



Conscious Life presents  
**HEALING TOXIC  
RELATIONSHIPS**

## **Parenting Peacefully**

**Guest: Tosha Schore**

*Disclaimer: The contents of this interview are for informational purposes only and are not intended to be a substitute for professional medical or psychological advice, diagnosis, or treatment. This interview does not provide medical or psychological advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical or psychological condition.*

### **[00:00:10] Meagen Gibson**

Welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, your conference co-host. Today I'm speaking with Tosha Schore, parent coach and the founder of Parenting Boys Peacefully, where she's on a mission to create a more peaceful world, one sweet boy at a time. She's the author of *Listen: Five Simple Tools to Meet Your Everyday Parenting Challenges*, which has been translated into five languages. Tosha works with parents to care for themselves, connect with their boys deeply, set limits lovingly, and play wildly. Tosha Schore, thank you so much for being with us today.

### **Tosha Schore**

Thank you so much for inviting me on. I'm excited.

### **Meagen Gibson**

So, Tosha, I would love it if you could start by telling us how you became a parenting coach and what made you focus on the needs of boys in particular.

### **Tosha Schore**

Well, the short story is that I bottomed out and I needed help, and that led me here. The slightly longer story is that I grew up with my mom, and we were a dynamic duo, if you will, and I grew up very much steeped in a sort of feminist ideology and fighting for women's rights, and I could be whatever I wanted to be. And I went to college, and I was a women's studies major. And I ended up partnering with a man, getting married, having three boys, and finding myself in a position where I was confronted with loving these boys more than anything in the world and anyone on the planet.

And realizing that somehow the way that I had understood the feminism that was sort of, that I grew up in, was that men were the enemy. And I had to reconcile the fact that these guys weren't my enemies, these were my besties. And I needed to figure out a way to really be able to be their allies. And as their behaviors were sometimes challenging, I needed to figure out how to advocate for them sometimes despite their behaviors. And so this just led me on a journey.

I was freaking out, and I was struggling, and I was working full time, and I was exhausted, and I was yelling, and it was just hard. And so I sought out help, and I ended up finding Patty Wipfler,

who's the founder of Hand in Hand Parenting, which is an amazing organization in California in the US, and she happened to be running a support group literally like ten minutes from my house.

**[00:02:51]**

So I joined, and it transformed my life. It transformed my confidence. It gave me skills that I didn't have before. I was able to transform my boy's behaviors and support them in ways that felt good to me in my heart. And then I just got so excited about my ability to do this that I felt like I had to share it with everybody else. So that's kind of the short version. And there are a lot of little tributaries on the side, but essentially, that's how I got here.

**Meagen Gibson**

And I want to ask you one more follow up question before we get really into it: what was at stake? I mean, it was not just your sanity, but I imagine the relationship that you had with your boys as well. Right?

**Tosha Schore**

When things were hard, you're asking?

**Meagen Gibson**

Yeah, exactly.

**Tosha Schore**

Yeah. For me, what was at stake was a lot. I mean, one was the relationship with my boys because I felt like I was damaging it the way that I was behaving, and there were a lot of relationships at stake. The other relationships that I was seeing at stake were their relationships with other kids. And I was sort of catastrophizing imagining what their lives were going to look like moving forward. Then there, of course, is the relationship with the parents of those friends, not friends, or the school or whoever. And then, of course, I had a partner. So whenever you're struggling with your children, at least from my perspective, most couples who are struggling with their children are struggling with one another as well because the stress levels are just incredibly high. So there was a lot at stake.

**Meagen Gibson**

Yeah. And that's kind of what I wanted to set the table as. It's all of that. Right? Which is why it feels so overwhelming. And I relate to so much of what you said, which is why I was so excited to talk to you. As the mother of two boys as well, I distinctly remember this moment during COVID and we were homeschooling, and we were both working from home, my partner and I, and my boys were in our pool, and they were trying to drown each other, but it was like their version of play.

And I just broke down into tears and absolute desperation, and I was like, I cannot make them gentle. I've been trying for eight straight years, and apparently I'm a failure because they are not gentle and they are not kind. And my husband was like, that's not fair. There are things about boys that you can't parent out, and you're going to have to stop trying. And so there's got to be a

different way. And I've definitely been guilty in the past of undervaluing their energy and their aggression and trying to make them gentler and kinder.

**[00:05:33]**

So how do we allow our boys to do what comes naturally to them while also doing our best to kind of combat toxic masculinity? And by that, I mean men's behavior that are entitled to engage in violence on men, or I mean women, and other people of marginalized backgrounds.

### **Tosha Schore**

Yeah, I think that we don't really see a correlation between young boys who are playing physically or rough together and an increase in violent behavior as they grow older. I think that's our fear. That's not really how things tend to play out. And your question reminds me of a parent who I was working with yesterday, who was saying to me every time I want to play with my kid, all he wants to do is play sword fights, lightsabers, I can't even remember all the things, but shoot each other around the house with nerf guns. And she's just like, how do I get him to stop? That was her question.

And I just think the question is so interesting because it comes from this place of desperation. And I was like, well, essentially, you can't get them to stop. And by the way, boys are different from one another. There are all kinds of boys. But for boys who play in this aggressive way, I think one of the biggest gifts that we can give them is to work on our own fears so that we can relax enough to be able to move in and play, which is essentially what I coached this mom to do.

And I'm excited to sort of hear how things play out. I mean, I know how they're going to play out because I've coached a million parents before in this realm, and I was a parent who hated the gun thing and the Nerf guns. And I remember my kids begging me for Nerf guns and my partner saying, like, what's the big deal? And I'm just like, no. No violence. I'm anti. I don't want to teach them to use guns.

Anyway, at a certain point, we came to agreement that he would be the one to play that with them, and I would stand back because I just couldn't deal. And I acknowledged, okay, this is about me. Y'all do your thing. I'm going to stand back. And then I got jealous because they were having so much fun that I had to get in on it. And then it just became like a family thing. And I have to say, the whole thing lasted for, I mean, not even a month. It was a very short lived excitement, bit of excitement.

But the other part of your question is sort of like, how do we raise our boys to grow into emotionally intelligent men who use their power and their privilege for good, who share that power?

My assessment of the best thing that I can figure out is that we create a safe space for our young boys to be able to feel their full array of feelings, right? So that includes this big what we might feel as aggressive behavior with each other. We need to really kind of check ourselves to join them in that play, to allow them to enjoy that, but to also not sort of box them in to the feelings of anger or make them figure out how to deal with their feelings on their own.

Which is why I don't promote strategies such as isolation or shame based strategies that many of us use because we don't know what else to do, like timeouts or come back when you're feeling

better. Because I think one of the most horrible things we can do to our boys is send them the message that when you're struggling, we're gone, and you need to deal, because that is what leads to them shutting down. They can't function on top of those feelings, so they have to find ways of suppressing them.

**[00:09:25]**

And that's when we get into repetitive behaviors when they're young, whether it be thumbsucking or you see kids whose shirts are totally drenched, their sleeves or their collars are completely drenched from chewing on their shirts or obsessive masturbation, something we'll see. There's lots of different repetitive patterns that we'll see. And then as they grow, you don't want it to turn into addictions of all kinds. I mean, we all know that there's a huge challenge that men are facing right now with addiction. Yeah, there's a lot of numbing going on, and we need to change that. I think we need to create a safe space for our boys to be able to feel.

### **Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. And that's really what it comes down to, isn't it? Is the disconnection from feelings, the compartmentalization, of only certain feelings being acceptable for men to have, right? No vulnerability, no sensitivity. If you fall down, there's no crying aloud, like those kinds of things, only toughness, only strength, only all of these things that are held up as the bastion of masculinity. That's not helping our boys grow into men with a full range of integrated feelings and expressions, is it?

### **Tosha Schore**

It is not. And I want to be clear that, you asked me sort of why I focus on boys, and I just want to be clear that when I'm talking about boys, I'm actually really talking about people who move through the world as boys. So I'm not talking about what gender you were assigned at birth. I'm talking about how you move in the world because we absolutely treat boys differently than we treat girls. I mean, I have been witness to boys on the soccer field who get cleated in the neck and are in pain and crying and get berated by the coach, get it together and get back out here or you're out next game kind of a thing.

Whereas the girl gets a pat on the shoulder and like, hey, take a break for a second and catch your breath and when you feel better, come back in, kind of a thing. It happens all the time. We look at the situation for boys in school. I get called every week, I'm talking to parents whose kids are kicked out of preschool. Preschool. It's like, we don't know what to do with the two year old, three year old, four year old, boys and these big behaviors.

We get scared of them. And then they see these adults going like, oh, my God, I don't know what to do with this kid. And then more fear sets in for them because they're like, well, if she's scared, if he's scared, and they don't know what to do with me, maybe there is a problem here and then the behavior spirals and gets worse.

### **Meagen Gibson**

Yeah. And there's so much self examination to do as parents too, or teachers, for that matter, because it really is the catastrophizing, isn't it? I mean, I've definitely had those moments where, whether it was my two year old, my four year old, my six year old, like all of these developmental

milestones I can remember where I was getting calls from teachers. I remember when my oldest would go into his preschool class, you named preschool, they had those magna-tiles, which are these magnetic tiles that you can build big towers with. And when he would come into the class in the morning, all of the other kids would go like this because they knew when he walked in he was going to destroy their towers.

**[00:13:01]**

And it wasn't because he was a sociopath. It was because it was really fun to knock stuff down. But in my mind, I'm like, oh my God, it's my first child, he's two years old, he's going to be a sociopath when he grows up because he likes to destroy other people's stuff. And I was like, no, he just likes things to fall. Doesn't mean he's mean. It doesn't mean he has some sort of pathological desire. Or the way that boys can't, or sometimes struggle, and this happens to girls a lot too, but struggle in our normalized teaching environments where it's like sit very still and pay attention and there's no movement and it's very rigid and for 8 hours a day, which is completely unnatural for a lot of people.

### **Tosha Schore**

Right. And I think what I see a pattern of is that when a girl is struggling in an external situation, external environment, like school, for example, oftentimes we are looking at adults who go, well, what's going on here? What's the environment that might be contributing to this? Or how can we help her? Versus when it's boys, it's often just a straight up blame and his fault. And there's not often a lot of thinking about whether or not the expectations that we're setting for this child are reasonable or whether or not the adults are taking enough responsibility for setting limits around where limits need to be set.

So, for example, when you tell your story about your boy knocking down the magna-tiles, I imagine there are a lot of listeners who are going, well, that's not okay. He can't just go in and knock over everybody's magnet tiles. And I just want to say, yeah, of course that's not okay. What we're saying is not that those behaviors are okay. I would come at it from the perspective of that's a kid who's doing the best he can in that moment, and we as adults are seeing that the behavior is problematic.

So rather than sit back and expect him to do differently when we're seeing that he can't, let's look at our own behaviors and say, okay, how can we intervene here such that this doesn't happen, so that those kids don't get their things knocked down? And so that even more importantly, the relationships between those kids don't get damaged. Right? Because ultimately that's what we're looking at. We want to help our boys develop close, kind, respectful, loving relationships with other kids. And while we're talking about it, yeah, other boys.

There's so much homophobia. There's so much, in the United States, it's insane how few close friends men have versus women. And just the other day, a female friend of mine said, oh, I was talking to so and so who's in my partner's men's group. And she was saying, yeah, I was telling him we should start a women's group. And then I was like, well, we don't really need a women's group because we talk to each other all the time, we share all this stuff all the time. But it's been transformational for this group of, I don't know, ten or twelve men who meet monthly and they did it out of desperation because they had no one to talk to.

**[00:16:18] Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. And they're all going through very similar versions of the same thing, and they all feel completely alone, right?

**Tosha Schore**

Absolutely. And then the world suffers. So the mission of my business, Parenting Boys Peacefully, is to create a more peaceful world, one sweet boy at a time. Why? Because I feel like as parents of young boys, we have an amazing opportunity to transform the world by shifting the way we discipline, because we bring peace into our homes. That ripples out into our school communities, into our faith based communities, into our sports and arts and clubs, and it just ripples out. And then these boys are going to grow up into men, and some of them are going to have a lot of power and privilege and imagine what they could do with that if they were thinking straight.

**Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. I think about we see these examples of, I'm going to use men and masculinity interchangeably, they're not the same, I just want to acknowledge that, but very, what we would call, masculine men displaying these what we think are extremely rare vulnerabilities. I think about the Senator that was just on a late night talk show the other day talking about his treatment for depression and how just absolutely hopeless he felt. And we all hold that up as this huge example of vulnerability. And it should be the norm, not that it should be the norm that people are suffering from depression, but that they seek treatment, that they are healing, that they're talking about they're hard and what got them through. That's what we want to normalize, not hold it up as the exception.

**Tosha Schore**

Right. And that's one of the reasons, I should say one of the opportunities, that we have in parenting young boys is that if we can parent by connection as opposed to using our control over them and putting a rift in the relationship then what happens is as they grow, they come to us with their challenges and they get lots of practice as they're growing up, coming to us. Hey, I was at so and so's house and there was porn. I was at this event and somebody made a racist comment, what do I do?

Or I made a mistake, right, I was at a party, I was drinking, I shouldn't have been. And I'm calling you because I need a ride home. Yeah. No. Do I want him so drunk that he can't drive home? No. But am I happy that he calls and doesn't drive drunk, but knows that he's not going to be berated and shamed for doing that, but instead welcomed home safely? Yeah. It makes a huge difference.

**Meagen Gibson**

Yeah, absolutely. My kids came home off the bus yesterday, and we walk home from the bus stop on purpose because I read somewhere once that when you walk side by side with someone or if you ride in a car with them, they will talk more openly. And so I intentionally walk with them because they're in that side by side sort of disclosure shape. And they talk about all kinds of things. They talk about the language that they hear. They talk about the fights that they see at school. They talk about what someone tried to share with them on the bus.

**[00:19:40]**

And sometimes it's somebody else and sometimes it's them pretending it's somebody else when they really want to disclose something they did. And so we want to make sure that they're coming to us, and it doesn't mean, and I want to make sure that anybody who's listening to us does not expect or hear that we're trying to say that there is any version of perfect parenting or that you get it right all the time, right?

**Tosha Schore**

Definitely not. Yeah. I talk in my community about getting yourself into good enough parenting shape. I'm like, we just got to get ourselves into good enough parenting shape. We're not going for perfection. We're never going to be perfect. It's not possible because there isn't nearly enough support in any of the societies that we live in around the world for this work of parenting to make that possible. So, many of us are holding full time paid jobs at the same time that we have this full time 24/7 job of parenting.

And speaking of gender divisions, this is another issue we have and another opportunity that we have as parents of young boys and getting them involved, is that the feminist movement has been amazing in terms of making huge gains for women. I mean, we still have a long way to go, but we've made huge strides, and the boys have been left behind. The men are not doing well. And so where women have moved into the workplace, men have not taken over, and this is in a heterosexual relationship, the men have not picked up the slack. And so many women still in 2023 are finding themselves full time paid work and full time CEO of the family managing everything.

I had a client yesterday, and she said, I asked ahead of time, please let me know what your family looks like, and so she said, me, it's my partner, our three children, an Opaire and a nanny. And she got on, and she's like, I know it's ridiculous. I'm totally embarrassed or whatever. And I thought to myself, I didn't think to myself, I mean, I said out loud, I want to appreciate you. I think that's amazing. You have the resource to be able to do that and to get the support that you need to do all of these jobs that you're doing. They both work full time, and they have three kids. They're young. They have doctors appointments every week. Somebody's been sick every day since school started. The first five years of life, someone's always sick.

**Meagen Gibson**

Right.

**Tosha Schore**

So there's a lot of work to do.

**Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. I resonated with so much of what you said. I remember I had a friend who's an entrepreneur and has several businesses, and somebody said to me, how does he get all of this done? It's amazing that he can remember all of these things. And I said, well, he has a partner that doesn't work, and he has a nanny full time. That's how he does all of that. It's not that mysterious. He's also smart and capable and has certain tendencies that make him successful, but he also has just a ton of support and doesn't have to take up any part of his brain running his household.

**[00:22:53]**

It feels harder to you, this was a woman I was speaking to, because you work full time and you don't have that kind of support. And I wasn't bashing that support. I was like, good on you. We can't compare ourselves equally in unequal situations.

**Tosha Schore**

That's right.

**Meagen Gibson**

Yeah. And I was just telling my kids yesterday, we were talking about income, it's kind of a sidebar, but they were saying, oh, so and so who has this illustrious career is rich because they make this much money. And I was like, well, there's a lot of factors in wealth and context, depends on what city you live in. Do you have health care? Is it provided for you? Do you have student loans? I was just running through, I was like, I've made way more money than I make now, and I had way less money at the end of the month because of the circumstances of my life.

And I think about it the same way in the currency of our households, in the labor distribution and I've often said that I came from a generation, I think we're of the same generation that we were told and championed that we could be anything we wanted. And so many people came before us and allowed it so that we could, we could have checking accounts, we can own homes, we could get a car loan, we can get an education. But nobody taught the boys what that was going to cost them or how they were going to have to adapt in order for us ladies to get it all. And so, yeah, that's what we're trying to do with the next generation, isn't it?

**Tosha Schore**

Yes, absolutely.

**Meagen Gibson**

So how can we shift our attention from trying to parent things out of our boys and instead focus on what we want to parent into them?

**Tosha Schore**

Well, it's interesting. When I think about the question parent out versus parent into, my first thought is they're separate beings from us. And it's really more about just accepting who they are. I can't really parent something in or parent something out of them. I can only model, meet them with love, and acknowledge that they're always doing their best. When that best isn't good enough, make a plan to help life go better for them and get the support that I need to implement that plan. So I think that was the first thing I thought when you said that. I think it's really about accepting them where they are. And I think when they're struggling, that tends to be harder for us.

But when you think about it, we can't ever get anybody to change. But when we see somebody who's struggling, like, we've got a young boy who's struggling, I often talk about, like, we're here and he's here and we're wishing that he would just be over here with us. We're wishing and so



we're calling and we're saying, stop hitting your sister. Stop hitting your sister. You know, that's okay, stop hitting your sister. And he's over here sort of flailing or whatever. He can't change. If you don't stop hitting your sister, no iPad for the rest of the week or whatever it is, right? And he's floundering. He's floundering and he can't change and nothing's changing.

**[00:26:02]**

But if we move over to him, if we set a loving limit, if we move in and say, hey, sweet boy, I can't let you hit your sister, and we make that hitting stop and we allow him to release whatever feelings are driving that behavior in the first place, right? So maybe he needs to flail and fight and cry. And if we can allow that process to happen, he will come out more sparkly and fresh on the other side and he will be able to think more clearly and he will be able to behave in better ways.

But people don't change when they feel like others are against them, whether it's our kids or anybody else. So it's hard to get a kid to change when they're feeling like you want them to be different, regardless of which direction that difference is. They're only able to change from a place of feeling like they're accepted where they are now. Does that make sense?

### **Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely, completely resonates with me because kids also can't differentiate between I am bad and you don't like my behavior if you're not careful. The two things get completely merged in their minds of, like, hitting is bad, therefore I am bad.

### **Tosha Schore**

Right. And I think even more importantly is that we as parents confound those two things. We don't understand that there's a difference. We see, quote, unquote, what we label bad behavior, and we label that kid bad, right? He's the class clown or he's the mean kid or he's the bully or he's the whatever it is. And the thing is, it's harder to deconstruct that as they grow older, when they're adults, but we have this opportunity when they're young to remember, okay, there's always this sweet boy under here.

I tell parents to come to me, and the kid is hitting and pulling their hair out and punching them and all sorts of, we've got hard behaviors going on in these little guys, yeah. And the first thing I always say, and I was just talking to a guy yesterday, working with a dad who's in the military and has that background, and he's a super sweet man, and trying to figure this out with his little guy who's struggling. And we were talking about this idea that there's this sweet boy under there always, even when he's got these yucky behaviors that are being shown on top.

And I was telling him, if you focus on the behaviors, like, he was really frustrated because he wouldn't brush his teeth. And then the dad was losing his patience and yelling and shaming and feeling horrible about it. And I suggested instead of focusing on the refusal to brush the teeth, the refusal to do what he was saying, which is this behavior of, I can't cooperate, I'm stuck, can you focus on that sweet boy underneath and just sort of think to yourself, the question always being, how can I connect? How can I connect?

How can I help this child feel like I see him, that I love him, that we're going to get through this? Not that the behavior is okay. This is where we get all confused. But if I'm kind, if I'm empathetic, then he's going to think it's okay to not get ready for bed when I tell him to or whatever. It doesn't work

that way. That's not how our brains work. So it's this idea that there's a sweet boy under there, and there are these yucky behaviors, and if we can focus on connection, we often see the behaviors fall away.

**[00:29:42]**

So we were talking about like, well, what if you offered five minutes of play? You just took a break and you realized, okay, I'm about to get on that train that I can't get off, the shaming, yelling and what if you stop and you say, hey, how about we do five minutes of play, and then let's get back to getting ready for bed? That's focusing on the connection. Then what happens is, you play, he feels much more connected. Both of your nervous systems calm. You remember that you actually like the kid. So you can behave differently, and then the challenging behavior kind of falls away. So the mistake, I think, often is we're focusing on these behaviors rather than the roots of them and connecting with the sweet boy underneath and giving them tools to show up differently.

**Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. I love all of that framing, and that's where, that's such a beautiful image, and I want to leave it there. Tosha, how can people find out more about you and your work?

**Tosha Schore**

I'm online at [parentingboyspeacefully.com](https://parentingboyspeacefully.com). I'm horrible on social media. You can find me places, but I'm really bad at it. I don't like it, but [parentingboyspeacefully.com](https://parentingboyspeacefully.com) is probably the best place to find me.

**Meagen Gibson**

Good for you for not giving into the peer pressure on social media. I'm proud of you. Pat yourself on the back.

**Tosha Schore**

Yeah, it's not good. I will share just, could I just share a quick side? Because so many parents come to me, and they're struggling with their kids with electronics. I just have to share a story. So one of my kids fought for years. So we had a rule in our house that electronics stayed in public places, so no upstairs and bedrooms, no bathrooms, kind of a thing. And he fought it till he moved out of the house when he was 18. He's 21 now, and he moved away into an apartment with roommates. And it was not a month after he had left that he called me and he said, I just want to say thank you.

I have roommates. I can't even talk to my roommate. I wake up, and he's sitting at his console on his game, and I go to bed, and I have to ask him to turn it down because I can't sleep. He's on that thing for over 14 hours a day, and it's like, okay, that was a lot of work and a lot of years I had to wait. I got a thank you in the end. So sometimes the ROI is, like, way down the line. And then a couple of weeks ago, and he's played, he sometimes struggles with anxiety, and he has played with putting away social media and logging off his accounts for periods of time, which is, you think it's hard for me? It's not that hard for me. But it's really hard when you're in college and you're 21, and it's everything.

**[00:32:32]**

And he's played with it gone back and forth. Like, three weeks ago, he texted our family chat and said, I have moved my SIM card to a flip phone that I bought. If you want me, call me, I'm out. And he's like, I'm doing this for the full quarter and I'm going to see how it goes. And he talked to me the other day, he said his anxiety is essentially gone. He's getting up, going for a run every morning, meditating, going to work, going to class. He's like, I feel so much better. And he's like, you know what? Everyone who wanted to find me, found me.

**Meagen Gibson**

It's so true. Oh, my gosh, I love that. And yes, and for anybody listening, the return on investment is sometimes so far down the road.

**Tosha Schore**

It is. But don't give up. It's so worth it.

**Meagen Gibson**

Exactly.

**Tosha Schore**

So worth it.

**Meagen Gibson**

I love it. Thank you so much, Tosha. It was great to be with you today.

**Tosha Schore**

Really great to be with you as well.