A Mother's Story - Philippa

[00:00:00] **Delphine:** Welcome back to the access to education podcast, where we talk about all things having to do with learning disabilities and learning challenges. Being able to share stories on this podcast is what I love about it. Getting to speak to people and learn about their journeys to help even one listener feel less alone makes it worth it.

When we start out as parents, we have no idea what the road holds for us. We have a vision of what it might be like, but we cannot predict the future. On this episode, I'm speaking to Philipa, she's a mother wife, former lawyer now life, coach and author from Bristol, UK. She has a journey, which like many of ours is unique to her and her family, but within their unique story is one I'm sure some can relate to Philipa was sure that her son was struggling at school, but the school just kept saying, it's fine.

He'll catch up. Just wait. There's time during the pandemic lockdown, she began to really see her son's needs. She used this evidence to advocate even more [00:01:00] strongly for her child. Philipa welcome to the show. I'm really glad you are here to have this conversation.

[00:01:06] **Philippa:** Yeah. Hi. Thanks for having me. It's great to meet here.

[00:01:09] **Delphine:** It's just so nice to, to just, you know, Talk about our kids in our journeys. Because as I said, in, in the intro, it really is about sharing story and sharing your journey, your road. None of our roads are the same. Yeah. But there are definitely parallels. There are similarities. And I remember for myself when I was going through it with my own kids, even though I had personally done it, I think, you know, as a child with a learned usability going through, it was one thing.

But as a parent, it's like a whole other, that's a whole other ballgame. So I'm excited for this conversation. Yeah.

[00:01:40] **Philippa:** Yeah, me too.

[00:01:41] **Delphine:** So let's start right at the beginning. Can you tell us a little bit about your son's journey, what you were noticing and kind of maybe some background on the school and what was happening?

Just kind of give us an overview of what was going on.

[00:01:52] **Philippa:** Yeah, yeah, of course. So I've got two sons who are just under two years apart and they're they're one school year [00:02:00] apart because of where their birthdays fall. So, you know they're the only children I've ever had. And, you know, I kind of think they're both boys, they're the same mom and dad, they're growing up together.

How different can they be? Well, of course, you know, we all know they're very different. And I. Very much was guilty of comparing them in that, well, this one was doing this by the oldest one was doing this by this stage, so, mm. Why is the younger one? Not. So there was, you know, there, there were quite a few times that I, I thought that, one of them was most definitely the way he was at school and, I pretty much thought from age.

So year one here is age six where they turn six. So. Reception was fine. Um, but that, by the time he got it to year one, I noticed his reluctance to read at school. [00:03:00] So at home he was reading or he definitely seemed to be able to read to an appropriate level, but at school there were like, Uh, yeah, he's not, he's just going a bit slow.

So we'll move him up when he's ready. And I was like, right. Okay. And I couldn't decide how much of it was me feeling like the peer pressure of all the other kids are, are doing better than mine. And why is he not? And I can see him doing this at home and I, I couldn't quite work out whether there was some of that going on, but I, I think I knew.

In my gut, that something wasn't quite right. There was definitely a disconnect between what I saw and what was being fed back to me from school. So I went in one day and said, you know, um, I'm not quite sure what's going on here because he, I think he seems to be much more capable. Than [00:04:00] what is going on in here.

And they sort of just fogged me off really and said, yeah, yeah. You know, he, he, he's fine. And he just needs a little bit more time. and that was kind of the pattern all the way through primary school. you know, he just here in the UK, they test them at seven and then test them at 11, I think. And. You know, every time he just missed the mark.

Um, but it's like, he's okay. He's, you know, he's doing okay. He's pretty average. He just takes a little bit longer. Um, yeah. You know, fine. Um, I kind of get that, that some kids are like that. And I, but I just felt that nobody was getting him. I just felt that, oh, you know, hopefully one teacher will actually see.

In him, something that I thought others hadn't. I mean, he was happy at school on the whole, he didn't enjoy lessons, but he [00:05:00] liked going to school, you know, but if you asked him what's his favorite thing, he would always say home time. Um,

so, you know, we kind of, you know, it wasn't an awful, it wasn't a terrible disaster. Don't get me wrong. You know, school wasn't really awful, but I did have this niggle all the time, all the way through primary school, which for us is up to year, uh, up to age 11. And. Same happened in, in secondary school.

 But for, for us, , so, you know, we went into lockdown here in March, 2020. Gosh, I, so I found it so hard working out times now. I think that was when he was in. The first year of secondary school. Yeah, it must have been. Yeah. So it was, um, it, it halfway through the first year of secondary school and, um, you know, so all the lessons went online and I.

You know, uh, we were quite good during the first lockdown. I tried to get my sons to do the work we eased off after a while because I realized quite what a battle it was and how amazing teachers are. And I am not a teacher, [00:06:00] but what I realized was it was, it was fascinating because I, he didn't wanna do the work, but if I sat with him and I read the work to him, He worked out the answers and I typed the answers for him.

He knew it all. We could have a discussion about it. He understood it. He got it. And the kid that I know who is very articulate, who is very aware of what's going on in the world, who learns a lot from YouTube, God, you know, don't, they, you know, um, Cause it's video. Um, you know, he, he, and he often went off and looked at videos about some of the things that we'd been talking about.

So it wasn't even that he was disinterested, he was interested, he was articulate. He was capable of doing it all. But what he couldn't do with, with any ease was read the lesson and type or write his answers because. He doesn't do much typing at school, so he is not that, , [00:07:00] buffet with the keyboard, but all, and his, his handwriting is, is lefty as well.

So he is lefthanded. His handwriting is not brilliant. So he kind of doesn't try because the teacher said they can't meet his handwriting. So I realized then that something wasn't right. Um,

[00:07:17] **Delphine:** and that's the thing too, right? Like what you're bringing up. So there's two things that you've said in all of this that I think is really important.

And I just kind of wanna go back to for yeah, please, before we get too far. But the first thing is that gut instinct that parental, like something doesn't feel right. And I've talked about it before and I've certainly talked to experts about it and I've talked to other parents about it. Listen, it doesn't matter how your child got to you.

Cause I've spoken to parents who have adopted children and they, they know they're like something isn't matching the child I have in front of me. And the things they do with me on a daily basis are not matching what the teacher is saying, what they're coming home, what the child, themselves, like all of that doesn't match up.

So I [00:08:00] think that's the first thing that I wanna kind of highlight that you've said in all of this, is that like, if you're a parent listening and your gut is saying to you, something's not lining up here, continue to do, as you did, right. Continue to advocate, continue to ask, see your family, doctor, go see all the people do the thing.

But I think the other thing that's important for people to notice. And I think a lot of parents. Got a really interesting insight during the lockdowns when we were learning from home, kind of how their child responds to learning and the learning environment and the way in which it's set up for them.

And what I mean by that is not every child can sit in a desk, read the instructions and just write beautiful sonnets about whatever was. Told to them, they need it done in a different way. They need it chunked. Maybe they need, you know, less writing on the page. So they're not overwhelmed. Maybe they need a sentence starter, right?

Like yesterday I read about, okay, well, there's, there's your beginning of the sentence you fill in the blank, right? Because for some of our [00:09:00] kiddos, the blank page is overwhelming. Yeah, too much information is like, whoa, okay. I can't possibly do all, then I'm not gonna do it. So then they resist it and they don't do it.

Even though like your son, like my own children, they're so capable. It's all in the, the, the brain. And I was gonna say, it's all in here and I'm pointing to my head. Nobody can see me, but yeah, it's all in their head. They have the information. The problem becomes the time and the effort that they must use to go from the brain kind.

Put the thought into some sort of organized pattern so that it's not coming out as gibberish. And then it has to go all the way down their arm and through a pencil or all the way down their arm and typed on a screen. So I think all of those things get in the way of our kids being able to perform really well.

So that's why some of the technologies that we have, so the voice to text is really brilliant. I didn't have that as a kid. I wish I did it would've been lovely. But yet it's been very interesting. I've spoken to a couple of parents, , Over the pandemic when there was the lockdown and they're [00:10:00] saying, oh, I just didn't realize what accommodations cuz that's what they are.

They're just little accommodations and they're not, they're not massive. They're not making the child seem massively different from anybody else. , they're making them successful. So once you came outta lockdown and you were kind of able to get back into the school buildings, how did you start the conversation with the teachers?

Where did that go?

[00:10:25] **Philippa:** Well, I decided that I had to get him assessed because I knew school wouldn't do anything. I was pretty sure school wouldn't do anything, , about it without a formal assessment. And there isn't any money in the state system here for them to do the assessments they did use to do them years ago, but the chronic underfunding just means they, they don't do it.

And also because he's just about managing, he's just about. Slightly below average, he's not bad enough to warrant the internet. The, the, you know, bad. He's not he's, his needs are [00:11:00] not serious enough to warrant the interventions where that there is money for. So I, um, I got, uh, him a formal assessment by educational psychologist.

Um, which luckily, because he was 12 at the time she could do on zoom cuz we was, um, we were still, um, in lockdown and she came back and said to me, he is clearly severely dyslexic and she has absolutely no idea how he's managed up until now. Which was a relief and a shock , um, you know, in equal measure.

So that's sort of like 16 months ago now.

[00:11:37] **Delphine:** It's interesting that he came back with that diagnosis of severe, but was able to make it all the way to high school. Yeah. Right.

[00:11:47] **Philippa:** Yeah. Yeah. I, and I think, because at high school, the, the, the speed of doing the work and the quantity of work that is required, just ramps up so much.

I think his coping mechanisms [00:12:00] just don't work anymore. And, um, He wasn't able to keep up in class, uh, read the work, copy the work down from the, the, the, the whiteboard, um, and produce off writing. And he said that the amount of red all over it, if he did do some writing was really, uh, disheartening. So he actually just stopped working really,

[00:12:24] **Delphine:** but she's like, we still use red pens.

I think we should ban the making of red pens. I think we should get a petition going to say, op pen company will ever make the color red ever again. Know

[00:12:34] **Philippa:** it's and it, you know, he, he, he only really opened up to me after we'd had this diagnosis. Uh, and he, he just, he was telling me it's just, oh God, it was heartbreaking listening to it.

But the one thing he did say to me was which really broke my heart, but also really helped us move forward. He said to me, oh, does that mean I'm not stupid then? Oh, I know it's just so [00:13:00] awful, isn't it? So, oh my God. I was like, you know, always filling up now thinking about it because I had not realized he, he, that he was sitting in classes.

Children who were just doing their work. And he kind of, he said, you know, in some cases I know that I can do that work, but I, in my head, I know I can do it, but I can't actually get it on the paper. And, you know, I just thought I, there was something really I'm just stupid or there's something wrong with me that meant I couldn't do it. So for him, it was a real relief.

[00:13:33] **Delphine:** And I think there's something to be said for, and I know people don't like the word label, but I'm gonna use the word label. There is something to be said for being able to label the thing that makes it difficult. Right. Um, I was just having this conversation with someone the other day, in terms of, you know, how do we tell our kid?

We haven't told them yet. And this was in the context of the parent had said, well, my child came to me and said, I must have Alzheimer's cuz I [00:14:00] can't remember anything. And the parent was. No, but then didn't tell them the thing that they had. Do you know what I'm saying? Like, yeah. Parents are sort of keeping that ver and I understand as parents, we, we don't wanna shatter our children.

We, we wanna, we wanna protect them. We wanna guide them. We wanna help them grow and flourish. But if, if they sense that something is wrong and then we, as the parent having the information I feel, and this is my opinion, and everybody has their own opinion. You're. It's fine, but I feel like if your child comes to you and says, I feel this and that, and you have information that can help them better understand their thinking, their learning, their brain, how they see the world.

I think it's important to share that. So by getting this diagnosis, you were really able to give your child a window on what is he really, really good at? Because my guess is there was like a laundry list of things that he was above average average on, for sure. And then there's a small list of things that like, sort of below average, well, below average, right?

That's usually what happens. There's a big [00:15:00] discrepancy between what they're capable of and what they output. And that's the important piece for parents to be able to communicate and teachers to understand and children to understand that they're not stupid. They are not at all. No child is stupid. They all just come to things and learn things in a different.

[00:15:20] **Philippa:** Yeah, well, it's in, it is really interesting cuz now I see how restrictive our school system is here. That, you know, it's just, you know, as long as you're in that lane, you know, which is I'm, I'm pointing with straight lines with my hands, which again is not very useful on a podcast, but as long as you are, your, your children are in that narrow lane, then you know, they'll do fine.

But if they are outside that lane, for whatever reason, . You know, there's, there's going to be some difficulties. There's going to be some accommodations that are needed. But actually, I, I think there are more kids outside that lane than there are actually [00:16:00] in that lane and making accommodations to suit. I believe that actually kids certainly here in the UK could be taught an, an awful lot better.

That would suit everybody. But I dunno what that answer is, and I'm not a teacher and I don't, you know, that's not my expertise. But, um, and I, I know what you mean about labels. I, I have friends who don't want even to have assessments because they don't want to even think about whatever label that might be.

I'm completely opposite. I think like you, I think it helps explain. It helps them understand it helps you know where to look for, for support. You know, I mean, I've got two children that on the face of it are, you know, I've got one child who's dyslexic and the other child has my mild cerebral palsy.

And, you know, you, I said to my husband, I said, it's really funny. We've got two children who would actually, if you wanted to be labeling them disabled, it's made me rethink all that as well. And that's a [00:17:00] whole of a, um, conversation. So they're not average children. You know, but they're, they're brilliant kids.

They're gonna, I'm sure they're gonna do course I am saying that on their mom, I'm sure they're gonna do, you know, great things. But from the, you know, this, this very small, normal average, sort of label, which is a label in itself in a way they, they fall well outside of that. And then yeah. I'm quite, you know, quite glad they do

[00:17:31] **Delphine:** I need to, we need to normalize the idea of difference.

[00:17:35] **Philippa:** I agree. Totally.

[00:17:36] **Delphine:** We need to normalize. I mean, none of us are the same. We are all inherently different. Yes. And I think if we can kind of. I don't know it. I don't, I don't know what other word we use and this is something I ponder often on my drive home from work of like, how can I, you know, say that differently?

How can I word it differently? How can I make it different? But just having the diagnosis, having the understanding, [00:18:00] knowing what they're good at playing to the goods. Good strengths to support the not so good things are all things that are gonna move them forward. And this isn't just in education. This isn't just in school.

This is in life. And even later on in life, when they are working. Having accommodations and things put in place to support them to be successful in the environment in which they're working. And I did do another podcast, uh, a while back with someone who talks about autism and adults in the working environment and what it is that employers can do to support their neurodiverse workforce, feel successful, feel included, feel worthy, right?

All of those things, cuz no matter what. The hindrance is or what the disability is or what the neurodiversity is. The person inevitably wants to feel a part of society wants to feel like they are contributing to their own selves, to their family, to their friends, to [00:19:00] whatever. And sometimes it's a small accommodation, but if we don't know what the hindrance is, if we don't know what's going on in the brain to understand the wiring that makes.

What we perceive to be different, but for them perceived to be normal. Yeah. You know, when you can't see. Right. And you, you know, it's funny if a friend posted a video of her son, she didn't know, he couldn't see anything. Well, he wasn't seeing right. Took him to the eye doctor and she videoed this. And the eye doctor, you know, they do the check and they put the different lenses over.

Anyhow, he went back and got the glasses for her son and he put fun. He was like, mom,

is this what the world looks like? Oh, because for him it was that little accommodation of putting on glasses that allowed him to see properly. So if we can look at our children with learning differences in the same light of like giving them.

Technology, for example, giving them more time, removing the amount of work it's like putting on glasses for them. It allows them to go, oh, I can do this. I am smart. I am capable. It. It's [00:20:00] a tiny little change.

[00:20:01] **Philippa:** Yeah. Yes, absolutely. And, and like you say, it also helps them understand what they are good at because when we're not all, you know, we're not all good at everything.

So, um, you know, we he's, he's learned cause I've learned, I mean, I didn't know anything about dyslexia. So I have, I did take him a few years, um, before his formal, um, assessment for a screening that this lady said, she, and he passed out with flying color. Which is interesting. So he passed out, no problem, but then it turns out he's fairly dyslexic, which is like, cause he's got the visual thing and the auditory thing going on.

So, you know, he said, cause he said to me, he said, you know what I said, when you said, did you hear me? And I said, I heard you, but I don't remember what you said. He said, I really don't. Um, I was like, oh God. Um, but you know, he's his spatial awareness is amazing. You know, when we go away, he packs the car.

Yeah. Because he unpack it so much better that he can. So much more stuff in than anybody else can. Um, [00:21:00] I

[00:21:00] **Delphine:** used to call it the Teris right. I used to be able to do the trunk Teris and I could play Teris really, really well. Yeah. Old enough to remember, I don't know, probably there are maybe people on this podcast who have know nothing about what Teris is, but yeah, I was really good at that.

Moving the shapes and I could see, and I could move them in the air to see where they would fit. Yeah,

[00:21:17] **Philippa:** exactly. And my husband's been an engineer and you know, they're always messing, he's got loads of tools and stuff out in the garage and they're always messing about doing stuff. And my youngest son will go and help him with things and he will come up with solutions.

He'll go, well, have you thought about doing it like this? You know, my husband's like, you know, 35, 40 years experience being an engineer and he'll go. God, I've never thought about it like that. He, he really, you know, his neurodiversity is like, is a great gift. It's just, and I don't really worry about him out in the world.

Actually, once he's left school, it's just getting him through this, which is, which is awful. But this is the way I feel about it. It's getting him through school. Yeah. [00:22:00] So that he comes out with enough. Qualifications to allow him to at least be seek, be, be viable for work and without having him without his self confidence crushed.

[00:22:13] **Delphine:** Wow. That's the thing. So what's been the hardest part for you in terms of advocating for your child in all of this? What's what's been the hard part.

[00:22:22] **Philippa:** Well, I certainly think when he was. Younger. So when he was at primary school, I didn't have the confidence to, to feel that they weren't either really taking notice or weren't really listening.

So I, I very much thought, well, they're the experts. They. Must knew more. And certainly with my oldest as well, when everyone refused to accept, there was a problem with him. Um, I very much knew there was something wrong and eventually we got a diagnosis of cerebral palsy, but, so I've always [00:23:00] been.

I've never really found my voice. If I'm honest, I had a lot of childhood trauma, so actually I found it really hard to, to follow my gut instinct, to, to stand up for them. Um, and I, you know, I have done a lot of my own healing work over the last five years, which I'm sure is no coincidence universe is like making me do this.

So what I can now. Advocate for my children. So now with my, once we, they went back to school after lockdown. I, um, sent them the report and, I, they went right. Okay. So we'll put a plan in place. So, uh, Easter, I think it was last year, they went back and by summer things weren't going great, but it, the, you know, That there hadn't been a lot of time, but by the time we were getting his report in the middle of October, November, so he'd gone into a new school year and I could [00:24:00] see his, the way he was working and his predictive reason and everything had gone down even further.

So I said to Scott said, this is not okay. I said, look, I don't know where the, I said, if you know, if we have to privately plug the gap, We have to get him help. I am quite happy to do that, but I don't know what that gap is. I also don't know what school is capable of. So can you let me know where, what you think about what the, you know, what he needs?

Can you let me know what is possible? And then I will see what we can do and.

They came back to and said, look, it's early days actually, but also we will go and observe some lessons. So they went and observed. Some lessons came back and said he is absolutely not getting the help that he needs. So, um, you know, we will remind all the teachers. Um, how they should be helping. And he's not the only dyslexic kid in, in his class.

No, not be for sure. No. Uh, but he is also not the only one that [00:25:00] they know about. There's bound to be ones that they don't know about yet. Uh, and things are slowly improving actually. And I can see in his attitude, he is. Feeling like he is capable of a bit more now. And I think things are starting to turn around.

So he starts his, the main two years before his exams. He starts out this September. So I'm just crossing fingers that, you know, we've sort of got here in time. But for me, the hardest thing for, to advocate for him was a, I didn't know anything about his IIA. I know a lot more now I've. Really, I have immersed myself in it to the extent that I think I need to, I haven't necessarily learned everything I possibly can because I'm, I can get a bit obsessive about things.

So actually I feel like I've learned enough to advocate for him, but also I'm on it and I'm [00:26:00] watching it and I'm keeping an eye and I will be back on them at school. If it. If it things go downhill again or stop progressing, cuz he's certainly not where he could be with more help. So it, I think the things that hindered me were not knowing enough and also finding my own voice so that I could advocate for him because I found it quite difficult to go into a not totally receptive place and say.

I don't think you are helping my child enough, or I think my child needs more help. You know, that's quite, I found that quite really quite hard.

[00:26:39] **Delphine:** It's very hard as a parent and even for myself, I mean, I'm an educator. And so it's even hard for me to go in and ask questions and, and to feel as though they're going to be receptive to hearing my feedback.

Yeah. Yeah. My feedback is this isn't working. We need to try something else. You know, I mean, I just got sent paperwork to sign for one of my kiddos and I was like, [00:27:00] nobody told me the paperwork was coming. Why am I signing this now? It's the end of the year? Like what helped me guided me, support me in understanding as a parent, how I can help you as the school.

But if you don't tell me, then I can't tell you, and then we're not working together. And then we're each working in our own silos. The kid is pulled between the two of us. Yes. Which doesn't work, right?

[00:27:23] **Philippa:** Yeah, absolutely.

[00:27:24] **Delphine:** So what could the schools do in your opinion? Cuz I think this is important to talk about.

And everybody has their own opinion on it, but again, it's important. What do you think schools could do in order to make it an environment where you feel comfortable going in and saying, Hey, I need help with my kid needs this, this, that, like, what is there? Maybe there isn't anything. I don't know. But do you feel there would be something that would support that for you?

[00:27:50] **Philippa:** I think perhaps all this happening in lockdown didn't help because they, we weren't able to go into school. I think if I'd been able to go, [00:28:00] my husband and I could have gone in and spoken to somebody, uh, and felt like it was. Being received better that might have helped. but you know, we were in and out of lockdown and even when we were out of lockdown and the kids were back, they still didn't want people going into school.

So we were doing a lot of this mainly by email, sometimes over the phone, I kind, and also the teachers are. Like, you know, they've had for sure. They're all, they're all really tired. They've had so much to deal with. It's just chaos to, to be honest. So me throwing this, I was very aware that me throwing this in.

Was not really what they wanted and I'm sure I'm not the only one, you know, they go to a big high school. So I'm sure there are other people who, other parents who are having similar, uh, things that they've got to deal with. But also my child is one of them and my child decide, deserves their time as much as [00:29:00] anybody else does.

So I wasn't really shirty cuz I, I wasn't really, I wasn't shirty at all, but I was just quite. Firm, maybe right. Um, that I wanted to know what was being done and what they had, what they might think might be useful, but perhaps they couldn't provide, I was quite happy to hear that there was something they couldn't provide and we would see if we could provide it right.

Somehow. Um, but actually what they said was let us try, we can do better. Let us try it and do better. So. They are. Um, but we'll see. But a lot of the kid, a lot of the staff that look after the kids with needs have left, right. Because they've, it is just too much. So they here, there's a real problem of recruiting people at the moment, but you know, so far so good.

[00:29:54] **Delphine:** So I know one of the things that you and I talked about a little bit kind of before we hit [00:30:00] record. And when we met previously was sort of talking about the gifts that some of these things bring with us and the learning that we get to take as parents from our kids. Yeah. So can you talk a little bit about what that has been for you and your family in this journey?

[00:30:14] **Philippa:** Yeah. Um, I think helping, helping him, helping my youngest understand his strength. Um, and also accepting that there are some things that he's not very good at , you know, cause I can't, you know, he's not gonna be good at everything has been very good for us all to understand that there are, that we all have strengths and there are also things that we are not particularly, um, good at.

So I, I really think it's helped us see ourselves more as our own unique. Cells rather than, um, you know, one of a mass and trying to fit in with, you know, the so-called norms. Um, we have had a [00:31:00] little, uh, quite an interesting, you know, The oldest is very keen to downplay the strengths, you know, the, the rivalry and the competition between them carries on.

Although actually all of a sudden they seem to at obtain the terms. So, you know,

wait for it. They'll change the rules again. They just, this, you think we're, this is what our children do to us. Right. They're like, yeah, yeah, we figured this out. And then they. Change the rules again. So yeah. Well, glad it's working for now, but hold on a minute.

Oh yeah,

yeah. I'm well aware. It might not last, but I'm enjoying it for this moment. So I think it's been very good for all of us to sort of understand our strengths, um, and, and all, and our uniqueness, because actually right about, at the same time I had finished me' therapy and sort of dealt with a lot of my childhood trauma.

And I discovered that I have high Sen that I'm a highly sensitive person. I think his dyslexia, his dyslexia, and going through that with him has helped me embrace this understanding about [00:32:00] myself. Definitely it has. And, um, I definitely think my high sensitivity is. Superpower of mine now, it definitely helps me with my coaching.

I get subtle nuances that other people don't. So we talk about all these things now be between us and, um, and you know, what are, what we're good at and, oh, you know, they're really good at that. Can you do that because you are really good at that. And actually let's get moms do that because she's really good at that.

And. And actually all working to our strengths, maybe a as well as having to go at things that were not quite so good at and learning from each other.

[00:32:39] **Delphine:** I think that comes back to that idea that we were talking about earlier though, about naming. I won't use the word label. I'll use the word naming, naming the difference, right.

Naming the thing that. Makes your brain wired differently. Does it make you better or worse than anybody else? It just means you have things that you do really well. The other person has [00:33:00] things that they do really well. You each have things you don't do so well, but when you come together as a collective and come together as a family, as a grouping, And you can recognize where the strengths and weaknesses are and you can support each other in that way.

And that's what it is. Right. It's being able to express to the school and the teachers, Hey, this is the thing, this is where I'm strong and this is where I'm not strong and I might need help here, but I won't need help here. Yeah. Next question for you is, I mean, your son is, you know, year two in high school.

Where is he? Uh, oh,

[00:33:33] **Philippa:** so we, uh,

[00:33:34] **Delphine:** yeah, I know it's not year two. So we would be like grade 10, which would be 15 or 16. So,

[00:33:40] **Philippa:** yeah, so that's the same here. Okay. So year 10. So mines in year nine.

[00:33:44] **Delphine:** Perfect. So then my question to you is, cuz this is something I talk to clients about a lot is. How are you changing the, the work of advocating from you as the parent, which is important in the early years, but as they get older, they need to know how to do that.

So is he beginning to advocate for [00:34:00] himself? Is there conversation about what that looks like for him?

[00:34:03] **Philippa:** Uh, we, I am talking to him about it. He is still a bit inclined to sit back and do nothing. he, he very much says to me, he said, I know what I can do. Why do I have to show anybody else what I can do? Uh, and it's like, um, I kind of get that, but equally for you to get some exams for, you know, from, for you to get some qualifications that will allow people to give you the opportunity to show what you are capable are.

Cause whether you like it or not, that is the way it works. You know, so in order for you to do that, you do have to show what you know, and what you are capable of. So, we have, I have talked to him already. He's supposed to have a laptop that he works on at school. Uh, there has been no sign of this laptop.

Uh, so I keep saying to him, Hasn't ever spoken to you about a laptop yet? He said, well, no, I don't want one. Great. That's fine. [00:35:00] But equally, if you want to use a laptop in your exams, which granted are two years away, you need to start learning how to use it. So. I mean, I, I, you know, I say, do you want me to phone schools?

Like, no. Right. That's fine. So you need to, you, you need to know that it's okay for you to ask for this. It's okay. Are you getting extra time in your assessments? Cuz you should be having extra time while they won't give me extra time. Well, You should be getting extra time. So if you are not doing the amount of work in the time, know that it's because you've not got the extra time that you should have, but also if you want to say to them, right, I should get extra time.

That is completely okay to say that. And if they don't, if they have a problem with that, That's not because you asked for something out of order it's because they're not, you know, they might think, oh, you know, they might be having a reaction to what said, so I, I don't do anything. I don't go to school now or phone them or do [00:36:00] anything with any questions without running it by both of my children, actually, cuz they've both got needs in different ways because I want them to know that.

Yes, I'm on their side. Yes, I will take it up, but equally I'm not gonna go and do it without their say so, because if they want to go and you know, you know, do it, or in fact they don't want anybody to do it and they want to work it through by themselves, then that's okay. Yeah, because

[00:36:28] **Delphine:** yeah, it's a good way to do it though.

It's sort of that back and forth in terms of. did you get this? No. Okay. Do you need me or can you do it? No, I can do it. Okay, great. Yeah. And then leave it for a bit and they're like, so you said you were gonna, did you yeah. Do that thing so, yeah, it's a good way to build the independence of it. So that's great.

Um, I'm wondering, you know, as you went through this, was there a resource, is there a resource, is there some, a website, something that you read that kind of has helped you either in your own journey with your highly sensitive. [00:37:00] Thing, um, or through your journey with your son in terms of understanding his dyslexia, is there a resource as parents are listening that you think, you know what, this is really one that's worth reading, listening to looking into?

[00:37:12] **Philippa:** Well, I didn't know anything about dyslexia really until he had his diagnosis. So it certainly didn't help me before then. It was just my gut instinct, that something wasn't right. So the British dyslexia association, I, uh, they've got loads of resources online and, um, I follow them. Of Instagram.

There's quite a lot of dyslexic groups here in the UK. Um, actually I'm not sure whether they're British or not. I think a lot of them are, I follow a lot of what they say and. Now I recognize that if I followed, if I followed them before, I would've known a lot more about dyslexia, but I didn't, because I, I generally didn't know what the test was gonna, what the assessment was gonna come back and tell me, I kind of didn't think it was gonna be dyslexia because I take him for that screening.

And they said, no, [00:38:00] he's not dyslexia. So I was actually really surprised. I knew, I didn't know. What the answer was. Um, so I know a lot more now about dyslexia that I would've recognized it before had I come across those resources, but I didn't know what I was looking for. Cause it's like a mountain, a needle in a hay back.

What I have found now though, is that I talk about it more with other people quite easily and freely because I have no problem talking about it. And the number of people who say to me, oh yeah, we're I having the same problem? Um, we've moved schools because of this and that. And, and people say to me, oh, that's exactly what my son's like, maybe he's dyslexic.

So, um, I think it's hard. We don't know about the struggles your children are having at school, especially when you don't know why. But maybe if I'd spoken about them before, with people who I felt comfortable sharing with, not just anybody, maybe I [00:39:00] might have come across somebody who said to me, have you thought about dyslexia?

I, I don't know. I, but I do. I think, I think with dyslexia, there is a myth that if your child can lead, they can't be dyslexic.

[00:39:14] **Delphine:** Yep. My son was reading. He was very much like yours. He would sit and he would read books and the psychologist said, well, he's not actually reading. And I said, well, what do you mean?

He's not actually reading. Right. And it was in the phonetics of it. It was in the understanding of how to break the word down, to read the word, to make sense of the word, to create meaning from what he was reading. So, yeah, it's true. It, it, it's deceptive when they sit there and they're reading a book and he, yeah, he'd read books from memory.

He. Curious, George always, he could read it with us and we were like, but he's reading now. He just memorized it. But for us it was reading cuz we didn't, I. I don't know. I don't know too many people who can tell the difference between memorizing a book and reading a book. I don't know.

[00:39:49] **Philippa:** Yeah. That's a really good point.

That's interesting. Um, but you know, he, he, he passed his spelling test because he could memorize orders of letters. He didn't understand that the [00:40:00] sounds that were being put together to format were, but he did really well in his spelling tests. He could read. He just didn't because it's such hard work. His handwriting was appalling.

But then lots of kids have appalling handwriting. Yeah. So he didn't tick all the obvious boxes. So, um, I, I think just knowing that dyslexia comes in many shapes and sizes, um, and actually, you know, Seek some help. Don't in a way don't be too proud to get help because actually it's not about us as parents.

It's not about how we feel. It it's any reflection on us. It's all about them because if they, if they are leaving school feeling low in confidence, and basically like my son felt that he was stupid. I. He's not gonna bring his gifts into the world. He's not gonna feel confident about coming into the world, being a valuable member of society.

And that's actually all I'm worried about rather than at, you [00:41:00] know, really great exam results. And, you know, it would appear that I'm a bit weird thinking like that because nearly all my friendship group are more obsessed with like, You know, um, great exam results. I'm not saying they don't matter. I don't mean that at all, but if it was a choice between him having average exam results and being happy and confident in himself, or somehow struggling through getting great exam results, but feeling crushed for, I know which my choice would be.

Yeah. So, I think resources, there are resources out there when you know what you are looking for resources for. So maybe. You know, look at those sort of got there's so much information online. Yeah. About, about any, you know, any special educational need, but it it's get the help so that you can understand more what's going on.

If you think there is something not quite right.

[00:41:48] **Delphine:** Philipa, where can people learn more about you? I know I've you. Trolled around on your website a little bit, but you wanna tell people where to find you .

[00:41:56] **Philippa:** Yeah. Yeah. So, um, I'm, I've got a website. I'm a, I'm a life [00:42:00] coach. Now I wrote my memoir last year, which is not anything to do with what we've been talking about today.

It's all about my journey with my childhood trauma, but, um, I'm www.safeandsupported.co.uk. And there's more information, um, about me on there. If anybody wants to know anything.

[00:42:18] **Delphine:** Well Philipa thank you so much for this, uh, conversation, today. It was really great. And I certainly hope it's brought some light and insight to other families on their journey.

[00:42:27] **Philippa:** Yeah, I hope it has too. Yeah. And thanks for having me. It's been great.