

Episode 20: Scary vs. Dangerous: Tips for Parenting in a Digital Age with Emily Cherkin, M.Ed.

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

Christy Keating 00:40

Hello, podcast listeners. Welcome back to The Heartful Parent Podcast. I'm really excited to introduce you today to Emily Cherkin. And the reason I'm really excited about this one is Emily focuses on screens and parenting. Her entire focus is on how we can utilize technology for all the good that it offers, but not let it sort of destroy, you know, the connection and the relationships that we have with our children, and how we can protect them from the downfalls of screen technology, which is a topic that I hear so many parents talk about, ask about think about. So Emily is a nationally recognized consultant, who takes a tech intentional approach to addressing screentime challenges.

She's a former middle school teacher, which I just think gives her some pretty great street cred. And she's been featured for her work on screen time in the New York Times. The Washington Post's The Today Show, Good Morning, America, Australia's weekend today in numerous other places. And I will also note that she was one of my experts in The Safe Parenting Summit that I hosted back in February of this year 2023. She recently testified before the National Academies of Science, Engineering and medicine, about children and technology, and sort of where we're headed and what we need to be thinking about. Emily offers private one-on-one consulting parent courses, professional development, training, and personalized school presentations based on that edtech intentional approach that I mentioned.

She's the parent of an 11 year old and a 14 year old. And as that she really understands the real life challenges of parenting in the digital age. She is also the co-founder of the student data privacy project, which is an advocacy group fighting to protect student data in schools.

This will be a nice kind of follow up to some of the conversations that you've heard recently from Dr. Mandy Sanchez at Culture Refrained from Dawn Wible, at Talk More, Tech Less, this is all part of the same conversation.

In this conversation with Emily, we dig into the difference between scary and dangerous. We talk about at what age kids should get a phone or what questions should we think about before we do that? We talked a little bit about parental controls and monitoring. And we talked about, you know, some of the

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anxiety and, and challenges that we're seeing come up for kids and teens right now that are caused at least in part by screens, I think you'll enjoy this one fair warning, there is one or two swear words that are used in this one. So if you've got little kids in the room, just be aware before you dive in. But this is an important conversation. And I think you're gonna like it. Emily has a lot of wisdom, a lot of great perspective, and has done the research. She knows her stuff. So enjoy.

Emily, welcome to The Heartful Parent Podcast.

Emily Cherkin 04:03

Thank you, I'm so glad to be here.

Christy Keating 04:05

I'm really excited to have you here. And as you and I were just talking offline before we started recording, we have so much alignment on so many things. And we could go in a thousand different directions with this conversation. So I'm really excited to see where this goes. So buckle up listeners.

I want to start with talking about something that you and I did an interview about for The Safe Parenting Summit, which aired back in February of this year. And that is the difference between scary and dangerous. And it ended up you know, obviously it was the theme of your presentation, your interview with me for the summit. But it really ended up being kind of a theme throughout the whole Summit as we talked about safety. But like how do we not feel afraid all the time and what do we need to worry about and what do we not need to worry about? So let's start there like

Emily Cherkin

Yeah.

Christy Keating

I know you talk a lot about this about the difference between those two things. Let's dig in on that.

Emily Cherkin 05:04

That sounds good. Well, I should let me start too by saying that, as a parent, I have not been without my own anxiety and fear about raising kids in the world today. So like, I want to normalize that, like fear and anxiety. And parenting is very real. What I have learned, and this has taken me many, many, many years and good therapy and good friends and good mentors, is that I can put my attention and focus into things that I can't control. And that doesn't make me feel better or more capable, in fact, has the opposite effect.

And so one of the things that I see as both a parent, a former educator and now as screentime consultant is how much fear and anxiety there is in parenting, as it dovetails with screen time. And it's lots of things. It's fear about what their content is, like, what what kids are seeing or doing online, it's

fear about how much they're doing it. It's a fear about safety in the real world, like needing that contact with communication. And it's fear of like, missing out, right, the FOMO that parents don't want their children to experience. And the thing I always try to remind parents is that there can be multiple things that are true at the same time, like we can have these anxieties about the world, and our children can still feel left out.

And technology isn't always going to save us. And that it isn't the word I've been using a lot right now is just nuanced. It is all about nuance, because even identical twins that are biologically the same family are going to experience things very differently about technology, right? I mean, yes, that is an example.

Christy Keating

Right, about the whole world. Yeah, exactly.

Emily Cherkin

Exactly. Right. And that's true within families. So people will say, Oh, well, my oldest we did this, and it totally didn't work with my youngest. But that's, that's absolutely normal. And it makes it even harder, which is why there isn't a one size fits all, to screen time.

Christy Keating 07:01

Totally. And, you know, I see that in all aspects of parenting, where parents are like, well, this worked for my first kid, what has gone off the rails with my second one or my third one or my fifth one, because they are so different. And I think when it comes to tech, unlike some other areas of parenting, it is changing on a near daily, I mean, it is changing on a daily basis. Right?

Emily Cherkin

Right.

Christy Keating

And I am not as immersed in the tech side of things, although I do some work in it. But like two years ago, for example, would I ever have thought that ChatGPT would be here and that, you know, my kid could theoretically she has not done this to the best of my knowledge, but could theoretically like write a paper using AI. We're all trying to catch up on it like, minute by minute basis and feeling like we're perpetually behind?

Emily Cherkin 07:57

Well, there's a great line that getting information from the internet is like a tank, trying to take a drink of water from a firehose. Yes. And I think that feels very much like parenting in the digital age, too. I had a parent once say it feels like I'm holding back a tsunami with sandbags. You know, like it just, it's like, it doesn't even matter what I do. And I'm, you know, I'm an optimist. And I definitely say to parents like, yes, it still matters. Yes, this is a fight worth having. Yes, there are things you can do. No, there are not

quick fixes. No, it's not going to be easy. No, you're not exempt from looking at your own screen do this, right, like so. I think there's that piece of it.

And I also want to just like when we talk about, I say screen time. But the problem is that means so many different things like recording a podcast interview over Zoom is one form of screentime. Meanwhile, I could be scrolling through Twitter or Instagram, or, you know, somebody could be calling me or I could be writing an essay, or I could be watching a movie, right?

So one of the problems is that screen time is this, like, people get real up in arms about what you're saying. It's all bad. Well, no, I mean, this is again, why go back to nuance, right? It's all about what depends, is really the answer. And so I say to, you know, to parents, we've got this perfect storm, we have personal devices for children starting at younger and younger ages. But that's just, you know, the graph is just climbing on that. We have screens for school. And I think a lot of times that gets left out of this conversation because parents feel so much like oh my gosh, how am I going to handle this at home.

But meanwhile, kids are now coming home with devices for school from the school or are being required to log into platforms to do school. That's a huge problem. And as a teacher, I saw the beginning of that. And then we have the isolation of the pandemic and the you know, everybody sort of threw their hands up said we have to, we have to use these devices to stay in touch with friends and family and teachers, right. And it's short term. And I always used the line that like you know, it was the lifeboat we needed in that first spring of 2020. But lifeboats aren't long term how thing you know, it's like, now what? Now we've like we're still living in the lifeboat.

Christy Keating 10:07

But let's not navigate the ocean in a lifeboat.

Emily Cherkin 10:11

Exactly. All kinds of water metaphors today, I'm realizing. No, I mean, like both I don't know, maybe because it's raining. But I do think there is something here about like, parents, we've got to get out of the lifeboats, we can move to a bigger ship, we can, you know, like, it's time and, but it's also so hard. And so I think I hear a lot from parents, like, I thought I had a handle on it. And then COVID hit or I have a good rule at home are a good system at home, but the school is sending home, all that stuff. And I feel like I can't fight against it, or my daughter is the only one without social media and all her friends have it. And she blacked out. Right. So it's so multifaceted, and hat's what makes it so hard.

Christy Keating 10:49

Like, nas a parent, I feel all of those things. Right? I feel all of them. Because I've got as I think, you know, and the listeners probably have heard me say, I have a 13 and a half year old, and I have a six year old. Obviously, the screen usage for both of them is quite different, because they're in really

different developmental places. But here's what I will also say it's very different for my six year old than it was for my older daughter when she was six. Yes. And part of that is the pandemic. And part of that is, yeah, she's in kindergarten and has a computer at school. They don't use it, you know, all day, she doesn't bring it home, but she's already doing learning on the computer. And she's in a dual language program. So there's some things that that computer can share offer, but it, I'll be honest, it makes me crazy.

Emily Cherkin 11:37

So again, like even the activism that I do, which is around school, three news and data and privacy, we were having this fight pre pandemic. So I don't want to say that like the pandemic caused all of the screens on school use, it just accelerated what was already happening. And, you know, I think you're right, like to compare your two kids at different age sixes is really illuminating. I had a parent Call me once. And she said, I have eight children. Oh, boy, they are. And she said, I am having such a hard time with number eight, who is 15 now, and she said, I have never experienced the parenting challenges I am experiencing now with my 15 year old because of tech.

And you know, look, again, I know I just said temperament and all of that, and every kid is different. But like, to me, that was a very fascinating anecdote, right like that. It is a different world. Even if you have two kids within, you know, seven years, I always say this is not even a 10 year problem. This is a five year challenge. And we can maybe even say it's a three year acceleration because of COVID. Right. And so that's why none of those old things work. That's why what we had control of pre pandemic is just not happening now for a variety of reasons.

Christy Keating 12:54

I like thinking about it that way, in the sense that like this woman who had, you know, eight children, youngest is 15. So you got to imagine, at a minimum, her older one is 23. Right? And that's if she has right one baby every year, one baby after another. Right, right? Probably the older one is even older than that. And they're spread out a little bit more. And but that's one parent, because a lot of times what we hear is like my parents saying, it seems like it's a lot harder. We're saying to them, what we're doing right now is a lot harder to parent than when you were parenting.

And, you know, the older generation had their own challenges. I don't want to diminish that. But so they're, it's harder for them to maybe wrap their head around that. But when you have the same parent, in an eight year span, 15 year span, whatever saying no, no, no, this is harder. Right? And I'm saying the same things like it is harder. It's harder for my with my younger one than it was for my older one. And now that she's hit 13. And, you know, we did the whole approach to cell phones that is promoted, and it's called wait till eighth, and we did wait till eighth, really?

Emily Cherkin 13:59

Yeah. Yeah. And did I? Yeah.

Christy Keating 14:02

And oh, my god, we're drinking from a firehose, right. We're still drinking from the firehose, you know, you and I work in this space, and we work with parents, and we read the statistics and the articles and the studies and all of those things. And so, when I'm in my rational brain, I can calm myself down and say, Okay, right, I can get into that optimistic space, I can rely on the parenting tools that I have. But I'm not always in my rational brain. And a lot of the parents that that I'm sure you see, and that I see are not always in our rational brain. And so we're getting really confused. To kind of circle it back about that. That difference between what is scary Yes, yeah. And what is dangerous specifically when it comes to screen usage? Because if you ask me, and I love the internet, I use the internet all day I'm we're having this conversation over the internet. And yet, I still would say really my my default position is It's all scary.

Emily Cherkin 15:01

Right, but Right. Well, and that just also to tie back to the nuance piece, right? Like, I think, to think about those differences in kids just generation, even in the last 10 years, how much has changed? It's nuanced again, right? Because, I mean, I'm 45, we had computers in the classroom when I was in elementary school. But here's the big difference. They didn't have algorithms the way that they do today, they weren't connected to the internet, where you could access literally anything, anytime, anywhere. And that is one of the ways in which it's so different.

And so I think I always want to make sure to that I'm clear that I'm not anti technology, right? Like I think and I'm not either. Yeah. And there's, you know, I always say tech intentional, right, like, just to your point about, you know, language learning, like maybe for foreign language as a tool for certain activities in that kindergarten class. That makes a lot of sense.

Okay, so let's go back to scary versus dangerous, because one of the things and I'll just give some hypotheticals because of what I hear a lot like, and I mentioned this earlier, like number one thing I hear all the time is my kid feels like they're the only one without fill it in, you know, Minecraft, social media, a phone, they are very concerned about their child feeling left out. And I want to just back it up a minute, because I taught middle school for 12 years. And some of that happened, pre smartphone, and even pre cell phone. And I will say that being left out in middle school, actually, at any age, but especially in middle school is normal. It sucks, it doesn't feel good. But it's not a unique situation to this generation.

Christy Keating

True. Yeah.

Emily Cherkin

So, I think it's very important for parents to know, this is not new. And that what I say is, you are concerned about the fear of missing out because they don't have this tool to communicate on. And I understand that it is a very different way that kids are communicating. And that can make it harder for

those who don't have it. But I always say, just consider how much more FOMO they're going to feel once they have it. Because now they're going to see all the things they were left out of all the parties, they weren't invited to all the chat things that went on, that they weren't included in. And so I you know, you parents may still decide to give it but don't be fooled into thinking that you're actually decreasing FOMO you're doing the opposite. Right?

Christy Keating 17:19

Yes. And that is such an important point. Because I when I when I asked parents, like why did you get your child a cell phone or a smartphone? Right? There's generally two categories of answers that I get. And the first is for safety reasons, right? So I can get in touch with them so that I know where they are so that they can call me if something's wrong. And then the second big reason is kind of a Keeping Up with the Joneses, for lack of a right, everybody's doing it. My neighbor gave their kid a cell phone, my you know, all of her classmates have cell phones. He doesn't want to feel left out. And so I gave him a cell phone. Yeah, and those are really, you know, I've never once heard a parent say, Well, you know, my kids really into molecular biology and would like to have access to research.

Emily Cherkin 18:13

Under present, no, I'm 100% with you on those are the two reasons. And the second one you list is just the FOMO. One, it's like everybody else is doing it. I don't want them to be left out. But in both those circumstances, I'm going to ask a tricky question. For whom are we getting the device then? It's not for the child. It is for us as our parents, our anxiety and our fear about the world. And again, I'm not judging you. Like I always say I replaced judgment with curiosity. Why is it that you feel that it is so necessary? And before you make that choice? Is it possible to think about what skills are being displaced? By offering it too soon, sooner than others? Whatever you want to say? And what are the possible skills might be gained by not providing it?

So as an example, and I hear this a lot about the I need to reach my child right, which is first of all about a parent's need not about a child's need. Schools have front offices fill with phones, landlines? Yeah, and actually it's incredibly disruptive to classroom. I'm a teacher, I know what this is like to have kids phones ringing in the middle of class or buzzing or vibrating or going off. In fact, my daughter's K-5 schools sent an email home at the beginning of this year K-5 that said, please remember to have your kids leave their smartwatches and smartphones in their backpack with the sound off during the day, because they're disrupting class. So parents don't necessarily always think that through.

Now, I also always hear well, my kid needs it because x there's this feeling that our situation is special and unique. There are a few exceptions to this and, and one of them, for example would be as a medical device, a no brainer. A kid has died. That's their glucose monitor. No problem. That is not what I'm talking about. Right? I'm talking about the fact that my kid walks home alone, and I'm scared about them walking home alone, and I want them to be able to reach me. That is a one not a need. And that is a parent one, not a child. Well, I mean, I'm sure the kid is sad to have it. But here's the other problem

that we have to think about what we're talking about scary and dangerous. It is a scary feeling to get lost. It's a scary feeling for a parent to think about a child getting lost. But how are you making sure that your kid doesn't get lost outside of providing them with an internet connection, connected device in which they can get lost? In the cyber world? Where Yes, creepy people work and live, right?

Christy Keating 20:42

Well, totally. I always say to parents, the internet is a place. It's not a thing. Right? So it's a location where they go. And so if you would not set your child loose. I mean, I say this sort of it's sort of tongue in cheek, but not really like, if you would not set your child loose in a mall full of strip clubs, and shops. Right. Right, then why would you set them loose? On this device? Yeah, but but it's also yeah, there's even if they're not going to those things on the internet, there are places where predators do lurk.

Emily Cherkin 21:17

Yes. And we as parent, this is the problem. It's about risk assessment, right? We're overestimating the risk of kids walking home from school, alone, or even with friends. And we're under estimating the risk of them being online with strangers in this place called the internet. The problem is, is because we as parents are on our devices all the time. And the way in which these companies and news platforms and social media apps make money is by keeping us engaged longer. And in order to keep us engaged longer. They have to give us content we want to read, well look content, do we want to listen or watch? Maybe we don't even want to but it's the clickbait stuff. It's we're rubbernecking, the car accident on the freeway, it's the horrible story about the one kid who got kidnapped, because some Tic Tac Three, you know, like reached out and you got picked up.

And I'm going to add one more thing here that I think is really not talked about a lot is how much parent shaming goes into this when those things happen. So we all feel very self righteous, when somebody else's kid has something bad happens to them. We say, Oh, well see, because my kid has a phone that will never, you know, XYZ or because I did. And it makes us feel better about it. And yeah, we're all lovely people, and we want what's best for our kids, right? We're not necessarily walking around with our noses in the air. But it justifies our anxiety, even though our anxiety is disproportionate to the risk.

Christy Keating 22:42

Yes, yes. I mean, we just live in an anxious world in general. Right. And so many of you and you and I were talking about this as well offline about sort of the the reasons for that increase in anxiety because the CDC research that came out in February is abundantly clear. And I you know, that I did a podcast episode on this, that anxiety rates are escalating rapidly. The the research that the CDC recently released is related to kids that are roughly ages 14 to 18. But let's be honest, our anxiety is going right up along with them. Yes. And so it is so hard to get I mean, it's not hard, it's easy to get lost in that mix of scary and dangerous because we do hear something and and you know, it's so funny you say like, it makes us feel better to judge others when I was working as a prosecutor and doing like sex offense cases, right, which are not, you know, they're not for the faint of heart. It was more than once either in

one of my cases, or one of my colleagues cases where I'd have a jury that would acquit the defendant, because they would victim blame, because it made them feel safer. Right? So to say, Well, I would never wear what that victim wore. Right? And so therefore, I'm not susceptible to that risk, that risk won't happen to me. And so it was easier in some cases to do that, than to say no, actually, this guy over here is the one responsible here. Right? And and that's, that's just an analogy that popped into my mind about what you're describing here. When we as parents are judging other parents for something happening. We do it because it is easier to blame that parent and to find some way to distinguish ourselves from that parent than it is to recognize this bigger the bigger context of what's going on.

Emily Cherkin 24:47

That's a powerful example. And you know, to go back to the thing I just was talking about the Tick Tock kidnapping, right again, we're talking like super, super, super rare. It's not that predators online are necessary. really rare. They know I call it digital Whack a Mole. They're popping up everywhere. But being kidnapped, physically kidnapped is and I saw some post about it on social media. And it was from an organization I find reputable. But there was a bit of fear mongering going on in that. And I really struggle with that, because I think it's good for parents to be informed. But I don't think fear mongering makes us make better choices. And what was shocking to me was in the comment, thread, how many parents were saying, Why didn't that parent take away the kids phone? I mean, comment after comment after comment.

And then if you actually read the article, it was the third phone like mom had confiscated the phone twice, and the kid had gone out and got a burner phone. So here's the reality. This, these things happen. We cannot inoculate and protect our children from anything bad ever happening. Do we don't want bad things to happen to them? Of course not. But we're not keeping them safe when we like, literally think they're safer by being on the internet all day, first of all, nor does it actually make us safer, even though what your point is absolutely right. Like the psychological part of that is we feel about our choices, because oh gosh, well, she was wearing that or that parent didn't take away the phone. And so then we can feel better about our choices. But this is where I pushed back hard on parents and say, if you want things to be different, you are going to have to step into that discomfort of accepting that we are not perfect, we are going to screw up, our kids are going to have hard experiences. And actually, that's what's going to keep them safe. This is the paradox, the more we tried to protect them from the real world, the less safe they are.

Christy Keating 26:36

Okay, I just want to say I want you to say that again, that say that again.

Emily Cherkin 26:40

The more we try to protect them from the real world, the less safe they actually are. Because they need the skills they need skills like so again, go back to the walking home from school alone. First of all, by the way, like in many other cultures, and even in America, a generation or two ago, it was the norm for

kids to walk to and from school alone, right? Like that was expected it was not only tolerated it was you would be weird if you didn't. That is flipped right now we're in this world of like, we have to opt in. And then we're the like, Whoa, you're an extreme parent, right? If we decide that our eighth grade or our eight year old, safer walking home from school, when we give them a smartwatch or a smartphone, what are we not thinking about?

So okay, yeah, maybe he has a map, or he can call us if he gets lost. But now he has a device on which he is going to be very distracted, even though like dumbed down ones are really distracting their buttons to push. I mean, literally, that's what kids do. Right?

Christy Keating

Yep.

Emily Cherkin

And especially young children. Plus, he's not safer if he's looking down at something when he's walking through traffic, right? This is an example where we have to teach basic safety, like we don't give our kids bicycles and not put helmets on them. You know, like, there are all the things that we do. We want them to learn to ride a bike, and we want them to not have head injuries. So we give them a helmet, but like we don't tell them not to ride the bike. Right? So we have to approach that again with it.

Maybe you need to give him a phone someday. Again, fine. Does he know how to walk home alone by himself without a phone first? And if he gets lost? What would he do? Those are the skills that has to be in place first. Those are the skills that will keep kids safe, right?

Christy Keating 28:22

Yeah, yep. I think there's a lot of different reasons behind why we are not as invested in teaching kids skills, sometimes, like we've gotten into this kind of bizarre era in parenting, where we do a lot for them that they are capable of doing for themselves. And yes, do not encourage that skill building. And this is one more area of it. Yeah. And so actually, this is a nice sort of like to turn our I don't know if it's turning the conversation.

But another direction that I want to head in, which is this idea of when we reach the point where there is a legitimately good reason or age, you know that they're quote, unquote, age appropriate, if any of us are age appropriate for cell phones, for smartphones to give them a phone? What are the skills that we need to teach them are the conversations that we need to have? You know, and when we get into the weeds about like, what should happen when a kid gets a cell phone you and I have a few points of disagreement, but they're minor, right? They're pretty minor, right?

Emily Cherkin

Yeah.

Christy Keating

Overall, you and I are totally aligned on what needs to be happening and what the end goal is. So why don't you start with that? What's the end goal? Yeah, like we're gonna give a kid a phone. What should we be thinking about? And what are the what are some of the things we need to do to get there?

Emily Cherkin 29:53

Yes, and again, I'm going to bring up that word nuance, because, again, I mean, parents will say, Well, how much time is too much? whether it should I get a kid a phone? It depends. It depends on so many things. And ultimately, at the end of the day, the first thing I would say is it has to be a choice that you're making, not because of your parental need or anxiety, but because it's the right time and your child has demonstrated certain things. Some of those things would be things like, you know, independence, right? Like, are they capable of walking from A to B? Are they capable of asking for help and talking to strangers? And you know, this is that hard thing where we talk about Stranger danger, but actually, you'd want our kids to know how to ask for help from people. And when we do the stranger danger thing that's not necessarily teaching them the skills, right? Well,

Christy Keating 30:35

oh, my and in my child sexual abuse prevention classes I teach. I'm like, if I can invite you to get rid of one phrase, it would be stranger danger. Why? Because 90 plus percent of abuse does not happen at the hands of a stranger, it is somebody who know. Right, right, if that phrase is, so that was originally developed by Nick Mac, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. And they now regret Oh, boy introduction of that phrase, oh, wow, it has put blinders on many of our eyes to what the real risks are. And also kids don't think of strangers in the same way that we do.

Emily Cherkin 31:16

Exactly. And also, again, when we talk about what fears, like, we want our kids to worry about the right face, or to be fearful of the thing. We want them to trust that other people I mean, again, from a big meta perspective, in terms of the fabric of our society, we need each other. And if we teach each other not to trust one another, I'm not disputing, like teaching safe. And avoiding sex abuse, like no question, right? But that doesn't start by fearing anyone is not somebody you know, because that doesn't inoculate you anyway.

Christy Keating 31:49

100%, in every talk, I give, I'm like, Look, your kid needs to be able to ask a stranger for help. Now, they might need some skills as to who to, how to evaluate, who's the best person to ask for help from.

Emily Cherkin 32:00

I always say ask the parent with kids, you know, or somebody who's with another person, right? Like, yeah, I'm with you, 100% on that. And I think, again, that goes into our parents fear about the world,

most people aren't terrible. And it feels that way, because of our 24/7 news consumption and social media feed. And so that is our job to pull out from that and try to remember, you know, like, no more people are wanting to be helpful than are harmful. And that's a really thing. We need to say that so that our kids start to believe it too. Right? Yeah. And with skills that go into being safe, right, that is absolutely important. So how to ask for help, who to ask for help. The words to say, you know, and also things like, you know, we talked about, like you mentioned, kids are reluctant to do things and not you know, we do a lot of stuff for our kid. chores. I know that sounds old school kid. Are you making their lunch for them? Are you putting their stuff away? Are they doing their own laundry? Like, basic life skills? It's not because we're mean parents. It's because when they go to college or jobs after high school, whatever it is they're doing, they have to be able to take care of themselves. I mean, there's some real, like, you've I'm sure you know, Julie, what is it like?

Christy Keating 33:15

Julie Lythcott Haim? I love Julie, I've chatted with her. She is one of my parenting heroes.

Emily Cherkin 33:21

Yes. So to that that's the end product, right? We're talking about when people are sent into the world and they have, like parents are showing up to do their laundry on the weekends at college like, no, no. And I just read this yesterday that today's 18 year olds are less mature than 14 year olds 30 years ago. And I say that with a little bit of compassion, because I would argue that the pandemic just sort of minus three years of development for all of us, right, so to cut ourselves some slack here, if you're if you have a 12 year old, they're probably behaving like a nine year old, right? Developmentally. That's so that's okay. They're going to be okay. But I do think we need to give a little leeway for that. If there was a lot of hope I really believe that young people are the future you know, it's cliché as that sounds but yeah, we have to set them up with the tools you know, this this is to go back to what we were just talking about about you know, what do kids need when they're ready to have that phone you know, I again, I always just say like, certainly delay as long as you absolutely can, you know, whether that's access to it as an iPad when they're little or social media when they're in middle school or a phone or whatever, just even a month even just a bit every day is a benefit and I always say this no parent has ever said to me, I wish I'd given them a phone younger or social media earlier.

Christy Keating 34:40

Yeah, they've never said that to me is the opposite.

Emily Cherkin 34:43

Yeah, and so again, and I I use this metaphor or analogy of the avocado the ripening avocado that like you know, you get it and it's like not right not right not right. Not right. Oh crap. And I feel like a lot of parents think they kind of you know, especially those pending under As you know, like parents who have younger kids like three middle school, they're like, they're like, I got a handle on my avocado, you know, like they're doing great.

Like we limit screen time we protect them, we know what we're doing. We know what they're watching, boom, everybody's got a phone. Everybody wants social media. So it's like, I'm not saying it's too late, but it is the like, Oh, this is a different reality, you know, and I think it's really hard until you're in it, to see how hard it is when you hit that transition point of, you know, the uptick, typically, and who has a phone, but the developmental shift that's happening around 10 and 11, that, you know, and puberty and adolescence and hormones and like, oh, boy, is it a storm?

Christy Keating 35:39

It is a storm? It is? Yeah. And I feel like I've spent the last few years in the middle of it. And my daughter didn't have a smartphone until eighth grade, as I said, you know, I know a lot about like, the conversations that I need to have, and we have them and it is still really hard.

Emily Cherkin 35:58

It's still hard. Yeah. And, you know, to the point about wait till eighth, I think what I would say what I like about that is it's encouraging parents to see you're not alone in waiting. Right? And I mean, it used to be kind of, like way too late. But it's not such a big deal. Now, it's a much harder thing to do. Because, you know, it's something like 20% of eight year olds have iPhones now, right? Like, it's it's a very different world. But it's not like wait, police means don't talk about technology until eighth grade. Like there is so much foundational stuff. I mean, like I was saying those skills before screens that have to happen before. It's because then you're going to just have a whole different problem. If it's wait till eighth birthday, eighth grade year, here's your iPhone, have fun, be safe. Oh, you're definitely going to have issues. Right?

Christy Keating

Yeah.

Emily Cherkin

Like so you know, and this is where you and I have bounced around a little bit. But like, I definitely feel like there are some alternatives, right. And one thing that I'm doing with my daughter is turning 12 in 15 days, and she would very much like her own phone. And it is two kids completely different experiences in terms of what they want. And right now we're sharing my phone and a personal thing. No, we're not sharing it, you let me use it. Well, okay, technically, that's true, because I pay for it. But what it is allowed is teaching in the moment. And this is the the hands on stuff that parents I think too often want to outsource to parental controls and apps.

And I always say, Look, if you have them and they work great. In my mind, they end up generating a lot more work for parents, and they don't exempt us from that mentoring part. So it's allowed us some pretty amazing opportunities to sit and be side by side and say like, whoa, okay, you're having a little drama with a friend, maybe texting isn't the right like, let's, let's navigate this, what do you want her to

say? What you want to say? What is it your goal here, and letting her come to those conclusions herself? Like, you know, maybe I should just call her. I could have told her it's better to call than to text. But letting her come to that herself is to me, the beginning of practicing these skills that I'm going to want her to have when she hasn't.

Christy Keating 38:02

Totally Yeah. And TierPoint. Like, absolutely, you have to start these conversations even before they get their phone. And I as you know, because this is a place where we have talked about this. I am a big fan of parental controls and monitoring and, and using the tech that's available just because of the prevalence of pornography. And I mean, you know, however, I always say to parents, that does not mean, you don't have to talk, it doesn't mean you don't do spot checks of your kids phone, which you know, and that might change as they get older, like, I may not be doing the same, I anticipate I will not be doing the same types of spot checks for my 18 year old that I'm doing for my 13 year old, right, because the need for privacy increases.

And you know, it's there's a whole number of reasons for that. But but so we use both right. So we have tons of conversations. Yeah. It's those conversations that I think are so key. We also I use my phone for my business. And so I couldn't I during the pandemic, I couldn't share it with her. Sure. I recognized dumb phone. Yeah, right. She had a gag wireless phone that allowed her to talk and text, but had zero internet connectivity. And that was a win for us. And again, every family has to figure out what works for them. But yeah, for us, that was a really nice intermediary. Yeah. Did you kind of start those conversations with in a baby steps kind of way? And even now that she has a cell phone, she does not have social media.

Emily Cherkin 39:37

Right. And, I mean, again, I'm actually agreeing with everything you're saying. I think again, it goes back to nuance, like, you know your kid, you know, your parenting style, you're very well informed about this. You're not relying on parental controls to keep you informed. I think the problem is, too often parents think that parental controls will keep their kids from getting into content that they You know, and to some degree, yeah, it does. But it doesn't monitor in that content, right? That's always a shock to parents is like, wait, what? No. And that's not because you have bad parental controls. It's because those platforms don't allow monitoring of an outcome. Yeah, it's designed to make it hard.

And so that, to me is like, there's that missing piece you if you're going to monitor fine, but like, boy, you need to be talking about what's happening within the app, you need to be talking about what do you do when you see x, y, and V, you know, and the way I mean, again, and I may have mentioned this at the parent summit, but like, make an account as the age of your child for whatever platform they're asking you to use, you know, if they want Snapchat, great. You make an account as a whatever your old to do Snapchat for a week and see what content gets pushed to you? And then if you're okay with it, fine. But I'm gonna guess you're not?

Christy Keating 40:50

Yeah, it is. It's really shocking. What gets pushed to our kids? Yeah, thats.

Emily Cherkin 40:56

Yeah. And we want them to come to us. I mean, that's the other thing is why this all to back this all up, you know, go back to birth, all comes back to the relationship we have with our kids and trust. And, you know, I, I just say to my kids, it's not that I don't trust you, it's that I don't trust all these people on the internet, you know, I don't know, you can tell me that you're not doing X, Y, and Z. But that doesn't mean other people aren't reaching out. It doesn't mean my kids friends aren't showing them stuff. So I'm not going into this naively.

But like, the most important thing for me is that if not, if I correct myself, when they see something that makes them uncomfortable, they tell me because I say to parents, it's either you or it's Google, what do you want? Do you want them to come to you? Or do you want them to go Google it and, you know, you meaning it could be a trusted adult doesn't have to be a parent, but like a teacher or mentor, somebody? Totally that is a conversation that we can have well, before our kids have devices or access to stuff?

Christy Keating 41:47

Oh, my gosh, that, you know, I mean, obviously, given where this conversation is sort of, you know, wandered, we could go on for hours, and probably will, again at some point. But I think that's such a great note to end on this idea that it's really based on relationship. Just like those are the two things that will keep our kids safer than anything.

Emily Cherkin 42:07

Yes, yes, I agree. And to the trust, you know, I'm glad you mentioned that, because that's another point about the, you know, letting kids walk around in the neighborhood. When we can say to our kids, I trust your ability to find your way home from a place that you know, they can, boy, what does that do for their self confidence? Totally, that is the thing that will keep them safe, whether it's online or in the real world, because they know, I can handle this. And when I can't handle it, I know I can ask my parent or adult for help. Yeah, that's what we want, at the end of the day, whether you give them a phone at eight or 16. That's what you want first.

Christy Keating 42:43

Absolutely. Emily, where can people find you? Because I know, like, people are gonna want more. You've got such great information. And by the way, you've also got a book coming out in January 2024. Yes, but in the meantime, where can people find you?

Emily Cherkin 42:59

Well, ironically, on the internet, so my website is the screentimeconsultant.com. I post on social media too. So I'm on the major platforms, of course, I have an assistant to help me do this, because I don't want to spend a lot of time on social media. And then I actually recommend my mailing list is a really good place to be because I send weekly essays out that are a lot more in depth related to parenting and screen time than the stuff I post. So that's a great place to start. I do have some essays on my blog as well that, you know, like making a fake Snapchat account as a pretending to be 15. And yeah, boy, was that illuminating? So yeah, that would be lovely. And yes, my book is called the screen time solution, a judgment free Guide to Becoming a tech intentional family. Now, it'll be out in January,

Christy Keating 43:42

I can't wait. I get to read it before everybody else. And I'm pretty excited about that. Awesome, we will make sure that people have all of those links in the show notes. Emily, thank you, thank you for being here. And, and just kind of wandering our way through this really fascinating world that we are all living in right now.

Emily Cherkin 44:01

Absolutely. And I think this is how we navigate it is not by going to people who agree with us, but like talking with each other and finding out we have a lot more in common than indifference. And I think that's so important for our kids to seem to do. So thank you for having me.

Christy Keating 44:14

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for joining me on this episode of The Heartful Parent Podcast. I hope you got a lot out of that conversation with Emily Cherkin and sort of that, you know, we really just dug into the conversation and let the conversation go where it took us. I hope it was valuable to you. If you enjoyed that and if you've been getting something good out of The Heartful Parent Podcast.

Please, please, please do me the favor and the honor of dropping a five star review. Sharing a few thoughts about why you think it's awesome and why other parents should tune in. I want to get the word out there. I'm so grateful to you. Best luck in your week of parenting. Hang in there. Hang tight, find joy See you next week.