

How to Advocate for Neurodivergent Children

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SPEAKERS

Seth Perler

 Seth Perler 00:00

Parents and teachers, what's up? It's me, Seth with SethPerler.com. I'm an executive function coach and I help struggling students navigate this thing called education so that they can have good life. If you've been following me for any period of time, you're gonna love this vlog today. And if you're new to me, I think you'll like it too. So parents and teachers, this one is different than what I normally do. I'm recording a special thing for Debbie Reber, my favorite podcaster in the education world and in the parenting world. You will get to see what I'm sharing with her, and that is going to serve as my vlog for today. So, at this point, Debbie's editor, if you want to cut out everything before that. So hello, Debbie Reber, thank you so much for asking me to celebrate this special occasion with you today, five years of your podcast. It is an honor that you have asked me to share some of my thoughts on this special edition of your podcast today. And I want to thank you, Debbie Reber, for everything you contribute to the world of parenting and kids, and into the world in general. You're an amazing person and thank you so much for how you show up in the world and what you bring to the world and all of the effort, and time, and energy, and heart that you put into sharing your message with the world. So thank you, Debbie Reber.

 Seth Perler 01:23

Debbie, you asked me this question, to respond to this question. What can we all do to keep this paradigm shift to one of more inclusion for neurodivergent children moving forward? So how can we keep the paradigm shift moving forward? Well, I have six points that I want to cover today. I really thought about this. For everybody listening, I put a lot of energy and time into this and really thought about it. This is an excellent question. What can we do? And here are the six things I think we can do.

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Seth Perler 01:55

Number 1: The number one thing that we can do is remember the why. Why are we here? Why are we doing education in the first place? Why do we teach kids? Why do we have school? And there's this great quote that I'm sure you've heard from Rob Siltanen. So it is Siltanen, not Steve Jobs, technically. And it goes, "Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes, the ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules, and they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them, about the only thing you can't do is ignore them because they change things. They push the human race forward. And while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius, because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do." And our neurodivergent kids are these people, they are so important. We need them. We need to educate them in terms of helping them become who they are. So the first thing I want to mention in terms of remembering the 'why.' There's a lot of pressure, a lot of pressure on new parents and teachers and professionals and all of us out there. And what we are not doing in terms of the 'why,' we don't need to focus on the pressure of grades and good grades, and pleasing others, and compliance, and education, and having kids do what they're told, and following instructions, and be a good little boy or a good little girl, and just listen and sit still and don't rock the boat. Get in line, be normal, make your adults proud, know your place, conform to our expectations, get good test scores, go to college, all of these things. While there may be value in them, that is not the 'why.' So conforming to those pressures is not the 'why.' What's the 'why'? Why do we educate our kids? What we want for our kids? Educare, education as you say in the Latin root, the etymology of this word means to 'bring up, to lift, to raise, to lead out, to launch.' We want to raise our kids, we want to bring our kids up. Listen to the words we say, "I'm bringing up my kids. I'm raising kids." What does that mean? Upward motion, up up up. Not down, not stifled, not stuck. How do we bring people up? How do we help our kids launch a good life? How do we help them fly? How do we help them self-actualize? How do we use education to help them self-actualize and serve at their highest capacity, where they're aligned with who they are and what they're good at, with exactly who they are? How do we teach them to think for themselves? To question things, to create things, to use their gifts and their strengths and their talents and their interests to have a life of purpose and meaning where they can

serve at their highest capacity aligned with those things. That's the 'why.' So remember the 'why,' educate. To lift. The why. Why are we here to lift them, to raise them, to bring them up? Not to get them to get good grades and test scores, and conform and all these things. We're here to help them shine.

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Seth Perler 05:13

Number 2: The 'can't' and the 'won't.' What can we do to keep the paradigm moving forward? Remember the can't and the won't. See, what happens is that a lot of these neurodiverse kids are misunderstood. They are seen as that they won't conform, they won't do what they're told, they're being lazy, they're not trying hard enough, they don't care, or whatever. They're often misunderstood as that they won't do certain things when in fact, they often can't. And when they can't do certain things they're being asked to do, our job if we want to keep the paradigm moving forward is to create systems and supports and education that looks at the can't and says, "How can we help them?" Not, "How can they try harder to conform to us?" Ask, "How can we conform to their legitimate needs to help them get what they need in order to have a great life?" So remember, there's an important distinction between the can't and the won't.

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Seth Perler 06:10

Number 3: Question everything. If we want to keep moving forward, we need to question everything. So there's a quote, "Once in a while, it really hits people that they don't have to experience the world in the way they've been told to," by Alan Keightley. We don't have to experience the world in the way we've been told to. So the way schools are set up, we have grown up in the world is seeing them how they are and it seems like that's the only way. But imagine there was no such thing as school ever. It had never been invented. What would you do to create it? If grades didn't exist, grade levels didn't exist, subjects didn't exist. What subjects would you create? Would you do it by subject? And what would you do to create schools or education or something to raise our kids up? Now, how can we question everything? Well, I think it's important for us to question everything in the education system, to question grades, to question grade levels, to question how the system is set up. But when we think about these things, I think it's important for us to work backwards. What I mean by that is this. What do we want school to do it? Well, like I said before, I wanted to teach kids how to think for themselves, how to question things, how to create, how to be self-learners, things like that. And what do we all want for our kids? Well, the thing I've heard more than anything is parents say, "I just want my kid to be happy. I just want my kid to be successful." What the heck does that mean? We want our kids to be happy, healthy, and successful. We need to think, what does that mean? What does it look like when a child has grown up and they're happy, healthy, and successful, and

contributing member of the society they're serving, they're aligned with who they are? What does that look like? And then we can reverse engineer and see "Well, how can we design educational approaches that can help them be that help happy, healthy, contributing, successful person? That's what we all want. Question everything is number three, question everything. Pretend none of this existed. When you get a gut feeling that something's off, it probably is. Question it.

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Seth Perler 08:14

Number four: Speak up. Martin Luther King Jr. said "Our lives begin and end the day we become silent about the things that matter." And a lot of times parents and teachers are shushed, are told, you know, "We've got this." You know, are told that our voice is really not that important. And it's hard to stand up to big power and speak what seems like a little voice. But we have to do this. Well how do we speak up? How do we advocate for our kids? How do we do this? We've got to be the squeaky wheel. Connect with each other, make grassroots groups, make clubs, connect with like-minded people, create meetups, be the squeaky wheel. Speak up, connect with others, take action now. Literally now. Stop the car, stop the podcast, whatever. What can you do to connect with people and raise the vibration, raise the voice and to speak up. Connect and speak up?

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Seth Perler 09:16

Number 5: Debbie talks about this a lot. Do our own deep inner work. If we want to move the paradigm forward, we've all got stuff. We've all got dysfunction, maladaptive patterns, things we've grown up with that are not working. The problem is we don't always do our deep inner work and we don't always question those things. But if we really want to help our kids, it's so important that we address our own traumas and things like this. So Abraham Maslow said, "What is necessary to change a person is to change his awareness of himself." So whatever your deep inner work is, your meditation, your prayer, your journaling, your therapy, your support groups, you're reading books from people who inspire you, what can we do to do our own deep inner work? To work with our challenges, our things that are often really hard to work with. But once we do, it models it to the kids, it helps us be better for the kids, it really helps them. I can't say enough about this. Do our own deep inner work, the challenging work. That's number five. Number six, the last one. Let me review these before I do this.

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Seth Perler 10:22

Number one was remember the why. To lift, to raise so that they can launch. Number two, the can't and the won't. We need to know when it's a can't and when it's a won't. Help our

kids compassionately, empathetically. Number three, question everything. If it doesn't seem right, it probably isn't. Just because it's the way it is doesn't mean it's the way it has to stay. Number four was to speak up. Advocate, connect to do that. Number five is to do your own deep inner work.

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Seth Perler 10:50

Number 6: The last one, the last one. What's it really, really all about? What's it really all about? You might be surprised by this, but I think that all of us would agree that what it's really about is love. Love, the relationship. Our relationship with our kids, whether you're professional, a teacher, a parent, our relationship with our kids, we do it because we love them. We care about these human beings, we want to see them have a great life. This is about love. We don't often say that. Teachers don't often say, "I do this because..." well, actually they might. "I love kids." These are expressions of love, how we help our kids. Mary Williams says this quote here, "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who were you not to be? You're a child of God, your playing small does not serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine as children do. We are born to make manifest, the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone, as we let our own light shine we consciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others." Now, I did not read this to be religious or to say anything controversial in terms of spirituality. I read this because of love. I think it's a fantastic expression of love, that we love our kids. We don't want them to play small, we want them to really shine. So number six, the last one is love. Love everybody, even the teachers that you think might be unfair, they're doing the best they can do. So if you're a parent, and you're worried about this, approach them with love. Love yourself. Teachers, approach the parents with love. All of us, approach everybody with love. But also love yourself, love ourselves. That can be hard to do. We have our inner critics, we have our baggage, whatever stuff that we're still working on. But love is an action, love ourselves. And of course, love our kids. Again, love is not just a feeling, it's an action. In terms of loving our kids it's easier said than done sometimes because we can get lost in all of the static. But loving our kids, what I want to say about that is to remember to play, to laugh, to joke, to connect with our children, to listen to them, to daydream with them, to accept them 100% with unconditional positive regard. Love is an act. Connect, connect, connect, play, joy, connect. Don't forget to spend time.

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Seth Perler 14:13

These these kids, these neurodiverse kids, all kids, you know, they grew up so fast, so fast. Time is so precious, and all the time with them to connect. And again, there's so much static and clutter and noise, and the periphery pressure as I started talking about in this discussion today. Pressures with grades, and compliance, and kids doing what they're told, and following instructions, and be be a good little boy or girl, and pressure to sit still, and not rock the boat, and make people proud of all those pressures. How important are those? Really, when it comes down to it, it's the time. So my last encouragement is to make time to play and connect today with your child. My name is Seth Perler, I'm an executive function coach. I help struggling students navigate this thing called education so they can have a great life. That's why I do this. I want to thank again Debbie Reber for her contribution. Take care everybody, be well. Go connect, go play. Take care.