



Episode #215

**Dr. Christine Carter on The New Adolescence...
In a Global Pandemic**

June 30, 2020

Debbie: Hello Christine, welcome to the podcast.

Christine: Thanks for having me.

Debbie: Well I'm happy to have you here and talk about your work and your new book. But before we get into that I always ask my guests to introduce who they are in the world and if you can within that answer touch upon your personal why for the work that you do?

Christine: Sure, I'm an author, speaker and a coach and you know I have a PhD in sociology so I've always looked at happiness and well being which is mostly what I've studied from a perspective of what the things that we have control over, our behaviors and beliefs and you know, cultural aspects. So you know, my personal why in all this, why do I write parenting books? Why do I write books about work life balances because I teach what I need to learn, right? Like, I was raised a pretty anxious kid, I come from a long line of very anxious women on both sides of my family and, and I would say I'm not an anxious person anymore, that's for sure. I've really, over the last couple of decades, changed the way I interact in the world and the way I see the world and in such a way that, you know, I have a lot more peace, but I couldn't have done that if I hadn't studied what I've studied and written the books that I have. So my most recent book is called *The New Adolescence: Raising Happy and Successful Teens in an Age of Anxiety and Distraction*. And I think it's quite relevant that I have four teenagers, myself. So I wrote the book about teens in time to raise teens.

Debbie: Yeah, I'm curious to know what your kids think of your book... have they read it? Do they know that they are the inspiration for your most recent contribution?

Christine: I don't know. I don't know. I gave it to all of them. And I don't think that they really read it. Like I know that they've flipped through little parts of it. And then it comes back to me, you know, because I've written about them a lot for their whole lives. Basically my first parenting book, *Raising Happiness*, I wrote when Molly and Fiona were three and five, I started working on that like when they were really really little. So now I think that they just take it in stride, they have this sort of idea that I I can kind of make them internet famous, a little bit like it's so funny how their attitudes have changed towards this, like they don't mind if I post about them, or if I put a picture of them on Instagram. It's just really like the culture of adolescence has changed a lot and my kids have changed a lot too. So my book will come back to me a little bit or through them like, you know what one of them last week said, Oh, you know, mom, my philosophy teacher, read everyone a passage from your new book on zoom today. And I was like, was that embarrassing? Like, what? How was that for you? I'm so sorry. She was like, no, it's pretty cool. I totally agreed with what you wrote. Like it was news to her but it works. Funny, so funny.

Debbie: Yeah. I love that. And I just want to say that I think I'm already inviting you back for another episode. But at some point, I would love to have you on the show. Just to talk about your book Raising Happiness and talking about, you know, more positive psychology. You know, within my community, many parents are raising kids who they would probably describe as glass half empty kids. So I think that would be a conversation that parents would be really interested in how to help our kids develop a happier or more positive outlook in life. So just putting that out there. I'd love to do that down the road. Sure. But let's talk about teens today. And listeners know that I've also got a 15 year old teen that I'm sheltering in place with right now. But one of the things I love is it right at the beginning of your book, you say, this is going to be easier than you think. And that parenting teens can be much, much easier and more fun than we've been led to believe. So can you even just address that? Why do you open your book that way?

Christine: Well, that aspect of it actually comes from my dissertation research, like forever ago. When you really look at the data on adolescence. You can kind of see that Americans have this notion that teenagers are total pains in the asses, right, like they're just belligerent and they're rude and parents become punching bags you know, like that, that adolescence is really really hard. And for sure adolescence for the teenagers themselves, particularly when they're sheltering in place, which is it's harder, they feel their emotions more strongly and a little tiny bit of the reputation is deserved from an emotional standpoint and and we can talk a little bit more about that but the reality of it is that when you get into a groove with your teenagers that they did when when you don't give them so much to push up back against the the rudeness can really fall away and the rebellion and all that kind of stuff. And what you're left with are these like incredibly competent, delightful human beings. You don't have to tie their shoes for them, you don't have to pack for them. I mean, my kids are so competent, I'm seeing them all up close right now because we never leave the house during this filtering it plays like they're changing their own sheets doing their own laundry and vacuuming the house and showing me Tik Tok videos every night that make me laugh hysterically. Like, this is so much easier than sheltering in place with little kids. Right? They're managing their own lives. And they are helping me with my life, right like and in a way that littler kids just couldn't write like that it's just a lot easier. So this is amplified obviously right now while we're on lockdown, but there is an aspect of getting to be a parent, right like having my kids home and stuff because they're teenagers and also really getting your own life back because they can manage themselves and in fact, they need to manage themselves.

Debbie: Yeah. And so I'm just gonna say that there are probably listeners who are like my kid, that aren't managing... my teenager is not managing themselves. My teenager is not doing their own laundry, is not helping with chores with any sort of cooperative attitude. So I do want to talk about that because, well just actually a little sidebar, I think when I read that too, and just hearing you talk about this, it is an important perspective to have that while, raising teens can be difficult, especially differently wired teens brings on new challenges and maybe increased fear and anxiety because we see launches coming soon. And we may see these

lagging skills and feel like there's such a gap that we need to kind of help our kids bridge. But, I will say personally, it is so much easier than when my guy was little. And just from an emotional regulation standpoint, it is easier in the fact that what right now we're binge watching 24. Like, we are just, you know, really enjoying a lot of the same things and being able to have those conversations at the dinner table. And so there are so many positive things. So I would agree with you. If you can get out of that control battle mode, it can actually be such a pleasant experience. So you have a chapter on overparenting. And you have a really nice explanation of scaffolding and and to tie into what you were talking about the way that your kids are showing up and managing their lives. We talked about scaffolding quite a bit on this show, but I don't know that we've ever really explicitly defined this is what scaffolding is. This is how we do it. This is how to take it away. And you have a really nice breakdown of scaffolding in your book. So could you kind of walk us through what exactly scaffolding is and maybe show us how we might use it even now in helping our kids develop some of those management skills or those self care skills that we could be taking advantage of right now during this time.

Christine: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So I see scaffolding as being the sort of structure and support that you put into place in your household. So instead of rules and boundaries and things that feel permanent, I like to talk about scaffolding because it's meant to be temporary. Right? So the idea is that kids will be able to do all the things themselves at some point, right, but now they need a little bit more support for whatever it is they're learning to do. And, you know, there's a long list of things that kids need to be able to do for themselves, right, managing their own sleep and eat and basic self care is of course one of them managing their schoolwork, their calendars that appointments, their money, their screen time. I mean, the list is really long. And so think about the place where as a society we provide really good scaffolding is in teaching kids how to drive. And so that's kind of a nice example or even metaphor for the way that we can provide scaffolding for all these other things, too. So you know, first we give them basic instructions, and they might have to take a class about it, or they have to sort of learn the basics. And then we give them their permit and they can drive with an adult for a while. And then they get a provisional license where they can drive except for late at night or, you know, like, we just keep removing the supports, right, but we're right there with them as they're learning until they're ready for us to sort of let go remove the scaffolding and then you know, sometimes it goes backwards and we have to put that Got scaffolding back. But basically, we've provided really clear bright lines around where kids have freedom and where they don't when they're driving. Like we don't just say, hey, drive north and good luck with that. We say, you know, you stay between the lines, these signs mean that you do this, that and the other thing and that kind of guidance is really helpful for kids and really important in a lot of areas of their lives. I feel like as a society, we haven't done as good a job with technology as we have with cars, right? Like with kids, we're like, here, yeah, have a smartphone, right? Like, and I'm gonna tell you every day to get off it 50 times a day, but it's kind of the same as like, go north, right, like figure it out, you know, find a way to resist or whatever I don't know. So that's, I guess a whole different topic. For me, scaffolding is like really identifying the milestones that they need to hit before

you start removing it. When they hit the milestones, you start removing some of the support and the structure and you know, that they might be in a fender bender, but hopefully they're in the place where they're not in a, you know, they're not speeding or driving drunk or doing something truly dangerous.

Debbie: That's a good metaphor. And I guess our job as parents then is to just really pay attention to know if they need more if we need to, you know, go back in the other direction and build up a little more scaffolding. So is it just that constant curiosity about where they are in the process and paying attention to how they react?

Christine: Yeah, and I think we've teenagers really coming to some agreements in terms of what kind of support they want. If they ask for more support, and it's clear that they need it right, like, they might ask you to do their laundry for them and But they don't necessarily need it right, like, so you don't have to provide the support that they asked for. Right. But, you know, if they ask for more support in a given area, then that's the first sign, right? If they're failing repeatedly, right, they may need more support. So providing sort of structure. And so as parents, I always, you know, say what we can do is provide structure for them, like really clear, bright lines for them to operate completely freely between, right they have total freedom within the scaffolding because they need to have that autonomy. And if it turns out to not, you know, be enough, then that just tells us like if we're engaged, basically, like, you know, letting them operate freely between those bright lines does not mean a lack of engagement. It means that you step aside and you are present, but not involved not making decisions not anxious, you just are there. And then if they ask for more support you provide it right? Or if it's obvious that they're failing repeatedly, repeatedly, like they're just not getting it, then you can step in and provide a little more support.

Debbie: Right? makes total sense. Well, I want to pivot a little bit, but this is still connected to that. You said something that really stuck with me. In the book, you said when kids know you're going to nag them, they don't monitor themselves, they wait to be reminded. And yes, that realization like, Oh, you know, because I, you know, you reference *The Self-Driven Child* in your book.. that's like my Bible right now. And I think there's so much wisdom in there and I'm really, really working hard to not be a nag and so many differently wired More so than other kids who really struggle with executive functioning skills, right? So I'm just wondering, what is that balance? So I think that makes so much sense. If that becomes our role, then it's like a script that we're going to keep replaying over. But what if we ask them you suggest saying, What's your plan, which is something I do all the time? So what's your plan? What if their responses? I don't have a plan or I don't know, or my plans to do it later? You know, so then I personally, I find myself nagging about that. Do you want help with the plan? You know, what is that? Yeah. What is that balance in us as parents intervening without overstepping without over parenting without becoming that nag in those situations?

Christine: Right, right. So there's a couple of things here. The first is that I mean, all kids to a certain extent, don't have fully developed executive function right. And some kids for sure struggle with it more. I've To have my force really, really struggle

with it. So what that means is that they're not naturally going to make the plan unless prompted, and they won't necessarily like put themselves into the future in the way that we can we can like foresee, okay, they're gonna show up at lacrosse with out their gear like we can sort of see it in a way that they can. So it makes it really hard. What they need is some sort of external reminder or support because it just won't really come from within it's a developing skill. So there's a difference between setting up an external reminder and nagging, right? Nagging creates conflict and creates a power struggle between parent and child. So yeah, absolutely using the like, What's your plan? And then when the answer is I don't have a plan, or I'm going to do it later. Or you can say, Can you be more specific? Right? So one of the things is to just walk them through the planning process themselves, instead of saying, Okay, I need you to do have your homework done by five, because this that and the other thing to say, Okay, I get that you're going to do it later, specifically, what are you going to do? And when are you going to do it and try to get them to envision it themselves to have the mental picture of them sitting in a specific place? So just continuing to ask them questions, where are you going to do it? What time are you going to work on whatever it is that they need to do that planning piece around it? And then the sort of final piece I think, for a lot of these kids is, how are you going to remind yourself, right, okay, I get that you're going to do it later. They need a reminder, most kids need a reminder. And so how are you going? To remind yourself, and so encouraging them to set an alarm or find some other external reminder that requires them to make a transition. Right? So at the very end of it, you can say, Do you want my help? Right? You know, trying to pull yourself out of the external reminder mode is always a good idea. But you can say, what would you like me to do is you ignore your alarm? Right? Like just trying to get them to like, be in the place. So the worst case scenario is, you're still reminding them but they've already asked you to be in that role.

Debbie: Yeah, I love the language that you're sharing. How are you going to remind yourself is such a great question, because it forces them to problem solve? And then what would you like me to do? That is such a great question because you're almost, you're kind of designing an alliance with them. So you're not in that role. And so whatever you do, you've already agreed upon it. And so they're not going to react in a negative way, hopefully, right?

Christine: Yeah, exactly. I mean, then there is, like, remembering that the goal is that we are really trying to not engage in a power struggle, they still need to feel a sense of control over their own lives. And when we're nagging and reminding, it's just like, we kill their sort of intrinsic drive to step up and do it themselves. And so to preserve that intrinsic drive, all they need to do is make the plan themselves even if we end up still reminding them if they've asked us to remind them they still retain a sense of control. And that, you know, having that intrinsic locus of control is incredibly important for them. Motivation really affects their sense of competence around their ability to manage things themselves, which we need them to feel that they can. We need them to have the confidence in their own abilities. And we need them to feel a sense of autonomy, or we're always going to be the engine for them, which is no fun.

- Debbie: No, no, not at all. And I'm wondering, actually, just what you've been noticing or observing in the families that you work with, or just kind of out in the world during these days of the COVID-19 pandemic? I would imagine that parents are over parenting even if they are not realizing it like more subconsciously, they're playing that role.
- Christine: Yeah, absolutely. Because everything outside of the household and sometimes inside the household just everything feels so out of control. Right now. We're in the middle of a tsunami of change, and it's obviously really scary. And, you know, we have a lot of anxiety we feel out of control. I'm talking about us as parents. And I mean, I think the kids probably feel the same way in some ways too, but like so I think it's really natural when I'm seeing a lot of is like, if you can't control what's outside of your home, well, then we can control what's inside of the home. Right? Like we can tell. I mean, I am so naturally bossy Debbie, I am like this. Like, my brother once made me a T-shirt when I was in my 20s that said, I'm not bossy, people just need direction. Just like I've thought this whole process through, I have an idea of what the best practices are, I have an opinion about it and I have not, you know, like, it's just so hard for me not to tell people what to do. And I think that that is just the way that I make meaning and create a sense of control. In a really out of control kind of a world right now, so I think it's normal to be more controlling and everything right now I think it actually makes things so much worse. This has been actually a really good time for me to really practice what I preach because it doesn't come naturally to me and so to you know, give my kids privacy and let them make their own decisions and not you know, come up with my like, my original ideas like, Oh, this will be just like camp, I'm going to create a structure and there's going to be meal times and there's going to be bedtimes and there are gonna be times to work on college stuff and times to work on you know, I just had all these ideas and you should I mean, thank God I didn't like force that but that's my inclination, right like was to like we need to create some structure around here, friends, you know, my youngest is 17. They are not like looking to me for
- Debbie: But I can completely relate. I'll just say I homeschooled my son for six years starting in third grade and my first year was all about my attempt, my failed attempts at exerting control and creating structures. And it was a major fail that first year. So I have a similar inclination as you do, I think. But I learned my lesson the hard way for sure. Yeah. In one chapter of your book, you talk about how important it is to coach your kids through difficulty. And, you know, in reading that just I know that when you wrote the book, you could never have imagined what we're going through right now. And you know, there's a lot of evidence that there are so many kids I remember reading about the millennials really struggling in their 20s because they hadn't really faced much adversity or experience disappointment or push through something difficult and we know that it's important for kids to experience this. And so I'm wondering, in this time as our kids are experiencing something which, you know, for some might feel traumatic. Certainly we know that anxiety for a lot of kids is increasing. This feels really hard for a lot of teenagers especially. So how can we best coach our teens through this difficulty to really help them develop the resiliency that will, you know, support them when they're older?

Christine: Yeah, I mean, I think that the first thing is to say to kids, you know, there's going to be a payout here, you guys, and that is that you are going to be able to handle change and uncertainty, much better than previous generations because like, that's what we're learning right now. This is very, very hard. And I think that's also really important to acknowledge for our kids to acknowledge that They're, they've lost a lot, a lot of them have maybe not all of them, but a lot of them have lost things, rites of passages, proms and final projects. And, you know, three of my kids were away at school and came back and lost a semester abroad that she'll never get back. And these are their suffering losses. It's very challenging in a lot of ways. So we need to acknowledge that and say like, I'm so sorry that this is so hard. And also, it's okay to feel sad. It's okay to grieve your losses, like I get that it's a problem and not a death, the death of a family member. I mean, obviously, some kids are going to be dealing with deaths of family members and bigger losses. But for the kids that aren't like even losses that might seem trivial to us, given our greater perspective in the world or greater losses. to them. It's the first time that they're learning How to grieve. And that's a super important lesson. You know, we don't, we don't love it when our kids have to. I mean, this is just like speaking professionally, when you look at the research on difficulty or trauma, even in childhood, like you don't really want kids to have to deal with a big wallop of difficulty all at once you want them to learn over time, you kind of want it to be spread out. That's the ideal. They receive what researchers actually call a stress inoculation. Right? Like you if you need it out, then kids learn to deal with it. And in everyday life, they're not actually a lot of kids, not not all of them, that's for sure. But a lot of kids aren't getting that and now they're getting this big wallop of it. And also, I don't think it's traumatic. I don't think any of this is going to put a dent in them that they can't deal with later. Right That isn't, isn't necessarily Going to be unrecoverable. So, you know, acknowledging that what they're going through is hard. It's appropriate for them to be feeling these challenging feelings. But communicating to them that like, we're not worried that they're sad. Mental health is about having, having emotions when they're appropriate to have. It's not about being happy all the time. Right. Like we've really understood. And actually, I think that that's like the biggest difference between the way I see happiness now, versus when I wrote raising happiness, right. Like, I think that I didn't understand or appreciate the role that difficulty and discomfort plays in leading a happy life in the way that I do now. So interesting.

Debbie: Yeah, I mean, I think that happiness thing is something that so many of us as parents struggle with, I mean, First of all, it's so hard to see our kids disappointed and, and sad. And I'm just like, remembering the time the very first time. I think Asher was three and he had wanted this giant mylar Cars balloon for his birthday party we had in our little backyard. And he had it for less than like a minute and it came loose from his hand and, and I'll never forget the look on his face. And I just couldn't hold back my own tears because I was like, Oh my God, this child's experiencing a loss for the first time and he's got a lifetime ahead to experience loss and it just broke my heart. Yes, you know, and I know that that's just how we're wired that way right? We don't want to see our kids suffer and it's something that's so important and you talk about this idea of practical

acceptance that that's really what we want our kids to to develop. Can you explain what that is?

Christine: Yeah, yeah, I mean, it's so it's interesting to look at to think about right now. So our kids are grieving losses and the fifth stage of grief when you look at Elizabeth Kubler Ross is, you know, old research is acceptance, right? And I, I'm sorry, I'm sort of seeing it through a new light as I bring my kids through all of this and acceptance is not the same thing as resignation. I think that, you know, our culture trains us to resist challenging emotions, difficult situations. And it's not that there isn't a role in the world for resistance. It's that we really suffer when we resist what is actually happening, right. So especially when we resist the emotions that come from loss, so your son lost the balloon, it was gone. That was something that actually happened. So he felt sad, probably right and you felt sad about the whole thing. So cut bringing some acceptance like the loss has happened, we don't need to be in denial about it. Right? The balloon is gone, and acceptance around the emotions that come from the loss in particular, right or the discomfort or whatever it is the circumstance, you know, the sadness, that they're like to just bring some acceptance that our kids feel sad. We don't need to fix it. It's appropriate for them to feel sad when they've experienced a loss. If we try and take their sadness away from them, that's a way of resisting what they're actually feeling. And when we resist our children's actual experience, creates distance between us, right? They don't feel seen. They don't feel validated. They don't feel heard. They will learn to resist their own emotions. And we know that emotional suppression is problematic on many fronts now. Just from a happiness front, but it also causes cognitive impairments and like your brain and your nervous system really struggles to deal with suppressed emotions. So it's just one of the most effective things that we can do in the face of our children's difficulty or pain is to not fix it, but to accept that right now. This really is how they're feeling. Now that's really different than accepting that they're always going to feel this way in the future. Right? That's where I think we get kind of confused. And like if they're thinking about something that is a worst case scenario right now, like I just had a kid with kind of a worst case scenario moment. About like she just all of a sudden had got this idea that like for sure she wasn't going to be able to go to school next fall and, and she was sort of like playing out in her head the loss right? Like, of not being able to go to school next fall, and very, very upset about it. And while her emotions were real, the loss was not like, we don't know what's gonna happen yet. And so I wasn't like I was just sort of letting her wallow in her sadness about something that hasn't actually happened. Right? That's sort of that's a form of resignation of just rumination. Really, that isn't helpful. So acceptance is really, really helpful for things that have actually happened in the present. Right. It's like accepting whatever the weather is, instead of shouting at the sky that you know, you wanted rain and you got sun or the reverse.

Debbie: Well, you bring up something really interesting that you know what I hear from my community and what I know of a lot of differently wired teenagers again, I mentioned at the beginning, some of them can be or many of them can be more glass half empty kind of people. And they often require more evidence for things. So it takes them longer to process difficult emotions or situations. And so I'm just

wondering, you talked about wallowing or ruminating and you know, I know you know, the term story fondling, like we might have kids who are just going to continue to replay the same disappointments, frustrations, annoyances. And so how do you suggest parents support their child towards the School of practical acceptance with a child who needs a lot more evidence and who may be in that wallowing state about what is?

Christine: Yeah, I would, I would teach them to look for evidence in their body, right to like, ask them to just be really present to what they're feeling right now. So that they're not answering qualifying what they're feeling in order to get you to sort of believe their pessimism, right, like, so just constantly bringing them back. How are you feeling right now? Like what? And you can tie it to this specific thought? If you like what they're thinking often will cause their feelings but trying to bring them back to the present. What are you feeling in your body? Do you feel it? Can you give it a name? Can you give it a color? Does it have a texture? Is it moving to try and ground them in their actual experience? And then help them with alternate ways of thinking about things so pessimistic. Children, or people in general, tend to be very good at coming up with the worst case scenario, right? So then asking them when they're calm when they're grounded. What's the best case scenario in that asking them to use their imagination To create thoughts that will trigger so much negative emotion.

Debbie: So there is this book, it's called The Big Life Journal for Tweens and Teens, to help them discover the power of their brain and mindset. And that's something I've been seeing a lot of people talking about on social media and Instagram, and it's very much rooted in that idea of helping teens get more in tune with. Yes, I guess it's more of a cognitive behavioral therapy approach, like understanding that our emotions stem from our thoughts. And if we can work on the thoughts, then we can change the way that we feel. I will say we have a copy of that book in this house, but it has yet to be opened. So there's some resistance around that, but it might be worth people checking out if their kid might be interested in that.

Christine: Yeah, that sounds great.

Debbie: So there's First of all, your book is so comprehensive and I just want to say that we can't possibly cover everything that you talk about which is a bummer, but this conversation will be all over the place. But you have such great chapters on how to talk with your kids about sex, how to talk with your kids about drugs and alcohol. And you have a great section where you talk about the most important character building skills that we can teach our teens for them to be successful today. So maybe just as a last question, this is a whole part of your book. So I'm not expecting you to summarize it in two minutes. But you talked about connection focused and rest. So would you just tell us a little bit about those traits and how you identified those as being things that we really want to help our kids foster?

Christine: Yeah, so I actually started with how the kids how the teenagers today tend to be really struggling and I mean, I guess adolescence, kids that are in middle school all the way through college and beyond. A little bit. Like I was looking at data in

where, you know, why are they so anxious? Why are they struggling with depression, it's much higher rates trying to identify some of the root causes. And one of the things that you see are that sleep and rest is an issue, you know that these kids don't ever take a break and just stare into space and their sleep is really disrupted compared to previous generations, not necessarily compared to adults today, which is kind of interesting. I think adults are other generations are struggling now in a lot of the same ways that teenagers today are but when we're looking just at adolescence, if you pull sleep out of the data, right, like if you control for the kids who are getting enough sleep, you don't see the big spikes in depression and anxiety. So obviously, that's not the only thing that's going on, but it really does change the picture quite dramatically. I knew that Rest was a big part of it. And same thing with connection. These kids even though there's so much more connected online than any other generation there, they're also the loneliest generation that we've ever seen. They are more likely to say that they feel lonely and left out, then any generation that's come before them. They're also, frankly, more likely to spend time alone right here that they've there. They're just it's not really confusing why they feel lonely because they are spending less time with their friends than previous generations and more time, you know, a loan in their rooms even when they're with their families when they're home. So there's that and then focus is the other big thing, right? Like focus has now become the superpower of the 21st century I really believe because it's so hard to focus because there are so many distractions and of course, Rest is the sort of counterpart to focus. And so the two things are very closely related. But I felt like focus is a skill in and of itself that needs to be taught and practiced, and developed really deliberately now.

Debbie: Yeah, and all three of these chapters were super interesting to read. And you offer so many practical suggestions on how to, like your whole book is full of just very tangible practical things to think about and to consider and to try to foster these skills with our kids. And I just want to talk about focus and maybe this isn't part of your research or expertise, and that's fine to just say, not my thing. But obviously we have a lot of parents in this audience who are raising kids with attention issues with ADD/ ADHD. And I'm just wondering if you have thoughts on how or in your research you've come across some really great resources to help kids who already struggle with attention issues, to develop more focus or to work on honing those skills.

Christine: Well, it really isn't my issue, but I'm never without an opinion. So I give you my I mean, it really isn't my area of expertise. But I was really, really struck by how many things actually are within our control that really relate to focus. It kind of gave me hope, like, obviously there's biological stuff going on, as well. But as a parent, I was really in some ways heartened to see how incredibly tied to sleep for example, focus can be, you know, across I mean, obviously, it's going to affect some kids more than others, but the things that like we provide as parents, the structures that we provide around sleep and food and a quiet place without interruption like this is These are the things that the kids need. And they're also within our ability to provide, like that we have more effect on them, then I think that we realize, I think it's, it's obviously there's a lot of factors in play here. But from looking at the data, what I can see is that many of those factors are actually

lifestyle things that are within our control, which to me is hopeful. I, you know, I have two kids that really struggle with ADD or just focus issues and learning disabilities and everything. So I've been able to feel like there's more I can do for them. The more I look into it, Mm hmm. Awesome.

Debbie: Well, before we go, I know that you also coach parents, and that's something I think that some listeners would be really interested in learning more So, could you take a few minutes and talk about how you work with parents and then also just where the best places for parents to connect with you and learn more about your work?

Christine: Yeah, absolutely. I am finding just great joy coaching parents. I've been a parent coach for over a decade, and I'm doing a lot more of it now that we're all at home and parents need more support. I think a lot of joyful parenting is actually skillful parenting. And there's skills that we never were taught, right that our parents didn't either didn't need the skills because the world was really different. Or they, you know, they just didn't teach us right. And so that's a lot of what I'm doing is problem troubleshooting with individual families as well. Like what what is going wrong, what why are you stuck in this pattern? How can we get you out of the habit of being in this power struggle? What skills do you as a parent need? So it's fun, it's really rewarding work to do. And people can find out more about my coaching. On my website. It's Christine Carter calm. There's a little section called coaching and there's a little inquiry form that you can fill out and I will send you an email with more information, basically.

Debbie: Awesome. And I love that you use the word joy. You know, when describing what you hope to help parents achieve through learning new skills, I think joy is attainable as parents, even parents of teens and I think it's a word that we don't use quite enough when thinking about our experience in our parenting life. So I love that and listeners I will of course have links to Christine's website and her book. She's written several books, but The most recent that we've been talking about is the new adolescence, raising happy and successful teens in an age of anxiety and distraction. So there'll be links to that and the other resources we talked about on the show. So any last words of wisdom parting thoughts before we say goodbye, Christine?

Christine: I think the most important thing is if you're finding yourself overwhelmed if you've got teenagers and you're in lockdown, and you feel overwhelmed is to think about you know, what you can do for yourself right now that's a positive coping mechanism, right. So that's much more important than what you can do for your kids is, you know, just model positive coping to the extent that you can, how can you comfort yourself in a way that isn't going to have long term negative consequences? Right. So that's, that's my parting advice. Comfort yourself in a healthy way today.

Debbie: I love that. What a great reminder and we talked a lot about being self interested. This has been such an insightful conversation Thank you.

Christine: Oh, it was lots of fun. Great talking to you.

RESOURCES MENTIONED:

- Christine Carter's website
- *The New Adolescence: Raising Happy and Successful Teens in an Age of Anxiety and Distraction* by Christine Carter, PhD
- *Raising Happiness: 10 Simple Steps for More Joyful Kids and Happier Parents* by Christine Carter, PhD
- *The Sweet Spot: How to Accomplish More by Doing Less* by Christine Carter, PhD
- The Big Life Journal