

Episode 16: “Safe” Adults Aren’t Always Safe: Lessons from the Latest Clergy Scandal

Christy Keating 00:08

Hi, friends, and welcome to The Heartful Parent Podcast. I'm your host, Christy Keating. In this podcast, we talk about it all, our parenting, our partnering and our professional lives, because they are all a part of us. And we were never meant to do this alone.

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Hello, friends, and welcome back to The Heartful Parent Podcast today is going to be a little bit different than what you've been getting over previous weeks. And part of that is because of the holiday weekend here in the US. Part of that is because May is a month with five Tuesdays. And part of that is because I feel the need to address some things. And I don't know quite where to start. For a full confession. I have not mapped out what I'm about to say. But I have some things to say nonetheless. So thanks for joining me, before we dive in, there are three caveats that I need to issue and the first is that there will be swearing in this. So if that offends you, maybe don't listen or plug your ears when you think it's about to happen. I still think what I'm going to share with you today is important enough to set that aside, but just don't want you to be surprised by it. Second of all, this is not a kid friendly episode, we are talking about very adult things, we are talking about kids being harmed. And so please do not listen to this episode with your children in the room. Or popping your airpods, your earbuds, put on your headphones, whatever you got to do. The third warning is that we are talking about child sexual abuse on a large scale in this episode, and if you are a survivor, I want you to be warned about that before you dig in. So please take care of your heart as you listen. But also, I think it's really important that we all are aware of this.

I'm recording this on May 24. And yesterday, May 23 2023. The Illinois Attorney General. So for those of you based outside of the US, Chicago is obviously major US city based in the state of Illinois. And the Attorney General is like the head lawyer for a given state that it is typically an elected position. And they have a lot of power to do massive investigations and bring criminal charges. And you know, depending on the state, they have jurisdiction over a pretty wide variety of things. So in this case yesterday on May 23, which will be last week by the time you hear this. The Illinois Attorney General released a report detailing decades upon decades of child sexual abuse by Catholic clergy, it detailed 451 Priests and other religious figures having abused nearly 2000 children. I want to say that again, we have nearly 500 priests abusing 2000 children. And those are only the ones that we know about. Those are only the ones that have been substantiated to date. And what's more disturbing than even those statistics that I just shared with you is the cover ups in the Catholic Church and the Catholic Diocese that allowed these abusers to hide in plain sight and to keep doing what they were doing. And if I sound

mad right now, it's because I am fucking furious. I am furious that an organization that holds itself out as a moral compass for people allowed this to happen and what is even more upsetting is that the report out of Illinois is not the first one. This has happened in what we know in Boston, right, that's what sort of first broke the whole thing open. If you haven't seen the movie spotlight, you should absolutely see it. There have been reports out of Pennsylvania, there have been reports out of Maryland, of a similar nature. And so this is not intended to, you know, demean anyone who is a practicing Catholic. But it is intended to say, hey, we need to be paying attention. How can this happen?

And I'm going to talk about that a little bit. And I'm also going to talk about what your kids need to know, to protect them from this, because I don't care where you live right now, if you know, you probably aren't in Illinois, I don't know. But whatever state you are, in whatever city you are, in whatever country you are in, if you think that this has not happened in your state, city country, by the Catholic organization that is based there, frankly, are delusional. And if we think this doesn't happen in other organizations, other churches, youth serving organizations, public schools, etc. We're delusional. The I think what's so upsetting to me with this one is this the depth, the breadth, the scope, of not just the abuse, but of the cover ups, which have been, you know, we've known for years that this keeps happening and happening and happening. We, as parents have to figure out how to make this stop happening. And the first and number one way and so here's my challenge to you parents, the number one thing that you have to do is you have to demand better, you need to be asking what sort of training everyone is required to undergo, you need to be asking what sort of policies they have in place, just both in terms of reporting abuse, and sort of going up the chain? Do they report it to law enforcement? Or do they handle it internally, which is what the Catholic Diocese has been doing for decades? Do they have policies about who can and cannot be alone with children, you know, in like one on one sort of setting, you want to know what kind of training they are offering to kids, and what training they are offering to parents.

Because I am a strong believer that the only way that we can reduce or eliminate abuse is with a trifecta approach, where we are educating professionals, whether those be Catholic priests, or kindergarten teachers, they need to be getting regular. And by regular I mean every one to two years training on child sexual abuse prevention, recognizing abuse and other adults and older children and how to stop it what to do, where to report, etc, etc. When need to be educating kids, about their bodies about the right to be secure and safe and private in their bodies. And how to say no, and what you know that they have the right to tell and back that they should tell. And I say that because it's important that we talk to them. And also no child is ever, ever, ever, ever responsible for anything that happens to them. That always 100% lies in the hands of the abuser. And we need to be educating parents so that we know how what to look out for what to allow our children to do what not to allow our children to do who can get access to our kids, who is likely more likely than others to abuse etc, etc. So my first challenge to you is in whatever youth serving organizations and whatever religious organization you are in, to start asking questions like now start asking questions, bring this report to them say, this is what happened in Illinois. It happened in Maryland, it happened in Pennsylvania, what are you doing to

prevent it from ever happening here moving forward? And I mean, I think you could even walk in with the assumption that it has already happened, right? That's a pretty safe assumption. Okay, I'm taking some deep breaths because I know like this thing just gets me really upset like the number of children families, lives destroyed by what those priests did, is absolutely incomprehensible. You know, those are all adverse, what we call adverse childhood experiences. And they are they result in worse outcomes health wise, mental health wise, like lifespan wise, I mean, I can't even begin to describe the impact that that has generationally. on families. So why am I talking about this? Well, because I'm mad. And I have a platform in which to do that. And because I am so intent on sharing with the world ways to raise our children, both brain and body safe, we all need to know about this. Okay, the other reason that I'm talking about this is because in the talks in the safety talks that I give, I talked about three forms of safe boundaries.

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And if you haven't heard me give a safety talk, hire me to do that for your organization. But here's something that you need to know our children need to have us teach them and model for them three important types of boundaries. The first ones are physical boundaries, the second are personal boundaries. And the third are relational boundaries. I'm going to explain what each of those is. Alright, physical boundaries, is exactly what it sounds like. It's the idea that every person gets the right to decide what happens to their body, what they like, what they don't like, what they want, what they don't want, and when they like it, and when they want it. That should start from a teeny, teeny tiny age, that we should be demonstrating physical autonomy, you know, autonomy over their physical bodies. We should be sending the message that they do not need to touch anyone hug anyone kiss anyone sit on anyone's lap, high five, anyone fist bump anyone if they don't want to. This is a hard and fast rule. And I don't mean to sound insensitive. But I don't care where in the world you hail from, I don't care what your culture is. I don't care what your religious background is, this should always be true. And yes, there are many cultures and family cultures, where touching and physical affection is part of the game or part of the part of the culture. It is in my family, we were very physically affectionate. And we have to send the message to our children, that their comfort and their autonomy is more important than an adult's comfort, and an adult's wants or needs, we have to start shifting that narrative. Because if we don't, we see abuse happen in families and outside of families, right? It starts with those physical boundaries.

Okay, the next piece is personal boundaries. And this is the idea that we want our children to understand. And we again, we do this by talking with them, and by modeling it for them, that there are some questions or conversations that we have only with our safe adults that we don't have with the priest that we don't have with the coach. Right that we don't have with the checkout guy at the Safeway grocery store. We talk about, you know, our bodies and sex and safety with our safe adults. We do we ask questions about those things with our safe adults, but not with other people. And the reason for that is a right we don't want our kids going to the grocery store and talking about, you know, anything. But also we need them to understand that when adults are asking them questions, or sharing information with them. That is something we're supposed to talk about with our safe adults. That that is not okay.

Right, a coach talking to you. And talking to a child about their sex life, or a high school babysitter or talking with a young child about the pornography that they watched over the weekend. Right, our kids need to know that's not okay, then that there are certain conversations that we simply don't have outside of our safe adults who should be clearly defined for your kids.

Okay, and then the third one and the one that's most important with what we're talking about today, in light of this sexual abuse that has been proliferated by the Catholic Church, our relationship boundaries, and that means our children need to understand in really clear terms, what is a normal, healthy, safe relationship between them and the people in their lives? So between them and the priest, between them and their soccer coach between them and their piano teacher, between them and their third grade teacher? They need to know what is appropriate, safe, healthy, normal, so that when one of those figures I should add babysitter in there or older kid, right? When one of those individuals tries to violate those relationship boundaries or do something outside the healthy boundaries of that relationship, our children have a red flag that go up and say this isn't okay. And I need to tell my safe adult. And those 2000 Children that were abused in Illinois alone. And again, only the ones we know about. Right, those 2000 children were not taught this. This was not emphasized. for them. They didn't know this. Their parents probably didn't know this. And by virtue of the fact that that was a religious figure, and the so called moral guide of their community, it was assumed that they were safe. And that is a really dangerous assumption. And so yeah, I am mad, I am mad, mad mad. This comes on the heels of too many other things happening in the United States, at least, that are making our children less safe. And as a parent educator and a child sexual abuse prevention proponent and expert and as a parent, my heart is breaking for all those children and all those families. It's not okay. It is absolutely not. Okay. And I will say, I just want to add to this, that when this report came to light, there was a statement made by the Archdiocese of Chicago, which is the largest archdiocese in Illinois. And one of the things that they said, is, well, they're concerned that the data is being presented in ways that could be misleading. That's a sorry, not sorry, kind of response. That is a bullshit response. Sorry, I'm mad.

So I want to come back and say, we as parents have the obligation to talk to our children about those three boundaries, right, personal, physical and relational boundaries. And we also need to start asking some questions. If you're not Catholic, ask questions where your child does attend church, or plays soccer, or does gymnastics, or takes music lessons, ask questions. And if you're not getting satisfactory answers, go up a level. Like we need to ask questions, and we need to demand better of the adults that are guiding our children and our families. All right, I'm gonna take a big deep breath. I mean, yeah, that's all I can say right now is I'm going to take a big, deep breaths. And then I'm going to start asking some questions, which, for any of you who know me, you know, I do anyway. But I'm going to keep asking. I hope that this was helpful if you hadn't heard about this report you needed to. And like I said, I issue that challenge. Ask some questions, talk to your kids. Do it this week. All right. That's it. For the heartfelt Maron podcast this week. I'm sending all of you hugs. I am sending all of your kiddos hugs, because I am such a believer that every child deserves to grow up healthy. Happy, and hold on this isn't okay. All right. I'll be back next week with a much more regulated episode. If you have thoughts,

questions or things you'd like to know about, please reach out to me I'm here to support you in whatever way I can. Alright, take care

