

# ICGS Episode 20:

## Parenting Girls in a Changing World

[00:00:00] **voice note:** My biggest fear, my biggest fear of, my biggest fear of parenting my daughter in a changing world is we're dealing with heightened issues regarding social media and its impact, negative impact on girls' mental health. And this is compounded by the fact that we've had this ongoing assault with body image issues documented for over 40 years.

[00:00:33] **voice note:** As an 11-year-old, almost 12-year-old, all of her technology uses what she does on her cell phone, the sites that she visits on our shared computer for the, at the home. We monitor what types of games she has access to and what she doesn't have access to. And because of all the bombardment of all these negative images, especially for a little black girl in America, we need to keep her [00:01:00] safe for as long as possible until she's able to discern what is right, what is wrong, what is good for her, and what is not good for her.

[00:01:07] **voice note:** I am raising children who are probably much more tech-savvy than I am. And who knows what it is that they are discovering on the internet and discovering on the world wide web that I have no idea about.

[00:01:24] **Trudy Hall:** It seems like every time we check our newsfeed there is another alarmist article on some new peril that parents must manage as they help their daughters steer the course through childhood to adolescence.

[00:01:37] **Trudy Hall:** Headlines scream about catastrophic climate change, toxic chemical waste management, rampant social media addiction, dangerous chemicals in vaccines, and the unfathomable reality of gun violence in school. Such news blasts are continuous, often contradictory, and seem to be designed to keep us in a constant state of "red alert" as parents.

[00:01:59] **Trudy Hall:** Some days these dire reports may cause us to feel guilty that we are not doing enough to protect our children from the hidden dangers of a world we no longer recognize. An added frustration is that it is not always easy to verify the accuracy of the latest ominous prediction that sends us into an anxious frenzy.

[00:02:18] **Trudy Hall:** For sure, today's parents are NOT parenting in a world that we recognize. What is a conscientious parent to do? I am Trudy Hall, your host for On Educating Girls, a podcast produced by the International Coalition of Girls Schools

for parents of all girls everywhere. And, while these parenting challenges may be true, there is no need for parents to be crippled by the onslaught.

[00:02:44] **Trudy Hall:** Being aware and proactive is a better approach in this new terrain. My guest today is going to help us get firmly grounded as parents in these anxiety-producing times. Liz Joyce, a clinical social worker, is the school counselor at Nashoba Brooks School in Concord, MA. A parent herself,

[00:03:04] **Trudy Hall:** she brings bundles of common sense and calm to the project of parenting a daughter through tumultuous waters. As importantly, she is going to give us permission to acknowledge that the project of parenting is indeed different these days. As a parent shared with me recently, "you are living the reality you have never seen before even as you are parenting your child through it."

[00:03:25] **Trudy Hall:** If you like what you hear in this episode, we encourage you to rate and review it or simply forward it along so that others can benefit. Liz, it's really good to be with you today, as I know our listeners are gonna find your insights filled with common sense.

[00:03:39] **Liz Joyce:** Oh, well thank you. It's so good to be here today.

[00:03:42] **Trudy Hall:** Well for starters, what ages are the girls you work with and more specifically since our focus today is on proactive parenting, can you offer up a few themes that you know you want to cover?

[00:03:53] **Liz Joyce:** So I'm the school counselor at Nashoba Brooks School where we have grades preschool through grade eight. [00:04:00] Our students in preschool through grade three are all genders, and we have students who identify as girls in grades four through eight.

[00:04:08] **Trudy Hall:** And as we dive into this parenting in this new world, as you and I have talked about, is there a very basic piece of advice that grounds you?

[00:04:16] **Liz Joyce:** So some themes I hear coming up mostly, you know, with the parents that I work with, but also with friends and colleagues a lot of times is around like, is what's going on with my kid typical, should I be worried? And this is especially heightened in the aftermath of Covid and, and all that we're, have been dealing with in, in, are currently dealing with. Um, and also when I reflect on parenting right now, We are parenting children in a world we did not grow up in. So we're learning how to guide and support them in this new landscape while also acclimating as adults to this new landscape, whether it's [00:05:00] technology or, or something else.

[00:05:02] **Trudy Hall:** Challenging, challenging times for sure. Um, and I know that you're gonna be able to, uh, walk us through this and so as we dive in, is there a basic piece of advice that grounds you?

[00:05:14] **Liz Joyce:** Yeah, there's a lot. And honestly, it depends on the day and it depends on the role I'm playing. So when I'm thinking about my own kiddo, I try to remind myself to just trust my gut, um, and, and start from there.

[00:05:28] **Liz Joyce:** Thinking about friends and colleagues and parents I work with, I often find myself repeating something that Danielle, my head of school instils in all of us at Nashoba. Don't worry alone.

[00:05:39] **Trudy Hall:** Love that. Don't worry alone. That makes good sense. That makes a lot of good sense. Right. And it's something we should all teach our children as well right? Um, sometimes, um, when parents think about parenting an adolescent, just the mention of the middle school years makes them wince. Um, perhaps they remember their own wild years. So where do you [00:06:00] wanna start our conversation? What does it look like to be proactive and where does it matter most?

[00:06:05] **Liz Joyce:** Yeah, it's so important and honestly, a lot of times that I'm talking with parents of adolescents or pre-adolescence, I sort of say like, okay, stick with me, but we're gonna think about what it was like for you when you were in middle school. Like how did it feel? Everything felt uncomfortable and very intense. Like whatever was going on felt like it was the biggest deal of all time.

[00:06:31] **Liz Joyce:** Um, and I think especially right now, especially on the heels of the newly released CDC data, there's such a heavy emphasis on teens and teen mental health, and I don't wanna downplay the importance of making sure our adolescents are healthy and getting their needs met. And when it comes to parenting, I actually think that the building blocks start much earlier.

[00:06:58] **Liz Joyce:** You know, thinking about even [00:07:00] when we're raising toddlers, how we interact with our youngest children sets us on a road. And that's not a road that can't be altered or changed. Um, but if we think about, you know, parenting a three-year-old, for instance, I like to pick on three-year-olds because they are very cute and they are very challenging

[00:07:19] **Liz Joyce:** Um, and you know, they have really big emotions and they don't yet have the language to talk about their feelings. And so we see that in behavior, you know, behavior is communication. And especially with our youngest kids who don't have the language or don't have the skills to, you know, sit down and articulate what's going on, often will see it in a behavioural change.

[00:07:42] **Liz Joyce:** Um, and so when I think about you know, the building blocks of parenting and you know, with an eye on parenting adolescents. But where do those, where does that healthy foundation begin? It's really like, All the way through.

[00:07:58] **Trudy Hall:** In many instances, it shouldn't [00:08:00] be daunting when you say that. It should be encouraging cuz as a parent, it gives me an opportunity to continue to build on some patterns I've set as opposed to having to gear up at a certain time in life because there's a barrage coming at me Right?

[00:08:11] **Trudy Hall:** So having said that, obviously, you know, you're, you're in a school setting. Um, do you have strategies that are particularly helpful for parenting with your daughter's school? Particularly as you mentioned, this proactive strategy.

[00:08:25] **Liz Joyce:** Yeah, well, it's a really good and timely question because I've actually been partnering with my daughter's school a lot in the past week. Um, so I've really tried to take my own advice and I've tried to not worry alone. I've checked my assumptions and my worries with friends or colleagues before reaching out to her teacher and the other folks at school. I've really tried to trust myself. and remember that behavior is communication. So for example, I happen to have a kid who loves going to school.

[00:08:53] **Liz Joyce:** She cries when we have a snow day, and all of a sudden she was saying she didn't wanna go to school. And so I was like, [00:09:00] what's going on here? So when I reached out to the school, you know, I think most importantly I tried to approach the conversations from an inquiry-based stance. So I've laid out, you know, what I'm hoping to gain from the conversations, the questions I have.

[00:09:15] **Liz Joyce:** And that no matter what, I am always seeking partnership with the school and reinforcing that my partner and I are always open to feedback. We want to know what our child is doing to complicate matters or what we're doing or what we're not doing at home that could be influencing what's going on at school.

[00:09:33] **Trudy Hall:** Makes a lot of sense. Well, we also, and you and I have talked about this in previous conversations, you know, we hear the theme of modeling a lot, and when I do these podcasts over time, that seems to always come up in some way. Um, how does modeling show up in this conversation for you? What do you think about modeling?

[00:09:51] **Liz Joyce:** It's so important, and it's also something that we don't wanna stress ourselves out over, because oftentimes as parents, we can, [00:10:00] you know, lay awake at night feeling awful about something we did or said, even if it wasn't directly in front of our child or children that they may have heard or they may have picked up on, and then they may have been impacted by.

[00:10:12] **Liz Joyce:** So I think it's, you know, something to not beat ourselves up about, and at the same time, when we can consciously model whether it's, you know, behavior regulation, like I think about times where I've said to my child, I'm gonna go take a timeout because I am feeling upset and I want to come back and really be able to talk with you about this.

[00:10:36] **Liz Joyce:** So that when I put her in a space of like, you need to go take some time to yourself, it's normalized. It's not like you are the child and so you have to go do this. I also think about, you know, modeling self-care and I wanna use that term very carefully because I know with my friends and colleagues in education, it's [00:11:00] sort of, you know, in, in the wake of the pandemic, this type of thing where if they hear self-care one more time, that's gonna be the end of it.

[00:11:06] **Liz Joyce:** And like, don't tell me to breathe and don't tell me to go take care of myself. Like, it's hard, right? And so I think about ways in which I can model natural self-care both for my kid and also for the kids at school. And so oftentimes when I'm sitting with something and really trying to process something or digest something or just make sense of something, I'll take a lap or two around campus.

[00:11:32] **Liz Joyce:** And we are lucky enough to have like so many windows and people will see me all the time like, oh, Ms Joyce, she's working something out. And sometimes I'll take the kids with me and we'll go for walk and talk. Um, so I think that's another way to model and, and it is important because kids are sponges and they're picking up a lot, whether it's intentional from us or not.

[00:11:55] **Trudy Hall:** Uh, they are definitely sponges for sure. As you know, I live with a three-year-old [00:12:00] and so that little sponge is challenging at times and I'm pleased that you noted that parents tend to sometimes beat themselves up about this sort of thing and, and, you know, one of my colleagues said recently, you can't bubble wrap your child..

[00:12:12] **Trudy Hall:** And so as you think about, you know, bubble wrapping one's child, what's the downside of bubble wrapping a child? I've heard you talk a little bit sometimes about, you know, preparing kids, moving kids through things. What, what's the opposite of bubble wrapping a child?

[00:12:28] **Liz Joyce:** It's skill building and it's really, this is challenging. A parent here, actually, years ago, once said, and it has stuck with me because it just resonated so strongly. that I think she said, I seek to prepare my child for the path, not the path for my child. And that's not black or white because there are times, for example, my kiddo's six, and you know, if there's something going on at school, I have to lean in and I have to speak up for her because she's six and she just can't make sense of certain things.[00:13:00]

[00:13:00] **Liz Joyce:** But I think the downside to bubble wrapping our children or preparing the path for our children is that we're not always going to be there, literally or figuratively. And so if we're not preparing them with the skills and the tools that they need to handle the expected or the unexpected, then we're not actually doing our jobs.

[00:13:22] **Trudy Hall:** Good point. Really good point. So if, you know you've got a tough challenge, uh, to talk with your child about, are there specific approaches or um, ways in which a parent might open that door to a challenging conversation?

[00:13:37] **Liz Joyce:** Totally. Don't do it at the moment. That is like my best piece of advice I think, is that we all as human beings have receptive and reactive states. And when our kid, or maybe our partner or co-parent or, or ourselves, we're in a reactive state, good work is not gonna happen. And so you really wanna take the [00:14:00] moments when they're in a receptive state or a calm state to outline expectations, to do sort of behavior modifications to, you know, reflect on something that may not have gone well.

[00:14:14] **Liz Joyce:** I hear from parents and friends and colleagues, sometimes they're hesitant to, you know, reopen a can of worms when they're outside of the moment with their child, or things are finally calm again, and they're worried that if they bring up the issue again. that it's just gonna be hard and, and we don't like to do hard things.

[00:14:35] **Liz Joyce:** And actually that is the perfect time to bring it up. So we all have a nervous system and we can have agitation and, and have agitated nervous systems, but we also have a parasympathetic nervous system that's our rest and digest. And so when we're in a receptive state, that's where we are and we're just more open to hearing, you know, different perspectives, points of view and, and working on things.

[00:15:00] **Trudy Hall:** Having said that, um, you know, we're talking about parents as if it's parents plural. Um, lots of parents have to do this project on their own. Uh, do you have specific advice for parents who are single parents and running this railroad on their own?

[00:15:15] **Liz Joyce:** Yeah. I am so glad you brought that up. When I think about, you know, parenting with a partner, That is hard enough. You know, just parenting, you know, inclusive of a partner is hard and when you're walking this road solely, and I just wanna say like, I don't know that personally, but I've worked with tons of parents who either, uh, don't have a partner for whatever reason, or they're a co-parent, that's an added layer of challenge.

[00:15:42] **Liz Joyce:** And I think it goes back to sort of where we started actually, which is don't worry or wonder alone. Identify your support system, identify your trusted resources, um, and, and use them when things get tough. And maybe that means like [00:16:00] having your friends sleepover at a relative's house just to get some rest, or maybe it means talking to a parent consultant or coach just to get some objective guidance.

[00:16:11] **Trudy Hall:** Having said that, there are lots of ways in which parents can open the door to challenging topics. Um, are there topics to avoid or topics to double down on?

[00:16:21] **Liz Joyce:** So I'm a big believer in the spirit of transparency in that there's room at the table to talk about, just about anything though I think that needs to happen in a healthy and bounded way.

[00:16:34] **Liz Joyce:** And at the end of the day, as the parent or the caregivers, you're still in charge. And so as the people in charge, it's so important to decide and identify what are the non-negotiables for your family. It might be body autonomy that, you know, consent is very important. It also might be we don't hit, we don't kick, or we don't name-call in our family.

[00:16:58] **Trudy Hall:** So we hear all the [00:17:00] time that we should let our daughters take risks. You know, speaking of, you know, setting some non-negotiables up. Um, but it seems like that's now more challenging than ever to let our daughters take risks. Do you have any guidance for parents who want their daughters to fly solo on some important endeavor?

[00:17:17] **Liz Joyce:** Yeah, I think it does go back to non-negotiables and identifying what is a healthy risk. And that's the language I like to use a lot because a healthy risk is something that pushes you out of your comfort zone, into your challenge zone, but doesn't push you into the panic zone. And that's where we grow.

[00:17:35] **Liz Joyce:** We grow in the challenge zone. Um, I think, you know, again, in this landscape of Covid and within that context, when we think about those early dark days, everything was so situated and anchored in the family. And as parents and caregivers, we controlled everything because we had to, we didn't know what was going on.

[00:17:56] **Liz Joyce:** And everything was a little scary. And now, although Covid [00:18:00] is still very much with us, we're getting back to typical functioning for the most of us, like at schools and at work and different things. And so I think when we think about taking healthy risks, maybe as parents, part of that is relinquishing that

locus of control a little bit and giving it back to the school, giving it back to the institutions where you're sending your child there because you trust them.

[00:18:24] **Trudy Hall:** I like that you've mentioned, um, uh, you know, sort of relinquishing, um, some of that control. And I know that it can be challenging, but somehow just saying it out loud gives me permission to let go just a little bit right?

[00:18:36] **Liz Joyce:** We also talk a lot here about controlling the controllables and identifying, "what is outside of my control?"

[00:18:44] **Liz Joyce:** I can't control what they're gonna say or what they're gonna do, and when it comes down to it, all I can control is what I say and what I do. And then I also have this amazing addition that a student said to me. Um, and the intent with which we're [00:19:00] doing or saying things.

[00:19:02] **Voice notes:** There are so many predators out there on the internet and social media and being able to set parameters and create a safe space for her to be able to take risks and try things without, um, or at the same time as having the fear that there are people out there. The pace at which information just enters the children's lives and they really don't have time to sort of think about things on their own and grapple with ideas.

[00:19:30] **Voice notes:** I think I have a lot more worries than fears and, um, as a mom of two young girls, um, A person who works in a school and a therapist, I hear, um, a lot about, um, the unpredictability of our changing world and, um, all the concerns and worries [00:20:00] of my kids.

[00:20:01] **Trudy Hall:** I am always wary of going down the rabbit hole of, uh, social media, especially in this day and age. And you and I could do an entire season on social media, I guess. Are there any things that you think, um, a parent should know as they begin to monitor this beast, um, in their preteen's life? And again, you know, we don't have to go too far down this rabbit hole, but does something come to mind? A big theme?

[00:20:25] **Liz Joyce:** Yeah, it is totally a beast, isn't it? I think remembering that you are in control. You are the ones in charge. You are the ones you know, paying for the device and paying for the mobile service, and setting. Again, going back to non-negotiables and setting those expectations very early on. When you do decide to give your child a cell phone or a tablet or messaging or Snapchat or whatever it may be, make sure that they understand how you will be monitoring it, how you will [00:21:00] be engaging with it, and how you very well may take it away at certain points because that's what's in their best.

[00:21:07] **Trudy Hall:** Laying that groundwork and then sticking to it can be some of the hardest things. If you, I mean, could you just tell, say it a little bit, just a little bit about how we've all seen parents who say, you know if you don't do X, Y, and Z, this will happen. And then of course the child doesn't do X, Y, and Z. Um, and there you are as a parent having said that, there's gonna be a consequence and, uh, you haven't followed through on that consequence.

[00:21:31] **Liz Joyce:** Well, I would just advise like be prepared to deliver on the consequence. Don't ever put something out there that you can't deliver on, like saying something like, you are never gonna watch TV again.

[00:21:44] **Liz Joyce:** Well, that's like, that's actually not true. They will watch TV again. So I think that's a place to sort of if you need to take a pause before coming back to your child, that's another way. We were talking about modeling, of modeling to say, you know, I [00:22:00] really wanna think about this. Um, before we talk about a consequence, I'm gonna think about it and then, and we'll get back to it.

[00:22:06] **Liz Joyce:** Also, the secondary gain there is that your child is learning to tolerate the discomfort in that waiting time. And it's not intentional. We're not like trying to punish them by sitting with uncomfortable feelings, but that's a skill that they have to build. We all have to build it.

[00:22:24] **Trudy Hall:** Good point. Good point. So I know that there's so much more that we can learn from you, but as we wrap our conversation with nuggets of wisdom, is there something that can't be said enough or something that did not get specifically mentioned in the conversation up to this point? Or even you've been very good about dropping quotes and phrases. Is there a quote, or a phrase that you would drop with us?

[00:22:48] **Liz Joyce:** Well, when I was thinking about it and, you know, thinking. You know, the honor of being invited on this podcast and all of that. I was thinking a lot about, there's a lot of [00:23:00] noise in the ether right now around children and adolescent's mental health and the crisis, the global crisis around children and adolescent's mental health.

[00:23:10] **Liz Joyce:** This is obviously all true and valid, and as a parent, you have your child or your children, we need to stay aware and we also need to stay grounded in who we know our children and or our child to be.

[00:23:27] **Trudy Hall:** Because we know them better than most. Right? We know them better than anyone, right?

[00:23:32] **Liz Joyce:** Totally. Yeah. Um, parents are the experts on their children.

[00:23:35] **Trudy Hall:** That's a great note to sign off on. The parents are the experts and their children, but I also heard you say, you know, don't worry or wonder alone, which I think, uh, deserves repeating again and again and again. Uh, trust your gut, behavior is communication. Um, control those things you can control and then let go of those [00:24:00] things that you cannot control.

[00:24:01] **Trudy Hall:** Right? As you, as we move through this space, um. Liz has been really wonderful as you promised. You know, we've got some great nuggets of common sense that can go back and ground us in our times when we are most anxious. So thanks very much for being a guest today and I know our parents are gonna love the wisdom you shared.

[00:24:21] **Liz Joyce:** Oh, thanks so much for having me. It was awesome.

[00:24:22] **Trudy Hall:** You have been listening to 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. I

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