



Parenting the Mental Health Generation Podcast
Season 4 Episode 1
Noticing What Our Kids Need
TRANSCRIPT



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INTRODUCTION

[00:00:12] **Amy O.:** On today's episode of Parenting the Mental Health Generation, we invite you in to listen as we discuss reintroducing the podcast as a place to share our stories and find power and community in them. Welcome. I'm Amy O, the founder of CATCH, Community Action, together for Children's Health based in the Chicago Northern Suburbs.

We want this to be a space where you come time and again to learn and discover that you are not alone in parenting young people whose mental health is now challenged in ways we never even imagined. This is our first episode of this new season, and today I'll be chatting with the producer of the pod, Anne Neumann.

We're going to just talk about where parents and families are right now and how this podcast might be helpful, informative, and supportive. So put in your earbuds. Take this 30 minutes for you and join my conversation with my friend Anne Neumann. Welcome Anne.

EPISODE

[00:01:24] **Anne N.:** Hello.

Amy O.: We're doing it. Yay. I think we should start by just giving our listeners a brief personal introduction. Remind them who we are. I am Amy Oberholtzer, the founder of CATCH. I live in Northbrook, Illinois with my husband, and we raised our two children here. My son is now 28 years old. My daughter is 24 years old, and both of them live out of state, so I talk to them relatively frequently, but I see them all too infrequently.



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Anne N.: And I am Anne Neumann. I am one of the founding members of CATCH. I live in Deerfield. I have three kids. My oldest is 23, my middle is a junior in college and 21, and my baby is, a sophomore in college and she's 19.

[00:02:25] **Amy O.:** I'll just add for the listeners that both Anne and I came to CATCH organically, for lack of a better word. My daughter is still on a mental health journey, although she is doing very, very well, but she was the impetus behind the founding of CATCH back in 2017. And Anne, you came shortly thereafter.

Anne N.: Yep. I showed up at a coffee talk. My oldest started struggling with mental health in seventh grade. I do want to note, my 23-year-old is now a seventh-grade teacher. So for us, it is truly a full circle moment.

Amy O.: I'm jumping up and down. Yeah.

Anne N.: And with the pod, I'm so glad that we're able to find the space and the time to bring it back.

[00:03:15] **Amy O.:** Yeah, so peer support is one of the arms CATCH that I think we're both most proud of and that we think is unique in the mental health support community in our area. And to that end, the podcast this year, we hope will be a place that continues that legacy, I guess, of peer support. And now that we're kicking off another school year, it is the Fall. You're all sending your kids back to school. Fall brings a fresh start. School years bring a fresh start and we all kind of have a new opportunity to support our children in ways that I think is important to kind of think about and talk about. You know, I think we all do a really good job making sure that our kids are physically safe, right? We get them the right size backpack. We buy them the right shin guards for soccer. We make sure they don't run down the stairs, at least while we're watching, feed them good food. But sometimes I think we don't know exactly how best to support their emotional wellbeing in all of the hustle and bustle and schedule and routine of the Fall. Would you agree with that?

Anne N.: Absolutely. I wanted to share a post that I recently saw in one of my mom's groups, because I think it actually speaks to being potentially so caught up in the things and the moments of



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scheduling and maybe then missing the key parts of the Fall. This kindy mom said, "As we send our children off with backpacks full of sharpened pencils, fresh notebooks, and nerves wrapped in excitement, let's also send them with reminders that will last far longer than any school supply. Please remind your children that not everyone in their class will look like them. Talk like them or learn like them. And that's more than okay. It's what makes our classrooms rich, our friendships deeper, and our community stronger. That's the beauty of school. All of our children in all of their differences, learning and growing side by side, what a gift for them and for us." And I was really struck by that last sentence; "What a gift for them and for us."

[00:05:34] **Amy O.:** You know, when you read that, what came to my mind now the second time that I've heard it, is about what you might ask your child when they come home from school, right? School's going to take care of the learning part. What your child might want to tell you more about is who they met.

Amy O.: Who they played with.

Anne N.: What happened on the playground? What happened in the lunchroom?

Amy O.: Yeah, exactly. When we're talking about taking care of our kids' emotional wellbeing, it's about checking in with them. It's about noticing their body language. It's about listening to what they have to say or listening to the silence. It's about, you know, being their safe place at the end of whatever chaotic day might have happened.

[00:06:29] **Anne N.:** And I think it's also accepting them for how they show up. You know, some of my friends have freshmen in high school this year and I wanted to find out how their first day was and they said, "Well, we think it was okay because we were told it was 'fine, fine, fine.'" And we all laughed. But that's the reality, it's, it is physically being there for your kids and accepting whatever the answers are to the questions and knowing that more will unfold if you've created that space.

Amy O.: Right. I mean, I think one thing we've both learned and I know other parents involved in CATCH have learned is creating a space where your child does not feel judged or does not have an expectation about what they're supposed to say to you, but in fact can say what they actually want



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to only then continues to create those spaces, which I think can start from the very beginning of a school year. Right. You are the one willing to listen without reacting in a powerful way, one way or another. Just hearing.

[00:07:44] **Anne N.:** And I think for me, it's taken me a long time to have at the forefront of my mind the approach with curiosity and to understand that whatever the, the answer I am hearing as a 55-year-old woman, not the 12-year-old who is sharing it and I can't put what my experiences want to put on the words that they say or the words that they don't say or read into whatever story they're telling. It's truly just being there to listen, to validate, and to create that constant reminder that you are always there to hear.

Amy O.: For some reason this came into my head when you were talking. You know how sometimes your kids will come home from school and they'll be like, "oh, man, I, I sat alone today," or "nobody ate lunch with me." As a parent, my reaction often was sort of a panic, like, oh my God, they were alone for a lunch period, or on the playground or whatever. That's okay. Kids are really resilient. He's going to be okay. Things like this take time. Friendships take time. Comfort takes time. What's really important I think, for that kid is to know that it doesn't matter to you that he was sitting by himself. It doesn't matter to you that he was alone on the bench. Meaning maybe tomorrow it'll be different. Maybe we could try something new tomorrow instead of, "Oh gosh. Hmm. What can I do about that? Who can I call to fix that?"

Anne N.: Or what posts can I make on social media for everyone to fix my problem?

Amy O.: Listen, hear, and ask him if he wants a bowl of apples.

Anne N.: Right.

Amy O.: I mean, obviously parenting isn't that easy, but the point being this is a long journey with a lot of bends and turns in the road. And if we can all just remember to check ourselves and check in with our kid and be there in ways that are simple but real.

[00:09:56] **Anne N.:** And what they need, not what we need.



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Amy O.: Right. Call a friend and get what you need. Come to the CATCH parent support group ([Parent Support Network/Parent's Connect](#)) and get what you need. Like we did. I mean, because it really does help, but also, yeah, agreed. It's about what they need for sure. I guess one thing that we that we always talk about every Fall at CATCH, well really year-round, is this idea of, free time versus scheduled time, and I think it's worth revisiting in this conversation. You know, let me first say though to the listeners that Anne and I are not mental health professionals. Anne and I are parents. Parents who've learned a great deal from mental health professionals through our work with CATCH and through our work with our kids' programs. So, you know what we talk about here, advice that we might share, ideas that we might have to share with you are those of fellow parents. And we're hopeful that by sharing our experiences and our stories, you will feel empowered to try some new things. To notice some new things,

[00:11:15] **Anne N.:** Maybe not feel, "I am the only one that has this thought." Yes. Or, "I'm all wrong," right? Because it's always the all or nothing that maybe you can see yourself in our voices.

Amy O.: Yes, exactly. And, and so what I was getting to before I turned there for a minute, is that I think we would both urge our listeners to watch and observe our kids, particularly around their time, because one thing we know for sure is that free unscheduled play even in older kids is critically important not only to their development in their brain, but their development socially, and that overscheduling them and having too many prearranged activities could create undue stress and take away from that critically important time of exploration, imagination. And in the them is a good chance to check in on that because you're busily signing up for sports teams and clarinet lessons and et cetera.

[00:12:28] **Anne N.:** I remember my oldest, he did karate for kind of the early elementary grades, and it, it was good for him. He learned a lot about himself, and then it got to a point where he, just didn't enjoy it anymore, and I struggled to let him stop doing it because "you don't," "you start, and you finish" and it stuck with me, and it's helped me to now be "okay-ish" when my kids want to stop something before we (I) feel it's complete. Figure out first, "Are you okay with that?" And how do you get okay with that so that you can respond to your child the way they need to be responded to? It's hard.



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[00:13:17] **Amy O.:** You know, when my daughter was really tiny, we were at a fair and my daughter was fussing like crazy. I mean, she would not stop fussing. And so finally exasperatedly, I said, "What is wrong?" And she just looked up and she goes, "Mommy, I cannot see anything." And when I looked at her, I realized she'd been staring at the back of people's knees. The point of the story being your child's experience and perspective is important, and when it comes to karate lessons or soccer team every day is not going to be good, that doesn't mean that it's not a good fit. But listening to them saying, "I don't want to do this math class. It's hard. It's stressing me out." Let them say it. Talk to them about it, hear them and, and try hard not to come to judgment right away that they're giving up or they're quitting because they might not be, they might just be saying no, and that's okay.

[00:14:24] **Anne N.:** I think both of us have also had that experience where when we involve our child in the decision making of what comes next, sometimes they stick with what they are doing, but they've found that agency of being a part of the problem solving, not necessarily just the person who brought the problem.

Amy O.: Yeah. Which author was it that we hosted during the pandemic? Who wrote the book about teachers making decisions with their students?

Anne N.: Was it Ross Green?

[00:15:01] **Amy O.:** Yes. [Ross Green](#). He is adamant about the fact that if you want a child to succeed in the classroom, a child who might be struggling or whose behaviors might be indicative of the fact that they are struggling on some level, that coming to a decision with the kid. Look, if you can't do the 10 spelling words, how many can you do? Let's agree that you're going to do 7 and then maybe next week we can up it to 8. Does that work? The buy-in that you get from a student who agrees to the 7 is big. And the same goes like what you were saying for a parent and a kid making a decision.

Anne N.: I think sometimes we get so caught up in the structure. Yeah. That it must be the 10 words and again you only pass, or you only are a success, or you only have the A if you've done all 10 steps. And that's not life. Like once you're out of school, you know it, it doesn't always have to be, you have to get all 10 steps done.



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Amy O.: I think part of what we wanted to do today for our listeners is to somewhat take the pressure off. Both Anne and I would agree that when our kids were really on the struggle bus emotionally and mentally, that one of the things that we did that was most profound, for lack of a better word, was to sit with our kids and not say anything, but simply be a presence in their room, on their couch, in their space to let them know that they were not alone. And I think we can all take that example back to our everyday life if you pick up your kid at school and bring them home for snack and make yourself available. Sometimes magic might happen. Words might come tumbling out of their mouth that you wouldn't get if you were on the phone or changing the laundry. It's just a matter of sort of taking note of each other and being there. And I think life can feel simpler when you do that too. There's like a calm that comes.

[00:17:11] **Anne N.:** I remember how often I used to think, "well, we can't not do that." You "can't not go to school." You "can't not go to your middle school graduation." You can. Mm-hmm. And you know what? You can still be standing. I have found that once I learned that, anything can happen, and you can still be okay on the other side. With my other kids, I found a release. I found an ease of parenting because I wasn't living in that black and white. You have to do it. And you have to do it the same way everyone else is doing.

Amy O.: You know, I smile when I hear you say that because one of the goals that we all had at the beginning of CATCH was to give some grace to people and allow them to live their life in a more authentic way so that they didn't always have to feel compelled to do like the neighbor, do like the friend, because everybody's journey is different. And so that warms my heart. And also, I think it can be a good reminder for all of you listening that you know, the world right now is a big hairy mess and there's a lot of really strong feelings that people have and a lot of information is bombarding in at us. And it's okay to say no to that too. It's okay to turn it off. It's okay to chill out, but it's also, I think, even more important to create those spaces of calm and connection and authentic listening with our children because they too are experiencing the wild and crazy ride that is this world right now.

[00:19:03] **Anne N.:** And again, having them say how they feel and sitting with that with them.

Amy O.: Exactly.



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Anne N.: And it's hard.

Amy O.: Something that came to mind for me is when you said, sitting with them in their feelings, you know, if they've identified that they're scared, for example, that is probably the hardest thing that I've learned in my parenting journey. I'm going to scream it from the rooftops. It's super hard to have your kid be uncomfortable or scared or sad or anxious or mad, or

Anne N.: or anything other than joyful. Happy. Yes. Right. Content. Content, right. At peace. Yeah.

Amy O.: It is hard. It makes you feel like you want to barf and that you can't stop your nerve endings from tingling, and you want the feeling to go away. However, we have learned that the most appropriate thing to do is to sit right in that feeling until it passes. Name it, acknowledge it, and go on. So when your kid comes home from school, for example, and says. You know, I was so sad at school today. It's okay to be sad. People are sad.

[00:20:20] **Anne N.:** Because if we can do it when they're in kindergarten or first grade. And then they're going off to college and they're having a really hard time transitioning that first semester. Yeah. Because all of a sudden, they have to make friends for the first time. The last time they made friends was their mom setting up play dates in preschool. If they've sat with those feelings in first grade, they know how to sit with those feelings

Amy O.: And they're less scary. They're less overwhelming. Absolutely.

Anne N.: They can get to the other side.

Amy O.: And I can guarantee you that kids of all ages, your college kids. My college kid. A kindergarten kid. They're all going to have big feelings at the beginning of the year. They're all going to have those feelings and validating them. Noticing them. Super important to helping them be able to live in this world of complex feelings.

[00:21:14] **Anne N.:** Lizzy Appleby, shared [SOY](#), (Some, Others, You). And she shared that with us, I think during COVID in one of our programming. And so what she what that framing is, is her



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speaking with anyone, a child saying, some people might feel scared. Others might feel worried. You might feel afraid. It allows the young person or really anyone who is struggling with some yuck inside and not necessarily being able to put a word to it, giving them that framing, and it does it in a safe way because we're talking about other people. And it's so much easier to label other people before you label yourself. I use it because I think it's a, a great way to help people find the words that match what they're feeling.

Amy O.: Lizzy Appleby is a therapist with Glenview Northbrook Youth Services, and she also leads the Pride Program and is a dear friend of CATCH, an important member of the mental health support community in our area. For sure. Absolutely. What else do we want to touch on, Anne, in this sort of kickoff episode?

YOUR HOMEWORK: NOTING

[00:22:39] **Anne N.:** What we are going to try to do in this season is give you a little bit of work to do at the end of each podcast. And so the work of this podcast episode is noting.

Amy O.: So the idea is to take stock of where you are, where your kids are, and where your family is emotionally. Noticing just how you're all kind of being. So that you can understand where there might be a place for you to connect in a deeper way, in a calmer way. The point is as you jump into your more rigorous schedules and routines, stand behind the kitchen counter and watch, breathe, listen. Think about how you're feeling, what you're seeing in your child. So that we can then move through the podcast episodes to come to kind of work together to find ways to increase the connection, increase the validation, the authentic communication with you and your kids that will last a lifetime, but also provide them with the structure to feel like they are enough. To feel like they've got this.

Anne N.: They're seen. They're heard. And so the nugget from this episode is your only job is to "note it." Yeah.

[00:24:12] **Amy O.:** Yep. Yeah. You know, maybe one of the little diamonds that we can sprinkle around since now our kids are older is that sometimes I think in the hustle and bustle of life, parents



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often have a hard time distinguishing their children from themselves. And their feelings, and yours might not always be the same. Their experiences and yours will not be the same, but theirs are just as important and equally as valid and as real as yours are. And if you can offer that gift to your kid to, to give them that, you know that, that autonomy, I think you're well on your way to a heck of a good year.

Anne N.: I agree.

CONCLUSION

[00:25:01] **Amy O.:** So stay tuned. There'll be more episodes coming up that will give you more tools and strategies to parent the mental health generation of 2025 and beyond. Thanks for listening to another episode of [Parenting the Mental Health Generation](#). Stay current on all CATCH programming by liking us on Facebook (catchiscommunity), or by visiting our website [CATCHiscommunity.org](https://catchiscommunity.org). Thank you so much for joining us to continue the conversation and we'll see you next time.