Lunch and Learn
The Teen Whisperer Conflict Connection
TRANSCRIPT
Modified for readability without watching the video

Video Link

Watch Time: 35 minutes (presentation)

Read Time: 20 minutes (approximately)

Introductions

Amy Oberholtzer, CATCH Executive Director (00:04):

I am Amy Oberholtzer. Hello. Thanks for being here, the CATCH team and I welcome you. We are really glad that you have joined us today. Our guest is Kirsten Cobabe. I attended one of her speaking events about a year ago and have wanted to host her here ever since because I know it can be really challenging to communicate and truly connect with our teens. Conflicts are commonplace. Kirsten will provide some truly tangible, useful and important tips and strategies for responding and developing trust while still holding to our boundaries with our teenagers. Kirsten Cobabe, a teen whisperer and coach for parents, caregivers, and young people specializes in helping families navigate the waves of adolescence. She focuses on interpersonal dynamics to create lasting change and connection. Kirsten has over 20 years of experience with teens and families, including supporting parents in embracing their new leadership role and their teens with confidence. Her background includes social work, counseling, coaching, relationship building, and mediation. And I warmly welcome Kirsten Cobabe.

Kirsten Cobabe, MSW, The Teen Whisperer (01:31):

Thank you, Amy. I'm so happy to be here. So, if we want to get started, we're going to take a few minutes just to breathe. We're all coming together in this one space to share and receive and connect about this, I believe very sacred conversation. And we're talking about a very sacred role of parenting and supporting young people. So, we're going to **take a minute to breathe and then we'll dive right in. When we breathe, we remember it brings us back into that slowdown, which can be really helpful in this day and age when everything's very fast and very full. And so, this is even an example of what we can try our best to remember to do throughout the day.** It's free, it's available and it doesn't take too

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much time. Even pausing for a second can be life changing sometimes. And perhaps today we'll find the extraordinary in the ordinary.

Presentation

We're going to talk about conflict to connection. I actually feel like conflict is a very misunderstood concept and just the moments can be overwhelming, understandably so. And what I find over and over again is that in those moments of what could be conflict with teens, there is massive space for authentic connection. So, I think that's even part of what this stage is all about is teens bringing the hard to their parents, to their adults, to see if they will hold it with them. To see if we can hold it with them. So, we're going to talk a lot about that.

Kirsten Cobabe (03:50):

Adolescence is a very unique stage. It's all about differentiation, risk taking, boundaries, the self, social pressures and having new experiences. The Circadian rhythms and sleep are shifting dramatically for teens. And our world isn't really set up to accommodate for that as it is for say babies who also need specific sleep. We have these cultural and societal hurdles that we're also in and that teens are in that make some of this connection even trickier and makes conflict more likely. I think a lot of parents might feel, "Why can't I do this? Or I should be better at this." And yes, sure, we all have things to learn and there's a lot of stuff in the way, stressors and schedules and waking teens up at 6:00 AM. I mean, this doesn't make any sense if we look at child development.

Kirsten Cobabe (04:51):

So, we're going to go easy on ourselves and remember that we are doing the best we can and so are teenagers. So, in this interesting and unique stage in age listening and limits are both important and clear boundaries and authentic connection are key. So, even though the brain is done growing in size, it's expanding in the areas that are all about planning, prioritizing, and understanding consequences. All that executive functioning stuff. And so, this helps to explain why some days your teen might act like they're 20, and other days they might act like they're 12. All they have is falling back on what they knew,

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which is when they were little. And that's why we see teens sometimes acting really young and other times wanting to be more mature and older than they are.

Walking the middle path with our teens

Kirsten Cobabe (05:41):

I often say let's walk the middle path with the people that I work with and people that I coach so that we can kind of wiggle back and forth a little bit. And so, we're not on one end of the spectrum or another. We're in a really balanced middle road place. And of course, I already touched on this a little bit, but what's happening for parents, right? The village is not what it used to be when we were raising teens and children not even that long ago. There was a more communal atmosphere to this. And I see it a lot in Maui where I live. There's the aunties and the uncles and I'm an auntie for lots of people. And this means another safe adult to hold the energy of this person who's growing up before us. We used to have more aunties and uncles and the family might have even been together more throughout the day, for example, on farms before we had factories and school. And not saying this was perfect, of course there's always issues with whatever kind of phase and moment in time we're talking about. But what was great about that is there was a leader, there was collaboration, there was teamwork. If your teen didn't go collect the eggs a couple hundred years ago, you weren't eating. And so, the jobs and the chores made more sense. We were in nature more. We were receiving sunlight. We had our toes in the soil and we were working together. And now everyone sort of separates and leaves. Parents, you're overwhelmed. You've got probably like a million things on your plate that seem impossible sometimes, right? There's so many to-dos, there are endless stressors.

Kirsten Cobabe (07:16):

We're all feeling it spiritually, financially, physically, emotionally, mentally, it's here. And so, we'll also talk about how we can find treasures in these triggers and even come together again in these moments of conflict that there's so much potential for this. So, what's coming up for most families right now are chores and responsibilities. Curfews and rules, sleep and wellness, school and homework. We're going to dive into all of these chores and responsibilities. I imagine many of you are struggling to get your teen

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to take out the trash, to clean their room just to get stuff done. This is partly because they too have too much on their plate.

Kirsten Cobabe (08:10):

There's more homework than ever. There's more tests than ever. There's more drama than ever. If we think about technology and Snapchat and parties and all this stuff, it's not like it was for us seventies and eighties or maybe sixties, right? You heard about this stuff, you didn't have to watch it. If you had a crush on someone, you passed a note. It wasn't about all this other stuff. There were less layers in some ways, and it was all real time. Now all this stuff follows teens home. So, they're overwhelmed too.

Idea of counterwill with teens

There's also this concept of **counterwill** that I think is often talked about for toddlers, but it's also important to reference for teens. It's instinctive, innate resistance to coercion or agenda from someone else. This is why teens are like, "You want me to do what?"If it's an agenda, they're like, "Uhuh, this doesn't feel right." This feels transactional and it needs to be more natural and relevant and meaningful and connected. I always point out when I'm working with the families I work with, how can we increase that connection and that relationship, not to get them to take out the trash, because they'll sense that agenda, but because that's where everything can grow from when we have that connection. All this other stuff becomes way more possible, easier to talk about. You don't feel like you're having to tiptoe. And teens won't feel like, "Oh, my mom or dad only talks to me when they want me to do something." A lot of teens are feeling like that right now. They only tell me what to do. They don't know .

Kirsten Cobabe (09:41):

So, **counterwill** is something that if you want to spend more time reading about it, it's very interesting, can be helpful just to know that that's happening during this age. So, it's not personal. This is actually a really healthy response. We want teens to keep this kind of intuitive sense about people's agendas. It's actually a safety mechanism from my perspective. And it's also this essential stepping stone that helps them on their path or that can lead to differentiation, individuation and interdependence, which is just that next phase, that young adulthood phase. And that's where teens are going and that's what we're helping them prepare for that next phase.

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Kirsten Cobabe (10:21):

Curfew and rules

So, we know with children that having edges and lines and boundaries helps them feel safe. You are supposed to be their leader as their parent and they will push up against those, which can be challenging because then we have to deal with that right? We have to then engage with that, figure out how to navigate this. For some parents being really, really stern and punishment oriented feels easier because then you're not having the conversations. For other parents, being really passive and permissive feels easier. But really both of those are extremes. And that middle road is where we can have those conversations and really tease stuff out and come together in this.

So, examples might be, if we look at the rules piece, okay, you're 15 year old has Snapchat. How do we prepare them to know how to navigate that world and how can we trust them in that world? So, it's setting them up for success beforehand. Talking about your expectations and the guidelines and making a deal, if that makes sense. Here's what I'm offering can I trust you for this? Can we trust each other in this? And also, I'm here for you when things get hairy or if they should get hairy. If you get a message from someone you don't know or if there's a conversation you need help with, I'm here for you. So, this is what we can do. Instead of later being like, why did you do that there? That's not safe. You can't post that. Let's set them up for success. Because sometimes even though they look big and they are big, sometimes teens, they're still kids and they need support and guidance of navigating this stuff.

Kirsten Cobabe (12:08):

And if we look at curfew, I mean this is a perfect example of, it might be different during the school year and different in summer. It might be different on prom night than it is on a Monday night. And so, how do we just get really real with this? And ideally my friend Michelle Kenny, she talks about how and her family in her home, there's no curfews because she has fostered such a strong relationship and connection with her teens that they just come home on time. They just don't stay out till three. They want to be home and not all the time, right? They still want to go out and be with their friends and have

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those age appropriate experiences, but that's possible too. But I think there's a path to that and we have to kind of work towards that.

Kirsten Cobabe (12:51):

That's not always immediate. That's a lot of relationship building. So, in the meantime it's like, oh, something special going on tonight. Yeah, maybe tonight's a later curfew and we want teens more than anything to know how to stay safe enough to keep having fun, because fun is the highest priority for a lot of teens, even sometimes the type A teens. How to stay safe enough to keep having fun, keep going to parties, keep enjoying life. This means not drinking and driving. You can call me at any hour of the night, not rushing home to get home by exactly midnight. We don't want teens doing that. We want to raise people that can be present with what is, take their time if needed and do things safely with awareness.

Kirsten Cobabe (13:41):

Taking risks

We have to be aware of what they're going through ahead of time. I think that's part of what this conversation today can be preparing ourselves. The world is different than it was when we were growing up. So, we do have to learn the Snapchats, the Tik Toks, what might be happening at parties. There's different substances now. There's different ways we have to be aware to stay safe when having these risk taking experiences. And how do we guide teens to take healthy and safe risks? My preference is safe as safe as they can be.

Sleep and wellness

Most teens are not getting enough sleep. Most people are not getting enough sleep. And teens, it really matters because their brain is going through such a dramatic shift. And brain circuitry is firing. And you know, this is where we can guide them again to explore new things because they're really ready for that. This is a great opportunity just like toddlerhood for those new connections to be made. Not enough sleep though can impact the brain, the mood, decision making, being positive and just thinking clearly

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that mixed with a lack of nature and sunlight and play and fun and doing what one loves. This is what is really impacting teens from my perspective. There's so much mentalizing. The tests, the studying, the school, the sitting, the inside. This is so far from what's natural for us as humans.

Kirsten Cobabe (15:31):

I talked about the village, right? It's like being outside, doing group activities, playing with nature, learning. We can learn any subject through nature. We can learn any subject through our passion and our gift. It used to be around 13, it'd be like, oh, you this teen is into "X" great, here's your mentor, here's your experience. You get to go explore that. And now we're saying, no, no, no, just get through high school. And then a lot of kids by the end are kind of apathetic. They're just like, ugh, we don't miss the window because our creativity is always there and our gift is always with us. But there is a window where it's wide open, where it's a doorway, where it's a path. And I think that we have a lot of room for improvement there.

Kirsten Cobabe (16:23):

And I know it's really hard, especially in schools because there's a lot of layers and things that need to get done. And I think we're seeing the results of all this unnatural way we're living right now. You get up early, you leave, everyone separates, everybody sits, everyone's inside and we're not doing what we're here to do and we're not with the people that we want to be with. Teens, specifically, are just with their grade level. We've seen this from multiple studies. I even remember one when I was in school when we were connected with the grade above or two grades above and how the results were amazing. Everybody learned better from every level. The kids teaching, the younger kids learned, the younger kids learned because it was another peer. And so, there's a little more mixing of ages, not too much still within the same kind of general age, but that's also helpful for the teachers. Not everything's on the teacher's shoulders. Because we're asking a lot of teachers right now. And that's gotten again to a kind of unnatural place.

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Disconnection

This leads right into **disconnection.** A lot of teens are realizing or at least feeling that they're disconnected from the work. It's not meaningful, it's not relevant. Their iPhones can do this for them. Why are we learning this? Technology is a part of our lives. And so, we're still stuck in the civil war era with school in a lot of ways.

Homework Pressures

Kirsten Cobabe (18:04):

And following teens home, they're not able to really get that break from **homework**. What we are seeing is that that's too much. There's no break. And what the human brain needs is these breaks. The hunter gather brain in us needs to know that stress is over and now I can relax or now I can play or now I can do what I love or now I can be with my friends. And it's sort of following teens around. We've also seen that we don't have to be in school, sitting in school. A lot of teens do better with their own time management. That can even be really helpful in their maturation. And it's not easy to make these transitions. And some teens are really just not liking school in general because they're feeling that lack of meaning, lack of connection, lack of relevance. I know for me personally, and maybe for many of you, when we were in school, there might have been that one teacher, that one subject or art class that kept us there. And a lot of teens that I know right now don't have that teacher or that class or even that friend group. And so that authentic connection piece that is so important for all of us humans to feel and experience. That belonging is now feeling distant or not even authentic.

Kirsten Cobabe (19:44):

We're in this culture of numbing it out of us. No, no, no, just focus on this and then you can be you. We can see in our teens how this might be so challenging and make it hard at home because you're probably seeing your teen come home and sit on their phone and you're like, no there's the trash to do. Or like, I want to spend time with you. And there's a lot of worry and fear there, so know that you're not the only one experiencing that. I talk to parents all day every day and there are ways to be with your teen in this. We want a quick fix; we want to fix the school. And while we're figuring out what changes

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we need to make in our communities, we can hold space for our teens. So, instead of, "Oh, your room's a mess or don't you have homework to do, iit looks like you have all this overdue stuff." How do we lean in and go, "Oh, my gosh, there's so much on your plate. Wow." These are the ways we can actually bring into awareness, the bigness, the hardness of what's happening. And open that doorway for conversation and connection. The homework will happen. And if it doesn't, it's summer school and maybe that's the worst case scenario. And even that manageable, sucky yes but manageable, right? And so, what's more important than anything is always our relationships with each other and with our children, with your children. Way more important than any test, any summer school, any homework, any waking up perfectly at 6:00 AM every day.

Kirsten Cobabe (21:34):

So, how do we stay in that place? It's really doing like we did in the beginning,

- Remembering to breathe every now and then.
- Remembering you you have a lot on your plate and so do they. And you actually can be together in that. I mean, I wish it wasn't so, but that's often the case right now.
- So, you can be together and then be like, "Oh my gosh, I'm overwhelmed. You're probably overwhelmed."
- And then model healthy coping skills. And that doesn't always mean get everything done now so we can go play later. Sometimes that means let's skip tomorrow, let's cook dinner together. Let's just go for a drive.

And not because it needs to be a lesson. So that we can spend time together because that time together piece even though you might not feel it, your teens want that, they just don't want it because it's going to be luxury. That's how most teens experience time together. So, how do we take that off the table and have actual real conversations like we might with a friend and not saying you're friends with your teen that comes later when they're grownups. They need you to be their parent. But we can still have conversations that resemble that where it's like, holy crap, whatever language is appropriate in your family. Oh my gosh, we just have too much on our plate. What a wild society culture we've kind of found ourselves in. Wow. And as we do this, we start to see teens go, yeah, it's really hard. Here's what's

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hardest for me. And they start opening up in these ways so that as we can be comfortable or not comfortable, but at least accept their discomfort and hold it with them. Then we can be together through it and walk together. Walk together through that and find those solutions together. And teens, actually part of what they're doing is they need to try on all the feelings, they need to try on this stuff. A lot of it's temporary. It's all practice. So, it's jealousy, anger, frustration, joy, sadness all of that they need support feeling those things so they know they can feel them and get through that. That's emotional regulation. They learn that through co-regulation with you. And so, another reason why it's important to be our best selves and to model what we wish to see **because teens can't be what they can't see.** So, friends and social pressures, this is a big one and a lot of teens are dealing with a lot of drama at school. It's not just tests, it's also social stuff.

Kirsten Cobabe (24:06):

So, how can we remember that actually this stuff is registering like pain and physical and emotional pain are so connected. Everything's connected and so school's not separate from emotions. Their friendships aren't separate from their inner realm, you know, to some degree at least they're connected and so they're finding their place, they're making new friends, they might even lose friends. And they're looking at the world with this new more mature lens at least sometimes and going, "Oh my gosh, what? This is unfair. This isn't right. Why do we have homework?" And this is when we can say, "Yeah, why do we have homework?" Instead of, "I know, but you just have to do it."

Kirsten Cobabe (24:59):

Which is what we all heard, right? **"You just have to do it. Your job is school." It's not a job. They're not getting paid and they cannot leave. So, that is not true and they will call you out on that.** So, I wouldn't go for that. I would go more for, "Yeah, what is up with all this?" Let's look at it because if we start looking into the actual history I'm picking on school, it's just an easy one right now, we see that its origins and roots are all about creating workers and education has a history of really educating the sensitive out of us. Just conform this way, here's a box fit in here, this is how we do this. And so, often questions aren't welcome and the arts are being cut and the movement's being cut and all these things are really important for people in our development. So, it's tricky right now. So, when your **teen's like,**

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"Why is this, this is not fair," and all this stuff, we can lean into that and say, "Yeah, what's happening here? What do we wish it was? What's the hardest part?" Those are some of my favorite questions because usually we're trying to change their experience rather than be with them in their experience. And it doesn't always mean they're right and it doesn't mean we can't have boundaries and say eventually, "Well, you know, that's not going to happen or we can't go there."

Kirsten Cobabe (26:37):

But hearing them out allows them to have their process and that's really important. And that again, is how they learn to self-regulate, which is one of the most important skills. That's how they learn to critically think, have discernment and gain confidence in themselves that they can make it through this tough stuff. And so, we actually have to be with them in that instead of telling them, you can just do it. I mean that works for some kids, but for a lot it doesn't. Everybody's personality is different. Some teens really do need that cheerleader and other teens need us to show up as a, "Hmm, yeah, what do you think?" Before we share our wisdom. A lot of teens need to feel heard first. And then they are more open to receiving that.

Types of stress responses

Kirsten Cobabe (27:26):

Types of stress responses that you or your teen might be in fight, flight, freeze. Just know that this is some of what's happening, right? And when we have awareness of it, we can go, "Ah, that's what's happening. That's where I'm at." Instead of going through autopilot every day like a robot, we're humans.. So, we've got to stay connected to that part of us, especially if we're wanting to have a relationship with our teenagers. They'll want this from you, they need this from you. They're here for your authentic connection and they're so attuned to you because they have been and had to have been since the very beginning for their survival. So, they know you inside and out and they can sense when your words and what you're feeling inside are not matching. So, your awareness of where you are is critical. Critical. And that doesn't mean you have to be perfect. **This isn't about being perfect, actually being present, it's not about being present all the time. It's about noticing when we are and aren't**

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coming back to that as we can. Our brains like to go, but I can't do that all the time or I can't do that perfectly. Why try? These are some of the areas where you can connect with your teens; car rides, nature, they're hobbies, cooking, even technology. It's not all bad. It's here, it's probably here to stay.

So, how do we engage with this stuff? Authentic listening, connection. Teens really need us to model this being-ness this so deeply right now because they have grown up in a digital world where there's a lot of distractions, media, influencers, there's a lot to choose to consume. And we need to model how to do this wisely with awareness so that they too can have these skills. So, they really need your safe, sound and age appropriate support and authentic connection.

Kirsten Cobabe (29:58):

And the little moments are the big ones. And I spoke to this before of the energy we bring into the room, similar to those words matching with what we're thinking, your teen's going to know. And so, are you walking into their room with critical eyes? Are you walking into the kitchen and just immediately asking them, have they done all their work? Are you having thoughts about them that aren't really that positive? And it's okay. Negativity is, I mean we have to have both. We're humans, right? I'm not talking toxic positivity, but what lens are you seeing your teens through? For some reason it's so different from when they're babies. When they're babies. It's just like, ah, ah, and we're in awe. And then we forget that awe. And partly because of the culture we live in that says that teenagers are entitled and all this stuff. No, they're self-oriented because that's actually their stage of development. So, we get to choose which lens we see through, we get to choose how we interpret what we know about this stage and age and what they're worthy of and what they deserve. They don't have to get an A or even pass a class to be worthy of love. That's just not true. And we've been told something different and teens can feel that and it's incredibly heartbreaking for them. What I hear from teens regularly is just, "Ugh, I wish my parents would, you know, just listen." And this isn't parent bashing. You guys have so much on your plate. We need that village to come back. And so, hopefully we'll see more of that. They really want you to hear them out.

Kirsten Cobabe (31:40):

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They're spending their days doing stuff they don't love. Summer is coming. And what changes in summer. And we can even talk about college for those of you that have some of the older teens **being their lighthouse during these changes, whether it's summer change, college change, friendships changing, how to really be there with them and go, "Wow, that sounds really hard." "What's it like for you?" Or, "Hey, summer's coming, how do we want to design our summer? So, it works for everybody in the house?"** "What do we want to talk about here?" And then, they need fun. We need fun. Everybody needs fun or restoration or rest or downtime. This is so essential in a lot of cultures. We need just as much rest as we need work and we're way off right now.

Kirsten Cobabe (32:30):

Work, tasks, to-dos, stress is up high for so many reasons in so many ways. And our fun is low and we need to bring those closer together and teens need that too. How to model this. What's possible? connection and trust, guidance and support, emotional regulation, mutual respect, self-awareness, resilience, differentiation, which is interdependence and on their way to young adulthood, intrinsic motivation, critical thinking, communication, accountability. This is what's possible when we're really able to hold space and pause long enough to remember, "Oh yeah, I'm connecting with a human, connecting with my child who's a human and who's in a difficult moment in their life." "And yeah, we might be 10 minutes late. And you know what? It's worth it." It's worth it because this moment right now connects to all the future moments. It's just this is this moment right now and I need to show up for this and I need to be present for this. And it is the most important thing, at least whenever we can. It's not always possible. The more balanced adults can be, we can pause. And when we live really empowered joyful lives and in a balanced way this is a beautiful gift to give the youngest among us something to look forward to because right now they're looking out like, I don't really know about this adult world. I don't know. Especially if we're complaining and we're stressed, why would they want to graduate, go to college and do this whole path that we're saying they should do if this is what it leads to, right? Let's live good lives so we can be together in that as best we can amidst all the hard and part of living a good, balanced, empowered life is looking at what's hard and being together through what's hard.

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Q&A

Amy Oberholtzer (35:08):

You did such a beautiful job reminding us all where we are and where we can get with our kids and with ourselves and I think that's a really lovely way to sort of dig deeper into the more specific questions that we've received. Just remembering all of those feelings that you have shared with us and the possibilities that we can get to.

What if your teen is choosing friends that just aren't good for them? How do I open up that conversation?

Kirsten Cobabe (36:10):

This is an opportunity to ask your teen what they like about these people, these friends. What's exciting, what's interesting, and then also how they feel around these friends. And I say that because there's likely something they're receiving, whether it be fun, community belonging. These are what we get from our friendships. And so, asking about what they're getting will help to understand where they're at, where your teen is at, and then maybe there's a way to fill some of those in other ways at home, at church, at sports, whatever the things are. And that also keeps the dialogue open because a common reactive response might be more like, they're not good kids, you can't be friends with them and you can't hang out with them. And then teens usually want to more or they feel like you don't get it. And so, it cuts off a lot of opportunities for connection. If you keep that conversation open, then you can keep talking about it. And that might mean that there's also rules. Like, okay, well that's fine and I get that and here's some expectations or boundaries around any friendship you may have.

Amy Oberholtzer (37:37):

You're starting the conversation by asking them what they're getting out of the relationship and you're opening up the door to listen to them first before you share whatever your fears or discontentment might be. Is that what you're saying?

Kirsten Cobabe (37:51):

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Exactly. And spend plenty of time there. What's it like for you? Tell me more. Oh, what do you guys do? 80/20 is one of the ways to gauge; **80% listening, 20% talking. And listen first as much as they'll share, keep listening.**

Amy Oberholtzer (38:10):

It's interesting that you say, kids only hear from us when we want them to do something. This is actually how I feel as a parent. I get into conversations only when my daughter wants something. Clothes items, use the car, pick me up, whatever. So, I guess the question would be

How do we shift that kind of a relationship from their side too?

Kirsten Cobabe (38:40):

I love this question. Partly this is happening because they're self-oriented, that's the stage that their brain is at. Self, self self, me, me, me. And that takes time to mature. They're also seeing this happen in the world. So, they're being modeled on this. This is what teens are seeing and it doesn't mean every parent is doing this. And, hopefully that was clear. These are just examples and common themes and teens usually pick out those few times you've done that and feel like you always do that. So, one of the ways we can work with this is bring light and awareness to it, “oh, I wish I could do that for you right now. I wish I could do all the millions of things you've asked” or, “What else? Tell me more. What else do you need me to do for you? Give it all to me. Give it all to me. Let's see what we can manage. Let's see what we can check off. Let's see what I can actually offer you today. ” Because so often we're trying to stop it, we're trying to cut it off. “I don't have a million minutes in the day, there's only one of me.” We start to feel overwhelmed and maybe even triggered. We're just pouring all of us out. I think that's one way, because again, we're often trying to change it and make it stop. But one of the ways is even just welcome it in and then notice if we might be doing some of that too and go, oh, I'm caught in the "do's" and asking you to do all the things. And if your kids let you hug them, just hug them. Be like, you know, I wish I could do all the things for you in this one second. And I can't. And it sucks, but we can at least do some of them.

Amy Oberholtzer (40:39):

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Thank you so much for reminding us or recommending about the importance of being outside. But how do we get our teens to go there without their phones?

Kirsten Cobabe (40:58):

I would encourage maybe not trying to get them to go there without their phones. My approach is always, let's start where the person's at, where the teen is at. If their phone is always with them, then getting them outside with the phone is the goal. It's the most appropriate goal because that's where they're already at. They might feel not safe or they might feel disconnected. Their friends are their lifelines and this is how they reach them. That's okay if they're phones with them, maybe they like taking pictures. Maybe they need to call their friends. Outside is outside. We remember as humans how good it feels to be outside. If you do want to try it out, they'll be like, let's try it together without our phones and just see what it's like. We don't have to like it. Let's just see like an experiment because the teens will often feel like they have to then always go outside without their phones and it just becomes extreme. So, those are some ideas.

Amy Oberholtzer (42:13):

One of the things that I made a note of during your presentation, and I really like the way you stated it, was **walk together in the solutions so that your teen feels part of it and in it.**

When a parent problem solves with a teen and then comes up with a plan that works for everyone and then when the time comes, the teen won't follow through. whether they choose not to prioritize it or emotionally they can't do it. How should the parent proceed when that happens?

Kirsten Cobabe (42:51):

One way is to be like, what happened? What's in the way? Do you need help with something? Usually I would use that last one. The first two are really like what's happening for you. I'm confused. What's in the way, where are we at now? Because I remember we talked about X, Y, Z and now we're experiencing A, B, C, what's going on?

Amy Oberholtzer (43:23):

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So, you're offering them an opportunity to be accountable without judging them. You're just inquiring.

Kirsten Cobabe (43:29):

Like we might with a friend where it's like, you didn't show up for lunch. What happened? Right? You didn't take out the trash is the thing that happens. What happened?Because what I tend to find there was a breakup, they failed a test, something happened at school, they're worried about something, they didn't sleep last night, they're hungry, there's usually something else. Or they literally don't have that executive functioning skill and do need our guidance and support. Let's do it together. I'll walk with you, I'll walk the trash out with you and then boom, before you know it, they're telling you how hard the day was and you're having a connection moment when it could have been, I said, take out the trash. You should have done that an hour ago. That's the difference that these pauses and these questions can make.

Amy Oberholtzer (44:19):

I think a lot of the people on the call today probably feel like they're literally butting heads with their teens and that there's a lot more kind of emotionality than what we're feeling right now while you speak.

Can you take us to a place where we're in it real hard with our teenager and talk about how we respond or react in those situations? What would be most beneficial?

Kirsten Cobabe (45:14):

If things are really heated or it's been months or even longer of just disconnection that's a little bit more of the lower energy. What I hear you actually maybe talking about is that high energy, like lots of arguing, right? Get stuff done, get up for school, they're failing classes. Maybe they yell at you or maybe they've even punched a wall or something and you know, it's just like, "Ah." What can we do in those moments is give ourselves what we need. As the parent, which hopefully you're already doing, taking good care of yourself, that's key. And maybe that's obvious, but I think it's often forgotten. And then in the moments that just allows for you to have more bandwidth. With more bandwidth in those moments that are like, "Ah," or your teens like, "I hate you, you never listen to me." Then we might be able to

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instead be like, "Oh, I don't listen. What have I not heard?" **We can either keep elevating with them and some teens are elevating stuff actually to see how we're going to handle it. So, there's a lot of testing the boundaries happening. So, when your teen is pissed all the time or there's lots of conflict, they're asking you to be steady, not fake, calm, but with them in it of like, "I didn't hear you. Okay, what have I missed? I hear you that I didn't hear you. I'm listening right now. What did I miss? That must feel really hard."** I think in those moments what's important to do is honor how hard it is because it can feel like fake calm if we're trying to be calm and we need to really honor that it's effed up, hard, miserable, frustrating, unfair and be like, that's where we're at. You're feeling this and I'm feeling this. Ugh, I wish this wasn't happening but I know we're going to get through it. Space is okay and sometimes teens are open to it if you're like, "What's one thing I could do right now?" They might be open to it. And even if they go, "I don't know." That's okay because they're still with you. They're still sitting together in the same room.

Amy Oberholtzer (47:49):

So, Kirsten, once you've set the rules and boundaries and you're getting to a place with your teen that is difficult.

Is there ever a time when we say you're really not doing all that you can and I really do have to set consequences in place here?

And how do we go about having that conversation and pushing to the point of like, "No, this just doesn't fly. I know you're a teenager and you're in your angsty time and things are tough, but you screwed up and the consequences are real." How do we navigate that with them?

Kirsten Cobabe (48:28):

I think as much as it can look natural and feel like a natural consequence, having the phone taken away because you didn't do your homework. That stuff doesn't always land or really make sense. And often, whatever the mistake is, the consequences are already there. Whether it be summer school because they missed too much class or they haven't been cleaning their room and now they have ants in their room or whatever. You know, these are just some random examples. Sometimes the consequences are already there. That being said, it doesn't mean that there isn't space for here's the hard line. Yeah, I

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know it sucks. This is the line though and it's for me too. Making sure they know what those parameters are because then they can live inside of them and it's okay. I think setting it up early whenever possible and before is helpful. That's why some of the, okay, summer's coming, let's look at that. Or, you're going to be in high school next year, let's look at that instead of waiting until later. And so, I think that can be done with things like chores or whatever their responsibilities are. And what I've seen work, and I know this is maybe not what people want to hear, but the **culture, community and environment we create in our home will either support that teamwork and accountability and responsibility or not.** And so, yes, we can have consequences after like, hey, you didn't do this so you can't do this. Sometimes that has to be or that's what's most appropriate depending on the situation. And also, **there's so much we can do on the front end, this is our little community and I know sometimes maybe it feels like a pain in the ass or you don't want to do the thing. So, is there another thing you'd rather do? Offering some sense of control helps with buy-in and actual interest engagement in it. Who wants to live in a home that's just like, your job is this and my job is this and we don't even really interact otherwise and we just kind of like are surviving. It's not fun, it won't be inspiring. So, what culture can we create?**

Amy Oberholtzer (50:49):

Can you give us some strategies of things that we can remind ourselves to do in the moment so that we can continue with that feeling at home that we're hoping to create?

Kirsten Cobabe (51:32):

Anything you can do to keep taking care of yourself for your bandwidth, but then in that moment, no matter how much bandwidth we have, those moments can happen.

And so, if we can notice that they're happening and we're yelling all of a sudden just noticing that these feel-like non-things, but they actually are things. Noticing we're screaming at each other and going, oh my gosh, we're screaming at each other. Let's pause for a second. Right? You're not saying you can't yell at me, you can't talk to me like that. It's saying, "Oh wow, here's where we're at. Okay." And just speak it out loud **sometimes, almost narrating what's happening**. This can be helpful for a reset and your teen doesn't want to be yelled at and they don't want to yell at you. I know this, I hear it every week.

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And then **sit down, sit down on the floor or a couch or something**. Because when we sit down the messages our body gets and our brain gets is that everything's okay. I mean, even if it's not okay, it means there's no emergency, which then our whole system can sort of reset at least a little bit. And this can help us remember to pause long enough to notice we're yelling and then stay sitting. I love this one because it's a physical thing we can do that has a reaction in our body.

And then another, **taking space** I think is welcome anytime and not, I can't talk, I can't deal with this right now, you need to get away from me, but, let's just take five or take an hour. We'll connect back. I know we'll figure this out.

So, much of it though is **recognizing where we as the adult have allowed ourselves to become overwhelmed by our emotions and we can't be surprised when our teens are also overwhelmed by theirs because they don't even have those skills yet.**

Amy Oberholtzer (53:39):

Don't be too hard on ourselves I think is an important message of today because this is hard stuff.

I want to make a suggestion to my teen that I feel is in their best interests. Can you help me with how best to phrase that or intro, that kind of suggestion?

Kirsten Cobabe (54:38):

One, and I love this question, asking if it's a good time to talk, is now a good time or would later be better the more we can offer. Or,I had some wonders or some questions or some thoughts like, would you be open to chatting? You're not in trouble, that's an important one. You're not in trouble and I'm not mad at you. Teens are always scared about this. **We can offer them some control about that when they do want to have a conversation because sometimes they're not in the mood just like sometimes we're not in the mood.** Sometimes we don't want to talk about stuff. Sometimes we are not in that place. The other piece that I love about this is that it kind of highlights how far away we are from our innate natural parenting ways and also from each other. Maybe your teen can only ask certain people certain questions or they feel more comfortable with them. I think in those moments and when we are in community and when we are in the village, we might feel more confident. We might feel like we're

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more connected to our gifts, our innate ways and just the wisdom that we all have in our bones for how to communicate with each other. And I think sometimes these questions really reveal how far away we feel from that. And that's one of the things we miss in this current way of living.

Amy Oberholtzer (56:31):

I think you've given us some really good ideas today about how to regain our own sense of connection within our families and to take steps to remember that we're all just human beings and we're trying to find our authentic selves, not only within our own selves, but amongst our immediate circle of neighbors and friends. But we often do feel as though we're doing that alone. The garage doors are closed, the air conditioners are on, nobody's going outside.

How do we regain or begin to regain that sense of village that you talk about so often?

Kirsten Cobabe (57:21):

We've all separated into our boxes. One opportunity could potentially, if people are open to it, they can find someone that came to this event because you already know you're interested in something similar and you're probably raising, or at least supporting a teen is to find a buddy. And this is what I've done in various workshops I've been part of. And then other ways to kind of, whether it be at school like, "Hey, I'm looking to find a parent group to talk about some stuff or to be better parents or to understand what's going on with our teens." I bet you if you raise your hand and go, anyone out there wanting to chat or connect a little bit more, I bet there are people because it's not only a need that we all have but it's something most people are lacking right now. And so, yeah, my guess would be a lot of people would go, yeah, I'd love that.

Kirsten Cobabe (58:20):

Go easy, really go easy on ourselves because the reality is a lot of parents raising teens right now might also be caring for their parents, raising their parents. We might have really had a very passive parent or maybe we had a really strict parent, but not that middle road. And it can be challenging to do it this way when we don't know what we're doing.

Amy Oberholtzer (58:59):

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I can't thank you enough for being part of CATCH and our community today, Kirsten. It was fantastic.And I just want to thank everybody very much for coming today and taking an hour to learn with us. It was an absolute pleasure.

Kirsten Cobabe (59:31):

Thank you everybody too. You're amazing for opening this door and raising teens today. Thank you Amy.

Amy Oberholtzer (59:40):

Thank you. Take deep breaths, reach out to CATCH if you need any support and take good care of yourselves.

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