.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:22:02](#)

But here's the thing, if your child is getting her emotional goodies elsewhere and doesn't trust you and doesn't feel motivated to let you in, then it's very hard to make the connection you need, to get your kid cooperating. That's all the bad news. Here's the good news -- it's not too late! Focus on connection, 24/7 empathy. Work on yourself, work on your own self-regulation. Role model the kind of

communication you want to see. You are going to have to unpack a lot of old baggage that your child has been carrying. That's a lot of emotional work. There's no way around it. But as you do this, you will see your children begin to open up and trust you and let you in. There's a price that you pay. You have to listen to all their old pain. But if you're willing to do that, you can absolutely build the relationship you want with your kids.

### Question 25:

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:23:08](#)

Our next question is from a parent who says, "My partner experienced an unsupportive traumatic childhood and self-medicated for many years. He is now sober and doing very well and I'm in therapy too. This has been an issue throughout my eight-year-old's life. We both struggle with a sense of deep shame around regrets and mistakes we've made. What is your advice for parents in recovery towards repairing the deep secret of ruptures within our family? Can you suggest how we can be open and honest in a way that supports our girls? Our other daughter is three. How do you recommend talking to children about addiction, as we are determined never to be dishonest or secretive if it comes up."

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:23:45](#)

So first of all, congratulations to both of you for your courage and commitment to your own growth. You're giving yourselves a transformative gift, obviously, but you're also giving your girls a transformative gift. You're changing the way their entire lives will play out for the better. So talking to children about addiction is scary, but actually pretty straightforward. Addiction is a disease. Anyone can get addicted. It does not mean the person is bad or weak. It's a physiological interaction between a substance that affects the brain and body and it has very powerful effects, so initially it can feel really good when you first try the substance and it can make all your problems shrink or go away because you feel so good.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:24:39](#)

But then over time the brain and body get used to it and this can actually happen very quickly. The brain and body get used to the substance and begin to crave it. The person stops being motivated by the things that used to

motivate them, the things they actually value, that they care most about, and feels it's critical that they have more of this substance, whatever it is. Some people do seem to be more vulnerable to addiction, more susceptible, but it can happen to anyone. But the more complicated part is the more personal part, talking about your past. I would be open about the pain of the past and how the addiction was in fact, at least initially, self-medication to avoid feeling the pain from childhood because he didn't know what to do with that pain. You can talk about your own codependency and why that was the case.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:25:39](#)

So is your three year old ready for that discussion? No, of course not. Your eight-year-old probably is though. Do you sit down and have it all at once? I don't think so. I think over time that different parts of the discussion come up. Maybe there's a reference to addiction in the newspaper, maybe you're referencing your own childhood for some reason. So as these things come up, you'll go into deeper and deeper discussions as your children are ready for it. So there should never be a time when they don't know about the past. There's no secret there. It's sort of like adoption, it's something that you talk about as it comes up, not just one time. You don't wait to bring it up when your child's a certain age, you reference it as early as you can and then on an ongoing basis. I want to add that as you have these discussions, talk about your regrets, the choices you made, the choices you wished you had made. Discuss the cost of the addiction. Children always want to be like their parents. You don't want your children to ever feel like there was anything glamorous about this. So be sure that you communicate the shame and the feeling that you had to hide something and the awareness that this made you do things you were sorry about and that you didn't stick to your values. And then created the life you wanted. It's just important for children to understand that this was a time in your life that you would never want them to have in their lives, and that it took a lot of strength for you to move beyond it, which is what you're doing every single day.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:27:23](#)

Talk about the things you're doing so that you can heal, not just from the addiction, but also from childhood. So talk about your 12 step program or your therapy. Talk

about your commitment to not holding secrets. Talk about the fact that in your family there are no secrets, everything is discussed and people accept each other with all their big feelings, with all their imperfections, we can love each other just the way we are. We're more than enough. So if you do this, your daughters will have an understanding of what happened with you. But I think there's a more complicated part and that is that you say this has been an issue throughout your eight-year-old's life. It's not like the two of you were clean and sober when you first got together and your daughter came into a different kind of a home. You're saying that it has been an issue for her and that both of you feel a deep sense of shame around mistakes you've made, I'm presuming they have something to do with her and your family life together.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:28:34](#)

So the last thing I want to address is how you address that effect on her. If she's been hurt or scared, either physically or by changes in her parent when they were under the influence, if she's felt shame and the need to hide the family secret or cover up for a parent's behavior and maybe if she's felt that the substance abuse or the resulting behavior were her fault, which is very common for kids.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:29:03](#)

So the messages you want to give her are: "It is not your fault that your parents struggled with addiction. Your behavior had nothing to do with it. Your behavior wouldn't have mattered, your parents still would've struggled with addiction. You couldn't stop the addiction, so it's not your fault. There was nothing you could have done to stop it. It's your parents' responsibility. And your parents' behavior while they're under the influence and afterwards is not your fault. That behavior might not make sense and might not even seem like your parent. It does not indicate who your parent is, or what they value, or their feelings about you."

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:29:44](#)

When someone is addicted, the addiction becomes so important that people sacrifice other things they value, even other people. But that's the substance talking and making the decisions, not the person. So if you have been hurt by your parents' addiction, your job is to heal yourself. This is true for your eight-year-old or for an adult



who's listening to this. You do that healing by caring for yourself, by talking to others who care for you, and can help you heal, and by making healthy choices.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:30:20](#)

The National Association for Children of Alcoholics suggests that children dealing with family addiction learn the following seven C's of addiction: I didn't cause it. I can't cure it. I can't control it. I can care for myself by communicating my feelings, by making healthy choices and by celebrating myself. So be honest. Acknowledge your own grief and regrets. Allow your children's feelings.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:30:58](#)

If your eight-year-old has feeling she needs to share, she may need to be in therapy to do that, to tell you about it, or you may be able to do it at home. But if you see any signs that she can't talk about it, that she has feelings she can't talk about, I wouldn't hesitate. Go into family therapy just for a few sessions so that she can tell you about how this experience was for her, and you can all leave this in the past and go on to create the family you want.

### Question 26:

Dr. Laura Markham:

Our next question is from a parent who says, “My mother has borderline personality disorder. I was raised on a heavy dose of disconnection whenever I misbehaved. I want so desperately not to do this to my child, especially after listening to your audio on triggers and shame. However, when my daughter tells me no when I'm asking her to do something, and I know she's capable of it, like put on her shoes, or clean up her toys, I am immediately triggered. I feel such a drain in energy after so many years of fighting that it's hard to use the tools you suggest. Here's my question: while I'm working on myself to get better and heal my wounds, how do I convey to my four and a half year old that I do still love her so she doesn't feel disconnected as a result of my lack of emotional energy in that moment? Is there something specific I can say or do that allows me the time and space to process my triggers while not making her feel disconnected or unlovable as a result of her defiance?”

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:32:33](#)

So what you're asking is "When I get triggered, is there a way that I can stay connected to my daughter even while I'm triggered? Is there something I can say or do in that moment?" I would say yes there is, but you have to remember to do it. "I am having a really hard time right now and I need to calm down. I'm going to sit right here on the floor and I'm going to take some deep breaths so I can feel what's going on and calm myself down." That way you're not leaving the room to calm down so you're not shutting her out, which would be an obvious disconnection. And you're breathing. What happens when you breathe is that you connect with yourself and therefore with her. And you can describe what's going on as you're breathing. You can say, "My stomach feels tight, my whole body feels out of energy right now, so I'm taking care of myself and I'm just breathing deeply. Do you want to breathe with me sweetheart? We can breathe together."

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:33:40](#)

Now you're totally changing the subject from what you were trying to get her to do, put on her shoes, let's say, or clean up her toys. You're changing the subject, you're just sitting there on the floor and breathing and she might say, "Mommy, are you mad at me?" You can say, "Hmm, I guess I was getting mad at you because you wouldn't put on your shoes, but you're not responsible for my feelings. I do want you to put your shoes on soon, but I'm calming myself down because I'm in charge of my own feelings, so I'm breathing. Do you want to breathe with me? We can both breathe." And you sit and you breathe. If you are in the middle of an altercation and she's still really mad at you, she might try to continue the fight. And you can just say, "You are so upset about this. I can listen to you even while I calm myself down. I'll keep breathing and you can tell me what you're upset about."

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:34:34](#)

But I need to add that this is not ideal. What would be ideal is to not get so triggered. You can do that by working on your triggers on your own to heal your own childhood totally apart from your daughter. As you do, you'll begin to see that you don't get triggered so much. That is always the telling thing for parents, right? What happens in the moment when your child's defiant? Well, stop, drop your agenda, take a deep breath and notice your breathing. If

you need to take 10 breaths, if you need to sit on the floor, do it. That's what gets you re-centered.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:35:15](#)

Then finally, I just want to add that even though a child knows how to do something, like clean up their toys, children don't usually clean up their toys by themselves. The best way to get children cleaning up toys is to have it be part of your routine that you participate in, that you make fun, and sing a song while you do it. If you do that every day, kids will eventually work with you to pick up the toys. It's not something that you really just tell them to do and they do it. If you're getting triggered because your kid won't cooperate with cleaning up the toys, you may have an expectation that's not appropriate for their age. I find often that parents have expectations that are just not age appropriate. Because the child could do it one time, they think the child should be able to do it all the time, and that's not the way it works. Just because you can stay patient one time doesn't mean that some other time, when you're under total stress, you're going to stay patient. Your child has many moments like that where they didn't get enough sleep, they're hungry, they're upset about something, they're tired. Whatever it is, they can't function at their best, their highest level, and we shouldn't expect them to do that. The final tip and answer to this question is if you're triggered because of your view that your daughter is capable of something, always re-examine whether your thoughts are what are triggering you.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:36:55](#)

Because in fact, it is always our thoughts that create our feelings and our thoughts are not necessarily true or realistic. In fact, often when we get triggered with our kids, we're looking at them through a lens that's not fair to them. We could notice that we're getting triggered. Take a deep breath and start over with a do-over.

### Question 27:

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:37:20](#)

Our next question is from a parent who says, "I have a spirited nine-year-old. We had counseling years ago to reign in her behavior and help with her anxiety. I had no support and I couldn't handle her. Love wasn't enough. I was strict sometimes without kindness. Now, I see a

counselor who shows me that I have needs, too. I'm so sad because even though I know there's a better way, I can't get there and be consistent. I get angry at my kids and myself trying to keep boundaries, and then I'm sad after I yell. Our time should be joyful. Now, I'm afraid of the future."

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:37:55](#)

You're not alone. There are many parents who have children who were more difficult, more spirited, more anxious, just more, and harder to handle, and the parent felt overwhelmed, did the best they could, and now they're realizing that it wasn't what they really wanted to do. And now they're seeing that their own parenting actually falls short. There is a better way, but it's hard to consistently be the best parent they can be. In fact, it's impossible, is the truth. And they get angry and then remorseful after they yell, and they know it's not good for their kids, but they don't know what else to do. The answer is, you don't have to do it yourself. This is the hardest work in the world because you're raising human beings, some of whom come into the world with their own challenges. And at the same time, you're trying to heal yourself. Not an easy thing to do.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:38:58](#)

I'm really glad to hear that you're seeing a counselor and that your counselor is helping you do some healing around your own value as a human being. It sounds like maybe you're getting in touch with some big feelings through your counseling, which is a great thing, emptying that emotional backpack, because you know what happens if we don't empty it -- we end up taking it out on our children. So please, don't try to do this yourself. You need a parenting coach. You already have a counselor. That's wonderful. That's not what a parenting coach is, although many people can also do counseling for you, and even couples counseling while they do parent coaching. But now what you need is somebody who specifically can help you with your kids, so please don't wait. Find a parenting coach, go to the Aha! Parenting website, put the word coaching into the search box, and find yourself a coach. And make this consistent. Develop the habits you want so you can stop yelling and start to be the best parent you can be much more often.

### Question 28:

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:40:04](#)

Our next question is from a parent who says, "I feel differently about my two children. It's not that I love one more than the other, but it's just the ease I feel toward one compared to the struggle with the other. I feel as if my son, 15 months, is the sunshine. While my five-year-old is me, when I was a child. All the feelings I felt then are now stuck there with my five-year-old daughter. While with my son, he's a new being I have a clean slate with. How do I handle this emotion when I know my daughter can clearly see it? How do I ever forgive myself for feeling like this?" Here's how we forgive ourselves. It's not by minimizing what we've done and pretending it didn't have an effect. We take responsibility for what we did and for the negative effects of what we did.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:40:51](#)

Then we say, "I never want to do that again. I'm going to do something different now, and I'm going to give myself the support to do something different, and I'm going to make it a priority in my life. It might be really hard. It might be the hardest thing I've ever done, but I'm going to change my ways. I don't have to be perfect, I can backslide, but I have to be headed in the right direction and I have to take action daily to get myself out of what I've been doing that I am guilty about, or ashamed of, or don't want to do anymore. I am going to head in a new direction to be the person I want to be and show up in the world the way I want to show up in the world. I didn't get a choice about the hand of cards I was dealt at birth. I'm who I am. I got the genetics I got, I got the parenting I got, but I am going to take responsibility now for how I show up in the world and I'm going to learn to play the heck out of that hand of cards."

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:41:56](#)

That's how you forgive yourself. What that means is if you see the negative effect on your daughter, it's time to change. You said, "How can I forgive myself?" The only way to forgive yourself is to do something different. Then you can forgive yourself for the past, because then you didn't know better what to do. Now you know better, you'll do better. And it won't be easy.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:42:35](#)

If it were easy, you would already have done it. It won't be easy. But that doesn't mean it's impossible. You can make this difference. The truth is, your daughter, at five, is not you. She's her own separate person. Her genes are different than your genes. She got half of them from somewhere else, for sure. She's a different person and she deserves to live her own life, not to be stuck as the repository of your projections about your own childhood. I want to say something about the 15-month-old, they are like a ray of sunshine. My experience is every baby, until they're about 14 or 15 months, is that way. Then they make a developmental leap. They learn that they can say no. They begin to resist. They cannot be distracted from what they want the same way they could be at 14 months. And they begin to change.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:43:34](#)

So this is the time actually, according to the research, when children become less sunshiny and more resistant, more grumpy, and get into more power struggles with parents. You might find that just naturally your son rebels against his sunshine perfect status and becomes a true human being. I mean, he always was a true human being, but becomes allowed to be his own person. And frankly, your daughter needs to be allowed to be her own person. This is what you owe her as your parent. I want to encourage you to go into counseling, coaching, therapy with somebody in your community or long distance online and make this change. Yes, you can forgive yourself by taking action now to make something different for your daughter, and your son, and yourself. Because this is not about your daughter. It has nothing to do with your daughter. It's all about your own childhood. As Lu Henessian of *Parent to Parent* says, "Unpack your own baggage so your children don't have to carry it."

### Question 29:

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:44:47](#)

A parent says, "I have taken my vow of yelibacy and introduced the concept of a reward jar, which mirrors a tool my daughter has at school. She's four. At the end of the day, we decide whether I get a pebble in the jar, and when the jar is full, we get a family treat like my husband and daughter bring me tea and toast in bed, which she

loves to do. The problem is she's so excited about filling the jar, she just wants me to get a pebble. Have I raised a people pleaser?" Well, I don't think this is about pleasing. I hear this as a child who wants the family treats. Now, it's a treat for you to get the tea and toast in bed, but really it's a treat for her to bring it to you.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:45:22](#)

So, she's willing to compromise on the reality of whether you earned that treat so that she can enjoy the treat herself. In other words, she's a normal four-year-old. I think the problem here isn't raising a people pleaser, it's that you're giving the reward for the respectful voice to your daughter. Naturally, she's subverting the system to get as many rewards as possible. I would start over. I would have a chart. I might even skip the stickers. Just ask her if you yelled or not, and if you didn't, give yourself a check on the chart, or she can give you a check, and something that's not to reward her, right? Not stickers. Give her a high five and ask her how it felt to her so she sees the value in it, and do plenty of tea and toast family celebrations, but for other things.

### Question 30:

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:46:10](#)

Our next question is from a parent who says, "What tricks can I use to stop myself in the heat of the moment from snapping and shouting?" Your big trick is stop, drop, and breathe. Every time you do that, you're developing self-discipline. It's really hard to do. That might mean you want different tricks, more tricks, but this trick is the big trick, and it works. You give yourself that pause. It's a pause button before your reaction, and you allow yourself to choose a more productive reaction. Stop, drop your agenda just for the moment, and breathe. You may need more than one deep breath, but every time you do that, you're rewiring your brain and developing more self-discipline.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:46:58](#)

Another thing that will help you is not to gather kindling, because you know what kindling is, right? It's resentments that you gather up all day long. The more kindling you have, the more likely you are to have a bonfire. Notice when something bothers you in the course of your day,

and whenever possible, take care of it right then and there. Just clear it out, right? So you're not ending your day with a whole load of kindling and anything will set you off. It makes it so much easier to not snap at your kids or lose it and shout.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:47:33](#)

That's the short answer. Of course, there's lots you could do. It's a lifetime of work. I did write a whole book about the long version of this answer. It's coming out at the end of February. It's the *Peaceful Parent Happy Kids Workbook* and has a long subtitle about using mindfulness, and coaching, and connection to transform your family and your life. But basically, the answer is still stop, drop, and breathe, which is what allows you to change your response in the moment because it gives you more internal resources.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:48:08](#)

I would just add that if you're finding stop, drop, and breathe to be not quite enough, it might be because you're physically mobilized. It can really help to change your physical response in the moment by doing some tapping, EFT. You can look up EFT on the (AhaParenting.com) website. Just tap on your karate chop point of your hand. Just tap and say, "Even though I'm getting annoyed at this, I can let it go and stay calm while I intervene here." That's an example of actually changing your stress hormones in your body, because there is research that shows that doing that tapping does change the level of stress hormones in the body. And of course, you need preventive maintenance, too. You need laughter just like your kids do, which also changes the level of stress hormones in your body so you don't fly off the handle as easily.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:49:03](#)

My final tip, change the way you're looking at things. If you're looking at things in a way that says, "Oh my goodness, this kid is a brat." Of course you're going to lose it and snap and shout. But if you're looking at things in a way that says, "Oh my goodness, my poor child is having a problem here. How can I help her?" At that point, the last thing you're going to feel like doing is shouting. So our orientation, our belief system, our entire frame and the thoughts we're thinking will make a huge difference in



whether we're able to maintain self-regulation at any given time.

### Question 31:

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:49:41](#)

Our next question is from a parent who says, "Can you give me advice on being less annoyed and frustrated by my nine-year-old daughter? We're different. I'm quiet, orderly, methodical. She's boisterous, messy, easily distracted. I feel her sunny energy is a strength for her, but I need help living with it." Good for you for asking this question. First of all, I want to recommend the book by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka on spirited children. What I love about Kurcinka is that she sees the strength in these kids and she's able to reframe all the things that you could find annoying as wonderful qualities so that you see your child more positively. I think that's where it starts. I know you don't naturally perceive her positively and you have to work to do that. I think whatever you think in your head will eventually come out of your mouth, so I'm going to suggest that you begin to recalibrate your perception. Even though you can still perceive her as messy compared to your orderliness, maybe you'll also see her as creative, as a for instance. Maybe you like being quiet yourself, but you can learn to appreciate her boisterousness. I think reframing her is critical. That's really what you're asking me, is how can you be less annoyed at her? The answer is to reframe how you see her.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:51:12](#)

I would also suggest that you make a list of things that you love about her, and read that list often. Look for things to appreciate about her in your mind constantly, but also aloud, and say them to her. And you know, she's a handful, but she's a gift, and she came to you, and your job is to nurture her to the best of your ability so that she can be her best self. Obviously that means loving her for who she is. A lot is being asked of you here, but I think you are up to this job or you wouldn't have asked such a question. I'd love to hear how this works for you.

### Question 32:

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:51:58](#)

Our next question is from a parent who says, “How do I deal with a two-and-a-half-year-old who won't leave me alone for five minutes? I fear I've damaged my child with my rage and he's missed a crucial window of experiencing deep play.” It's not unusual for a two-and-a-half-year-old to not want to leave you for five minutes. And when you say you've missed a window for deep play, I'm not even sure where you're getting that. That's definitely not true. There are two-and-a-half-year-olds who do play independently, but they're pretty rare, and they seem to be the kids, well in my experience, they're the kids who are the engineer types who really want to figure out how things work, so they sit and they play with their building blocks, or their trains, or whatever. But most two-year-olds do not play by themselves for any length of time.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:52:46](#)

There are kids who do learn to do it and it's great, but that doesn't mean that if a child has not learned to do it by two and a half, he's missed some window for deep play. In fact, deep play is often fantasy play that children play with each other when they get older. Your child is not damaged from not playing by himself at all. But if you're raging at him, yes, that could damage him. I hear you're overwhelmed. I hear that you're resentful from having to constantly be on call to your two-and-a-half year old. I want to point out that we're not really designed to parent this way. Children are designed to have many more people around them, both adults and other children, including older children. For better or worse in the old days, meaning back in tribal days a long time ago, children didn't make it to adulthood as much.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:53:47](#)

So there were many more adults in ratio to the children. There were apparently, according to anthropologists, about seven adults to every child, so there were always people to play with- children, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and of course 14-year-olds and seven-year-olds. Two-year-olds are not really designed to sit by themselves and dig in the dirt or whatever. They're designed to watch what's going on in the tribe, to watch what the dads are doing, what the moms are doing, what the big siblings are doing. It's an unfortunate thing that we are in single family homes or apartments with one adult and one child, and it can drive people crazy.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:54:35](#)

My first suggestion to you is your son could deal with childcare at this point, some sort of school at the age of two and a half, and that will keep him interested in everything. He'll be very excited about that. Then when he does come home, you'll have the ability to relate to him because you'll have more inner resources at that point, having had some time to yourself. I strongly encourage you to do that. I think it's bad for your son to be home with you if you're resentful. It can't be good for him, and can't be good for you, and you can't be the mom you want to be when you're feeling resentful and angry. Really, work on getting him a really good school situation. I think you'll both be a lot happier.

### Question 33:

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:55:24](#)

Our next question is from a parent who says, "When I'm with my son, age two, I am sometimes uninterested in what he's doing. I view his behaviors as basic and elementary. This isn't challenging to me or engaging. I believe this is just a matter of perspective. How can I develop more interesting curiosity in his learning and activities so I can build an authentic relationship with him?"

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:55:46](#)

Well, yes. This is a matter of perspective. Of course what a two-year-old is doing is basic and elementary. It's not going to be challenging to you -- but it's also miraculous. His IQ is not taken up with paying the rent. He's able to focus 100% on exploring and learning about the world, and we get to watch him do it. To me, that's fascinating. I would recommend that you read a few good books on toddler development so you can understand him more. I think that would really help you appreciate him. I would recommend Alicia Lieberman, *The Emotional Life of the Toddler*, and I'd recommend Tovah Klein, *How Toddlers Thrive, What Parents Can Do Today for Children Ages Two to Five to Plant the Seeds of Lifelong Success*.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:56:45](#)

But I also want to caution you about something. You asked, how can I develop more interest in him and his learning activities so I can build an authentic relationship with him? Well, the authentic relationship doesn't have anything to do with his learning and activities, really, it has to do with him being a human being here on this planet, and you being his sacred guide who's there to nurture him, protect him, introduce him to things, assist him as he begins his journey, console him when he's upset, teach him how to love. That authentic relationship comes from holding, touching, loving him. It's not an intellectual process about learning. My assignment to you is to begin by connecting with your son, adoring him, and enjoying him, every single day for at least 15 minutes. Really, 15 minutes. I know that will seem like a long time to you because you're not used to sitting with him for 15 minutes and appreciating him, but just let yourself off the hook.

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:57:53](#)

You don't have to feel anything in particular. Forget about everything else you have to do. You do not have to teach him anything, that's specifically not what you're doing here. You're just enjoying your son. Let yourself enjoy him. I think you'll begin to build an authentic, rewarding, wonderful relationship that will bring you closer to him now and for the rest of his life.

### Question 34:

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:58:18](#)

Our next question is from a parent who says, "How do I calm down when I can't move away or even just be quiet? When I stop, drop, and breathe, I literally stop talking to try to calm myself, but my son is by my side crying badly and insisting that I talk and instantly be happy."

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:58:32](#)

First of all, yes, this is the hardest thing to calm yourself down when your child is agitated and continuing to interact with you. That's why you have to practice not in that moment. Once you practice stop, drop and breathe by yourself, once you practice self calming when you're not upset, and when you're not with your child -- for instance in traffic -- then you have much more ready access to that calm, even during a moment of crisis when your child is crying badly, and agitated, and pulling on you. That's the

first thing, is that you have to do preventive work yourself in order to have that calm accessible to you. Then in the moment when your child is upset, and you're upset also, and you want to calm yourself, try to do that with your child. Look at your child and say, "We both need to calm down. Let's stop, drop, and breathe together."

Dr. Laura Markham: [01:59:34](#)

Now again, this is something that won't work in the moment unless you've done the preventive work, so start doing that with your son at times when things are good. Every night when you're going to bed, for instance, stop, drop and breathe together. Practice it as often as you think of it. That way in the moment when you're both upset, you can say to him, "Remember, stop, drop and breathe. Let's help ourselves feel better." I also want to address something else that I saw in your question. You said your son wants you to talk and instantly be happy, so your son is asking for you to reassure him that you're okay. Your son is not responsible for you being okay or you being happy. I mean, it's actually an odd idea that children have any responsibility for our happiness and need us to be happy. I would have a conversation with him at a time when he's not upset where you say, "Everybody needs to cry sometimes. Everybody's upset sometimes. Everybody's unhappy sometimes. It's okay for mommy to be unhappy. It doesn't mean that I don't love you. I love you no matter what. There is nothing you could ever do or say that would make me not love you, and you are never responsible for me being happy."

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:00:56](#)

Then in the moment when he says to you, "Mommy, talk to me, be happy." You can say, "Mommy is breathing. After I breathe, I will feel better. It's okay. I love you and right now it's time to breathe and calm down." And if you've practiced stop, drop, and breathe, he will at least know what you're talking about, even if it's hard for him. And you can take him with you to the kitchen sink or the bathroom, and pull out a stool and let him put his hands under the water and say, "Now we're going to be quiet and run our hands under the water so we can calm down." The reason he's insisting on relating to you is that he wants to know you're okay. He wants you to show him that you're okay, that you're, "happy". As long as you're showing him you're okay by your demeanor and by the

way you're relating to him, he'll let you be quiet so you can recover with your stop, drop, and breathe so you can calm yourself down.

### Question 35:

Our next question is about the parental star chart. A parent says, "I love the accountability and feedback it provides, but I've noticed our kids are more selective now with our rewards than they were at the onset, even though our behavior has improved. I haven't yelled in weeks. Is there a way to discuss negativity bias with them and focus them on the positive experiences without negating their power, their voice, in this regard?"

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:02:33](#)

First of all, how great that you haven't yelled in weeks. That's fantastic. The star chart has done what it's supposed to do. I think it's probably that your kids are raising their standards. They have gotten used to seeing that you actually can manage yourself and not yell. They're really happy about that and they're more attuned to you now so that when you don't yell but you get irritable, and maybe you're not raising your voice exactly, but your tone might be a little sharp, they notice that in a way that they would maybe not have noticed if you were doing more yelling, but certainly would not have felt empowered to comment on. So as you say, we want them to feel empowered and have a voice in how people treat them.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:03:25](#)

On the other hand, you're right that we don't want them to be always looking for the negative and expecting you to be perfect. You're not perfect. That's okay. I think, yes, you can have these discussions. I also think you don't need to continue the star chart unless it gives you the feedback that is really helping you to stay accountable. You haven't yelled in weeks, but that's not months, so you may need it to go on for another month maybe, just to create a habit here. But I would absolutely have a discussion, but not in a defensive way, about the fact that your children have really raised their standards, and how great it is that you aren't yelling.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:04:09](#)

Remember, this is a respectful voice chart, so are you using a respectful voice? And if you're using one, then your children should give you a star for it. At some point, of course, you can just stop the chart as I've said, but I wonder if your children are really loving the power this gives them to influence your behavior. I wonder if you could tell them that they can use their words to influence your behavior. When things get tense, they can just say, "Could we have a do-over please?" Then you'll take a deep breath, stop, drop and breathe, and you'll calm yourself down and you'll do a do-over. Right? I guess what I'm suggesting is maybe instead of just later in the day talking about it, maybe your family is ready for noticing in the moment when things start to get tense, and having a do-over at that moment that creates positivity, rather than later your children saying, "Well, I really think you could have done better at this mom."

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:05:13](#)

As far as the discussion about negativity bias, I think absolutely every human should know that. I think you can say to your kids, "Did you know our brains are designed to notice when things go wrong? That's because we're always trying to make sure we'll survive and that we can make things better, so we really notice the things that are wrong. You know, years ago before we had houses to live in, if we didn't notice something wrong like a tiger wanted to eat us for dinner, well, we wouldn't be here today. Our brains are not really designed to savor the good things, like how nice it feels when we have a wonderful time together. But I think in our house, let's retrain our brains to really notice the good times. Every day at dinner, let's find an appreciation, something we loved about our family, or our sibling, or our mom or dad. When we savor those good feelings, it really does change the brain." And you can use the opportunity to talk about those times when in fact things did go right.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:06:22](#)

This is a wonderful family practice to focus kids on the positive and shift them out of a negativity bias. And by the way, I don't think that the star chart is actually creating a negativity bias, I think they're just more sensitive than they used to be and their standards have changed. I think shifting the focus of the family is a great idea, and there's nothing wrong with discontinuing the star chart once

you're ready to do that. But when you discuss it with them, just have a sense of humor, and if their standards seem impossibly high, you can certainly point that out in a loving way.

Dr. Laura Markham: [02:07:05](#)

That's all our questions for today. Thank you for listening and I hope this was helpful. If you still have a burning question that wasn't answered on this audio, please submit it for possible inclusion on my podcast. Just go to [ahaparenting.com/podcast](http://ahaparenting.com/podcast) and leave your question as a voice memo. This is Dr. Laura Markham, wishing you less drama and more love. Goodbye for now.