

# On Educating Girls: The Connected Girl Episode 3

## Title: Setting Healthy Boundaries, with Elizabeth Ziegler

[00:00:00] **Trudy Hall:** Tweets, soundbites, texts, emojis, in our modern world that's how we connect. But in a world where we are supposedly more connected than ever, why are so many young people, and girls in particular, feeling more disconnected from themselves? At the International Coalition of Girls Schools, we're invested in ensuring that girls are whole, healthy, and well. We believe keeping them connected to their voices and their confidence

[00:00:35] **Voice Notes:** Like a gentle wind chime, my voice knows music happens. When connection begins. My voice, my voice, my voice synthesizes with my friends and teachers. Allows other voices to complement mine. Harmonizing and mixing as one. My voice leaps across the hallway to say hello to my classmate who's having a bad day. Our voices speak of powerful magic. Tell a story that will unfold long into the future. Together. Together. Together. Together. We make history every day. Together. We are instruments of change.

[00:01:07] **Trudy Hall:** Connection often begins with an invitation. The Connected Girl, a podcast series curated by the International Coalition of Girls Schools, is an invitation to those who know, love, and believe in empowering girls to engage with the experts we have gathered to understand the power and possibility of the many connections in the lives of girls.

[00:01:31] **Elizabeth Ziegler, ED:** I just turned 16 I think and for some reason I was just like, I felt like I was in a sort of depressive state but that might be a bit bold to claim but I felt empty inside and I still don't really know why but like, I felt it for weeks and I just felt nothing like I actually felt nothing and it was so scary and I remember the relief I felt coming after that and I've been suffering issues with like all of like my support network and things like that or it felt like that obviously if you take a special It probably wasn't but I never felt so empty and so like feeling nothing in my life because I'm quite an emotional person. So it was really weird and getting out of that. I realized right like I need to work on myself, like, as we all are, we're all teenage girls, insecurities are so profound, things like that. And I really thought, I spoke to some like, really true friends after that, and I thought, okay, like, I can start bettering myself, learning for myself. It's still a process now, but like, exactly, it's made me realize, and it made me deal with so many connections and feelings better since then. It's made me really grateful, if that makes sense.

[00:02:40] **Trudy Hall:** Hi. I'm your host, Trudy Hall, and you're listening to On Educating Girls, a podcast produced by the International Coalition of Girl Schools. If this is your first time with us, welcome. For those of you who've been on the journey with us already, you know that for the last few episodes, we've been exploring the idea of connections and disconnections in the lives of girls. We've been talking about why keeping girls connected to their parents, their voice, their peers. And the real

world is critical to their wellness and offering advice and strategies on maintaining and strengthening those connections. This is the third episode, and we intend to get to the heart of the matter, so to speak, as we hear girls talk about how they stay connected to themselves, to their core values, as they confront challenges to the things that are most important to them, their feelings of safety, personal boundaries, and their bodies. Hard and real for sure. My guest is Elizabeth Ziegler, the executive director of I Have a Right To, a non-profit dedicated to being a hub for students, parents, and educators as they search for resources and support to address the topics of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Elizabeth, also the founder of Claremont, a consulting and coaching firm that takes leaders to the next level of excellence, is an experienced CEO who asks the right questions, believes in the power of transparency, and is committed to ensuring respectful cultures, as she believes that no one needs to be facing serious challenges without a network of support. Since our conversation is all about self-respect, and the criticality of girls respecting themselves, and staying connected to those who care deeply for their welfare, Elizabeth seems like the perfect person to walk the path with us today.

[00:04:29] **Student voice note:** It's sometimes just very hard to have like a realistic perspective on things and because of that I feel like we don't always have the resources to actually put like a reality check on life and get back to like your centralized self.

[00:04:42] **Student voice note:** Sometimes it's just more about just like relaxing yourself a lot of the time and just calming yourself down and doing things you know you enjoy just to feel more like you, because again, like your connection to yourself will help better all the other connections you have.

[00:04:55] **Trudy Hall:** Good conversations often start with compelling statistics. So I want to put a few into the airspace with us. Now let's keep in mind that these statistics are from U.S. sources, and so it is an international podcast and there may well be very different statistics in other countries. But I think we can assume that this topic needs to be addressed by every parent in every country. So as we think about the violation of personal boundaries, one in five middle school students have experienced unwanted sexual contact. One in twenty U. S. girls have changed schools due to sexual harassment. One in four women in the U. S. have experienced some form of sexual violence before college. By the time students finished their education. Eighty-one percent will have experienced some type of sexual harassment. This is a conversation that we may not want to have, but we need to have it. We need to be proactive, yes, but we also need to know what to do if the girl in our life is feeling unsafe due to some sort of harassment. Elizabeth, I'm so delighted to welcome you to our conversation today. I'm so happy to be here. Thank you, Trudy. Elizabeth, I am very keen on having you help me unpack this complicated conversation. The statistics are certainly cause for alarm, but you talk to students and parents near daily about this reality, and I know you believe that some groundwork can be laid by talking to girls about what they have a right to expect in terms of their personal space. So as we launch our conversation today, can you help

us understand how you would explain what every girl has a right to expect in terms of safety and dignity?

[00:06:36] **Elizabeth Ziegler, ED:** Thank you, Trudy. I think that's a great way to start this conversation, and as Executive Director of 'I Have the Right To', that non-profit is named intentionally. And when we think about safety and respect, and girls in particular, we start with the most basic thought, which is every student has the right to an education free from sexual assault. And inherent in that right is the right to safety. When we talk about safety in schools, we talk about the safety and the dignity that each student deserves at school. And we know that students and schools are truly safe when every student is seen and protected for who they inherently are.

[00:07:20] **Trudy Hall:** So, perhaps what also makes some sense is as we speak about boundaries, a word that comes to mind is consent. And I think it's important that if we explore, um, this topic, let's also talk about this word. What does it mean for a girl to give consent?

[00:07:36] **Elizabeth Ziegler, ED:** This question, we could probably do a whole podcast on this question. And so often people associate the word consent with intimate physical activity. When we can be teaching our children consent from, from the youngest ages. You know, may I give you a hug? May I borrow your crayon? May I eat one of your French fries instead of just taking a French fry off of a plate? And so it becomes this word that's fraught with meaning when actually consent is really about human interaction and exchange. And when you think about the pandemic and what that taught us, are we hugging? Are we shaking hands? Are we, how are we greeting each other? Um, We believe and we support the definition of consent that is, um, defined by the Consent Awareness Network in New York, and that definition is freely given, knowledgeable, informed agreement without force, fear, fraud, or incapacitation. So in other words, no girl can be forced, or intimidated, or misled to give consent. And no girl, no human can give consent if there's any incapacitation.

[00:09:04] **Trudy Hall:** So do you think that girls fully understand the notion of consent? And I, when I say girls, I guess I'm, um, that's such an unspecific question because it could be girls at any age. But let's just pick a middle school girls. Do middle school girls understand the notion of consent?

[00:09:22] **Elizabeth Ziegler, ED:** Not by and large, no. And we encounter that every day when we're working with middle school students, boys and girls that don't know the definition of consent. Ah, one of our founders likes to say, especially to boys, if you're asking more than once, you, you, you're not, you're going down the wrong path because now that you might be looking for assent and not consent. And so we need to work with our young people to understand what consent means. Um, at the, at the very highest levels in the United States, and I recognize that this is an international podcast with an international audience. I sit here in the United States, and when I started this work, um, about two years ago, I learned that there's not one common definition of consent in our penal codes, and that was mind blowing to me. And so our founders are also working to advance the definition that I just shared with you so

that it's in our penal codes and our law enforcement and our legal experts are versed in that definition.

[00:10:32] **Trudy Hall:** It is amazing to me that we don't have one standard definition of consent. Um, do you think this is universal? Are there some countries that have perhaps done a job in this area that we might learn from?

[00:10:46] **Elizabeth Ziegler, ED:** Yes, Australia. And we have been celebrating what is happening in Australia, Chanel Contos, who was motivated by her own personal experience with sexual assault. She has rallied her peers and harnessed their collective voices in ways that we hope students around the globe will follow suit, and we've been so touched by her organization and what they've been doing, and we've actually been in contact with the Australian ambassador here in Washington, D. C. So Australia is a, is a shining light that can illuminate our pathway forward.

[00:11:26] **Trudy Hall:** As you mentioned, this is an international podcast. And so I, I know that our friends in Australia will be cheering as they hear you say that. I think another "reality", I'm going to put quotes around that word that might be out there, which is that most girls, many girls deal with the tyranny of being nice. Wanting to be agreeable, wanting to please, can you speak to this in the context of personal boundaries?

[00:11:50] **Elizabeth Ziegler, ED:** I think so many of us were raised that way by our mothers and our grandmothers, you know, to be polite and to be agreeable. And one of our co-founders, Susan Prout, speaks to this. Um, she talks about how she raised her three daughters in Japan in a culture that emphasizes the nail that sticks up gets hammered down. And Susan has said multiple times that one of her biggest regrets is that she puts so much emphasis on being polite when teaching her daughters how to interact. And if girls are cultured to ignore their own instincts and to go along with others so that they're not upsetting people or they're not being impolite, we are teaching them not to be themselves. We are teaching them not to respect themselves and not to have their own boundaries. And when we think about behavior, I've been labeled difficult. I've been labeled bossy. I've been labeled all kinds of words that men are celebrated for. And that is something that's part of our, our culture. So we don't want to culture our girls to ignore their own instincts.

[00:13:08] **Trudy Hall:** Clearly it sounds like it's important for parents to be proactive. And as we think about being proactive when it comes to preparing the girls in their lives for the moments when they found that their boundaries or their values have been compromised, how do you start such a conversation with a teenager?

[00:13:26] **Elizabeth Ziegler, ED:** Well, hopefully it will start before the child is a teenager, but for many of us, we start those conversations in the teenage years and they can be difficult. I don't know about you, but I found that sometimes it was easiest to talk to my daughter in the car because we're both looking straight ahead and we're not looking at each other. Um, but starting early. And if you're a parent like

me, one of the things I always told my daughter was trust your instincts. She would say from a very young age. I remember her sitting in a chair with her legs dangling. She couldn't reach the floor. And she said, Mommy, I don't like that man or that person makes me feel uncomfortable. And I think so many times we might say, Oh, it's okay. Don't worry. I would say three words. Trust your instincts. Always trust your instincts and go with that. So validating what the child is feeling or the teenager is feeling is so important. They want to be heard. They don't want to be fixed. They don't want to be changed. They want to be heard. And so my advice would be start there, listen and validate their feelings.

[00:14:48] **Trudy Hall:** So, let's shift and go into a more uncomfortable terrain, you know, despite all the work that we might do to prepare our daughters or the girls in our lives for that moment when she finds herself in an unsafe place, sadly, as we both know, despite our best efforts and the statistics tell us this, it happens. What would you want that girl to know or believe or do in such an instance?

[00:15:13] **Elizabeth Ziegler, ED:** The first thing is that it's never her fault. It's never the victim's fault. It doesn't matter what the circumstances were. Someone's perpetrating against that individual. It is not the victim's fault. So that's the first thing that we want a girl to know. And every girls' pathway or journey to healing is different. And healing looks different for everybody. And it's important to talk to somebody that you can trust. In Chessie's case, she confided in somebody at school who, a school leader, who encouraged Chessie to speak to her mother. And the minute that Chessie could speak to her mother, Susan. Susan was on her way right up to school to hug and love her daughter and to take care of her.

[00:16:13] **Trudy Hall:** I'm wondering about the use of hotlines. Does your organization suggest that? Are there some hotlines that are better than others? I know this is an international podcast, so perhaps, you know, there are no international hotlines, but a word about hotlines.

[00:16:27] **Elizabeth Ziegler, ED:** If we take a step back, and then I'll answer the question about hotlines, it's important to know that the very first experience that a victim has disclosing whatever happened, whether it's sexual assault or harassment or violence in some form, the reaction that they hear to their first disclosure can determine how she proceeds going forward. In other words, if she's not met with things like, I believe you, I'm here for you, I'm here to support you, mostly I believe you, then that pathway could look very different. The average age of disclosure of sexual assault is fifty two years old. I like to say that our founder, Chelsea, helped to bring that average down. What victims need to hear is acceptance. So that acceptance may come from a hotline, and that might be a positive experience for a victim that would then encourage her to talk to even more people. So there are a number of hotlines that are out there. There are resources on our website. We are based in the United States, and so the resources mostly pertain to the United States. So we would encourage the listeners to, um, see what's available in their respective countries.

[00:17:45] **Trudy Hall**: Oftentimes, it's a power dynamic that might be at play when a girl feels threatened. So she might perceive that someone who has power over her, a trusted adult, An influential peer is putting pressure on her to cross her own personal boundaries. So these situations are pretty tricky. Do you have any thoughts on how she might keep herself safe in these areas?

[00:18:09] **Elizabeth Ziegler, ED**: Trudy, we would probably say that the power dynamic is in play in all of these scenarios. So I love that you're asking the question. When we think about grooming and the imbalance of power, those with power often use and abuse that power in order to groom their victims. And we can think about this in a number of different ways, and if I give an example, a real life example, a recent example, of an adult, female, sexual assault survivor and advocate who has dedicated her life's work to working with football teams at the collegiate level in order to raise awareness about sexual assault and masculinity and what that means on the football field and off the football field. This woman was engaged by a major university, well known football team, highly paid coach who through his professional relationship with this advocate used her vulnerabilities. Some of the information that she shared in preparing for the work with the football team, he leveraged in order to make her more vulnerable to his sexual harassment. And so no one is immune. We can all be vulnerable at times. This is a very strong survivor of sexual assault and advocate of sexual assault who fell victim to grooming. So we just need to be aware of circumstances and the fact that girls really need to understand this early on.

[00:19:46] **Trudy Hall**: So let me go way back. I've heard you tell a story that I think our listeners might like to hear early, early on in your relationship with your daughter, there was an incident, a situation in which she was expressing some concern. It's a situation that I think will surprise parents. Would you tell us that story? Because I think it takes us back into how one can actually be very proactive in affirming one's daughter.

[00:20:12] **Elizabeth Ziegler, ED**: Thank you. I'm smiling because I wrote a blog about this and I'll tell you the story of my daughter who's now twenty two when she was, I don't know, somewhere between six and eight years old, ah, we were getting ready to go visit Santa Claus, ah, at the mall in her dress and her shoes and her hair and off we went and she was We had to wait in line for two hours and there was one point where he went off to feed the reindeer and we were waiting and anticipating and when we got to the front of the line, my daughter was squeezing my hand, which is not unusual. We would communicate through hand squeezes in a number of different ways. And when I looked down, I expected that she would be excited and we made it to the front of the line. It's time to see Santa. And when I looked at her, it was the opposite. It was dread. And I said, what's wrong? She said, I don't, I don't want to, I don't want to see Santa. I don't want to sit on his lap. I don't want to see him. And I just looked at her and I said, okay, let's go home. And she couldn't believe I could see the look on her face. My mom bought the dress, brought the shoes, did my hair, waited online for two hours, and she's letting me just go home. I said, let's go, and off we went. And one of the elves, you know, handed me a sheet of paper, I was supposed to write which package I wanted, and I just handed it back. I said, we're

leaving, and we get home, and there's my husband, her father, and he said, alright, where are the photos? And I said, we didn't get any. He said, what? He said, you've been gone for so long. You didn't get any photos? I said, she didn't want to do it. And I think he might have said, why didn't you tell her to do it? I said, when our daughter says that she does not want to sit on a strange man's lap, there's no answer I'm going to give, but okay, let's go home. So I wrote this blog last year for the organization with my daughter's consent, by the way, I asked her, may I please write this blog about our story? She said yes, and then at the bottom of the blog was a picture from 2021. We're in Christmas sweaters toasting with a glass of champagne and I asked for consent to have that picture in the blog as well.

[00:22:32] **Trudy Hall:** So thank you for sharing that because I think it's important to take our listeners way back to the beginning of this as you're talking about, you know, how early these conversations can start. And it really is about being present with your daughter when she is in a place of discomfort to figure that out and make sure she's seen and she's heard. So thanks for that story. So I know you, I know the good work that you've done with, I have a right to, and I happen to know that your organization has produced a deck of cards with some fairly straightforward language about the rights that any young person has, ah, to give our listeners a sense, those cards have sayings like, I have the right to trust my gut and my instincts. I have the right to ask for help from trusted adults. I have the right to do brave things, even while I'm feeling scared. Because I found those cards so powerful, I'm wondering if you can share how the organization came to create them and how they're used.

[00:23:30] **Elizabeth Ziegler, ED:** Thank you. Our cards are amazing and it starts with Chessie Prout when she wrote her memoir, which is called 'I Have the Right To' as well. And in creating that book, she and her sisters had a conversation where they said, what should girls have a right to? And they started to complete that declaration. I have the right to, and then they would make a statement. And when Chessie founded the non-profit, she also started a viral hashtag. Which is hashtag, I have the right to, so she's invited millions of people to complete that declaration on social media. And then you fast forward to a few years ago, and these cards were the genius of a colleague that worked with our organization. She's a mother of a sexual assault survivor. She's the spouse of a boarding school teacher. She lived for many years on a boarding school campus, and that's where they raised their family. She is an artist and a nature lover, and these cards were something that she brought to life, combining her love of people, of art, as a mother, and all the wisdom that she could offer her daughters, and all the language that she wished she had more exposure to when her daughters were younger

[00:24:55] **Trudy Hall:** It's a great story and they're great cards. And I know that people can look on your website and order them as well. So unfortunately, we've got to close our conversation about this critical topic. Very critical topic, very sensitive, hard to talk about topic. Can you offer one to two pieces of wisdom that you want our listeners to remember as they take what they've heard today, process it and carry it back to the relationships they have with the girls in their lives?

[00:25:24] **Elizabeth Ziegler, ED:** So the two things that I'd like to leave the listeners with would be number one, in telling the story about my daughter and trusting her instincts. I also had to hold myself accountable to honoring that when I tell her trust your instincts, trust your instincts. And so I encourage every listener out there to think about as they speak to their, their daughter, their niece, their sister. Um, if you're encouraging that person to trust their instincts. You must honor that, and that can be challenging sometimes, so self-awareness points there. And number two, obviously this podcast is recorded for ICGS and girls and parents of girls. I would encourage parents of boys to think similarly about how they can engage their sons in similar and parallel conversations, because really what we're talking about is raising humans that respect each other for their inner innate worth. And so I encourage you to think about how boys can be engaged in these conversations, particularly around the topic of consent.

[00:26:41] **Trudy Hall:** That's such a brilliant way to end our time together because I think you've hit on two of the most critical points. You know, number one, it is hard sometimes to allow a young person to trust their instincts, particularly as a parent, when you think you know better. And then secondly, I love the conversation we've had about consent. As we both said, I think consent is all about good communication and that includes everybody. No, nobody's off the hook, uh, to really understand what consent means and what good communication is all about. So thank you very much for this important conversation. I'm so pleased that you were able to join me today.

[00:27:16] **Elizabeth Ziegler, ED:** Thank you, Trudy. It's been a pleasure.

[00:27:20] **Student voice note:** I know from personal experience, school has often not been my favorite place. I've had a lot of issues with like friendships and things like that at school, as most people do. And I think now being in year thirteen and being in this position where we're almost adults, it's really taught me the value of myself, like obviously, I'm not there yet, I'm not in the stage of my journey where I can be like, I'm fully secure, but I think I'm learning, and that's really helped me when I have moments of disconnection, taking a step back, look, because you can get so lost in your own perception, if you take a step back, you can be like, this disconnection, I might just be having an off day, sleep on it, Yeah. Be fine the next day. Or just, yeah, take these into account, like, don't get too lost and spiral into what you're experiencing because you do have yourself and we're all lucky to, you know, have us.

[00:28:12] **Trudy Hall:** You've been listening to the third episode of the Connected Girl, a specially curated series produced by the International Coalition of Girls Schools for its On Educating Girls podcast. This episode is the third of six podcasts engaging listeners to think about the many ways that the connections in girls lives keep them whole and healthy. The International Coalition of Girls Schools created this series in true partnership with Two Stories. Audio editing, engineering, and sound design were done by Kozi Mzimela and Jordyn Toohey. Thanks to the girls of Wickham High School in Wickham, England and Culver Girls Academy in Culver, Indiana for the audio clips of girls voices used in the Connected Girls series. The story of the poem, 'Tell Our Story', used in the intro, can be found on the ICGS



website. For more information, please refer to the show notes. Thanks for listening.  
It's important to the girls in your lives that you do.