

Ep. 5: Girls as Confident, Courageous Self-Advocates

[00:00:00] **Trudy Hall:** Hello there you're listening to on educating girls, creating a world of possibilities, a podcast produced by the national coalition of girls schools and I'm Trudy hall, your host for these important conversations about girls. Today, we have an opportunity to meet educators who have focused professional and personal energy on talking about body image to girls in their pre-teen and early teenage years.

[00:00:24] A time when girls are bombarded from every direction. From boys, media, advertising, parents, coaches, and even friends about how every part of their bodies should look and feel. There's no denying that many girls contend with body image issues beginning in their pre-teen years and continue to struggle throughout their teenage years and well into adulthood often to the detriment of their emotional well-being their physical.

[00:00:52] And their confidence. These two educators tackled the topic head on convinced that the right messaging at the [00:01:00] front end of the process of becoming a woman can have long-term positive effects on a girl's sense of herself in her own body. And it, her ability to accept herself for who she is tall or small, muscular, or lean curly haired, or straight.

[00:01:17] I urge parents and adults who are raising girls of all ages to listen in as getting girls to feel comfortable in their own bodies is critical to their health. And we need you to do this work together. Speaking with one voice

[00:01:58] What makes this conversation about body [00:02:00] image different is that it's happening in a girls school, a school community entirely dedicated to the education and healthy development of preteen and teen girls in such a community. There is a surround sound that is possible when all adults come together around common talking points on a given.

[00:02:20] The teachers who we meet today are not psychologists or medical experts, but they are experienced practitioners in the day-to-day work of connecting with girls on sensitive topics. They're working intentionally using a number of strategies to create a force field of healthy language, to combat the unhealthy barrage that society is flinging at girls from other sources.

[00:02:44] Girls schools have an advantage in this arena and they know it. Fortunately for girls everywhere. Girls' schools are only too happy to share wisdom about what it takes to ensure girls thrive. My guests today are from two different sacred heart schools within the [00:03:00] network of sacred heart schools, the unique and visionary, sacred heart education encourages students to walk in the world, applying quote, intelligent faith, compassion, action, and courageous hope unquote.

[00:03:14] So as to be of service in a fractured. The girls' voices you will hear during this episode are those of the students of our guests, Eric wrath, and Warren Perry. Erica serves as the director of student services at sacred heart of Montreal and Canada, and teaches a class called personal development. And Warren is the aquatics director at convent of the sacred heart in New York.

[00:03:38] Each has far more than a coach or a classroom teacher, however, both have developed compelling communication strategies. They offer to parents and colleagues to address various issues they see their students experiencing.

[00:03:51] **voice note:** I was nine years old when I started to think about how I looked. Um, it was mostly because I started to realize that boys liked prettier [00:04:00] girls.

[00:04:00] And I thought I was pretty, but I was like looking at others and maybe they didn't think that. Like they didn't think of that themselves. And maybe they were worried about them. I think mainly in middle school was when I started to think about how I looked. It was, um, definitely a really toxic experience in middle school, because I think since a lot of people are getting phones for the first time, they were like all over social media and there's all these unrealistic beauty standards portrayed there.

[00:04:31] And then everyone kind of gathered all these insecurities from social media. I find that being in an all-girls school really makes a difference regarding conversations about body image, because in a school like sacred heart, you feel more comfortable talking about your body and don't feel self-conscious about it.

[00:04:47] Everyone always accepts you and you never have to feel afraid of others will think of you. The most helpful piece of advice that any adult has ever given me to help me with my body image is that I should really just be confident in [00:05:00] myself. Because if you're confident in yourself, then you radiate happiness and radiating happiness is much better than not being confident. I think talking about body image and feeling good makes a difference at an all girls school than a co-ed school. The reason why is because you don't want boys to hear what you have to say, they might be private to you and all girls will understand what you have to say.

[00:05:25] **Trudy Hall:** Erica and Warren welcome. I'm so pleased to share this time with you.

[00:05:31] **Erika Rath:** Thanks for having me so happy to be here,

[00:05:33] **Warren Perry:** Trudy. Yeah, it's a privilege to be here with you and Erica today.

[00:05:36] **Trudy Hall:** As we talk across the Canadian us border. I know that even though you work in different countries, you work in a network that shares a compelling philosophy on educating girls, Erica, to set a frame for our conversation. Might you describe very briefly what is at the heart of a sacred heart education?

[00:05:54] **Erika Rath:** Sure. So all of our schools share common goals. We have five common goals. They are a personal and [00:06:00] active faith in God, a deep respect for intellectual about. Uh, social awareness, which impels to action, the building of community as a Christian value and personal growth in an atmosphere of wise freedom.

[00:06:12] And that's essentially how we run all of our schools throughout living these mission goals and values. And I think it plays a role in everything that we do as a Sacred Heart School and part of the now.

[00:06:22] **Trudy Hall:** I encourage our listeners to take a closer look at sacred heart, because it really is, uh, a very interesting environment in which to educate a girl and they've done a wonderful job of globally, um, innovating within the context of the language that Erica just shared. And Warren, I know that your girls swim team has been conference champions for six years. So you clearly know a bit about coaching girls. Our listeners will be really interested to know what drew you as a male athlete, into teaching and coaching at a girl's school.

[00:06:53] What's different for you as you work with a teaching environment that has only girls in it.

[00:06:57] **Warren Perry:** So Trudy that is a question I get often, um, [00:07:00] you know, I grew up in a family where a lot of our, uh, a lot of the girls in my family went to girl schools in North Carolina. Um, I also, my father and my grandfather attended all boys schools in Virginia.

[00:07:12] So certainly had experience or familiarity with single gender schools. Um, also had experiences working alongside of their coaches who taught at girls schools in Connecticut, North Carolina. They were amazing people making great impacts.

And so they certainly inspired me to look at a single gender schools, uh, specifically in this situation, it wasn't necessarily the desire to work at a girl school.

[00:07:34] As much as something that Erica referred to as the special environment of the sacred heart network that really caught my attention, uh, or sacred heart, I'd always taught in co-ed environments. Um, and I have fond memories of those times, but, but know, there were distractions then, um, that, you know, at Sacred Heart with the girls that I work with. Is not that distraction per se. They really have a steadiness and a focus, um, [00:08:00] you know, in line with that mission, uh, both of the school and through their extracurricular activities. I just love seeing that sisterhood.

[00:08:06] **Trudy Hall:** Wonderful. Now getting to the heart of a conversation for today. Erica, you teach a class called Personal Development, and I know that you're able to teach every single student at the school. Where, and how does the conversation about body image fit into that class? And at what age do those issues emerge in your work with students?

[00:08:27] **Erika Rath:** Great question. I mean, this class is just so dear to my heart and I, I kind of feel that in order to move forward and teach students about. What's important. I think I kind of need to look back at my time in high school and realize that adolescence is a really hard time for everybody.

[00:08:42] And I would say, especially female students. Um, and I remember just struggling a little bit, uh, and wanting to have conversations with people that I could trust and maybe. Not knowing who to turn to or who I could have those conversations with. And so I [00:09:00] believe that all students and, um, you know, teaching girls that they need to have those conversations and, um, they need to know where to go.

[00:09:09] And so this course is designed to have intimate conversations, look each other in the eye, put ourselves out there, be vulnerable, tell each other how we're feeling, because let me tell you. If one student is feeling it, they're all feeling it. And so what's really special about that is that it's not a secret, we're all feeling the same way.

[00:09:29] Let's share how we're doing that. Um, often, you know, I'll have discussions about body image and peer pressure and maybe the desire to look a certain way. Um, early on in high school. And then as the girls age, we get into little bit of a deeper topics, social media comparison, things like that. Um, but the topic is not a one and done and it doesn't start in grade seven and then, then it's done.

[00:09:52] It continues all the way until their graduation. Um, if I hear students talk about. I might overhear a conversation about [00:10:00] trying to diet for a prom or a

sporting event or how they looked at a party in a picture. And so I want to make sure to really touch on that if I've heard it in the hallways. Um, and also I can tell just by their level of engagement.

[00:10:12] So, you know, if they're really confident and they feel that we don't need to have this discussion, then I'll put it on the side for awhile. Um, until something comes up or if they're super engaged in a conversation. They're the ones that dictate to me if they want to keep it rolling and going. And, and so, uh, I really hear what they need.

[00:10:29] It's not based on what I think is right or wrong. It's, I'm being in tuned to their desires.

[00:10:35] **Trudy Hall:** I'm interested to hear you say something that I know you believe deeply about not one and done that. So many of these conversations with girls have to emerge naturally again and again and again, that this is a topic about which reinforcement is is key.

[00:10:49] So thank you for raising that issue. Warren, um, as a swim coach, your work finds you at the very crux of the challenge. You know, girls [00:11:00] of various sizes and shapes, various phases of development. They're asked to put on a swimsuit and stand with others on a pool deck where it's really hard to hide from view.

[00:11:09] How do you initially address this vulnerable phase in your work with girls, as you get them to focus on their athletic capabilities and not necessarily the way their body, the way the body works?

[00:11:19] **Warren Perry:** You know, that really is the crux of the issue. And I love sports and working in sports, especially at girls schools, but you know, the swimsuit on the pool deck.

[00:11:28] Really brings out everything. I mean, you are truly stripped down to what you bring to the deck, uh, in those skin, tight suits, which we'll talk a little bit more about down the road, but, you know, initially I just had. Uh, get to the root issue, which is, you know, awareness and shame of the body, um, and, and awareness of the body in any sort of shame that, that is keeping us from owning who we are and loving who we are.

[00:11:55] Um, and I want everyone to know that differences at all ways and all levels is okay. [00:12:00] Uh, on the one hand, no matter the age, I always try to find ways to validate the girl's feelings and affirm the beauty of differences. Uh, but on the other hand, it really does depend on the level. Um, and so initially the lower school, these girls come to the pool and they are so fun, loving, and carefree, and

they jumped in the water and they're splashing with friends and just enjoying the pool and the activity.

[00:12:21] And then we see, as the girls get older, they are hearing these messages, which Erica mentioned that she addresses in your classes. You know, from the world that the way you look defines who you are. Um, and then we start seeing, you know, discomfort and fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, uh, when they're on the pool deck and they're aware of what their body looks like and what other girls look like and compare it.

[00:12:47] It starts to come into play. So, you know, lower school students I'll keep the conversation very broad. It's just about vulnerability, sensitivities around the pool. Let's just have fun. It's okay. If you don't like swimming. So Kay, if you don't like getting your hair wet, I know the pool is [00:13:00] a little cold, but let's have fun, you know, but then in middle school I have to get a little bit more direct.

[00:13:05] And there was an article I read on girl schools and male teachers in particular. Um, and a lot of female, you know, students, um, we'll throw out the issue of female concerns and female problems like periods and tampons thinking that that's going to make the male teacher uncomfortable. And that's one thing that I, as the teacher have to be aware of as a male on the deck, but saying that doesn't make me uncomfortable.

[00:13:27] This is okay to something every girl deals with. Um, and then from that of dissolved, The uncomfortable situation, knowledge, and that we're all in the same boat. Um, they usually trust and respect me more, uh, to be able to coach through that. Eric,

[00:13:40] **Trudy Hall:** I know you're going to want to add something to

[00:13:42] **Erika Rath:** that. I just love what Warren Warren said.

[00:13:44] You know, first of all, about making it fun, it would be such a shame for a student to not participate in something that has so many rewards like. Um, being athletic or having fun because she doesn't feel comfortable in her body. So I really want to [00:14:00] say like kudos to Warren for addressing it and really, you know, addressing it head on because I think, um, that it was just, it would be such a shame for students not to participate in something that could be so much fun.

[00:14:10] And it's so rewarding. And often when it's not addressed, students kind of go back behind the curtain and say, this isn't for me. Um, instead of dealing with the issue at hand

[00:14:21] **Warren Perry:** Lauren. Yeah. So, you know, going on from that, you know, I really want to make sure these girls are freed up to be who they are. Um, and you know, being a Catholic school, we often bring in, you know, writers and authors who can better say what we're trying to express.

[00:14:37] And one thing that Henry Nowan wrote once that I try to tell the girls as they get older is that community is like a large. Uh, each little piece seems so insignificant. One piece has red and others, blue or green, another shining. Another sharp. Yeah. Somewhat precious. Others are ordinary, somewhat valuable, others worthless, [00:15:00] somewhat gaudy others delicate.

[00:15:02] We can do little with them as individual stones except compare them and judge their beauty and value. But when all of these little stones are brought together in one big mosaic portraying the face of love, who would have ever questioned the importance of any single one. If any, if one of them, even the least spectacular, one is missing, the face of love is incomplete.

[00:15:22] And together in one, mosaic, each little stone is indispensable and makes unique contribution to the glory of God, which is what we at sacred heart. That community, that fellowship is what we're about. Making visible to.

[00:15:33] **Trudy Hall:** I love that quote. That was well said. I'm glad it's going to be included in this episode.

[00:15:37] And, but Erica now, um, you know, you have a joint Warren, obviously this is a topic that's of interest to both of you and clearly it's important in the work you do. Um, you crafted a blog. A blog specifically to, um, draw in other members of the community. It deals with a variety of topics. But what I know for sure is that each moment you make [00:16:00] yourself a little bit vulnerable.

[00:16:01] Um, if for, in the, in the blog topic, uh, what are you, what are you finding that this is teaching you about girls and maybe let's start with, why did you create the vehicle?

[00:16:12] **Erika Rath:** Created the blog as an opportunity to continue the conversations at home. So what's once a month, what I do is I send an email home to families and let them know what's taking place.

[00:16:21] The speakers I'm bringing in the topics that we're having. And at the end of the email, I always sign off with, and I hope you continue these conversations at home because let's be honest in an hour, once every eight days, I'm not gonna be able to accomplish everything that I want to do over the course of this.

[00:16:36] However, I think it's important for parents to know that we're partners and that they should be having these conversations with their daughters at home. So I'm kind of hoping that their daughters come home. They say, this is what we discuss in Ms. Ross class today. I still have questions. I want to talk to you about it.

[00:16:49] What was it like for you growing up when you talked about this topic and, and so on and so forth, the blog was really a chance for. Parents to read about how I'm [00:17:00] feeling about something or what I'm seeing, what I'm noticing, or maybe what I was inspired by my last blog was inspired by Warren's article and then maybe reading it with their daughters or reading it to them, and then having a conversation.

[00:17:12] Um, I started the blog about three years ago and it was. General at the time, my opinions, my concerns, what I was seeing. And then as I've gotten more comfortable and maybe found my voice, like you said, Trudy, definitely becoming more and more vulnerable. Um, I talk a lot about my experiences in high school and how hard it was for me and how I feel like I've been given a gift to come back to high school.

[00:17:36] Um, and maybe help girls, uh, change a little bit. Yeah. Uh, without me physically being back in high school as a student, and now I, I have my voice and I'm confident to do that, but really I feel that, uh, there's, there's power in stories and there's power in community and, and in sharing. And if we are vulnerable and we take the time to hear each other's stories, then there can [00:18:00] also be less judgment because now we know who people are.

[00:18:03] Without stories without all of that, there definitely will be judgment because we're just making assumptions and seeing what's on the outside instead of really hearing what's on the end.

[00:18:14] **Trudy Hall:** I heard, you mentioned another theme, we're going to come back to community. Um, and, and the, and the power of community, both you and Warren have mentioned that, but also, I also heard you talk about the power of storytelling.

[00:18:26] Uh, so, um, Warren, you used a bit of a. Approach. I know you do some blogging as well, but you got, you intentionally wrote an article and why, why that article, what inspired you? What's it led you to understand?

[00:18:41] **Warren Perry:** Well, so I've been in swimming for, gosh, I guess like 25, 30 years to date myself a little bit. And so.

[00:18:47] Then around the topic of body image, um, you know, subconsciously and consciously for a long time. And I've had many conversations about this live in person with parents, with friends, um, and I [00:19:00] just needed to get it down in one place, um, where it was easily accessible. Um, and so that's why I wanted to write.

[00:19:06] Well, the issue of girls and swimsuits and their anxiety around it kept coming up in our curriculum for the past eight years. We've been forming things at Sacred Heart around our pool, and I really wanted to address it in one place, incorporating voices, uh, from experts of other swimmers and teachers and coaches from around the country.

[00:19:22] Um, as well as people at our school, um, and swimmers who had similar feelings. And so, um, you know, I really had a good time with this. It was a period of, probably about four to six months where I met with a lot of people, um, spoke with swimmers and non-swimmers, and, and really did feel like there were three faulty mindsets, uh, that needed to be addressed with.

[00:19:41] Number one wearing skimpy or bathing suits is, is cool. You know, and that's not necessarily cool. That's, you know, something that you feel comfortable in. Um, it is what's important. Uh, secondly, this faulty mindset that the new SQL is perfection. Well, thirdly, perfection is attainable, which, which those are not the correct [00:20:00] mindsets.

[00:20:00] We want to be teaching our young girls. Um, and so, you know, meeting with people, uh, both the faculty staff, uh, and even my fellow coaches and students and helping reinforce that everyone's body is different and unique and beautiful, and that it's important to find a support system, um, whether friends or family members or faculty and staff that can help you, uh, move into more acceptance of yourself.

[00:20:24] Whoa.

[00:20:25] **Trudy Hall:** I, I, I say that because I, I just, I wish I'd had a swim teacher like you when I was coming of age. And so our listeners can get a feel for your style and approach. Um, Warren, I'm going to ask you, and then I'm going to ask Erica, uh, to, to read, um, some excerpts. And as we do, I, I want our listeners to know that I am going to provide the access information to these articles.

[00:20:49] So you'll be able to get the. To Warren's article and you'll be able to get the link to Erica's blog. So you can listen carefully now and know that you can read it in whole as a, at your [00:21:00] leisure. So, Warren, um, go for it. Uh, read a couple of paragraphs

[00:21:05] **Warren Perry:** appearing on deck and a tight bathing suit with lines and busts on display for all to see, consider fear and even the most advanced student in a class like students who learn at different paces.

[00:21:16] Bodies develop on different timelines. Some girls develop breasts quicker. Others have periods earlier and still others have hair that doesn't fit into traditional swim caps. There's a fear and not just the unknown in ourselves, but the unknown in others. That's imitation is to compare and contrast with friends.

[00:21:35] What we look like in bathing suits, or perhaps worse to scrutinize one's appearance against the sculpted bodies of professional athletes or filtered images on magazine covers or social. The fear of being judged and to be found lacking is palpable around. Today. We want our girls to feel empowered, to try new things, brave new adventures and cherish.

[00:21:58] Their personal sense of [00:22:00] femininity. Uniqueness is good and our bodies are temples to be honored and enjoyed. We all want to own that. And teachers and coaches in particular commit their professional lives to helping youth grasp a fulfilled life. It is okay to not like swimming, but it is not okay to not like yourself and by approving of ourselves in vulnerable situations.

[00:22:25] For example, in swimsuits, we will accept ourselves and many other life endeavors, body image is a pressing issue, not just in the swimming world, but in our consumer culture. Growing into one's body can be traumatic for every adolescent, but especially for the girls going through tremendous bodily changes, this trauma can keep girls from one learning the lifesaving skill of swimming and to enjoying a lifelong wellness activity.

[00:22:54] **Trudy Hall:** I just know that Erica is going to want to comment on, uh, what she's just heard you

[00:22:59] **Erika Rath:** say, [00:23:00] first of all, I mean, just hearing you read it, instead of me reading it, this is such a different effect. You know, it gives me the shivers just because I actually used to be on the swim team growing up. And I have to say reading your article, you know, brought me back to how uncomfortable I felt on the deck.

[00:23:18] And there were oftentimes where I would go into the locker room and I'd say, okay, forget it. I'm not doing this today. And I'd go to the little cafe and an order of fries and a sandwich with a friend and we'd skip swim team because it was just too much to handle. So I, I feel first of all, You're really saying what everyone's feeling, but you're actually putting it out there for all, all to hear and see, which I think is the first step also, you know, I think it's so true.

[00:23:43] We're always critiquing our bodies instead of realizing just how great they are. All the amazing things that our bodies can do for us. Um, And I think about how, if I had a swim coach who has half as understanding and supportive as you then, then maybe I wouldn't have [00:24:00] missed swim team as often as I did.

[00:24:02] Um, just to have that conversation about how uncomfortable I was. So I think what's amazing is that your students clearly know that you're accessible and supportive. Um, and they are just going to feel more comfortable going out on the day. Knowing that you've had these conversations and everyone is aware of it.

[00:24:19] I think that's so important. Alright.

[00:24:21] **Trudy Hall:** Turnabout is fair. Play, Erica. Uh, you get to read some of your blog now and we'll hear it. Warren, react to that. So pick a piece that you're, uh, know created some conversation with your girls and awful go.

[00:24:34] **Erika Rath:** Sure. So this blog was about confidence and how we can actually help our daughters and our students to become.

[00:24:40] More confident women. So I wrote girls do not take as many risks as boys because they are scared of failing. And this fear doesn't only hinder them in school. It holds them back in life. We need to think about our role in this and what we can do to help. We need to focus less on their achievements and praise their efforts.

[00:24:57] No matter the. We need to alleviate [00:25:00] some pressure and focus on our daughter's wellbeing while making them feel that they are enough, just the way they are not smarter, not thinner, not anything just as they are now. I've learned that the students really like it. When I engage in conversations and lay the cards on the table, we talk about worst case scenarios and I let them play those out.

[00:25:19] But I also share mistakes that I've made such as failing a math test and worrying about how my parents would react. The question I've learned to ask is can you live with. Usually the answer is yes. And often students realize that the worst thing that can happen isn't as bad as they thought. Maybe we need to have more conversations like these so that these chats become normalized.

[00:25:39] And a part of our everyday lives. We need to remind ourselves that embracing failure is just as important as embracing success. We are all enough just as we are

[00:25:52] **Trudy Hall:** Warren, as you hear that thoughts and reactions. I

[00:25:55] **Warren Perry:** certainly love the idea of a bright embracing failure. I think that's [00:26:00] something that I try to drive home with my pre-K students all the way through 12th grade is it's okay to not be okay.

[00:26:07] That is okay. Talk to me about your feelings. Why, what are you most scared about with the water? Um, and, and, and understanding even as adults, like we fear failure, um, and there are issues that we need to be able to work through and wrestle with with. Um, but failure is okay. Um, being a sports fan, you hear coaches, uh, often after failures and losses.

[00:26:27] Talk more about what they can learn, um, from risking and falling short, then even the wins and the achievements. So thank you for helping us alleviate the pressure from girls to have to be perfect, um, to help them understand. They are enough. And, and in my office, there is a painted picture from one of my friends that just as a heart with the words enough in it.

[00:26:50] And I think that if we could remind ourselves of that daily, um, the confidence that we would take into the world, um, would just change things.

[00:27:00]

[00:27:00] **Trudy Hall:** Erica you, you mentioned in your, your reading there, um, that, uh, oftentimes a girl's sense of herself like this can get in her way. And I'm wondering, um, if you can talk a little bit about how a girl's sense of how she fits into her own body, um, inhibit her ability to flourish and invest energies on becoming her best self.

[00:27:22] Um, you've already shared some language that you sometimes use in, in some of your work, but is there something specific that you say around the issues of body image, and particularly as girls are transitioning from girlhood to womanhood?

[00:27:36] **Erika Rath:** Sure. I mean, I think most of the conversations that we have are incredibly open, you know, very open-ended questions, nothing closed, lots of dialogue, uh, creation of safe environment, um, small groups.

[00:27:48] And of course we never force any students to participate. You know, my office is, is right beside, uh, the study hall, which, uh, houses, uh, desks for all the students. And so I'm really right in the midst of [00:28:00] their environment and I'm not, you know, closed off or, or somewhere far away, I'm somewhere where they can always pop by.

[00:28:07] Um, but I'm also very aware of, of my own strengths and weaknesses. I, I'm not a personal counselor. I'm not, I'm not a psychologist. And so I'm here to listen and talk. Talk about what it was like for me and give some suggestion or advice, but, um, I'm very big on referring when a student is feeling, you know, they need a little bit

more, um, I think, you know, just going back to what Warren was saying, you know, that he's taught at co-ed schools.

[00:28:32] And so have, I, I think there's just such a difference in the way girls want to talk when there are no boys around, it's so much freer and they're not worried about who's listening. Who's gonna, you know, throw it back in their face. It's the locker room conversation or the, or they're walking with their books to their, to their classes.

[00:28:54] I can just tell you, it's just, it's so free. And I think there's a lot of freedom within the girls to express how [00:29:00] their feelings and they're never shut down or put down for having those few. So I think from a really young age, when they come into this school and they start these classes, which let's be honest are, are quite unique.

[00:29:12] PD is a very unique class. Um, they right away understand that it's a safe place and a place where they can talk. So I feel really fortunate that, that our school offers this class because I think it's very important. Um, and it's not just sitting in an office with an adult with now, you're sitting in a classroom with your peers and you're sharing how you feel.

[00:29:34] Or maybe you're scared a little bit at the beginning, cause you're in grade seven and you just started high school, but then, you know, a month later you're thinking, okay, other students are opening up. I should too. I might get something out of it. And I think the reward of putting yourself out there is, uh, is much greater than closing yourself off.

[00:29:51] I'm

[00:29:52] **Trudy Hall:** interested because, um, as you talk about that you are a woman. Two girls. And you've [00:30:00] set up an environment where this can happen naturally, where the girls can have conversations over a period of time and go back and revisit some of those conversations, some of those topics. And I'm guessing that as you get to know them better, more emerges, uh, as over the years.

[00:30:15] And so, Warren, I'm curious, you mentioned this earlier, um, as a male. Have you learned that there are ways that you have to speak differently or communicate differently because your audience are girls. And if so, what have you learned as a man that enables you to have better conversations in this regard?

[00:30:34] **Warren Perry:** So certainly I'm constantly reminded. That I am not a woman. Um, and, and I'm also not a mother. I don't my parents. And so sometimes those two things, um, are presented to me as a disadvantage and be like, well, who

are you to speak on these things because you're not a parent and you're not a woman you don't understand.

[00:30:52] Um, but I think that in an age and a history where men have used power over women in very unhealthy ways, I can actually be a [00:31:00] positive male voice and influence, uh, in these girls' lives. Um, and, and they need. Right. Um, you know, I think that it's very important for me as a man to recognize my limitations.

[00:31:10] There are just certain things that I cannot speak to, and that is okay. But for me to practice empathy, the best that I can to communicate respectfully with discretion and to lean on my female colleagues for support. Erica mentioned that sometimes you cannot tackle a situation with a student. I see that a lot, especially on the pool deck, I can not go into the locker rooms and deal with some of the things the girls are dealing with there.

[00:31:32] Uh, but I am to validate the feelings and experiences that my students have hoping that they can hear. Uh, you are okay and you are good, uh, from a male voice and, and, and reviewing, you know, information and research for this article. I found, uh, something written in 2013 with the Atlantic, um, that noted that actually age or maturity.

[00:31:52] And personality, uh, often have more to do with connecting with students than necessarily gender. Um, and certainly there are [00:32:00] claims out there that boys learn better from boys and girls come in better from girls. You know, I, I don't really buy into that. Otherwise I wouldn't be working at sacred heart. Um, but I really do believe that by recognizing my limitations.

[00:32:12] Um, and practicing vulnerability that, that I can still inspire that, uh, in the girls' lives and still make a positive impact.

[00:32:20] **Trudy Hall:** I'm intrigued by what Warringah has said and because you work so clearly across all grade levels, I'd love to have you comment on what he said in regards to. Age and maturity being useful tools in this conversation, or even, you know, gender, uh, thoughts that you have in reaction to what?

[00:32:37] Sure.

[00:32:38] **Erika Rath:** First I completely agree with Warren. I do want to say yes, I am a female, but I'm, I'm not a parent either. And so when I write my blog, it's really from the perspective of me being an educator at this school and working with 200 plus students, uh, for now over 25 years in education. So I think there's a different dynamic.

[00:32:56] Um, I don't see [00:33:00] things necessarily from a parent's perspective, which I think gives me a much more objective point of view. Um, I see girls at a different part in their life. Um, I'm not at home with them. They're not as comfortable with me as they are with their parents. And then that should be the case.

[00:33:17] Um, but we have a different kind of relationship, um, which I, I really respect and I feel that, um, Gender doesn't really have anything to do with it. I think we're in really touched upon, you know, like empathy and respect and vulnerability and being trustworthy. So I feel like those are really important and I don't think it matters who you are.

[00:33:37] Um, I, I do though think that there are some sensitive topics sometimes that we talk about where what I try to do is make the groups smaller, so that. If they want to chat, they don't have to think about putting their voice out in front of 40 students. We'll bring it down to groups of 10. I think the numbers are more important than who it is per se.

[00:33:59] [00:34:00] Um, and so basically when I talk with younger grades, because they're, or they're just coming out of elementary school, we do a lot of more things that are like activity-based. So they kind of, I, I can they kind of they're learning, but they're learning through an activity and that, and they don't have to just say, I don't have to say.

[00:34:17] What do you think? And then, you know, you wait for the hands to be raised. And of course, nobody wants to raise their hand. And instead they're doing like little group work together. And then older grades, obviously they want more discussion. They want to have the discussion where they're like talking to their big sister and they're looking to someone for advice, but it feels really authentic and just a genuine conversation.

[00:34:39] Um, often the older grades are leading those conversations. I'm not necessarily bringing in the topics. They're kind of saying what they want to talk about. Um, but also as they get older, we're planning for life outside the walls of sacred heart. And what's that gonna look like once they graduate? It's so exciting, but it's, it's, there's a lot of [00:35:00] anxiety like, oh my God, I'm leaving secondary school, the nest.

[00:35:05] And I have to go and do this a bit more on my own now. So yes, we're having conversations about body image and, and, and peer pressure and, um, other things, but we're also kind of getting them ready to like to leave and, and, and be young, independent. Women who are ready for the next step, which is so exciting.

[00:35:24] That's

[00:35:25] **Trudy Hall:** terrific. I know both of you are passionate about getting this right for girls. Um, you've developed your approach through your experience. One of the goals of this podcast is to leave parents with some tools or language they can put to use in their dialogues with their girls. I'd love it. If each of you would share three key takeaways that have helped you make headway with girls on the topic of body image.

[00:35:49] Erica, let's start.

[00:35:51] **Erika Rath:** Sure. So I think it's more about how you do it and not, and less about what is said per se. So the first and [00:36:00] foremost is just listen. I mean, just be here to listen. Someone wants to come in and just rant and rave about what's going on. So listen and, and give them a place that they can, they can.

[00:36:09] The second would be help them understand their feelings. Sometimes, you know, we, we often mix up like anger and sadness and frustration and anxiety, and it all comes to a head and, and there's tears and, and we don't really know what we're really feeling. So kind of maybe walking students through. So that they can understand and put like a name to their feelings or I'm feeling this because of what's going on in my life, but saying, what is that thing, you know, really addressing it.

[00:36:37] Um, and then the third is that, you know, to empathize and, and, and just be there, like I said to listen, um, and let them know that it's okay to not be okay. We all have good days and bad days, and they don't define who we are. Um, we don't measure our success, uh, at the end of the week, based on how many good or bad days we had.

[00:36:59] And just that [00:37:00] high school can be challenging at times. And to let them know that we've gone through it and we made it out on the other side and, um, the lessons that we learn in high school. And I guess, I mean, I speak from experience. I think. Who I was then really shaped who I am now. And it actually helped me find my passion and what I want to do.

[00:37:22] So without maybe the challenges and the struggles that I had in high school, I might not be who I am.

[00:37:28] **Trudy Hall:** You are precisely right. Um, I can, I can make the same claim that who I was in high schools, not who I am today, but thank goodness I had the challenges I had in high school. I loved that message. Um, Warren, your takeaways.

[00:37:40] **Warren Perry:** First off we at sacred heart, uh, continue, uh, you know, a new Yorker, continuing to find ways to meet girls where they're at, uh, on the full deck. Um, and that really comes through flexibility. And so my first takeaway comes from find a swimsuit for my students. Specifically find a swimsuit that makes you feel.

[00:37:57] Comfortable. Um, so we actually offer [00:38:00] board shorts, um, water shirts, um, all different types of swimsuits that the middle school swimmers can wear when they come to swim class, uh, whatever they can, uh, where to get wet and to be healthy and have a positive outlook on themselves. We want to encourage that.

[00:38:15] So flexibility of swimsuit, also flexibility of activities. Uh, I fully understand that not everyone's cup of tea is staring at a black line, swimming back and forth, right? So let's find you an activity in the pool that you love. It could be water polo, synchronous, swimming, um, you know, there's many other ways to enjoy water-based recreation than just swimming laps and, you know, it's a saving skill.

[00:38:37] So it's okay to not like swimming per se, but you have to learn how to support yourself in the water. It is something that you will take you very far in life. Uh, your identity is more than your activity or your swimsuit that's first. Secondly, Eric already mentioned it. Vulnerability. It is okay to not be okay.

[00:38:54] So I constantly say this, no matter what level I'm teaching it is. Okay. To have feelings that are hard. All [00:39:00] of our feelings and experiences are. Here at sacred heart. And we want to remind you that you are accepted and loved just the way you are. Let's talk through this together. You are not alone. Uh, and then lastly, community that we are in this together, that, um, you cannot isolate yourself.

[00:39:16] Um, when you are struggling, when you're having hard feelings, when you don't want to swim, when you come to the pool deck and you say, I'm just not going to get in. We're not going to sit you in the corner and give you something else to do. You're still going to be a part of the class somehow on the pool deck.

[00:39:29] **Trudy Hall:** Thank you both for affirming. Wonderful sacred heart does its work around creating educational communities that are there to ensure our girls come out whole and healthy in every way imaginable. And finally, as we conclude our conversation, I want to turn to Megan Murphy, the executive director of NCGS who spent time recently visiting with girls and teachers at girls schools in great Britain and Spain.

[00:39:57] Megan, what were some of your takeaways from those conversations?
[00:40:00] I have to

[00:40:00] **Erika Rath:** say Trudy, it was wonderful to meet with member girls schools in London, Cambridge, and Barcelona recently. And I think that my first takeaway is that girls schools share many more similarities around the world than they share differences.

[00:40:15] I think that girls schools are spaces of community and collaboration. I think that there are places that are deeply dedicated to equity and inclusion and are characterized as places of innovation, leadership, and opportunity for girls. And I think what girls' schools do so very exceptionally well is to cultivate self efficacy and agency among girls.

[00:40:41] And I actually heard this in the way that students talked about climate. Especially on the heels, Trudy of the cop 26 UN climate change conference that was held recently in Klasko. The girls I met were deeply concerned about eco justice. They are [00:41:00] eager, I think, to be climate change makers and they feel this sense of urgency.

[00:41:05] Perhaps even eco anxiety to begin that difference-making immediately. And I think that the educators at our girls' schools, they really understand this and they are fostering agency among their students, by making sure that they're developing real-world classroom and co-curricular opportunities for girls to explore climate science.

[00:41:31] And change-making not tomorrow. But right

[00:41:35] **Trudy Hall:** now today. Thank you, Megan. It's always interesting to learn what you are learning about girls and their needs. This has been the fifth episode of on educating girls as always. We would love to hear from you with thoughts and suggestions to inform our conversations.

[00:41:52] Please send comments or questions to podcast at girls' schools.org and join us next time. As we provide insights, [00:42:00] information and resources you can put to use. Thanks for listening. It's important to the girls in your lives that you do.