Forest For the Trees

**Delphine -** Welcome back to the access to education podcast, where we talk about everything having to do with learning disabilities and learning today on the show, I'm going to take a bit of a different turn. It's just going to be me so often. And on this podcast so far, I've done interviews with experts. I've done interviews with parents.

I've done interviews with people who have things to share and important pieces of information to give you. I felt like today, I wanted to take a little bit of a sidetrack go down a different road with you today. I recently did an Instagram post about seeing the forest through the trees. And as I've been working with clients over the last little while, I'm realizing that the forest is big, and I had forgotten how scary and dark that forest can look.

And that it can be overwhelming. And so, I wanted to share with you a little bit about how to help you make that forest seem less scary, how to be able to see the trees in this great big forest and how to be able [to cut back some of the brush that might be in your way. When we start on a journey with children who have learning differences or learning disabilities our out of the box thinkers, it can be really hard to know where to start.

It can feel scary. It can feel overwhelming. What's important is that you find a group, a person, a friend, a family member, whoever that might be to be in your corner, it might be the psychologist that you've been working with. It might be a friend. It could be a Facebook group. There are so many options.

These days of places to get help. When you start to think, or if you think that there might be something different about your child and you wonder, I'm not sure where to start. My guiding suggestion is always to start with your family doctor, or if you don't have a family doctor and go and see a physician and talk to them a pediatrician generally, if our kids are really little go and see them, talk to them about what you're seeing.

Talk to your daycare provider, talk to the babysitter, talk to your child's teacher, someone who gets to see and hear your child in a different space, have a conversation and say, “Hey, I've noticed these things. Have you noticed anything?” Just asking the questions can often be eye opening for us as parents.

Now that being said, I'm making it sound like it's really easy. Sure. Just call up your family doctor or have an appointment with them, have a conversation. It is scary if there's one thing, I've learned in my 11 years as a parent and my 40 some odd years, as someone with a learning difference and having been in education for a while, I've learned that asking questions is really important.

Trusting my gut is really important. And when I work with families, I try and empower them to see. What they already know, or the questions to help them guide through the questions that they have. It's not easy. I'm not going to sugar. Coat it for you. It doesn't always feel good. It doesn't always feel comfortable.

It's scary. It's overwhelming. But you start with one small step and the first step. Is to seek help is to find a space, to get someone, to help you to identify what is happening for your son, your daughter, your child. Never mind. What a family member has told you. Oh, Boys will be boys. Oh, that doesn't happen to girls.

Oh no, it's fine. They'll grow out of it. If you, as a parent feel in your gut that there's something going on, it is always worth exploring. It is always worth checking it out. So, you're like great Delphine. I've gone to the doctor or had a conversation. What does that get me? Going to the doctor and having a conversation allows your family doctor to provide you with other doors to make attempts through doors that you might not have thought to walk through resources to potentially have a look at.

One of the things you might want to think about is something called a developmental assessment. This is just at a young age. Generally, when kids are sort of kindergarten or pre-kindergarten, and it's really just a group of assessments that looks at your child or the child in front of the doctors and people who are doing the assessment to have a look at that child.

Based on what other children, their age are expected to be able to do. That's all it is. It looks at how are they developing in comparison to their peers? And it can also give you lots of really interesting information and flag stuff that you might not have thought to look at. For example, their gross motor skills.

Can they jump up and down? Can they run? Can they stand on one foot can look at their fine motor skills? Can they hold a pencil properly? Can they pick up small things off of a table? Do they have the attention span that, you know, would be expected of a child that age? Lots of little pieces of information, and that often begins to open the door for other things.

So, in my case to use my children as an example, Some of the markers that we were able to see early in these developmental assessments was the early markers for ADHD, which meant that we as a family could be sort of on the lookout for this sort of a thing. It also meant that we saw that they had some fine motor skill issues.

Holding a pencil was really difficult, picking up small things off a table was really difficult. It gave us as a family, a direction, a sense of. Where were we struggling? Where were the things that were really great? For example, one of my kids had really great oral language skills, but his ability to write things down was not so great.

So those were some of the things that happened. We took those things then onto the school. It helped our kids. Teachers be able to create programs for them that would continue to foster their learning. It allowed me as a parent to create a safe environment in my home where I had a really good understanding of what my child was good at, what I needed to be able to put into place.

Things like working on fine motor skills. So, Nope, I'm not going to help you cut that piece of paper. You need to do it yourself. It is really hard as a parent to sit on our hands. And not help our children, but sometimes not helping is helping. And it's been a long journey for me to learn that, but it's important.

Next thing that I did as my children started to go through all of this was I had the teachers approach us about getting an individual education plan. I wasn't hot on the idea. I didn't want to believe that there was anything. That my child needed. That was different from another child. Yup. You remember?

I just said we had a developmental assessment that told me that there were markers for certain things didn't mean that I wanted to believe that there was anything different. That's the thing as parents, it's hard when we hear that our kids are struggling. It's hard when we hear that our kids are different, but it's also important that we hear it, that we acknowledge it.

But most importantly, that we support our kids through the challenge of whatever it is. So off we went, we got an IEP, an individual education plan. Did it help it? Did it allowed me the teacher to create programming that was specific to my kid specific to my child's way of learning. And that was awesome, but then we needed more.

So, the next thing we did, next was got a psychoeducational assessment done. It's a really big, long, scary sounding name for just playing a bunch of games. Over a couple of sessions over a couple of hours, my kids got assessed on their learning. What were they really good at? What were they not so great at?

Where are the places where they got hiccups or had challenges and what were the things that they could fly through? They played some games, they read some stories. They wrote some stories. They did some talking. And then there was the debrief for those of you who have been through the psycho-ed assessment, you know, that it is a long process.

It is not a short meeting. When I was told it was a two-hour meeting, I thought, what could we possibly talk about for two hours or there's a lot to talk about, but does that ever give you a window into your child's mind? It is quite simply amazing. We learned about the things we already knew that they were good at and struggling on, but we learned about things.

We didn't know they were good at. We didn't know that they struggled with it was eye-opening for us. We were able to bring that information again to the school because we believe that sharing information is important to being open about where the struggles are and where the strengths are Fosters a relationship between our house and our children's school. The being able to talk openly with our school is the ultimate goal to create a cohesive learning environment for our kids.

This is our case. It's not every family's case. Every system is different. Every school board is different, but what I would say, and what I do think is important to remember is that no matter where you are on this journey through special education, through learning that your child is neurodiverse through learning that your child is an out of the box thinker.

At the end of the day, you are your child's parent. You are the one who knows your child best. You've known them for a very long time. You are able to advocate for them in ways that other peoples can't, you are able to advocate for them in ways that other people are not able to, but here's the trick.

Eventually you have to teach your child how to advocate for themselves.