

Ep. 11: Girls Who Speak Up

[00:00:00] **Audio clip:** What is the good we forgo, not just the trouble we avoid when we choose to be uncivil? And by good, I mean, friendship, I mean connection. But I also mean in, in a larger way, you know, as communities and as a country and as a world, what are we missing out on? So, today we are engaged in a great civil war of ideas and identity, and we have no rules for them.

[00:00:26] **Trudy Hall:** Journalist and author, Steven Petrow, who has earned the nickname Civilist, has written and spoken extensively on civility, its definition, its rules—or lack thereof, and the critical necessity for it in today's polarized world. We have all experienced that engaging in civil discourse in any number of settings has become increasingly challenging in "a culture of outrage" in which public shaming has become an unfortunate norm.

[00:00:52] The fear that we are losing the ability to speak productively through and beyond political and cultural differences transcends cultures and borders. The need to be more civil is now a global conversation topic. For educators, it has never been more essential to be intentional about teaching the skills needed to use one's voice when the attacks become personal and the disagreements become fierce; it has become vital to teach "civility."

[00:01:39] **Trudy Hall:** I am Trudy Hall, your host for *On Educating Girls*, a podcast produced by the International Coalition of Girls Schools, and the song you just heard, "Brave", by Sara Barielles, is but one of many songs in pop culture that calls to this generation to speak their truth. The lyrics: "I want to see you be brave, with what you want to say,"

[00:02:01] remind us that speaking up and out is hard work. It requires the use of the courage muscle; it demands vulnerability. For many girls, who often confront societal norms NOT to speak up and NOT to be disagreeable, this is tricky terrain. It is especially critical for them to have safe spaces to learn and practice how to hold their ground

[00:02:21] even as they respectfully engage with those whose opinions are different from theirs. One might call it "a voice curriculum," as girls are first encouraged to speak up and then supported in how best to speak their mind with authority, for impact and, yes, with respect for the other voices in the dialogue. Today my guests will help us understand ways of encouraging girls to exercise their voice in challenging conversations—and "exercise" is absolutely the right notion here—practicing leads to competence.

[00:02:53] **Voice Note 1:** I have had the most success making a point and ensuring that I was heard and my opinion was honored when I was surrounded myself with people [00:03:00] who respect my opinion and who are open to listen to it. Making a point can sometimes be difficult, especially when people may not respect you or not willing to listen to what you have to say in this case.

[00:03:11] Try to be patient and respectful towards them, even if they may not be the most respectful towards you. When I have stood, proud and spoken confidently, my voice is often heard.

Voice Note 2: My understanding of the word civility means formal politeness and courtesy in behavior and speech. To me, this word means respecting others while not demeaning them. Civility means you don't have to be friends with everyone, but giving them respect in the process.

[00:03:39] Examples of actions, people take to demonstrate civility are paying attention to others, acknowledging other people, being inclusive, and most importantly, respecting people, no matter what. This practice of civility generates a sense of inclusivity and moral equality for ourselves and for others.

Voice Note 3: There are many factors that you [00:04:00] need to consider when you're making a choice about whether to step up, stand up and take a stand in a conversation.

[00:04:06] First, you need to assess the environment and whether it's a safe environment where the people will respect your opinions, then you need to recognize the topic and your knowledge of the topic. And if you don't know much about the topic, maybe it's smarter to listen more instead of using your voice. But if it's something you're passionate about, you need to speak up and voice your opinions.

[00:04:26] **Trudy Hall:** We are going straight to the girls' school world for this conversation as research tells us that nearly 87% of girls' school students feel their voices and opinions are respected as compared to 58% of girls at coed schools. This respect leads to the risk taking that is essential for a girl as she learns to first find and then shape her voice, a nuanced practice for sure.

[00:04:50] Each of my three guests leads a school that is a part of the Girls Day School Trust—or GDST—in London, England. GDST is a non-profit founded in 1872 by four pioneering women who believed that girls should have the same academic quality of education as their brothers. Today, there are 25 schools in the Girls Day School Trust, and the focus remains on academic excellence and accessibility;

[00:05:19] they care deeply about both what girls learn and how they learn it, constantly assessing programs to ensure best practice and optimal results. With me today are: Fionnuala Kennedy, Head of Wimbledon High School, Alison Sefton, Head of Norwich High School, and Jo Sharrock, Head of Shrewsbury High School.

[00:05:47] My guests today have just returned from the Global Forum for Girls Education in Boston, Massachusetts, where the topic of teaching civility was featured in several sessions. Allison, Jo and Fionnuala, let me offer a warm welcome. I hope you found the Global Forum to be both stimulating and satisfying and perhaps what you learned there will find its way into today's conversation. What did you think of it?

[00:05:59] **Fionnuala Kennedy:** Oh, [00:06:00] it's fantastic. Absolutely.

[00:06:01] **Jo Sharrock:** Fantastic. Yeah. Loved it. Great to all be together

[00:06:04] **Trudy Hall:** At the core of our conversation is the notion of civility in both social and intellectual discourse. So, to ground today's conversation, let's first agree on a definition of civility. I like the one offered by the *Institute for Civility in Government*: "Civility is claiming and caring for one's identity, needs and beliefs without degrading someone else's in the process." The definition goes on to say that civility is about "disagreeing without disrespect;"

[00:06:38] "it is about negotiating interpersonal power so that everyone's voice is heard, and no one's is ignored." How does that definition sit with each of you? Might there be elements we should add? Fionnuala, can you launch our conversation?

[00:06:51] **Fionnuala Kennedy:** Thanks so much, Trudy. Yes. Just hearing you talk about the definition of civility really took me back to the beginnings of our civil discourse program [00:07:00] 18 months ago when we were putting it together, because we wanted to be very clear what we meant by the term.

[00:07:04] Civil making sure that none of the girls or young women who are educated as in our school, Felt that what we meant by civil was having to be polite or good or quiet, or any of the things that have been associated stereotypically with the way in which girls communicate whilst at the same time, making sure they understand that shutting people down and just saying you're offended by something and walking away is never going to lead to progress either.

[00:07:27] So, um, I absolutely do agree of course, with, um, the interpretations that were given there. The strapline we came up with, I think is slightly different. Um, we talk about civil discourse being authentic encounters between inquiring hearts and

minds and what we wanted to portray through that was that we are being ourselves.

[00:07:47] I think, in, in your definition that notion of claiming and caring for one's identity through the word authentic, uh, making sure that they understood that these were encounters, not necessarily collisions or, um, [00:08:00] fights where one person had to win and one person therefore had to. But also that we are being inquiring.

[00:08:05] We are being curious about the way in which other people think and their own lived experiences and that we are always bringing both our hearts and our minds to these encounters. So we understand not only that we have an intellectual responsibility to think around a problem, but also that we do have the ability to hurt other people's.

[00:08:23] Feelings, uh, with what we say and therefore we have to be responsible for that and understand that freedom of speech doesn't mean freedom of speech for that consequence. Um, so I think the notion of civility is an interesting one. Really, to me it means what is for the greater good. And we know in society that for the greater good means everybody having a, a space at the table, everybody having a voice that is respectfully heard, even if that voice makes other people at that table feel uncomfortable.

[00:08:51] **Trudy Hall:** That was excellent. And I think you've layered the definition nicely with some warmth. I love it when things are wrapped in grace. And I think you just wrapped a really complicated [00:09:00] topic in grace for us. And, and I guess I would ask each of you, I became really intrigued when we decided to do this, um, uh, podcast that each of you do this very differently and, and essentially.

[00:09:11] You could have chosen many other things to really deal within your schools, but yet each of you, um, in all the ways that we know girls schools do has prioritized this particular topic. Why is it at the top of the agenda for girls schools and, and maybe Allison, do you wanna start there and give us some sense of, at least from your perspective, why is this at the top of the agenda?

[00:09:35] **Jo Sharrock:** I think that it's really

[00:09:37] **Alison Seffon:** important to ensure that we, we pitch this correctly with the girls and ensuring that they understand that a voice that is heard. Is a voice that can start to make change and picking up on what Lema Gabo said, um, at the conference last week, um, she started saying, you know, you can't make global changes until you're making local changes.

[00:09:59] So [00:10:00] if your voice can be heard and heard well and civilly, um, I like to talk about disagreeing gracefully, um, that then we can start to make a change and that ability. Understand why other people have different views to your own. Um, and that just because somebody has a different view, that doesn't mean that you can't be friends.

[00:10:23] And I think that's an important thing in the context of girls schools. And we do, we do a lot of work around that, about how to manage those friendship issues within. Your own peer group, particularly when there are some fundamental issues that you are disagreeing on. So, you know, the importance of starting local, starting small, whatever that disagreement is, um, you know, it, it might be in terms of who went to a party at the weekend.

[00:10:52] We're not necessarily talking massive social and societal issues, but if you start with the small things, then it makes [00:11:00] easier. It makes it easier. To tackle the bigger things. If you, if you treat everything in an understanding way, How to disagree gracefully.

[00:11:09] **Trudy Hall:** Actually. It's interesting you say that because oftentimes those are the hardest times to disagree because you don't want to quote unquote hurt feelings.

[00:11:18] Um, and I, I think that says a lot about, you know, how girls monitor their relationships. They, they really prize relationships. Uh, do either of, uh, you, Joe or Joe, why don't you just do some pile onto that? Yeah, it's really

[00:11:30] **Jo Sharrock:** interesting. What you, what you say there about girls sort of monitoring relationships and one of the things that our schools.

[00:11:36] **Fionnuala Kennedy:** Do very,

[00:11:37] **Jo Sharrock:** very well. is to help our girls find their voice because I think we know all too well, how often girls will nurse a thought or a feeling and sit in a room where they may be the most intelligent, the most experienced, have something of real value to say. And it's almost as [00:12:00] if their voice is captive.

[00:12:01] Um, actually probably captive to their own self doubt. How will this land, what will people think of me? Will they think I'm this, that the other, and it, and it really comes back to something that fan said at the beginning about sort of trying to help girls escape from some of these stereotypes around.

[00:12:17] Being polite and pleasant. Um, you know, as Allison said, no voice, no power. And we know that girls struggle even listening to themselves. And I don't

know how the rest of everybody feels, but when you hear your own voice, for example, on a podcast, isn't necessarily something that you are immediately comfortable with.

[00:12:37] So, you know, we as grown women can find this a challenge. So it's absolutely vital that the younger we start, the more comfortable they get hearing themselves speak the better.

[00:12:47] **Trudy Hall:** could you talk a little bit about how you do open the door and how you engage?

[00:12:53] **Jo Sharrock:** Yeah, of course. Um, I mean, opening the door, it's very important.

[00:12:57] It does depend what age you're trying to open that door, but [00:13:00] irrespective of age, if you want to engage a young person in something, you, you have to make them curious. You have to hook them in. There's no point in opening the door. If they're not really interested in coming through it. So if we said to our six year olds, um, we are going to do a course with you on, on how to speak civilly.

[00:13:17] Um, we'd, we'd lose them before we'd even begun. So one of the things that we try and do here at, at Rosebury high is to open the door by picking a very relevant. Topic, something that they are interested in and engaged by already, because then they're going to be happy to sort of come through that door.

[00:13:40] So, so it's, it's hooking them in it's also then once you've opened the door, about making sure that it stays rooted. I think in, in real world examples, we need them to see that civil discourse has great benefits, that there is a, a good reason [00:14:00] to want to develop this skill set. And of course it isn't one that is going to necessarily help them do better in exams.

[00:14:06] So it, it has to be almost incentivized, you know, why do I need to learn how to do this? What is it gonna enable me to do? And whether you. Um, created opportunities through debating, um, or speaker programs or whether actually it's a real issue that your school council perhaps want to debate you, you have to create those opportunities where they can understand.

[00:14:32] I got what I, I needed to get because I engaged in civil discourse. Um, I felt good. And I can see that the other people around the table felt good because we did this with civility. So it's trying to give them good experiences of it working, I think, uh, which then incentivizes them to come to the table, perhaps on a more difficult topic.

[00:14:53] **Trudy Hall:** Um, I'm guessing that funnel might have something to say about.

[00:14:57] **Fionnuala Kennedy:** Yeah, absolutely. Truly. Um, I'm gonna disagree with [00:15:00] Joe A. Little bit. I think it does make them better at exams because to me ultimately engaging civil discourse, being able to look around an idea in a 360 way. So to understand what that the question has more than one potential answer.

[00:15:12] So I think actually a few. I mean, I say this now, we haven't had any public exams since we put it in place. So there is no evidence whatsoever for my, uh, view on that. But I think if you then go into a history exam and you can understand that there may be three or four different approaches to that particular question, you probably are better set.

[00:15:30] Um, the other thing I'd say is that I think with the little ones and Joe, um, and I both have three schools, um, from four to 18, um, it's really all about empathy, civil discourse. And of course, young children learn through play. How to empathize with someone else. So they are constantly actually engaging in these inquiring, uh, sorts of authentic encounters that we talk about civil discourse.

[00:15:53] And again, trying to inculcate that sense of playfulness in our older students to take their own opinions, [00:16:00] just that tiny bit less seriously so that they can see that there is flex there potentially as they go through their lives. If you are 16 or 17, you're quite entrenched in your viewpoints or you can be, um, you're very passionate and that's wonderful.

[00:16:13] And we see social activism as being very high on the agenda for our young people, but they are quite entrenched and they don't understand at that point. Their viewpoints will change as they mature and get older and, and read different things, hang out with different people. Um, so it's really important that they are just can be a bit more playful.

[00:16:29] And what that means is therefore that they are able to listen to things, um, that are absolutely at odds with sometimes even their own fundamental values and understand that that could just be an idea or a thought that is being aired. It isn't necessarily something that needs to be shut. Or dare I say it canceled.

[00:16:45] Um, it's really interesting. All the, all the discourse around girls and young women finding their voices, which I couldn't agree with more and actually felt quite moved when Joe was talking about that voice as being captive in a room. Um, I think we've all experienced that and certainly when we were younger. [00:17:00]

[00:17:00] Um, but I also, I don't want them just to engage their voices. I want them to, to find their listening ears as well, and to think with empathy when people are talking to them, Am I receiving this in a particular way because that other person in this room is afraid or feels in some way that I'm not listening to them well enough.

[00:17:17] Um, we had a really interesting visit from the leader of the women's equality party here in the UK, a south African woman called Mandy Reed. Who said, look, it's great to have all this activism, but if you don't think you can change anyone's mind, what is the point of being an activist? And I think that's right.

[00:17:32] I think you have to engage in, in dialogue and that means finding your voice, but it also means sitting in discomfort and listening very carefully.

[00:17:40] **Trudy Hall:** Well, and that takes us right back to the comment that Allison made, where, where she was talking about a voice that is heard is a voice that can make a change.

[00:17:47] And so really starting at the very beginning with knowing that these girls can only make that change. If their voice is a voice that can be heard. Interesting. And so, so what would you say then are the barriers, [00:18:00] um, to this important work? I know, um, fan, you've talked a little bit about, uh, some of the ways in which, uh, you see empathy being critical.

[00:18:07] Are there other things that are barriers to this work and maybe, uh, start with fan and then move on to, um, either Allison or Joe?

[00:18:15] **Fionnuala Kennedy:** Yeah. And we've touched on some of the stereotypes haven't we around. Girls and the way in which they should engage in dialogue. And I think those still are barriers, both internal ones for the girls themselves, that they bring into that space, but also potentially societally structured barriers that perhaps even I am, um, playing into in, in an educational setting.

[00:18:33] I think that all girls setting such as ours are far less guilty of some of that and certainly of some of the, um, unconscious bias that goes on, but those structures still exist that get in our own way. We also see quite a lot as a school that is in Southwest London, some cultural barriers, uh, for some of our families.

[00:18:50] So we are a very, um, feminist progressive school, but it may well be that those are the messages they're getting in the daytime. And then at home, they're coming from quite a [00:19:00] different cultural experience. And that can be really confusing actually. And very decentering as to which self they are going to show up with.

[00:19:08] Um, in which setting, I think that's very difficult. Something we must bear in mind. A multicultural city, um, that I am not necessarily obviously talking to families that are similar to my family. Um, and I've got to be really aware of that.

[00:19:22] **Trudy Hall:** So as, uh, Alison and, um, Joe, as you listen to talk about barriers, do you see other things, um, go ahead, Alison.

[00:19:30] Um,

[00:19:31] **Alison Seffon:** we had a group of six formers who ran, um, a program for younger girls called the outspoken award.

[00:19:38] **Fionnuala Kennedy:** Um, and it was all

[00:19:39] **Alison Seffon:** about, um, the younger girls taking a topic that was perhaps a little bit controversial and researching it. But the important thing was they had to research both sides and they had to get a really broad understanding of what it was that they were trying to find out.

[00:19:56] Why people might have views of both sides so [00:20:00] that they could then present something to another, another audience. And that was also going back to your last question truly about, um, engaging younger girls in particular. Um, what that led to with some of our older girls then presenting in our junior school, cuz we we've got girls from age three.

[00:20:18] Looked to. So they got an understanding of some of some topics that they might not necessarily have access, um, in their curriculum, but was just starting to play with some of those, those ideas and looking at both sides. So there's so much that we can do, but there will always be barriers, um, to their understanding or what we have to do is make sure that we present as many sides as possible and help them to understand.

[00:20:48] **Trudy Hall:** Joe, I guess, uh,

[00:20:49] **Jo Sharrock:** you'd like to add, yeah, just on the barriers really, cuz I, I don't think we should underestimate the, the, the scale of the task that, um, that lies ahead of us. It was something that Ola said earlier about [00:21:00] listening and, and having someone around the table who might make us feel deeply uncomfortable.

[00:21:06] And I think there is a sort of current misunderstanding, not, not just in young people, but I think a lot of adults share it as well. That if we listen to people. We are

somehow agreeing with them or, or even worse colluding with them. So one of the biggest barriers is, is, you know, let's say somebody who is peddling hate speech.

[00:21:26] It is very difficult to have that person at the table. Um, and as we become more sure of ourselves and, and more sure of, of what is right and what is wrong listening then to somebody who we have already decided is wrong. Becomes an incredibly difficult thing to do. Um, so I think trying to teach young people that listening is not agreeing or colluding, it is really, really important.

[00:21:51] And I don't think it's something you can teach just once. I think you have to keep coming back again and again to it.

[00:21:59] **Trudy Hall:** I wanna [00:22:00] put, uh, your two points, Allison and Joe's points together, cuz I'm intrigued by something here. And that is, um, you know, your voices are not the only voices that girls are listening to.

[00:22:09] They're out there and culturally, their parents may feel differently about some of the things that are being taught and. If you agree with some, or if you listen to someone, you may be agreeing with them. How do you manage that really interesting relationship with the parents who are giving a different message at home?

[00:22:28] How do you get girls to feel confident and comfortable in respectfully saying to a parent I've learned something different at school? And I'd like to share that with you. Very

[00:22:38] **Jo Sharrock:** carefully I would say very carefully.

[00:22:44] Yeah. I mean, it's really interesting. We, we are all day schools, so, you know, we, we pride ourselves on very, very close relationships with our parents. We send our, our, our young people home at the end of the day. Um, and that relationship of trust between home and school, um, needs to be [00:23:00] maintained, um, often with civility.

[00:23:03] So I, I think it's. Integrity and courage. I think it's about giving young people the tools, the language to open some of those conversations. And I also think it's about making sure that your parents and I'm, I'm sure for example, you know, that the, the fantastic course at Wimbledon for Nola's parents will know all about it.

[00:23:25] Um, and, and no doubt, some will have challenged her on it, but if you are open as a school about what you are doing and why you are doing it, They are choosing to be at our school. So there is a sense of, of actually being very brave and

courageous. And if we model that for the girls, then they are going to be able to start those conversations at home.

[00:23:46] Um, because we've already started it for them. If, if you like.

[00:23:51] **Fionnuala Kennedy:** Absolutely right. Joan, I think one of the key things that we emphasize is the importance intergenerational dialogue. Um, I, I have really worried in this [00:24:00] country, um, truly ever since Brexit, there has been a generational divide in a way that we haven't seen for quite a long time where.

[00:24:07] The assumption is that all of the older people are voted to leave the EU and the younger people voted to remain and it's caused a, a problem, an intergenerational problem. So actually most of our parents who are a little bit sick now are sitting around the dinner table, are being told that they are of the boomer generation and they don't understand.

[00:24:25] And they don't know what real social activism is and they don't even get what Twitter is. And so on. They're actually quite grateful that the conversation is being opened up. What we would always do for example, on a Monday, if we're having a session on a Wednesday is send something home to the parents to say, here's some questions with which you could scaffold this before the session happens.

[00:24:45] And then here's some follow ups that you could ask if you were interested, um, when your child comes home. So actually it's, it's feeding into their own familial dialogue and strengthening that into generational understanding. Cause I think that's something that we've really lost as a country [00:25:00] in the last 10, 20 years.

[00:25:01] I feel that quite strongly, um, and. I know that hanging out with teenagers and talking to teenagers for the last 20 years has definitely kept me on my toes in terms of my opinions and my viewpoints. And I probably am more progressive and liberal than for example, my friends that I went to university with, BEC who don't do the job I do, uh, because I've been kept current and modern and.

[00:25:24] Explain to the adolescents in the school that it's down to them, that I think the way I do, but that therefore they should also be listening to their parents and their parents' friends and their teachers to help advise and shape their viewpoints. I think it's really important.

[00:25:38] **Trudy Hall:** So it seems to me that this is a terrain where language is really critical.

[00:25:43] And I wanna talk a little bit about, um, the difference between intellectual discourse and arguing. I was talking recently with an educator about this and her

point was that these are really two different approaches. To engagement and yet, um, in today's world, um, they're often the same. [00:26:00] So, so since you started us down that path, can you help me parse the language and, um, the vocabulary of respectful discourse?

[00:26:07] It sounds like you give prompts. It sounds like you prepare questions, but are, are there ways in which you use the vocabulary, um, in this

[00:26:15] **Fionnuala Kennedy:** area? Yeah, I think you have to have agree. Um, before you proceed so shared, um, tenants that have been shaped by the group who are about to engage. Um, so that really everybody knows that these are parameter ed conversations.

[00:26:31] Um, very much as you would in a professional setting. We might use a very unshared language and be emotive and often angry and irrational and all those things. And some of that's cathartic, right? We need that as human beings. That's not what civil discourse is. So you have to lay out the groundwork first, before you can engage in the dialogue.

[00:26:49] The other thing is that that then does feed into how as a community, you speak to each other more informally. Um, and I've, I'm very much when I'm an English literature teacher. Anyway. So the power of [00:27:00] language is very, um, palpable to me and always has been. And I massively am in my Angelou's camp where she said that I believe that words are things.

[00:27:08] I think they get into the carpets and the walls they're things. And therefore you have to be careful of them. They live in your house and they breathe in your house. The more that you use them. And I think what's been interesting. Introducing the civil discourse program is we have boundaried the sessions.

[00:27:22] We have laid down the groundwork, but then outside of those sessions, the way in which students are engaging with each other more informally has improved. They are always sticking to those rules unconsciously as they go. Um, they now are better tooled up a better equip. To engage with each other when they are truly emotional, outside of the less emotional boundary sessions.

[00:27:43] Um, and therefore the things, the words, the language that is floating around our school has become more positive, more civil, more respectful, sort of on mass. And I think that's been a massive side effect that we didn't really know would happen. And it's only been 18 months. I'm hoping that really continues a [00:28:00] pace.

[00:28:00] Um, but that said what we mustn't do. Is produce a generation of children who are constantly self-conscious about the way in which they engage with each other. I wouldn't want to take away from the ability to really, um, emote as a human being, um, and to share. More intimate, informal moments of pure anger, because that's the other thing that we know, right.

[00:28:21] That girls and young women are often told that they shouldn't express anger ever. They shouldn't be, uh, naturally, uh, free in that way. So I wouldn't want to go too far in that. Um, Allison,

[00:28:33] **Trudy Hall:** go ahead. Jump

[00:28:36] **Alison Sefton:** in. What fan is saying is, is absolutely brilliant. And what I want to pick up on is that remembering that we are talking about children and young people and civil discourse. It's challenging and, and young people will get this wrong at some point and it can get quite messy when it goes wrong. Um, and I think we have to be careful not to judge our [00:29:00] young people.

[00:29:01] With the way that we expect mature adults to, to live and breathe and, and learn and, and work through a problem, we are still there to scaffold them, um, with these, um, debates and, um, and their learnings. Um, and I think sometimes we can assume, um, or society can assume. A young person will have fully formed views and right from wrong is fully understood.

[00:29:30] And you know, when things go wrong, they can deal with it. And that's not always the case. So I think that it's really important that surrounding any of these discussions, we have places and spaces

[00:29:42] **Fionnuala Kennedy:** for our, um, our young

[00:29:44] **Alison Sefton:** people to be able to, to learn. From any debate that has happened, um, and make sure they can move forward with it.

[00:29:54] And I'm gonna, I'm going follow up with S Maya Angelou quote, with one of my [00:30:00] own that I use quite a lot in, in this space, which is do the best you can until, you know, better than when you know, better do better. Um, which works really well in this environment. So if you get something wrong, learn from it and, and

[00:30:14] **Fionnuala Kennedy:** move forward with.

[00:30:16] **Trudy Hall:** I love that be the best that you can until you know, better. And then when you know, better be better. Um, Joe, I can, I can see you wanna add no, I mean, I

[00:30:24] **Jo Sharrock:** think one of the best things about working with young people is that you are working with a group of people who have not yet made their mind up. And, you know, actually they, they can sound very entrenched, but actually often their opinions are, are.

[00:30:40] You know, that deeply entrenched at all. They're bringing with them outrage and passion that they've maybe picked up from all sorts of places. But, but, but often actually they're not deeply held beliefs. And I dunno if it's a phenomena that's happened in America, but we've had, um, you know, upstanding members of our community.[00:31:00]

[00:31:00] Bought down by something. They said when they were 14, 15, 16, even 18, um, you know, careers destroyed because when they were a teenager, they thought out loud and I think we have to really, you know, that's, that's. Frightening for a young person. Um, and, and the last thing we want is a, is to bring up a generation who are, who are too fearful of having an opinion on the off chance of that opinion causes offense.

[00:31:26] So, I mean, I think we, we're all getting this sense is everyone's talking, there is a very fine line to be trod here. There is, there is nuance of plenty. So. We, we, we can't have a situation where a, you know, should a 14 year old be watching their language all of the time. No, I don't think they should.

[00:31:46] **Trudy Hall:** You have all done a great job of telling us why this work was hard.

[00:31:51] Um, you know, the, the landmines that are out there, the fact that we're working with young people, the fact that they're not gonna get it right. They're, they're gonna make mistakes. The fact that there are cultural [00:32:00] boundaries, what's giving you hope. Uh, what, what is in the work that you do? Where, where do you see the Ray of sunshine that perhaps there are some young women who are breaking through in ways that make you proud?

[00:32:11] Where do you see that evidence? I think

[00:32:13] **Jo Sharrock:** what's giving me hope is, is the girls themselves, because they are responding to the various different things we are doing in our schools. And we're all doing it ever so slightly differently, but we're all seeing, I think the same response, which is that we are getting.

[00:32:33] Positive activism, um, active listening girls who are having some incredibly mature conversations and discussions, the like of which I don't recall having when I was there age. And I think the other thing that gives me hope is, is part of what brought us to this. were the, the falling outs that were coming from some very, very important conversations around issues of social justice issues of the environment.[00:33:00]

[00:33:00] You know, the, the, the, the topics that our young people are concerned about should give us tremendous hope. They want to talk about meaningful change? Um, that again is not something I recall most 16 year olds when I was 16 wanting to spend their time discussing. So I think it's incredibly hopeful. I think the work that for Nula is doing at Wimbledon is hopeful.

[00:33:22] I think the work that Allison is doing is hopeful. You know, that the fact that we are taking this on and engaging with it and that we are being. By our young people with, with enthusiasm and a, a desire to, to take part. I think that's, I think that's brilliant.

[00:33:41] **Alison Sefton:** Well, it's exactly following on from what Joe said, it's that knock at my door with the miss Septon I've got an idea.

[00:33:49] and it it's, it's coming from the heart of what the girls want to see happening as a change generally. And they have seen something, you know, and that might, it might be from, [00:34:00] you know, you know, we don't want macaroni cheese at lunch. Um, You know, through to, you know, what about pronoun badges for the girls?

[00:34:09] Or, you know, we don't think this is fair and I don't really mind what it is that they bring forward, but it allows that conversation to start and to engage and to look at both sides and all those things that we've talked about so far. But the fact that. Have the confidence to come forward, knock on the door and do the missin.

[00:34:31] Have you got a minute? Um, and whether that's to me or to somebody else on the team, it doesn't really matter. As long as their voice is being heard. And they're learning about what happens when their voice is heard and it's equally as important that they then understand. What happens when I, when we can't follow through with an idea.

[00:34:52] So they might come and say, oh, I can't think of something from the top of my head now, but, you know, but it's like, no, you know, we can't do [00:35:00] whatever that is, but allowing them to be part of that discussion to understand why we can't work a four day in school, um, that.

[00:35:10] **Fionnuala Kennedy:** You know, if they feel

[00:35:11] **Alison Seffon:** part of it, they can, they can have ownership for it and they can feel like they are starting to be those change makers that we know they all will be.

[00:35:20] And that's what gives me hope, but it doesn't matter how old, you know, a girl is, whether it's a, you know, a year one student saying something or a sixth former, who's about to go off to university. Um, that sort of engagement is what gives

[00:35:33] **Trudy Hall:** me hope. Ola. Where do you see, where do you get your inspiration?

[00:35:36] Your hope? I

[00:35:37] **Fionnuala Kennedy:** guess I'm hopeful because people are alive to it as an issue and educators are really alive to it. And it does feel like, as Jay says, we're doing it all slightly differently, but people are joining forces in terms of the mission. That gives me hope. It gives me small things. Give me hope. Like we just see the girls falling out less on online because they're writing less openly aggrieved offended things under each other's posts.[00:36:00]

[00:36:00] They're not interpreting silence anymore as some kind of aggressive act, you know, all the things that we've been able to talk with them about that gives me hope. But mainly honestly, Trudy and, and Joe and Allison will testify to this mainly. I just want to enjoy my life and have fun. And I want that for each kid in my school.

[00:36:14] And it's been great fun and where there is fun and, and childlike enjoyment of, of dialogue and debate and human engagement. There's always gonna be hope so that's where I get my hope is that they're really enjoying it. They love it. They're intellectually very capable and they like exploring what it is to be a human being.

[00:36:31] So when you put those two things together, that is civil discourse. And so of course they're having a great time doing it as well. So if they can take that sense of, this is something that is not only important and kind of weighty, but also really intellectually engaging and fun. Through with them into their lives.

[00:36:47] That I'm hoping, really hoping that that means we'll have a government filled with people that have been educated in this way who understand how to engage properly, because frankly at the moment in our country, it's a mess.

[00:37:00]

[00:37:00] **Trudy Hall:** And I have to add just one thing to that for Noah, I have to say yes, and they would be women in those roles who are doing it, cuz we all know that we need significantly more women in, in roles, in leadership like this across the Royal.

[00:37:10] So across the global stage. What would you each say? And I'm gonna give each one of you a chance to put in a concluding word or two, um, that our parents should really take to heart. As they find themselves trying to promote civil discourse in their homes and with their children. Let's see, let's start with Alison.

[00:37:28] Okay.

[00:37:29] **Alison Sefton:** Um, what I would say is that it's important to help their daughters, to research both sides of an argument, um, to be able to consider the views of others and understand the language of opposition, help them to understand that you can have respect, um, for others opinions, even if you don't agree on everyth.

[00:37:47] So, what does that look like as a parent? Well, we know that, um, young people look up to parents and look to them for guidance. So model it use a point of disagreement to support [00:38:00] young children in arguing well, and that can, can come from a really young age, even if it's over, you know, bed times or, you know, can I have a mobile phone cell phone?

[00:38:10] Um, you know, all of those things. Can start to help those AR those arguments and disagreements in, in looking at both sides. Um, so I think that, you know, that goes, you know, gets around to the AR the discussion of modeling, um, and making sure there's a time and a space to do that. Um, you know, whether that's around the dinner table, so making sure family are sitting down and, and having those discussions in the round.

[00:38:42] But, um, I would say one note of caution, be careful about engaging children who are too young in details or disagreement that you as parents are involved in, their understanding can often be black and white. And the situation is rarely that simple. Um, but when you are thinking of has moved on theirs might not [00:39:00] necessarily have moved on as well.

[00:39:01] So keeping those discussions in the round, um, and understanding all sides. Um, and I think that modeling can be done very.

[00:39:11] **Trudy Hall:** and now let's move on to, uh, Joe,

[00:39:14] **Jo Sharrock:** I would, um, advise parents to remember if they can, uh, the outrage and that they maybe felt when they were a teenager or younger. Um, and remember that you did not want your parents to fix it.

[00:39:30] You just wanted to be heard. So my biggest. Tip to parents is listen. Even if it's really uncomfortable, even if it frightens you, what your young person is coming out with, listen to them, really listen to them and then ask them. In return for that same deep, wide listening. And I think, you know, even at the end of that, if you still disagree with each other, at least you've acknowledged [00:40:00] each other's views and you've both been heard and it takes real discipline because most parents instinct is to want to protect, to fix to clear paths.

[00:40:09] It's not what your young person wants from you. They want to be heard.

[00:40:13] **Trudy Hall:** Nice. And vanilla last up your, your advice, just to jump

[00:40:18] **Fionnuala Kennedy:** on what Jay said there. Absolutely. Right. The older generat. Of every single era have always thought that the teenage generation was misguided outrageous, you know, in the sixties, it was Terri is an Elvis, a terrible influence, and that television's gonna ruin everybody, you know?

[00:40:33] And so try as Jason says, try and remember that for yourself, you are in your own sense about outrage actually about what teenagers care about and what they are outraged about. If you, if you want them to listen to you, you have to listen to them. But the other thing I'd say to parents of very young children, um, is allow them to be bored.

[00:40:49] Let them be bored, do not hover over them because boredom, we know leads to two things. It leads to a sense of imagination and play, which we need for civil discourse. And, and it also leads [00:41:00] to understanding that you are not the center of your parents'. And if you are allowed to be on your own occasionally and so on, you actually develop the understanding that there are other people out there with different, um, experiences and so on, and you are not the center of things.

[00:41:14] And I think it's really important now that that parents do not feel bad. For pursuing their own interests. And so, and when their children are little, you've got to let them play and get on with it themselves. Uh, we see so much ruinous empathy parenting. Now that actually leads to young adolescents who are brittle, who can't listen to other people's opinions who need this program far more than any of the others.

[00:41:36] And it's usually come from over love over parenting. Um, that, that sort of helicopter parenting that we are, we are very familiar with now. So that would be my advice as Joe says, that's not easy to do. I know that to let them get on with it and to take some tumbles and all that kind of thing, but you really, really have to.

[00:41:54] **Trudy Hall:** none of this is very easy to do and all of it is important to do. And [00:42:00] so, as we close, I, I hear you recommending that they need to understand the language. And as man added in her school, you set the boundaries for discourse. Um, in addition to that, you yourself need to model. That and make sure that you are following the same rules that you're asking them to observe and listening deeply.

[00:42:18] Um, and if you listen deeply, you can then ask them to listen deeply in return, which goes right back to that modeling question. But the bottom of at, at the end of the list and, and actually at the top of the list and throughout the list is that sense of play. And really letting them, um, create a life forward without your hovering.

[00:42:35] And I think we would all and could all agree with that. So, um, thank you. All of you so very much for finding time in your busy lives to help us understand civil discourse. It's been a lot of, uh, Great dialogue and I know that it'll prompt a lot of good dialogue in the homes of our listeners. Take care now.

[00:42:53] **Voice note:** I'm very passionate about my faith and I'm always using my voice and speaking up in religion class, because I know this is a safe [00:43:00] environment where I will not only use my voice and it'll be heard, but I will learn about the faith and beliefs of others in the process. And that creates a growth mindset within.

[00:43:11] **Trudy Hall:** This has been *On Educating Girls*, a podcast produced by the International Coalition of Girls Schools to address real issues that impact the lives of girls we know. And the girls voices you heard earlier in the episode are students at Merion Mercy Academy, recently recognized at the Global Forum for Girls Education with a Moulton Student Global Citizenship Grant for their work supporting Nigerian women who struggle for access to clean water.

[00:43:36] As always, we welcome your thoughts and suggestions as we create a dialogue with you. Perhaps you have a topic that you want us to discuss in a future episode? Please send comments and questions to podcast@girlsschools.org and join us next time as we share insights and resources. Thanks for listening; it is important to the girls in your lives that you do!