

Gentle parenting doesn't have to mean permissive parenting

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SUMMARY

The podcast discusses the misconceptions surrounding gentle parenting, emphasizing that it does not equate to permissive parenting. It explores the importance of understanding both parents' and children's needs to create effective parenting strategies that foster cooperation without resorting to punitive measures like logical consequences or limited choices.

- Gentle parenting is often misunderstood as being permissive, but it can be both gentle and effective.*
- The podcast critiques traditional parenting styles, particularly the authoritative style, which may include punitive measures like spanking.*
- Understanding the needs of both parents and children is crucial to avoid permissiveness while maintaining respect.*
- Logical consequences and limited choices often fail to address the underlying needs of children, leading to resistance.*
- Natural consequences are preferable as they arise naturally from a child's actions without parental intervention.*
- Parents should focus on meeting their own needs alongside their child's needs to foster cooperation.*
- Setting boundaries is essential when parental needs are not met, teaching children the importance of boundaries.*
- The podcast encourages parents to ask their children about their needs and to use phrases like "Are you willing to?" to foster autonomy and connection.*

Hello and welcome to the Your Parenting Mojo podcast. Today I want to talk with you about a couple of linked topics. How to do gentle parenting without being permissive and also why the typical tools that we jump to to avoid being permissive like logical consequences and giving choices don't work. I'm noticing a really concerning trend over the last year or so. There's this idea floating around that gentle, respectful parenting inherently means being permissive. That somehow if you're committed to treating your child with respect, you're doomed to let them walk all over you. I see this most often in long-form journalism about respectful parenting where the writer commits to trying what they perceive to be gentle parenting. And when their kid doesn't do what they're told, the writer concludes that gentle parenting doesn't work. So using power over tools like giving choices and logical consequences are really the only alternative. But what if that's a false dichotomy? What if it's possible to be both gentle and effective in our parenting? What if meeting our child's needs doesn't have to mean that they walk all over us? Because that's what we're exploring today. And it's also the focus of the setting loving and effective limits workshop. The workshop's available all year for a fee.

This is the only time of the year when you can get it both for free and with my support as you're doing it. All the details on that are available at yourparentingmojo.com/setting-limits. So, let's start on the first of our two main

ideas in this episode, which is that being a gentle, respectful parent inherently means that you're a permissive parent. The perception is that whatever the kid says, whatever the kid wants to do, is what actually ends up happening. And the purpose of today's episode is to really push back against that idea and say that's not necessarily the case. This idea that it's a slippery slope, that we start off being gentle, we start off being respectful, and it's a slippery slope from there into permissive parenting that's not really good for anybody. and that one inevitably leads to the other. You can't do this gentle, respectful parenting thing and not have it slide into permissive parenting. The only alternative to that is to go into what's more commonly thought of as the good parenting method of authoritative parenting. And we'll talk more about that in a bit. I should mention that so-called gentle or respectful parenting is not super well defined. So, it's kind of hard to know if you're really doing it. If you're here in this community, if you've listened to my podcast, if you're generally aligned with what you hear about here, then chances are you're practicing some variation of gentle, respectful parenting. But of course, because it's poorly defined, it's much more difficult to say, well, I'm doing this or I'm not doing this. It's hard to know what you're doing and thus what you're walking away from if you decide you want to walk away from that. And what are we walking towards? Right? If we're saying, "Well, no, I don't want to be a gentle, respectful parent anymore." What are we walking towards? The sort of four parenting styles that you see quoted around all the time, and I'm going to raise my hand on this, right? I unquitly presented these four parenting styles really early in the podcast episodes. I think it was around episode 20 where I walked through what they were and said which one is the best one. And I didn't really look at the research behind it. If you've heard of these four parenting styles, you know there's neglectful, authoritarian, permissive, authoritative, and it's organized on this quadrant with warmth on one axis and demandingness on the other axis. And so warmth is sort of exhibiting this loving attitude toward your child. And demandingness is how much you're exerting control over them.

In the low demanding, low warmth quadrant, we've got neglectful. In the high demanding but low warmth, we've got authoritarian, where the parent is giving all their orders and not really expressing much warmth. The opposite of that is the low demand, high warmth quadrant, which is permissive. And that's saying, "Of course, I love you, and you're amazing, and you get to do all these things, but I'm not going to ask anything of you." And that's what we're afraid of potentially sliding into. If we see gentle parenting as something that is meeting our children's needs and not necessarily meeting our own, then the quote unquote best parenting method, the authoritative method is seen as high demanding, high warmth. Although that's often these days redescribed as high expectations, high warmth, as if you can just change the labels on the axis and you know nothing else changes. We're told that when we're warned towards our child and we set these high expectations on their behavior, then our children quote unquote do the best. And so these styles were developed by Dr. Diana Bowrine and she actually worked in Berkeley, California, just down the road from me in the 1960s. She never called them parenting styles though. She called them models of parental control, which is why we had demandingness. And so she was not looking to prescribe what parents should do at the time. and she was trying to describe what a few hundred parents in Berkeley were already doing to control their children's behavior. And then she was trying to use that to work towards what is the optimal way for a child to develop. And she basically said, you know, I can't look at anyone who isn't white and I can't look at anyone who's experiencing any kind of economic distress because those folks are not going to develop optimally. We have to be able to remove the stress from poverty, from racism, from all that stuff to know how children will optimally develop. So she deliberately only looked at middle-class white children. And she noticed these four methods of what she called

parental control. But also in one of her papers, she found a few parents using another method. She actually called it harmonious. And that was where the parents refused to rate themselves on the demandingness scale. And those parents were doing things that sound an awful lot like the ideas we talk about here on the show and in our communities where we're actually considering the child's ideas and needs as just as important as our own. And Dr. Brand found six children whose parents were using this harmonious approach. And she said the effects were universally positive among the girls. And I think she said something like they're easy to control.

I think the word she used was actually tractable which of course is her criteria for whether a parental method is worth using or not. But there were two boys in this sample and she said the effects on the boys was universally negative. She thought it made them effeminate. So based on this tiny sample of six children, two boys, she never really looked at this idea of harmonious parenting again. And so I think it's really important to know these four methods, these four styles that are presented all the time are not, you know, parenting styles.

And they're also not the only ones. And just because she described four of these styles doesn't mean there aren't other styles out there, other ways of interacting that may even potentially be better for our kids because she found one herself. And the fact that she didn't choose to study it tells us a lot about our culture and what we expect parents to do with their children, which is to control them. I also think a thing that a lot of parents don't know about the person who developed the parenting styles is she was an avid proponent of spanking. Dr. Dina Bowring co-authored a paper with Dr. Robert Larrier who's written about spanking for decades on the positive side. And in this paper they wrote on average authoritative parents remember this is the good kind right spanked just as much as the average of other parents. Undoubtedly, some parents can be authoritative without using spanking. But we have no evidence that all or even most parents can achieve authoritative parenting without an occasional spank. So again, this is the good kind, right? The high warmth, high demandingness. Dr. Bowring, who developed these parenting styles, these methods of parental control, is saying you kind of have to spank your kid to be good at it. That this is an integral part of parenting and we expect you to spank your child to control them.

And to me, that's kind of problematic. I don't think we can really strip out the spanking and expect authoritative parenting to be what it was when Dr. Bowring described it. So that's one bucket of ideas for this episode. Right? If we're seeing this slide into permissive parenting, where does permissive parenting fit into a model of how we might be with our children? The next piece of this is that people who are moving away from this gentle, respectful parenting model basically are thinking that gentle respectful parenting is permissive parenting. The two are synonymous. You can't be a gentle, respectful, respectful parent without being a permissive parent. And so if we know we don't want to be a permissive parent, right? The only alternative that we are given to respectful, gentle, permissive parenting is this authoritative parenting. But here's this kind of core idea that I want to float out to you today. What if this isn't true? That gentle, respectful parenting has to be permissive. What if that idea is not true? What if there was a way that we could be gentle towards our children and meet their needs and also meet our needs as well? Which is what makes this not permissive, right? It's permissive when it's only the child's needs they're considered. It's not permissive when our needs are considered too. What would have to be true for that to happen? Now, for that to be true, we would have to understand our needs. We would have to know what our needs are. We would have to know that something like getting out the house in the morning is not a need.

It's not a need. The English language allows us to use the word need. Like I need to get out of the house in the morning on time. Actually, that's not our need. Our need is for responsibility to our co-workers. It might also be for ease, for harmony, for collaboration with our children. We can have multiple needs, but our need is not to get out the door in time in the morning. Getting out the door on time is a strategy to meet the other needs that I mentioned. Stopping our child from jumping on the sofa is also not a need.

That's a strategy to meet a need for perhaps our child's safety or some financial safety if we don't want to replace the couch or potentially again for peace, for ease, for harmony, especially if we've had a long day and we don't want to hear the noise. Getting our child to stop screen time is not a need. That's a strategy we're using to meet a need often for competence as a parent. We want to know that we're good parents and a child who watches too much screen time, right? If we have a kid who does that means we're not a good parent. We also have a need for their health and safety. So again, stopping screen time is a strategy to meet these needs. Another big bucket of things is we would have to understand their needs as well. We would have to understand that sometimes their difficult behavior indicates a need that we can choose to try and help them meet. So if they're stalling at bedtime, their need is not to stall at bedtime. Their need might be for connection with us. They're not deliberately being disrespectful or defiant or all the things we might say when our child is doing something that we don't want them to do. It's possible their need is for connection with us.

And they know the longer they drag out bedtime, the more time they get to spend with us. And they wish that we weren't having a hard time with it. But they will take that time with us over not having time with us. Sometimes when they hit their sibling, they might again be looking for connection with us because they know if they hit their sibling, we're going to be there immediately. So then they can get connection with us. Sometimes when our children resist us, they have a need for autonomy. So if they're saying, "No, I'm not putting my shoes on. No, I'm not going to do this."

Then they want to have some kind of say over something that feels really important in their lives. They have a need for autonomy. And so I'm wondering if there have been times when you might have thought that you're being a permissive parent. Have there been times when you've wondered if maybe you're on that slippery slope from gentle, respectful parenting into permissive parenting? And if so, can you now maybe identify what need of yours was not being met in that moment? And how did not meeting that need lead to permissiveness? Because that's ultimately what permissiveness is, right? It's saying, "Yes, child, you have a need. You get to have your needs met all the time, and my needs don't matter." And what I'm saying is that your needs matter just as much as your child's needs, not more and not less.

And that is how you get out of being a permissive parent. That is how you practice gentle, respectful parenting without being permissive. It's not that gentle, respectful parenting is the same as permissive parenting. And the alternative to that is authoritative parenting. No, we're saying that gentle, respectful parenting is not inherently permissive. We can separate those two things. And what makes gentle, respectful parenting not permissive is when we can do it meeting our needs as well. And we don't have to control our children's behavior in that case because they're going to come towards us because their needs are being met too. And I'm actually thinking back to a parent Corey who was in the workshop a couple of years ago in the setting loving and effective limits

workshop. She was having such a hard time with her toddler. He was not yet two at the time, definitely not talking very much. and he had been resisting toothbrushing for a year at that point. And that seemed really hard for them to deal with. And so she sort of set it aside for a few days because at the time she was basically holding him down to get him to brush his teeth. And after we started the setting limits workshop, she would tell him, you know, I wish there was a different way we could do this together.

I'm really committed to working toward finding a different way for us to do this that's respectful to you. At the same time as this was going on, she was also having a hard time with him dumping liquid out of cups. So anytime he would find liquid in a cup, he would dump it out on the floor. And of course, the solution there is to give him liquid in covered cups, which is great and it works if you can always find access to a covered cup, which sometimes you can't.

And sometimes he would find her drink and dump it out. And so one day he gets hold of a cup of hers that she's left out and he's about to dump it. And she's ready. She has a plan this time. She says, "How about we take that outside?" And so they go outside and they take a picture of water with them and a cup and she pours the picture water into the cup. He dumps the water. She pours. He dumps. She pours. He dumps over and over and over again. When she told us about it in the community, she said he was thrilled. And they kept dumping and pouring and dumping and pouring over and over. And so the next day, her son finds another cup. and she's bracing herself cuz this is something she's been trying to get him to stop doing for weeks and weeks and weeks. So he finds this cup of water. She's like, "Okay, it's going to happen again." He grabs the cup of water. He looks at her and he says, "Outside." And she couldn't believe it, right? He's not yet to. He stops himself from dumping the water. It's not her setting the limit and saying, "You can't do that anymore." He stops himself. And they go outside and they're playing together. And it's evening as this is happening. They come back inside at the end of this pouring session. She's putting the picture away and he's running away and she thinks he's running away hiding and trying to prolong bedtime as usual trying to, you know, get out of toothbrushing again. So, she goes to find him and he's sitting in the bathroom in the spot where previously they had decided they were going to brush teeth and he looks at her and he says, "Te willingly let her brush his teeth for the first time in a year."

And so there's not always a oneto-one connection between I let my kid do one thing and all of a sudden they let me do something else. If we come into the setting limits workshop expecting that direct connection, wanting that, we may end up being disappointed. But if we go into it from a perspective of I'm looking for some movement here. I'm looking to come towards my child as much as I can on the topics that I can and the rest of it I'm going to kind of see how it plays out and we're going to keep expressing willingness to work with our child on those topics. then we may well find that something loosens up. Cuz Cory was still holding her kid down to brush his teeth for most of the time we were in the workshop. But they were having very different conversations about it.

And our kids know the difference between come here, I'm going to hold you down while you brush your teeth because you're not going to let me brush if I don't hold you down. And I really wish there was a way that we didn't have to do it this way. And I'm actively working right now to make it so that we're not going to do it this way forever. They know the difference between those two things. And that very often means that they're more

willing to come towards us even when perhaps we haven't fully learned these tools yet. We don't fully understand their need. After the workshop, Corey sent me a message. She said, "Everyone I've spoken to cannot believe this is a free workshop and neither can I. This approach is going to change the world." And so, if you need help identifying your needs, we have resources to help you at [your parentingmojo.com/needs](https://parentingmojo.com/needs). It's a publicly available list of needs. It's also available in multiple languages. The bottom of that page, we have a printable list of needs with pictures on them that you can print, stick to your fridge, and use it to understand what's happening with you and your kid when you're having a hard time. Corey did that. She printed the needs list and she stuck it to her fridge. She used it for several months, referring to it as she's trying to understand her needs and her son's needs. By the time he turned three, he was starting to identify his needs. And this is not I have a need to watch screen time. This is I have a need to be heard and understood.

And my goodness, if a three-year-old can articulate their need to be heard and understood, what does that say for the relationship that they're going to be able to develop between the two of them as they go throughout their lives together? Cuz that's where I want to be, right? And that is not permissive parenting. That is parenting where your child's needs are met and your needs are met as well. So, I hope this piece of the episode has been helpful in terms of seeing how we can get out of this trap of there's gentle, respectful, permissive parenting all wrapped up in a ball and then there's this good authoritative parenting on the other side because that's a false dichotomy.

It doesn't exist. It's absolutely possible to be a gentle, respectful parent and also to get your needs met as well. And so now I want to shift into talking about why the alternatives to gentle parenting, which tend to be tools like logical consequences and offering choices don't always work. And sometimes when I meet parents for the first time and they haven't had very much exposure to the podcast or to the ideas that we talk about, it's pretty common for them to think, well, can you just please tell me what is the appropriate logical consequence to offer for every kind of misbehavior that I'm seeing from my child? because if I knew what that was, I would know how to handle the misbehavior. And I think often parents want this menu, right? We see these things on Instagram where the post says, "If this happens, you do that." So it's like, well, if I knew what that was, then every time a difficult behavior came up, I would know what to do. I would know how to handle it. And then I would feel more in control. And I so want to feel in control and to, you know, have it seem like I know what I'm doing in this parenting thing when often it seems like I'm on quicksand and I don't know when I'm going to sink. And I think there's also this idea of well, we got to teach our child a lesson. We have to teach them that their behavior is not acceptable. They have to learn it's not okay that they do this thing.

And so the question that I find to help to ask ourselves when we're thinking about this is, is it possible that your child doesn't already know they're not supposed to do that thing? Because chances are by the time you're even considering doing something like joining the setting loving and effective limits workshop, you've been telling your child not to do the thing you don't want them to do for quite a long time. And so the chances that they don't know they're not supposed to do the thing are pretty slim, but they're doing it anyway. So what's going on here?

Right? And so that these are the kinds of cases where we might start to use tools like logical consequences which

can feel really icky to us. And I want to shine a really big flood light on the reason for that. The reason that logical consequences can feel icky is they're essentially punishments. They're essentially punishments. What we're saying is your behavior does not match my idea of what I think good behavior should be in this situation. And so I'm going to apply this logical consequence because I want to teach you this lesson which as we just talked about is often you have to know that you can't do this thing. And that's why it feels icky because we were punished when we were children often in much more extreme ways than we punish our children now. And so it reminds us of that. It reminds us of when we were punished. And even though it's got this label on it of logical consequence and we're like, "Yes, I want to be logical and I want my child to respond to logic." They sound like they're a really amazing thing, but actually logical consequences are punishments. So, let's spend just a minute untangling what logical consequences are compared to natural consequences. So, a natural consequence is something where the parent does not make a decision about what's going to happen and the thing happens or it doesn't happen. So, if your child decides to go outside without a coat on, it's 0 degrees, they are probably going to feel cold. They may not. Not all children will, but they're probably going to feel cold. You didn't make a decision to make that happen. You didn't go and turn the cold on outside to teach them that they shouldn't go outside without a jacket on. It's just cold outside and they feel that cold. A logical consequence is when we where we are deciding because you did this, then this is what's going to happen. This is what I'm going to do to hurt you. And I don't argue that there's no place at all for logical consequences. But I do think that when we default to logical consequences as one of our first tools that we use along with setting limits actually essentially what we're defaulting to is these tools that try to change our children's behavior. And nobody likes to have their behavior changed. You don't like it. I don't like it. Nobody likes it. So it's almost like these classic parenting tools of setting limits and logical consequences are the things we go to first. And it just doesn't feel good.

doesn't feel good to us and it doesn't feel good to our children either. So, a logical consequence would be something like, you know, the lightest touch we could do would be something like, I see you're not ready to brush your teeth right now. If you're willing to brush and get it done before 8:00, then we'll have time for stories. If we don't get it done by 8, then we're not going to have time for stories. And so, what we're doing there is we're tying that consequence very tightly to the thing that we want to have happen, which is not brushing teeth. And we're not making it completely out of proportion. So if we're saying you're not brushing your teeth right now and so you're not allowed to go to the party that you've been looking forward to for weeks if you don't you know brush right now then that's completely out of the time scope.

It's not in any way related to the thing we're doing right now. This is several days away and it's massively out of proportion in terms of the amount the child is looking forward to this event. So an appropriate consequence is something that's super tightly tied to the thing that's happening. But if we're finding ourselves applying these logical consequences over and over and over again in a situation, that's a massive red flag that there are unmet needs here. And very often they do come up in these kinds of transitions, in these situations we're getting into with our child over and over again. Getting dressed in the morning, getting out the door, they're brushing their teeth, getting in the bath, getting into bed.

When these things happen every day and we're relying on logical consequences every day, we're essentially punishing our child every day, multiple times a day. And if we think to doctors John and Julie Gottman's work, we're looking for five positive interactions in a relationship for each one negative interaction to feel good in that

relationship. And I would actually argue that a logical consequence, which is a punishment, right, counts for more than one negative interaction because the Gottmans are applying this framework to adults who are in a mutually consenting relationship, not to a parent who has a lot of power over their child and who is probably the child's primary attachment figure. And so, if you think about it, you don't apply logical consequences to your partner's behavior if you have a partner. You don't apply it to any adult. You don't say, "Well, you didn't take out the trash, and so I'm going to punish you by cutting off your Netflix."

Well, you might think about it, but if those words ever came out of your mouth, there would probably be some response from the other adult that would indicate that's not your place. They're either going to be thinking or saying, "I'm not going to allow you to have that much power over me." But in our culture, we expect to have power over our children. We expect to shape their behavior. And so, that's why we have this really weird icky feeling because there's this tension in us that we don't want to be doing it. We want to be in a relationship with our children where we're meeting all of their needs. And yet everything in our culture is saying, "You got to control your child. You better make sure that they show up in this way and they do these things and they do what they're told and they don't answer back and then you will know that you are competent parent." And that tension really really gets us into trouble. And I think sometimes we can try to avoid getting into that place where we are right where it seems as though setting the consequence is the only way forward by doing this thing called offering choices. And episode 181 goes in a lot more detail at why giving choices doesn't work. And I'll post a link to that in the show notes. But I just want to cover briefly here the reason that giving choices doesn't work is because when we decide what are the two available choices to our child, we don't consider all of the needs the child might be trying to address through their resistance. So for example, if I'm thinking back to a parent that I coached where they were offering, you know, they they actually they wanted the kid to wash their hands. So they said, well, do you want the pink soap or the green one?

And so that's a choice, right? Both of these choices are acceptable to the parent. And that's the sort of framework that you hear a lot of from respectful parenting advocates that both of the choices have to be acceptable to you. And the thing about the choices is it doesn't consider what are the child's needs. Why is the child resisting? It assumes that we can kind of trick a child into complying with our wishes by offering them this choice which on the surface seems like it's meeting their need for autonomy because they get to make a choice. But it's not really a choice. What if the reason that they're resisting handwashing is because the water's too hot or the water's too cold?

Or both of those kinds of soap are the same except for their color and they don't like how it feels. What if that kind of soap feels really slimy and they prefer a more bubbly texture? Or both of them smell kind of weird or the towel is really rough or last time you did it, you kind of forced them and now they have a need for autonomy to show you this is something that they don't want to do. And so offering these two choices, do you want the pink soap or the green soap? doesn't even consider any of these child's needs. And frankly, it doesn't even consider our needs either. Our need is not necessarily to get the hands washed with one of those two soaps. Our need is for our child's safety. It's for peace and harmony and ease. Like, can this just please be easier? Can we just not fight over every single one of these little things? And there are other ways that we can make that happen. I'm thinking of an example where my daughter was sitting at the dinner table. She didn't want to go and wash her hands. And her dad's like, "Go wash your hands." And she says, "No, go and wash your hands."

"No." "Well, where do you go from here?" Right? Do you just sit there and let her eat her dinner when she's playing out in the garden all day? Do you frog march her down the hallway and make her wash her hands? One of you wins and one of you loses in each of those scenarios. And so, she was tired. She'd been outside all day. And I said, "Well, I can get a cloth with some soap on it and a, you know, wash and wipe your hands for you." And so I get two cloths actually. One is soap, the other's just warm water. And so I wash her hands off with the soapy cloth and I wipe them with the watercloth. And so they're rinsed as well. And so our need for her health and safety is met. She's not eating with hands that have been in the dirt all day. And her need, which was for rest and ease, were also met. And so both of our needs get met. And so that's where we're going, right? When we see this resistance in our child, that resistance is telling us what you're asking me to do does not meet my need.

And that's so difficult for us to hear as parents because we weren't allowed to say that. We would have been punished for saying that to our parents. And so when we hear it from our children, it's like this big fire goes off in our heads like you're not allowed to say that. You're not allowed to say that you're going to not do something that I'm asking. And so we think that by getting the child to do this particular thing, we will get our needs met. But actually there are so many other strategies we can use. When you can see what is the need underneath the child's misbehavior, then we find the strategies to meet both of our needs rather than seeing the logical consequence as the only way forward. Rather than seeing, well, you get to choose which color soap you want as one of our main tools to get this cooperation.

With a very young child, offering choices can quote unquote work because they don't fully see that the choices you're offering are not meeting their need for autonomy. It's almost like we're pulling one over them and they think maybe for a time or two that this choice does actually meet their need for autonomy and then pretty quickly they realize no, it doesn't. And so that's why giving choices can sometimes work to get your child's cooperation for the first time or two that you try it, particularly in a new type of situation.

and you try it once in getting dressed and once in breakfast and different situations, it's going to work once or twice because the child thinks their need for autonomy is being met. And then they realize it's actually not. And then we see the resistance again. Okay? And then we think, okay, well, now I'm going to have to apply logical consequence because that's the only tool I have left. And so what we're moving toward in the setting limits workshop is this idea that instead we can see why they are resisting. Where is this resistance coming from? What need are they trying to meet by resisting in this way? And why am I asking them to do this? What need do I have? If I can clearly see that my need is for their health and safety, which can be met by them going and washing their hands, or it could just as easily be met by me getting a cloth and wiping their hands for them, then I can find these multiple strategies that meet both of our needs. And then there's no resistance. There's just no reason to set a logical consequence because there are just two people in this relationship whose needs are both met. Sometimes there are natural consequences associated with your child's behavior and maybe in some cases you're not willing to live with some of those. Toothbrushing is the most obvious example that comes up over and over again. The natural consequence of not doing toothbrushing is you get cavities.

Many parents understandably are not willing to let that happen. And so that's where we can start to move into logical consequences. And of course, again, right there, what we're looking at is if this is coming up repeatedly,

we're going to say, why is the child resisting this? Okay, so thinking back to Corey's child that we talked about, autonomy was huge. And when Corey was able to move toward her child and allow him to pour water out in the garden over and over again, completely unrelated to toothbrushing, meeting his need for autonomy, he's now more willing to come toward her on the toothbrushing. So, it isn't necessarily something that has to be fixed in that toothbrushing situation. We can look much more broadly at the ways that our child's need for autonomy is met or not met in our whole relationship. And then you may find something loosen up with the toothbrushing.

So, a question parents often ask me is, well, how do we get both people's needs met while getting out the door, especially potentially with older kids, right? We're looking for what are the needs that each child is trying to meet in the mornings. And I think about a parent that I coached a while ago and actually told her story in my book, *Parenting Beyond Power*. And the name I use for her in the book is Maria. And Maria's having this fight with her daughter Isabelle, who I think at the time was about six. Every single morning, Maria's saying, "Get dressed."

No. Get dressed. No. same thing over and over again. So, we start working together and I said, "Well, do you know why she doesn't want to get dressed in the morning?" And Maria says, "Oh, no. Actually, I don't." And so, I said, "Well, do you want to go and ask her?" And so, one day she asked Isabelle, "Why is it that you don't want to get dressed in the morning?" And of course, the answer is something we would never have guessed. I like knowing that you are the last person to touch my clothes in the morning before I leave the house.

Isabelle's need is for connection. So, clear, right? And is Maria willing to help her need our child meet that need for connection? Of course she is. And so when we see that resistance and we ask what's actually going on for you? Why is this hard? Why are we struggling with this? Then we start to find the needs underneath the behavior. So if you're seeing stalling, if you're seeing resistance in the mornings, it's very possible, especially with younger children, but also with some older children, their need for connection is not being met. And they know that any minute they spend dragging out the morning routine is another minute they get to spend with you. Same happens at bedtime. Any minute they spend dragging out bedtime routine is another minute they get to spend with you. And they would prefer it if we were not yelling at them, but they will take that minute over a smooth exit from the house, a smooth exit from the bedroom, which would meet our needs for ease and harmony, but not their need for connection.

So to build that connection time into the morning, maybe this is one strategy, right? We could separate our getting ready time from their getting ready time. And with their getting ready time, we're really focused on them. So they're getting that need for connection met. And it's possible it might actually end up being faster and easier to do it that way than it is to try to multitask, which doesn't tend to work out well because when we're multitasking, we're thinking about different things at once.

Our capacity automatically diminishes. is our capacity to take on any additional thing. And so our child says no to something or something feels just a little bit difficult and we're like big explosion. So the more we can focus on one task at a time, the easier time we're going to have. If you have older children, their needs may be a little bit different. It might be related to autonomy. Certainly toddlers have needs related to autonomy, too. Might

also be related to rest.

Right? I'm starting to wonder what kind what time their school opens. Some schools open phenomenally early. Some schools open at 7:30 in the morning. And most days I don't even want to be out of bed at that time. And so when that happens, we're seeing how our lives are constrained by these systems we exist within that don't really have our best interests at heart. And so if we're making the choice to exist within those systems and our kids are in school and we've decided that's the best strategy that meets the most of our family's needs for right now, then we're really looking at well, how can we maximally meet everybody's needs within that framework? So if we have a child who's not getting enough rest, is it possible we can work with them to help them get more rest earlier in the evening so they're then able to get out of bed in the morning? Is it possible they actually don't have to have breakfast before they go? that we can have breakfast options that can be portable and go with them. So maybe they can still be resting for that time when previously they've been trying to eat breakfast. How can we make transitions as easy as possible? Even simple things like putting socks in a bucket next to the door so shoes and socks are right next to each other. Making toothbrushes more accessible. Maybe if we live in a two-level home, maybe we could bring the toothbrushes down to the downstairs bathroom. So we get dressed, we do everything upstairs, and then we come downstairs. There's no reason to go back upstairs again. In our conversation last year with listener Dr. Arie Parcy, she told me she puts a toothbrush with toothpaste on it in a cup in the car and the kids brush before they get out and spit in the cup. Anything we can do to make this easier is going to be really important. And I think many of our struggles occur because of our kids needs for connection and autonomy. So again, as with the autonomy example I mentioned earlier, we don't have to try to fix this only within this tight window of time in the morning when we're getting out the door. What we want to be doing is looking at this from an entire family perspective, an entire amount of time we spend together perspective so that we're meeting our children's needs for connection at multiple points during the day. So they're not trying to ring out every moment of connection that they can from getting out the door time and bedroom bedtime routine time. So then they stop the stalling in the morning and at bedtime as well. Same for autonomy, right? We can address that outside of the mornings about the mornings and say, "How do you want your mornings to go? How do you want me to support you in the mornings? Oh, and this child wants to be supported in this way. This child wants to be supported in that way. And I'm going to be getting ready for work at some point, too. So, let's work together and see how all these pieces fit together because I think we can do this." And then, what else in their lives do they think they don't have enough autonomy over? What decisions do they want to be able to make that maybe until this point we've said, "You know what? No, that's not your decision to make. Can we say, "Okay, here's what I'm worried about.

Here's what I'm worried is going to happen if you make this decision for yourself. And is there a way we can meet my need for your safety and whatever else is going on and also meet your need for autonomy and whatever else is going on for you?" And then we end up in a place where their need for autonomy is met. And again, they start fighting us much less in the morning. And so this doesn't just have to happen in the morning. As a final example, I'm thinking of a parent who was quoted in an earlier episode. Her name was Pedu.

And Pedu's daughter was resisting everything. I think she was like six or seven at the time. She had a Chinese class at least a couple times a week. And she basically dug her heels in and said, "No, I'm not going to Chinese class." And Pedu realized through our conversation that she was setting limits on so many aspects of her child's

behavior. what her child's eating, what she has for breakfast, for lunch, all these decisions that she her child wants to have a say over. And so Pedu relaxed around all of that stuff as much as she possibly could. And all of a sudden, her child announces, "Okay, I'm going to go to Chinese class." And the resistance that Pedu was seeing at dinnertime when her daughter was saying, "No, whatever you're making, I'm not going to eat it." Right? She's seeing as a need for autonomy. Once her autonomy is met in all these other ways, she's willing to come toward Pedu and she's willing to sit down and she's willing to eat dinner. Some kids, I will acknowledge, seem to be kind of these hole in the bucket kids. No matter how much connection you pour in, it seems to pour out the bottom and the bucket never gets filled. There are some kids who need a lot of connection, whose need for connection is super strong. And so that's where we start to introduce other tools like boundaries. So I'm going to bring in one last tool in this episode, right?

boundaries. And so what I'm going to ask you to do when this comes up, when they're asking for more connection, is to check in with yourself and see how you're doing. See if you've had an opportunity to meet your needs today. And to the extent that you can come toward them, obviously if there are other children involved, other considerations as well, but if you can come toward them with this kind of full and open heart and say, "Yeah, I see your need for connection and right now it either meets my need for connection with you, so yes, I'm willing to do it."

or it doesn't block me from meeting one of my needs and so I'm willing to do it. Right? That's when both of your needs are being met. Great. Go ahead and play some more. And if that's not happening, if you're saying, you know what, I'm tired. I'm hungry. I'm tired of pretend play. I'm kind of done with this for right now. That's an awesome time for a boundary. Okay, we're going to talk a lot more about boundaries over the course of the setting limits workshop. A boundary is essentially when we say, "I am not willing to do X. I'm not willing to play right now. I'm not willing to carry up the stairs because my back hurts. So, whenever you see yourself start to feel these three red flags, frustration, anger, resentment. Those are the things you want to look out for.

If you're seeing any of those three things, you know, you kind of stepped over your needs a little bit. You come a little bit too far towards your child and you're going to set a boundary and say, you know what, I'm actually going to meet my need for rest right now. I'm going to do something else right now. And when that happens, that's how we're abandoning this idea of gentle parenting, respectful parenting is permissive. That there's no other way for gentle respectful parenting to be other than permissive. Because we're saying that yes, when this meets both of our needs, we're going to do it. And the moment that it stops meeting my need, I'm going to set a boundary and say I'm not willing to do that. And that also teaches our children it's okay to set boundaries and that setting boundaries is a really valuable life skill to have.

And I would love for you to start playing with that a little bit and just seeing to what extent can I move toward them in having these interactions, these really connective interactions and where is the right time for me to say and now I'm going to take a break. And sometimes parents will ask me, is it better to say I'm not willing to than I can't do that? And I would say yes, particularly if you're setting a boundary because very often when we're setting a boundary, it's something we physically could do, right? I'm imagining I've just sat on to breakfast and my child is sitting with me. They want the green spoon. I could physically get up and get the green spoon. I'm

physically capable of doing that. So, when I say I can't get the green spoon, what I'm essentially doing is saying it's not possible. And that's not really true. So, another way that it can come up is when there's something else happening that we really want to have happen and our child is asking us to play. So, our child says, "I want to play with you." And you say, "I can't. I have to cook dinner. I can't. I have to work."

And so what we're doing here is we're setting a boundary, but we're kind of making out like we didn't set a boundary. And I think the reason for this is really important because we learned when we were little that setting boundaries is not safe. That setting boundaries is tied up with this idea of I don't love you. That if you would ever set a boundary with your parents, your parents would say, uh-uh, you don't get to do that. You have to do what I say when I say it. You don't get to set boundaries. And so we use this camouflaging language of I can't do it as a way of hiding the fact that we're setting a boundary. And what we're actually doing when we say I can't play with you, I have to cook dinner. Is saying I have a need for nourishment.

And I'm pretty sure in an hour you're going to have a need for nourishment, too. And the strategy I am choosing to meet those needs is to cook dinner. And there are other strategies we could use. We could order food. We could ask a parent who's out to pick up food on the way home. We could get a pizza out of the freezer. We could eat leftovers. We could eat cereal for dinner. All of those are strategies to meet our need for nourishment. But we've decided the one strategy we're going to use is we're going to cook dinner. And maybe if our child has a need for connection, we could meet both of our needs. We could invite our child to help us cook dinner.

We could give them a task that they can help with. We could talk with them. We could meet their need while we're also meeting our need. even right if I am recording a podcast episode I might say to my child if she's out there wanting to play I can't play with you I have to work and what I'm actually doing is saying I have a need for responsibility to you right to listeners and my need for responsibility is really important to me and so if I say I can't I'm kind of denying that and I'm making out like I'm not the one making the choice when really I am so I can say to her I'm not available to play right now I'm going to be recording for the next hour and then we can play after that. And so that makes it more clear.

It's my choice. I'm prioritizing my need for responsibility to you over my need for connection with her and also over her need for connection with me for just a few minutes, right? For an hour. And maybe I might have seen this coming and I might have thought, okay, perhaps we should get our connection time first thing in the morning to make sure that happens before I record today. And then probably that transition is going to be a little easier to navigate.

So, this I am not willing to is a really useful phrase to use. And I'm I'm going to leave you with one final nugget, which is the flip side of that phrase, which is are you willing to, it's kind of like magic, magic dust in your relationship with your child. Because if you start saying the phrase, are you willing to before you ask them to do things and you have to start doing it, particularly when you get started, but you know, really always, this has to be something they can say no to. It can't be, are you willing to brush your teeth?

And they say no. and you say, "Okay, well then I'm going to make you brush them." It has to be genuinely their

choice. But the more that you can say, "Are you willing to the more you're allowing them autonomy in the relationship?" And really, everybody craves autonomy. And where it starts to get really magical is when your child starts saying it back to you and they say, "Are you willing to play with me right now? Are you willing to sit with me in bed because I'm feeling really lonely and and I have a need for com comfort right now? are you willing to sit with me while I fall asleep? Right?

When we start to hear that from our child that they're actually considering our needs and they're asking us to consider our needs as well and make space for both of these needs in the relationship, that's where I want to be. That's where I want to be in my relationship with everybody around me. And that's where I want to help you get to in your relationship with your child as well. So, let's bring all these ideas together. So, gentle, respectful parenting does not have to mean permissive parenting.

logical consequences and offering limited choices don't always address, in fact, very rarely address the real needs at play. What works much better is understanding both of our needs and our child's needs, right? And finding ways to meet all those needs together. And so, if you need more help applying these ideas, I would so love to see you in the free workshop, right? It's totally free. Setting Loving and Effective Limits starts on May 7th. That's less than two weeks away. Over the course of the workshop, we're going to dive deeper into identifying needs, setting boundaries where the the most appropriate tool, finding strategies that work for your unique family in each situation that you find yourself in. We are going to learn how to set limits effectively because you do need to know how to do that. But when you use all these other tools first, you'll find that you just don't have to set limits anywhere near as much as you are right now. And your needs will be met more than they are right now.

workshops completely free and parents who have participated in the past have described it as transformative. Right? So remember Corey, the two-year-old who's holding or the parent of the 2-year-old who's holding her kid down to brush his teeth said, "Everyone I've spoken with cannot believe this workshop is free. It's going to change the world." So registration's open right now only until May 6th. After that, it shuts down with the free guided workshop with getting my help and turns into a you know, you got to pay a small amount for it and do it by yourself. So, make sure you get in now while it's free. Head over to your parentingmojo.com [settinglimits](https://parentingmojo.com) to reserve your spot. Right, I've redesigned it this year to be super super accessible for busy parents. All the content is emailed to you. There's nowhere to log in. Participate anytime that works for you and I will be there along with our community to help you over the next few weeks. And you get my help in our private community. Ask questions anytime you're online. I'll give you a personalized answer for your specific situation.

Also, it can be tricky to do this in in writing. If you know you need more support with what's going on with your family, you also have the option to join the full experience where you get five group coaching calls with me over the course of the 10 days we're together. 11:00 a.m. 5:00 p.m. Pacific, you get to join whichever call works better for you. We can do a lot to support you through posts and comments in the community, but if you've experienced coaching before, you'll know we can do a lot more when we talk live. we will get a chance to coach everyone who wants to be coached. But even if you choose not to be coached directly, parents are often shocked by how much they get out of watching someone else being coached.

And some people say they find it more helpful to watch someone else being coached than being coached themselves because they end up seeing themselves in the person who's being coached. But you're kind of a bit removed from the situation. So you're not so emotionally invested and that can help you to generate new insights in your situation as well. And so the cost for the full experience is just 37 bucks, which is pretty amazing price for five 90-minute coaching calls, as well as access to all of the module content in one place so you don't lose it in your inbox, plus a bonus module on learning new communication strategies if one of your main challenges is communicating with your partner without somebody getting triggered. And so you'll watch a couple who have really struggled with their communication as they learn new tools so they can each truly be heard by the other and find strategies that meet both of their needs as well. So if you're tired of the power struggles, if you want to move away from punishments and consequences that frankly just don't even seem to work because your kid is still doing the things. If you want to build a relationship with your child where both of your needs matter, the setting loving and effective limits workshop is for you. Totally free. 37 bucks if you choose to get the full experience with the group coaching calls, forever access to the content, the bonus module on communicating with your partner. We get started on May 7th.

So that the last day to register is May 6th. And so we'll discover how to set loving and effective limits and also get your needs met by setting far fewer limits than you ever thought possible. So registration for all of it is available at your [parenting.com/setting limits](https://parenting.com/setting-limits) and I can't wait to see you there.