

Episode 5: Unpacking the Emotions of Parenthood with Wendy Sloneker

Christy Keating 00:10

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

Christy Keating 00:37

Welcome back friends, to The Heartful Parent Podcast. I am so excited today to introduce you to Wendy Sloneker. Wendy is a friend who I've known for a couple of years now. And a colleague, she and I are working on a really exciting project with another parent educator for parents of middle schoolers. And Wendy, has a background that, and a specialty that might not always jump out at you as being helpful or important to parents. Because Wendy, whose company is called Heart Healing From Loss is a Grief Coach and Specialist. And when I first started talking to Wendy about what she did, I realized that the work that she does privately and in group sessions with folks is so relevant to parenting, because there is so much loss and grief that we experience as parents in so many different ways, right? It's not just grief and loss isn't something that just happens when someone dies. But you know, through changes in our lives and our children's lives, and when things don't turn out the way we thought they were going to; our kid isn't who we thought they were going to be or so many other arenas where we where we deal with that emotion. And so I love that Wendy is here to talk to us a little bit about that today.

In this conversation, we really dig into some tools that parents can use to manage themselves, or as Wendy describes it so beautifully, reparent ourselves, she talks about the difference between being an emotion like being mad and the difference between saying we are feeling mad, and how if we can acknowledge it as a feeling and give ourselves some space that can be so helpful in managing it. She talks about the importance of being present and of the self-talk that we are using, and some other really beautiful practical tools that I think are helpful in dealing with the daily stressors and worries of parenting. So I hope you enjoy this conversation with Wendy Sloneker. Without further ado, let's get started.

Wendy, Wendy, Wendy, I'm so excited to have you here and to introduce you to my listeners, and to dig into emotions and feelings and all the stuff that we as parents are dealing with. So welcome. And thank you for being here.

Wendy Sloneker 03:25

I am thrilled and happy and a half to be here. I love that being a half. Hi, everybody. Hi, everybody.



Christy Keating 03:33

Oh, you guys, everyone, everyone, y'all are in for a treat with my dear friend Wendy Sloneker. I want to, you know, obviously I have shared what you do. And when somebody here is like that you work in grief, or that you're a grief coach, that might not necessarily resonate with them as something relevant to all parents. I mean, you know, obviously, someone's going through an acute episode of grief. But can you just share with us a little bit about how grief is for everyone? And you don't have to be dealing with an acute episode of grief? For it to be important to learn how to manage that emotion?

Wendy Sloneker 04:15

Oh my gosh, 100%. Right. Well, grief is something that we are navigating all the time. I won't say that we're like consciously dealing with it at every given month because we're not, however, change. You may have noticed, just try this thought on in your own life-change has been a constant companion. And so some changes we're excited about and thrilled about and have dreamed of and some changes are they just blow like we did not want them we did not sign up for them. That is not what we had in mind. And so that can change just on its own of the 40 Plus life events that just plain happen. They can bring about feelings of loss, and feelings of grief. Now, a lot of people try to opt out of well doesn't really apply to me grief doesn't apply, because it's not a death. However, what if it's a loss? What if it's just something that is heartbreaking? Or tender? Or maybe there's some resentment or anxiety or worry, these are things to know. And just ask, I'm not here to say that, you know, every one of those 40 Life Events means grief. No, this is for you to try on and test out from inside your own lived experience.

Christy Keating 05:39

Yeah. You know, it's so interesting as I was just listening to that, because this podcast isn't just about parenting, right? It's about parenting and partnering and our professional lives. And as you were describing that, it really resonated for me that that sense of loss can be something that happens in any one of those spaces. Right, relative to I mean, I certainly recall, and have shared with this audience, you know, a loss around a profession that I thought it was going to be my forever profession. And that, you know, there was, although I wanted the change, it was there was also a loss there. And with our partners, if we are parenting with a partner, there are little moments of loss that we deal with there, or big ones.

Wendy Sloneker 06:31

Right? What's unexpected, but also what is like, Oh, I didn't think this was gonna be what it is. Right?

Christy Keating 06:44

Nobody told me it was gonna be this way in our relationship, knowing exactly what they had come into them, right, not possible, not possible. And then, of course, in parenting, and you and I have talked about this before, when you were a guest in The Heartful Parent Academy, about all the different forms of loss that can happen for us just in that parenting space.



Wendy Sloneker 07:07

Oh, my gosh, it's a range. I mean, it can go from just the path to getting to parenthood can be rife with loss and change. It is rife with loss and change. The first time you bring the little new creature home, and you're sort of it's all real, and you're responsible, like how am I going to keep this kid alive? I hope this works out God. Um, so you know, from that to just even the space of a few years, let's say that that new creat., net new little human was an infant when you brought them home. And now it's time for them to start school. That is, I can't tell you how many times I'm hearing about parents who are just having a hard time leaving the kid at school on the first day,

Christy Keating 07:57

The tears that I shed with, especially with my first one, that, my second one, we were running late. So it was like, oh, okay, you gotta go in the classroom. And it wasn't quite enough time to grieve. But oh, we're big that day. Yeah.

Wendy Sloneker 08:14

And it's different. Like, it's going to be different with every child, it's going to be different for every parent or guardian, it's going to be different because your relationship to parenthood based on how you grew up, what informed you what the dynamics were, where you were, and what's happening now. Like, it's just different for everyone. And so honoring what is individual is not something we're really taught Oh, lot of hearing our American society. But going ahead and honoring what is true for you, this is how we move through grief and change and loss.

Christy Keating 08:54

That is, I think, such an important statement that because you're right, we are not taught to honor our own experience. And I think in parenting in particular, we really get sold this bill of goods that it's Oh, it's all joy, and it's easy and natural. And, and look, I do believe it can be joyful, right? Part of why I do what I do. But with joy comes Joy's opposite.

Wendy Sloneker 09:24

Well, there's a contrast, right? So even what you were talking about earlier about how some things are both amazing and abundant and gorgeous and joyful. The other side of that is there could be some tenderness or bitterness or bitter sweetness, and some like oh, that's going to be different. And our brains, like our human brains crave certainty and familiarity. And any change even if it's good, is going to include some sort of dissonance in getting, getting to the new nothing's wrong there.

Christy Keating 10:08

Yeah, nothing's wrong there. And yet, I think we we aren't taught well to deal with difficult emotions. Right? And so let's, let's dig into that a little bit. Because parenting is full of difficult emotions, whether it's loss, you know, whether it's that experience of Oh, my baby just went out to kindergarten, or, you know, my child that I used to cuddle in my arms is suddenly a teenager who is talking back to me, right?



Wendy Sloneker 10:42

Or there might be some frustration and loneliness. Yeah. So

Christy Keating 10:46

I mean, it that there's such a wide range of human experience and emotion in that. So you share with us just a little bit about not just in that space of loss or grief, but with with a huge range of difficult emotions. How do we as parents, how can we learn to better process and manage them, because I know from my own experience, and in speaking with, you know, hundreds of other parents, you weren't taught well, to do. Our parents didn't know how to do it, right. And now, we don't know how to do it.

Wendy Sloneker 11:24

Right, a few generations ago, just to give some context, like there's a reason why we don't know this yet. And one is this is relatively new material to work with. I know we've like, been around for some centuries, and we got lots of soft tissue and gray matter nerve endings Great. However, we've been busy, like my grandmother was making soap and candles as a kid. And so like, I'm in my early 50s. And this is not that new, like my grandmother was born in the early 1900s. And she didn't have time, she was like making breakfast for loads of people who are coming to work on the farm. She was making soap and candles for, you know, this space she was in, she taught my mother, who was busy with three kids.

And like that was in the 70s 80s. When women were starting to go to work and get full time jobs more regularly, more frequently. There was not time for this learning. So I want to say and honor that the job of parenting is radically different now and today than it was when any of the parents were kids. Yes. So I notice, like many of my clients are grieving a childhood where like, the parenting was so different, and there were emotional needs that did not get met. This is real. This doesn't mean you're messed up. This just means there was a gap. And now this is the work. Right? So you're right on time, is how I want to frame that for you.

Christy Keating 13:02

I love that idea that we're right on time. And you know, it's not as if we suddenly have more time available to us. I think almost every parent, if not every parent I ever speak with VI say do you wish you had more time or that you are busier? Everyone will say I wish I had more time; I feel really, really busy. And yet we are figuring out in this generation, the importance of bringing in this emotional piece. Because we're realizing I know for myself and and so many others were realizing the deficit, I guess, for lack of a better word that we're feeling or that we're experiencing from that inability, or lack of skill in managing some of those tough emotions that are coming up for us.

Wendy Sloneker 13:52

Well, let me like offer just a couple of things about emotion because I think a little education is going to take a lot of people really far. Awesome. Okay, so, and this is going to include some positive moments too, because like we crave those and that's the, you know, like, we're here to savor and have a lived



experience. And sometimes it's crap. So like, let's normalize that's happening. And okay, this is not ideal, and everything happens in moments.

So the more present you are, the less you're going to miss. We spend a lot of time societally not just as parents, because I'm not one, but we spend a lot of time in our society worrying about what we are missing out on or what is missing. We are not present when that is going down. So having an understanding that like, if I don't want to miss moments, even the good ones, presence is where my life is happening. So getting present with oh, okay, I'm here now and And this is happening around me. There are anchoring techniques like 54321, where you notice five things that and you incorporate your senses. If you have a hard time getting into the moment, look around and notice five things, you can see four things, you can smell three things you can hear one thing you were actively tasting, even if it's air, and then one thing you are sensing or whichever sense, I've forgotten by now. Yes, yeah, thank you. So like, that's an anchoring piece of like helping yourself to get present and reminding yourself that feelings happen in the moment, and we create them by what we focus on.

So I want to talk a little bit about how we continue because some people are like, Wendy, I've been having this feeling for 25 years, and it is not going anywhere. So this is how we prolong it is we resist painful feelings. And we argue about why we should not have the feelings that we are having without feeling them. So what we're actually doing is resisting or suppressing or something along that line, it's kind of the equivalent of, here's this door I want to go through, that's going to lead to the other side of feeling better. And I'm going to stand in front of this door and be mad that it's here. And I'm going to argue with myself in front of the store instead of oh, this is the feeling I'm having, I wonder what that's about. And then walking through. We have not been taught this, we have not been taught how to work with our instrument, meaning our body and our awareness, we have not been taught.

So fortunately, I learned a lot of this in college, when I was studying to be an actor, here's how we bring up an emotion is we use our imaginations and we create it in terms of being afraid of our emotions. I want to honor that too, because this is scary. And as parents were the adults in the relationship and the family and it's up to us to go first. Even if we don't know how to do it. What Yeah, this is where he like gathering support and getting a little bit of information is helping you so if I've mentioned already that feelings happen in a moment, we continue to create the same feeling or the same anxiousness, the same worry, the same concern, the same end, anticipatory dread, all of those things that we are deplete us.

And we do this by actively worrying and picking up the thoughts of, I'm worried that time is passing me by instead of being in the moment and being sure that we're not missing anything, because like we're in the moment, being in the future or being in the past is a lot of what Grievors and people going through loss, are habituated to, it becomes a habit that based on what we're telling ourselves that like it's, I'm afraid I'm always going to feel this way it turns into, I seem to always be feeling this way. When we're continually arguing with whether or not we're going to feel our feelings. Mostly because we don't know how.



Christy Keating 18:08

Yeah, and you know, as I listen to you, I'm like on an there's two sides of my brain talking about me right now, right? Side is saying, okay, that makes sense. Like we've been habituated to sort of, and not even though they're just like really actively grieving, but I feel like we've been habituated to kind of worry and wish and do all of those things. And what we need to do is get present and just let it be what it is right now. That yeah, that that sounds lovely. And it makes sense. And the other part of migraine is going okay, great. Wendy, how in the heck do that right? Yeah, so I feel my feelings. How do I get go? Yeah, so yeah, yeah.

Wendy Sloneker 18:55

So one of the things like I would pick out if it was me, and I was let's say, I'm working with you, Christy. Okay. So I'd be like, Okay, well how often are you telling yourself you don't have enough time would be one way of avoiding the present right and so we there's nothing wrong with this the noticing and the awareness is exactly the work. So having some encouragement around, oh my god, I think I tell myself that like 65 times a day, okay. And you get quantum results in a day because I know that parents pretty much put in 25 years of living into a day write the equivalent just work with me here the to do list is long. The drive is huge. The enthusiasm and the love for the kids totally there and you telling yourself that you're not having that you don't have enough time is not actually feeling good.

So offering yourself I have plenty of time for this is a change, even if it doesn't feel true. Like I Want to offer the like, for those who are getting like a tremendous lot done in a day equals all of you that maybe you have plenty of time? Maybe they have exactly the right amount of time. Part of this is like, am I am I actually consciously choosing what I'm spending this time on these moments on? Doing what I want to do? At least some of them? Yeah, so some of it is like, oh, there's that thought and being onto yourself around. Oh, did I just say that thing that I? That's not working for me? For me, I did work with, I don't have enough time. Because I choose how I spend all my time. I'm a grown ass woman. Like, that's mine. Yeah, yeah. Those are my moments. So am I going to relinquish responsibility? And be like, Oh, well, I don't have time for that. Meaning. And that turns into like this sort of tornado of, I don't have time for my life, which is dramatic and not specific. Right? Specific is where like, Oh, where do I Where specifically? Do I want to spend my time? Can I give myself 11 minutes? And oftentimes, we think we can't, and we believe our brain when it's on fire, telling us no, you can't possibly pee. No, no lunch, no water. No. And this is also how we are leading.

I want to offer one other thing. And that is we need a little bit more distance between feeling a feeling and becoming a feeling. And this is, in our words, so much of this is in our self talk. And how we parent and lead is in our self talk. Because that's how we learned from some of our oldest relationships on the planet, our parents, this is what we're teaching oldest relationships for our kids on the planet. Now, back to the whole thing of not yourself, when you're saying things like, I am mad. So you're becoming the emotion of mad or angry, versus I'm feeling angry. And this is probably stuff that you cover to Krisztian



in your work is having a little bit of a space between being the feeling versus feeling the feeling. Now the reason this is important is because like, we need the reminder that feelings happen moments at a time, even if we may be so in it in the moment that we can't see or remember it. But if you can say I'm feeling this than that is more space for you than being that feeling. I'm devastated. Versus I feel devastated.

Christy Keating 22:55

And I love that distinction. I think it's really important. But I want to back you up a little bit. Let's do it as I think there's there's a question that sort of bubbling around in my head around this idea. So going back to your example of, I don't have enough time, versus I have plenty of time. I'll be honest, I struggle with this a little bit with my older daughter who I adore, but who also will sometimes tell herself kind of negative messaging around school and I get it. She's a teenager, she's a middle schooler. It's not all awesome. Right? But there are times when I want to say like you're talking yourself into hating this. I also want to be really careful.

We've heard that phrase, probably many of the parents listening have heard the phrase toxic positivity, right where we yet be so like, you're not allowed to have those negative feelings. And when we say I don't have enough time versus I do that's not a feeling so much as a view on reality, right? Our statement versus a frame, right? I'm feeling mad, or I'm feeling sad, or I'm feeling anxious or whatever. I'm sort of distinguishing those two. So how do we put ourselves in the present? And I like to call it living in a place of abundance, right? Like I have plenty of time. I have plenty of clients, I have plenty of whatever. But not and living, you know, teaching our children to do those things to living in the present feeling, allowing for abundance and living, not being afraid to feel all their feelings. And we do all of that without going into the realm of I'm happy all the time.

Wendy Sloneker 24:41

Yeah, no, we're not. Yeah. Some of this is about locating and identifying your emotional truth. And so what that can look like I like to try things out with things not at the very ends of the scale. So something mildly annoying or irritating. It could be anything, it could be traffic, it could be, oh, that was like two pumps too many of vanilla in my life, whatever it is, whatever it is mild irritation, you got me. So allowing yourself to feel mildly irritated, like this is a pressure that we have is to be positive and live from positivity versus, you know, that's annoying. And I'm totally okay and safe. It's also the difference, if I have plenty of time does not feel like a truth and feels like toxic positivity than saying I have a moment for or some time for is good enough. Something that is true.

And feels, you could say it with a straight face to whoever somebody you trust or in a safe place. So some of it is regulating the self talk around what is true, and how do I feel. And this more than anything else, is about being honest with yourself. When I say emotional truth, I'm talking about the emotional truth you have for yourself. So oh, I didn't love that. I didn't love how I showed up for that. I had a consult a little earlier this morning. I'm like, there were things that I really loved about how I showed up. And there were things that I could do better. And letting that not mean I'm a hideous been business



owner. Right? Okay, both can be true. And it evens out to here I am and my day. Let's keep going. Yeah, like so we're constantly looking for meaning what that means about us? And I don't know that that's really helping us all the time having what is balanced in terms of am I willing to look at anything positive about what that experience was? And maybe it's nothing that you're willing to look? And that's the work? Actually, I can't find anything that's positive about that. And I'm pissed off. Great. You know where you're at, and your present. That's it? What do you want to do from here? Do I want to parent from here? Do I need a minute? Let's assess what do I need that would be kind, fueling, nourishing, and allow me to continue on my day in a way that I could look in the mirror and get to sleep at night?

Christy Keating 27:25

Yeah, okay. I want to go there more because, and I mentioned this to you before we started recording, people who have been listening for the last few weeks know that back in February, February 13, there was a report released by the CDC, that talked about sort of the not so great state of our youth, and the fact that our young people are struggling, that they're dealing with increased, like alarmingly, you know, alarming increased rates of anxiety and depression and debilitating depression, and suicide, ideation and ideation, all of that stuff. You know, we've dug into that the last couple of weeks, and I think there are a lot of parents who are, and I've put myself in this category, too.

It is really hard to not go to a place of worry and fear, which Oh, yeah, right, don't feel good. So you've just been talking about sort of managing those emotions in the moment. And I'll confess, I will say I am worried about this, as opposed to, I am feeling worried. I think that's an important language shift that we can all start to make. But for those who are in the trenches, and I mean, that's every parent, right? On a daily basis, who are feeling all those things you talked about. And maybe one moment it's joy, and the next moment moment, it's frustration. And one moment, we're laughing and giggling with our child, and the next minute, we want to throttle them. Never advocate but like, are you know, we're jumping out of our skin ready to yell? What are you know, I like this idea of creating distance between being and feeling. What are other skills in the moment that parents can use to recognize what's going on? Yeah, and manage it in a way that they don't then at the end of the whatever, say, oh, my gosh, not only did that feel awful for me, but I just totally screwed up my kid.

Wendy Sloneker 29:28

Because I hear that fear. That is Yeah, so part of this whole emotional management thing is keeping up with ourselves. And I've given you a couple of things to consider and talk about in terms of in the moment. I'm gonna go a little deeper and dig here, because, like we're walking around with 12 to 15 150 found emotional backpacks of previous relationships. how our lives are not what we thought it would be maybe divorces is maybe careers like unpacking those emotions that we can store up and call to mind. Like that could be with our own parents that could be with whoever, whatever. people places and things that could be, you know, there are a lot of people who come to me who are still having soft spots and grief about their family pets that died as they were growing up.



So these things have not yet been unpacked, yet. We are carrying them and they are heavy. And we don't even know that we're carrying them because we are totally skilled in adaptation to our detriment. So I'm going to suggest that unpacking a couple of those backpacks is going to make you feel and have more emotional capacity for what is in the moment. Is this going to solve the CDC report? No. Is this going to help you get more press in your life? Yes. Unfortunately, like this is the tedious work that our brains like, yeah, I have something more pressing. Not more important, but definitely more on fire and pressing, because like, this is tedious stuff that while valuable and fulfilling. It's not something we have been taught or are familiar with. So we're not especially skilled in it just yet. Being more emotionally available to check in with our specific kids that are in our lives is going to be what changes those reports.

Christy Keating 31:31

Well, that's what I was just thinking, you know, we had my guest last week Sherra Grasser was talking about how disconnection is feeling the report, you know, or the things that we're seeing in the report. And that connection is so, so critical and feeling seen, as opposed to being seen. And as you're just talking, we are able to deal with our own shit. So to speak, yeah. And unpack those backpacks, that opens us up for more connection, which might actually be part of the solution to what we're seeing with our kids.

Wendy Sloneker 32:05

Right. And it doesn't have to be every kid like, parents, you are responsible for plenty right now in having kids, with leveraging support and your community in different ways. But also allowing yourself to feel your feelings, not to your own detriment, I guess what I mean by that is, hey, I need to just take a minute for myself, because something's up. And I'm going to be with you in five to 10 minutes, I'm just gonna take a little bit of time to get myself grounded and clear, so I can be with you. And this isn't running away from our lives. This is actually demonstrating and modeling adulting Oh, I'm having some feelings. And rather than, like, react and yell, and then go beat myself up about it over a bottle of wine and get a plate of carbs, I'm gonna just take a few minutes and be with myself and ask myself what I need next. And then I'm gonna give it to myself. And this is re-parenting, right? So everybody's gonna have an opportunity to do this, because as we've seen and talked about before, the job of parenting has changed over generations, it's going to continue to do that. The perfect parenting is re-parenting. And we each get to do that even our kids one day,

Christy Keating 33:23

The perfect parenting is re-parenting. It's funny, I always say there's no such thing as a perfect parent. But the idea that if we re-parent ourselves and sort of process some of those things differently than we were taught to process them, that's how we show up for our kids, which is so in line with what I talked with so many parents about, which is you've got to take, put yourself on the list. And not just on the list, but at the top of the list. Right. So that because we show it better for kids when we can do that. Wendy, I feel like I mean, there's so much rich content here. And I mean, emotions are not something that we're gonna wrap up and make everybody feel like okay, I got it. I know how to do this



Wendy Sloneker 34:13

Forty minutes. Nailed it. Right.

Christy Keating 34:17

But I am hopeful I'm so grateful for, for what we've talked about today, because I think we've really touched on some practical tools that we can all use, you know, around language, the language that we're using, taking time for ourselves, being present, re-parenting, and that those are the things that we can do to manage us, which helps us manage our children and teach them to manage them. Right. Yeah.

Wendy Sloneker 34:46

It's an availability in a whole different way. And it impacts your connection and your relationship. This is what we need.

Christy Keating 34:55

On that lovely note. I want to thank you for being with us today. A, I want to make sure that listeners know how to track you down because you are doing such great work in the world and, and helping us all think about things in a different way than maybe we have. So what is the best way for people to find you? And? And what kind of work do you do with people? I know we've talked about that a bit, but I'd love to let you know some more.

Wendy Sloneker 35:22

Thank you, thank you, you're all invited to come hang out at my podcast, which is Heart Healing From Loss, we talked about many different types of life experiences in there, not just death, although it's up, because this happens, right? So I do one to one coaching. And I also have a group offering, which is largely based in writing, writing pen to paper is one way we access the heart, which is a tool that we often avoid, in order to, you know, in favor of our brains, we'd rather figure it out than feel it. So no, group coaching is one offering programs are annual, if you think you'd like to talk with me directly, please reach out and connect on my website. And you're all invited. We get to figure ourselves out and be with ourselves, and learn our bodies and our, our awareness. This is how we continue to be more present and create capacity, create a feeling of spaciousness, and also grow some confidence that we can demonstrate to our littles.

Christy Keating 36:37

Yeah, not so little. You know, I'll just I'll just add to that and say, I mean, Wendy and I do work professionally together. And a number of my clients, have worked with Wendy privately. And it's such a lovely compliment to everything that I talked about and work on with, with clients. So, Wendy, thank you for being here and sharing your heart and your wisdom with our listener listeners. This is I think, a really important piece of parenting that we don't always talk about, right? We want to talk about what do I do



when they're having a tantrum? But really, we got to start with what do we do when we are having a tantrum?

Wendy Sloneker 37:16

Right. Right. Yeah. So thank you for being here. Such a pleasure. Thank you, Christy. Thanks, everybody.

Christy Keating 37:26

Thank you. Thank you, everyone, for joining us on The Heartful Parent Podcast today. I hope you found my conversation with Wendy, to be helpful, informative, maybe a new way of thinking about some things that you hadn't previously considered.

And I look forward to hearing from you about how this impacts your parenting on a daily basis. Please reach out. And in the meantime, don't forget to hit that subscribe button and drop a five star review. If you are so willing, that helps the podcasts get out there and get this important information about how we balance our parenting, our partnering and our personal and professional lives into the hands of more people just like thanks for being here.

I'll see you next week.

