

Sarah: Hey, everyone. Welcome back to another episode of the Peaceful Parenting Podcast. I have Corey here with me today, and we are going to be talking about peaceful parenting teens and tweens. Welcome, Corey.

Corey: Thanks for having me.

Sarah: All right, Corey, we were just reminiscing about how long we've known each other, and you have known me for eight years now. So you've seen me through all of the teen and tween years. How are you feeling about when your kids are getting closer to those ages?

Corey: I actually feel really good about it, and I tell people this all the time. I think from watching you go through it and seeing how much you loved and enjoyed the teen years, I actually don't feel nervous at all. I feel excited. I'm really enjoying watching my kids get older.

Sarah: That's so great. Yeah. I guess Maxine was 10, Asa was 13, and Lee was 16 when we met each other. So you really have seen me through all of those years. And Maxine, I can't believe it, she's going to be 19 soon, so I'm almost done with the teen years.

And you know, it's really interesting because when they were little, Jesse and I went, "Oh my gosh, we're going to have three teenagers at the same time." And teenagers get such a bad rap. Everyone's always talking about, "Oh, just wait. Just wait until they're teenagers." And I thought teenagers were amazing. Those were some of our best years when they were teenagers, and really, it's all because of peaceful parenting.

I don't think my kids are unusual. I mean, I think they're great, but I think they were pretty typical teenagers, and I just think it's peaceful parenting.

Corey: Yeah. I can't get over how often I hear that. All the time, everyone's just being like, "What's it going to be like when they're teenagers?" It's this fear. It's this cultural thing where everyone's terrified of them.

Sarah: Yeah, yeah. And teenagers can have a hard time. It's interesting: I was looking at some of this research the other day, and there's a study—actually, I think my dad sent this to me—about how the most protective factor for a teenager not getting into trouble or having issues when they're teenagers is a warm relationship with parents. That's the number one protective factor for how teenagers do.

So in peaceful parenting, it's all about the relationship, right? It's all about connection. Since we are talking about teens and tweens today, maybe we'll talk about some of the mindset shifts that we need to make with teenagers and tweens, and then we'll go over a couple of tips. How does that sound?

Corey: That sounds great.

Sarah: Great. And before we get too far into this, part of the reason we were talking about this is because I have a course coming up. It's a small group coaching course. It's part instruction, part coaching, about peaceful parenting teenagers. Because while the concepts are the same as peaceful parenting younger kids, there are some adjustments that we need to make for teenagers, and there are also special considerations for peaceful parenting teenagers.

So if anyone's interested in that, it starts on Tuesday, on the first Tuesday in May—whatever the date is. And it will be recorded if you can't make it live. If anyone's interested in signing up, it's for six weeks starting on this coming Tuesday. We'll put a link in the show notes for more information and for signing up.

I only offer this once a year, and you really do need to have a teenager. Don't sign up for this if your kid is 12 or 11. We're really focusing on kids who are already teenagers. So check that out in the show notes if you're interested in joining us.

Let's talk about teens and tweens.

So, mindset. These are things that are really important to remember whether your kid is 4 or 14, but they're especially important. I think peaceful parenting teenagers is like peaceful parenting on steroids.

Corey: That's a really good way to describe it.

Sarah: Yeah. Everything that you need to do when your kid is younger, you need to do even more when they're teenagers.

One of the things that I always remind clients and people—and reminded myself when my kids were teenagers—is: don't take it personally. It can be so hard, I think, because they're bigger and they look like adults in some ways, right? Even parents who find it easy not to take it personally if a four-year-old is like, "You're the meanest mommy, and you're not invited to my birthday party"—it's easier for us not to take it personally when they're little. But when your 14-year-old says, "I hate you," or whatever, it can be really hard not to take it personally because they are bigger and more mature, and they seem like adults in so many ways.

Corey: And you've just invested so much time into that relationship.

Sarah: Yeah. And we have to remember, though, that their brain development is more similar to 4 than 14, and that's something we're going to get into in the course. But the way that the brain is developing, they've got big feelings, and the rational part of their brain is not as strong as it will become one day.

So really trying not to take it personally is so important when you've got a tween or a teen. And that brain transition that I was just talking about starts in the tween years, and then it continues on. My experience is that by around 15, kids are starting to smooth out a little bit with those big feelings.

Related to that, just like you would when your kid is four, try to ignore the attitude. I always say with teenagers, the drama is real, but we really need to try to ignore the attitude and respond to whatever the feeling is underneath. Again, this is all stuff that we talk about in the younger years, but with teenagers it's even more important.

Corey: I've said to parents before, you know how you reacted so calmly when they said, "I want the blue cup, not the red cup," or, "You cut my muffin wrong"? You sort of have to get back into that mentality, right? This is meaningful to them as teenagers.

Sarah: Yeah. Totally. If their hair looks bad, or the jeans they wanted to wear are in the wash, or whatever, it can be hard to remind ourselves of that.

The other big peaceful parenting idea that we really need to keep in mind, as much as we did when they were younger—and again, this is hard because they look mature. I think that's one of the biggest things: they look mature, but they are not mature yet—is that they're doing the best they can.

Corey: Yeah, totally. It's exactly like when they're little. You have to remember they really are doing the best they can. And when you think about it, think about us when we're having those really big feelings. We're still doing the best we can. So we have to give them that same sort of benefit of the doubt.

Sarah: Yeah, it's hard. And it's also hard because there's probably in the back of the mind of most people who are listening and have teenagers this thought: "I can't let them talk to me like this," right? So that's definitely something we're going to go over in the course: how to respond.

It's not that we are letting it go in the same way that we are with a four-year-old, but there's a different way to respond that's not going to be the traditional, quote, "discipline way." So really having those skills of how to respond when you do get those big feelings, and reminding yourself that they're doing the best they can, but also thinking about how you are scaffolding them to manage those feelings. That's really important too.

I also think that we want to remember—I don't know about you, but did you enjoy being 13 or 14?

Corey: Oh gosh, no.

Sarah: No, me either. Those were some of the most awful years. When everyone says, "Oh, to be young again," I'm just like, "Thank goodness that I am through those years." It was so hard to be a young teenager, or even an older teenager. So I think that when we have a teen or a tween, if we can remember how hard it can be to be that age, and just remember our own teen and tween years, that can really help.

Corey: I remember my mom used to say to me when I was super upset as a teenager something like, "Honestly, I wouldn't go back if I could. It was just such a hard time." And I remember that was the most comforting thing. I felt like she really did get that it was hard.

There's so much pressure because everyone always talks about the high school years being the best years of your life. So having someone just be like, "Actually, yeah, it is really hard," is such an important thing to hear.

Sarah: When Maxine graduated from high school, she didn't really like high school very much, and when she graduated, she said, "I'm glad I didn't peak in high school." I thought that was so funny.

Parents will often say to me—I'm thinking of this one client who is worried all the time. She thinks her daughter doesn't have good self-confidence because her daughter is so concerned with what everyone else thinks about her. And I'm like, you know what? Honestly, that is part of being this age.

I remember once, one of my kids, when he was in, I think, grade nine, I bought these socks. They were from Winners, like the TJ Maxx/Winners type of store, and they were, I think, Nike socks with the little basketball player logo on them. Is that Nike? Anyway, whatever they were, they were plain white tube socks with the little Air Jordan basketball player logo on the ankle. They were just plain. Nothing special.

I brought them home, and he was like, "I can't wear those socks."

And I said, "Why not?"

And he said, "Because everyone's going to look at them, and they're going to say, 'Why are you wearing those socks? You don't play basketball.'"

And I was like, "Really? Are you kidding me?"

I don't think anyone really would have said that, but that was his perception of being so under a magnifying lens that everyone was going to notice this, and he was going to get called out. It was just wild to me. I always think of that example of how they really feel so self-conscious, like everyone's looking at them and judging them.

I don't know. It's actually making me feel a little anxious now, thinking about how I remember how hard that was. So I think really trying to remember our own teen and tween years is important. Maybe somebody listening had the best teen years ever, and more power to you if you did, but I think most of us can recall how difficult those years were.

I love that your mom said that to you because I think sometimes we forget. That's why I'm reminding people. We forget sometimes because we get the golden glow of the past. I know some parents might say to their kids, "These are the best years of your life," and how horrible would that be to hear from your mom when you were talking about having a hard time?

Corey: I often think about how I had to wear a uniform in high school, and I remember thinking that was the best thing ever because then you all looked the same, and it took off a level of pressure.

Sarah: Yeah.

Corey: For sure. So it really shows you that if they don't have a uniform and they have to make all these choices, kids do seem to point out things about each other at this level of scrutiny that we just don't have as adults.

Sarah: I remember I had a diary where I wrote down the outfits that I wore so that I wouldn't repeat an outfit.

Corey: Oh my goodness.

Sarah: I know. Isn't that awful? I was worried that people would say, "Why are you wearing that? You wore that last week." Now I wear the same thing every day and nobody cares.

Corey: Me too. I actually realized I've gone back to a uniform because I found that so comforting in high school.

Sarah: Yeah. It's so hard.

Okay, so let's talk about some tips. There's actually a lot more in mindset, but I want to get to some tips. In the course, we're going to go over a lot more nuts and bolts about hygiene, diet, exercise, rules, guiding them, autonomy—there's a lot that we're going to talk about. Sex and drugs and alcohol. And because it's a small group, I can also cater it to whatever people feel they need.

It's about half full right now as we're taping it, but I would love to be able to work more deeply with whoever's listening to this.

So let's go on to some tips. These are basically connection tips, and one thing that I repeat over and over again in the course is: at what cost to the relationship?

I'll tell the story again. I know you've heard it a million times, but when my oldest son was in high school, he said, "Mom, so many of my friends don't answer their phones when their parents call, or they don't tell their parents where they are. Some of them don't even go home at night."

And then he said, sort of disdainfully, "You're really lucky that I care what you and Dad think."

I realized that is so much of peaceful parenting, right? Peaceful parenting teenagers is that relationship.

So let's go over some tips for connection, and we'll get to some nuts and bolts here.

Have you ever heard of sideways listening?

Corey: Yes. And you know what? I think this is actually one of the things I recommend to people the most after hearing you teach this, because I think it is the easiest.

Sarah: Why don't you explain it?

Corey: Sideways listening is setting up an environment with your kid where they can talk to you and where there's low pressure. You're side by side. This could be driving somewhere in the car, going for a walk, sitting and playing video games with them, or doing dishes together. It's any low-pressure environment where you don't have to look each other in the face and feel the intensity of, "We're having a big conversation now." It just takes that whole level down.

Or even just lying with them in bed, if they want to lie beside you in bed. Even teenagers still like to do that sometimes.

Sarah: Yeah, for sure. I think that's also probably a tip that works for anyone who's not comfortable with eye contact.

Corey: Oh gosh, that's me.

Sarah: Yeah. Some of our parents listening might have neurodivergent kids who aren't comfortable with eye contact, and they've probably discovered that those situations where you're not looking at someone are when kids tend to open up.

And that's also, I think, why with kids of all ages, you get the bedtime dump of what's happened in their day, right?

So sideways listening. Really setting up some opportunities for that can be great for teens and tweens.

Okay. Next, I'll do this like a quiz for you. Do you know what being a potted plant refers to?

Corey: Okay, so I think this is what a parent I was working with recently talked about, where they said, "I feel like I'm not having a lot of connection with my child, but I just make sure I'm always around. I'm there in the morning when they're getting ready. I'm there when they get home from school. I'm just around and available."

Sarah: Yeah. Basically, it's being a presence that is not demanding. You're there, and you're sharing space. I like to think of it as sharing space.

For us, it was pretty easy because our house isn't very big and there were a lot of people in the same room as each other. It's funny too, because when Jesse and I were mapping out how we wanted our family and our lives to be, and how we were going to work things out with working and stuff, we both talked about how we really wanted, if possible—and I'm not trying to make anyone feel bad if this isn't what they're doing—to have somebody there when kids came home from school.

Our joke was, "Even if it's just somebody for our teenagers to ignore." That was our joke, even before they were teenagers. When they were still little, we were like, "We've got to have somebody around for them to ignore when they come home from school."

And that's sort of how I think of the potted plant, right? You're there. You're sharing space. They can ignore you if they want, but that's still important.

I think a lot of parents of teens and tweens forget that because they think their kids don't need them and don't want them around, but they really do. The idea that teenagers don't want you and don't want to spend time with you is not true at all.

If you have a good relationship, their friends are going to be important and their peers are important, but they do still need you and want you. Part of how we can let them know that we're there, unobtrusively, is just being in the same room. Think of yourself as a potted plant.

Credit goes to Lisa Damour, I think. I'm 99% sure, but we'll double-check that. I think Lisa Damour is the one who coined that phrase, "Be a potted plant."

Corey: I love that because both those suggestions, the sideways listening and the potted plant, are both about not being a demanding presence. I love that.

Sarah: Yeah. Unobtrusive.

I keep wanting to give so many tips. We could do this for hours and hours, but we'll keep it to two more.

One thing that is really important to remember for connecting is: connect on their terms. Your kids are probably still in the age, or at least your younger one is probably still in the age, where they're more demanding about wanting to show you something or tell you something. If you say, "Let me finish this thing first," they're going to come right back and want to show you their picture or whatever.

Teenagers don't do that. So if you have a teenager and they want to tell you something, and you say, "I've got to finish this email first," then you go back to them and they'll be like, "Never mind."

It's really about connecting on their terms and on their timeline whenever possible. It might be impossible sometimes, but whenever you can, put down what you're doing and connect on their terms.

I remember once my middle son, he was probably 12 or 13, was really into snowboarding videos—watching snowboarding stuff on YouTube or whatever. He had it set up on the TV, and he was like, "Mom, come and watch these snowboarding videos with me."

That was really, honestly, the last thing I wanted to do: watch snowboarding videos. But I said, "Okay," and I went and sat down on the couch. By half an hour later, he was snuggled up on me, Corey. He was holding my arm and had his head on my shoulder. My big, almost six-foot-tall 13-year-old was snuggled up watching the videos with me.

That never would have happened if I had just thought, "Do I want to watch the snowboarding videos?" So that's something that's really helpful.

Corey: That makes so much sense. I was talking about this with a client. They were saying that their child seems to be really into TV, but this client says they're not a big TV watcher. Become one.

Sarah: Yeah.

Corey: Just sit down and, whatever it is that they're watching, see if you can find a show that you can get really into with them. That's the perfect way to connect, even if you're not into that TV show. I was saying that I really notice that's something you've done to connect with your teenage daughter. I was just telling you before we started about these shows.

Sarah: Yeah. I was just telling you before we started taping that we're working our way through, we're on the end of season five of Gossip Girl.

Corey: Ooh.

Sarah: I hate to even start to think about how many hours we've spent watching that show. I have a little bit of, "Okay, maybe I don't want to figure out how many hours we've spent watching that show."

But yeah, especially with my daughter, we've watched a lot of series together over the years, from Gilmore Girls to Sex Education. That's definitely something that is, you know, finding that commonality is something that's really great to do.

So yes, really trying to connect on their terms. That's the last tip that we're going to talk about.

I hope to be able to share more of this wisdom that I've had because honestly, my kids are so great. I know everybody thinks their kids are great, but I don't think that people who raise their kids without peaceful parenting have the same kind of relationship that people do who raise them with peaceful parenting. Really, honestly, I think a lot of people are finding that if they didn't raise them with peaceful parenting, maybe they don't talk to them very much or see them very much.

I just want to give a shout-out to this kind of parenting for what kind of relationship it helps you build with your kids.

Corey: I think so too. It was interesting because I keep telling people that you have something to look forward to as they get older. Everyone just gets so sad and is constantly mourning each phase that they leave behind. I'm like, it's totally normal to mourn that, but I think if you are peacefully parenting, you also can be excited about the future that you're going to have, that this isn't going to just end after 18 years.

I think this is a beautiful window of time where a lot of parents think it's their time to check out, but it's their time to really check in.

Sarah: Yeah. And there's something on social media where people say, "You only have 18 summers." But I think if you do peaceful parenting, you have way more than 18 summers.

My kids go on vacations with us. My 21- and 25-year-old will take a week off of work in the summer and go on vacation with us, or go visit my dad in Florida. Granted, it's Florida, but still, it's not a big fancy anything. They want to spend time with us.

I was just texting you the other day when I was sending you those videos of Asa and his bike race, and I think I said something like, "Honestly, how awesome my kids are as people and how much I enjoy them almost makes up for them growing up." The fact that they're cool, interesting grown-ups who actually give me advice and are "let's meet for lunch" types of people almost makes up for them flying the nest.

Corey: It's true. It does feel hard, so just embracing this precious time, I guess.

Sarah: Yeah. Okay. Well, again, we'll put the link in the show notes if anyone wants to go deeper. Hopefully, you've got a great place to start with all of the things we talked about today, but if you want to go deeper and get some personal support inside the Peaceful Parenting with Teens course, we've got it linked in the show notes.

Let us know if you have any questions. And if you don't have teens or tweens yet, keep all this stuff in your back pocket and remind yourself of it when your kids get older.

Thanks, Corey.

Corey: Thank you for having me. And I'll put in the show notes that you did write a blog post about this that I think is really great too, so I'll make sure that's in the show notes for everyone.

Sarah: Awesome. Thanks, everyone.