

Raising Strong Girls Part 1

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:06.7] ANNOUNCER: Next is Dr. Charlene Wrighton to discuss everything early education about your children or students in our new show, Ed. Talks with Dr. Char.

[EPISODE]

[0:00:21.4] CW: Hello, this is Dr. Char Wrighton and I am here to share, this is going to be one of those part one part twos. Today's topic is raising strong girls, strong women. And this really hits home for me because I was, as I was researching and analyzing the topic, I thought of my dad. He had to be the one of the first, he was born 1903.

So, his first daughter was born in 1927. That's my sister, she's 19 years older than I. So, as the first born daughter whom he cherished and then he had his two sons after that, but he raised her of course with my mom too, but I mean, it was his influence on her that he encouraged her from youth on to strive for something different.

This was relayed directly to me many times we discuss this, in the era where women had very clearly defined roles and it was the get married, have children, have your white picket fence, your garden, your home, meet your husband at the door era. That was a very traditional family. Certainly World War II sent women into the workplace and factories to help and that was very interesting era because it changed the family drastically, but then it went back to – in the 50s, that very traditional roles again.

He was the one that told her, “strive for something different. Be who you want to be. Don't be the person that you think your parents want. Don't be the person that society dictates. Be your own person.” And so, he would joke and say, “be a newspaper reporter, travel around the world.”

[0:02:12.7] CW: He really encouraged her to wait to get married, but again, not harshly, I don't mean harshly, but not dictatorially but just as a suggestion. He was just adamant that he wanted his firstborn or his daughter to be strong and to lead the life she wanted to lead.

And interestingly, she did. She didn't marry until she was quite a bit older. But she had that as she traveled all around the world, many, many times by herself. She never felt that she had to be anyone else's person or that she had to – she couldn't travel alone – didn't have to travel with somebody else, she could do it alone. That was my sister, this incredibly independent woman and of course, highly successful.

When I came along from that point, 19 years after that, being a big surprise family. That was my sister's legacy that just kind of naturally – I don't recall him even having that kind of discussion with me. Yet, my sister certainly was a huge influence on my life. Each one of them, of course, my mom also, but just the whole concept to be different, to be independent was a quiet and I emphasize over quiet because it wasn't dictated.

It was just a quiet expectation or encouragement, see expectation's not the right word. Because I don't think my family would ever expected us to be anything, but decent human beings and hard workers. But it really had me thinking, as I'm looking at this, "what makes a strong woman?" Next week I'll be doing what growing strong young men and growing strong boys and young men and as I always say, it starts early.

And so, I have a pretty long list of things that I want to discuss as I have analyzed and also researched.

[0:04:11.2] CW: But with my daughter, I had my son first and with him, it was just kind of a natural kind of let him be and let him choose type philosophy as we were raising him and of course, we were 23 and my husband was 26. So, we were so new at it. I was also a special ed teacher and so I knew enough to really want to encourage the all processes, special, intellectual, visual auditory, all the modalities getting him all stimulated so that a child can learn to do a multiple things, many different things, many different interests.

So, when my daughter came along 10 years later, I didn't want to mold her or even suggest or guide or certainly not push, but you know, gently push her into a specific model, gender model. I'm not sure I thought it in terms of anything but, "I want her to be really well rounded." I knew as a teacher, and as someone who researched and read constantly and took classes that girls were always lagging behind in the area of math and sciences.

And boys were always lagging behind in the area of language and arts. I really understood the brain in that. I thought, now I have this girl and I really want her to be a visual spatial as well as anything she wants to be. Anything that she wants to do. And so in order to do that, we put in front of her, anything she wanted to play with, whether it was dolls which she wasn't terribly interested in, but it was like, "here's an option."

Or, we weren't really princess-y in that era like we are today. Everything is princess and unicorns and mermaids. It wasn't that era but it was more of the Barbie era. And if anyone knows my middle child or oldest daughter, anything but a Barbie which I actually have to chuckle and think about it.

[0:06:13.6] CW: I wanted her to build things with her hands. I wanted her to analyze that she was building because I saw my son do this and I wanted those critical thinking skills developed as well as the spatial visual because males are so strong in that area naturally.

I wanted to be able to just provide her with that, she's not interested then she's not interested, that's fine. I wanted to at least make it available and I'm so glad I did because she did. She did play with that, she was actually quite well rounded. She ended up being very, very athletic.

But certainly, she's a surgeon so she uses her hands constantly and she's one who analyzes all the time. Definitely not a girly girl. However, the point being is that, it's putting something in front of a child, so you're going to do the same thing with a male, you're going to put possibilities because with males which I will elaborate next week is more of a – wanted to develop their tender sides and their nurturing sides and their compassionate sides, which do not always happen when they're ones who like to bomb things and destroy things and whack things loudly, it's just who they are, by nature.

I think it's important so anyway, that will be next week. However, being able to just put things in front of children and actually sit down and kind of show them the way. I think was of every valuable thing that my husband and I did for our first daughter and also watching her interests was very critical because when my second daughter came along, her interest were not in the same area.

We put the same similar things in front of her, but she gravitated into towards a different direction so that was okay. That's the message certainly that I want to send today is allowing children to make choices and what they're interested in playing and doing is critical.

[0:08:01.8] CW: And we're talking from a very early age. Limiting roles by gender is – we just know not to do that now. We know that we want our daughters to experience science, engineering, architecture, which has always been in the past in a quite a bit pass has been – I'll tell you that in a minute but our roles have been genderized and I think that we're realizing now that – we have been realizing in for quite a long time that we need to encourage both genders to explore what they're interested in.

It doesn't have to be designed or guided by gender or dictated by gender. When Lindsey started medical school, hers was the first class I history that had more females in medical school than males and it's the first time in history. And that also was a universal thing, seen across the nation and in other countries.

I've talked about it before, I'll talk about it again, but it's a whole different topic so I'm not going to talk about it today. When dealing with your daughter and when I'm talking about from babyhood, it is really starts from babyhood. I'm not a gender fluid type person, I'm certainly an accepting and tolerant type.

I want my children to just be joyful and to be strong, regardless. And we are really not talk about that here, I'm just saying, opening up doors according to their interest, according to the way their brain is structured. So much is how the brain is hooked up, how it's structured. We always wonder, nature, is it nurture, is this you know, brains are different.

Male brains are different than female brains and I've discussed it before and I will discuss it again because I think it's valuable. But again, I'm really not talking about that, here. I'm just – what I am saying is that we have to start early by providing all sorts of wonderful, different experiences.

[0:09:56.6] CW: The best way for us to do this is by books. Starting with the kind of books that we read to our child while they're young and also discussions. I have told you before that when children are babies, you need to talk with them and it does sound like you're babbling endlessly to a child who we have no idea. We can guarantee, let's put it that way, we can guarantee that they're not understanding what we're saying.

However, what they are doing is they're mapping every single one of those speech sounds and putting it in their own brains. So that's how they develop language and they develop it so naturally. You want to talk with your child and I'm saying, mom, dad, talk to your children, both genders talking to their children. Not just mom changing diapers. So let me just say that from the very beginning.

That is really important is that and certainly not limited to any kind of typical family structure, but whatever the family structure is. Both voices need to be heard with ideas and with different perspectives and so talk to your baby. It's so exciting to be able to exercise in the baby's legs or changing out diaper or are just holding nursing, hugging, feeding a bottle, whatever it is to be able to talk to that baby.

And sometimes sitting in silence, seems like the smarter thing to do, but it really isn't. Let's make sure that we're doing that, but this is a wonderful time of talking about the future and what the child is – what is ahead of the child. So that the child hears this from a very early age that this – the possibilities for that child are endless. That's what you want to say.

That's the message that you want to give. And that child can do anything that they want. We want to make sure that they're pursuing dreams and that they have a passion. I think what the comment is, do what you love and don't work a day of your life. I certainly – that's me and my whole career.

[0:11:49.9] CW: I've been teaching for my whole career, developing curriculum for children back at Safari Learning, playing with children daily, talking with them. It is absolutely a joy. If it's something you love, you get excited and you can't wait to go to work. You want to build that in your daughter very, very early to pursue her dreams.

To reach for the stars, to not be limited. We don't have to limit our children, we don't want to limit our children. We want to be excited about what they are excited about and sometimes it's very difficult to be excited when a child says, "I want to be a mermaid." That might be a dream for the moment but you want to be excited about it for the moment.

So, another one is to not oversteer to gender too early in life. You want to make sure that that child is who she is. And so, again, watch carefully, listen. I think we do more talking than listening and I just think it's imperative that we listen more. And with that listening, it's an active ear, but it's eye contact also. There's one thing when you're stirring tonight's dinner, you're making soup or whatever that you're doing and you're busy concentrating and following directions or chopping or whatever.

The child's talking to you, that's not necessarily active listening. It is an okay venue to talk back and forth but I'm talking about the kind where you're at eye level with that child and you're really actively listening. Whatever their interest is, princess dolls, tools, sports, spatial, tactile, motor, whether it dancing, singing, that is the interest that you need to support and the interest may change and it will change. Guaranteed, it will change.

[0:13:31.5] CW: It may fluctuate, it may go back and forth. Your interest and your support and your backing is essential here because that child needs to know that whatever they decide is okay. And then you're going to be their cheerleader and you're going to be an encourager and you're going to really provide access to that interest. If they want to be a princess, obviously, easy for things for us to do is read stories about princesses and certainly provide them with princess dresses.

But I want you to think about this. This is one of my favorite books is called *Princess Wears Boots*. It's that I did that. Princesses can be very strong and so, I think instead of just having the concept of I'm a princess, which means I have everything I want and I get everything I want and I don't have to work, that's not the kind of princess.

We're talking about strong princesses and so I am just trying to give you a concept of how to talk with a child about their interest and then broadening it and so that it includes a lot more depth and quality. I, as a child, was taught how to use a hammer and I remember my dad was remodeling our house and he put me to work and I love it that I put in the light, the switch plates. I took a sledgehammer to sheetrock and tore it down.

I got to saw, I got to hammer, hammer and nails, in fact this is hilarious. When my dad was a painting contractor and he was also a writer and so when he couldn't, when it was raining out and he couldn't or didn't have a job lined out at the moment or it was raining and couldn't work, he wrote and he gave me

nails and wood and a hammer that I loved doing it and it's like when the hammering stopped is when he'd come looking for me.

As long as I was hammering, he knows I am safe and he knew where I was. But the whole point is that he did encourage me to step out of, especially at that point, 1947 to then the early 50s, is not to stick closely to that gender role, but I could explore other things. He taught me how to throw and be very, very coordinated. We lived in the desert and the heat was just almost unbearable and so as a painting contractor he was out in it.

Yet for some reason, he'd come home and say, "let's go throw a ball around. Let's go throw frisbees." We even threw hammers. I loved it. It was fantastic and so, we threw rocks. Whatever we could do in some kind of fun competition we did and so that was always encouraged in me and I am so grateful for it, growing up to be an athletic person and being able to pass it down to our children.

[0:16:01.7] Something that is really important is discussing ideas with children. And ideals and morals and valuing and there is a lot out there to explore and not all of us have the same values or the same morals, but strong people have to cope with so many different people as they grow up. I mean earlier in life they have to cope with other people on preschool. They have to cope with siblings. They have to cope with parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles.

They have to grow up with people who are a little scarier or odd or different. Certainly as they get into school, they have to cope with classmates. They have to cope with teachers that may not understand them or they don't understand. As they get older, the job becomes more challenging, more difficult for them as people get bigger and stronger and louder and more aggressive and so growing up very, very early with morals is really critical.

Some of the things that I would just highly recommend talking about is first of all, I love it and we don't do it anymore. It is the golden rule. We literally stopped teaching the golden rule in school. We might teach the concept of it, but we don't verbalize it and we don't call it the golden rule because it sounds too biblical. However, the biblical rule simply says or the golden rule simply says, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

So, if you don't like it, don't do it to somebody else. And I personally use this at our school all the time because if I see a child biting or hitting or grabbing another toy that is one of the first conversations I have with that child besides saying, "that is not an okay thing to do. That is not okay to hurt your friend. It is not okay to grab something from your friend." But I say, "would you like it if someone did that to you?" And they always say, "no," or they shrug.

[0:18:02.9] And then I say, "then don't do it to them." That is the golden rule. We need to treat others as how we would like to be treated and if we want to be treated with dignity and respect and appreciation then they need to do the same with others. So therefore it starts very, very early having this discussion with children. Talking about honesty, integrity, hard work, working for things that you want rather than expecting it just to be handed to you regarding the elderly with appreciation and respect.

Understanding someone with a disability. Understanding an elder, respecting an elder, these are all values that are really critical and again, they have to be taught early and it can't be one of those conversations you have once and then you never revisit it. I am really big on finding books that match those conversations and then there are lots out there and the wonderful thing to do is just plug it in Google or Amazon and up will come children's books with these topics.

And you can buy them second hand and it's okay and save yourself some money, but having them in a bookshelf or a bin basket close by so that you can read that and talk about it and again, listen. Listen to your child's views and encourage them to analyze and think and evaluate and judge. We need to teach our girls to take risks. Risks are scary regardless whether it is trying for something, I was a big risk taker I would say more physically than I was emotionally.

It was very difficult to put myself out there, although I did. I did run for school office. I did try out for things. But it was uncomfortable for me and it was something that I really preferred not doing. However I think that it is really important to teach our children that number one, rejection or failure just strengthens us for the next time we approach that because we'll learn from it. I didn't like rejection early. It was painful for me. I didn't want to put myself out there.

[0:20:13.9] But I have watched my middle daughter have absolutely no fear. She has put herself out there over her entire life because she's one who's got chutzpah. Just nothing daunts her, nothing. She is not afraid of anything and I watched her because she put herself out there so many different times and so many different venues, so many different types of activities, whether it was speech contests of spelling bees or athletic events or going for scholarships.

Whatever it was, it was like try, get it, fail, it's okay and I always said, "oh, I want to be just like you and I am not." I've gotten better over the years. Teaching children that failure is okay and that failure is not a life threatening experience. If you don't get something that you like for instance, if you are not on the first team, well then be on the second strand and then gain skills. Work hard to gain those skills, improve yourself if that is what you want to do.

Quitting ahead of time that's again, having children quit before they even work hard to obtain better skills that is a value in concept that has to be taught early. Children need to stick with things. They have to learn how to have commitment and to learn that failure again, if you fail at something, if you try for something and you don't get it don't stop. Get better at what it is and try again. Taking risks emotionally is one thing, taking risk physically is another.

Sometimes females don't take physical risks because they don't like either getting dirty or they don't like getting hurt, those are all understandable things but there is something to be said about children learning very early not to be afraid of things. Like for instance, being able to pick up a bug, pick up a tarantula, picking up a lizard, picking up a snake those are all incredible experiences for children. Swimming in the ocean, learning how to ski early.

[0:22:04.3] Just so many things that look like or climbing with ropes and pitons, going to a climbing gym. These are the types of things that make you stronger, make you tougher. When you fall down, children have a natural tendency to cry because it hurts. Crying is okay, children should not be taught not to cry. We don't want to say, "stop that. Stop crying, stop being a baby." That is not okay because you're not allowing them to express themselves.

However, the duration of the crying is one thing or if they don't try whether it was again. Normally kids got up and they forget about it after the pain has gone. You give a snuggle, you give a hug, you give a

prayer and send them on their way because you want them to get up and try again and that is really, really important. So taking those risks physically and emotionally is really critical and be involved with them.

You know obviously, I remember our son. Living in the country, he would be tearing down the hills on his big wheel and just terrifying us but I just knew that this is not only what he needed to do, but I always also realize that he was so good at it. Yes, he was going to fall off, he was going to bang his knee, he was going to cause something to bleed at any given point but he got better and better at it. The more you really allow a child to do something like that they do get better at it.

I was talking to one of our Safari Learning Academy teachers today and she was right on the money. We were discussing the theory of, “well, let them fall. They’ll figure it out someday and they’ll figure it out that it hurts.” And it’s like, “hmm, so we took the middle ground on that.” And it’s like, “yes, let them have the experience, but teach them how to do it well.” So, as a child is climbing have the child – tell them where to put their footholds.

[0:23:55.3] Tell them how to hold on tight, talk them through it so that they gain early skills and so instead of saying, “stop it, you are going to hurt yourself.” Teach them how to do it well and then they won’t and I really felt like that is critical. I love the idea that as we raise children we were snow skating, we were water skating, we were boating, we were doing all forms of athleticism. We were building so they had the experience to be able to try all different things.

That really helped them to decide what they liked and what they didn’t like to do. Solving problems is another one of those things. Too often, we want to as parents because we love our children so much we want to protect them, we want to rush in and solve the problems too often too early. Children need to solve problems because that is critical thinking skills. You want them to develop critical thinking skills and so you want them to be able to have that ability to choose rightly.

Because the earlier that they are able to make great decisions, the better off they are when it comes time to make serious decisions as they are older and they are on their own. You want to raise your children very, very early knowing that there is going to come a time in elementary school, junior high

and high school and college, should they go, if they go to a job, whatever it is that they are going to have to make decisions every single day that is going to be good for them or not good for themselves.

Whether it's drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, any kind of risky lifestyle. Whether it is not having integrity on the job, not having integrity in school, you want them to be able to say no to peers who are leading them astray or attempting to. You cannot start training and teaching and guiding when they are approaching that age. It has to be done when they're babies, one, two, three, four, five, every single year and it has to be done gently and with again, a lot of listening.

[0:25:56.5] Talk about heroes. I want my children to know about heroes male and female because I want my daughter to appreciate strong men. I want my daughter to appreciate both genders. not just females. Whereas I want to really talk about strong women in history, I certainly don't want to leave the strong wonderful men who have protected us, who have fought wars, have been a man of courage and integrity. However, I want women to know that they can be that strong woman and that they can accomplish anything that they set their minds to.

And so part of that is as they are very young, reading stories about what women have accomplished and what woman have overcome. In history, we have so many phenomenal role models for our girls. All the way back, there is a book called *Women in the Bible* and talked about these women who during that era, we are not treated as equals in so many different cultures.

But we are treated, they made choices that helped generations survive, just by their one choice. There is so many, Esther is a really good example. Ruth is a good example. But reading about women all the way through history is an exciting way to show your daughter role models and so I am going to leave you with this. I have so much more to say that I have a feeling that I just want to spend more time on this. So, maybe I am going to delay strong males for another week.

And I want to continue with this because there's still so much more to say. So call us, email us, you know we love to hear from you and thank you for listening.

[OUTRO]

[0:27:39.7] ANNOUNCER: That was Ed. Talks with Dr. Char. You've been listening on KAAD-LP Radio, live on 103.5 FM, or streaming online at kaad-lp.org. If you would like to have Dr. Char answer any of your questions, please e-mail your question to dr_char@zoophonics.com. Thanks for listening and stay tuned for what's next on KAAD-LP Radio.

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