

Differently Wired Kids with Debbie Reber

[00:00:00] **Debbie Reber:** It's more recognizing where are we not really seeing who this kid is? And once we understand that, then we can get curious about where they are right now.

And how can we scaffold skill development and really get to know who they are in such a deep level that we can fluidly move through learning opportunities and then recognize, oh, today's not the day for this. Or, oh, but I see an opening. Let's work on this. So it, and which is going back to that idea of being deeply connected, the more closely attuned to our child, we are the better able will be to capitalize on those learning opportunities.

[00:00:42] **Emily Edlynn:** That was Debbie Reber on Psychologists off the clock.

[00:00:49] **Jill Stoddard:** We are four experts in psychology here to bring you cutting edge and science based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships, work, and health.

[00:01:07] **Debbie Sorensen:** I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, a clinical psychologist practicing in Mile High, Denver, Colorado, and author of Act for Burnout, Act Daily Journal, and the Act Daily Card Deck.

[00:01:17] **Emily Edlynn:** From America's Heartland, I'm Dr. Emily Edlynn a clinical psychologist based in Chicago, Illinois, and author of Autonomy Supportive Parenting.

[00:01:25] **Michael Herold:** Calling in from Vienna, Austria. I'm Michael Herold, ACT coach, confidence trainer, and author of an upcoming book on being a better conversationalist and making friends.

[00:01:34] **Jill Stoddard:** And from coastal New England, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard, author of Be Mighty, The Big Book of Act Metaphors, and Impostor No More.

[00:01:41] **Emily Edlynn:** We hope you take what you learned here to build a rich and meaningful life.

[00:01:45] **Michael Herold:** Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off The Clock. Hi everyone, it's Emily and I am here with Michael today for our first rookie co-host intro.

Newbie Co-host intro. Yay.

[00:02:06] **Emily Edlynn:** So it feels a little bit like we're, um, kind of like the kids hanging out, pretending to adult while the parents are out.

[00:02:13] **Michael Herold:** Yeah, we're totally adulting here. It's just totally. I am so glad we're not releasing a video for, for the co-host intro.

[00:02:24] **Emily Edlynn:** so, but I, you know, I appreciate, Michael, your interest in, Introducing this episode with me. I have tended towards parenting and all about the kids and parents, and I know that's just not your life.

Even though you grew up as a child and had parents, right.

[00:02:42] **Michael Herold:** It seems that's, that's true. Uh, no, but I, I will say, and I, I, I know I've told you this a couple of times in our team meetings, that what I love about your episodes so much is that they're just so easy and so intriguing to listen to, and. I listen to them of course, because I listen to all our episodes because they're the best episodes out there.

If I say so myself, but yours are, you are right. Like they are as removed from my life as a race and as from, you know, competitive salsa dancing, middle school, young athletes like, you know, I can relate to puberty because that's. You know, just 5, 6, 7 years ago. Uh, but everything else is, is a little bit removed and I still, it's so interesting to listen to your interviews and to get a glimpse into, um, what life is like for other people than, me be.

[00:03:36] **Emily Edlynn:** well I take that as the highest compliment, so thank you. I'm curious what it was like for you listening to this episode about, and I was really excited to do this interview with Debbie Reber. She wrote this book *Differently Wired*. I. Years ago now. It came out in 2018, but it's amazing how she really started a movement towards talking about what we say neurodivergent now, but that wasn't even in the lexicon just a few years ago like it is now.

And I actually really like her title even better, which is differently wired. So. I've been excited to have her on to talk about the experience of raising

differently wired kids, and even though it's removed from your experience, your personal life experience, I'm curious what you found helpful about listening to.

[00:04:28] **Michael Herold:** There were a lot of things that I found useful and interesting to listen to. So I find that when I say useful, I'm talking about things that apply to my life directly, which I have a few things as well, but also her bringing in that. Language. She, she writes that, um, being neurodivergent is a difference that's worth celebrating.

And I think that is so important, and I've talked about this with, Debbie. Our Debbie in a co-host intro recently where we talked about how important it is to use the right language so that everyone feels like they're part of the team. Uh, in, in this book, she, and in the interview, she does a really good job of, um, explaining how that works.

And I have to admit, I still feel a little bit insecure in my wording when I talk about neurodivergent people, because I know for myself as someone who's living with a disability, there are certain words that are quote unquote right, and there are words that are quote unquote, uh, not right or worse. And it's a little bit tricky to guide people to find the right words.

And I find myself in that terrain a little bit, with the neurodivergent population, but she does it beautiful. Uh, job of guiding us through the lens to see that and, and you do as well.

[00:05:52] **Emily Edlynn:** Well, thank you. I mean, I really appreciate her whole philosophy about differences and I think as a psychologist, you know, I studied the DSM and the categories and the labels and this many years into my career, I still feel ambivalent about how I use those categories, diagnoses and labels.

They're so double edged. I mean, they can be really useful for having a framework of understanding and a pathway for what to do next, and they can feel really limiting and not specific enough to each person. And so I think what I loved about this conversation about reading her book is this isn't about what to do to raise an autistic kid or a kid with ADHD, for example. It actually this whole differently wired neurodivergence covers so much more territory than these diagnoses that we throw out there a lot and are talking about a lot. But even within those kids can be so different in terms of what they need and how they show those needs.

And we're as parents constantly, like in translator mode.

[00:07:09] **Michael Herold:** Yeah. And, and by the way, so this is the one thing that I really highlighted metaphorically in this audio podcast was, um, where she talks about. I think she calls it the most important thing, or you might have called it that, uh, to be in tune with your child. And the example that both of you, you both have an example for this, uh, for the lost in translation sort of, uh, problem where, uh, she's talking about a child who

again, quote-unquote misbehaves until the adults take a moment to figure out what just happened. And then you say something about one of your own children that does something that seems lazy, but there's a really understandable and really good reason for why this is happening. And I thought, this is so eye-opening because yes, that's exactly why this happened. And once you have lifted the veil and you explain like, this is why the behavior occurs, it makes perfect sense. But until then, it just seems lazy. It seems careless, it seems, uh,

[00:08:18] **Emily Edlynn:** Defiant. Right. and and think about how this could apply to all of our relationships, not just

[00:08:25] **Michael Herold:** exactly.

[00:08:27] **Emily Edlynn:** parents and kids. Yeah. What is the why? And what, there's something on the surface that could be very different from what's under the surface, and so taking a pause to be curious about that instead of reactive, which the other thing I love about Debbie's work. Her book and this interview is that she really centers the parents' experience rather than saying, this is how you do this to raise a great kid. It's more, this is how you take care of yourself to tune in and respond in ways to your child. That just is better for everyone involved, and I really, really loved that.

[00:09:11] **Michael Herold:** Yeah, so maybe our parents listening can do some of that. She calls it, uh, conscious maintenance or self-care, and maybe they can do a little bit of that while they're listening to your most excellent interview.

[00:09:25] **Emily Edlynn:** Well thank you so much, Michael, for helping me introduce this, and I really hope the listeners get a lot out of it.

Debbie Reber is a parenting activist, best-selling author, speaker, and the CEO and founder of Tilt Parenting, a top-performing podcast consultancy and community with a focus on shifting the paradigm for parents raising and embracing neurodivergent children. Her most recent book differently wired, A Parent's Guide to Raising an Atypical Child With Confidence and Hope came out in 2018 after living abroad in the Netherlands for five years. Debbie her

husband and differently wired teen. Moved to Brooklyn New York in 2019. Debbie is an avid runner, traveler, and hiker, and claims reality shows as her guiltiest of pleasures.

I had to add that last part because I join you in that.

[00:10:19] **Debbie Reber:** Excellent.

[00:10:19] **Emily Edlynn:** So welcome to Psychologist Off the clock, Debbie.

[00:10:23] **Debbie Reber:** Thank you, Emily. I'm happy to be here.

[00:10:26] **Emily Edlynn:** So I'm actually going to start with the end of your book. The title of your last chapter is, if It Doesn't Exist, create It. And I begin with this because what you've done with your platform, Tilt Parenting, is to create a community and philosophy that I don't remember existing before. And as a trained child psychologist, I've been around. So your book came out in 2018 and its message felt new back then, but seems much more part of the mainstream now. So I think you started a revolution for parenting neurodivergent or differently wired kids. So I wanted to start our discussion today with this philosophical shift that you've encouraged from viewing neurodivergent kids as a problem that needs fixing to a difference worthy of celebrating.

So let's talk about

[00:11:17] **Debbie Reber:** Yeah. Thank you. I thought we were gonna start with reality tv, but I'm happy to start with this,

[00:11:22] **Emily Edlynn:** We can go back to that.

[00:11:24] **Debbie Reber:** but I, yeah, I'm happy to, to, to talk about this because I agree that when this book came out, it was hard to get it published because people weren't talking about things in this way. And it's been fascinating to see how things have changed.

[00:11:39] **Emily Edlynn:** Yeah, I mean, even the term neurodivergent or neurodiversity was not in the vocabulary when I was doing my PhD training back in the early two thousands.

[00:11:51] **Debbie Reber:** Yeah. Neurodiversity as a term I think was just associated with the autistic movement or the, you know, the neurodiversity

movement was. Paired with autism and neurodivergent was not part of the vernacular, and one of the reasons why I started using the term differently wired was because I wanted a term that didn't feel like it was pathologizing, neurodivergence, or a medicalized term, or that had a negative connotation.

[00:12:19] **Emily Edlynn:** And I appreciate that. You know, as a psychologist, I really struggle with this tension between the function of diagnoses and labels and categorization and really the downsides of pigeonholing people with terms that end up becoming negatively associated as problems. And so I'd really like to talk more about how you see differently wired kids as having differences to celebrate.

[00:12:49] **Debbie Reber:** Yeah, I mean, I think from the moment that I just discovered that there were some real neurodifferences in my child and that our path was looking different, like. All the messages were that this was a bad thing. Like from day one, from teachers, from camp counselors, from you know, the people we were looking for information like, this is a problem you have to get on top of this.

Like it was always deficit-based, and it was always focusing on how challenging a path this was going to be. And so both from the professionals and from the parent community that I was engaging with, you know. It was also seen as a problem or as an undesirable thing. And so I struggled with that from the beginning, as I know many parents do because we see the incredible things about who our kids are and the strengths that come with their way of moving through the world and how they experience things and think about things.

And so I just really wanted to, from the beginning. Flip this paradigm and change the whole conversation. That was so important to me because not only are kids not broken, there's nothing wrong with them, but also there's so many of us, you know, like at what point is normal even a thing? At what point is there one way to be?

And so I, I really just wanted to disrupt that, that whole conversation.

[00:14:19] **Emily Edlynn:** and I was thinking that as I was reading the beginning of your book, and I think a lot about this just in my work and in my personal life, when we think about neurodivergence or differently wired and you start to add up all the potential differences, where has that become not even. An anomaly anymore, right?

If you think about the rates and the statistics and you put it all together, I mean, there's actually probably a pretty large portion of parents who are parenting neurodivergent kids and who are discovering their own neurodivergence in the process.

[00:14:58] **Debbie Reber:** Yes, absolutely. I mean, our kids don't fall far from the tree. So, you know, my husband and I both have realized oh, we've had a lot of those moments and I've realized that I am totally ADHD and always have been. I had no idea. I was just, you know, the obnoxious kid who couldn't stop moving or talking as a child.

I was a terrible student, but I got my stuff together, you know? Um, but that's the case for so many of us, and I just think that We didn't have the language to identify things back then. Right. It was, you know, it was all behavior focused. So there's good behavior, compliant kids, and then there's the bad kids and, and it was a.

You know, at least when I was growing up, it was very much the norm to be raised by parents in that authoritarian style. You know, very kind of top-down, discipline, consequences, punishments, lots of punishments in my case. And so I think if we had the capacity to do so, we've, we got in line, but we paid a price for it.

And so I, I think it's a really exciting time now that so many adults are discovering their own wiring as part of parenting these kids. And I think it's also complicated because a lot of parents feel a sense of sadness for the child that they were, who was so misunderstood. So yeah, it's just been a fascinating time.

I think Covid also played a big role in this, 'cause people had a lot more time to notice and reflect on their own experience. So it's, it's just been a fascinating couple of years in this space.

[00:16:37] **Emily Edlynn:** Not to mention during Covid the homeschooling that was suddenly upon many parents and they were witnessing their child learning, albeit in a very, you know, irregular environment being on Zoom. However, I think it got a lot of parents' attention that maybe wouldn't have guessed before oh, this is why.

[00:16:59] **Debbie Reber:** Yeah.

[00:16:59] **Emily Edlynn:** They maybe come home saying bad stuff about school, or we're hearing a lot of comments from teachers, like, I'm watching the

difficulty focusing or staying with a topic that's boring you know, or these different things. Were right in front of parents' eyes for the first time.

[00:17:16] **Debbie Reber:** that's exactly right. I had that experience because I ended up homeschooling my child very reluctantly from the time, uh, Ash was nine, it was like the start of third grade through eighth grade. Um, over the years, I, I became less and less reluctant. I kind of enjoyed it by the end, but, um, I remember that first year observing my child, you know, trying to write something or trying to do something, and I was like, oh my gosh.

Like I was like. I get it now. I, uh, I don't know how this human could have, you know, coped in a traditional classroom setting with all the demands and expectations like that was not happening. So I did have my eyes open pretty, pretty early. But I think you're right, like parents having that, that. Very kind of close-up view of what's really going on.

I think there was just a deeper understanding of where there might be learning disabilities and, you know, trouble with reading or focus issues or, or sensory issues or all the things. Yeah.

[00:18:24] **Emily Edlynn:** All the things. Yes. So well, maybe we should back up a little bit and even discuss what is differently wired. What does that encompass? I.

[00:18:34] **Debbie Reber:** Yeah. So. When I use the term differently wired, I am using it to kind of encompass any way of being neurodivergent. So it could be anything from ADHD or autism to being gifted, to having a learning disability, to being twice exceptional, which is gifted with some other neurodifference sensory issues. All of the above, maybe no diagnosis at all.

But we recognize as a parent that this child is really not thriving in certain environments or circumstances. And yeah, so it's kind of an all-encompassing label, um, for lack of a better word. But really, again, the idea was to. talk about it from a strengths-based perspective or just like a, like, oh, isn't this interesting?

There isn't one way to be, you know, we're, we're all kind of, um, unique. Our brains are all unique. We all experience the world differently.

[00:19:32] **Emily Edlynn:** Right. And even within all of those diagnoses or categories, there are so many differences for the unique child what else is going on? How many do they kind of fall into? And how do each of those present for that child along with their unique strengths. And your book is not a how to

parent a neurodivergent child. Right. I think what I loved about it, this is right up my alley, is that it broke the mold in terms of centering the parent's experience. So a parenting book that's actually about the parent

[00:20:11] **Debbie Reber:** Yeah. And again, as I said earlier, it was hard to get a publisher to get it because I wanted it to kind of launch the revolution, use that word when I designed Tilt, that's how I saw it, and I actually studied social change movements for a year before I developed Tilt to understand how to create content that would really get people.

Invested and, and they would identify into the movement and then feel inspired to move forward. So I did think of it as a revolution. And so I wanted the book to be part manifesto and then part very kind of practical strategies. But yes, centering on us. It's not like how to get your kid to do x, y, or Z. I mean there, there are some things in there that would be helpful, but really the way that we show up to these kids and parent them and understand them and, and, really lean into their neurodivergence is everything for how we feel and how our kids feel.

[00:21:11] **Emily Edlynn:** And how family life feels every day.

[00:21:14] **Debbie Reber:** Yeah, absolutely.

[00:21:16] **Emily Edlynn:** And your book sort of functions as a memoir in the sense of you really track your experience of learning about your child and who they are as you're homeschooling, like you said. I mean, so that is a lot of time together, a lot of relationship building along with relationship ruptures at times.

Um, but it's very relatable because I think you really did lean in to immerse yourself and make some shifts in your parenting. So this may be a hard question to answer, but I'm curious. would you identify, you know, some fundamental shifts that you made as a parent as you leaned in more?

[00:22:06] **Debbie Reber:** Yeah, I mean, I've changed everything honestly about the way that I parent. It was funny, my husband and I were walking to the park the other day. We live in Brooklyn and Brooklyn parents are their own thing. But, um, we're walking and I saw this woman pushing, you know, a stroller and her kid was maybe like two and a half and was just on a full out meltdown and this mom was so calm and like, oh, you're having a really hard time right now. And I was like, I was so, I just wanted to be like, oh my God. Like bow down to like, I was so impressed with how she just was like, yeah, you're having a hard time. And you know, after we passed her, I turned to Darren.

I was like, that was not me. Like I was, I fought it every step of the way. Like I initially really looked at all of this as some failure on my part you know, and it was so visible, you know, that this was a child having a hard time and what did that mean about me? And so that was probably one of the biggest shifts.

And I wish I had made it sooner, like I hate—. The fact that I wasn't more understanding that my kid just didn't know how to regulate or really was so uncomfortable in his own body, you know, from a sensory perspective, and was so overwhelmed and I got frustrated by that. and that makes me really bummed out sometimes.

So that was a big shift for me when I, you know, realized, oh, my child. It doesn't have the skills or the capacity to be different in this moment, and in this situation, I'm the one who needs to adjust my expectations because I do have the capacity and the skills to learn and grow and show up for this kid.

So that was a, was probably the biggest one. But I, I think kind of the overarching theme for me was that I am someone who likes to have certainty and to control things and to figure things out and make a plan and follow through and be successful. And so that has been just the ongoing learning for me is like I can't control any of this and the harder I try the bigger the fail and the worse it's gonna feel for everybody in my family. So it's just been this continuous letting go and willingness to lean into the discomfort and do my own work. Like that's been the past, you know, 20, 19, 20 years of my life basically.

[00:24:42] **Emily Edlynn:** Well, Debbie, we are kindred spirits. Because you just described me when you just described yourself. I like certainty. I like a plan, I like to fix things. Doesn't, it's not, that's not really compatible with parent parenting. Right. And I think, you know, I've had this similar journey where. My challenges in parenting, in terms of facing my own issues has propelled me in my parenting, writing, and becoming a resource for parents.

So I think it's using our own pain, um, to heal us ourselves and others. Right.

[00:25:22] **Debbie Reber:** absolutely. I mean, before I did this, I wrote books for teenagers. I've had multiple careers. Um, just so we'll put it out there, but Before this career, the career just prior was, you know, maybe eight years. I was writing books for teens and tween girls, and I was doing that and speaking at conferences and creating content for girls.

It was because I was a disaster as a teen girl, and I really didn't start to feel good about myself and realize that I actually had value and worth as, as a human.

Until I was like almost 30. And so I was like, I wanna help other younger girls kind of fast forward through some of that stuff. So that's just the way I always show up.

I try to take what I've learned and my hard-won wisdom and

[00:26:13] **Emily Edlynn:** mm-Hmm.

[00:26:14] **Debbie Reber:** help other people maybe skip some of the most painful stuff. So then I just turned my attention towards parenting neurodivergent kids and did the same thing.

[00:26:23] **Emily Edlynn:** Well, I see a lot of parallels though because I think the heart of your message is really viewing our child as perfect as they are. Right.

[00:26:38] **Debbie Reber:** Mm-Hmm.

[00:26:39] **Emily Edlynn:** how we all need someone to view us that way in the world. I mean, that's kind of the ultimate sense of acceptance and that we are good enough just as we are in the world right now. Yeah. Yeah, that's, now I'm hearing Mark Darcy, as you said, that, um, from from Bridget Jones diary. I, I, I quite like you just as you are, but No, you're, you're absolutely right. We all, you know, and this is what Tina Payne-Bryson and Dan Siegel write about in their book, um, well in many of their books, but the power of showing up that we all wanna feel seen, like that need to, feel truly seen is it's critical to our healthy attachment to our feeling, um, like we belong and that we have value. And yeah, I think that wasn't a priority, you know, for a lot of the adults in my life growing up to make sure that I felt that way. And I'm, again, I know that's a pretty universal experience for people and uh, you know, a certain generation for sure.

right. And I think, I've learned a lot in my own work, and this echoed in your messaging as well. When our children feel that they're seen and understood, it's so much easier to work through the challenging times when there's that foundation of, I know you get me Most of the time at least, it's more of a good faith partnership on those tougher days.

[00:28:13] **Debbie Reber:** Yeah, that's absolutely right. Um, that sense of feeling just emotionally safe. Right. And that's, I I like to give a shout out to Dr. John Duffy, who wrote this wonderful book, Parenting, the New Teen in the

Age of Anxiety. And that was kind of the core message for him when you're raising teens and adolescents is how important that deep connection is.

It's everything and. A big part of that is making sure that our kids know that, that we have their back, that we, we really, truly get and see who they are and that we're, we'll always be a safe place for them to, to share anything. And as our kids get older, we, that becomes more and more critical, right?

[00:28:54] **Emily Edlynn:** Yep, it does for their own

safety. I mean, it becomes higher and higher stakes.

They're not under our wing as closely, they're more out in the world without us, and so for them to feel safe coming back to us to share struggle

becomes especially important. So you get into some really great common parenting experiences and then some tips and strategies for.

Making those mindset shifts that we kind of touched on. So I wanted to start with one that I think is also really fundamental, which is this idea of letting go of what others think. And I'm gonna share a quote that I so related to, and I think a lot of parents will relate to this. You said Asher wasn't just normal.

Challenging. He was challenging. Challenging. It was like a compulsion my need for other people to get it. And you talk about self-conscious versus conscious parenting in the context of raising differently wired kids. So let's talk more about why that's so important, that distinction.

[00:30:06] **Debbie Reber:** Yeah, I mean, I struggled so much and was so self-conscious. I think, you know, again, tying back into my need to feel seen right, or that I had value or that I was good enough, which is something I never felt like, and being seen as someone who was capable, I felt so judged when the outward appearance wasn't what I wanted to project and yeah, it was really, really difficult for me. As, as Ash got older became even more challenging because then the kind of, the difference between the expectations and what was really happening seemed to get larger and larger. I was living in the Netherlands for those kind of critical years. And um, you know, I, people would just look at me or say like, your child is way too old to be doing that kind of thing.

Um, and so I really, some of my. Worst. I don't know if they were my worst parenting moments, but the some that I still kind of cringe when I think about

were, in those situations where I felt like I really had to over explain, well, you don't really get it. Like this is what's really going on. This isn't about me at all.

Like I am rocking it. If you knew what I was going through, you would know how good I am at parenting. And so I was really, um, yeah, self-conscious about everything. And so I think that pivot to, um, being aware, like part of being a conscious parent is being aware, this is a huge trigger for me. So how can I do my own work so that I don't throw my kid under the bus and actually I show up for my kid in those difficult moments and I prioritize my child's experience and emotional safety in those situations.

And how do I kind of consciously Be that, parent. But it, it's something you have to choose to do every day to do the work. And you know, as I always say, we get plenty of opportunity to practice. That's the good news. Um, but it is a conscious choice to say, I know this about myself.

This is hard for me. I'm going to choose to explore that on my own and continue to work on better showing up for the child that I have.

[00:32:14] **Emily Edlynn:** I remember when my son was four, we were at this museum known to be, you know, a quiet place. And I was with my in-laws. There's a whole group of us and he had a complete meltdown, you know, yelling on the floor. And I remember this moment of realizing.

I have, like I do have a choice here of how I respond. I can try and be really tough with him to get him to cut it out and stop it and be quiet, and I know him well enough to know that will not work. Like things will just escalate and so. I can't worry about what anyone else is thinking right now, and I'm going to scoop him up.

I'm going to sit him on my lap quietly and be quiet with him until he can

settle himself. So I, in that moment, remember that choice of, I'm not gonna worry about judgment right

now cause that's not gonna serve us and it's gonna make it worse.

[00:33:19] **Debbie Reber:** yeah. Like pouring gasoline on a fire. and when my kid was foreign doing that, I didn't make that choice. I would get so triggered myself and then my nervous system, you know, we just, my kid and I are still, we're so connected. Like it's, it's really like the way that we mirror each other.

It's really. You know, at least I know it now. So I, I use it to my advantage. To our advantage, but I would just be so triggered and so I would like kind of fake be calm, but underneath I was ready to explode. Um, and so we really struggled and in those years, and I think you know what you did, you know. Is the way to do it, or even just having an exit plan.

Like, I think being willing to ditch the plan is a huge thing, and, and just knowing that it's okay. Like we're gonna, you know, just always centering back to what matters in this moment. The only thing that matters when our kid is having a really hard time and they're dysregulated in that way, and we know they're dysregulated because their system is just, you know, their nervous system is fried, it's, there's they're just, they, they can't do anything different. So that we have to step in and we have to try to co-regulate with them and prioritize getting them back to calm. That's all that matters. There's nothing else that we can do in that situation that isn't gonna be potentially more harmful. Right. To our

[00:34:50] **Emily Edlynn:** And explosive. Yes. Right, right. Well, for the record, that was my third child, so I had had a lot of practice by

[00:34:58] **Debbie Reber:** Oh, that makes me feel better. Okay.

[00:35:01] **Emily Edlynn:** So many years. The other. Theme that you bring up that I really related to was this recognize when you're fighting reality. And so a big thing I have felt and thought myself and I hear from a lot of parents is, well, they shouldn't act like that.

Right? There's a should. There's a lot of shoulds.

[00:35:25] **Debbie Reber:** Mm-Hmm

[00:35:25] **Emily Edlynn:** And I do wanna point out just from the scientific perspective, that from decades of research on ADHD, for example. On average. Kids are functioning 30% lower than their chronological age. For ADHD, autism is by nature a developmental delay in the sense that there are important skills that are just delayed from their chronological age. So we really, when we're talking about knowing our kids and seeing what they're capable of, it's remembering that their skills are not necessarily matching their chronological age.

So I just wanted to put that in there. But I think really reframing shoulds is an important part of parenting all kids, and especially these kids.

[00:36:19] **Debbie Reber:** yeah. I think should anytime, like I encourage people to banish that word altogether from their vocabulary. But anytime we're saying should, needs to, has to, must, like any of those kind of absolute words are definitely signals that we are we are fighting reality because the truth is, and I, I shared this story in the book, I, I do remember my husband saying, well, he has to be able to, you know, to calm down more quickly.

He needs to be able to deal with disappointment better. And I remember just saying, and he's not

[00:36:59] **Emily Edlynn:** Right.

[00:36:59] **Debbie Reber:** So, yeah. Uh, so a lot of the things I do in the book and in my work at Tilt Parenting, there are these little things, these subtle things, but once you notice them, they can kind of start to blow open your world and the, the shifts really start to happen.

So if you realize, I just said, well, he, you know. He should be able to, you know, get out of the house after five reminders. Um, and so then when he doesn't, then, then we're super frustrated and, you know, we're placing these demands and then our kid feels that they're a disappointment and nobody wins in that situation.

So then we notice okay. There's a lagging skill here. There's, there's something going on that, that is help, that's making my kid get stuck. And then of course we use Dr. Ross, Green's like collaborative product of solutions model and we figure out what is that lagging skill or skills and how can we start to scaffold and help our kid learn that thing.

So, but I think this idea of. Fighting reality. And there's a quote I have in the book from Byron, Katie. She says, when you fight reality, you lose, but only 100% of the time. And I just love that because it's true. Like we, there's no winning. If we're arguing with what's actually going on, then we're never gonna be happy.

So we have to understand where are we arguing. Where are we, you know, parenting the child we wish we had as opposed to the child we have? And, and how can we narrow that gap so that we're more showing up for the human in front of us?

[00:38:37] **Emily Edlynn:** Yeah. And in psychology world, we would call that resistance versus acceptance.

[00:38:43] **Debbie Reber:** Mm-Hmm.

[00:38:44] **Emily Edlynn:** So this idea of resisting reality causes so much more suffering

[00:38:50] **Debbie Reber:** Yes.

[00:38:51] **Emily Edlynn:** than the acceptance of this is

[00:38:54] **Debbie Reber:** Mm-Hmm. And acceptance is not easy. And it's also, and I have a chapter on that in the book, um, but it's, it's also not a once and done thing. It is a, just like we talked about, consciously showing up, it's a daily intention to navigate areas where we are not reconciling who this child is and making a choice to better understand, to better lean in in that moment.

So it's a daily action to accept who our child is.

[00:39:32] **Emily Edlynn:** Right, and we're, we'll make the distinction that we're not saying we're accepting everything they do and there's no teaching around, you know, more positive, productive, showing up in the world. It's more that when they're completely dysregulated and in that emotional haywire space, they're not

learning. And so it's, it's really balancing. Those, I think. But this is all of parenting, right? It's like when, what do we sort of work on as skill development and important change? So we're not just saying, you know, well, we're just accepting our kids for who they are, and by the time they're 18 they'll be okay.

We're not gonna do anything. This is still a very active parenting process, right?

[00:40:24] **Debbie Reber:** absolutely. Yeah. It's not like, you know, putting our hands off a guy. Oh, well, like, you know, that's the way it goes. That's not, um, that is not acceptance either. It's more recognizing where are we not really seeing who this kid is? And once we understand that, then we can get curious about where they are right now.

And how can we scaffold skill development and really get to know who they are in such a deep level that we can fluidly move through learning opportunities and then recognize, oh, today's not the day for this. Or, oh, but I see an opening. Let's work on this. So it, and which is going back to that idea of being deeply connected, the more closely attuned to our child, we are the better able will be to capitalize on those learning opportunities.

[00:41:15] **Emily Edlynn:** You tell this story that I will remember always, it just captures perfectly, a really easy, important pivot that parents can make in the moment. And that is this example you call a lost in translation example. And a little boy was like at the table and he knocked over a thing of milk and everyone got down on him.

And there was one adult at the table, I think an aunt or something who said, what were you trying to do?

[00:41:47] **Debbie Reber:** Yeah.

[00:41:48] **Emily Edlynn:** He was able to say, I was trying to help pass the butter or something, and so it's remembering, you know, what happens on the surface, maybe missing what was going on inside for that child and to try and tune into that.

[00:42:05] **Debbie Reber:** Yeah, and I think it was, uh, my friend, he's an ADHD coach in Denmark. His name is Anders Ronnau. He shared that story with me and there was someone else at the table who was like, what were you thinking? Right? Which is often the default when we see our kid do something that's like, seems like it came out of nowhere and it didn't make any sense and it had a negative, you know, side effect like spilling gravy all over the table.

But I agree with you. What were, what were you trying to do? What a beautiful question. And there's always a reason. There is always a reason why our kids are doing what they're doing. And as Dr. Monadel Hook says, there's very, very little behavior that is purposefully manipulative or negative, right?

There's, that's the rare, rare, rare circumstance. So most of the time if your child does something that, you know, just comes outta left field and is disruptive, or is problematic, or is quote unquote bad behavior. All we really wanna do is get curious, like, oh, what were you, what, what were you trying to do?

What was your, what was your goal here? And we can start to then hone in on, you know, what's the need that wasn't being met? Or what is that, that lagging skill.

[00:43:28] **Emily Edlynn:** Yeah, or what there was a function of the behavior. We just don't know what it

was, and it's exploring that. I think the beauty of that is it also helps a child develop self-awareness and insight if we're asking those questions and helping

them check in with themselves of, oh, what was going on? Because they may have to think a little bit about what led up to that

[00:43:55] **Debbie Reber:** Yes, that's exactly right. And that is something you know that I talk a lot about in the book is. Knowing that everything is a learning opportunity and, and you know, we want our kids to really get curious about who they are. So asking those kinds of questions where they can reflect and think, oh yeah, what was I trying to do?

Or, um, why did I think that would work? Or, you know, where did I get stuck? Or where could, you know, what could a different choice be, uh, in that moment? Those are all great ways to help our kids know themselves better.

[00:44:27] **Emily Edlynn:** Yeah. I'm just thinking about an example where my son, he won't do things that I know he can do like independently, which for someone who's all about expecting independence and children is really fun that like my own child's like, no, you can do that for me. I'm like, you can do it. But I realized I tuned in finally and realized he was concerned about doing it wrong.

You know, like one thing is pouring his own cereal and he is worried about making a mess. And he is, you know, I know there's a little perfectionism in him, and so it's sort of putting it all together. It's not lazy, right? So some parents might be like, why are you so lazy? You won't even pour your own cereal.

And what's really going on is he doesn't wanna make a big mess, embarrass himself, you know, cause more problems. And so he just backs off.

Um. So in that example, there's the scaffolding of, well, let's do it together. Let's come up with tricks for how you won't spill. Like you can use your hand to get out the granola, and when the milk isn't as full, it's easier to pour.

You know, there's little learning to go along with it so he doesn't get stuck there forever. But it just kind of is that example of the, of the why may be hard to find sometimes.

[00:45:53] **Debbie Reber:** it's so true, which is why curiosity is so important for us to have as parents. And I'll just share as you're sharing that story I was thinking of. My child is 19 now and is capable of doing a lot of things that I still end up doing, and every now and then I'll be like, gosh, I'm really like blowing this right now because this is total learned helplessness.

And my kid will go, it's not learned helplessness, but if you are gonna do it, why would I do it? If you're gonna do it anyway. And I'm like, okay, I get that. And so, but I also know there's a lot of anxiety around certain things. It is, it does create stress. So of course the easiest thing would be to let me do it.

So that doesn't mean that I then say, okay, from now on, this is all you. What I do instead is I look for. Authentic moments where like, oh, I'm running late. I need your help, could you, and then I'll ask my kid to do X, Y, and Z out of nowhere and you know, he'll step up to the plate and do it because I need help.

It wasn't, you know, and so, and then I'm like, in my mind I'm like, check. Got that one, you know, learning moment check, you know, but, and I, and then I don't. I don't do it all the time, but I, I do it enough so that I know that my child is learning the skills and can do the things right. And, um, but I'm also not placing, you know, I have a demand avoidance child, so I also try to navigate that balance of not putting so much demands on my kid that he's gonna shut down.

[00:47:24] **Emily Edlynn:** Yep, yep. And that's a really tricky one.

[00:47:27] **Debbie Reber:** It is

[00:47:27] **Emily Edlynn:** tricky

[00:47:28] **Debbie Reber:** tricky.

[00:47:28] **Emily Edlynn:** I think parents are always seeking support for that one.

So if listeners identify with that, you are not alone, um, I want to get a little bit into, I meaningful self-care for parents and caregivers, and I am one that rolls my eyes when we talk about self-care with parents because it's usually very superficial and not actually helpful.

I actually usually avoid the term because I think it's turned into such a turn-off.

But you have some really great ideas for self-care that's actually shifting thinking and mindset and expectations and one thing I love that you said was we can be more relaxed during conflicts because we know the outcome isn't a reflection of how good a job we're doing.

that has been part of my journey as well as a parent is I've realized when I've let that go, how much less stress I get in points of conflict, but I think that's an excellent example of where that simple, well simple but not easy mindset shift can then actually contribute to less

stress, and that is self-care.

[00:48:46] **Debbie Reber:** Yeah. Absolutely. And just so you know, I too cringe at the term self-care and I in my club, when we do this as a theme, we call it conscious maintenance because that's what it is. It, it, it is maintenance. Like we can't Neglect ourselves or there's no way we are gonna survive this. No way. Our kids, all kids demand stuff from their parents, but neurodivergent kids demand so much from us.

Like we can't phone it in. I mean, we can, but it's not gonna feel good for us or for, for our families or for our kids. And we're not gonna get the outcomes that we want. So in order to be able to really show up, we have to prioritize ourself. And you know, for me. I, I mean, yeah, I, I'm, I'm a, I can't stop moving, right?

That's part of the way I've always, you know, dealt with stress is I run, I work out. Like I'm just, I have, I walk really fast, like I'm just always doing things. So that to me is all self-care. I do it while listening to like, podcasts at two times. The speed, like that to me is like my self-care. Um, but I also have really leaned hard into self-compassion and just being so kind to myself and

just acknowledging, like saying to myself, it makes sense that you're feeling this way. This is really hard. And even just giving myself permission to feel like a failure or guilty or all the, you know, the negative emotions that come up when you're parenting a child who isn't really thriving. You know, we have to be so gentle on ourselves and remind ourselves we're doing the best we can, and.

Then really stepping up, tending to our own nervous systems, you know, whether that's yoga or breathing, or just even taking a shower with the door closed and just kind of, you know, checking out and just like having a sensory experience that feels nice. All of that stuff matters and it's non-negotiable.

hear from so many parents, you probably do too about they're just burned out. They're done. Especially after what we've been through over the past couple years. And I think again, and you know, you said you're similar in this way, so maybe of a similar experience.

I'm really good at like powering through and pushing through and I can do it and inside I'm, I'm not doing well. And I really, for me, I'll just share personally, like I hit a wall by the end of the year that I, I had been avoiding 'cause I'm like, no, I, I know all the tools. I can do everything um, and I hit such a wall where I kind of realized, oh, this is actually going to, like, I'm not gonna live as long if I keep operating at this level. it's just not healthy to have your nervous system be activated all the time, '

so,

yeah,

[00:51:49] **Emily Edlynn:** cortisol too. And when cortisol is raised for chronic periods of time that has serious health implications,

I.

Yeah, so if there's anything to motivate parents, and I am by training a health psychologist, so I'm very in tune with the interplay between our biology and our psychology, and that is really been my own motivation as well,

to really tune in to my stress levels and how it's affecting my body.

And then doing all the things, like you said, maintenance. This isn't once a month. Getting a massage. That is not gonna

cut it, right. It's day to day. What is going to be like TLC for the nervous system with everything that all of us parents these days are trying to manage. There's so much input all the time.

[00:52:40] **Debbie Reber:** Yeah. Yes. That's great. I love that you have that focus and um, you know, for me it's been, acupuncture has helped me kind of reset my system, but I got back into yoga. I can't meditate. I've tried. It is just not happening. I'm like, my mind like starts bing as soon as I try. But yoga, restorative yoga has been, has, I think it's saved my life over the past few months.

So, um. Yes it is. And, and just to again, be real, it isn't a, it could be a monthly massage, but it Right. You know, put on a song that you like, like I can put on like me and Bobby McGee by Janis Joplin, and I will. I will just completely freak out. Like, I will dance until I'm sweaty for that whole four minutes and what a release that is.

You know? And then I'm like, Ugh. It fills me with joy. I get this stuff worked outta my body and it just kind of helps me get regular. So a, a song, it could be as easy as a song? Yes.

[00:53:45] **Emily Edlynn:** Right.

[00:53:46] **Debbie Reber:** Yeah.

[00:53:47] **Emily Edlynn:** So important. I wish we could talk forever. Um, I feel like we have so much to share, but I want to. end with this idea of how mainstream parenting guidance can be really frustrating for parents of differently-wired kids. And as a psychologist myself, even in my own training, I know how the standard treatments or what's supposed to be the intervention.

Can fall really flat. Right? And I have to get flexible and understand each child in my office and how they're wired and functioning for what's gonna actually be effective. But I, I just am really aware of how many parents and families with Neurodivergence can feel left out of the parenting guidance world.

Now you have filled a big hole with your whole platform. Um. I know you're a big reader of parenting books, so can you share more just to validate this experience of parents of differently-wired kids reading a lot of these books, like what do you think is missing and how can parenting authors do better?

[00:54:58] **Debbie Reber:** Hmm. Oh, that's such a good question. I mean, I, I do feel that a lot of the kind of general parenting books, and I do read like all of them, um, I get pitched them from my show and, , I'm very curious about it and. I think the, the tricky thing is we, as parents of neurodivergent kids, we're always trying to like, like kind of cut through the weeds.

Like what's the nugget that I might be able to apply in my world? And some of sometimes the books. Just like diversity in other areas sometimes there's the kind of a mention here or a mention there that feels, um, we included that 'cause it needs to be in here, but it's not, there's not a deep understanding actually of what's going on.

And so I'll throw out the Julie Lithcott Hames, uh, most recent book. She wrote the book How to Raise an Adult. Um, but her

most recent book. She's wonderful. I, I love Julie. She, her most recent book is How to Be an Adult, and she did such an incredible job of, of really being

inclusive in all ways and representing, you know gender and sexuality and neurodivergence and race and just having it be, 'cause that's who we are as people. We are complex people with, you know, multiple identities and intersectionality and, and so I think I. That's just something to keep in mind in general. For Par, you know, those parenting authors just think about how could we, we be authentically inclusive and make sure that when we are talking about neurodivergence, that we're doing it in a uh, neurodiversity-affirming way, which is now kind of a buzzword and people don't even know what that means.

But it basically means not medicalizing things, it means talking to neurodivergent adults and activists and understanding, you know, how to approach conversations in a way that is respectful and centers their experience and kind of going from there and just, I think recognizing that there is no, there's no like normal, right?

There's no like normal and then everybody else is over here. We all benefit from all of these things, this conversation is, is applicable to a parent raising a neurotypical kid as a neurodivergent kid. 'cause it's all the same. We all get triggered by the same things. We're all navigating really complex lives, raising children.

[00:57:38] **Emily Edlynn:** Yep. And there is just a continuum of everything, right? And so within neurodivergent, or quote unquote neurotypical, even within those two, there are like executive functioning is this huge basket, and it can be all over the place for each kid. No matter where they fall on that quote unquote typical versus divergent, which again, I struggle with these terms too because what is typical? What is

normal? Um, but I think it's that reminder of the complexity of every human

being and we're all, we all share more than is different.

[00:58:22] **Debbie Reber:** yeah, absolutely. And we didn't even talk about mental health. I mean the mental health of kids and teens today. So, and of course there's a lot of co-occurrence of mental health challenges with neurodivergent kids, but also there's so many children, generally speaking, who are suffering right now,

[00:58:39] **Emily Edlynn:** So I'm curious, uh, 'cause we started with reality shows

and.

[00:58:46] **Debbie Reber:** Yes.

[00:58:49] **Emily Edlynn:** Uh, my fourteen-year-old loves the Show Love on the Spectrum.

[00:58:54] **Debbie Reber:** Mm.

[00:58:55] **Emily Edlynn:** Are you familiar with it?

[00:58:57] **Debbie Reber:** I've watched the Australian version. I have not watched the American version.

[00:59:02] **Emily Edlynn:** I'm curious 'cause I've kind of wondered, you know, this is a, a mainstream media portrayal of autistic young adults, and is it sensitive. Is it voyeuristic? Is it helpful to the cause of increasing understanding and acceptance, or is it further,

you know, differentiating?

[00:59:27] **Debbie Reber:** That is a great question. And you know, as an allistic person, which means as a non-autistic person, I also can only share. What I think is complicated about it and what I have heard, I think really, um, first of all, I know that Jennifer Cook, who I think is wonderful, and she wrote the, uh, she's written books for autistic teens.

Um, she's written, uh, books for autistic women and she's an activist. She's wonderful. She's an advisor for that show, and I think she's done a wonderful job. and I do. I think it's complicated because that show also I have only watched the Australian version, but they, they use a social skills kind of curriculum as the foundation, which is very much based on social norms.

This is how you engage in a conversation. This is how you, you know, show up to a date. This is, you know, this is the. The way to be. And I think there are many autistic adults who would reject that and say, when autistic people are together, we, we don't need those rules. We do our thing. We know how to communicate with each other.

So I think it's complicated. And then on the other side, you know, you mentioned voyeuristic. I think that's complicated too because does it create more understanding for the autistic experience? Probably. Do we need more visibility in that way? Definitely more positive portrayals and um. But we also

don't want it to be, you know what Emily LaDow talked about in her book on disability inspiration porn, right?

Is that it's

something that, so I, I, so all that to say, as an allistic woman, I don't feel like I can say whether it's good or bad. I try to hold space for the complexities of that show. And I, I don't know the right answer to that. it's an interesting dynamic and something interesting to think about.

[01:01:24] **Emily Edlynn:** I'm curious to see with my fourteen-year-old, how it affects her in terms of how she relates to people that feel different

from her in the sense of. One thing I think the show can possibly promote is this idea of the emotional experience is the

same, right? Like everyone wants to love and be loved, right?

And that's kind of the, the core

of the human experience. And so is there a certain sharing that could be helpful in healing? But I think you're, you're right. I think it's good discussion, right? I think, it may be a good point of discussion within this work of, of deconstructing some of this media

and especially in this day and age

of so much media, um, and our kids consuming so much media

is being aware.

[01:02:20] **Debbie Reber:** And just, you know, to speak to your fourteen-year-old, I think this generation of kids are, they're just growing up with so much more openness and acceptance of different ways of being. Again, whether it's, you know, related to neural divergence or gender identity or sexuality or, you know, it is very.

They're just a very different, very cool generation in my mind. So I could see how it would just be like, oh, that's interesting. Like a deeper understanding. Cool. Whatever, you know?

[01:02:52] **Emily Edlynn:** Right. Very different from growing up in the eighties and having this whole, all this baggage attached to everything.

I think our kids are, don't have that package. It's actually really refreshing. As much as we worry about this

[01:03:05] **Debbie Reber:** Yeah. They have their own challenges for sure, related to all these things, but I, I do think seeing how open they are and, and authentic and being who they are is really inspiring to me.

[01:03:21] **Emily Edlynn:** Barry, Very., so I'm gonna end with a scene from your book that I loved because I do this all the time, and that is watching your child sleep and as a form of reset. So this is how you, the context you placed it in is this idea of when there is sleep in their bed and it's calm and peaceful. Having that moment of just looking at them and seeing them as you are incredible.

You know, no matter what we went through today,

you are an amazing person. And as we started, I think that's just what all of us need in our lives is people seeing us flaws and all, no matter how hard the day was, that there's a perfection there in the imperfections. So.

[01:04:14] **Debbie Reber:** Hmm.

[01:04:15] **Emily Edlynn:** It was a lovely reset tip that I think other parents could benefit from.

[01:04:20] **Debbie Reber:** that was so helpful for me to do that and I try to almost connect on a soul-to-soul level, you know, in that moment and the essence of who my child was and just lean into that love. And I also will just encourage parents listening to this to consider, trying to have a light-up moment every day. That's something I do with my child is that. Making sure that there's an opportunity, whether it's coming up to the dinner table or picking up after school or something where I just do my best to exude love and just really light up when I see my kids, so they know how happy I am and full of joy that, that I get to be their parent, you know?

[01:05:06] **Emily Edlynn:** Yeah, I love that. It's like an unabashed adoration for a moment. They don't have to do anything for it. They

don't have to earn anything. It's just

there, and you're just really happy to be around them.

Yeah,

I love that. So thank you so much, Debbie, for your time today and your advocacy every day. What you have built in the last few years is extraordinary.

We've been really fortunate to have you on Psychologist Off the clock. Is there anything we didn't touch on that you want to add to the conversation?

[01:05:39] **Debbie Reber:** Um, well first of all, thank you for this conversation. It was really fun to go deep into some of these things and yeah, explore this. I appreciated it. I would just say that anyone listening to this show, you've got this. It is the most humbling experience to be a parent, and we can often just feel like we're getting it wrong and we've made bad decisions and we would've done things differently if only we'd known X, Y, or Z.

And I just wanna encourage you to. Treat yourself with grace and kindness and know that you're exactly the parent that your child needs.

[01:06:12] **Emily Edlynn:** Right. Our child is exactly the right person for them, and we are exactly the right parent. Hey, you know what? Our kids are lucky to have us. I'm gonna say

that too.

[01:06:24] **Debbie Reber:** percent. Yes.

[01:06:26] **Emily Edlynn:** All right, Debbie. So where can people find you?

[01:06:29] **Debbie Reber:** So the best place for everything is Tiltparenting.com. You can find all. 360 plus podcast episodes, including the one that we did together, Emily, and you can read it first chapter of my book and learn about my differently Wired Club community. And there's a ton of free resources on there as well. So Tiltparenting.com.

[01:06:52] **Emily Edlynn:** Yeah, it's amazing. There are all these groups all over the country. I mean, it's really incredible what you have developed, so

thank you for what you have contributed to the world.

[01:07:01] **Debbie Reber:** Thank you so much.

[01:07:02] **Jill Stoddard:** thank you for listening to Psychologists Off the Clock. If you enjoy our podcast, you can help us out by leaving a review or contributing on Patreon.

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