



Commentary Transcript: *Big Little Lies*

Clip 2: Season 1, Episode 1

We're still on the drive to Chloe's first day of First Grade, and Madeline is melting down over the behavior of a teenage driver in the car ahead of them.

Let's watch the scene.

[PLAY SCENE]

This commentary is about showing your child how to cope with fear or uncertainty. In this case, Mom shows that you cope with unbridled anger, verbal assaults on others, and a tone that drips with righteous indignation.

Let's break this down.

PAUSE: "You want to see how teenagers die? This is how."

OK, not to excuse texting and driving, but to put this into perspective. This girl may be driving while distracted, but she's in a busy area and coming up on a stop sign, so major injury and high-speed fatalities are not imminent. Madeline's reaction is highly overblown and based on fear and judgment, not on an indisputable truth: they're "going to die." Madeline is taking a ride on her fear and vents it, rather than taking a moment to gather herself before reacting.

PAUSE: Girl flips the bird.

Madeline's judgment is clouded, pushing her into attack mode. She's allowed herself to lose control, even though she's supposed to be the adult in this situation. She's also surprised when the girl she's yelling at flips her the bird. But considering that Madeline was honking and yelling at her first, the girl's response seems almost justified. Madeline would probably have expected such a reaction if the other driver were an adult.

PAUSE: "I'll be right back."

Madeline is so worked up she's actually going to get out of her car and leave Chloe in the back seat alone on a road Madeline just deemed potentially dangerous. She's so confident in her own righteousness that she's ready to unload on a teenage girl—acting as if that's useful, normal, or acceptable behavior.

PAUSE: "They're dead."

This is a perfect example of the expectations Madeline has set for Chloe. Chloe clearly knows how Mom reacts when she's overwhelmed by anger, and she can already predict what's coming for the other girls. And it's not going to be pretty.

So, how might something like this be handled in real life?

If Madeline were modeling healthy coping behaviors, she might have just said, "Oh my gosh, I



feel so scared and annoyed when people are driving distracted. Things can happen so fast when you're behind the wheel; it's important to always be paying attention. When you start driving, I hope you'll remember that it's super dangerous to check your phone or text while you're driving, Chloe. I hope these girls get to where they're going safely."

In this version of the dialogue, no one would be flipping out or flipping birds, no teenagers would be verbally assaulted by adults, and Chloe would learn how to express fear and uncertainty in a more skillful way.

A few thoughts about this exploration...

Being an adult doesn't give you free reign to say whatever you feel, however you want, expecting others—especially kids—to absorb your emotional outbursts. If Chloe had been the one freaking out, Madeline would probably have said, "Calm down. That's not acceptable behavior, young lady."

Besides, when you yell or get overly emotional, it triggers a response in others where self-protection takes priority over listening. One person yelling and another not listening is the perfect recipe for a negative interaction.

In real life, Chloe could have learned a very different lesson on how adults should behave and how to cope in stressful situations. Instead of reacting emotionally, Mom could have demonstrated a few key skills:

First, self-soothing to calm down after a stressful encounter. That might sound like, "Whew! That happened fast; give me a second to calm down."

Second, identify the triggered emotion: "That was really scary."

Third, translate it into a clear statement: "I would prefer that people not text while driving because it's so dangerous."

And finally, highlight the lesson: "Keep that in mind when you're driving, Chloe."

This kind of approach would have been a powerful life lesson on coping and learning from experiences. Instead, Chloe watched her mom get swept away by her feelings and vent those feelings on others.

Every emotionally charged situation offers opportunities to practice self-management and teach kids how to understand and act on their own emotions. In this case, that lesson could have been imparted in less than 30 seconds—without teaching Chloe that adults don't have to control themselves, and without an adult justifying aggressive behavior toward teenagers.



We're all learning as we go, and there is no perfect way to think, feel, be, or communicate. The lesson here is that flipping out is seldom the best choice. If we have kids, flipping out in front of them may cause more lasting impacts than we might expect.

Kids are constantly learning how to be and what to expect from us based on how we behave. In their minds, there are no nuances... they may think, "If Mom flips out over small things, she can be counted on to flip out over anything big I need to tell her. I should walk on eggshells around her, or she might pop."

But if Mom practices self-care and communicates thoughtfully in really difficult situations, the kid might think, "Mom can be counted on to keep her cool when I make mistakes or need to tell her something she might not like. She can handle whatever happens, and I can learn how to as well."

Here are a few questions you're invited to consider related to these topics...

- Do you tend to have big emotional reactions to things you don't like? What situations tend to bring out your strongest reactions?
- Do you have a habit of flipping out in front of your kids or your spouse? How has that affected their ability to trust you to calmly handle challenging situations? Do they keep things from you because they're afraid of your reaction?
- What do you think would need to change for you to see the events unfolding around you as a "story" playing out... a story that you can watch without getting caught up in or evaluating or judging? What might it feel like to not be dragged into action by your strong emotions?

OK, that's it for this exploration of keeping your cool and modeling healthy coping behaviors... for your own feelings of stability and as a lesson for the little eyes that might be watching. I hope you found a few useful tidbits that you can apply in your own life.