We Have to Do it Again….

Welcome back to the access to education podcast, where we talk about everything having to do with learning differences and learning disabilities. Over the past couple of months, I brought you lots of episodes from experts, from parents, different perspectives on how to support children with learning needs and challenges.

I brought you my own journey, my own story at the very beginning of all of this, when I started this many months ago.

What I also want to share with you are my stories of my kids. It's not enough to simply share stories of other people. I want you to understand that I have been through the road that you have been on. No two roads are the same. I can't claim that my story is identical to yours or that your story is identical to mine.

But I have certainly had times that were challenging, huge successes in my children's lives, through their learning challenges and Neurodiversity, but we've also had some challenges along the way. And what I want to share with you today is my middle son's challenges where my middle son's road to success.

His is a little different to his older brothers. Initially in the beginning, I really truly felt that everything was fine. He wasn't. Disruptive in class. He was very good socially. He loves the company of other kids. He could make friends and we still joke about this today. He could make friends with the tree, if that was the only thing for him to play with.

So, the red flags weren't lighting up for me. And to be perfectly honest, I was too busy with his older brother. I was focused on all of the issues his brother was having. His brother was making waves. He wasn't making waves. He was doing the things that he needed to do to feel good. And we were supporting him, and we were watching him and enjoying all of the funny gifts that he has.

He is a jokester. He loves to tell jokes. He loves to be funny, and he likes nothing more than to give people hugs and cuddles and just tell them how much he cares about them. He has such a big heart. He's always full of joy. So, it was a little bit of a surprise to me when grade one rolled around and it was becoming clearer from the conversations I was having with his teachers, that something wasn't going well.

He was not enjoying school. Don't get me wrong. He liked seeing his friends and he likes talking to his friends, but the teachers kept saying, you know, he just doesn't seem to be listening. He's not paying attention. We call on him and he doesn't have the answer. And he wasn't picking up his letters as quickly as he should have.

He was really struggling with the letter sounds. He was just having a rough go of it. And I hadn't realized that it was that hard. As I said, we'd been pretty focused on our eldest running him to and from appointments. So, when it became clear that, you know, holding a pencil was a problem that paying attention was a problem.

I, again, booked an appointment with our family doctor and we had a conversation. And this time we didn't do a developmental assessment more because he was just a bit too old to be able to have that kind of an assessment done. But we did go back to talking with the psychologist that we had worked with for our eldest.

And I started to say, you know, I think we're noticing some things and he's maybe a little bit different than his brother and we're not quite sure what's going on. And at that point it was still grade one. She was saying, you know, it's a little bit early. I'm not really ready to work with him yet.

She truly believes that it's best to do the assessments when they're closer to the age of eight than the age of six or seven. So, I sort of said, well, we'll come back when he's closer to eight, but I really need an assessment done. And she agreed that she would do the assessment when the time came. And the meantime, because I had some experience with this now, I was able to connect to some of the agencies and therapists who we had seen.

Initially I was able to, through my doctor, get a referral into the hospital for occupational therapy, where we had been for my eldest. So, I guess in a way, even though I was later to the game and seeing the issues and problems. It was a little easier the second time around. And so, I was able to see it from a different perspective, but then we got to grade two, oi grade two was a rough one.

Uh, it became very apparent that he was a non-reader, it became very apparent that he would do anything to avoid having to do the work that he wanted to do. So, at the end of grade two, I pushed really hard with our psychologist. He wasn't quite eight. He was a little bit shy of eight and she did the assessment.

And again, it was two days of assessments. I wrote a blog post about it. You can go check it out on the blog. I'll link it in the description of the episode today. Oh, I remember sitting in that office. Wondering what the outcome would be and how could I have two children? How could I have won the lottery and had two of my children have beautiful gifts, but I also wasn't sure how I would deal with it all.

I knew what was coming and I knew the struggle and I knew what would be hard. And I knew that. We would all get through it. We would all come to the other side, but it was going to mean more work for me. It was going to mean more work for him. It was going to mean more discussions with my husband about what therapies we should try and who should we see and what doctors do we talk to and where do we go?

And what do we do when sometimes quite honestly, having differing opinions on what we should do. And that was hard as parents. It's always a little bit challenging when there is a challenge put in front of you as a couple as partners. You're not always going to be on the same page. You're not always going to see the same things.

Um, not to say that we argued about any of it, not to say that we didn't agree that, you know, we needed to take a path. It was just that we weren't quite sure how to meet his needs in a way that was going to be. Beneficial. Anyhow. So, we do the two days of assessment. We go back for the two hour debrief and again, it was overwhelming.

Again, it was a ton of information to take in. it was the beginning of understanding his brain and his thinking and all of the strengths and the gifts that he has, but also really getting a deep understanding of his struggles and what help he needed. And the biggest thing that the doctor said to me, that the psychologist said to me, was that we really should remove him from French.

And I remember that specifically because I remember my husband and I looking at each other and saying, we can't do that. It's it's too much. We can't have our kids in different spaces. We're just going to figure it out. So, we do what any parent does. And we're lucky that we had the ability to do this, but we hired a French tutor to come and read with him, once or twice a week.

I don't remember. We went through a couple of tutors. He built some relationships with some; he didn't necessarily build relationships with others. There was some improvement, but not a whole lot of improvement. And come the end of grade three, things were still pretty tricky. He, at the end of grade three was really only reading at about a grade one level or maybe early grade two.

And so, we kind of had a bit of a, a heart to heart moment with what are we going to do? And we weren't really sure. And so, we started the September in grade four or after. Just so that people have a frame of reference or we're in the pandemic, I'm recording this during pandemic. It's kind of the end of the third wave, I guess, that we've got going on here in Ontario.

So, he had missed a lot of grade three. He didn't not thankfully have to do EQAO, which we were sort of thankful for in terms of it's already challenging, but then trying to do it in a pandemic would have been even more difficult. We were also a little bit worried about him doing EQAO , because we felt that his scores would be low and that emotionally, that might not be so great for him.

Again, the school was amazing and [00:08:00] supportive and they tried their best to support him through grade three, online as best they could. But you know, it's really hard remotely to support some of these kiddos, especially when you have an inattentive child. We were also lucky enough that once we got the diagnosis of ADHD, that the psychologist from Sick Kids who works with our eldest was willing to take him on as well.

So, he now effectively sees both boys and supports them in their medication. because I just decided this time that I was not going to put Liam through, or I was not going to put our middle son through the fish oil, through the vitamins. The important thing to know about our middle son as well is that he really.

Struggles to take medication. This has been a thing for him since he was two, he will throw up medication. It is hours of trying to get him to take medication. And so, for a while, it was really hard. It was, he would throw up daily when we tried to give it to him.

It was probably 30 or 45 minutes of fighting every day. Which meant he was going to school feeling pretty terrible. His morning was starting not nicely. It was him yelling at us, us yelling at him. There was screaming, there was yelling. There was just, anyway, nobody wants to start their morning that way.

So, because the medication taking became so difficult, my husband and I actually decided to stop the medication. Was not the best plan. , I will admit willingly, we did not talk to the doctor about it. We just said, you know what? This isn't working for. His mental health for our mental wellbeing. This isn't working for us right now.

And we just need to take a break and regroup. And during that break, we went to see a speech language pathologist who supported us with swallowing. I did not know that speech language pathologists could support. In swallowing issues. So, this is where I learned something. She did some great exercises with him and we started using sprinkles and he would just swallow sprinkles every day.

I also didn't know that carbonated drinks can be very effective for people who need to swallow because it opens the back of the throat because of the bubbles. And so, some of these tricks helped. They didn't all help, but some of them have. So, we took a break from the medication. We called the psychologist pockets of kids and said, you know, this is our struggle.

What can we do? As it turns out, there is a new medication that has just come out a time-release medication that we were actually able to crush and could hide in things. So the method or the vessel of medication delivery currently, and. Any dietician who's currently listening to this? I apologize as I say this, we crush up his pill in the morning and it gets dissolved into Coke and he drinks, you know, a swig of Coke every morning and down it goes, that has been what works for us.

So, if you are on the medication journey, If you were on the medication journey and you are struggling to support your child to taking this medication, I encourage you to explore all avenues. [00:11:00] It's a trial and error, so we've moved on to grade four. And what we did was we knew that reading was a big struggle.

He was not reading in English and he was not reading in French. And we got to the end of grade three, my husband and I are both educators. And we knew that reading. It was very, very important. His dyslexia, his, disability in the way of processing language and understanding words that are written, is, a higher deficit than his brother.

And I had tried some tutoring, you know, just generic tutoring and it hadn't really worked. And I had started hearing from other people about this Orton Gillingham. Pardon style Wilson, train Wilson style reading. And I said to my husband, this is what we need to do. This is the program that is geared towards children with dyslexia.

So we started a second last week of August, in the year he entered grade four. And the beginning was hard. His tutor was unbelievably patient with him, built a relationship with him, learned the things he was interested in was able to draw him in, in a way that made him feel confident and made him feel like he was able to, and he would go, you know, for 50 minutes, twice a week, all virtually unfortunately again, because of the pandemic, but this one-on-one time.

And this very structured, very directed way of teaching him really seems to work. And what we saw happen on October 20th of 2020, when my little bundle of joy turns nine was a confident little boy who opened every one of his birthday cards and read them independently. My husband and I looked at each other that night at dinner, in complete disbelief.

I had never imagined that he would make so much progress. Did he read it without stumbling? No. Did he stop and start and sound out the words and stumble and mumble? Absolutely. But he himself, individually with no prompting from my husband or I was able to read those cards and that's when I understood that he needed to leave the French language program.

That for him, the French language, as much as he sometimes likes it. And I think that if I asked him outright, he probably say he doesn't love it. I was pushing that I was the driver behind the French, and I haven't heard him necessarily, but what I have seen as his confidence grow, and I have seen my quiet, shy little guy.

Who's very social, but was always sort of, you felt like he was never quite sure of himself has blossomed and grown into this amazing young man. And he is going to do amazing things and he's going to be an amazing person, but it took that birthday for me to realize that we had to make a change. And so, we are.

We're doing what we need to do for him. I've advocated for him with the school. They've provided him some reading programs at the school, but he hasn't made the progress in French that he needs to make going into grade five. So he'll start at a new school. His anxiety is very high about this, but we are going to support him every step of the way we are going to encourage him.

And we continue to point out all of the amazing changes he has made. He is beginning to read independently by himself, and you can see the confidence building in him. So, what I would say is if you have a child who's struggling know that the road seems endless. No, that the darkness seems really dark sometimes, but know that you are not alone, know that with the right supports and the love of a parent or a guardian or just someone in their corner.

That child is able to do amazing things, never underestimate the power of the brain of an outside of the box thinker.