

Fourteen Talks by Age 14

Michelle Icard, Author, Today Show Parenting Team, NBC News Learn

Reaching Roots Podcast, E15



[Quote]

“Middle school can be awkward and hard, but it's an amazing time of life. Your child's brain, body, and identity are going through massive changes and that means they have so much potential”

[Description]

MICHELLE ICARD is a member of the TODAY show parenting team and NBC News Learn. The author of *Middle School Makeover*, her work has been featured in the *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Time*, and *People*.

Michelle Icard in her book *FOURTEEN TALKS BY AGE FOURTEEN* addresses big, thorny topics, including friendship, sexuality, impulsivity and technology as well as unexpected conversations about creativity, hygiene, money, privilege, and contributing to the family.

In this episode, Michelle Icard gives you some of the tools on how and when to have these chats and steer clear of landmines that shut down the conversation.

[Intro]

Jaison Dolvane: **MICHELLE ICARD** is a member of the TODAY show parenting team and NBC News Learn. The author of *Middle School Makeover*, her work has been featured in the *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Redbook*, *Time*, and *People*. Her leadership curriculum for middle schoolers, Athena's Path, and Hero's Pursuit, have been implemented at schools across the U.S., and her summer camp curriculum is offered at more than 20 camps each summer. She lives with her family in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Are you are a parent of Tween or a Teen? If so, there is a good chance that you're child is either headed for middle school, in middle school or entering high school. These are transformative years, where your kids seek privacy and more independence. They will make mistakes - some will navigate them seamlessly and others will struggle.

Tweens are faced with several challenges. They are figuring out how to express who they are, managing their increased academic responsibilities, navigating peer group pressures and entering into the online world of social media. Add to this romantic interests, changing bodies and determining how to deal with disappointments and overcome issues that feel like really big problems at this age.

It is an important time in your child's life and you as a parent are on deck to help them navigate these years and continue to talk to them. Most times, parents are at a loss of words and unsure how to talk to their children about these issues. Also, your kids are not good listeners - they have a short span of attention, increased attitude and are selective in what they hear.

Michelle says "Trying to convince a middle schooler to listen to you can seem like a herculean task. But keeping kids safe and prepared is all about having the right conversations at the right time. And from a brain growth and emotional readiness perspective, there's no better time for this.

In her book *FOURTEEN TALKS BY AGE FOURTEEN*, Michelle Icard addresses big, thorny topics, including friendship, sexuality, impulsivity and technology as well as unexpected conversations about creativity, hygiene, money, privilege, and contributing to the family.

To best approach these essential talks, she provides a simple, family-tested formula that she calls the BRIEF Model. She outlines What keeps your kids engaged and what annoys them, The best time to talk to them and how to leave your kids wanting more.

In this episode, Michelle Icard gives you some of the tools on how to have these chats and steer clear of landmines that shut down the conversation.

[Episode]

JAISON DOLVANE: Great welcome, Michelle.

MICHELLE ICARD: Hi. Thank you for having me.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah. Great to have you here. So, Michelle, you've spent so much of your last few years focused on middle school, and looking at all the books that you've actually written. Tell me a little bit about your background, and what got you so interested in doing all you're doing around middle school?

MICHELLE ICARD: Sure. So I have been working with middle schoolers and their families for 16 years now. My kids are 18 and 20. So they have really grown up with a backdrop of middle school to their entire lives. And I was drawn to this because first of all, I hated middle school, I think many people can share that feeling. It was a time for me, that was just super awkward, painful, isolating all of those things that many kids that age experience. And I had the background in teaching, I was doing some tutoring at 16-ish years ago, and working with kids, mostly on academic issues, but they would tell me about the social emotional things that they were going through at the time, not wanting to go into the cafeteria for lunch, because it was too scary to figure out where to sit, or having a best friend who suddenly dropped them. And then they were feeling really lost. And it just threw me right back to middle school. So I really diverted my attention from being an academic coach at the time to thinking I want to help people with this giant beast of how to get through middle school, how to help kids, and then how to help parents help their kids do that.

JAISON DOLVANE: Oh, wow. You know, as you're talking about that, I do have a tween. So just thinking about when you say giant beast, it really is in their heads such a big issue, right, in terms of all these different challenges that they navigate?

MICHELLE ICARD: That's right.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah. Tell us a little bit about some of the challenges that you've actually seen? I mean, you touched upon a couple of things over there. You know, I talked about a few of them in the intro, would love to kind of just get your perspective on what are some of the issues that you're actually seeing out there.

MICHELLE ICARD: The way I describe the middle school years is I call it the middle school construction project. And what I mean by that is that starting at age 11, each kid begins to build the three things they need to become an adult. So when I'm out in non COVID times giving talks at schools, I will often say what do you think are the three things a kid needs to

become an adult? And parents will say things like, Oh, they need responsibility. They need organization, all this stuff. And those are nice things for people to have. But we know many adults who are none of those things, right? So the middle school construction project is three things your child is actively building, they're building an adult body, and adult brain and an adult identity.

And to answer your question, the big issues come out of those primarily, I think, the identity piece, because having an adult identity means having an identity that is apart from your parents, apart from your family. So this is why we see lots of miscommunication between parents and kids at middle school kids are neurologically and biologically driven to separate at that age. And it doesn't happen right away. It takes you know, 10,12,13 years to become an adult after Middle School. But it causes all kinds of issues in the home. And the things that I see kids dealing with are changing friendships, figuring out how to navigate that, wanting more independence, and parents not knowing how to keep them safe. All kinds of stuff that stems from that.

JAISON DOLVANE: Right, right. So you know, you talked about sort of, I guess, body brain and identity, right. So, obviously, some of the identity things in terms of just trying to figure out, I guess they have a hard time just figuring out who they are right, let alone try to express what that is. Can you dive a little bit deeper that in terms of you know, what are some of the ways that we can actually sort of help our kids figure out how to navigate that?

MICHELLE ICARD: Sure. So really, up until Middle School, if you think about it, parents make most of the decisions around what feels like or what represents a kid's identity, who they are. So you kind of choose their friends, you're like, well, I set up a playdate for you. And it's happening next Tuesday. And it's with Chris, right. Or you choose their activities and interest, kind of based on your schedule, a little based on their interest, sort of based on your social group, what are the other parents sending their kids up for and then you buy their clothes and you put them in their room, and they can choose from what you've selected, but the sort of outward expression of identity, the idea of these are the people I like and associate with and feel good around. These are my interests. We pick all those for our kids.

By the time they get to middle school, they're like, I would like to be doing this I want to choose who I hang out with and what I wear and how I spend

my time. And to answer your question, how do we support that? I think it's in realizing that that's important that they need to do that. And then in kind of taking a step back, I write about the shift from being a micromanager to an assistant manager. And we really need to give kids far more opportunity to learn how to express themselves and to make choices for themselves at this age. So it's about kind of giving up a little bit of control there.

JAISON DOLVANE: Okay, now, a lot of our kids are when they're actually trying to figure this out, right? I mean, there's no magic formula. And certainly, what I see is that they're beginning to model other people, right? They're beginning to sort of model. In today's world Tik Tokers, or their peer group or whoever else, they may actually see. Are there ways for us to sort of like, put guardrails up and keep them on like the right track somehow?

MICHELLE ICARD: It's a great question, because having too tight of control is going to cause your child to rebel. And I don't just say that anecdotally, I mean, scientifically, your child's brain is driven to take risk at this age. And if we don't give them enough opportunities to do that, to a certain degree, their brain will say, Wait, this is the age when I'm supposed to be breaking out and trying things, I better go underground. So I can do that. And we don't want them doing that. So we want to keep them safe, as you mentioned, putting up some guardrails. So, I'll have parents say things like, my kid wants to dye our hair, and I'm really upset about it, I'm like, let the kid dye their hair, like, stuff like that it grows out, who cares? You know, non-permanent expressions, I think should be encouraged.

Now, let's say your child wants to post something to social media that you think is sexually provocative. And you're like, now Hang on, speaking of the Tik Tok, maybe it's something like that. There are times when no is the right answer. And you can say no, I think your duty in saying no, is to explain why. So you know, I cover that in the book, how do you say no, when you need to. But I think that also just sort of having a gentle interest in what is it that your kid is doing here can go a long way and can invite them to think about it more critically? So like, oh, okay, I see that you've posted this photo, let's talk a little bit about it. Like, what do you like about this picture, instead of just being like, Oh, dear God, take that down right now. I'm horrified. So you want to respect that they are trying to think things through but maybe they just need your help talking through.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah. And I mean, are there ways for us to sort of like coach them along in terms of, what the right behaviors to model are? Or is that controlling it too tight?

MICHELLE ICARD: Well, certainly the word you know, you said coaching, I think that's really appropriate. I think what kids respond to best are questions instead of just straight-out advice. So rather than saying, I saw you did this, and here's why it's not a good idea. Or before you even think about doing this, let me tell you why it's a bad idea. You want to just I mean, it's almost like playing dumb, you want to say, what are your thoughts around this? I see a lot of kids are posting pictures of this certain dance or pictures in this style. And I want to know what you and your friends think about this. So that's the way to coach is to act like you're just curious. Instead of I know what's best.

JAISON DOLVANE: Right. Yeah, very good point. Very good point. That's a good tip for most parents, because you know, we always feel so constrained on time that it's easier to tell than ask.

MICHELLE ICARD: I love that you said that, because I have in the book and you mentioned it in the intro, this brief model for talking. And it's an acronym, each letter of brief stands for a step in the process. And the final step in the process is feedback. That's the F. And that is where most parents want to start. Because for the very thing you just said, I've got about two seconds to say what I think is the most important piece of advice before my kid rolls their eyes or walks out of the room. But then when you try it that way, they're not listening to that either because you haven't acknowledged what they think or feel or their perspective. So this brief model really takes you through some steps to earn their trust, so that by the time you get to the point of giving advice, they're really willing to listen.

JAISON DOLVANE: Right. Can you expand on the brief model and tell us about what exactly it is?

MICHELLE ICARD: Yeah, I'd be happy to. So the idea for the brief model really came out of working with parents. I have a parenting group online, we've got over 7000 members. And it's on Facebook, if anybody wants to go it's called less stressed Middle School parents, but it's a really safe nurturing space where parents can talk about what concerns them. And what comes up a lot is I know I should be talking to my kid about feeling the

blank, pornography that they could find on their laptop or dating or whatever it might be, but I don't know how to start, I'm really afraid that they're just not going to listen, or they're going to think I'm lame, or I don't know what to say. So that's where this idea came from that you don't have to reinvent the wheel every time when you're thinking about talking about a new topic. Brief can be used for every single one of these. So the being brief is begin peacefully.

And again, I think the mistake parents make is they jump right in the deep end. Beginning peacefully could sound like gentle curiosity like Oh, hey, what have you heard? Or did you hear that news story? It's not about your kid, if you make it about your kids, specifically, they're going to get defensive or suspicious and turn off. So just a broad generalization. Are is relate to your kids. So show that you're not you're not trying to win here, you just want to kind of connect like, yeah, I can remember when I was your age, it was always weird to talk about stuff like this or whatever.

[11:00 inaudible] interview, and this is where you're going to collect some data. And I use the word data on purpose because it's sort of neutral and robotic sounding. And I don't want this interview to come from a place of emotionality or judgment. It's more like so what do you know, what have you heard? What do you think? The ears echo what you hear. So it sounds like what you're saying is this, or it sounds like a lot of grownups don't understand this perspective that you're sharing.

JAISON DOLVANE: Validation.

MICHELLE ICARD: Yeah, exactly. And, and it's a good way to check. Did I hear you correctly? Because a lot of times we think we know, but you need to clarify. And then if that's the moment, the parents are waiting for it, that's where you give your advice, or your suggestion, your feedback, your hope for what the kid will do.

JAISON DOLVANE: Right. Well, that's such a great model. It's such a simple tool to just work with.

MICHELLE ICARD: Yeah, I think it takes practice, it might not come easily at first, because it's not how we're used to doing things. But I know, from experience, and from the parents who I work with, that it's really effective in getting kids to open up and feel like they're not being judged.

JAISON DOLVANE: Right. Right. So I want to talk a bit about, obviously, you talked about, we talked about identity, you've introduced a brief model. You mentioned a few times around sexuality, pornography, I had sort of romantic interests. I mean, these are, I find, like the hardest topics to really be talking about, because you know, our little kids that we really did not have to worry about these things, all of a sudden, are kind of like beginning to hear about this and getting curious about these things. So can you kind of talk a little bit about, how can we, as parents sort of just take some of those steps to, put our toes into this world?

MICHELLE ICARD: It is a scary conversation to broach, and I find that many parents think, well, I don't want to put something on my kids radar that isn't there yet. I don't want them to grow up too fast. The fact is that by the time your child is 11-ish, when they go to middle school, they should be first of all fully aware of when you're talking about sex, like how that works from a physical operational standpoint, kids need to know all of that, because by the time they get to middle school, they're going to hear it, they're going to hear it from other kids, they're going to you know, they're going to be reading about it in literature. So, from just a clinical standpoint, don't send your kid to middle school without having an understanding of like, a clear understanding of anatomy and how it all works and all that. In fact, my suggestion is much younger than sixth grade, of course, but you know, at your comfort level, but well before Middle School.

JAISON DOLVANE: That's a hard conversation to have.

MICHELLE ICARD: It is sort of, here's the thing, for anyone who's listening, I mean, don't feel bad if you've missed this age. But eight is a really terrific age to be talking about this from a clinical sort of standpoint. Because it's at the point where your kid won't cringe or say gross and like be horrified by you, but they're still open and aware. So there's a little bit of a sweet spot to talk about it then but you could do it and there are lots of great resources out there to help guide you in how to talk about this and certainly plenty of good books written for kids that you can use to guide you through that.

JAISON DOLVANE: Is there one that comes to mind?

MICHELLE ICARD: Yeah, so what I love for younger kids, there is an online program called girlology and they have guyology as well. I think the website is girlology, and you can connect to guyology through it. They have

online classes that are amazing. And they call them cringe free talks. It's run by doctors, who are fun and funny. Please go there if you're feeling like I can't do this on my own. I think that's a very natural feeling. There are people out there who can guide you through it. So I recommend that and then what you really want to set yourself up as someone who doesn't freak out, so that when your kid is in middle school, they hear something and they're like, what does that mean? You don't want them to go to Google to try to figure it out, you really want to be able to at least give them enough of an answer that you quell the curiosity that they're not going to go searching for a video to explain what it means. Because as we know, the world is at their fingertips, right? They can find things out when they want to, in ways that are far too graphic for them.

So if you are someone who's like, Hey, I'm going to normalize talking about this in our family. There's also a great Instagram account called sex positive families that talks about ways that you can talk about these things in your home to make it a safe space. When kids don't feel like they can talk about it with you. First of all, they can go searching for answers, and you won't like what they find. Second of all, it puts them in a place where if something happens to them, they might feel ashamed to tell you if someone's inappropriate with them. Because you've never talked about this stuff before. You really want to be an open book on this.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah. So it's kind of like, by not being open, we create safety risks also.

MICHELLE ICARD: That's so well said Yes, exactly.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah. Great. So, we've been talking about challenges, and all the things that middle schoolers have to go through. And, I mean, that's life, right? We've all been through that. But what about the positive side of this? I mean, what are some of the things that you know, if we change the lens, that are really great experiences that they can be actually be having in middle school?

MICHELLE ICARD: I love that you asked that, because that's a huge part of the work I do is saying, sure, it can be awkward, it can be hard, but it's an amazing time of life. I mean, your child's brain, body, and identity are all going through these massive changes right now. And that means they have so much potential. I mean, your child is learning things at an incredible rate, they are shifting from concrete thinking to hypothetical thinking, which

means they're becoming really interested in these big concepts like justice and fairness and equity, and, empathy and that's almost a superpower for them at this age. So if we can embrace these qualities, I often relate it to like your little toddler learning how to walk. Terrifying, right? They're stumbling their foreheads headed for the, coffee table, like it's a really scary time.

JAISON DOLVANE: That's right. Yeah.

MICHELLE ICARD: We cheer them on, right? It's exciting. And I think middle school should be the same age, they're going to stumble and get hurt. But let's think about all the potential that they have. And I think for me, one of the most really specific and exciting things that happens at this age is the way that play shifts. So it goes from being like, here are my dolls, or here are my Legos or whatever, to this kind of entrepreneurial spirit that kids this age have where they really want to start businesses. They really want to make money, they might want to start a Babysitter's Club, or lawn mowing or pet care, those kinds of things. And I think that is like ingenious and creative, and also messy, and hard. But it's a great opportunity for growth.

JAISON DOLVANE: Oh, that's great. So you know, you talk about sort of encouragement, right? And, being an entrepreneur is one part of being of encouraging them. What are some of the other things that we should be encouraging them to do at this age?

MICHELLE ICARD: Hmm. Well, related to the safety talk we had earlier, we really want to find ways that kids can take more risks, it really is the safest way to keep your kids safe in middle school is to let them do things that they find thrilling, so that they don't have to go underground, as I said, to do other things in order to sort of feed that need that they have. Independence is a huge one. So I love to see parents, letting their kids explore their world as variable. It is, of course, harder right now during a pandemic to go out in the world and explore but there are some things kids can still be doing. Letting your kid you know, ride their bike up to the convenience store, put a mask on by a candy bar and come home by themselves that is really cool and independent, or make a map of the neighborhood if they go out exploring that way. They can be doing things like making phone calls for you. Ordering the food when you get takeout, they should be the one on the phone, really learning how to use their voice, how to be expressive, how to take control of situations that is so important at this age.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah, a really good point because there's so many things we do still, and we continue to do for them. But actually, we could sort of start to delegate it to them to let them take control.

MICHELLE ICARD: Absolutely. I am like, hey, when this you know, when we can all travel again, where are we going to go? I want you to research, put together a PowerPoint for us, give us some ideas of what [20:15 inaudible]. Start giving them a little bit of power, and they love it.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah, that's great advice. You mentioned COVID. And I just want to touch upon that briefly, because I actually read an article that you wrote around, I think it was titled the quarantine slide. So can you just talk about what that is? And maybe we can just touch upon that?

MICHELLE ICARD: Sure. So I think what many people now know too well, is that there is a feeling of I mean, we've always known about like the academic slide that can happen over summer. And now I think there's the social slide that a lot of kids are experiencing. And adults for that matter, too, who are like, I don't know, if I'm going to remember how to connect with people in a natural way, when I get back out there again. And I think it's important to normalize this for kids and to talk about it and to say, you might be feeling like, you're in a real routine now of spending a lot of time in your room, which by the way, is developmentally completely appropriate for kids this age pandemic or not, they want to cocoon they want to go in their room and be alone. That's another way of becoming independent, in the safety net of your own house. But if you feel as though your child may be uncertain how to connect with their peers, what we don't want to have happen is that they believe about themselves that they're not able to do it, because they haven't done it recently, that they say, Well, I'm the type of kid who doesn't make friends, right? We don't want any kid to kind of internalize that.

So I think it's important to give kids opportunities as you're able to make sure that they're still getting that connection, which is so important, particularly at this age. And that can be you know, time spent by a fire pit with other kids outside, socially distanced, that can certainly be done through screens. I run summer camps for kids over zoom and in real life, but there are zoom options as well. And it's really neat to see kids from all over the country and all over the world come together and talk. They're middle

schoolers. And I know there are other people who do this. And there are programs you can find like out school where you could take a class with other kids. But really identifying an interest is key. And then you can make connections around that interest. If your kid likes to draw, or if your kid likes acting or sports, whatever it is, follow their lead.

JAISON DOLVANE: Got it. So you know that sort of tying it back to one of the things to keep encouraging our kids, it's even more important now than ever to encourage them to socially connect with people, whether it's online or offline.

MICHELLE ICARD: Absolutely. And I would say not, not necessarily in the way that you would or in the way that you want to do. This is a big thing that I see happens a lot. Parents will say, my kid is so shy, my kid never wants to hang out with other kids I'm constantly offering, and they don't say yes. We think that our kids will want to be social and the way that we are, but they are fully their own humans. And you may be an extrovert who has a very introverted child, okay, we all have our own volume, and we're going to turn it up to the level that's comfortable for us. So, like that really introverted kid who doesn't want to go out to the firepit may really love connecting online with other kids who like, manga, whatever it may be. So just be sure I loved your advice. And just be sure parents that you were doing it in a way that fits your kid's personality.

JAISON DOLVANE: Right. Right. That makes so much sense. I want to talk about the topic of attitude. You know, there's a lot of tweens and teens. You know, what I'll hear a lot of parents say is, they've got attitude. And, if you're a sort of a parent of a younger tween, you'll get advice from other parents, something like, just wait, your time is coming is going to have attitude. So, can you talk a little bit about, obviously, we'd love to understand how you deal with this attitude that kids have, but, there's a negative connotation to it, and doesn't need to be that?

MICHELLE ICARD: It's a good question. You know, I can't remember where I read it, but whether it was a study or not, but there was, I think it was a study done about other cultures that not in the US who don't have the same the terrible twos. You know, we always talk about that with parents of younger kids. Wait, get to the terrible twos, boy, you're going to, and other cultures who don't have that concept don't experience as many tantrums as we do, right. So It's a bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy. And I think what you just said is entirely right that we predict this bad behavior, the sassiness, and

the bad attitude and the backtalk for middle schoolers. And if we sow our seeds, right? So I think there is, in truth with that need to separate.

Sometimes kids don't know how to self-regulate, and they're impulsive, and they'll be snappy. And they'll say something mean, or they're trying to be funny, and it's a real miss, it ends up being cruel. So, it can happen, I, like you I like the idea of keeping it positive and not saying like, Oh, it's going to be terrible, just brace yourself. But what you can do, when that happens, is cool the temperature down. If you engage with your child at that level, then their emotions really start pumping, and they come back at a heightened level too. If instead, your child says something smart to you, or smirky, or whatever it is, and you just calm down, take a beat, and you say, Wow, I'm not sure how to respond to that. I'm going to take a little bit of time to think about it, we can talk about it later, your kid will be like, Oh, no, this got serious. And mom's not flipping out. And you know, now what's going to happen? And I mean, 9 times out of 10, your kid's going to come back and be like, I'm sorry, so sorry. I didn't mean to say that it was a mistake. If not, maybe they're really upset, and they storm off. You're showing them when you have those big emotions. Take some time, calm down. We're not going to deal with it right now. And then you could talk about it later. And that has worked wonders for me. And for the parents. I know who used that trick.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah, it's like you've changed the expected reaction.

MICHELLE ICARD: Exactly. Yeah. It's like when they expect you to yell and you sort of Whisper a little bit. That's so disarming.

JAISON DOLVANE: That's true. So Michelle, you've become a voice, for sort of parenting and helping parents around middle school and sort of the early teenage years, outside of a lot of the successes that you've actually had, around your books and things like that, what are some of the other sort of deeper level transformations or impacts that this sort of journey is having on your life.

MICHELLE ICARD: I mean, personally, I'm living the life that I've always dreamed of. And I feel very lucky to be doing this work and to be helping kids and families. It's just like, crazy rewarding for me. I love getting a note from a parent who says, this really changed the dynamic in our house. And I'm at the point now where both of my kids are in college, I've been doing this their whole lives. So I'm an empty nester. And once I'm able to the idea of like, kind of living the dream of talking to people around the

country and writing and that sort of thing, I find it just deeply fulfilling, which is amazing. And really a credit, I always want to give credit to my husband, who is my partner through all of this, who has been so willing at times when you know, I'm just putting in the grind, and nothing's coming of it. Because any entrepreneur knows, as you're starting a business, there are those years, was just incredibly supportive of it, and my kids who were so supportive of it, too. So that's it from a personal level. And then I think it's just really exciting from a kind of business standpoint, to think about all the many ways we can reach parents and families now.

So I have an online course that's a companion to the book that parents can take. So you can read the book, and I hope parents will. But you've may still read it and be like, Okay, I get it, I believe it. But how do I now jump into this conversation? And the course is a module comes out every month. It's a 30-minute thing you do with your kid you sit there, you take quizzes and play games and start conversations, and it's a way of just bringing it home and into the reality of your house.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah, that'd be great. If you get us the link, we'll share it when we actually publish this episode.

MICHELLE ICARD: Awesome. Thank you.

JAISON DOLVANE: What about any frustrations or challenges along the way? Can you talk a little bit about some of the sort of things that you might have experienced there?

MICHELLE ICARD: There are a million, there's a saying that I love. There's no way to be a perfect parent. There are a million ways to be a good one. And I think the sort of yin and yang to that is that there is no perfect family. Even the parenting experts have crazy situations that come up in their homes that they have to deal with. So from a parenting standpoint, I never throw my kids under the bus publicly, but I can blanketly say that we have had many issues that we've had to work through as a family that run the gamut of what every other family is dealing with out there. So I respect their privacy and don't talk about it too much. I talk about some of it in the book where I've gotten permission. So for example, my daughter had really bad anxiety as a kid, and she's fine with me chatting about that. So that was a real frustration for me trying to figure out how to help a child who was so balled up tight, and kind of figuring that out working through that and

talking with therapists. And now she's like, a total Dynamo, studying for law school, great crowd of friends, like happy and confident. But that was a tough time as a parent.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah, I mean, so many parents would probably agree with you. And that, I mean, certainly with our kids, and a lot of the other kids that I see there, there is that anxiety. Where's that coming from?

MICHELLE ICARD: Oh, for me, and my daughter's case and her dad, too. We were anxious little kids, too. I think we see it heightened right now, for two reasons. Anxiety in particular one is, we have a name for it. So we're talking about it. And that's a really good thing. I suffered pretty silently as a child, because no one knew kids had anxiety wasn't you know, we didn't throw that word around, and certainly didn't go see a therapist for it or get coping skills, you just like, gritted your way through it. And there's something to be said for that, too. It can make you strong, it's really painful. But it can help teach you that you can do really hard things. So I think we're seeing a rise in it. Because we know what it is. And we're talking about it.

I also think that, we may be seeing a rise in it because of how we react when we see it. I read a great article recently that said, when anxiety rears its head, and we then go like, okay, you don't have to go to that party, because you seem really scared to go, your kid learns, Oh, okay. When I don't push through, it feels really good. Like, I get that relief. That's the payoff here. So I think, in part, we're seeing it keep going. Because we don't know what to do. So my advice for parents who are struggling with this at home, one is a really good book, I think the author's name is Don Huber. It's called, what to do when you worry too much. It's a great workbook to do with kids. And the other is find someone who can teach your kids really good coping skills for this because you do have to learn how to push through.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah, all good stuff. So Michelle, is there one feeling that you have as a parent that you would rather not feel?

MICHELLE ICARD: Often it's a different feeling, I would say, Yes, so I have two kids. And the thing that kills me is when I feel like one of my kids thinks I feel differently about them than the other, that as a mom, like goes right to my heart where I'm like, what have I done wrong? I want these kids to feel so equally loved, even though they're very different human beings. So that's the feeling I try to avoid, I work really hard to try to make sure that

each child knows, however they show up to me, they have my full love and acceptance.

JAISON DOLVANE: Right. Yeah, I think we've all heard that. You love the other one more than me.

MICHELLE ICARD: They all say that. It is so mean.

JAISON DOLVANE: That's great. So what's your hope for you know, you've been writing so much about middle school and helping Middle School parents, what's your hope for them?

MICHELLE ICARD: My hope is that parents of middle schoolers, don't blame themselves, feel too much stress, feel too burdened by these years. I want them to be really kind to themselves, give themselves a break, and sort of enjoy this time with their kids this really crazy fun few years of middle school, like just have fun with your kid and worry less.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah, that's so well said. It almost takes us back to you know, what should we encourage our kids for? And I think about like, encouraging entrepreneurship, encouraging sports, encouraging participation, I mean, seems like there's so many good things to be able to actually help our kids along and really have a great time.

MICHELLE ICARD: Right, right. It's all about to me, it's all about looking back, a long time from now and saying, like, man, I enjoyed that. That was good.

JAISON DOLVANE: Totally. That's excellent. Well said. So Michelle, tell us about where we can have people reach you, get a hold of your books. Maybe you can just give us a little bit on that.

MICHELLE ICARD: Great. Well, I have a website and it's my full name. My name is spelled Michelle with two L's and then Icard looks like I card. It's I-C-A-R-D. So www.Michelleicard.com. And I'm also on Instagram the same thing, Michelle Icard. So you can find me there. You can join my Facebook group less stressed Middle School parents. And that's probably a lot of options for folks.

JAISON DOLVANE: Okay, great. Yeah, we'll put those links up there. And now that you actually saying your name, and you're saying, Icard, I feel horrible, because I've probably said, Icard all the way through.

MICHELLE ICARD: You and everyone else. I am so used to Icard. It's what everyone says. And so I don't even hear it to be honest. I really don't. I'm totally used to it.

JAISON DOLVANE: Hopefully, I didn't offend you too much there then.

MICHELLE ICARD: No, not a big keep it.

JAISON DOLVANE: Well, thank you so much, Michelle. I really appreciate you being here. It's been a great conversation.

MICHELLE ICARD: Thank you for having me.

[Outro]

Thank you for listening.

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[Resources & Links]

Michelle Icard Books
<https://michelleicard.com/books/>

FB Private Group: Join Less Stressed Middle School Parents

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1674196086202645/>

Parenting Course: Fourteen Talks by Age 14

https://michelleicard.teachable.com/p/14-conversations-by-141/?preview=logged_out

TODAY Parenting: Posts by Michelle Icard

<https://community.today.com/user/michelle-icard>