



## Season 5 Episode 1

### The 15 Minutes That Matter:

How Curiosity and Connection Help Kids Discover Their Values and Their Voice  
**TRANSCRIPT**

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### Introduction

[00:00:00] **Amy O.:** We are so happy to be back. I think you're going to love this episode of the pod. When I met our guest for the first time just a week ago or so, we connected instantly, and we both felt as though we wished we had met much earlier. Welcome in. I'm Amy O., the founder of CATCH, Community Action Together for Children's Health, based in the north suburbs of Chicago.

This podcast, Parenting the Mental Health Generation, is a place where we discuss the topics that concern us as loved ones of young people struggling with their mental health. There's no getting around that the world is chaotic, divided, and very loud these days. How do we get our kids to show up with empathy and a willingness to understand and be curious amongst all that noise?

Today, I'm speaking with Buffy Sallee. Buffy's a teacher at a suburban Chicago high school. She spends her days with teens, and she is the mother of two herself. We invited her in to talk about how we can teach our kids respect and tolerance and guide them to identify and internalize their own values. We talk about just how much our actions and our words as parents and trusted adults really matter.

And we learn what changes Buffy has seen in kids and families over the course of her career, both positive and concerning. So don't go anywhere. Put in your earbuds, take this 30 minutes for you, and join my conversation with Buffy Sallee.

Welcome in.

[00:01:38] **Buffy Sallee:** Thank you.



## Season 5 Episode 1

### The 15 Minutes That Matter:

#### How Curiosity and Connection Help Kids Discover Their Values and Their Voice TRANSCRIPT

## Conversation

**Amy O.:** So during our last episode, we spoke with a local therapist. Her name was Karen Cloyd, still is Karen Cloyd, and she helped us understand the importance of creating safe spaces, places where our kids can talk freely with us and work to identify their feelings in this crazy upside-down world. You and I are going to run with that foundation today and start by talking together about how we can leverage those opportunities to connect with our kids and empower them to show up in their lives with empathy, curiosity, and willingness to understand. So let me just kick it right off, Buffy, by asking you what you are seeing at school. How are high school students coping or reacting to the world at large today, complete with its intolerance, division, and threat? I know that's a big question. That's a big question. It's a very big question to kick it off, but just generally speaking.

**Buffy Sallee:** I think they are a little bit lost. What I sense when I talk to kids is that they don't really know how to engage. They know that things are crazy, and they know that their brain is noisy, but they don't really know what's within their power. A lot of it seems inevitable. I also sense that they're disconnected. They're not in spaces where people are talking about those things. Like at a lunch table in a giant cafeteria, literally every student is on their phone, because it is their d- one time of the day instead of classes, so they're not connecting and discussing things with each other.

And as the parent of two kids, what I'm noticing is that there's a lot of, like, confidence that they know some stuff when it's artificial, right? Like, my own children feel very knowledgeable about some hot take that they've seen on a TikTok reel, and they speak with such gusto about it. And so I think the idea of, like, pausing is, pretty revolutionary in a place where, especially in an overachieving high school where I work, where people are getting more done, getting it done quickly, getting AI to do it even quicker, the idea of, like, taking a beat and questioning, "Am I living intentionally?"

What are the values that are happening here?" Like, all of that, pausing, I don't know that they are encouraged to do that. They are just chugging along on the treadmill of being a good student, or



## Season 5 Episode 1

### The 15 Minutes That Matter:

#### How Curiosity and Connection Help Kids Discover Their Values and Their Voice TRANSCRIPT

getting through the day, or getting to school, whatever is your goal. But I don't think the idea of, like-pausing to engage in it rather than just do it.

[00:04:15] **Amy O.:** Do you think they even realize that they are getting this constant input of information, and you know, visual, uh, what I want to call it, reels and... do you think they even realize that they're not ever pausing, that they're just going, going, going, going, going?

**Buffy Sallee:** Yeah, I think that they, I mean, I, I'll speak... my daughter, for example, who last weekend spent 14 hours on her phone one day, I think students now, especially when they were coming up during the pandemic, I- and the pandemic is a layer of this. Like I think, um, today's seniors were what? Six years ago, she was in sixth grade, and that's when parents started pulling away to go be on their screens even more and being fine with their kids being on their screens. So it became a default setting. I think of like now when I ask my daughter, I had the brave conversation last week of like, and I'm saying this as an educator and a parent, "I'm worried about how much time you spend on your screen." I mean, it was really scary because it's like it's all she knows. She doesn't know any other way to engage, and she feels gross after it. She can feel the ick, and the students can feel themselves get itchy, but in the absence of there being something else that's normed to do, no one's really broken that habit, I guess. And so they, they're exhausted, but they're doing the same things that are making them exhausted because they don't really know any alternatives.

[00:05:43] **Amy O.:** Know, I've told this story before, but it's worth telling again in this conversation. I worked for a long number of years in a first-grade classroom as a, as an assistant teacher, and one of the things that we do in first grade is we give them an "I" prompt, you know, an I writing prompt. So tell me a, a personal story, a personal narrative. And increasingly over the years, less kids were able to say, "I went and played outside this weekend. I went to my grandfather's house. I ate corn." What they would write is, "When I was playing the game, the blue guy moved toward the red guy." [Mm-hmm.] And we as the teachers would correct them or ask them to refocus and say, "Well, who were you with when you were playing the game?" Or "Who, what did you eat?" Or, "Did you have a snack?" Or whatever. And they could not separate themselves- [mm-hmm] from what they saw on their screen. So what we want to talk about today is how can we as trusted adults, and parents, and educators, help kids take the pause, identify themselves in the world- [Uh-huh] help them identify



## Season 5 Episode 1

### The 15 Minutes That Matter:

#### How Curiosity and Connection Help Kids Discover Their Values and Their Voice TRANSCRIPT

their own values, their own reactions, their own opinions about it, in a way that allows them to enter the world with more curiosity, with more intention.

**Buffy Sallee:** It's hard because they, I think they need to see that modeled by some of the adults in their lives. Like, one of the frequent conversations in our home is, you know, like my husband is as addicted to his phone as my kids are, and so any conversation with them isn't going far because they're like, "Look at what my role models are." And so I think seeing adults struggle and make goals and try and do things, I think is pretty revolutionary. Because I don't think we're very transparent about that for kids. Like for example, last year I was thinking about this same issue and with all my seniors, we came up with our own little, like, dopamine menus. And I took a whole class period where everyone thought about non-screen way, like things that water their plant, things that nourish them, things that they enjoy doing. If you have five minutes, if you have \$5, if you have two hours. And so we made these menus so that when the automatic, you know, move, you can maybe find something that nourished you a little bit more. I've also started pivoting weekend shares to talk about the idea of, like, watering your plant. How did you water your plant this weekend? How did you nourish yourself? Not with tasks or something, but how did you do something? And I'm really intentional about setting that up in the beginning of the year because you know you're going to come to school, and I'm going to ask you about watering your plant, and it, it's in your head. It's forcing you to be a little bit intentional about what am I going to be able to report when that lady asks me on Monday, right? [Right.] And I've been modeling, my own dopamine menu, right? Like, I'm struggling with a lot of the same things they are, I'm trying to model, like, I'm trying to figure out the same things they are. It's not that I'm on some higher level, but at the same time, I have a lot more resources and independence to go make some of these choices.

**Amy O.:** How important do you think that on that dopamine menu are real true connections with other human beings? I mean-

[00:09:02] **Buffy Sallee:** Essential. [Yeah.] I mean, I think that's one of the pleasures of being in a classroom. This year we've been talking a lot about what it means to be a part of, like, a soup, a community of soup, right? And what is everyone bringing to the soup, and what does it mean to maintain that soup? And not overpower it with an ingredient but notice yourself in relation to others



## Season 5 Episode 1

### The 15 Minutes That Matter:

How Curiosity and Connection Help Kids Discover Their Values and Their Voice

#### TRANSCRIPT

and think about what you're bringing to a community, and that it's not a passive but an active thing. So even framing a classroom as not something you just show up to, but that everyone is bringing their ind- every little thing as part of the soup, it helps them see the interrelatedness, right? I have this one class that gets wild, right? And I'll be like, "The soup is tasting pretty spicy right now." And the students know, "Oh, I'm going to back off a little bit," so they're noticing, we're talking a little bit about how things are happening within our own community, if that makes sense.

**Amy O.:** Yeah, for sure. So there are no phones in your classroom?

**Buffy Sallee:** No. But- That's a school rule. Yep

**Amy O.:** Okay. And do you notice that kids are listening more, are focusing more, are listening to other people more? Like, do you see a difference than, than what you saw pre-that?

[00:10:09] **Buffy Sallee:** It also depends on what you're doing in the classroom right? If it's a miserable place and I don't have my phone, what am I doing that makes a kid want to show up and come back, right? Am I giving you choice? Am I having you reflect on yourself? Am I connecting this to the real world? I think those are the things that students need to be bought in. And so taking the phones away doesn't help if the class is the same blah, not engaged. So I teach a class that I'm feel lucky enough to teach. It's a race and identity class, and so I mean, the students are developing their own projects. They're talking about their own identities. They're presenting about themselves and sharing of themselves, and I'm sharing of myself all the time. I think what we're modeling is, like, talking and connecting with each other is the good stuff. I mean, they'll notice I don't mind coming to this class, and I'm like, "Why not? All we do is talk about ourselves, and we talk to each other." And so maybe, um, I think, I think it's our responsibility as adults to help. Just telling kids, "You've got to come up with better things to do." I mean, I think about my homeroom at school. I used to fight with them all the time about phones. Now, it's like word search Wednesday. I bring in prizes. We're all doing word searches. My daughter, who also I have a hard time connecting with sometimes, she and I will parallel play. I'll get us two-word search books, and it just gives us something to do off-screen to be together and just feel a sense of accom- that's a dopamine hit for sure, finishing a word search, right? And getting a treat for it. Like, you know, so I'm buying tons of snacks. I'm buying tons



## Season 5 Episode 1

### The 15 Minutes That Matter:

#### How Curiosity and Connection Help Kids Discover Their Values and Their Voice TRANSCRIPT

of prizes, but that's going to motivate kids to pick a different option. I don't think just telling them it feels yucky is going to help. I think they need a little bit more m- um, um, exposure to things.

**Amy O.:** Do you think your students and maybe your own kids feel, like, more vulnerable without their phones? Feel more vulnerable in a classroom where conversation, connection, maybe even conflict is being welcomed?

[00:12:04] **Buffy Sallee:** Yes, but I think it's really hard to bring conflict. I think one of the things that's really challenging right now is the idea of, like, what does it mean to engage in conflict? What does it mean to repair? And if I was to name things that students really struggle with, they have no idea how to not just cancel something, how to not cancel a teacher, a friend, or ghost someone. Like, what does it mean to not agree with someone and then either repair it-

**Amy O.:** Because it feels uncomfortable.

**Buffy Sallee:** It feels horrible. I mean, I know it feels horrible too. [Yeah.] But, if I'm going to be your teacher for the year, we have to figure out a way to repair it. If you're going to be in a class with someone, you can't just ignore them for the whole year. Like, I think teaching those, repair tools, I don't know that they're getting that many places. That's what I heard a lot from my seniors last year. A lot of their action projects were, like, coming up with scripts. They literally were making cards of phrases to say to pause a conversation when it was going in a bad place, or when they noticed something was happening, or, how to speak to a teacher when a teacher was, maybe putting too much pressure on them or too grades focused. They don't have the language for it. And so that, like, becomes part of, like, what a classroom should teach, not just literary analysis.

**Amy O.:** And does that come with a conversation or multiple conversations about what it is that they, you value?

**Buffy Sallee:** Yes. So what does it mean to live with intention? We talk about, like- like, like



## Season 5 Episode 1

### The 15 Minutes That Matter:

#### How Curiosity and Connection Help Kids Discover Their Values and Their Voice TRANSCRIPT

**Amy O.:** you, uh, you know, I think the conversation that I'm in- that I'm envisioning is friendships or at least collegueship

**Buffy Sallee:** Mm-hmm

**Amy O.:** are important. And because you disagree or have a conflict, or it feels badly inside, it's still important to get through that so that it maintains itself. You don't just say, "Oh, this isn't important anymore because we disagree or because it feels badly." That's the value, right?

**Buffy Sallee:** Right.

**Amy O.:** And you work on that in your classroom, do you?

[00:14:03] **Buffy Sallee:** I think that we work on it, because we're always talking about power, identities, how they show up, how you don't know everything, and how you need to ask questions rather than just get defensive about things. The acronym in our class, so we say the minute you leave our class, we hope you've left with CHAC.

CHAC is curiosity, humility, awareness, and criticality. And so we are every day reflecting back to, like, "Tell me more about that," or "How might power be a part of that? How might this person..." And so it's about asking questions and knowing you don't know everything, but I think humility is not a really prized virtue either. Like, part of this entering conflict and doing this is to not feel like you have to have your script ready and have all of your points ready. Like, what does it mean to be imperfect? What does it mean to be, um, a work in progress? I think some of those things, I would say the parents even are pushing, you need to look polished, you need to keep yourself together. So I don't know that they're getting as many practices of, messing up. Again, like, they need help seeing what it looks like to mess up and fix it. And I would argue as an adult, I don't see many adults do that in my life. I don't see my department chair or my administrator be like, "Here's what I did wrong and here's how I'm repairing." So I'm try to be open with students about some of the stuff that I'm working on and try to repair and model it and talk about it and ask about how it's coming in their lives.



## Season 5 Episode 1

### The 15 Minutes That Matter:

How Curiosity and Connection Help Kids Discover Their Values and Their Voice

### TRANSCRIPT

**Amy O.:** So one of the things that we were really curious about talking to you about is this idea, and you mentioned it briefly earlier, that what we see often from our leaders right now and from our, you know, the world as the stage, is this incredible lack of humility and also, um easily dismissible humans. And we really want to help the parents that are going to listen to this conversation, start to understand ways that they, like you are in your classroom, can start to talk about what they see and hear and feel and remind themselves what they value and why, and then move forward with a different sort of intention in the world. I'd like to arm our listeners with some concrete ways to do that. And so one of the things that you just identified in your classroom is this sort of acronym. Can you tell us again what CHAC stands for?

Yeah.

**Buffy Sallee:** C is for curiosity, um, about like, what, what am I missing? What do I want to know more about? Humility is also a part of that, and knowing what don't I know, what do I not even know that I don't know. Awareness is understanding what you're bringing to it. What are your background experiences, what's limited, and also awareness of like the power dynamics that are happening. Why might their voice not be as comfortable being heard? And then criticality is all about looking at everything through the lens of power and oppression, and sort of thinking about how is that at play here. Not if, but how, because it's always at play. I think what I struggle with, I've been teaching seniors for a really long time, is its they struggle to see that they have values. And so some of the activities that I'll ask them about, we talk about how like money, physical space, and time - those are your limited resources. And so like given those three, like what do you spend your money on? What do you want to spend your money on? What's the most important thing? And so that helps identify a value, right? And so I will model that. Like just today I was, I went to Riot Fest last weekend with my husband. Three days in the mud. We spent all of the time in these, you know, cold, all of this, but our shared value is like we really like experiences. I really like to feel free in that way. When I'm at a concert, a music festival, I don't feel any of the pressures of the world. I feel totally present, and I love that. And so I'm very intentional about I devote my money and my time to go to concerts. It's, it's something for me. It's like other people's sports. And so asking students like, "What do you care, what do you devote your money and time to? What's important to you?" Um, or sometimes I'll ask



## Season 5 Episode 1

### The 15 Minutes That Matter:

#### How Curiosity and Connection Help Kids Discover Their Values and Their Voice TRANSCRIPT

after the end of a weekend, "What did you devote most of your time to? Is that a value of yours, or does that not match your values?"

[00:18:29] **Amy O.:** So, so paint us a picture of the kinds of answers you get, because it's hard when you're not in the classroom, and it's been a while since I've had... you know, my youngest is now 25, 26. Do they have enough experiences in the world to answer those questions and to be like... Have they been present places since you last saw them? Have they really been somewhere and felt the world?

**Buffy Sallee:** I mean, they've felt it in some senses. They have some appreciation of some of the structures their families have built in. When I ask them about their weekends, they'll talk about Sunday dinner with grandma, and that we always have Sunday dinner with grandma. And my mom used to force me, but now I like that we still go. We have Sunday dinner with grandma. And I'm like, "Great, what do you like about going to grandma's house?" "Oh, I like, because we actually play board games there." "Okay, so you really like..." So, I mean, it is building into, like, um, even with our freshmen, we'll ask them about family traditions, right? And so asking them questions about their own lives helps them find a space to identify those values.

**Amy O.:** So you're practicing your active listening all the time.

[00:19:32] **Buffy Sallee:** Yes. And I feel really lucky with my freshmen, I'm doing that with connection to a book, right? So we're reading a book, the character struggles with his mental health. That normalizes... I mean, the fact that we even have a book that has that is great. I'm very open about that I go to therapy, that I'm on medication,... I mean, I'm very open. It's my favorite night of the week. I talk about it all the time. I'm very open about the things that I'm working on, and the noise in my brain, and the initiatives. So I sort of see it as like we're on this journey together. Like, I'm working on this part of my executive functioning. With my seniors, we've even looked at the executive functioning wheel, right? And which, which of these areas is your biggest struggle, and which one's your strength? And then you'll see kids add stuff to the board, and then like, "Who wants to share how this is hard for them?" With my seniors, I don't have to read texts with them. We are the text. It is a critical thinking class about the world, and there is a freedom for the kid who



## Season 5 Episode 1

### The 15 Minutes That Matter:

#### How Curiosity and Connection Help Kids Discover Their Values and Their Voice TRANSCRIPT

is not going to be engaged in talking about this character. When I say I- this class is about understanding you, the kids are bought into that. They know that the vulnerability has to be a part of it and understanding that.

**Amy O.:** So I think that's a, a kind of a good segue to talk about another thing that I was really looking forward to asking you about, and that is parental anxiety. So that is a very vulnerable place for you to be as a teacher, as a, as a woman, as a, as a trusted adult to these people, to these young people. As a parent who might, for example, have a really good idea what they'd like to see in their child, or hope to see, or worried about what they might see, that's also a really vulnerable place to be. To open that conversation up to, let's get real," or "This is a space at home where we can get real." [Mm-hmm.] "I'd like to get real," or however they would put it. Help a parent start that, um, that presentness.

**Buffy Sallee:** I mean, I think you have to put yourself in there too. I think about, like, you have to connect before you correct. If I want to have a meaningful conversation with my kid, I can't just go and break that ice. I

**Amy O.:** "Hi, kid. meaningful conversation time."

[00:21:51] **Buffy Sallee:** Right, and it's on my time list. Like, I think that's often, for me, as a parent of high schoolers, like, we're always on different schedules. The minute they want to hang out is, like, I am done. I was available for all of these hours, so we do miss each other. So I think being intentional about, like, "I want to hang out, and I haven't seen you, and we haven't caught up in a while. Let's find a shared activity to do together." Not... my husband, I watch him fire and fail because it's always on his schedule. "What are you doing about this? I want to check in about this class. How are you feeling about this?" And that doesn't feel meaningful. If I really want to connect with you, I'm going to put aside the time to do it, and I'm going to put some of my own skin in that game. I don't know. I can only speak for myself as a parent, but I, I don't know how everyone else is being as transparent about all of their own struggles.



## Season 5 Episode 1

### The 15 Minutes That Matter:

How Curiosity and Connection Help Kids Discover Their Values and Their Voice

#### TRANSCRIPT

**Amy O.:** One of the things that I learned in my, um, in my journey with my kids [Mm-hmm] ... particularly my daughter, and most of the people who are listening to this will know that my daughter went through a, a period of time where she was struggling mightily with her mental health and got very ill. I was forced to relearn or at least reacquaint myself with what really mattered to me deep down. Because I was probably more like your husband at times, which was, I thought that the most important thing was let's talk through that soccer game. Let's talk through what happened at school. Let's make sure that we're connecting on the things that, that we at least on the face had identified as being important. And when your kid is so ill that she might die, you realize none of that matters one bit, and that the values that I had to re-identify were things like quiet, open conversation

**Buffy Sallee:** Mm-hmm

**Amy O.:** and real true time together, no matter what we were doing, which often was spent in silence, in all honesty. But we were in the same room, and we were prioritizing time together and all of those things. So it makes a lot of sense to me that what you say, what you are saying is you have to connect. You also, I think, as a parent, correct me if you think I'm wrong, have to check yourself and say- [Uh-huh] ... yeah, um, all right, I am in a good place to receive from you, child, kid of mine, whatever it is that you're going to throw at me. I'm ready, I'm prepar- I'm calm- [Yes.] ... and I'm, I'm open and non-judgmental. Do you agree with that?

**Buffy Sallee:** Y- yes, but if I'm not in that place, then I better not be talking to my kid.

**Amy O.:** Exactly, yeah.

[00:24:26] **Buffy Sallee:** That's part of the CHAC. That's the awareness, right? What am I coming in with? I'm coming off of a tough day at school. I needed to get an iced tea at McDonald's to even get home, and I'm going to get home and it's going to say, "Ugh." If I'm not ready, I'm going to say, "I can't wait to talk to you. I need about like 10 minutes to just unravel some of this and then is it okay if we catch up with this?" I need to be clear about that, and I would say I feel a lot of that now. I need to unlearn a lot of my own stuff. I'm constantly unlearning. I mean, I grew up an overachiever. I



## Season 5 Episode 1

### The 15 Minutes That Matter:

#### How Curiosity and Connection Help Kids Discover Their Values and Their Voice TRANSCRIPT

went to private school. I went to Northwestern. I played that game and I played it really well. Not everyone is like that, and it's not to say that I didn't pay a price. I have a lot of built-up expectations and especially living where I live. I mean, I live in the North Shore. Everyone is, "What's the school list your kid's applying to? What activities are they into?" My kid's activity is therapy, right? Like, I don't have a kid who's got a list of activities. And so I think as a parent, the way that I protect myself is I get out of those conversations. I know that they're not feeding me really well. I pivot or I say, "Let's talk about something else," because I don't think that's, that's not helping me in my relationship with my child. And I come into it with saying, I mean, I'll tell my kid, "I'm really nervous to have this conversation with you right now. I love you so much and I just don't want to mess it up, and if I hurt your feeling..." You know, I mean, I'm pretty, I'm not, I don't have a good poker face. Um, and so I'm, I'm pretty transparent about that, and I think that helps, too. It's like-

**Amy O.:** Well, it tells your family and your kids that one of the things that you value is open, honest conversation. [100%.] And that you are going to model for them, as best you can anyway- N- non-judgmentality and tolerance for whatever it is that they bring to that honest conversation. And that's kind of part of the meat of what we were wanting to get to today, was like helping parents understand how important it is that those things are valued and modeled within a family unit so that then your kid can take that out into the world.

[00:26:31] **Buffy Saltee:** And repairing with the kid is part of that. [Right.] I think parents need to apologize to their children. I think you need to tell them when you messed up, when you raised your [I couldn't agree more.] didn't mean to. And I think you need to, like, problem-solve together. I know that I'm an adult, and I do have responsibilities, but with my students and with my children, we are co-learning. I definitely don't see it a hierarchy as like, I know everything. This is a new terrain, and we're figuring out together. And I have some life experience, and I'll bring it up, but I don't see myself as some, like, knowledgeable in the hierarchy. I am just a facilitator on the journey, and I'm learning it with you. So I think that repair language, it's something that we talk about all the time. I, I think it's critical.

**Amy O.:** How important do you think it is and how much, I guess, does your family talk about what's going on globally? Or even in their own small community?



## Season 5 Episode 1

### The 15 Minutes That Matter:

#### How Curiosity and Connection Help Kids Discover Their Values and Their Voice TRANSCRIPT

**Buffy Sallee:** Yeah It's really hard. I will say that's something that, like, get us around the dinner table, and you've got two teens who are spitting out hot takes on TikTok, sometimes of things I've never even heard of, and sometimes very ill-informed things. Talk about self-awareness, I am, like, having a panic attack at dinner every... because I'm like, "I'm a teacher. I should know how to do this. I should know how to facilitate this. I teach a race and identity class. Like, I should know how to talk about hard issues." But then I'm also human. I've been doing it all day, and do I have to facilitate at my damn dinner table? Like, you've got to be kidding me. And my husband's looking to me, because I'm the teacher.

[00:28:00] **Amy O.:** just, what about embracing the, "You know what? I don't know about that. Tell me more"?

**Buffy Sallee:** So what I've tried is, "Where did you hear about that?" [Yeah.] I'm trying to model the, like, what are we missing? I wonder. So I try and... My, my go-to that's been helping me lately is coming in with questions, rather than, "I bet you just learned that on TikTok. Your h- habits are disgusting." I mean, that's the quickest way to end the discussion. [100%] right?

**Amy O.:** Yep.

**Buffy Sallee:** But, like-

**Amy O.:** But it's what you, it's what you initially feel

**Buffy Sallee:** Hell yeah. Every night at dinner, I just want to eat the damn food. Right. Like, I don't, I don't want to talk about a- any of that. I want to eat, and I want you to tell me, "Thank you so much for making this meal." [Yeah.] That's not what's happening. It's random hot take, something from the internet I don't understand, and me counting the minutes to get out of that table. I'm much better one on one. Dinner feels like it's some stage. I hate dinner

**Amy O.:** Are you phone-free dinner?



## Season 5 Episode 1

### The 15 Minutes That Matter:

#### How Curiosity and Connection Help Kids Discover Their Values and Their Voice TRANSCRIPT

**Buffy Sallee:** Yeah. Yeah. But I will say, my son, in the car last week, brought up, the Clancy, uh, case, right? And he's like, "What do you think about this?" And I was like, "Tell me more about what [00:29:00] you mean." He's like, "I just can't believe a s-..." And he really was feeling... It was a moment when I saw his values, right? And it was like he didn't understand mental health and postpartum. He didn't believe in an insanity defense. He didn't believe in any of that, and he had beliefs about, like, how a mother should be... And so it was really interesting to talk through that. I was like, "Well, you know, as a mom and as someone who struggles with mental health, like, here are some of the things that I feel walking into this." And so we were able to, like, ask questions with each other. He's looking for me to give him a stamp on an issue. I have it with the students right now. "What do you think about the Ed Sheeran thing?" And I'm like, "I'm not stamping anything." But I am noticing someone showing their values. I'm noticing, you know, that Macklemore had his time on the mic, and what did he choose to do? That was a choice. And so we have choices in those things. So I'm not going to give you a stamp of my belief on it. But I prime and modeling coming in with questions about things that I'm unsure about and what I want to know more about because they are looking for a clean answer, and I'm not going to be able to give that to them. And I used to get mad at dinner because I was like, "I can't... I, I don't have my research." But that's not my job. My job is to ask questions.

**Amy O.:** Do you think they're looking for a clean answer because they feel as though they are incapable and they don't, they don't, like, have enough self-belief to come up with their own? Or do you think they just... Like, what is it that is... They, they just, they respect you, they want to know what you think?

**Buffy Sallee:** I think it's gray area and they prefer black and white. Which one is this? And I mean, my kids are very much, "You said something, you're racist. You did this." They're like a police, right? And those are two kids of a race and identity teacher. We've been talking about things since they were babies, right? They know that I'm watching for those things, but they're policing for those things in a different way. I think it's much easier to label, dismiss, and put something away. They want to put it away. It's sitting in the, to be done pile, but they need to build their threshold on having gray area, right?



## Season 5 Episode 1

### The 15 Minutes That Matter:

#### How Curiosity and Connection Help Kids Discover Their Values and Their Voice TRANSCRIPT

**Amy O.:** We're back to that uncomfortable feeling again. [Right.] We're back to, like, not wanting to live in that not sure, this feels bad, I'm going to worry about this later feeling. And they don't like it.

[00:31:16] **Buffy Sallee:** They don't like it. You know, and I, I've been reading those Marc Brackett books about permission to feel, and it really is about like, when I have these uncomfortable feelings, what are some different things I could do? That's the, what we really need to be teaching students is like the strategy, which is not cancel or not, it's how do I, how do I process it?

**Amy O.:** It's like, it's the first thing you learn when you're parenting someone, or you have anxiety of your own. Avoiding it-

**Buffy Sallee:** Right

**Amy O.:** about a million times worse. And until you decide to sit in it, feel it, be in it, and move through it, it's never going to- feel better.

**Buffy Sallee:** No, it doesn't go away

**Amy O.:** So canceling and setting aside and doing all of that instead of figuring out where you fit as a human in those complicated feelings. Yeah.

**Buffy Sallee:** It's like short-term efficiency. [Right] and then that's why-

**Amy O.:** Well, everything is short. The reels are short, articles are short, everything's short. Conversations are short

**Buffy Sallee:** And I guess for me as an educator, rather than judge that and be disgusted, I can work with that.

**Amy O.:** I sound judgy just then?



## Season 5 Episode 1

### The 15 Minutes That Matter:

#### How Curiosity and Connection Help Kids Discover Their Values and Their Voice TRANSCRIPT

**Buffy Sallee:** No, but I have it. It's, I'm trying to unlearn it, too. I think they're disgusting when they talk to me at the table about their ill-informed, I mean, I was a journalism major. I'm all about seeking multiple sources on things, right? And so, like, I- inside it's gross, and it is what it is. It is what they've known. It is what's happened to their brains. We handed them screens, and we're fine with it for so long until we weren't. So rather than h- hate or judge them, that's not really helpful. We can try and come up with strategies together to both do that. But I think we have to model being in the gray area of something, too. I don't know how often children hear their parents feel confused about something or figuring something out. Those conversations are happening with the parents' friends or behind a closed room, but I don't know how publicly they're seeing someone figure something out that way. So again, it comes back to, being a model of, like, not having all the answers, being a model of humility, being a model of still trying to figure stuff out, and that it doesn't get neatly separated. Because I neatly separated last week doesn't mean I'm in any better shape today. I'm still doing the same thing today. It's a constant process. So I think it also helps them to know it's never over, right?

[00:33:30] **Amy O.:** Well, I think with the increase in, the speed at which we are getting input, it's definitely never over. It's always restarting. [Yes.] We're always kind of trying to figure out how we feel about something or how we're going to move forward w- with the knowledge about something. Whereas, in the past, I think it was just you had time to kind of marinate more. [Yeah.] Now you're just- It's constant.

**Buffy Sallee:** What is your hot take on this, right? A- and we want it right now. I mean, I will say, I'm pretty intentional, especially with my seniors this year, they have old school notebooks. They are cutting and pasting things and drawing in them. It is like a little scrapbook. They are not taking notes online at all. I'm trying some new stuff because I think that the minute they open it is the minute I lose them, and so I'm trying to keep them to close that as long as possible. And so at home, it's the same thing, too. It, it is like how quickly we are about to go look something up or check that. You know, that's like me doing the word searches with my daughter. We both put those phones away, and we do the word search. When we want to be present, we have to be modeling that presence, too, and then we have to be modeling the being lost and confused and the humility, too. We don't



## Season 5 Episode 1

### The 15 Minutes That Matter:

#### How Curiosity and Connection Help Kids Discover Their Values and Their Voice TRANSCRIPT

have it figured out, and you shouldn't. You don't need to have a hot take. I mean, as teachers, think about the literary analysis essay is like you have to have a strong feeling that something's either good or bad. Are we rethinking our prompts? As teachers, that's what I can control, right? Is that, like, tell me about a gray area, right? And I try and model, today was the day that I learned blah, blah, blah, right? Like, I didn't know that for... I mean, I work in a school with mostly Jewish students, and I, this was, this weekend I learned that you needed to have tickets to go to, um, go to services. And so, like, I didn't know that. That's really interesting. I'm always learning something new, and that's even being here and trying to be aware. So I think that sort of a-ha's and I didn't know that, I, I... that's all, like, good juice in the-

**Amy O.:** So I want to go back to one thing because I agree with so much, if not everything that you're saying. There are going to be parents listening to this episode that are going to say, "Yeah, okay, fine. Where do we find the time to do all this little exploration stuff, all this little, like, you know, let's find the, the time for conversation stuff? We have colleges to get into. We have soccer practice to get to. We have things we got to deal with on a daily basis. This is not; this is too fluffy for me. This is too, I, how," You know, what do we say to those parents? How do we get those parents to understand, well, I don't want to say it that way. How do we get parents to want to spend time doing things that might be of more substance or to help our kids-

[00:36:15] **Buffy Sallee:** Yeah, trust me, It's not like I've got limitless excitement it's ... third shift, right? But I feel like when I had kids, one of my friends said, like, the goal was, like, 15 minutes a day with a kid. If you could have 15 good minutes with your children a day, and I don't know where she pulled that number from, but it's a pretty realistic number. 15 minutes, that's what my goal is. If I can get my 15 minutes a day with my kids, connecting about something that is not about task mastering and is not about checking that. 15 minutes seems really doable to me. I've got a whole night of work ahead, but I can give 15 minutes to my kid, and 15 minutes of one-on-one time, and do I get it every day? Hell no. But when I have the space, it doesn't take more than that. It doesn't take that much. But it takes the creativity of, what's a question I can ask? What's an activity I can bring in? I'm buying the special snack. I'm going to McDonald's for iced tea runs together, right? 15 minutes is



## Season 5 Episode 1

### The 15 Minutes That Matter:

How Curiosity and Connection Help Kids Discover Their Values and Their Voice

#### TRANSCRIPT

not two hours. I don't need to watch a movie with you every night. But I don't know. For me, that 15 minutes is something that stuck with me. Realistic goal.

**Amy O.:** Yeah, realistic goals is good.

**Buffy Sallee:** And I'm not going to make it every day. I would love if it was 15 minutes every day, but if I can get it most of the days of the week, or at least on the weekends, I, I should be able to get the 15 minutes on the weekends.

**Amy O.:** And that, again, models for your kids. "You're important to me. I want to be with you for as long as we both can do in our schedule or whatever." On a more positive note, tell us some things that you see that might surprise us about kids. How long have you been a teacher?

**Buffy Sallee:** Uh, 2004, so 22 years.

**Amy O.:** 22 years. So you've seen a lot of change in students and the world, things are a lot different than they were 22 years ago. [Yeah.] What are some positive things that you see? What do we not give our kids enough credit for these days?

**Buffy Sallee:** I mean, they do talk about mental health more than I've ever seen kids talk about it. You would be amazed to find any kid who doesn't know a friend or have a friend who they help with anxiety. It is definitely not alarming or surprising. It is in the mix, and the kids know it, and they are not cruel about it. They've probably all witnessed someone have a panic attack in class at this point. Talking about mental health, knowing friends who went through hospitalization, ... it is pretty normalized, at least where I teach, that you know that mental health is not, not just fluff, and that it really does affect people. I have kids talking more often about the pressures of masculinity. I have boys talking about that, which blows my mind. I never thought that day would come. But again, we have opportunities for students. I have kids reflecting on stereotypes about identities they have, and they present about media that interrupts that. And so they're connecting to their identities, right? They're talking about the antisemitism that they experience. They're talking about the limitations on what it means to be a man. They're talking about body dysmorphia. I mean, they're talking about



## Season 5 Episode 1

### The 15 Minutes That Matter:

#### How Curiosity and Connection Help Kids Discover Their Values and Their Voice TRANSCRIPT

their internal stuff a lot more than I remember. When I was younger and I was having issues, my mom was always like, "Don't tell people. Keep that quiet."

**Amy O.:** Do you think they're talking to their parents about that stuff? I mean, I know that's a hard question to answer because you're in the classroom, but-

**Buffy Sallee:** They're talking to each other about it. At our school, the kids who need to take breaks, the kids who have, have had the money to go through the system to be identified, which is an inequity. There's so many kids who don't have that. But if you've been identified as needing breaks, they have the special passes, they can walk through the halls and take breaks. And kids know that they need to take breaks. It's very, it's just in the water. So they talk about it with each other. I see them take care of each other in those ways, try strategies, help each other on a team. In any activity, they've come across someone who's got something. I say the inequity because that's what breaks my heart, is that there's so many kids who aren't identified, right? So not everyone is getting the access to that. But at least people are, it's in the air and people are talking about it.

**Amy O.:** That's good. That's, that is a very positive thing. My daughter will say, as, as a now adult and traveling the world as an adult, she thanks us all the time for giving her the chance to recover. And you're right, there is inequity there because she sees it a, a lot. She said there are so many young women in particular that she's with that just never had the chance to fix, to help, to learn. And so you're right. It makes me feel as though if kids are responding to other kids' mental health struggles in that way, and that's a very positive take, maybe they can also become more tolerant about race, about gender, about identity, about all the things that we're, um, struggling with on a more global level now.

[00:41:14] **Buffy Sallee:** That's my hope. Uh, and it helps to be able to hear from your peers how it impacts them. [Yeah.] So if you can't create a space where they can hear those stories and understand it, that to me is the buy-in, is if I hear that someone who I sit next to feels unsafe all the time and learned how to hold her keys this way, and that's what it means to be a woman, I, as a man, I might think differently of that. Hearing students talk about the boxes that they're put into and how it boxes them in. The challenge is to show that we're all in it together, that everyone is being



## Season 5 Episode 1

### The 15 Minutes That Matter:

#### How Curiosity and Connection Help Kids Discover Their Values and Their Voice TRANSCRIPT

stereotyped and facing biases and facing power inequities in their identities, and how can we hear each other and help each other, not compete. Because I do think there becomes an oppression Olympics and, "Oh, you're a guy, it's so much easier. I'm a girl. This is what's really hard." Can't we just agree that there's enough space for all of these things to suck? You know, talking about we don't have to compete, and we talk in our class liberation for some is liberation for all, right? I talk about, as a straight-identifying woman going to a queer space and feeling more space to be, right? Going to a punk rock festival, and the whole notion of punk rock is more space to be free. And so, even though I may not even have all those identities, those norms are weighing on me all of the time. So knowing that all of us are freed by getting rid of some of the expectations and the judgments that come from that, I think, again, hearing from each other is the personal buy-in. I, I think that's the key, is making spaces where they, uh, feel safe to express that to each other and where they are. It's, if it's not assigned, if it's not a part of what you're doing, why, why are you going to take the time to do it? As a teacher, I can show my values with how I use my time, my space, and so that's where I feel really lucky. And as a parent, you can do that, too, right? How am I going to spend my time with my kid tonight? It's definitely not going to be about the college stuff. It's going to be, like, the word search and the iced tea tonight. Because, uh, for me, my value is less are you going to get stuff done and more are you feeling okay in your skin right now? Are you okay? It's really stressful being a senior in high school. You have a lot of feelings going on right now, and I know what she... I'd be happy to ask her, but she's been pretty direct. Like, "I don't want to do that with you. I want that to be my thing." "Okay, I'm going to respect your boundary on that, even though, uh, you know, I'm ner- I'm nervous. Are you going to hit all those deadlines? Are you..." "I don't know, but if you don't hit them, you don't hit them." "I'm going to show up for you in a, a different way."

**Amy O.:** Thank you so much for coming in today. This was really great. Will you do it again tomorrow?

**Buffy Sallee:** I'm like, I hope I said something helpful.

**Amy O.:** It's so helpful. Oh my gosh. Thank you.

**Buffy Sallee:** Yeah, absolutely. Thanks for having me.



## Season 5 Episode 1

### The 15 Minutes That Matter:

How Curiosity and Connection Help Kids Discover Their Values and Their Voice  
TRANSCRIPT

## Conclusion

[00:44:07] **Amy O.:** That was a great conversation. We want to once again thank Buffy Sallee for coming in and talking with us today, both as a teacher and as a mom. As always, we're going to offer you a couple actionable takeaways at the end of the episode. One small thing you can do as parents moving away from this conversation.

Today we have two. Practice naming one emotion aloud with your kid, one emotion that happened to you that day, that week. Let your kid do the same in a safe, non-judgmental place. And Buffy talked about this a lot today, model curiosity and genuine interest with your kids and about your kids. Next time you react to something you disagree with, try saying, "I wonder what I don't know yet." You're showing your kids that we can know what we stand for and still stay open enough to understand another person

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We're really glad that you joined us to continue the conversation.

[00:45:39]