

## **CPI *Unrestrained* Transcription**

Episode 13: Annie Fox

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Terry: Hello and welcome to *Unrestrained*, the CPI podcast series. This is your host, Terry Vittone. Today, my guest is the author and parenting expert, Annie Fox. Welcome, Annie.

Annie: Hi, Terry. Thanks for inviting me.

Terry: You're welcome. Annie Fox is an internationally respected author, parenting expert, family coach, and trusted online adviser for teens. Her life's work, as she describes it, is "helping youth effectively manage their relationships and emotions so they can feel confident in who they are." Annie graduated from Cornell University with a degree in human development before going on to complete her master's in education from the State University of New York at Cortland. After completing her degrees, Annie began working as a teacher.

In 1996, Annie developed the idea for a website devoted to issues that matter to teens and young adults called The InSite. For three years, she served as creator, designer, writer, and executive producer of that award-winning site. One of The InSite's most popular features was "Hey, Tara," a cyberspace "Dear Abbey," and her book, *The Teen Survival Guide to Dating and Relating*, is based on the hundreds of emails to Tara and Annie's responses.

That experience certainly must have been helpful in preparing her latest book, *The Girls' Q&A Book on Friendship: 50 Ways to Fix a Friendship Without the Drama*. It's for girls ages 8 to 12. The book contains questions from real girls struggling with relationships. Annie's latest book for parents, *Teaching Kids to Be Good People: Progressive Parenting for the 21st Century*, is a guide for navigating 21st century parenting challenges. Annie is also the host of the popular weekly podcast, *Family Confidential: Secrets of Successful Parenting*.

So Annie, we are finally getting to you. Let's begin with a question about *The Girls' Q&A Book on Friendship: 50 Ways to Fix a Friendship Without the Drama*. Can you talk about how you developed the concept for the book and how you selected the questions?

Annie: Well, as you said so eloquently, Terry, in your intro, I've been answering emails through my website. It began in 1997, so we're going on, oh, my goodness, 18 years. What I found over the years is that these friendship challenges are really the number-one thing that girls write to me about. More than about their parents, even more than about boyfriends.

The most distressing thing to them is when a friend stops acting like a friend. I wrote books for teenagers, and then I wrote my *Middle School Confidential* series for sixth through eighth graders, and then it just dawned on me that these friendship challenges really are skewing younger and younger.

So the idea for the book really was that I felt if I could give 8- to 12-year-old girls some tools in terms of how to resolve these friendship dilemmas, that by the time they got to middle school, they might be in a better place to manage the emotions that go with these and to effectively communicate things that they need in a friendship.

Terry: Do you have a gut feel for why that age range is shifting down for questions of the nature that you have in the book?

Annie: I believe it's because of the exposure to mainstream media and everything that kids see. They're always aspiring to be older than they are. If, for example, a nine-year-old girl is watching a show that was really intended for 12- to 15-year-olds, that nine-year-old girl is already getting into the mindset of the characters on the show, and if they're dealing with these kinds of teen issues, there's your nine-year-old going in that direction.

I think that exposure to media really is, in some ways, not forcing, but at least motivating kids to start thinking of themselves as older, more sophisticated. And that means that their relationships in the problems that they deal with are more sophisticated.

Terry: Well, from what you're seeing, it would seem to be very influential.

Annie: Yes, it is. My point is always that the adults who live and work with girls and boys as well can be as influential, if not more so, than their peers. We need to not step away from that role.

Terry: I see. Can you talk about how the book is formatted? Explain the concept, the layout of it.

Annie: Yeah. I'm the Q&A woman; this is kind of what I do. I built this whole career as being an adviser and when I go to schools, I invite kids to ask me questions that are troubling them. So I'm very comfortable with the Q&A.

So I thought, "Okay, maybe I can just figure out a way to make it really simple where you've got a question about a friendship from a real girl and an illustration that is very

pointed and sometimes over-the-top funny, so girls can see themselves, sometimes as overly dramatic." There's an illustration of a girl dissolving in a puddle of tears. A girl who feels that she's invisible, and in the illustration, you're seeing right through her as if she's a phantom.

I wanted to also obviously give the answers. So you've got a question and an illustration on one side and on the facing page, you have a very distinct "Here's what you can do" answer and that's kind of the format.

Terry: Great. I thought the illustrations were very effective and charming. Do you have a few favorite questions from the book?

Annie: I do. There are 50 of them and you think, "Come on, really? Fifty different friendship dilemmas?" I easily could have done a second or third volume.

I think what keeps this work interesting and after 17 years, the variety is ever-present. It's like, "Wow, you think I've heard them all? But nope, here comes one I've never heard before."

Yeah, I've got one that I love. It's essentially how do you get out of a fight? The question is "What do you do if you're in a fight and you want to get out of it?" I think, especially in this day of social media, when kids are on it and, as I say, mind is melded to their peers 24/7, if their parents allow them to be. The idea of the drama of it.

You find yourself in an escalating fight with a peer, a conflict, and you want the end of it already. This question I found was really poignant. It's like, "You don't want to be fighting with this person anymore. You're exhausted from the fight. You see that it's taken up more time and emotional real estate than you want to give it anymore. How do you extricate yourself from it?" Not an easy question. That's one of my favorites. Another one—

Terry: If I may, sorry, but there's a related question there. "How do I get out of a friendship?" That's a very, sort of, ticklish one.

Annie: Yeah, that is a ticklish one. Sometimes, we outgrow a friendship. We don't want to hurt anybody, but on the other hand, it becomes clearer that this person that I used to get a lot of satisfaction being with and for whatever reason, the magic is not there anymore. I want to choose to spend less time with that person. How do I do that in a way that respects the person, but also respects my need for different kinds of friends? Tricky.

Terry: It's brave; it's a brave question to put in. You were going to, before I interrupted you, Annie, go to another question that you were going to remark on.

Annie: Yeah, this is a question here that has to do with dealing with the anger of a friendship. The question is "My friend gets mad at me a lot. I don't know why. But I'm afraid to talk to her about it."

Terry, this is really a big part of the reason why I wrote this book. I feel that the lessons that we learn as children in our peer relationships are often carried over to the relationships we have as we're adults. It could be our romantic relationships; it could be our professional relationships.

So in this particular one where the girl was writing to me, doesn't like to be targeted with all this anger. She is afraid to tell her friend, "Hey, don't talk to me that way" because she's afraid she'll get more anger coming at her. I'm very concerned about girls putting up with—in this case, it sounds like there is abuse going on here—verbal and emotional abuse, between two girls and a friendship. How will the letter writer ever deal with this if she's ever faced with it in a romantic relationship?

Terry: And?

Annie: And the answer is that you need to understand what feels right to you. You need to create the, or draw from the, courage it takes—I call it "social courage"—to stand up for yourself in a friendship. Or to stand up for someone more vulnerable than you. And to say, "This is not okay."

I say to kids, "There's always an exit in a friendship." Sometimes you need to find it and, as I reference in the book, "take a vacation from the friendship."

Terry: It's great that kids would be able, I think, with the clarity of mind, to give themselves permission to do that and know that they can make that sort of decision for themselves if they're in an abusive situation.

Annie: Yeah, I think that they rarely have considered that as a possibility.

Terry: I like number 50. The final question, from a philosophical slant, "Why are people mean to each other?" Can you talk about that?

Annie: Oh, my goodness, yeah. Why are people mean—

Terry: What were you going to say? You knew I'd bring that up?

Annie: Well, I was going to speak because I remember the moment I got this question. Sometimes, I go to schools and I speak at student assemblies and I encourage kids to anonymously pass questions up on little pieces of paper that the teachers hand out. This one came up from a third grader.

Terry: Oh, my.

Annie: "Annie, why are people mean to each other?"

Terry: Did you just have to draw a breath and kind of blink?

Annie: I did. I'm very honest. When I'm in front of kids, I go, "Wow, I just got a really big question." Then, I threw it out to the kids. I said, "What do you think?"

Terry: That's great.

Annie: "Why do you think this is true?" They had some answers and as I did in the book. It's a wonderful, deep, and big philosophical question. I think most of the time, Terry, people who ask questions like this are thinking, "Why are people mean to me?" "Why have I observed meanness?" But they never consider the other side of it, which is "sometimes, I feel angry enough to be mean to other people" and I want them to explore that as well.

Terry: That's a great perspective and an enlarging one for all of us, I think, when we're angry or feel we've been hurt in some way. Do you see parents' involvement in this book in interacting with their daughters?

Annie: Yeah.

Terry: How might it be used in the home?

Annie: I hope so. I wrote that in the introduction. I see this as a great discussion driver. Where a girl might not have the track record of talking about this kind of stuff with a trusted adult—parent, grandparent, counselor, mentor, coach, whatever, an older cousin. But this book could kind of open those doors and the idea of reading some or all of it with an adult there. To be able to—that adult could easily say, "Wow, that's an interesting question." It could bring up stories in the adult's own life. Or the adult could say, "Has anything like that question ever happened to you?"

When you kind of put it that way, I find that girls, especially, when they're in a safe environment would say, "Oh, yeah, that happened to me." Then, the next obvious question is "What did you do about it? What did you learn? What might you do the next time if those emotions came up again in a friendship?"

Terry: I think that parental involvement could help really underscore the permission to accept the . . . how am I trying to say this? That it'll validate the response when the parent participates.

Annie: Exactly. I think it also helps girls recognize the fact that these emotions are things that all of humankind share and that while emotions come unbidden, our responses to them can and should be very thoughtful. This is how we distinguish ourselves, one person from the other. How do we handle ourselves when we feel jealous or hurt? When we feel betrayed, when we feel rejected, how do we handle ourselves? How do we process those emotions in ways that no one gets hurt? That's really the goal.

Terry: You know, there's another feature of the book where you bring in advice from teenage girls about how to be what you call a "super friend." Could you talk about that for us a little bit?

Annie: Yeah. I had it in mind that my voice is in here, obviously, with every answer. But I thought it might be cool to reach out to 14- to 18-year-old girls and ask them, "What do you learn from friendship?" Essentially, I crowdsourced this. I wrote to some of the older girls who write to me on a regular basis and I said, "Hey, I'm writing this book for younger girls. What advice would you give a younger girl about friendship?" I just found it wonderful. I would have done a whole book just on that. It was great, just kind of hard to—

But for an example, Michelle, age 14, says, "Be genuine and don't try to fit in if you're not comfortable with it. People see right through that."

Terry: That's good.

Annie: That's really great. It could have been a fortune cookie, really. Here's another one. "You and your friend don't have to agree with each other on everything. Don't get into a huge debate. Respect each other's differences." Fifteen.

Terry: That's embarrassing for us older people, maybe. Well, it's tremendous. I would like to move to—since you've got such great material—I would like to move to *Teaching Kids to Be Good People*, if we could talk about that a little bit. Is there anything you'd like to close with about *The Girls' Q&A Book on Friendship*?

Annie: I would say for adults that girls have lots of questions about friendship dilemmas and peer conflicts. They often either have the sense that we, as the adults in their lives, don't have time or that maybe we, as the adults in their lives, think that the girls should be able to handle it on their own.

We've seen time and time again, especially with social media, that girls fumble and stumble and often make unintentional mistakes that hurt other people and the results can be very long-lasting and deep. So I would say to any adults that are listening, "Please make yourselves available to listen to the girls in your life because these friendship issues are

important to them. They really need us to hear what they have to say and hopefully to coach them in the direction of being more compassionate."

At least being more socially courageous, as I say, to stand up for themselves and other people. So girls' friendships are important to them and we can help them. We can influence them in positive directions.

Terry: That's a great takeaway and we certainly wish you great success with the book.

Annie: Thank you.

Terry: Let's go over to another great read, *Teaching Kids to Be Good People: Progressive Parenting for the 21st Century*. In researching your book, you looked to the Internet and crowdsourcing to provide a definition of what exactly "good people" are. Could you talk about that process and the concepts that reappeared in the answers you received?

Annie: Yeah. In my work, Terry, I am a character educator. That's kind of, over the years, is kind of what I've synthesized it down to.

"What is it you do, Annie?"

I help adults help kids develop a moral compass. What is that about? That's about doing the right thing.

So I thought, "Okay, I want to write a book about what that process might be like for parents at any point in the parenting journey." So I came up with this idea of "I want to help parents teach kids to be good people." But first, I got stuck on that word "good" because everybody has their own definition of what goodness is. What is that? Is there some universal truth about that? Is there a universal understanding of what it means?

So I sent out hundreds of emails to people I know—professionals in the field, counselors, educators, and said, "Okay, when you say someone is a good person: 'He's a good person; she's a good person,' what exactly are you thinking? What do you mean?"

I got back hundreds of really thoughtful responses. I could write a book just on that. But when I kind of boiled them all down, I came up with eight character traits that continued to kind of resonate in all the emails.

We talked about emotional intelligence. That is, knowing how you feel and being able to empathize with other people. So there was empathy; there was respect. There was a sense of being helpful.

Another thing that was resonant was what I call "social courage." Standing up and doing the right thing despite the fact that other people will watch you and might judge you harshly. That sense of knowing "this is what's right and to hell with other people's opinions at this moment." This is the right and proper thing to do and it really all comes from that sense of wanting to be helpful.

I've got all the eight things which became the eight chapters of the book. I thought, "Ultimately, a good person is someone who actively looks for opportunities to ease the suffering of other people."

Terry: Well said!

Annie: Because you say, "Oh, A person is kind. I feel for you." I don't know; feeling is not enough. You need to be able to translate that into action.

So if you see someone who's hurting, yes, it's good that your heart kind of cringes a little and you feel bad. That's a nice person. The difference between being a nice person and a good person is that you take the extra step in the direction of that person and you find out "What can I do to make things better?"

Terry: So you talked a bit about the organizational structure of the book with the eight chapters about key concepts that reappeared in the answers. But there's also repeated sections that are really interesting. You have things called "real-world assignment" and "What would you teach in conversations that count?" I think our listeners would be interested to hear you describe this sort of ingenious way you've structured the book.

Annie: I have a master's in education, so I'm a teacher. So it's not just to be, "Here's some good ideas." I really want people to put them into practice. Within each of these sections, I gave parents, or any of the adults who are reading the book, a real-world assignment. So for example, I've got one called "Moving towards independence." It's not just to say, "Yes, we want our kids to be self-reliant, self-confident, and increasingly more independent as they grow. How do you teach it?"

So it's like, "Okay, if this is a real-world assignment and part of this is to actually teach some skills that kids can go away with, that assignment of moving towards independence really starts with the reader, the adult thinking back." Often, I ask my reader to make connections between the parent they are and the parent they had. If, for example, you as a teen felt that you weren't given enough opportunities to use your good judgment and to be independent, then I want the reader to think about that and to think about the feelings that came up.

Then, the next step would probably be to have a conversation with your child about what you uncovered from this little look back to your own childhood and say, "You know, I used to resent . . ." I'll speak from my own experience here. I had two older brothers, still have them.

It seems to me that they were given more independence than I as the youngest and only daughter. Even something as simple as to "I'm going out to ride my bike in the neighborhood." Where there was no question about my brothers being able to do that, but there seemed to be more caution around my going out and doing it.

How did I feel about that as a child and then how did I then turn around and raise my daughter and my son in terms of independence? Then, to listen to them. To have a conversation that counts, say, "Okay, you know, maybe I have been a little lax in my giving you opportunities to share your independence. I had a Eureka moment and from now on in this area, I'm going to give you more independence" and always to make agreements with kids. With independence comes responsibility and also accountability.

So there are ways that parents can phrase . . . to have conversations with their kids around each of these big key topics so that as a family, you're learning from each other and that parenting . . . parenting isn't a science; it's an art form. It evolves in the same way that film-making evolves.

Hopefully, we learn from the previous generation that the parenting we received can impact, but not necessarily cement, the parenting that we now give to our kids. So it should be fluid and it comes from good communication and awareness of what your goals are.

Terry: You have some interesting concepts in the book. One of them is that you write that too many teens are, what you call, "peer approval addicts." Could you explain the term and then how teens might go about breaking that addiction?

Annie: It's really an interesting one. I made up the term. So if anybody Googles "peer approval addiction," they'll probably come to me.

It really comes from the way that I read the emails that come to me. Which, after 18 years, I'm still getting them daily from around the planet. The question came to me as I'm reading these. I said, "Okay, here's a kid who's describing a situation. Clearly, he or she knows that they're in a bind and they're not comfortable continuing this behavior, with a friend, with a boyfriend or girlfriend. Yet, they feel stuck. What is it that's keeping them stuck?"

My stance was that their desire, the urgency for approval of this person, is weighing very heavy on them. So I thought, "Okay, we know what an addiction is. An addiction is a compulsive behavior that you feel you have no control over and that you're going to engage in despite the negative effect it may have on your health, your well-being, or your relationships." That's what an addiction is.

Peer approval is our desire, obviously, to be liked and approved of by the people we spend the most time with—our contemporaries, our peers. When we are finding that we are willing to do or say whatever it takes to get the approval of our peers, even stuff we're not particularly proud of.

Terry: Then it rises to that level.

Annie: Then I think we're dealing with a peer approval addict. The truth is, as human beings, we are wired for social acceptance. We don't do very well as solo critters. We're not designed as solo critters. We work in conjunction with other people.

So society and cooperative play at work is kind of the name of the game here. Otherwise, we'd be reptiles and we'd kind of be out for number one always and our own survival might actually necessitate us eating our young, which many reptile species do. It's kind of weird when you think about it, but that's really the difference between mammals and reptiles.

So we're wired to be looking at each other's faces, to read micro-expressions. It's like, "Hey, if I say an offhanded comment, I mean it as a joke." Your nostril flares a little bit for a microsecond and I go, "Terry didn't think that was very funny." Then I have an opportunity to kind of backpedal. I thought, "No, it was just a joke."

So we are constantly trying to gauge and re-gauge our responses and we're trying to stay in the good graces of the people around us. It makes sense. But part of the problem is that when we're adolescents, it's heightened. What our friends think about us is paramount.

When you take away our ability to read visual cues and you do that when you spend most of your time with your head down in a screen, then we are more likely to make mistakes. We are more likely to get dragged into other people's feuds. More likely than to pile on when someone has been chosen as the pariah.

None of this bodes very well for our own personal social development or for the development of healthy friendships.

Terry: You know, it's funny that devices that may purport to make us more social might, ironically, do the opposite.

Annie: Oh, my goodness, yes. I would totally agree with that. The idea of connections is something that is fascinating to me as well. The cover of my book has a thumbs-up and a thumbs-down in teaching kids.

This thumbs-up is liking on Facebook. This now universal symbol is often what kids live and breathe for. I've heard about kids who post something on their Instagram account and if they don't get a certain number of thumbs-up or "I like what you just posted," they won't want to go to school the next day. This seems so crazy to us as adults, but—

Terry: Some people, for instance, professionals that post on LinkedIn, are very concerned about the popularity of their posts. I'm not sure if that's directly analogous.

Annie: No, it is directly analogous, exactly; it's peer approval addiction. But if your self-worth is based on someone clicking "Like" or not or unliking something, then how fragile are we? Parents need to show (host murmurs to interject) yeah, let's go there.

Terry: I'm sorry, Annie. I was just going to say, because it bridges into the concept of progressive parenting.

Annie: Yes. Progressive parenting, as far as I'm concerned, is holistic. It's humanistic, which means we're talking about the entire person. Not this one little corner of their life which is, for kids, that little corner used to be "me and my friends." Now, that is huge; it takes over all the acreage.

I think the emphasis is unbalanced. It's misguided. It then leaves kids with a sense that who they are is really only a reflection of what other people think. That's not how we live our lives. It's like, "I am only as good a person as my friends think I am" and that comes from accumulation of thumbs-up. "How many friends do I have?" "How many LinkedIn connections?" "How many Twitter followers?" No, that's really wrong. That's really wrong and if parents don't counterbalance that skewed idea of what it means to be a good and valuable person, then they are, in fact, feeding their children that erroneous idea.

Terry: They're agreeing with the implicit message that that is the bellwether of your value.

Annie: That's it. That's the measuring stick. Use it, embrace it, and go out and get more likes. I have had emails from moms who—and this is going to probably blow your mind a little bit. Okay, an email from a mom says, "My daughter likes to wear whatever she likes to wear. Sometimes, what she puts together for her outfits for school is unusual."

Mom's problem is that the girl is not towing the line. She said, "When she wears these things, she gets made fun of. I wish that at least a few days a week, she'd wear the

Abercrombie & Fitch. I wish she'd be more conventional in her dress so that she would fit in more." My goodness.

I'm saying, "Mom, embrace the fact that your daughter is walking to the beat of her own drummer."

Terry: Embrace her originality, right. The social courage it probably takes to dress as she would.

Annie: Exactly. I said, "Mom, it's pushing her in the other direction. Be more conventional, honey."

Terry: It's surprising to hear that mindset here and now, I guess, if you know what I mean.

Annie: Yeah, it is.

Terry: There's a really interesting concept and I think it relates in some ways; you have a concept in the book *Teaching Kids to Be Good People* about something called "social garbage." How does that relate to the theme of your book?

Annie: Okay, social garbage . . . again, I made it up.

Terry: Coined it.

Annie: Yeah, I coined it. It is that stuff that is gossip, is rumor, is snarkiness. It's pretty much when you go on any aggregate "news site." It's those little things on the side that are kind of making you say, "Oh, so and so said that?" Or "So and so showed up at that event wearing that?" The innuendo. "So and so is leaving their spouse of ten years and was seen fooling around with so and so." Those things, those things that used to be the low level of tabloid and now are right in our face all the time.

We used to think that we were superior at the checkout counter of the supermarket and then it was *People Magazine*. Now, it's those enticing, sticky clicks away that you can find out anything you never really wanted to know. That's social garbage.

In middle school, social garbage is rampant in middle school, I would sometimes come to a middle school and I'd be on the stage, beautiful stage, polished floor, and I'd purposely bring some crumpled up pieces of paper in my pocket. I'd say, "I want to find out. Thank you for inviting me here. Your stage is beautiful. Your gymnasium floor is beautiful. How would you feel if I just emptied my pockets and put these crumpled pieces of paper all over them?" and they'd go, "Whoa." "Hey, is that okay?" "No, that's not okay." "Why?" "Because it was clean and people will see you dumping this stuff and you'll get in trouble." "Oh, got it."

So I dumped more paper on the floor and I said, "Imagine I came into this as your school. The stuff is already all over the place. Now, I have one more piece of paper in my pocket; it's a candy wrapper that I ate in the car on the way over. Is it okay now if I add this candy wrapper to the papers that are already crumpled on the floor? Would that be okay?" Some people said, "Yeah." "Why?" "Because other people already did it and no one will notice and you won't get in trouble."

But there will be some kid, Terry, who will say, "No, it's never okay to add to the garbage." I go, "Yes, okay, 50 points for you. It's never okay to add to the garbage. I don't care what happened before. I don't care what is normal for this environment." Think about the choices you made when someone says, "Hey, Terry, did you hear about? Pass it on."

What you choose to listen to, what you choose to forward, or even what you choose to like in the thumbs-up kind of way, that propagates the garbage. I say to kids, "Here's a really simple rule of thumb; it's never okay to add to the garbage."

Terry: If you contribute because you think it's all right to do that because someone else has done that, you might be in danger of being another thing you described in your book, you might be in a group of "sheeple," then. Talk about that and why it's important to this discussion.

Annie: Okay, I did not coin the phrase "sheeple." I don't know who did, but it's brilliant. Sheep just kind of go around with each other and they barely look up. They just follow whoever is in front of them, beside them, and they just keep walking over the cliff with those lemmings. But it's the same thing.

But a sheeple is really someone who doesn't think clearly about "What is right for me? What does my moral compass tell me? What does my gut tell me? Where are my values?" They just go along to get along.

Terry: All right.

Annie: If you care so much about what other people think that you're not thinking for yourself, then you're a sheeple.

Then when push comes to shove and you're now held accountable for something that you did that wasn't okay, then you can't use the excuse "Other people were doing it. She started it."

Terry: Yes. Can we talk about behavior modeling for a minute? So if we're going to not have sheeple, it makes sense that there be an example there of somebody who is independent and forward-thinking. You write, "If you're not modeling" and I'll quote from your book. "If

you're not modeling what you teach, then you're teaching something else." What's the danger there?

Annie: I have to unravel that a little bit because the first time I read it on a wall in a teacher's lounge, I thought, "What is that? 'If you're not modeling what you teach, you are teaching something else.'" What this means is kids are always watching. In fact, we're always watching everybody, adults alike.

If you're not modeling what you say is important in your role as a parent: respect for other people, compassion, forgiveness, social courage, if you're not modeling that in your own life, then your behavior is teaching something else. You are modeling or teaching something else.

I say to my kids, for example, "You need to get yourself up in the morning on a school morning; that is a form of showing that you are a responsible young person. You have an agreement to be at school and ready to work at 8:30 in the morning. So get yourself going." That's what we say.

But if what we're modeling is "Hey, I got a parking ticket. You know what, yeah, I did park in that zone, but I'm not going to pay it. Forget that." Then you're modeling something else. So you're talking about responsibility, but you're actually living something else. That's really what it means.

So for parents, I purposely use the words "teaching kids" because it's an active process. You need to not only watch what you say, but you've got to watch what you do and you've got to live the kind of life that you hope your kids will emulate. That's a transmission of values.

Terry: It's like in so many scenes in movies where the parent lights up while they say, "Don't smoke!" to the kid. You see that over and over.

Annie: Yeah. Or grab for a drink to relax while you're saying, "Find healthy ways to de-stress."

Terry: *Teaching Kids to Be Good People* has a lot of great advice in it. I enjoyed it a lot. I would ask you, is there one particular takeaway you want to tell our listeners about the book?

Annie: Yeah. Teaching is an active role, as I just said. You may not be a teacher because all teachers . . . my opening line in the book is "All teachers are not parents, but all parents are teachers."

I want parents to really think about what that means. You might not have had a very good experience in school. You may not have felt you ever had a teacher who understood you.

You may not have had a very good relationship with your own parents as models for being a good person.

However, you are now a parent. Regardless of the past, you need to figure out a way to teach your kids those values that you deem important to their character development. If you need help doing it, get the help. Sometimes, that help involves unlearning some of the things that you learned growing up from your own parents. That can be a very valuable process as you're starting on this journey.

But even if you've been a parent for a while and now have a realization "You know, now as my kid is becoming more independent, I'm seeing certain things in his or her character that I don't particularly like. What is my role here?" Well, your role is always as number one, positive influencer. Or it should be.

As kids spend more and more time in social media interfacing with their peers, the peer influence becomes more important. But that does not mean that you should step down from your role because even older teens continue to be influenced by their parents. And you want to make sure that that influence that you're providing is very positive, that it's consistent, and that you know what's important to you. It's not that you should be preaching all the time, but there are a zillion teachable moments that happen throughout every single day in every family where you can either demonstrate or talk about something that will reinforce what you say is important to you.

Terry: Thank you. I think *Teaching Kids to Be Good People* is a great read all the way through, but I'll bet you a lot of parents are going to use it as a reference guide just to go back to when they have a question and they have a problematic situation because there is so much practical advice and strategies in the book.

Some other questions, Annie—you're kind of a cyberbullying expert. It's a hot topic these days. Online harassment certainly becomes serious and huge in the media. How do we get kids to play nice on social media?

Annie: Well, okay . . .

Terry: How do we make gold fall from the sky, I guess—

Annie: No, it's not . . . people use the word "cyberbullying" as if it's something different from "bullying." I don't even like the word "bullying" because it's become a catch-all phrase. When kids say, "Teacher, he's bullying me," it's kind of like everything is not bullying. There's plenty of negative behavior that should be addressed, but it's not necessarily "bullying" bullying.

Let's say clear: bullying is typically unwanted, ongoing, and it usually has to do with a power discrepancy. That could be in the workplace between a boss and an employee. It could certainly be in a romantic relationship. It could be teacher to student where you see a discrepancy between power. Or it could be in a peer relationship where you often see it amongst kids. Where one kid has taken social dominance over another. A more vulnerable kid may be more vulnerable to being intimidated.

I like the word "intimidation" better than, not that I like what it is. But I prefer it to the word "bullying" because intimidation is an intentional behavior. It is me as the intimidator looking for ways to undermine you, to shake you up emotionally and to exert power over you. That doesn't matter whether I'm doing it in the locker room, on the school bus, or on Facebook.

So intimidation is really what we're talking about.

Terry: Or in the office for that matter.

Annie: Or in the office for that matter, absolutely. Or on the Little League field or wherever it is. It is a choice. Intimidation is a choice. It's not necessarily like, "Wow, that's quite a haircut you got." Which may be me putting a little jokey spin and a thumbs-down on "I don't like the way you just got your hair styled," but that is not bullying nor is it intimidation. It may not be appreciated. It certainly should be addressed, but it's not that.

When we're talking about cyberbullying and how to teach kids to be nice on social media, I think it goes back to core values. If you teach your kids that it's never okay to add to the garbage and it's certainly never okay to intentionally hurt someone, then I don't care what handheld device they've got on their person or what apps they're using.

Terry: Right.

Annie: That's really where parents kind of step back when they should be stepping forward. They're getting a little bit flustered by the fact that they don't know about Snapchat or whatever the next flavor app of the month is. It's not about that. This isn't a tech issue at all. It is a parenting issue.

If your kids know without a doubt that your expectation of their behavior is it that they will be helpful. Remember when we talked about to actively look for opportunities to ease people's suffering, not to increase it? Then your kid will play nice anywhere.

Terry: You know, I was just about to ask if you were a communist. (laughter)

Annie: I am a progressive! The word "progressive" for me means that we're making progress as a civilized race of people.

Terry: Thank you. We're not politically affiliated at all here with *Unrestrained* or at CPI. So what about Electric Eggplant? Can you talk about that?

Annie: Electric Eggplant is a multimedia company that my husband and I started in 1992. Do you want to know why we chose the name?

Terry: Yes.

Annie: I'll just say that we produce my podcast, we publish books, eBooks, iBooks, and we also develop apps. We chose the name because I'm a gardener and I like to grow all kinds of yummy things.

Terry: That's great.

Annie: My husband formerly worked for Lucasfilm. So Industrial Light & Magic was something that is a very cool name and I thought, "Okay, well, Electric something." Electric rutabaga, electric garlic . . . eggplant, Electric Eggplant.

Terry: Where can people find your stuff online?

Annie: Go to [ElectricEggplant.com](http://ElectricEggplant.com). There's only one. Or you can find me at [AnnieFox.com](http://AnnieFox.com).

Terry: That's A-N-N-I-E F-O-X, correct?

Annie: That's correct.

Terry: All right, great. Now, you're really prolific and you're a powerful and funny advocate. Who inspired you?

Annie: Who inspired me? Wow. Well, I've never been asked this question before.

Terry: Seriously?

Annie: Seriously, really. I do a lot of things, so I take inspiration from a lot of different places.

Terry: That makes sense.

Annie: My first paying job was an after school, part-time thing. I was a page in a library. For those of you who don't know what a library page is, those are the people who shelve the books. After you bring them back, the circulation department puts them on a track and then they have to go back in the stacks in a certain order. That was an after school job I got when I was in the tenth grade.

I was inspired by people who had a lot of books on the shelf like Pearl Buck or people who wrote a lot; they had a whole shelf of their books in the fiction section. I was inspired and also motivated. I wanted to have a shelf of library books that were mine.

Terry: That's a great moment to look back on and now to have that shelf of library books. Congratulations!

Annie: On a more philosophical level, I think Gandhi has inspired me.

Terry: Wonderful. Well, thank you, Annie. My guest today has been the author and parenting expert Annie Fox. We were grateful to have her. Annie, thank you.

Annie: This has been so much fun. Thank you very much for this opportunity, Terry.

Terry: All right, you're welcome.