

Episode 14: Keeping Your Kids Safe at Summer Camp with Cherie Benjoseph

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 beyond our professional lives, because they are all a part of us. And we were never meant to do this alone

Christy Keating 00:40

Welcome back to The Heartful Parent Podcast everyone. We've got a really important conversation on deck for you today. I want to start this by letting you know that this conversation is a conversation that is for adults, and not for kids. So if you've got littles with you, you may want to pop in your earbuds or put this on the back burner for another time when you've got some time to yourself.

And the reason for that is because we're going to be talking about summer camp and child sexual abuse and how we can prevent the two of those from meeting. The guest that I have today is a true expert in the field. She and I met through the National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation. We are now co-chairs of the membership committee for that coalition. Last year we did a series on social media together, talking about various aspects of safety and prevention.

Her name is Cherie Benjoseph and she has been in the field of social work since 1989. After graduating from Boston University with her master's in social work. She has been serving as a licensed clinical social worker for over 30 years in various school settings. And then she founded a nonprofit called the kids safe foundation in 2009. Kids safe Foundation has a focus on child sexual abuse primary prevention.

Cherie approaches her work as an expert in child sexual abuse prevention from a really proactive perspective and believes that educating professionals who are working with children and parents about child sexual abuse and all sorts of youth serving organizations will strengthen our families and help protect our children, which really in the end will break that cycle of abuse, Cherie, and I see eye to eye on this.

And we are, the work that we do overlaps in big, big ways. Presently Cherie is the Director of National Outreach and Education for the Center for Child Counseling, which sort of merged with the kids safe foundation last year. And she works with national and local leaders to improve defining the ever changing issues around protecting children, and how to help them their parents and their guardians, as well as all child serving professionals. She's been speaking nationally at conferences and symposiums

for over a decade. She loves to have conversations about talking to kids about personal safety. And like me, believes that a safe society, free from sexual abuse and exploitation is attainable.

Cherie is a mom of two. They're both grown and flown. She's a survivor herself. She practices Chi Gong, she loves working with clay traveling and spending time with her family. I love this conversation was treated because it is so so timely. If you have a child going to summer camp, this conversation is for you. In this conversation, we dig into the questions that you must be asking the director of your child's summer camp, whether it's a day camp or an overnight camp a week or, you know, 10 weeks. She really talks about what are those vetting questions that we need to be asking to get at how safe is this camp? How well trained are the people that work there. And then she also talks about the conversations that we need to be having with our kiddos before we send them out the door to summer camp.

I love summer camp, as you'll hear me talk about in this conversation. And I recognize that it is you know one of those places where abusers can achieve their aim. And so we've got to be smart and savvy and ask lots of questions. So with that, I'm going to turn the floor over to Cherie to talk about the work that she does in this space, Camp safe which is a part of the kids safe Foundation, and the Center for Child counseling and really all the things Things You Need to Know, before summer hits. Enjoy. All right, welcome back to the heartfelt parent podcast everyone.

As I said, I am so excited to introduce you to my friend, my colleague, Cherie Benjoseph of the Center for Child Counseling.

Cherie, thank you for being here.

Cherie Benjoseph 05:18

I am so glad to be on with you again. Christy. I missed you.

Christy Keating 05:23

I know I've missed you too. You know, for those parents who are listening to this and think, wow, sharees name sounds really familiar. She and I did a series in 2022 on Facebook, called Savvy Conversations for KidsSafe Parents and, and had a great time doing that. So you may, you know, you may remember Cherie from that. But I'm really excited to have you back to to have a longer conversation today.

And to talk about summer camp, because, you know, as we're recording this, it's May 2023. Summer camps are right around the corner, in some parts of the country sooner than others. You know, here in the Great Pacific Northwest, we don't get out of school till the end of June. So we're a little further off than in other parts of the country. But this is something on parents minds, right how to keep their kids busy during the summer. And so I want to talk about that with you today.

Cherie Benjoseph 06:24

Well, this is an area that I'm absolutely immersed in right now as it is that trees summer get trapped and get going. And the first thing I want to say to the listeners is it is not too late to vet your camp. It's not too late to figure out if this is the right camp for my child, especially when it comes to my special area, which is of course safety. So I'm on the other side of the country from you, as we know. And school is ending right in the beginning of June.

Okay, so you know people have either they're in the process of you know, confirming and reserving their spots for day camps, week long camps that are local, all different types of variations. Residential camps leave what I refer to as sleepaway, or overnight camps. And it is really important to have some of those conversations, you know, because most parents tell me, Oh, I chose that camp, because my friend is sending their son there and sent them there last year, and they had a great time. Right? Or that camp has a theme, that is a value, you know, matches the values of my family. Could be religion, could be vegetarian, could be whatever, sports or theater, and those were all important. We of course want to match our child's personality and interests to the camp.

But we really want to ask some tough questions. You know, think about it as if you're hiring a personal secretary for yourself, you want to make sure that you're gonna vet that person, that it's a person you want to have sitting next to you all day long, and minding your business. And this is the same who is going to be minding their child all day long.

Christy Keating 08:15

Yeah. You know, it's such an interesting thing. Because in addition to the, as you described, sort of parents choosing camps by, you know, personal recommendations, or because it matches family values, or interests, or whatever it might be, I know, in my part of the country, and I do not believe we are unique in this way. Some of it is just campus, sort of a substitute for childcare, right? I need my kids occupied while I work or while I do whatever or so I don't lose my mind, you know, over the two months that they're out of school.

And so I see a lot of parents piecemealing it right. This week, they're going to science camp this week, they're going to soccer camp, you know, these two weeks, they're going to overnight camp or whatever. And it's such a, you know, camps fill up quickly. They fill up early. And so I feel like there's this mad rush and parents are so desperate sometimes to get their kids in to the programs and fill the summer that we don't stop and think about some of these safety issues. And that may be because there's just an assumption that this is a youth serving organization, they must have thought about safety. Right.

So Cherie, talk to us a little bit about those assumptions that that many of us make, and whether they're fair assumptions or not.

Cherie Benjoseph 09:40

That's a That's a fair question. Because we do make assumptions. And we make assumptions that the babysitter is safe. Because other people have used her. We make assumptions that the coach of the soccer team is safe because he's received a job as coach or as volunteer from the goodness of his heart, and we tend to put aside the fact that that actually help holds no credence. Do not make logic between just because this person is an amazing volunteer with children. That means that he or she has saved it to separate beings. In fact, offenders will make it a point to want accessibility, an opportunity to harm children. So they often will put themselves in positions where they are caring for our children at camp, at an after school program, at sports, etc.

So, the two do not mesh. We need to do our due diligence as parents and I will say I was one of the parents that you described where I had my kid nuts, you know, sometimes they went to daycare, the same decamped for the whole summer. But usually it was basketball camp rather than theater camp and cooking camp. And like literally each week, was a different location, different people. And it was a concern for me, because I had to go in and make sure that they were aware that I am aware of parents that I am watching them, I am going to walk in and do a surprise visit at least once while they're in camp. If it's a day camp, not in sleepaway camp, and my presence is there, and that's part of being an advocate for your child, is making sure that you have a relationship with the people who are caring for your children.

Christy Keating 11:39

Yes. You know, I think whether it's camp or school or whatever, when the adults that are interacting with our children know that we're on top of it, paying attention, it makes our children less likely to be the target of any victimization.

Cherie Benjoseph 11:58

Absolutely.

Christy Keating 11:59

Okay. So one of the things you've mentioned, so far, it's just that idea of being present letting letting them know that we're there maybe dropping in if that's a possibility, it you know, it may not be in all camps, like overnight camps, my daughter goes to overnight camp out of state. So, you know, that's, that's a different scenario that we'll talk about, but letting them know that we are paying attention, we care, we're involved,

Cherie Benjoseph 12:28

I want to roll I want to roll the roll this back a little bit. Okay, we get to that point, we, as the parent should meet the camp director. And in today's day and age, that could be a resume. This, you know, we don't necessarily have to meet them in person, because often we do not live near where the director is living. But we need to make face contact with this person and ask them who should know everything,

some hard questions, so real questions. And once we up the ante, and all of us as parents are asking these questions, and maybe they might they might sound to you today a little bit tough. But with that said, the more we ask these questions, the better implementation of protection, they will start doing it.

Christy Keating 13:24

What I wanted to talk about what those questions are, but I also feel like, you know, for those parents who feel nervous about asking questions, or like, you know, the thought might offend the camp or the director or whatever, I just want to remind parents that those individuals who are in charge of youth, youth serving organizations serving kids, they will either be totally okay with these questions and expect them. That's the best case scenario. And if they're not, then the question has to be, do we really want our child attending this camp? Right?

Cherie Benjoseph 14:00

100% Because to me, that is one of the red flags. Any director of any type of camp needs to be able to talk about this, the personal safety of children being around bullying, beat around sex abuse, they need to be comfortable with it, because if they're not comfortable with it, the trickle down effect into the staff is that we can't really talk about these things. So the first, the first piece of it is when you start asking these questions, and by the way, you are your child's advocate, you have to do your homework. So let's all put on our big girl panties. Listen, it wasn't easy for me. In the beginning, when I first started doing all this type of work, even to ask my when my daughter was going on a playdate with a new friend. By the way, do you have a gun in your house? And if so, how is it stored?

Christy Keating 14:51

Right? Right? We ask that too.

Cherie Benjoseph 14:53

We literally had the situation for where she went on the play date when there were guns on the table. And both of Both of the people were police officers. And that's what they did. And that was the last time she went on a playdate there. Because just because it's a police officers gun doesn't mean you can't kill anybody. Right? I act, right. So we need to learn how to ask these questions, because we are children's first advocate. And these aren't scary questions. It's information that we want to make sure that the director can speak to us comfortably about it, and also build our confidence that, oh, we can talk to this director about serious things,

Christy Keating 15:30

as you say that we have to learn to be their best advocate. And I think what a lot of parents do is, if they talk to their, you know, talk or think about safety, they talk to their children about safety, they give them some tools. And that's important, right? We need to be doing that. But I also want to remind everybody, that the safety of a child is an adult's responsibility, right, it is not their responsibility, or their fault if something happens to them.

Cherie Benjoseph 16:02

So all we have control of is asking the right questions, and getting a sense of what what boundaries, what training, what is the environment, like at this camp, we can only learn so much, because that's reality. And then part of it is just trust, and making sure that your child knows healthy boundaries themselves so that maybe they will come to a person if they need it. Right.

Christy Keating

Yes.

Cherie Benjoseph

So a couple of questions. Pretty basic. Where do you find your staff? Where are they recruited from? And what is your screening process? And you want to hear more than we provide background checks. Because almost everybody, by law has to provide some sort of background check. But the reality and that's a must, they must do that. And it should be absolutely a fingerprint, national background check. Okay. But the reality of background checks that we all know is that most offenders of sexual abuse never get caught. So they're not in any system. They're not there, it's not going to come up in a background check. It will come up. If they're calling references, it will come up, if they ask the right questions during interviews to help screen it out.

That's what we train on. That's the information we provide to camp directors to help them strengthen their onboarding. So they make safer and smarter choices about who they are, you know, recruiting to their camp. But I would want a more of a robust answer from that director. And I will tell you that I did recently on behalf of a friend a friend asked me, she's sending our kids to sleepaway camp for the first time she's sending them there. Because his best friend is going there. I went there last year. I said, Did you vet the camp? And she said, No. And she's she's, she's a bright young woman. She's got she's a lawyer. And she said, Can you do it for me? And I said to myself, you know, actually do it yourself. And, and get a feel in today's world. My kids are full grown and fun.

So do it yourself and have this conversation. And what ended up happening was, the person was absolutely lovely, the director that that I actually had a phone call, it was lovely. But the reality was when I did a little bit of searching, there's a big history of sexual abuse in that camp. Oh, by direct bypass directors. And she wasn't forthcoming. They bought the campus has nothing to do with her. Except there's a history there. So because there's a history, she should be all over that in her answers to me. Yes. Okay. Because she needs to build up the reputation again of that camp. Right. Right. Right. And I felt like she really didn't have a pulse on that. Interesting. Yes, it was super interesting.

Christy Keating 19:11

So I'm curious, and you don't have to answer this if you don't want to, but after you did that vetting? Well, two questions. One, did the director commit to any changes? And two, did your friend decide what did they decide? sending their dry?

Cherie Benjoseph 19:28

So great question. So I did tell, of course, I did tell this director exactly who I was, but that I was calling him not on the behalf of Camp safe but on behalf of this person. And she ended up picking really picking my ear greatly and asking me for tons of advice and information about best practices, etc. And I which which I was very glad to share with her but I realized I that's not my job in this in this position that I was in at the moment.

So we you know, at some point I shut that down that conversation once I got the information I really wanted to focus on. I have not this is really recent, I have not shared this information. Okay, my friend, but I will keep you posted. Because if I if she, it's gonna be interesting. I have a feeling I know what she's gonna do. Not happy about it, but I have a feeling I know what she's gonna do. Yeah, it's for her, it's late in the game, she wouldn't want her child will be disappointed. I mean, you know, the list?

Christy Keating 20:36

Yeah, no, I do know the list. And as a parent with young children, I get it. You know, I'm in a, I'm in a really lucky position, and that my children go to the camp that I went to growing up. And I know the director personally. And so having conversations like these, um, she and I were campers together when we were kids. So having conversations like these are much easier to have that feel for some parents. But I do understand that like, this is my, this is the happy place for my kids. Right? So I cannot imagine having to tell a child No,

Cherie Benjoseph 21:14

I want to point out that sexual abuse can happen anywhere. There is no guarantee doesn't matter what training camp goes through. Offenders are savvy and they can sneak through an interview, they know exactly what they're doing. It's yeah, what makes this very gray, this is a very gray area. But the idea is that the camp has had to put into place really important guidelines, best practices, they need to a Child Protection Policy, that that really you feel confident that they've spoken directly with their staff about this issue. And what the protocol is, a lot of camps don't have to do that. Right.

There are camps that you're sending your children to that are not licensed, ask if they have a license. Some states, some states don't require that, which means there's no oversight at that camp, that has to do with every not about sex abuse only has to do with all of the safety issues, from food safety to water safety. Everything. Right, ask if they're ACA accredited, American Camp Association accredited, that means that they are running their very specific guidelines to earn that accreditation, and that they have access to good resources, a know better to do better, you know, some camps are a little bit fly by night,

you know, it's only a week here a week there, or it's a church camp and are full of volunteers. Well, that's an opportunity for risk. For sure. So as a parent, you have to think, Oh, I'm sending them, you know, to this wonderful church camp Girl Scout camp Boy Scout camp for just a week here and there. That doesn't mean that it's safe.

Christy Keating 23:12

Okay, so you shared a couple of the initial questions to ask, you know, to ask the camp and then followed up with, you know, finding out, are they licensed, are they accredited, et cetera, et cetera. But I know because I know you, Cherie. There are more questions. Lay out, tell us what they are.

Cherie Benjoseph 23:32

Ask them directly. What type of training do you provide for your staff? Because there's a lot of different training out there. You just want to hear that they're getting a good general training in sex abuse intervention and prevention and reporting, physical and emotional abuse, bullying intervention. In today's world, mental health and wellness. That's a new thing that I've added to camp camp training. Who is providing this training? You don't need to know the answers you don't need to know. You know, Dr. Joe Schmo is providing this training. That's not the point. The point is that your director has a pulse on this. Right. There's something they care about. Yes, they take it seriously.

Christy Keating

Yeah, yeah.

Cherie Benjoseph

And there's a plan in place. And they have pre-camps. So most camps day and, and overnight, have a week before camp where the staff is inundated with prep for camp and prep of cabins and prep of everything, while also going through a tremendous amount of trainings. It could be about allergy issues. I mean, swim, swim, Lake protocol, everything they cover in a week. I don't know if they even sleep. And it's an amazing fun week because all of them are meeting each other or they're having almost a reunion depending on how often I've been back to camp. So it's a very exciting, important week in advance and it's tight. They really believe in it. That's where they're supposed to be filling, you know, putting in all of these types of trainings. So just ask them, what do they cover? Do they have a cover? Do they have a training, specifically on sexual abuse? Or is it a slide? In the child abuse prevention? PowerPoint? Yes. Because that's not training on sexual abuse prevention.

Christy Keating 25:27

It sure isn't. And, you know, sidenote, I was recently provided by a local teacher at some of the training like slides from a training that the teachers go through. And it was two slides on child sexual abuse prevention. And I thought, this is completely inadequate, right?

Cherie Benjoseph 25:50

That is not, welcome to my world. I mean, I've been struggling with that issue in schools, and as we do trainings, in schools, etc. Sexual Abuse Prevention is its own beast. And it needs to be treated that way. Especially in the camp world. These kids have the they have access to each other, you know, and there's a whole thing about camper on camper abuse, which I know parents aren't even necessarily thinking about sorry, listeners, but the reality is with child sexual abuse, much of it I think, 40% 40% 40% is is really child on child, which is in a camper will be called camper, and camper. They could be same age children, they could be older with the younger, it varies. But that's a reality. And so what is the camp doing to prevent that? How are they super? So the one of the next questions is, how are the supervisors, the head, higher level supervisors, supervising the counselors, and what are they teaching those counselors who are boots on the ground, about how they supervise the campers, especially during what we call like downtime, transition time hanging out in the cabin time, shower time? And of course, bedtime?

Right, you know, and first of all, I'm a huge supporter of camp. So I don't want anyone to think out there in podcast land, that I'm anti-care, I am pro-camp. As soon as I had the opportunity to send my children sleepaway camp, I sent them and they were so glad I did. But I ended up doing a little bit later in their lives, not by choice, if I could have done it earlier, I would have gotten them out of the house. But with that said, I also know a lot about the realities, because I talked to directors and they know what goes on. And some of the stuff was tough. Yeah. And we need to feel as confident. And also we need to help almost in a way, help directors understand that we take this seriously. We'll do our homework at home, to help prepare our own children. But we need to know that they're preparing their staff, you know,

Christy Keating 28:03

But and, you know, I love that you said sort of help directors because I actually think that as parents become more and more aware of these kinds of issues, and I think they are right, because of the work that you're doing the work that I'm doing that, you know, kind of what we see in the news, I think, a camp staff that is well trained and well, you know, educated on issues like this and others as well, as you said, you know, other safety issues that occur, allergies, bullying, mental health, that is a huge selling point, potentially, for a camp, right, to promote what they've got going on. Because, hey, parents look at look at us, right?

Cherie Benjoseph 28:47

We're swinging a pendulum right now, in our society. Because parents know more about all of these things. And we're all more comfortable talking about these things. 10 years ago, we didn't we would not be having this conversation in quite the same way. I think that camps are, we used to do these types of trainings and sort of hide it. Now I want them to do these types of trainings. I want them to have a certificate on their website saying we are kept safe trained, we are mental health and wellness trained we are whatever it is, and where and literally wear the badge. Yes. And say we want to partner with our parents on protecting, you know, because safety balls type safety is the obviously the most the highest

priority for campus. If it's not safe, it's not fun. So I'm looking at this moving forward as we get even more involved with parents that this needs to become a conversation between camps and parents. Yeah, needs to be on the website. How to prepare your child. Parents can ask the camp say can you do a zoom for us about two months before camp starts? Not a month, but not a week before camp starts, how to talk to our kids about personal safety in regards to getting them ready for camp? Yes.

Christy Keating 30:08

And I actually want to turn to that. But before I do, are there any other questions that parents should be asking the camp itself? The director?

Cherie Benjoseph 30:19

Yeah. If they, if a parent has a concern, or a camper has a concern, or even a staff member has a concern? What is the procedure at your camp? Who do they go to? Who is their child protection team? Is this person accessible to my child, I want to tell my child where these people are, before they go to camp, I'm going to show them the picture on your website. This is Janie, this is John says so and so you can approach these people and talk to me about anything.

Christy Keating 30:57

Okay. I love that. Framing that as you know, who's your child protection team. And then making sure kids know who that is? You know, we've we've said and I want to, I cannot emphasize this strongly enough. But safety is the responsibility of the adults in a child's world. And that's not I don't say that from a blaming standpoint, right? If something happens to your child, that doesn't mean you're a bad parent, or you've done something terribly wrong. It is always always always the fault of the perpetrator. I want to be careful about how I word that. But I want to be equally clear. It is never the child's responsibility to keep themselves safe. They do not have fully developed brains, they are in most cases, much tinier, smaller, younger, less aware, less experienced, etc, etc. And we do need to provide them with some information. So what do you think? What kinds of conversations do you recommend that parents have with their kiddos before they head off to camp?

Cherie Benjoseph 31:58

So the first, the first piece of that conversation, is that you need to check in with yourself and say, How much anxiety is the sport thing bringing me about sending my kid off to camp because you need to keep that in check. Our kids are anxious enough, even if they're excited about camp, if they're reading into your anxiety, that can be a major deterrent to a successful transition, even if your child has been to camp before. So coming from a place of calm and not saying oh my god, I've got to teach my kid how to avoid sexual abuse. That is not the conversation. Okay. So that's a really important piece though, because, you know, in the old days, we had, you know, the birds and bees conversation, it was one time they checked it off the list and they moved on with their parenting. We do things differently now. We we really build things up when it comes to skills. So numerous months before, preferably at least two months before you get that camp list. And you as mom or dad or caregiver or whoever you are, you

don't start hacking by yourself for your child's trip to camp. You engage them in this process. And while you're engaging them in this process, and you're sitting there labeling all of these things. You're explaining that these are your belongings, and I don't care if you're explaining it to the seven year old who's going to camp or the four year old who's going to go to day camp, or the 13 year old, who's going to sleepaway camp and has been to sleepaway camp.

These conversations are not one time conversations, you start talking about personal belongings, you started talking about privacy, you start talking about personal space in the bunk area. And you start asking questions. Oh, tell me about what your space was like last year. How do you keep your belongings if it's a new person, you say, this is a shower caddy. And this is how you use it. And you wouldn't share your toothbrush, because that's a personal item. And you and the rule of Camp is that you can't share your bed. Your bed is your personal space. So you see how you're building into a regular conversation with your kiddos about these types of things. You're not like sitting down and having a conversation about living by touch you

Christy Keating 34:32

Well, right and that's what I love about that because that is a much it feels like a much easier conversation for parents to have right? Don't share your teeth, your toothbrush or your bed. Right don't lose yourself which is the conversation I have to have with my older daughter because she didn't lose it all.

Cherie Benjoseph 34:50

Yeah, but this is the beginning. This is getting I mean this is literally getting them into a different mindset that you are actually responsible for yourself and for your stuff. And then you can introduce the idea that, and work on this for the few months before, about hygiene, personal hygiene, and how Mom's not going to remind you anymore. I'm going to put a checklist up on the mirror, this is what you need to do before you go to bed. I know you know all this, you don't need my reminder, you're heading to camp.

And don't say I'm sending you away from home, say, you're heading to camp, you're so I'm so excited for you, but a camp, that's not their job to remind you to brush your teeth. You know, so if you choose not to, you're gonna have stinky breath, and people aren't gonna like that. But it will be, you know, up to you your responsibility, right, and you talk start talking about how do you feel about changing in front of other people. Some kids have already had that experience, they're in sports, they do this and that, you know, they're they've been in locker rooms, or whatever the thing is, and others might say what, you know, a six year old mindset, oh, my, that's, you know, and you can explain to them that it will be a choice that they can get dressed in front of their cubby, you know, or they can take their clothes that they want to change into, and walk into the bathroom area, and use a bathroom stall, or go into a drug, dry shower stall, because otherwise their stuff is gonna get wet. And they're gonna learn all this stuff. You don't have to get nitty gritty, but what you're talking about is that they have the right to privacy. Yeah. What does that mean, in a camp?

Christy Keating 36:37

I think that's so important. And I want to, I want to add to that. So my six year old is going to sleepaway camp for the first time this year, for three days. Right? It's a very short session. It's so cute. It's so cute. It's so cute. And I, she would love to go for longer, she would have zero problem with that. But she's going for three days. And the conversation that we will be having with her is not about you know, you have the right to privacy but that every woman has the right to privacy because that cattle run around that cabin naked if she's given the chance.

Cherie Benjoseph 37:15

And it's part of the age to because they haven't really developed, develop that self level. Yes. Yes, that is adorable. Yeah, but that's true, too. So part of the conversation, especially for really, for all ages is you shouldn't be touching anybody else's private parts. And you say this stuff. matter of factly. Don't say it with, you know, kind of tone. Don't say it was oh my god don't touch anybody else's private parts. Like, it's the aisle, most of what we speak is in our body language. And in our tone. Yes. So the kids are listening on all different levels.

So you say your body's special, belongs to you. You shouldn't be touching anybody else's private parts, and nobody else should be touching yours. Because your body's special belongs here. So if anybody gives you a touch that makes you feel weird, uncomfortable, or like, Oh, that was like, Oh, that was strange, but I'm not sure if that's okay or not, okay. That's exactly what you go and you talk to a counselor about or you talk to him, you know, remember I pointed that person out on Baba, we'll make sure we introduce you to that person. And you can say, I want to go speak to you know, Mrs. Smith, because maybe she's the camp mom, in a lot of camps, at camp, moms you know, and you can go and talk to that person about that. And say, I'm not sure this was an okay or safe touch or not, you know, not safe touch.

And give them a voice give them the ability to understand that they don't have to keep that stuff a secret. You know, no secrets about touching, doesn't mean, I don't care if you talking to your 13 year old or your six year old. It's really very similar conversation. The situation is very different. But it's a similar conversation. Yes, yeah. And they need to hear the message over and over again because they change they grow they mature they have new life experiences. And they experience the world differently.

Christy Keating 39:20

Please oh do they ever Yes.

Cherie Benjoseph 39:24

What boundaries are still the same? And and they're always a camp the test those boundaries. It's the net you throw one confused child into the mix of a banquet 12 kids, and there will be a ripple effects. So

it's really important that we give our children the voice. Remember, not the responsibility, but we do give them a voice. Yes. So they know that. Oh, this is exactly what I was told. I can talk about. So good.

Christy Keating 39:55

You know Cherie? I think I mean, I know you teach full workshops on this through Camp Safe. And I have written blog articles on it. In fact, a couple of your blog articles about this, I believe are on my website, okay, that you gave me to publish. So, you know, I know that we could talk far, far longer about this. But you've just painted such a valuable picture for parents that there's this is a really a two part process, right. There's the vetting of the camp, the discussion with the director. And then there's the conversations which are ongoing, repeated, gentle, not scary with our kids, so that they are also well prepared.

And I I feel like that's a perfect note on which, you know, with information to leave everybody with today. But I want to ask you one more thing, which I think is also really important for those folks who are like, hey, Camp safe. Sounds like a pretty neat program. I'd love to, you know, refer my camp that my child goes to, to camp save. How do they find you? How do they find the Center for Child counseling? And the camp Safe Program?

Cherie Benjoseph 41:04

Yeah. So if you've already signed up and whatnot, absolutely, just refer refer your director to and say, well, we just want you to check this out, I found this thing, it seems really good, you can literally go on to the Center of Child Counseling website, and head into programs and go to Kid Safe, and you'll see the Kid Safe Program and became SAFE program, I will share the link with you. So it will be you can put it in the notes section.

Christy Keating

Yeah, I'll put it in the show notes.

Cherie Benjoseph

You probably can Google Camp Safe Training, and it will probably come up. And camp safe is tours put together. Camps they've put together, there is a camping program as well with a similar name. But the idea is that the more parents are partners, with the camps that they're sending their children, the safer those camp camps will be. And I am so excited Christina have a had this time to talk about this topic, I still have a whole bunch more notes so that I know.

Christy Keating 42:01

Well, you know, we'll have to have you back. Because I know you you have such a depth of wisdom on all of this. But what I love because summer camp was such a positive experience for me, and I went for years, and then I was a counselor. And now my girls are going and this is my little ones first year going. And you know, they are over the moon about it. My older one, it's like it really is the best two weeks of

her whole year, I think. And so I like you, you know, I'm a big fan of camps. And like you, I know that we need to all be working to make them safer places for our kids. So thank you Cherie, for the work that you're doing in the world. And for the information that you brought to us today. I'm so grateful.

Cherie Benjoseph 42:48

I'm so grateful for you. Thank you so much. I really appreciate it was great.

Christy Keating 42:54

Alright, everyone, I hope that you learned a lot from my conversation with Cherie. Today, I'd like to challenge you to do something. And that is if your child is headed to summer camp this summer of any type. I'd like you to wherever you are, think about the next time that you're going to be sitting in front of a computer. Maybe that's right now, or have access to your email. If that's tonight, when you get home from your drive home from work or wherever you been, if that's later this morning, depending on when you're listening to this, whenever it is think about when you're next going to be in front of your computer. And I want you to commit mentally right now. Just sending an email to the director of the camp or camps that your kiddo is attending. And letting them know that you'd like to have a conversation with them about safety and training for safety at their camp.

Hey, that's my challenge to you.

While you're doing that, hop onto the internet, and if you've been enjoying this podcast, drop a review in there, give it five stars. like it, subscribe it, do all the things and spread the word. If you have friends who've got kiddos that are headed to summer camp, maybe send a second email with a link to this podcast.

I'm so grateful to you for listening. I'll be back next week with more heartfelt, savvy conversations on parenting, partnering and our professional lives.

I'll see you then. Cheers.