

**SERIES:** Caucus: New Jersey with Steve Adubato  
**TITLE:** Caucus Up Close with Maurice Elias  
**SHOW #:** 1628  
**TIME:** 26:47

STEVE ADUBATO, host:

Welcome to another edition of CAUCUS: UP CLOSE, where we talk with some of New Jersey's most interesting and compelling personalities. I'm Steve Adubato.

Life before September 11th was challenging enough for parents and teen-agers. Now dealing with everyday pressures has become even more difficult. How can parents raise their teen-agers to be responsible, non-violent and caring adults? Joining me now is Dr. Maurice Elias, a psychologist, professor and co-author of the book, "Raising Emotionally Intelligent Teenagers: Guiding the Way for Compassionate, Committed and Courageous Adults."

Good to see you, Maurice.

Dr. MAURICE ELIAS (PhD; Psychologist, Rutgers University): Good to be here.

ADUBATO: We've had so many conversations on and off the air about parenting, the challenge of parenting and children. Teen-agers: First of all, are they different from any other period of raising our kids?

Dr. ELIAS: Yeah. Yes and no. They're still kids. That's the important thing to remember about teen-agers. They're more kids than they are adults, and sometimes we give them more responsibility, more credit and less nurturing than they really need.

ADUBATO: Well, you know, the other thing about this is for those of us who have children, you know, we--we love those early years and--and...

Dr. ELIAS: Yeah.

ADUBATO: ...you get these other parents saying, 'Just wait--just wait till they become teen-agers. You'll see.' And I say, 'You'll see what?' 'It's terrible, they'll hate you.' And I'm thinking, 'Is it just those parents, or is that just the way it has to be?'

Dr. ELIAS: No, it doesn't have to be that way, although it can be that way.

ADUBATO: Was it that way with your two girls?

Dr. ELIAS: No, it wasn't that way with my two girls. It was...

ADUBATO: Tell everyone your--the--your credentials on that side.

Dr. ELIAS: All right. I've got a 23-year-old daughter, Sarah, who's graduating Rutgers.

ADUBATO: Right.

Dr. ELIAS: And I have a 19-year-old daughter, Samara, who is finishing her first year at the University of Maryland.

ADUBATO: And they liked you when they were teen-agers?

Dr. ELIAS: Well, I wouldn't go that far. I wouldn't go that far, but they were not overly difficult, and I think that was because we--we tried not to be overly pushy with them, and yet we had some standards. I think we appreciated them, and I think that's very important as--as parents. We didn't take them for granted, and one thing I will say that we've always done and that parents don't often do now, is we planned around them, and this was true both professionally, in my career, and personally.

ADUBATO: What does that mean, 'plan around them'?

Dr. ELIAS: We tried to think about what we can do as a family. What are some of the things that they needed our support with, and how can we make our lives and their lives stay connected?

ADUBATO: Give us an example.

Dr. ELIAS: Vacations. Vacations; we're not ones to take vacations that involve leaving the kids. We always focused on family vacations. That was one of the larger concerns that we had.

ADUBATO: Maurice, before we go any further, there's a whole--there are a whole bunch of folks out there, you know, and I'll--I'll put myself in this, who say, 'Wait a minute, you know. Shouldn't you on--at some point, be taking vacations not with your kids to get a break from parenting?' I'm not--my son, if he's watching, I don't--I don't mean anything toward him. But--but yet my point...

Dr. ELIAS: I do.

ADUBATO: Well, then...

Dr. ELIAS: I do. Well, there are many ways to take breaks, and I think you have to do as a parent what you need to do to take a break, and sometimes that involves being away from your kids for a certain period of time. That's true, but it also depends on your kids. You have to keep that balance. And I think this is the most challenging part of parenting today, is keeping the balance between what you need as adults and remembering your responsibility for these kids. And sometimes, I think that the pressure is on the adults to look a little

bit too much to themselves.

ADUBATO: Maurice, as we talk about this, I want to better understand this concept of emotional intelligence, originally coined by Goldberg?

Dr. ELIAS: Dan Goldman.

ADUBATO: Goldman.

Dr. ELIAS: Dan Goldman. Goldman.

ADUBATO: Right. Daniel Goldman. Did you work with him at all?

Dr. ELIAS: Yes.

ADUBATO: OK. We'll get to that in a second, but--but go back. You talk about this balance. One of the other balancing acts that we find incredibly difficult to pull off is the work/home life balance. You've got two parents working in most families. I mean, what kind of pressure does that put on parents with teens?

Dr. ELIAS: Tremendous, because you don't have that much time and you don't have that much energy. A colleague once actually did a study and showed that the--if you looked at the number of steps that a parent has to walk up before they actually get to their apartment--this is in an apartment context--the more steps they got to walk up, the less patience they had with their kids. Had nothing to do with their personality, it just had to do with their energy.

ADUBATO: So therefore, you advocate...

Dr. ELIAS: Their...

ADUBATO: ...homes with fewer steps?

Dr. ELIAS: Homes with fewer steps, everybody on a flat level. And--and parents who really understand what influences their parenting. It's very complicated to understand as a parent, all the things that are working on you, and filter them out, so that you can focus on your kids the way you have to.

ADUBATO: Before we actually get to teen-agers, you told our producers that there's--you talk about this category in the book as well--'tweeners,' right? Some of us who have children--I guess they're tweeners, nine, 10, 11, that range.

Dr. ELIAS: Right.

ADUBATO: They're not teen-agers.

Dr. ELIAS: Right.

ADUBATO: They're not little, little kids.

Dr. ELIAS: Right.

ADUBATO: What's the deal with them?

Dr. ELIAS: Well, the deal is with them that they often think they're teen-agers. They want you to think they're teen-agers. They want to act like teen-agers, have responsibilities like teen-agers, but they're not teen-agers. And so as parents, though, you have to understand that you can't treat them as if they were little kids. They're getting influenced from the culture.

ADUBATO: Let's just talk MTV for a second. I mean, I'm not--I'm not--we're not here to bash MTV.

Dr. ELIAS: No.

ADUBATO: But I mean, you have nine-, 10-, 11-year-old kids watching MTV, even watching Nick--Nickelodeon, even though they should be watching PBS 24/7, but the issue is, they do have all these images. You know, they have--do have all these stimuli, all this information that's intended for, like, 12-, 13-, 14-, 15-year-olds, and they're nine, 10 and 11.

Dr. ELIAS: Exactly.

ADUBATO: What's the deal there? I mean, doesn't that create tremendous confusion for a kid?

Dr. ELIAS: It definitely creates confusion for the kids, and parents have to watch this. The data that we're getting is very clear, that the kids' exposure to these things begins to develop attitudes in them that they don't even realize they have. These programs--the pace of the programs, the values of the programs, are generally not lined up with the values that parents want the kids to have.

ADUBATO: Let's get more specific. You got a nine- or 10-year-old watching Britney Spears, do a--doing a very suggestive dance on MTV or one of the evening music awards, whatever it is, and she's dressed the way she's dressed, and you're got like 25-, 30-, 40-year-old guys, you know, drawn to her, and you have nine-, 10- and 11-year-old kids watching it, both boys and girls. Real confusing.

Dr. ELIAS: Yeah, real confusing.

ADUBATO: And so a parent says what? `You can't watch Britney Spears dance suggestively,' you know, `in a--in a scantily clad outfit?'

Dr. ELIAS: Well, it might not be a bad idea to say that if you don't want your kid to watch it. You know, there's no--there's no God-given right to have Britney Spears in your living room if you don't want her

there for your kids. I mean, that's exactly what TV really is. It's a guest in your living room, and so you've got to decide, 'Who's going to be in my living room?'

ADUBATO: But, Maurice, a lot of the kids are alone at night. I mean like--some of us who...

Dr. ELIAS: Yeah.

ADUBATO: S--say the kid is in the room. First of all, you need a break. You need a break for an hour, OK?

Dr. ELIAS: You do.

ADUBATO: You go, you're doing some--some work, you're watching television, you're reading a book, you're chilling out, so the kid's watching MTV at night.

Dr. ELIAS: Right.

ADUBATO: The kid's watching Nick, whatever.

Dr. ELIAS: Right.

ADUBATO: What am I supposed to do? What are parents supposed to do, like every minute of the day, like get the kid to sign off on what they're watching? Or we sign off on what they're watching?

Dr. ELIAS: Unrealistic.

ADUBATO: Right.

Dr. ELIAS: But more than we do now. More than we do now. In the old days, parents used to know more about what their kids were doing, and James Comer's talked about this. Slowly but surely parents...

ADUBATO: Who's James Comer?

Dr. ELIAS: James Comer is an educator, Yale University, child advocate, who's done a lot of whole school reform.

ADUBATO: That's Yale. It's not Rutgers, but go ahead.

Dr. ELIAS: Right. Comer has--he said, you know, slowly but surely kids are getting farther and farther away from the parents.

ADUBATO: Right.

Dr. ELIAS: Without realizing it, parents have less and less knowledge of what their kids are doing. He says that's the number one issue that we have to realize as parents. Of course there's going to be times when you don't know what your kids are doing, but right now

he says it's slipping over to the point where too much of the time, we don't know what our kids are doing, and we don't know what they're watching. And he feels that's a problem because a lot of what they're watching ends up making our lives more difficult as parents.

ADUBATO: Emotional intelligence for teens means--and has it changed after September 11th?

Dr. ELIAS: No, emotional intelligence hasn't changed. It's just become more important, actually. Emotional intelligence is about the importance of your emotions in being a complete human being. Emotional intelligence means that in order to be a good student, to be a good citizen, to be a good parent, you can't just do it based on intellect, that you have to have that balance of head and heart, that you have to be able to think, you have to be able to interact with people and be sensitive to their feelings. And we have gotten, again, into a situation where we're puttin--we've put too much emphasis on academics and book learning and not enough on experience and what it means to be a compassionate person, in addition to being a smart person.

ADUBATO: How do you teach that stuff?

Dr. ELIAS: Well, you teach it in part by exposure. I mean, exposing--exposing kids to models of compassion and caring is very important.

ADUBATO: For instance.

Dr. ELIAS: Well, think about September 11th and the lessons there about our firefighters and other folks who acted in tremendously heroic ways, and these are folks who had enormous emotional intelligence. Were they straight-A students in school, necessarily? Maybe, maybe not. In fact, we don't really care. We care about what they did when the situation that came before them, and they acted in the name of their fellow human beings. That's an important value. These are folks who--and we're seeing it subsequently--the folks who are dealing with the cleanup...

ADUBATO: Right.

Dr. ELIAS: ...dealing with all the consequences. These are folks, in many cases, put their careers on hold.

ADUBATO: Well, how is it that children learn from that? How does a teen-ager or even a pre-teen learn from a parent exposing a child to that?

Dr. ELIAS: Well, they need to see that this is a valuable part of life, that these are things that we admire also, that getting 800s on your SATs is not necessarily the only thing in life that you're going to need to be known for.

ADUBATO: By the way, you mean 800 on only one half of it, right?

Dr. ELIAS: Yes, each half.

ADUBATO: OK. Because a lot of folks are saying, 'Eight hundred. I can do that.'

Dr. ELIAS: Not bad. Not bad.

ADUBATO: You mean 1,600...

Dr. ELIAS: Yes.

ADUBATO: ...putting the two 800s together.

Dr. ELIAS: Yeah.

ADUBATO: Real quick. We do put too much pressure on our kids to score well on the SATs?

Dr. ELIAS: Well, the high-stakes testing that we're doing is putting too much pressure on them to perform in narrow academic ways.

ADUBATO: But, Maurice, we don't make those rules; universities make those rules. The admission's people at the universities make those rules. We're just helping our kids to play by the rules.

Dr. ELIAS: You know, that's not strictly true. I think the Legislature in New Jersey is making those rules more than the universities are making those rules.

ADUBATO: Why are you blaming the politicians for what universities say you need to get into a university? You need 1,400 boards, you need to be in the top 10 percent of your class. What does a state legislator have to do with that?

Dr. ELIAS: Well, it's what we're doing to get the kids to that point, quite frankly. I think that the universities, when you look at things, ultimately, when they take kids, they're not taking kids with 1,600s. They--they drop down. And a lot of universities in admissions--and I know this is true at Rutgers--we're looking to find kids who are not only going to learn at the university, but contribute to the university. That's not easy to find. But the university is a place to learn and grow, not just a place to kind of excel on tests. And we need students who are capable of doing a whole range of things. In my advising of incoming students at Rutgers, I see what happens when teen-agers have been bred, so of speak, to get high test scores and then they come to the university with all the freedoms and they don't know how to deal with it. They're very smart, but they don't know how to be a citizen of a dorm. They don't even know how to be a citizen of a classroom.

ADUBATO: Emotionally unintelligent?

Dr. ELIAS: Emotionally unintelligent.

ADUBATO: Just not prepared.

Dr. ELIAS: The--academically well prepared, but not prepared in all the things you need.

ADUBATO: You know, if you've just joined us, we're speaking with Dr. Maurice Elias. He has been with us many, many times in this series over our--over our 15 years. We've learned an awful lot from him and the name of his most book, "Raising Emotionally Intelligent Teenagers: Guiding the Way for Compassionate, Committed and Courageous Adults." I want to let everybody know if you log onto our Web site, which will be up in a moment--there it is right there ... (unintelligible) Maurice's writings, those of others in his field will be listed there. You'll find them on our Web site, because what we try to do is provide valuable information for you, our viewers, in this area having to do with parenting and children.

Maurice, let me--let me raise another issue here. Go back to September 11th. Many of us, as parents, struggle with the idea of when--when--when our--when our kids ask us if it could happen again, we could no longer say no.

Dr. ELIAS: Right.

ADUBATO: When the vice president of the United States makes a speech saying, 'It isn't a question of if the United States will be hit by another terrorist attack, but when,' how do we make our children feel safe, or is that gone from the parenting guide?

Dr. ELIAS: Well, we can make our children feel safe, but we can't guarantee them perfect safety. They derive their feeling of safety a lot from us and our ability to project a sense of confidence. And it's harder to do that now when we hear some of the messages that are coming out on the media. But still, it's ultimately the parents who are going to be the--the strongest influence on the kid's sense of safety.

ADUBATO: And, Maurice, what about if we're scared to death?

Dr. ELIAS: If we're scared to death, we've got to be scared to death in private and not necessarily scared to death in front of our kids.

ADUBATO: Fake it with our kids?

Dr. ELIAS: Well, you know, I don't say necessarily fake it with our kids, but I would say fake it with our kids. I mean, I think what we really have to do is put them before ourselves. And, you know, it's

not different--when your kid's going for surgery, you are scared to death perhaps about the surgery...

ADUBATO: Right.

Dr. ELIAS: ...but you're not going to just let your kid onto all that stuff. There's--we don't do that. We have to project a certain confidence, and then we go off ourselves and then we're nervous wrecks. Kids--kids need to be able to go out into the world, and they need to be able to live. Now, what we're hearing is unfortunately so vague and will continue to be so vague. Even if something happens, it doesn't mean it's going to happen again, in the same way, in the same place. We live in a huge country, and there are so many possibilities.

ADUBATO: What is there? A question of playing the odds?

Dr. ELIAS: Well, you know what? You're always playing the odds in reality. You go out in the street, you're playing the odds. Everything we do, we're playing the odds. The odds of being personally victimized in a terrorist attack are not huge--they're just not huge. Now that doesn't mean, you know, you shouldn't be careful...

ADUBATO: Yeah.

Dr. ELIAS: ...and vigilant. Look, you cross the street, you want kids to be careful and vigilant.

ADUBATO: But the world is a different place, no?

Dr. ELIAS: Well, I think it's a different place, yes, because I think that we're--well, we're aware of it being a less friendly place to Americans.

ADUBATO: A scarier place?

Dr. ELIAS: I think a scarier place because there's a sense of personal threat that is more tangible because we've seen something happen that was unimaginable. Or even if it was imagined, the--the immensity of it just--we couldn't even embrace it.

ADUBATO: But, Maurice, it was even before September 11th and--and--and for teen-agers it may be particularly real. I mean, you talk Columbine. I mean, that word by itself conjures up horrific images.

Dr. ELIAS: Right.

ADUBATO: The world of high school doesn't feel that safe or at least through the media image of Columbine and others, other incidents like it. Is high school as safe as it used to be?

Dr. ELIAS: High school may be safer than it used to be, safer than ever before. Even during the time we had the school shootings, the rates of violence were lower. These--these spectacular incidents that get the public attention, but the overall rates of violence in schools had not...

ADUBATO: Yeah, but--but excuse...

Dr. ELIAS: ...elevated.

ADUBATO: ...Maurice, the difference is the violence today is a different kind of violence. Because now you're talking about a kid going in--a kid who has been picked on--a kid--I--I'm not going to characterize all these kids because--because they're all different in one way or another. But the bottom line is these kids are clearly very troubled or they wouldn't have resorted to what they did.

Dr. ELIAS: Right.

ADUBATO: You're talking about kids going in with shotguns, with semi-automatic weapons and mowing down other kids and anyone else that was in the way. That's not the same as getting into a fight in the hallway.

Dr. ELIAS: Absolutely.

ADUBATO: So therefore, if the incidence of violence: lower. What's the difference if you're talking about life and death?

Dr. ELIAS: Well, the difference is how you're going to perceive it as an individual and whether you're going to feel a sense of safety or not. Now part of the problem with the media is something happens in Colorado and we--we feel it in New Jersey. Well, you know, that happened in Colorado. We've got stuff going on in New Jersey that's real in our schools, that's tangible, that's important. And that's what we have to deal with. Quite frankly, the issues in New Jersey schools around bullying and teasing and verbal harassment, I mean, those are things that we need to be dealing with because they happen much more often and affect many more kids...

ADUBATO: Talk to us about that. Let's talk...

Dr. ELIAS: ...and violate their sense of safety.

ADUBATO: Let's talk bullying. Let's talk bullying. Nobody--people don't talk about it that much. Is the problem any different than it's ever been before, and how should we be dealing with it as parents?

Dr. ELIAS: It seems as if the problem is different because the potential consequences are greater. In other words, when kids get angry, they seem to have more means at their disposal to take more

lethal types of revenge. That's one part of it. The other part of it is that we know--we know that when kids are being bullied and they're in a school environment that's threatening, they are not learning. This is something I don't think that we have appreciated until recent research has shown the fact that they may be sitting there, they may not be acting out, but they are only thinking about how they're going to get out of this classroom to the next classroom safely and they're not listening to what the teacher has to say. So when we have schools that don't provide safe environments for kids, we rob them of learning opportunities.

ADUBATO: But--but let's stay on this, Maurice, because there was a piece in--in the--the Star-Ledger, for those watching outside of New Jersey, many consider the paper of record in New Jersey, big article on this kid--if our producers can remember the kid's name--16-, 17-year-old kid, I think, in Hillsborough High, one of the better schools, if you will, in the state. Did you read this piece about the kid who was being--some of the kids thought he was gay and...

Dr. ELIAS: Yeah.

ADUBATO: ...started saying all kinds of things to him, calling him names and then started beating the heck out of him. And then when his parents went to the school, they said, 'Well, what--you know, what--what do you really expect us to do?' Meaning, how can a school protect a kid who becomes a target of other kids for whatever reason, all of it unfair? But how does a school really protect a kid?

Dr. ELIAS: Schools protect their kids by setting climates, by being concerned with the character of kids, by being concerned of the character of the building. I mean, schools can do this.

ADUBATO: Give us an example. How does a kid who feels different, whether it--he or she--sexual orientation is different, whether they wear their hair different, whether they're--they're--they're heavy or they're thin or they're t--tall, short, whatever it is? What's the deal? How can a school have an environment that's safer?

Dr. ELIAS: The school has to be a place where all kids can feel accepted. If you're eligible for being teased because you don't have one of the key attributes that people think you should have, well, then you're--then you're setting a certain climate in the school. And schools take quite an interest, I think many schools, in setting a climate where every kid can feel welcomed. You know, adolescents, teen-agers, really like to be welcomed and appreciated...

ADUBATO: Accepted.

Dr. ELIAS: ...every single one.

ADUBATO: Do--do most--do virtually all kids want to be accepted?

Dr. ELIAS: As much as adults do.

ADUBATO: OK.

Dr. ELIAS: But they also want to be welcomed. They want to know that when they come to school, it actually makes a difference that they're there and that the school cares that they actually attended that day. Now when they are gonna come in and they're gonna be teased and berated, well, what do you think? I mean, this is--this is not going to set a positive climate in the school. This is going to begin to set groups against one another, and this is going to create a climate where genuine learning is going to be hard to come by.

ADUBATO: So what should they do? What should a school do?

Dr. ELIAS: School...

ADUBATO: Say a school knows it has a problem right now. They've had some incidents. They're concerned about others. What could they do right now? I mean, you've got school administrators, teachers, you know, parents--you've got them watching right now. What should they advocate?

Dr. ELIAS: Well, one of the things that they're going to have to do is sit down and really look very carefully at their policies. And when I say policies, I mean what do they really and truly tolerate and what do they let slip under the table? They ought to walk into their school as an outsider and see what values are we projecting when you're walking into the school door? Do we have all the trophies of the academic teams when you walk in and all the banners for all the academic excellence and athletics. I mean, what is it that we're saying matters in this school?

ADUBATO: Back up. Say you walk into a school and that's, in fact, what you see? Say you see the state championship football, you know, trophy for the last eight years. You see all the academic honors, kids up there. What's wrong with that?

Dr. ELIAS: Nothing's wrong with that. Nothing's wrong, but you've got to keep walking. Got to keep walking.

ADUBATO: Go ahead.

Dr. ELIAS: And if you're a kid, you have to ask, 'OK, where are all my students in this school? At what point am I going to find myself if I'm a student in this school?'

ADUBATO: So if I'm not a superstar athlete, I'm not one of the brightest kids or I'm not on the National Honor--or in the National Honor Society, where's my place?

Dr. ELIAS: Where's my place? Do I have a place in this school or am

I just kind of window dressing? And don't I really matter? And can I be picked on and teased and then the people who do that will be protected?

ADUBATO: What can they do? What could the school do? You're--keep walking down the hallway, Maurice. What else should be there?

Dr. ELIAS: You're walking down the hallway and you want to find examples of things that the school does together as a community. You want to see examples of supporting the community, things like community service, where we've got values that we're showing the community we care about, in terms of senior citizens, in terms of the elderly, in terms of the peace--concern with the peace process, engaging the kids in the social issue of the day, engaging the kids in issues in the community.

ADUBATO: Artwork?

Dr. ELIAS: Peace quilts, artwork, music, all the different things that are going to capture some of our kids at one point or another. You know, when our kids go into special education, they get an individualized education plan, so that we make sure that their individual needs are going to be met. Well, why does a kid have to go into special education in order for the school to have a plan on how each student's needs are going to be met? I--I don't understand why there can't be an individual connection and contribution plan for each student.

ADUBATO: No reason that can't happen?

Dr. ELIAS: Can't...

ADUBATO: Or shouldn't happen?

Dr. ELIAS: There's no reason that it can't. And--and in smaller schools, it happens more often.

ADUBATO: Maurice, let me take care of a piece of business and we'll keep our conversation going. I just want to take a minute to remind our viewers that if you would like more information on Dr. Elias' books or any of the topics that we've discussed on this program, please visit our Web site. It's [www.caucusnj.org](http://www.caucusnj.org). And for the family of CAUCUS, I'm Steve Adubato. Thanks for watching.

Let--let's pick up in the last minute we have or so--we talked about billing--bullying, picking on kids, you know, you're--what should a parent do, because some of us are thinking, 'Let me talk to that kid. Let me talk to that kid's parents. Let me talk to the teacher or the principal. I'm going to deal with this myself.'

Dr. ELIAS: It doesn't really work. Implication: Your kid's at fault. Implication: Your kid can do something.

ADUBATO: No. My kid's being victimized.

Dr. ELIAS: Right. But what are you going to do as an individual? Are you going to go to each of the individual parents, and you're going to tell them, 'Stop having my kid picked on'?

ADUBATO: I'll fix this situation.

Dr. ELIAS: Yeah. It's a nice impulse, but what you have to do is you have to go to the school principal and you have to talk to the principal about the fact that you got to get on this and you've got to work to make this a safe school, because it's not going to be this one situation. Very often, this is a--sort of a tip of the iceberg type of thing.

ADUBATO: It's happ--if it's happening to my kid, it's usually happening to other kids in the school.

Dr. ELIAS: And if some kids are doing it, there are probably other kids that are doing it, and so if you stop these couple of kids, others kids will pick up.

ADUBATO: Maurice, every time you come on, I learn something new and I'm confident our viewers have as well. Thanks so much.

Dr. ELIAS: Hey.

ADUBATO: It's great.

Dr. ELIAS: A pleasure.

ADUBATO: Excellent job.

Dr. ELIAS: Thanks.