



Episode 40: Eliminating Mealtime Battles—Part 1 with Christine Muenz

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 00:39

Hey, y'all, it's Christy, I'm back here for another episode of The Heartful Parent Podcast and listen, if you have been following along with the podcast for any period of time, you know that there are some really phenomenal guests who so generously, give of their time and their expertise to be on the pod to talk with you to like, share their wisdom. Right? And I'm so grateful to each and every one of them.

That being said, I have to confess that this week's guest, and actually she's going to be on for two episodes, is an extra special one for me, because of our personal relationship that has sort of grown out of our professional work.

So this week's guest is a friend, a colleague, and an incredible woman by the name of Christine Muenz. And I have known Christine for over 14 years. As you will hear in this podcast interview we met when my oldest Macy was a teeny, teeny tiny little peanut. And we met in a parent baby class that Christine was teaching.

So Christine is a parenting educator. She's a lactation educator. And she's also a nationally known infant feedings specialist. She teaches numerous classes at a Seattle area hospital. And she also lectures at conferences for professionals who work with pregnant and postpartum families alike. That is her kind of professional bio. But there's so much more.

So one of the things, you know, that we share in this podcast is kind of how we met. Christine really was there at the birth of my business, not at the birth of my child, mind you, but at the birth of my business, which sometimes feels like another child that I take care of. And I now know her whole family. And in fact, her daughter Grace, took as was a nanny for my oldest one when she was in high school, she would pick her up from school, on the days that I was working at the prosecutor's office, and then she nannied for us for a while when we had our little one. So Grace was well out of high school at that point. But she helped take care of Maren when she was just an infant.

And so I feel very tied to Christine and her family. But also, I think that that connection, that tie is rooted in a deep, deep, professional respect. And as I hope you hear on this podcast, we also just have a lot of fun together, like we have a really fun rapport. And this might feel a little different than some of our other podcast episodes. So I'm going to let you know, our conversation kind of unfold and let you hear how we know one another even more. Because I don't want to spoil all the good stuff now.

But if you, you know, think about what I shared about Christine's credentials, that is what we're going to dig into today. And if you don't have a baby, we're not really talking much about babies. This really is what we dive into is how the way that we feed our children when they are infants grows and changes expands when they get older and how sometimes the decisions that we make and the battles that we pick and the fights that we fight can have unintended effects with our kids and our families, right? It can turn the mealtime into a battlefield that can, you know, result in kids having an unhealthy relationship with their bodies and food and all of that kind of stuff. So we're going to kind of dig into all of that.

And as you will hear, Christine is now officially designated as a friend of the pod. She will be back we will talk about many things because you know, she and I both have many opinions that we will relish sharing with you. But today, that we're going to start with that piece about feeding and to just the way that we feed our children as parents.

And we've talked about feeding before on the podcast, but this really is sort of a different perspective, a different approach, and maybe even a little bit of like an answer to some of the previous conversations that we had, that I think were really fantastic. And also left parents, some of you saying, like, Well, what do we do now? Right? Like, where do we go with this?

So we're gonna start opening up that conversation again. And this won't be the last time we talk about this. So one thing that you'll hear is, this conversation with Christine and I, we can talk forever, it went perhaps a bit longer than either one of us intended. So we're going to break it up into two episodes, you'll hear the first part of our conversation today. And then two weeks from now, you will hear the rest of our conversation. Because there's just so much good stuff that we couldn't get it all into one episode.

So without a lot of further ado, you know, I'm not gonna give you much more introduction. I'm gonna let this goofy, crazy, fun and important conversation with Christine and I sort of speak for itself. So enjoy.

Christine Muenz, you're here in my office, in real life. And we're talking about a whole bunch of stuff today. And this won't be the first time that we talk, but welcome to the pod.

Christine Muenz 06:33

And won't be the last time because

Christy Keating

Oh did I say the first time?

Christine Muenz

Yay. We, my whole goal in life is to be known as Friend of the Pod. That's all I want. Every time I listen to your podcast, there are things I want to talk about afterwards. I have comments. I have thoughts. So.

Christy Keating 06:56

Well, I'm putting the virtual crown on your head, as it says at the top friend of the pod.

Christine Muenz

All right, yeah.

Christy Keating

Okay, so tell the people how we met.

Christine Muenz 07:07

Christy Christie came into my parenting class. I teach parenting classes at the Seattle area hospital, and have been doing so for 27 years now. And so Christy came into my class, when her oldest was just a few weeks old. And the way I remember it,

Christy Keating 07:29

And you guys, this story gets better every time. Christine?

Christine Muenz 07:33

Well, okay. I was lecturing at a conference once sidebar, I was lecturing at a conference once. And after I gave a talk, a woman came up to me, a participant in the conference. She came up to me and she said, In my culture, the storytellers are the wisdom keepers. Your stories hold so much wisdom. And I thought there it is, vindication for all the people who say my story's a little bit overtime. It's because I'm a wisdom keeper.

Christy Keating 08:08

Because you are your wisdom keeper. Okay.

Christine Muenz 08:11

Okay. So anyway, Christy came into my class with her baby and had a couple of questions. And as I was answering those questions, Christy had sort of some rebuttal. And I would say, litigated me a little bit to make sure that I knew my staff knew what I was talking about, and that I was teaching evidence based best practice infant care, which I was. And in that moment, we fell a little bit in love with each other. Then you came to class religiously, every week for the first year, or,

Christy Keating 08:51

Oh, no, but not just the first year we, my group, and me as one of the activists made you and the other teachers continue teaching until our babies were 18 months old.

Christine Muenz 09:06

Well, and then we, you all are the ones who made me start a toddler series. So, we've for all these 15 years now, we've been teaching toddler classes, and then I just, you know, I don't know, we're kindred spirits. And we both want to make the world better for parents and kids.

And when you were ready to leave the prosecutor's office, you came to my house, and we had a bottle of wine and a couple of notepads and wrote ideas for what the next chapter of your professional life was going to be. And that's how the Heartful parent was born in my living room. So true story, true story. See, I didn't embellish.

Christy Keating 09:52

That really is a true story. That really is a true story. Okay. So, you know, we've been doing this podcast now for forty-some episodes or I don't even know where we are right now, almost a year, right, February 14, Valentine's Day, 2023 is when we launched this podcast.

And I have to tell you that Christine and I have been talking about having her on the podcast since episode one. Because we've also talked about having a separate podcast, that was the two of us, but we'd get into a lot of trouble. She's not kidding when she says, like, there's a lot of things that we could talk about, because she listens to the podcast, and then has thoughts and comments, and which probably all of you who are listening do too, right.

Christine Muenz 10:35

And here's the thing I always think, it's parenting. It's not policy and procedure. And so even though you have some incredible guests on, who says incredible things. Sometimes I take ninety percent of it and think, yeah, yeah, one hundred percent. And ten percent, and that, I think, is what all of us should do a little bit when we're listening to parenting experts.

And I'm using air quotes when I say experts, because parenting is the most individual thing in the world. You got to parent, the one in front of you. And anyone who has more than one kid, as you do know.

Christy Keating

Yeah.

Christine Muenz

You think you know everything you finally figured out parenting with your first one, then you go ahead and have a second one. And oh, my god, totally different. Totally different kid. Totally different temperament. You have to get a whole new toolbox for that kid. Yeah. So anyway, I just think it's okay to sometimes take what works for you from what someone says, and leave what doesn't work for you.

Christy Keating 11:44

Which is exactly why you were okay with me litigating you and parent baby class.

Christine Muenz

Yeah.

Christy Keating

Because I was like, wait a minute, let's back it up. And I hope that everyone that listens to the podcast does that for stuff that I present, and stuff that you listen to from other parenting podcasts or, you know, as you said, quote, unquote, experts, because there are a million different ways to be a fabulous parent.

Christine Muenz

Yep.

Christy Keating

But we also I'm also a big believer, which, you know, came out and that story about me litigating Christine. I'm a big believer, and so is Christine, in evidence based practices.

Christine Muenz

Yep.

Christy Keating

And making sure that we're not just shooting from the hip. I mean, sometimes we, let's be honest, like sometimes that's what parent, that's the art part of parenting, right. But sometimes there are things that we know are good for kids. And there are things that we know are bad for kids. For example, and this isn't the focus of today, but we know, the science is equivocally clear that hitting our children, spanking our children, is damaging to their brain development to like, all sorts of things. Right? That's unequivocal, right? But then how you parent outside of that corporal punishment, like then there's a bunch of gray.

Christine Muenz 12:58

All right, all right, the one that I always talk about, because I do spend so much of my professional work, talking to parents with babies, there are measurable consequences to letting babies cry and cry, and nobody comes. Unresponsive parenting has lasting impact on the brain mapping. And so let's look

at the data. What we know, I one hundred percent agree., I always like to look at evidence based best practice care, and then help parents to find their own way within what does the data teach us? Yes. Also, let's look at the child as an individual

Christy Keating 13:38

One hundred percent.

Okay. All right.

So then with all of that, because you guys, those of you who know me know, I can talk for a long time. But you put Christine and I together. And I mean, we could record, you know.

Christine Muenz 13:53

Topics that we're passionate about, yeah, buckle up,

Christy Keating 13:57

Buckle up. But today, we are going to talk about feeding and bodies and body image. And you know, all things sort of related to that, because it's something that Christine talks about and teaches, and it's something that's really prominent in my mind as well.

For many of you who are listeners or women and bodies and body image, it probably has been something you've thought about once or twice. It's certainly something that you know, that I have, but also I'm now the parent of a high schooler. And I see the challenges that come with that and the messaging that she gets and that her friends get. And, frankly, it's kind of scary.

Christine Muenz 14:49

So how do you raise children who have a healthy relationship with food and love their bodies, love have self love in a culture that makes it almost impossible. Yeah, our culture just inundates us with freaky messed up messages about food, and tells us especially as women, but everybody, that we're supposed to hate our bodies, that we're supposed to change our bodies.

And as we age, we're especially supposed to hate our bodies. And it is a really hard place to love yourself, and to love food and have a good relationship with food, even as an adult, who does the research and thinks these things through. How are our kids supposed to navigate this? And how can we help them with that? Right.

Christy Keating 15:44

And one of the questions that always comes up for me when this topic gets broached is I mean, we live in a super fat phobic culture, right? Shaming anyone for their body size, or their appearance or whatever is never ever, ever, okay, ever, whether it's yourself, someone you see on the street, your

child, someone that's on to whatever, it's not okay. And we also recognize that, again, going back to evidence based practices that, you know, we want most of us as parents to want our kids to be healthy. Right, right, we and so how do we talk about messaging around health, without talking about messaging around the size and shape of their body and like self love, and you know, what the intersection of all of that is, and I feel like there was something else I was gonna say in there and can't remember?

Christine Muenz 16:35

Well, one of the things that I really like is that some of the some of the people I think, who are doing the best job talking about this, are talking about weight neutral conversations, weight neutral relationship to health. So that we're not talking about being a specific weight, or a specific size as linked with our child's health. And that means not talking about being a specific weight, or a specific size for our own health.

And because as every single parent who's listening knows, your kids are always listening. And so if you stand in the kitchen and say, Oh, well, I can't have that I'm off carbs. Carbs are mommy's enemy. And, you know, if you stand in front of the mirror, and you grab your tummy, and you say, Oh, I have got to lose some weight, your child is watching.

Your child now thinks that some foods are better than other foods, some things are our enemy. And that there's a hierarchy of foods and all of this stuff that we can talk about. And then they also think that I've got to lose some weight is an important part of health, right? So it's, for sure true that some of us losing weight is a part of our health goals. And you can love your body and still have goals for your body. But how we talk about that to ourselves, and in front of our children is super important.

Christy Keating 18:15

It is and, but I also want to say is this: Christine and I are not magically good at this. We're not immune to any of the messaging and for full disclosure, no joke, we're hitting record on an episode food about body and body image. And we're both looking in the zoom camera, trying to make sure that we're at the right angle, and then it's catching the best side of us, right? ,

Christine Muenz 18:38

Like super annoyed with my friend that she didn't tell me this was going to be video, because I would have done something different with the look.

Christy Keating 18:44

Right? And I said it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter doesn't matter. Okay, so anyway, just wanted to put that full disclosure that we're not perfect at this.

Christine Muenz 18:56

But I think that's one great thing that I hope people take away from thinking about this with their own kid is that even things like pediatrician visits, that, let's make them health focused medical visits, and not visits about the child's weight. I know there's been a lot of press about this lately, just seeing all different places where professionals are talking about eliminating conversations about BMI from pediatrician visits.

Christy Keating 19:26

But let's be honest, the whole BMI thing is bullshit anyway,

Christine Muenz 19:29

It's meaningless, yet is a meaningless metric that has nothing to do with health. And yet, it's still a part of many pediatric questionnaires, you know. So it's part of our job to advocate for our kids at their medical appointments. And so to go in and before you start any conversation in front of your child to say to their physician or the nurse or the office manager, it's important to me that we don't talk about my child's weight or my child's BMI at this appointment.

Christy Keating

Yeah.

Christine Muenz

You know, and if you have any concerns about it, shoot me an email, or we can talk about that not in front of my child.

Christy Keating 20:10

Yeah. I want to back up, though, because, yeah. Because you know that that's a conversation that comes in when our kids start to, you know, grow and get older, and they're eating their own food. But you talk a lot, and in fact, you know, I was concerned as a new parent about and as somebody who has, you know, gone up and down and my weight and struggled with that, over the course of my life. Like, I wanted to make sure I was doing right by my kid, now kids. And was giving them good information and like talking to them about it in the right way and not doing damage.

As parents, I think we all want to start from a place of like, do no damage, right? I mean, we're all gonna screw up our kids in one way or the other, but at least sometimes we can be aware of it.

So I took a class from you, Christine, that talked about feeding well, and throughout our parent baby class that sort of led eventually to The Heartful Parent. We talked about breastfeeding, and bottle feeding, and how does that all play into this long term picture of body image and health and all of that?

Christine Muenz 21:18

Yeah, awesome. Okay, so to me, it all goes back to the idea of the division of labor around having a healthy relationship with food. And I know this has come up in previous episodes of your podcast. And also, I'm sure your listeners know, from you introducing me, I am not a registered dietician, or nutritionist. I have worked with lots of RDs and, but I'm a parenting educator, and I'm a lactation educator and an infant feeding specialist.

And so I often approach things, starting from when this human being is a baby. And a baby in the first year of life has a perfect relationship with food. One hundred percent of their nutrition comes from the milk feedings, whether that's breast milk, or formula, or a combination of both. And a baby at the breast has all the control, they come to the breast, they eat when they're hungry, they stop when they're satisfied. And sometimes they will just stop transferring milk, but they'll stay latched on to the breast.

So every person listening who has breastfed a baby probably has had that experience where they're looking down and they're like, Oh, she's done, she's finished, and they go to take the baby off. And the baby's like, oh, no, no, no, no, no, not done. And they're like fluttering their little lips. But they're not transferring any milk anymore.

So they're not finished with the nursing, they're not finished with the connection, the skin to skin, the hormone transfer that's happening between the parent and the baby, they're just finished with the milk.

Christy Keating

Yeah.

Christine Muenz

And it turns out that that's super important for brain mapping. I eat when I'm hungry, and I stopped when I'm satisfied. And so for decades, there was this research that showed that bottle fed babies were more likely to be obese as adults than breastfed babies. And originally, they thought that this was because of the composition of human milk versus the composition of formula and the way that interacts with the GI and all that, which some of that is true.

But it also turns out that it's about the mode of delivery. Because at the breast, the baby has all the control. And when we're giving a bottle, the parent has the control. And so the way we were bottle feeding back in the day was this big open hole that we put the bottle in your baby's mouth. You'd squeeze the milk would just pour into the back of their throat and in a straight stream. And they had to swallow it, or they would sputter and choke. And nobody ever thought to take the bottle way to give the baby a break to give the baby any control.

And so that was what was mapping the neural pathways, for not *I eat when I'm hungry, I'm stopped when I'm satisfied*, but *I keep eating until they take it away*. And so what the super cool research showed that babies who had been bottle fed and that way. When they were given a cup at two years old, they were much more likely statistically to actually finish everything in the cup than the babies who had been breastfed, or the babies who had been bottle fed in the way that we now call paced feeding.

So some of you probably weren't taught paste feeding. I always want to say P-A-C-E-D, not P-A-S-T-E sounds like paste feeding.

Christy Keating

Here's some good Elmers. It's glue.

Christine Muenz

It's P-A-C-E-D. And all it means is that we're giving the baby breaks. We're letting the baby decide, do I want more? And you can, there are lots of great resources for learning more about PACED feeding. But that's the way that bottle feeding is taught now.

And it's so that babies are mapping these neural pathways, listening to their internal cues in that whole first year of life when the milk feedings are the composition of their nutrition. And then after a year, when we're introducing more and more solids. And the solid foods are actually making up some of the child's nutrition.

This is when they start responding more to external cues. And not just listening to those internal *I stopped when I'm satisfied*. So, *Oh, are they offering me more? Okay, I guess I'll eat more. Oh, wait, is everybody else at the table having seconds? Oh, okay. I guess I'll have seconds or Oh, look, my whole family snacks in front of the TV, I'll snack in front of the TV. Right?*

Christy Keating 26:16

Well, don't you think this is also a time not just when the child is paying attention to what's going on around them. But when parents start to decide, like even if they were breastfeeding, right. And even if they were letting their six month old decide that they were done eating, suddenly they start eating solids. And we get all sorts of opinions about how much they should eat, when they should sit like when they're full, you can't possibly be full, you've only had two bites keep eating more. Right? And so it's not just them paying attention, but it's us if we weren't bottle feeding, and taking control at that stage. Now we desperately as parents want control?

Christine Muenz 26:52

Oh, yes. And it's, first of all, I get it, it is the most primal thing in the world, to need to know that your child is growing and getting what they need it there is no denying that, that I'm sure anybody is worried about making sure their baby is getting enough or their toddler is getting enough. Or oh my gosh, did

my teenager eat anything green this week. I don't know that she put one vegetable in her body. And it's very primal. So I am not dismissing that at all how difficult that is, as a parent that need to know that your kid is getting what they need. And then on

Christy Keating 27:35

I just say I had to pause as you were saying that and think, has my teenager eaten vegetables? I'm not sure to be honest. I don't know.

Christine Muenz 27:44

And then I know that this is an even bigger concern. For those of you who have challenges around feeding, whose babies started in the NICU, who you were measuring cc's of input and cc's of output and counting wet diapers for weeks to make sure that baby was growing. I know this is a way bigger concern for those of you with kids with food aversions or special needs. And so this is a multi-layered conversation.

Plus, every single one of us brings to the table literally to the table, the way we were raised and our own relationship with food. And just as I know that you talk a lot about people who are trying to undo generational trauma, around parenting, and you know, people who were shamed or people who were spanked, you know, are trying to undo that and not shame or spank their children.

Some of you were raised with really controlling practices around food, you have to at least try it. We're not leaving this table until you at least take a thank you bite, you know, or, you know, dessert until you are a clean plate or, you know, there we could tell a million stories. Yeah, these very culturally dominant practices around food that maybe some of us are trying to undo because they haven't served us well as adults, and our own relationship with food.

Christy Keating 29:25

Can I just interject with a story? Okay.

Christine Muenz 29:28

The storytellers are the wisdom keepers.

Christy Keating 29:31

Wisdom keepers Okay. I don't know if this is wisdom, but I think it's kind of humorous. So when I was growing up, I had a best friend and then we kind of did everything together. And she spent time with my grandparents, and I spent time with her grandparents and we knew each other's parents and everything.

And one year, one summer, I guess, and I was probably, I'm gonna guess twelve, somewhere in that range. You know, not fully teenager yet, but like, knew my own kind of mind or whatever. And we were

spending time with her grandparents. And they, you know, this was in the Pacific Northwest, and they had a boat. And it was like a boat that they slept on. And so her grandmother had cooked us dinner on this boat. And she and I and her brother were eating our dinner that our grandmother had cooked us out on the back of this boat.

And her grandmother had cooked spaghetti squash, which I will just say, none of us were a fan of, I don't think I'd ever had it before. And that just was not a part of my family's food culture. And we looked at it, and I think we tried it. And we decided it was disgusting. But the rule was to go to these like these rules about food, you may not have dessert until your plate is clean. Right? That was the rule. You have to finish everything on your plate.

And so my friend and I and our brother all looked at each other. And we went, let's huck it overboard.

Christine Muenz

Yeah. Okay, I knew that was coming.

Christy Keating

A word to the wise, spaghetti squash floats.

Christine Muenz

Oh, oh, no.

Christy Keating

So we're sitting on the back of this boat, like hoping that her grandmother does not come out there as we're trying to take, like a paddle or something. We're in the marina right? We're in a marina and we're trying to get the like, spaghetti squash to like go over the boat next to us. So that nobody can see that we'd thrown the spaghetti squash over and we could actually get our dessert and.

And I think we got it out of the way just in the nick of time as her grandmother came out. But like it was I think about that story. And the fact that spaghetti squash floats. And I giggled, but also I think that there was some pretty, you know, clear messaging there about the hierarchy.

Christine Muenz 32:02

And say, you have to get through the indignity of spaghetti squash before you get to the glory of ice cream.

Christy Keating

Right, right.

Christine Muenz

You set up this hierarchy of foods. And we do that all the time in our culture. And we see it with babies that if somebody hands the baby, never had anything in their mouth, other than breast milk or formula, hands them their first bites of solids, right? And so if we give them a slice of a peach, and they hold on to it, and they're second on it, and they're, they're kind of licking it, and they'll make a face, and they're like, and what the parents or the grandparents will say, *Oh, look at her. It's juicy. Oh, she likes it.*

You hand that baby a piece of steamed broccoli. And she licks it, and she kind of gums it or whatever. And we, she makes the exact same faces because she's never had anything in her mouth other than her breast milk or formula. And she starts making faces, and we go, *Ooh, she doesn't like it. It's bitter. Oh, she's just like you. She doesn't eat green food,* or you know, all the things we say from the very first bites of food in our culture, we are establishing this hierarchy of foods,

Christy Keating 33:21

And telling them what they like and what they don't like this.

Christine Muenz 33:24

So that's one of my number one tips for families is when we talk about the division of labor, is don't talk about it. Your job is to serve the food to your kid, whether that kid is eight months old, or eight years old, or fourteen years old. You decide what, when, and where. So here's your division of labor. And your child's job is to decide whether they eat it and how much they eat.

So go back to the milk feedings that first year of life where they have a perfect relationship with food. I decide what, where, and when. Right now, breast milk in this chair, right? My baby decides whether she wants it and how much she wants. And my breasts aren't calibrated. So I don't know how much she got. But she either falls asleep or you know gets antsy so I offered the second side or whatever.

Same thing with the baby who's exclusively bottle fed. I decide what, when, and where. Okay, this chair right now, bottle of formula. Baby decides whether Yes, please. How much? Well, I made a three ounce bottle, but baby fell asleep after an ounce and a half. Nobody wakes that baby up and says *Come on, you gotta finish it. Mommy worked hard on this. You got to be a clean plate or we're not leaving this couch until you drink the last ounce and a half.*

I mean, we would just never say any of those super controlling messages, we'd be like, Oh, I guess she was done. She only needed an ounce and a half, and you put it down. Nobody says to the baby who has popped off the breast, and is happily looking at her hand or, you know, watching the dog or whatever. Nobody says, *Come on, you have to at least try the second side. You have to take a thank you sip of the second side.*

All right, it's just ludicrous too, thanks for laughing.

Christy Keating

Yeah.

Christine Muenz

It's ludicrous that we would be so controlling about the milk feedings, because we're giving the baby this control. Why can't we do that with the solid foods? Right?

Christy Keating

Yeah.

Christine Muenz

Just you decide what, when and where. And then they decide whether they're going to eat it, and how much they're going to eat? And don't talk about it. Because the other really big part of this is kids want control. They want

Christy Keating 36:01

All the time.

Christine Muenz

Yeah.

Christy Keating

All the time. This is one of the you know, we talk about this in positive discipline a lot. And we don't need to go into detail now. But that's one of the times where we see their behavior derail is when we have taken too much control and they are feeling they have no control. And that affects that sense of belonging and significance that every human has a need for right. So yeah, keep going.

Christine Muenz 36:25

Well wait and just rewind because of what you said about belonging and significance makes me think of connection and heartfulness and everything that our goal is in connecting with our children. The very first thing out of my mouth should have been, I want you all to have mealtimes as peaceful, connected heartful times in your family. And not a time for battles of will, super controlling parenting practices, fights, tears. You're grounded. You're sassy. You know, I mean, that.

Eating is wonderful. It's one of life's greatest joys. And it's a time of connection and togetherness when your family. And so take away the power struggles. Yeah, and let it be joyful and heartfelt. And, and Okay, so now circling back, what I was talking about with control is at every single age at every single stage, ultimately, our kids are trying to separate from us, right?

Christy Keating 37:33

I know dammit. It's really.

Christine Muenz 37:37

Yeah, they do that I shouldn't have started this with, you know, I have three grown children, all of whom have successfully separated from me and are making their way in the world.

Christy Keating 37:49

And one of them who used to babysit my children.

Christine Muenz 37:53

Yeah. Anyway, how your child tries to get some control is often around food. Because you make them wear shoes, and you make them do their homework and you make them take a bath, and you make them brush their teeth, and you make them sit in a five point harness in the backseat.

And then I mean, all of the things that we do, your child, ultimately at all these different ages only has one hundred percent of the control over two things, whether they swallow the food, and where they poop. Don't ever make one of those things about a battle of wills in your home. Because ultimately, you will lose. And I can tell you, I have a very vivid memory of my dad telling me you are not leaving this table until you eat that coleslaw.

Christy Keating 38:51

Okay, oh, it was broccoli. For me. I have the same memory.

Christine Muenz 38:55

I could picture this pile of coleslaw. I'm in my fifties. So this was not recently, right. And my, for whatever reason, my dad dug his heels in. And he said you are not leaving this table until you eat that. And I couldn't do it. And for whatever reason, I could not choke down that coleslaw. And maybe it was because I didn't like the taste of it or whatever, which we can talk about in a minute. Because some of you your kids are more sensitive to taste and texture.

But maybe it was because I was at a stage where I was trying to assert some independence, find some control. I was feeling crushed by my parents parenting or whatever. So I also dug my heels in. And what I remember is that not only did everybody else leave the table, my siblings, you know, had long since left the table. The dishes had been done. I don't know where my mom was. My sister and brother had both gone to bed and I was still sitting at the table looking at that coleslaw. I want, I'm not going to do it. You know what, mister. I win on this a hundred percent of the time.

If you dig your heels in over food and they dig their heels in over food, that child will win because you can't make them swallow the food. So just don't go there. Yeah, don't get into a battle of wills over.

Christy Keating 40:21

Well, and not only because they'll win, but because if we go back to that connection and control piece, right, like belonging and significance, like with every moment that we're trying to get them to do something, now, okay, they do have to do things like their homework and whatever, right? There are things we have to get them to do. But when we get into fights over things, we don't need to get into fights over like, do you eat three bites? Or four bites? Or, you know, do you eat the broccoli tonight? Or not? Or the coleslaw? We're breaking connection.

Christine Muenz 40:52

And is this the hill I'm gonna die on?

Christy Keating

Yeah.

Christine Muenz

That was a question I'm asking as a parent ten times a day, and it's certain phases of parenting a hundred times a day. Is this the hill I'm gonna die on? Man some days and some phases with kids you feel like all you do is say, No, don't and stop.

Christy Keating 41:16

And the teenager is that the teenage years and toddler like are pretty.

Christine Muenz 41:21

Toddler baby. Yeah. And if I have to set a boundary and enforce that boundary seventy five times, and the hours between when you got home from school, and when we hug each other goodnight. I don't want to add food to that. I want eating to just be a time of connection.

And so I'm going to decide what is offered and present it to you and you are going to eat it or not eat it. And that's okay. You're in charge of your body, little person. But then don't ask me to go make something different. I'm not a short order cook. This is what we're having: chicken, asparagus, some rice, a salad, you know?

Christy Keating

Yeah.

Christine Muenz

And what if your child only eats the chicken? And they don't eat any of the asparagus or the salad? They just shovel in chicken and rice. This is a problem?

Christy Keating 42:15

I mean, I think a lot of parents would say, yeah, they need vegetables,

Christine Muenz 42:18

Right? But they did their job. The division of labor says you did your job. They did their job. You offered chicken and rice and asparagus and salad. And they decided whether to eat?

Christy Keating

Yes.

Christine Muenz

And how much some chicken and some rice. And so you don't have to talk about, *Don't you want to try the asparagus? I made it the way you like it, buddy. I thought you liked roasted asparagus. Last week I made roasted asparagus you ate it.*

And the more you talk about it, the more this kid goes, *Watch me make these monkeys dance. They care so much whether I take a bite of this asparagus. And now it has become the axis around which this whole family is spinning. Whether or not I'm going to take a bite of asparagus. Or honey, did you have any salad? When's the last time you ate something green? You need green foods or you have energy.*

If you know all of the things we say that make the kid think I have all the power in the world. And these parents are so jacked up about whether or not I take a bite of this. Let's just see what happens if I never eat asparagus again. So don't talk about it.

Christy Keating 43:33

Yeah, I mean, I learned all of this from you fourteen years ago, and I ended up with one kid who will eat anything. And I as I'm listening to you talk, I'm like I think I've slipped into saying things like because my younger one. She will say she would subsist on french fries. If I let her. I mean

Christine Muenz

So would I, by the way, French fries are amazing.

Christy Keating

They are amazing. And not terribly nutritionally complete. And so like what you know, I'm just thinking of things that both my husband and I have probably said that aren't probably helping the situation, although she's a pretty easygoing kid but wakes up when it comes to food.

All right, listeners, I hope you got so much out of that first part of my conversation with Christine. It's always a challenge to figure out what you know, when we end up recording a long conversation like

that, where do we break it up. And where do we pick up next time? So I hope you feel like oh, you got some good stuff and you want to hear more because Christine will be back. We'll finish up that conversation two weeks from now. So the week after Thanksgiving.

In the meantime, next week, we're going to dive into, it feels appropriate, as we approach US Thanksgiving and I know not everyone listening is US-based. But whether you're US-based or not, whether you celebrate Thanksgiving or not, however, that you know, this time of year, and that holiday lands for you, the conversation next week is for you because it's about gratitude and the ways that gratitude can actually change our brain chemistry and like the things that it can do for us that are really quite remarkable. So we'll dive into that a bit next week.

And then as we're all coming off our food comas after Thanksgiving, again if you partake in that, we will follow up with Christine and finish off this conversation with some great questions and food for thought and all of the above.

Have a great week.

And I'll see you next week.