Alex Leech Autism Journey

**Delphine:** welcome back to the access to education podcast, where we talk about all things having to do with learning disabilities and learning, being a parent to a child with learning differences or a child who is neurotic. Can feel scary, isolating. And at times overwhelming, there are just so many questions around who to see what to do.

And wonderings, are you doing this right? Are you the only one struggling for some? They find community and friends and families. Others prefer to find help from professionals who have knowledge and understanding about the road they are on and give them guidance and advice on what to do. And from a real experience position.

Today on the show. I'm talking to Alex, she's a professional life coach and mom to two amazing neuro-diverse teens. She works with families to help them feel less alone and feel empowered on their path to success with their families. Alex, welcome to the show. I'm super glad that we are [00:01:00] putting this down officially.

It is getting recorded tonight. We're doing it finally.

[00:01:05] **Alex:** Oh, Delphine. And I'm so excited and thank you for having me on. I just am. So in awe of your podcasts, I love listening to it and you just give so much great information and support. So well done my friend. Well, well

[00:01:21] **Delphine:** thank you. I couldn't do it without people like yourself.

So one of the things I really wanted to make sure we talk about, and we'll get to all of this, but. You know what you're doing now and that you, you started in one spot and where you started has taken you to where you are. And I think that that is a story of resilience. It's the story of power. And it's the story that, you know, I think needs to be shared because I think it's important, as I say, always on the show that we share our stories and no two stories are the same.

No two roads are the same. But they join. And there, there are parts where they intersect and there are parts where they separate, but where they intersect, that's where it gets really interesting. So I'm excited to [00:02:00] hear your story. Having said that let's get you to start maybe with your journey of your own kids.

I know. No two kids are the same, just like no two journeys are the same, so you can weave the stories in the way you feel. But I know you have to have your own amazing kids who have their own amazing journeys, but you have been their support system. And so I think it would be really great if the audience could hear a little bit about your story and kind of about your kids and, and how you figured out what was going on and kind of the road you took, because it's sometimes it's a bumpy road.

[00:02:34] **Alex:** Oh, it was a dark and bumpy road for a very long time. So a little backstory, like I have been a registered massage therapist since 1999, and I've always been in health and wellness industry. And I had my kids a little later in life. I married the love of my life. Second times a term, he's a keeper. And we, at one point, I didn't think I was going to have children because [00:03:00] I was.

You know, I was about 30. I was thinking I was like 37, almost 38 when I got married for the second time. And we decided we were going to go ahead with it. And, and you know, when you're expecting, you read the books, that magic Bible and, you know, And you have all your testing done. And there wasn't anything in our family history that indicated that there were, you know, we needed some special, you know, genetic testing or anything like that.

So. You know, barring any birth trauma or like free and clear. Here we go. And our son came along in 2007 and there was a few, you know, a little like, oh, he's really. Lining up the little cars very specifically. And I'm like, Ooh, that OCD or on, or no. And just like, you know, put a pin in that. And, and then he [00:04:00] wasn't really playing, like, we'd go to these, uh, play centers and to get out the door and we'd finally get there.

And he was like, um, He was explaining beside kids. I mean, they mostly do that at that age anyway, but there was less interaction. And then when it came to carpet time, oh my God. Like we were that. You know that mother, child that was always on the periphery. Like my son couldn't sit on the carpet and there was all these little quirks and things that were coming along, you know, coming up and, and suddenly there I am pregnant with my second child and that's a different story, but there were some huge medical issues that were happening and we spent, oh, a good chunk of time at sick kids.

And. Then when my daughter finally came home, we still had to do some quarantine. And in those three months of quarantine, um, the stress level and sort of [00:05:00] some meltdowns w weren't happening as much. And we realized, and there was another like little red flag and trigger that was happening, like, huh, we're not going out as much.

We're not rushing out of the door. We're not doing this. They kind of parked it off to the side jump a few years later. And we hit school and suddenly like whose kids spends four visits in the principal's office before Christmas at the age of. Four or five minded. And it was because he couldn't sit still.

And there was all these things that started to come up and, and through the process, by the time he got to grade three, he was being, um, he was being interviewed and, and tested for being gifted. And he, he failed like literally failed the gifted. They said because there was a few other things that kind of.

Jumped up. And it was like drawing. He can't draw a cube and there's some sensory stuff. And then [00:06:00] through that, the school psychologist is like, well, let me diagnose, let me see, do another assessment. And that's when we found out that he fell on the spectrum, he has what they used to call Asperger's. So level one and, um, And then suddenly my daughter, bingo, is on there as well.

And we fought through it through school too. But through that process, I was starting to feel, I was advocating for my kids, trying to figure what, what was going on and the more I pushed through and to all these appointments, then suddenly I started shrinking. I started got very isolating. I felt very alone.

I. I was having, you know, I had these friends and families who, um, love and support and care for me. It wasn't really understanding what w what was going on. And at some point, somebody asked me if I was doing this for attention. Because [00:07:00] I was not, I know, right?

[00:07:03] **Delphine:** Like, I'm going to interrupt that story for one second, because I feel like for any parent who's listening to that right now, that is the comment of the friend or family who you kindly just say to, I can't deal with you in my life right now.

Yeah. For anyone to say that as a parent, you would do any of what you've been through to that point. Because

[00:07:30] **Alex:** do they really need to, do you really need to drive up to Newmarket to go to this specific osteopath? I'm like, yes, because my daughter has major gross motor skill delays, and that's where our osteopath referred us.

And this is the person who specializes from this age group to this group. Or why are you driving up to. Vaughn to go to this vision specialist. I might because they're the only [00:08:00] person in Southern Ontario that does this, you know, or can't you go to sick kids? A that's not where we referred and be that specialist doesn't work at a sick, like, yeah, anyhow.

So that was going on. And I just started, started to feel like I wasn't really a part of the world. I was sort of like, I was in the background, making things happen, organizing things then, and feeling less than less like the, the woman that I know that I am. And I didn't recognize myself. And I found myself in a very, very dark place for a very long time.

And, um, I found that I was going back to bed when my kids were in school and I would get up when. I go to pick them up and I'd be on, I'd be happy. I'd be mom, I'd be doing this. And, and then, but when I was not interacting with my kids and supporting, I [00:09:00] was in a ball and, um, Time moves on. And I'm just like, there's got to be like, I talked to professionals and I tried to find people to help me.

And there were so many resources and wonderful people that could help with my kids or help me help my children. But there was nothing really there that was supporting me the way that I needed to be supported. Um, the people that I were talking to didn't have that hands-on life experience that I was. I needed somebody to really understand what I was going through and, um, you know, jump a few years ahead.

I, I traded in my coaching for health and wellness along with my massage therapy practice. And I decided that I am not going to have one other mom go through what I went through and. Yeah, it was this, it was like a calling. [00:10:00] And, and when I finally realized that, like to pivot my coaching practice, to supporting and empowering moms with kids on the spectrum of as well as being an RMT, it was like this FARC was lit inside and everything started to make sense because there were so many times that I was having feelings of like, why is this happening?

There's gotta be so much more like, There's gotta be a reason for all this. And. Uh, suddenly it, all these pieces came into place and here I am, I have the, I have the battle wounds to, to show for it. And I am so grateful for my children. For that experience. And I wasn't grateful at the time don't get me wrong and there are still challenges, but they've taught me how to be a better mom.

They've taught me how to be a better person, a [00:11:00] better caregiver, a better listener. I'm so grateful. Yes. When I first found out that they were on the spectrum, there was a lot of grieving that went on and we can talk about that in another day, another time later on, but you carry this baggage of all these emotions that you feel so guilty about.

Right. And you don't know what to do with them. So you kind of park them, but you don't realize that you're you carry you. Log them with you everywhere that you go. And to be able to talk to moms that understand what I went through and I understand what they're going through. It's an amazing bonding experience.

And to watch. And just, and just to be a part of their story and their journey, it's an honor and a privilege. So that's where I am. I, I don't know if that's what you wanted to

[00:11:56] **Delphine:** know, but no, that's, that's really great. I mean, it's [00:12:00] just, it, it's kind of showing the path of, of kind of where you were. Where you want it to be and how you've ended up there.

Right? I mean, there's so many steps and so many processes along the way. And, and I, I always say this cause it's so important to remember that we haven't all had the same journey, right? Our kids might have the same diagnosis or similar diagnosis, but the journeys are different. How we got there, who we saw, who we talked to.

But what we get from the community of moms who've been there is, Hey, I saw this doctor or I saw this osteopath, or I went to that natural path, or I saw this doctor at sick kids, or go and ask this person because they might be able to get you. Right. It's

[00:12:44] **Alex:** the point, right? This is when you're coming from a place where you're like, you're absolutely befuddled.

I can't believe I just used the word befuddled, but fuddled. And you're like, And then someone says, oh yeah. Have you [00:13:00] seen this? Or did you read this? Or like you said, go to see that doctor or he is just like, oh, thank God. It's like the clear you've come through the brush and there's this clearing and, and it's, it's this.

It's kind of like a research and you get energized and you're like, you're forever grateful. Right? I, I know everybody that I spoke to, I

[00:13:22] **Delphine:** having kids who are different, having kids who need extra stuff, having kids who need extra doctor's appointment, extra, whatever it is, it's exhausting. And if you can go to someone who has maybe already walked the path and can suggest to you, Hey.

I saw this person and I got help from them with this, that, or the other. Right. Like, you know, I think that there's a lot to be said for the collective knowledge, because quite frankly, as parents, because I don't just want to single this out to mothers. This is as parents,

[00:13:56] **Alex:** parents get tired

[00:13:59] **Delphine:** [00:14:00] because we're going.

All day long. I mean, I don't know about you, but until I figured out that I was the, the co regulator for my own kids, I had nothing left at the end of the day. So being able to think about K, who, who should I call for this thing that happened today? I didn't have it in me anymore. And if I'd had, or if I could have had, or if it existed and maybe it didn't, I never found it, but some sort of collective of people or an expert or someone who had been down the road before, and I could have said, Hey today we had this meltdown.

Or, you know, I've noticed this pattern of things where you at. Yeah, just to have that person.

[00:14:42] **Alex:** And that's, that's the thing. Cause like, you know, just like how our children are all, um, you know, they fall under the same, you know, add a gory. Everybody is so different and unique and um, whether they're on the spectrum or they, you know, [00:15:00] whatever a diagnosis is, every individual is very unique and puts their own spin on it.

And I'm a part of many Facebook. Groups that are for moms and parents with kids on the spectrum. I have my own, and there's a lot of the different ideas and it's, and it's finding the right support. And sometimes this group in that group and the other group over their work, but Ooh, I was in there and I am out because they're talking about something else.

So just because you're, you know, you're a, for example, Situation, um, an autism mom doesn't mean that all as autism parents think the same way, want the same thing? I mean, yes, we all want our children to be the, you know, to be successful in life. Meaning non I'm not talking about dollars in high paying jobs, but I'm, but the way we all go about it, we all have different paths and, you know, [00:16:00] Sometimes I'm just like, yep.

Thank you very much for that input. And I'm going to, you know, you know, store it and I may use it for later. I may not. Right. It's overwhelming because there are so many groups out there. Which one is for you, you know, and everybody's in their bubble. Right. And everybody's trying to figure it out. And sometimes we, we clash and bump into each other.

And other times we, we noticed someone who's in need or where a need and they hold out a hand or we hold at hand and we got. And we move along together and then separate and help others. So it's, it's an amazing, it's amazing support the communities out there for neuro diversity. And unfortunately, there are a lot of people out there that are still afraid to talk about it openly and admit that they have children that need some help.

And at the end of the day, it's not. I hope you it's about your [00:17:00] kids. Your mental health has to be on point and you need to know your value and you need to feel appreciated and you need to be able to have the energy to go on and move on. And that's why there's this sort of tug of war as parents that we have, because we give, give, give, but we also need to, and it's finding that balance and all as parents, we crave that.

Not only calm and less stress in our homes, but in our own bodies and how we feel as people, because there are days I'm sure Delta and you just feel like you're just losing the plot. And other days you feel like you're, you know, the greatest warrior in the world. Right. And it's a tough road, but knowing that there are other people on that road with you is.

It gives you the strength. It gives you strength.

[00:17:50] **Delphine:** Yeah. And that strength is, is doubling. I mean, I loved your point about, you know, you reach out and grasp that person's hand who needs help. And then together you help the next person you branch [00:18:00] off and you can help next person. I mean, it really is a beautiful community that can come together when it comes together.

Well, on that same kind of. Topic, I guess I'm just trying to think, like as a parent of two children on the spectrum, what is something that has been the most helpful for you?

[00:18:20] **Alex:** Realizing that a lot of my frustration, it's just, I, I have to admit this is a V this was a very big aha moment for me coming to the realization that.

Those big moments of frustration where I feel like I'm losing the plot because something isn't happening the way I want it to happen. It's because that was my expectation and forgetting that our child, my children have their own. Timeline of processing, right? So even though it's the same routine at the same, you know, each day of the week, [00:19:00] you know, in and out month in and out year in and out, they need.

The space and we've come to, to realize that we have like, yes, we have to give our kids the heads up on almost everything. And yes, we fight that helicopter parenting feeling, but we realizing that it's really more supervision because of the executive functioning pieces. But the big, the big thing that I have learned is when I am losing my crap, it's because of.

It didn't go how I wanted it to go. And then that's when I have to step back, I have to breathe and I apologize. I apologize to my children saying, sorry, that was not my best parenting moment. And from that moment on, I engage in a discussion and sometimes they don't have an answer for that. But realizing that, that.

Really, I have to take a step back and let them do their thing at their [00:20:00] time. That that's the big, that was a big piece of the puzzle for me. I

[00:20:05] **Delphine:** think that for parents whose kids are neuro-typical. Probably is one of the same parenting lessons that at some point we all come to the realization of, oh, I expected us to be able to be past all of these skills or whatever it is.

But you forget, like when your kids come into your. As infants or babies, or whenever you get them, because we don't all get them. When they're we tiny newborn, the, the kids kind of direct how, and when things are going to happen. And we always was parents think, oh, well, we're going to do this, that and the other.

And it's all going to be fine. And I mean, I can even think of in the winter when we're trying to go skiing, we want to be at the ski hill for nine o'clock. So we all got to like,

[00:20:48] **Alex:** get out the door or.

[00:20:50] **Delphine:** Going to school in the morning, we're all going to get out the door at seven 30. Well, just because you have that plan in mind, doesn't mean that Sammy isn't going to be able to [00:21:00] find her favorite shoes that she needs to wear to school that day.

And Carter is going to have a meltdown because you poured the wrong cereal and all of those things happen. So I think, yeah, adjusting our expectations as parents and that. Not sometimes I find, I don't know if you find this, but I find this in my house. Sometimes when my kids forced me to slow down from that thing that I want to have happen, I find we have more fun.

Yeah. The outcome ends up being more positive for everyone.

[00:21:31] **Alex:** Yes, and it, and it is, you know, Delphine, that's that little secret sauce that people talk about. That's a little tough because we're so used to today's day and age, and I'm, I'm very guilty of this too. Everything is scheduled and we're always trying to cram as much as we can into to times.

And, and we have to be here by this time there, by that time, get this done. And then there's all these. [00:22:00] Expectations that are actually come there, external expectations. And somehow we end up internalizing them as parents, because that's what we're supposed to do. Like, I even remember the first time, one of the sessions up at Holland Bloorview, it's a great place and it's been a great resource for us, but they were, you know, early on, it was like, everything needs to be, yeah.

Schedule we've took the advice and we, you know, cause that was our starting point. And here you go. And we found that that schedule caused a lot more stress. Not only for me, but for my kids. And then there was a time where everything was labeled and there was reminders. It looked like, um, a post-it note factory vomited in my home because it was everywhere and I'm like, that's not working either.

And then. And, you know, so we had to find our own group. So we just went and, you know, and it was when we slowed down and I listened to what our kids are telling us what they want all the time. Right. It is amazing how they are. You even [00:23:00] non-verbal children are communicating with us all the time and it is our job as parents to sit back and really try and figure that out.

But we're so. Whereas the program to be in this routine and schedule and be busy. And, and like you said, when, when our children force us to stop or slow down, yes. It's frustrating at first. Right. But then all of a sudden this thing organically happens and you realize that it was a blessing and it was a blessing,

[00:23:36] **Delphine:** right?

Yeah. And just, I don't know. The listing to your kids, but the trial and error too, like you go to these places, it's like parents, when you're pregnant or parenting books and you read them and you're like, oh, I like that idea, but I could take her leave that idea. It's like the Facebook groups, right? That one feels good.

It's like the Goldilocks syndrome of like this bowl is [00:24:00] too hot. This bull's is too cold, but this one's just right. And sometimes the just right is a smattering of what Holland Bloorview had to tell you a smattering of what the school is telling. A little bit of what sick kids is. Like part of this journey is taking in the information, testing out some stuff.

Did the sticky notes work everywhere? I would imagine if it looked like a sticky note factory vomited in your house, it probably didn't work very well. So, you know, you probably tried it and thought we're going to move on to something else, but yeah. Part of the journey. It's, it's part of the experience and that's part of what is so awesome that you can share.

And you can say, well, we tried this, it didn't work for us, but maybe it can work for you, you know? And that's the awesome part. And the, and the

[00:24:45] **Alex:** thing too, when you're you're parenting, whether it's neuro-diverse or, you know, neuro-typical right. We were all parented a certain way. And we either, those are, those are our [00:25:00] defaults that we go to, whether they're they work or they don't work.

That's like our starting point where like, yeah, that doesn't work for my kids or that, you know, oh, I got to take that. And I remember. How my friend, when I was growing up an atmosphere at her place for parents to dislike, it's the same thing. We miss it all together. It's like, when you, you know, you have some information you want to talk, so you don't talk to the same girlfriend all the time.

Right. You go to this friend for this and that friend for that, or you'd bring both friends and it's the same with parenting. Right. And at the end of the day, whether you are parenting neuro-diverse, neuro-typical, you know, Adopted natural whomever. You are. It all comes down to the same, the same things we have to, we have to listen to our gut.

We have to listen to where kids we have to. And that's where we're all so exhausted too, because there's all this input that all this [00:26:00] information and inputs coming in and we're, we're constantly processing information, even when we're not even aware of it. Like our subconscious is working. It's like churning, I'm not a computer tech person, but I'm pretty sure it's like, whatever is happening in my computer right now and all this stuff that's happening just to make.

You know this moment in time for you and I working, it is getting hot. It's the fans going and, and I, and I that's what our brains are doing. So. When we can find when we can, we can find a port in the storm, whether it's our Facebook group, our friends, like-minded parents, sometimes even just taking those moments to yourself, to pause and breathe.

Those ports in the storm are they're priceless and they're. Is there a key to survival of keeping your, you know, am I allowed to say shit? Sure. Go ahead.[00:27:00]

[00:27:02] **Delphine:** But it is about keeping your shit together, right? Cause it's a shit storm and shit hits the fan on a daily.

[00:27:07] **Alex:** This is what happened and it's a shitty job.

[00:27:11] **Delphine:** It can be, and it can feel that way. That's what it can feel like. You're a shitty parent. You're not doing it right. You haven't parented properly. You haven't like all this stuff and it's the.

[00:27:25] **Alex:** Oh, my God. I know like there's D dad's guilt pattern, but the mom guilt and, and, you know, there there's this whole reservoir that we have that is overflowing of guilt. And then, and sometimes there's resentment in there and then we feel guilty for feeling resentment. And it's just this. The cycle and we really have to really stop.

Right. It's

[00:27:58] **Delphine:** hard. [00:28:00] It's really hard. Yeah. That's something that was really hard on this journey. I mean, I've, you know, we tried to talk a little bit about like something that was helpful. And so the port in the storm, I think is probably, you know, From all of that. I think it's really the port in the storm and having your people, but what has been something that's been really hard through this journey?

Cause it's not all sunshine and roses. So what was,

[00:28:23] **Alex:** I think the hardest part was allowing myself and acknowledging my feelings and allowing myself to have the feelings of that. I was feeling and to honor those and not to be embarrassed by them or shamed by them, because what I was feeling was real at that moment in time.

And like, you know, if you're down, you're down, but don't stay down. Right. And we beat ourselves up [00:29:00] as moms and we we've really hard on ourselves and. And, um, like you said, you know, sometimes we feel like we're epically failing and I have to realize I have to, I had to really learn how to accept those feelings, process, those feelings, be okay with those feelings and then learn from those feelings and build and.

Because at the end of the day, I am the only person that can give my kids the gift of a happy mom who loves for life. Right. And I had to learn, I had to appreciate my own value. I had to, I had to take care of my mental health. I had to honor who I was and [00:30:00] where I was in the family. And I had to talk to people.

And it was hard to open up and talk to people right. And share it. But then the more I shared and the more I heard that other people were feeling this way too. And, and, and suddenly it became this no ball and realizing that I wasn't so isolated and alone, I wasn't a lost cause I wasn't the worst parent.

And, um, yeah. And came out the other side.

[00:30:34] **Delphine:** I think it's really interesting that you talk about. Kind of acknowledging how you feel and sitting with that and being able to kind of process that. And it's really funny now with all of the mental health stuff that we do with kids in our school system, a lot of it it's about acknowledging the feeling and what to do with that feeling.

Right. And it's so funny that as the parents and as the adults, the hardest part for us, [00:31:00] Is what to do with that, or being worried about what other people perceive of us. So I don't know how many times I've talked about this example. And I was just at a big mom event a week or so ago, and we were all talking about it.

You know, the kid who's having the meltdown in the grocery store and that person who's walking past you rolling their eyes, being like what? You can't get your kid together. Like, no, the meltdown is going to happen because my kid has a sensory thing. My kid there's too much lighting. There's too much noise.

Somebody dropped something and it. It set them off, like whatever it is, but it's hard as a parent to not. Pull yourself out of that. I remember my son who early on had impulse issues and he'd get pretty upset fairly quickly. And his reaction was to hit. And I kept thinking, oh my God, these parents who are getting the phone call from the school to say, oh my kid, you know, well, not my kid, but would have said another child hit your kid.

Well, you know that, that kid's going home at night and saying, oh, so-and-so hit me today. So I was going to be the same kid. And I'm thinking those parents must think I'm the worst parent in the world, but [00:32:00] they don't know the whole story. The person who's making that judgment of you doesn't know your story and that's

[00:32:09] **Alex:** yeah, we, we judge ourselves very hardly as parents and then to have other people judge us when they only have that little sound bite, that little clip of what's happened and they don't know.

And. It's really hard not to, to deflect that anger onto that person, but it's also very difficult to not internalize that as well. And so it's, it's a process to learn how to do that. And it sounds so basic and easy and people are like, well, yeah, I can do that. But really no it's being awake. And it's the awareness and what to do once you are aware of how that made you feel or others feel and owning it.

And now what are you going to do with that? It doesn't [00:33:00] mean that now that's never going to happen again. But, you know, each time we get better and it's through repetition and learning and sharing and taking care of ourselves and pausing. And also too, when we're doing this, our kids are watching, they are absorbing, they are learning, they're internalizing and they see mom losing your shit and getting frustrated.

They don't know the whole story. Right. So they think they are the ones causing all of this and they're not. And, and it having my child say to me, mommy, I'm sorry. I'm autistic. Heartbreaking. And it was a low point for me in my parenting experience. And I had to say, oh honey, that is no, I know, I apologize.

And I just said, I am Blackberry. I had to talk about this [00:34:00] situation and it's not you. And it was, um, It was really, really, that was another moment. That was another moment where I realized that I had to share appropriately age appropriately and time appropriately. I had to share with my children, how things made me feel, and I have to teach because they taught me that I had to teach them.

It's okay. Not to be okay. And see that, how I can take that moment. And. Move through it or overcome it or, you know, process it. So it's, as I said, at the beginning, my, my children has made me a better person. Okay. So my hair is gray, you know, I'm not as healthy as I'd like to be. I have long since said goodbye to my favorite pair of jeans many years ago.[00:35:00]

Like all those things. Right. And forget about childbirth and not what that does to the body. Right. But at the end of the day I looked back and that stuff isn't important. It's I have these children that, and it's not, I'm not raising children. I'm raising future. Adults. Right. So I'm teaching, I look at my children as future adults and I am there to help them grow into the best possible people that they can be.

Right. And that is that it's key. That was that that's

[00:35:36] **Delphine:** huge for. And that's the goal of any parent, right? I mean, it doesn't matter who your children are. Yeah. At the end of the day, you're raising the next generation of people to see us through in the world. That's what it is for sure.

[00:35:51] **Alex:** Yeah. And sometimes that's really scary because I look at my son going, like he's guaranteed.

He's in grade nine. You know, [00:36:00] I'm just like, oh, was the high like that in grade nine? I'm like, no, I was not, I was not a 14 year old boy, but I was worse. I was a 14 year old girl. So, you know. Yeah. So there's you pretty in there? Right?

[00:36:13] **Delphine:** If we look at the starting. Okay. And if we think about someone who might have listened all the way through to this point in the episode, and they're thinking, okay, that's great that you're all talking about this, but I'm at the beginning stages of this journey.

What is something that families should do when they're starting the journey? They've just put their toe in the water, or they've just started talking to someone. What should parents do in the early stages of learning about their child's diagnosis?

[00:36:44] **Alex:** So this, this for me is, is it, they're just starting the process.

So they're inquiring about it and they haven't got a diagnosis yet, or they have the diagnosis. I would

[00:36:54] **Delphine:** say they already have, let's say they already have the diagnosis. I think because otherwise we can get, you know, [00:37:00] there's gray in between there, but let's say they've got the diagnosis. So they've just found out that their child is autistic and or that they're on the spectrum.

And now what, because. I remember getting the diagnosis and my kids are not on the spectrum, but they, they have their own set of exceptionalities and that's, that's a pretty hard pill to swallow initially, but then there's 1,000,001 questions. So where do parents start? What would your suggestion.

[00:37:31] **Alex:** So after we've like read through that thing and we've, we've left that office thinking we had, we we've answered all the questions have been answered.

We get home and we have tons more. It's like, pause, just pause, read. How do you feel? And you know what, there there's a grieving process that happens. I know I mentioned it very earlier, but it's just like nobody planned to have their children have. [00:38:00] You know, exceptionalities and there was a lot of emotions that happened.

Right. But then also too, we're very worried about what. How this affects our child. Our child is the same child where the same family don't let the diagnosis take over your family. Your diagnosis is a part of your child and is a part of your family, but it doesn't define who your family is. You're still the same people.

Right. So that's the first one. And then the other one is be open and honest and have that conversation with your child. So many parents are afraid, how is my child going to take this? You know? And, and it's all our own fears and insecurities that are in there. And I remember I sat with it for a good. Four weeks before I talked to my son about it and I found some great videos on YouTube.

Uh, this woman, Rosie king, she's a [00:39:00] woman now, but she was a child there and she did a BBC series and I just happened to stumble upon it. And I started watching it when he was in near shot. And then he started tuning into what she was saying. And then he started asking questions and then I said, yeah, and.

When I told him, I said, yes, you are on the spectrum. He went, oh, it all makes sense. Now. And then, cause he heard that somebody else was feeling the same way. And then we started talking about it. He didn't feel so alone and isolated and like he was, you know, missing out on things. It gave him clarity and that was a huge relief.

So it's having an open and honest conversation with your child and give them time to absorb it. And they're going to surprise you. They're going to go. Yeah. And

[00:39:50] **Delphine:** walk off, you know, I know it's always more devastating for us as the parent than it is for them and the child. I remember sitting down with my eldest when we got his dyslexia [00:40:00] diagnosis and started to sort of, I didn't read through the report necessarily, but I said, you know, here's the things you're really good at.

And here are the things you struggle at and these things mean that you are dyslexic. And he was like, oh, is that why I can't spell very well. Yep. That that's actually part of the reason. Okay. And he just was like, this is fine. Like no big deal. And I was not the reaction. I thought I was gonna get.

[00:40:23] **Alex:** Yeah, and they surprise us.

I have a, a client of mine who has been struggling for a while to talk to her daughter and her daughter is 16. And, um, I just said like, shoot the. Pull the cord. Just say it like, you know, oh, because kids are smart. Right. They want to know why, like my first question is what did you tell your child when they started going to all these appointments?

You're struggling in school or are there some that you've given them a reason, right? Yeah. [00:41:00] I

[00:41:00] **Delphine:** said something. I think we had said something along the lines of like, we want to find out what you're really good at and where the teachers can help you more. It was something along those lines, right? Like it's very benign in what we were doing.

It was just sort of like. You're going to go play some games with the doctor. Cause that's what it is. Right? The assessments are sort of, yeah, we just said,

[00:41:20] **Alex:** you know, sometimes school can be really difficult, so we're gonna make, we're gonna go see the specialist and he's gonna, he's gonna talk to you and he's going to ask you some questions and you get to do play some games and then they're gonna write a report.

And hopefully that has some answers, right. So they already know what's going on. So. So I just said to my client, like, she's back do it. And so she had this, you know, this huge elaborate plan and that she was very comfortable with and it didn't go well because her job either didn't like, What she heard.

[00:42:00] She's like, I don't want to be autistic. I don't want to have the label I don't want. And so we, we worked through that and we found out that a lot of it was coming from, and I know it sounds like I'm blaming the moment. I'm not blaming the mom, but we have our stress. And also it's, it's we know more children.

So for this mom, If I knew that information, I would say let's have conversations a bit before and say, you know, what autism, like, what is your view on autism? Or what is your view? And, and test the waters and see, because she had her own experience with somebody who was autistic in school. Right. And so it was a negative thing for her, but.

The mom didn't know this. I didn't know this, but as soon as we got this information, you were able to work together and strategically build this, this plan, and then suddenly realize that, um, [00:43:00] We like knowledge is power, right. And we took that information and personalized it, and now she wears it with pride.

I mean, she's not walking around going I'm autistic, but you know, she she's. The diagnosis was basically to make sure that you get the support that you need for school and onward. Right. It's not to put a big sticker on your forehead and let everybody know what's going on. So, um, yeah, it's just, kids are smart.

[00:43:30] **Delphine:** Kids are, and they know when they're different, right. They're reasonably aware of when they're different from their peers and that can be difficult. So if they understand why they're different. Yeah. Dart to have conversation with you or teachers or friends or whatever, you know, and, and that helps too

[00:43:49] **Alex:** well, Delphine, I don't know if you know this, but after my kids were diagnosed and we're, you know, checking out all those questionnaires and paperwork and I'm like [00:44:00] thinking ding, ding, ding, ding, suddenly my childhood made a whole lot of sense.

All right. And so after a few years I went, I got diagnosed and I have ADHD and it, um, and all, cause my kids are multiple diagnosis. They're autistic and they have ADHD and they have my daughter's dyslexic. And you know, my son has other things. There's a whole, the nice little mixed bag for both of them, but it was, um, it just made so much sense.

And if I knew that. I think my life would have been a lot easier.

[00:44:37] **Delphine:** Well, you just would have been able to know what was coming. You would have been able to set things up for yourself in the work environment, in the school environment, wherever it was. I mean, I knew from an early age that I was dyslexic and that conversation was always kind of happening in my house.

I was in a small class placement. Those decisions were made for me because it was the best decision for me at the time in terms of what was offered and all those things. But it meant that I've gone through [00:45:00] my. Being able to advocate for myself and do the things that I need to do because I've understood who I was and what I needed to be successful.

And so that's the same conversation I continue to have in my house that you continue to have in your house that I hope today's conversation will open. Other people in their homes and the importance of sharing the diagnosis with your children, not to shame them, not to make them feel badly, not because you want them to take on some level of responsibility for their actions, but because knowing to your point of knowledge is power.

If they understand who they are as a learner, they are then better able to set themselves up,

[00:45:41] **Alex:** powering our children. Is the BA is, you know, is the best thing for them, right?

[00:45:50] **Delphine:** Yeah. And that's really our role as parents, right? Our role is to empower our children. So speaking of empowering, what helpful websites or resources have you got that [00:46:00] might help to empower families as they go through this

[00:46:03] **Alex:** journey?

On my site, I have a website [www.alexleech.ca](http://www.alexleech.ca) . And so you can go there. There's also on Instagram. It's at the spectrum mom, coach. And there's the Facebook page, the spectrum coach. So information there, DME, Alex leech. And if you have any questions, I'd be more than happy to talk to you or point you in the right direction.

Share any resources that I have. You know, we're, we're a village, we're a community and we support one another.

[00:46:44] **Delphine:** Alex. Thank you so much for today's conversation. I really appreciate it. I'm so glad we finally managed to make this happen.

[00:46:50] **Alex:** Thank you so much. Thank you for having me on this.

[00:46:55] **Delphine:** Thank you for listening to today's episode.

If you are looking for help [00:47:00] and support in creating a roadmap to success for your child through challenging times, contact me at access. Education.com. I work with all families to help them build power and knowledge in understanding their child's needs and how to build success through advocacy. Follow me on Facebook and Instagram at access to education.

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