welcome to empowering

homeschool conversations

your authority in

navigating the world of

homeschooling diverse

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educational consulting and tutoring

With over seventy five years

of combined homeschooling expertise,

experiences and perspectives,

this group is eager to

share their wealth of

wisdom to empower your

homeschooling journey.

So grab your favorite mug,

settle in and get ready for

insightful discussions,

valuable insights and practical tips.

Give your homeschool the

power boost it needs to

successfully educate the

unique learners in your home.

Thank you.

Hey everyone,

and welcome to another

episode of Empowering

Homeschool Conversations.

I'm your host, Peggy Pleur,

and I'm so glad that you're here today.

Whether you are folding laundry,

sipping your third cup of coffee,

or hiding in the pantry for

just a quiet moment,

this week's conversation is

one I think that'll speak to a lot of us.

Our episode is called

Homeschooling Autism with

Hope and Healing,

and I'm joined by a very special guest,

Heather Anderson,

a homeschool mom who's been

walking this road with her amazing son,

Tosh, who has nonverbal autism.

Heather's story isn't some polished,

perfect fairy tale.

It's real life, hard lessons,

surprise breakthroughs and

a whole lot of learning

through in and out what works.

She's going to share how she

went from surviving to

truly thriving and how her

family found healing,

joy and academic success right at home.

Before we get started, just quick reminder,

if you're looking for more encouragement,

helpful tips or just a reminder,

that you're not the only one

trying to figure out this as you go,

head over to spedhomeschool.com.

It's packed full of resources,

real support for parents

like you who are

homeschooling unique learners.

All right,

let's jump into the conversation today.

Welcome, Heather.

I'm so glad to have you here.

I'm so pleased to be here, Peggy.

A lot of the families in my

program are big fans of yours,

so they're excited for me too.

It's always nice to be on

somebody else's program or whatever,

because then people get to

actually learn about you

instead of you focusing on

just resources and stuff.

And I enjoy being on other

people's podcasts for that reason, too.

It's like, oh, yeah,

my story kind of gets lost.

Yes.

It's fun to go from

interviewer to interviewee sometimes.

Yes, exactly.

And you've got so much to

share and I'm so excited to

have you just to have this

time to be able to showcase

that for our families and

for you to even be able to

share with your own community,

a little bit of your own story too.

And, and kind of in a, you know,

a compact version of that.

And because I know you've

written a lot of blogs,

you have a lot of resources and yeah,

Yeah.

So I just love for you to

start by sharing just a

little bit about your

homeschooling journey and

what led you to making that shift.

Sure.

All right.

Well, my son, like you said,

has non-speaking autism,

severe level three.

And we were lucky that we

have a couple of things

that worked in our favor.

First of all,

even though he's truly non-speaking,

he only has one word,

And that word's mom,

which is a blessing and a curse.

But he's always been a

pretty good communicator

and able to get his point

across without words.

And so I saw the

intelligence in him from

the very beginning.

We also...

We lived in Washington, D.C.

when he was young.

I was a reporter in the district,

very important.

And we had a wonderful nanny.

a young woman who was going

to college for occupational

therapy and had worked in

an autism preschool.

And so she knew exactly what to do.

I had no idea what I was doing.

And so she, yes, yes.

She discovered that one of

the things that calmed him

was to sing the ABC song.

And yes.

And so that kind of opened

up a love of letters and

reading and learning and

that sort of thing.

So

She also taught him counting.

And so he was equipped with

the two primary skills that

we teach in my program,

which is letters mean a

sound and numbers mean quantity.

They're not just symbols to put in order.

So she helped him get over

that very first academic hurdle.

And so we came back to

California success in Washington,

DC is a twenty four hour gig.

And

I did not have that as the

mom of what was becoming Heidi's child.

So we came back to

California and settled down,

put him in public school.

We did the head start IBI preschool,

the federal program that so

many families have a

wonderful experience in.

And like them,

we did have a wonderful experience.

He blossomed.

He was learning.

He was getting great

reports coming home every day.

And I was very encouraged

about public education.

Then kindergarten happened.

And this is so typical in a lot.

It is.

I was going to say that

shift is so hard for so

many kids that have been in

that program and it works so well.

And then school.

Yeah,

because they lose the one-on-one and it's,

there's just the assumption that

the incorrect assumption

that the non-speaking kids

have intellectual

disability and they

instantly kind of start

treating them differently.

The standard becomes a

standard of behavior rather

than a standard of learning.

And so I would pick him up

and I would excitedly ask,

what did he learn today?

And they'd kind of look at

me like I was crazy and say, well,

he ate his snack and he went potty.

And he didn't hit anybody.

Yeah, that's great.

What did he learn?

And it quickly became clear

that they thought I was

crazy for assuming he

should be learning things.

Right.

Yeah.

So there were a few final

straws and that was it for

public school for us.

Yeah, I, yeah, that's,

that's probably the same

road my son would have taken.

But yeah,

we started homeschooling right at

that kindergarten age, too.

And yeah, we, but yeah, we, we, you know,

and I tried a few different

things as a lot of parents do, right?

I,

I got a lottery spot in a charter school.

So we went to the charter

school and he was placed in

a gen ed classroom because

they didn't really have a

lot of special ed

facilities and it didn't

work out for him.

It was just too overstimulating,

but he had the opportunity

to prove himself as a serious student.

He tried very hard and he

did show mastery of some of,

this was first grade,

some of the first grade academics,

Um, and that was where I met Mr. Sims,

who has helped me so much with my program,

special ed teacher.

Um, but you know,

and that didn't work out.

Then I put him back into our

neighborhood public school

for just a semester.

And I was just stunned at

the difference between a

charter school that was

willing to work with him as

a mainstream student and

give him truly the least

restrictive environment and

our neighborhood public school.

where I had a conversation

with the teacher that he's

ready for addition.

They were trying to tell me

he can't count past seven.

I'm like, that's impossible.

He's counting to one hundred at home.

And I told her, I'm like,

he's ready for addition.

And she looked at me and said, well,

how in the world would I teach him that?

Oh, boy.

She was a special ed teacher.

Yeah.

Yeah,

and it hit me that they had no

intention of teaching him that.

And then the other one was

when the other final, the final,

final straw was when an

aide pulled me aside and said, you know,

they take away his AAC

device as soon as you leave

and put it way up on a

shelf because he talks in class.

Oh.

Yeah.

So we were, so to summarize,

we're discouraging communication.

Right.

Unwilling to,

we don't know how to teach them addition.

And so I'm a very, you know,

give me that you're doing

it all wrong kind of person.

And I'm like, I can figure this out.

And, and the experience I had at the,

the charter school was such

a positive one that I just

ended up homeschooling through them.

And then that's when I

really got the program

together for my son.

It really started seeing some,

some results for him.

Yeah.

That's encouraging.

I, you know,

a lot of parents find

themselves at that place and they're like,

well, what do I do?

Yeah.

And so your story is filled

with a lot of hope as well as,

as some encouragement and,

and resources too.

So, so continue listening.

I, and I know you,

Some of your other story has

been filled with hard

seasons around sleep and

aggression and burnout.

And so I definitely don't

want to skip over those two.

Can you talk about what

those days look like for you as a mom?

Sure.

So I've actually completely

crashed out twice now.

The first I have.

Yeah.

And I'm the older my son gets,

the more I'm realizing that

it's probably going to

happen again in this

transition to adulthood,

because I kind of stalk

parents of older kids.

non-speakers who were pretty

successful in life and want

to know every single thing

that they go through.

It's interesting that that happens too.

But so the first difficult

time was after we moved

back from Washington, DC,

and it was clear that I was

going to have to give up my career,

which I had worked so hard

on and had always,

I never dreamed of being a mother.

you know,

while the other girls in school

would practice writing, you know,

Mrs. Andy Rogers, you know,

like the husband I would

have and the babies I would

have in the home.

I practiced my name on big

checks because I was going

to be the owner of the company.

And I played entrepreneur.

Like I didn't play dolls or

mommy or house.

I played entrepreneur, right?

So that was, I am work.

Like this is me and the essence of me.

So to lose that career,

and be a stay at home mom

and full-time caregiver was

a very big adjustment.

And so I became very depressed.

And then I, you know, I,

there was no place for my son, you know,

I knew he was smart and the

schools weren't helping and

I'm very into natural

health and the doctors weren't helpful.

And,

You know, I had I was really into,

you know,

all of the causes of autism from

the environment,

which my son was never exposed to.

And so it was a very dark place for me.

And my marriage was failing at the time.

And so I was, you know,

waking up in the morning

and making a screwdriver for breakfast.

And, you know, it was it was bad.

And a lot of moms get in that situation.

Right.

I'm seeing a lot of them on

social media that are in that stage.

So homeschooling and this

business is kind of what

brought me out of it.

You know,

that once my son was finally able

to make academic progress,

that relieved a lot of the

future anxiety that I had

and just made me feel like

there was something that I could build

and put myself into and make

use of the talents that I

was leaving behind in my former career.

So that was the first hurdle.

And that's the one that we

talk about on my website

and my about me page.

The second one happened recently, um,

my son became very

physically and mentally ill

and I was completely gaslit by doctors,

by, by everyone.

Um,

his pediatrician refused to

refer him to psych because, um,

those pills, the, that,

that doesn't help anyway.

And this is just how these guys are.

And he told me you either

need to toughen up or put

them in a group home because there's,

this is completely normal.

And, you know, we, he was,

he was violent and extremely destructive,

um,

Me and his dad and my son

were walking around with

scratches and bite marks

and bruises and broken

windshields and broken

windows and the walls were

down to the studs.

And it was just horrific.

Horrific.

He would look at me with a

fear in his eyes like he

didn't know who I was,

like he didn't recognize me.

And I'm like, this is not normal autism.

Right.

Yeah.

So...

I just wrote a blog on this

because we had to involve the police.

And luckily for me,

the police in our area are

extremely supportive and

very well trained.

And it was opposite

conclusion of the horrible

tragedy that we saw last

week with the non-speaker

killed by police.

Um, so I,

I wrote about that and how

wonderful an experience that was.

Um,

it turned out my son had very severe

mental illness and, um,

that was just waved off by

the doctors as behaviors.

Um,

luckily the police were able to hook us

up with the correct

supports and resources.

And after about six months,

he was completely stabilized.

Um, we,

we were able to do that safely at home.

it was pretty bad.

We could do a whole podcast on that story.

We went through the same

thing with one of our kids

just in the last year or two.

And it is not easy.

I haven't really talked

about that experience myself.

But the police, there's a lot,

like in our local area,

they have a whole mental

health unit and they are very, very good.

and what they do and they can walk you.

Like you said,

we had been asking for

resources from multiple

people and finally it took

the police to get involved

before anything really happened.

And you feel bad,

you feel like this isn't

what I should be doing in

my house and what are my

neighbors gonna think?

And at this point,

it doesn't matter anymore.

Um, because I feel threatened.

My child is out of, you know,

control and something's got to happen.

Losing control with reality.

Yeah.

I mean, it was that bad.

And yeah, we, you know, um, the very,

I was, I couldn't get any help.

Like we were ready to go

with a group home because

all the doctors were telling us, Oh,

well then we can do, you know?

And so I couldn't get,

we here in California,

we have what's called regional centers,

which is a private public

partnership that

distributes services to

disabled people in California.

And they refused to help me.

They said, well,

just put him back in school.

I'm like, he can't go to school.

He's violent.

He is violent.

And they're like, well,

that's their problem.

Oh, no wonder.

What a good answer.

Because, you know,

like they the the resources,

the community resources are like, well,

just send them to school.

Let them deal with them.

Like, I'm not going to do that.

That's not what school's for.

And so when I I went to a we

have a wonderful kind of local school.

Facebook group for special

needs parents in my area.

And I asked the group I posted,

what should I do?

And the parents were like,

call the police.

The regional center will act

if you have a paper trail

of police activity.

So I did that.

That's what the policeman told us too,

is that, you know,

it's better that you're

involved and this is a good

situation that we come into

instead of us finding

something further down,

but also they're able to

respond in a much more informed way when,

if you have other follow-ups,

they already have that record in place.

So yes.

Yeah.

They, so the very first,

the two officers that came

on the very first call,

One had a mildly autistic

son and the other one had a

level three severely non-speaking son.

And so they knew exactly

what was happening in our

backyard and advised me like, you know,

if you invite us in and he charges at us,

we are required to use police force,

which is not appropriate.

We know this as dads.

So we're going to stand

outside and be here until he calms down.

We can come in if needed,

but we're just going to,

And then they referred me to

our behavioral health team

and got us in to see a

better level-up psychiatrist.

And they...

They forced me.

They literally went to the

regional center and said,

if we get one more call from this family,

because you didn't help them,

you're going to hear from us.

They like threatened them

into inviting us with some support.

Regional center expected me

and his dad to both stay home with him.

For the six months he needed to stabilize.

And the police were like,

these people need to work.

Yeah,

that's not you're supposed to do your

job.

So yeah,

that was that was quite an experience.

But through that fire,

we as a family became really close,

even as divorced parents,

we are such a team now.

And

my son trusts us like really, really,

really trust us.

And through that,

we developed some

incredible communication skills where,

you know, he, he can tell us now,

you know,

if these things are coming and right.

And he, you know,

even if he's having an

episode and I sound scary

or I look scary,

He trusts that, no,

I know that's really mom,

like I can talk him down.

And so it's just like,

I feel like that horrific

experience set us up for

success with him forever now.

Yeah.

Yeah.

I think the same happened for us, too.

It's been it's it's coming.

It was we celebrated.

Yeah.

But a year into this a

couple of weeks ago.

And yeah.

It's our one year anniversary.

Yeah.

Yeah.

And how it has changed my marriage,

how it has changed my

relationship with my child,

how it has changed our

whole family dynamic.

It has opened everybody up

to like being able to do

family counseling that

nobody was thinking otherwise.

Now, what do we need that for?

You know, and so I, yeah, I love,

I love that your story is the same way.

Cause how encouraging that, you know,

two totally different stories, you know,

we're living in different

areas of the country.

And, and my, my child is verbal,

but still has a lot of

other things that he's dealing with.

His was more brought on by,

he was physically attacked and,

Um,

and that led to some really downward

spiraling things.

And, um, but yet on the end,

we can see it as a being a

positive because of what it

has brought about, um, in healing really.

So isn't it crazy that you

and I have had such similar

experiences and we had no idea.

about the other.

And that's,

I really would like to talk

about this more not in your

form in your call.

But I think this is

something that parents need

to hear that when your

child is prescribed

antipsychotic medication,

that is such a blow.

And there is so much shame

associated with that.

And we don't realize,

especially with the non-speakers,

that almost all of them

take that medication.

And had I known that, like I know that now,

now that I start talking

about it and I talk to

parents of older non-speakers,

they're like, oh yeah,

we're on that and this,

we tried that and that didn't work.

And now we stopped and then

we started to get on.

Oh yeah, that's the process.

And so I really kind of want

to normalize this

experience so that it's not

so fearful for everyone.

Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Yes.

And it is, it's,

it's a crazy adventure and

it is a lot of trial and error.

And I don't think people

realize that it's like we

change meds and then go on vacation.

It's like, well,

that was the worst vacation

ever because of that med change.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Well, or they, they grow, they develop,

they get bigger, you know,

and it stops working and it's, you know,

the med game is a long game.

Yeah, for sure.

Yeah.

And of course it needs to be

supported by natural health

and all those things as well.

Yeah.

Well, speaking of game changers,

you mentioned that sleep in

your story is also a game changer.

What changes did you make

that and how did that

affect everything else?

Yeah.

So I always recommend that

sleep be the first thing

that a family tackles before homeschool,

before education,

because if you're not sleeping,

you're not learning.

I love sleep.

It's my favorite pastime.

It really is.

I have a very full life on

the other side when I'm asleep.

And so I was just unwilling

to keep that up.

I can't.

I was the friend in college

who would go out and

disappear before midnight

because I cannot stay awake.

So that was a top priority for me.

So I've been interested in

natural health for...

over thirty years.

And so I had a lot of things to try.

For my son, here's what worked.

Diet.

Right.

So the obvious ones,

the non-dairy and gluten free,

that kind of stuff to get

rid of the constipation and

the tummy pain and that kind of stuff.

Right.

Because that's highly

prevalent in any child on the spectrum.

Oh, yeah.

I mean,

it's it was a problem for me as a child.

You know, I was a weekly pooper for many,

many years.

And so that's the first thing.

The second thing, though,

is processed food.

My son is extremely sensitive,

extremely sensitive to processed food,

as am I. Just a little bit

of MSG will keep me up all night.

And it gives me like

restless leg feeling and

just the feeling that I

want to crawl out of my skin.

All kinds of processed food, food dyes,

too much sugar and all that stuff.

So that's even more

important for my son than anything.

dairy and gluten.

So I've been making

everything from scratch for

a really long time, but I get to sleep.

So it's totally yes.

Another big thing for him

was Epsom salts in the bath.

Oh, yes.

Because to the magnesium, yes,

autistic people are

unusually low in magnesium

and magnesium is needed to

regulate sleep.

So and it also supposedly gets rid of

in the body and just makes

you feel relaxed and takes

away that restless body feeling.

And so,

and the fun thing about Epsom salts

is that they can play with

it in the bath and it's, it's,

it's everything and it tastes terrible.

So if you have a bath, like I did,

it will put a stop to that as well.

So many, so many benefits to Epsom salts.

So we started doing that and those things,

those things did it.

Also my son, when he was younger,

he liked some white noise.

When he was an infant,

we did the to get him to sleep.

Right.

And so then we had to keep that going with,

you know, white noise apps and stuff.

And he still uses those from

time to time as well.

But now that he's, he has his own,

iPad and his own YouTube

channels that he likes to

listen to when he falls asleep.

He's in charge of that now.

And he's for years now,

he's been twelve hours a night.

Wow.

Consistently.

Yeah.

That's great.

Yeah.

It's in this home.

Yeah.

I'm sure that was a process, though,

of what what you figured out,

what worked and what didn't.

Yeah.

But I mean,

I started when he was preschool.

three toddler.

And he had like the,

he had the night terrors

and that kind of stuff too.

That was a rough period as well.

Right.

Yeah.

That diet is a huge thing.

And I know a lot of parents

struggle with it because

their kids are sensitive to

food and textures.

And then you get picky eaters.

And then you try to, you know,

it's just like the

spiraling downward trend of

trying to help your child

be healthy and to use natural things.

And they seem to be very resistant to it.

Do you have any advice for

parents who are kind of on that trend?

that track.

Yeah.

You have to eat the same food.

Well,

the reason it worked for our son is

because his parents both eat clean, clean,

clean, you know,

I'm kind of a hippie and his,

his dad is a coach and like

a strength and conditioning

coach who was a bodybuilder.

So he, you know,

knows exactly what to eat

and how to be clean and

that sort of thing.

So, um,

you know, our son never had,

he didn't know what fast food was.

He didn't know what soda was.

He, you know,

the worst thing he got was

like hot buttered toast was

like his cheat meal.

So, you know, he was just, he,

he grew up thinking it was

normal that like everybody

eats broccoli and has a

green juice and he didn't

know any different.

So, you know,

you can't have everyone in

the family eating

you know,

pop tarts and then your autistic

kid has to have yogurt.

Like that's not going to work.

Everybody has to do it.

Yeah.

I think the greatest

blessing for us was we

moved to a farm when right

after a couple of years

after my son was diagnosed

and we started growing our own food.

And, and so, you know, our, our kids,

they not only worked on the farm,

but they ate what was from the farm and,

And it was,

it was a huge shift and yet it

made dramatic differences in,

in their health and, and all of,

all their wellbeing all over.

Oh, absolutely.

I grew up on a farm and, you know,

was in four H and went to

Kansas state university.

So I know a lot about plants and

Yeah,

we've been eating from the garden for

years.

And we live in Southern California,

so we're lucky in the backyard.

We have two orange trees, a lime tree,

and a lemon tree.

Oh, nice.

Yeah.

And strawberries and a blueberry bush.

I just keep killing them

because we get a freeze here in Texas,

like once a year.

Yeah.

I'm like, oh, if they could just make it.

Texas weather's impossible.

Yeah, it's a hundred and five.

It's twenty below.

Well, thankfully I'm near the coast,

so we don't get that low.

But yeah, it's still crazy.

I grew up straight north of Amarillo,

so that was rough weather.

Yes.

Yep.

That will happen there.

So when you gave up, you know,

the mainstream schools and, you know,

what did that look like?

And what did that process of

starting to teach reveal to

you about how your son learns?

I was so lucky.

that we were assigned Mr.

Sims as our supervising

teacher when I finally

decided to homeschool him.

I went and homeschooled through a charter,

the same charter that had

allowed him to try to be in

the mainstream class.

And they assigned Mr. Sims.

And I didn't realize it,

but when my son was in the

mainstream class at that charter,

he was working with Mr. Sims' son

So Mr. Sims was indirectly

already working with my son

because his son came to him and said, dad,

I have this non-speaking kid.

He's really bright,

but can't keep his body still.

What do I do?

And so Mr. Sims put together

a program for my son that

presumed his competence.

Mr. Sims is known in this

area for taking kids off

the completion track and

getting them a diploma.

And I charged into that charter, that mom,

who was like,

he is going to have mainstream academics.

Don't you dare give me this

presumed incompetent stuff.

And so they said, we have the guy for you.

Let's put you with Mr. Sims.

And we hit it off.

And the first thing that he did was

through his son,

work with my son to teach

him beginning consonant

sounds and make sure he had

those down before we moved

on to the CBC word families.

And so instead of sitting

him at a table with a

pencil and trying to get

him to do a worksheet,

Mr. Sims had me put letters

on post-it notes and stick

them up on the wall and

then tell him which letter

makes the buh sound,

which letter makes the mm sound.

Which letter makes the sound.

And Mr. Sims even took it a

step further where he would

put several of them up in a room.

And my son had to go around

the room and find all of the beans.

Okay.

So it was a treasure hunt, active.

Right.

But also showing academic mastery.

And that method is included in my program.

I basically digitized all

the things that Mr. Sims

showed me from his thirty

five years as a successful

special ed teacher.

But he hadn't worked that

much with the non speakers.

And so together we kind of developed it,

made it more geared toward non speakers.

And so, you know, once my son,

if he is allowed

to move.

And also we learned,

I learned about errorless learning,

which is where you show the

student how to do it first

and then gradually back off

instead of doing hand over

hand or just throwing them to the wolves.

Our children tend to be very

anxious about getting it wrong.

And so if you can tell your student,

when I could tell my son,

I'm not going to let you get it wrong,

I'm not going to let you get it wrong.

Just watch me.

You can join in when you're ready.

And my son's like a lot of

our students has a nice big ego.

And so as soon as he figures it out,

he's pushing me.

I know how to do this.

That's when you know you got him.

Right.

That's I figured out that

that that was a big part of

his learning style.

He needs to move.

He can't, you know, if.

the second you make him sit

down and hold a pencil,

that's going to be all of

his focus is keeping his

body straight and trying to

make his finger move.

And so the knowledge just

gets lost along the way.

Right.

And even now.

Sensory things involved with that too,

that, that cloud thinking and, and,

and the ability to concentrate.

So yeah, absolutely.

Absolutely.

So we incorporated movement and, you know,

taking away the pressure of

always having to show expressive mastery.

We don't do that every day anymore.

And he just he flourished.

He flourished.

He's now fourteen and he's

doing eighth grade work in

all subjects and beyond in some subjects.

Yeah.

So he and he like I said before,

he's always been a good communicator.

Not in neurotypical ways, but like he,

you know,

point at the right answer is

something he's been able to

do for some time,

point at the correct

multiple choice answer.

A lot of our students can do that.

So that's kind of the first

skill that we work on with them.

Yeah, that, that makes a lot of sense.

And, and yeah,

but unfortunately a lot of

curriculum just isn't created that way.

And,

and so I'm glad that you've stepped in

the gap to do that.

Yeah.

Yeah.

So we, Heather's website will,

is in the show notes for this show.

It's the autism oasis.com.

And she'll talk about more,

more about that site as we,

we progress into our conversation.

But so I'm assuming, you know,

that wasn't your only support system,

the father and son team

that you've added to that

team since then.

How did you go about...

just figuring out who would

best support you with your

goals in mind for your son

versus what you had received.

Because I think a lot of parents are like,

well, what am I getting into?

You know, putting myself out there for,

you know, therapists and other people.

And do you have any advice

on navigating that?

Sure, I do.

So when it comes to therapies,

therapy is so individual.

So individual.

What works for you will not

work for another family.

What worked for another

family is not going to work for your kid.

So the only way you know is to try.

All you can do is try.

I give therapies six months.

Six months to see something.

If I see nothing, then no harm, no foul.

It's either not for my kid

or it's not for him right now.

And nobody's wrong.

Nobody is right.

It just didn't work.

So I think that attitude is

very important.

Just try it.

All you can do is try.

Also,

you don't have to do all of the things.

I feel like parents get the

hard sell from therapies.

If you don't do ABA,

if you don't do speech therapy,

if you don't do OT, if you don't do PT,

if you don't do feeding therapy,

if you don't eat equine,

you're a horrible parent.

that you have to do all of these things,

right?

When I meet moms who are

completely burned out,

I tell them to cut the therapies in half.

Fifty percent, gone.

Get rid of it.

Pick the fifty percent

that's doing the best,

and then get rid of the rest.

Let your kid be a kid.

So that's on the therapy side.

On the support side,

I am obviously very

friendly and talkative.

And so I would purposely try

to make friends in the waiting room,

the lobby of the therapy,

or back when he was at

public school or doing like

the charter school, you know, once a week,

little class thing.

I would try to make friends

with all of the parents that were there.

And we throw parties here.

We throw parties and meetups

for non-speaking friends.

And so...

Since, you know, for ten years,

we've had friends come over

for birthday parties and

Halloween parties.

And we've developed a really

awesome core friend group

that's still together.

That's very cool.

And so my son has, like,

five or six really, really good friends.

He just had a birthday party.

They all showed up.

And so there's,

there's some completely

non-speaking friends.

And then we have some like

mild to moderately autistic

friends as well.

And, you know, we,

we'd lock all the doors and, you know,

it's, it's, it's such a good environment.

Like, you know, the new parents that come,

the new friends are nervous.

Oh no, you know,

he broke something like that's,

not a problem.

I always like to say it's not a party.

If,

if nobody is drug kicking and screaming

out of the place, it wasn't a good party.

That comes with it.

Right.

So I have, I have a mom group,

a local mom group.

I have friends who are

parents of non-speakers who

we text all day long, you know,

and whenever we're cleaning

up poop or whatever,

we have that outlet of, you know, the

Other mom on the other end that says, yep,

I get it.

We lost a window this morning, you know,

or whatever.

So that's important.

And then educationally, of course,

Mr. Sims, I was so blessed with Mr. Sims,

but we also have had some

really good therapists along the way.

At that charter school,

there is a wonderful speech

therapist that got my son

to use AAC for the very first time.

And she figured out right

away that he's an action guy.

And so he loves office chairs rotating.

He loved her chair.

And he got as a reward a

spin at the end of each session.

Right.

So she turned it into, well,

I'll spin you right now if

you use your device and

tell me how many spins you want.

And then she took that out

to the playground with

pushes on the swings.

And that made the connection for him that,

oh, this iPad,

this app can get me what I want.

And that opened the floodgates.

And she was so great with

him that even during the pandemic,

he was able to do virtual

sessions with her by

himself without me sitting

right there with him

because he trusts her so

much and wants to impress her.

So she was amazing.

And then, of course, like many families,

we discovered Spell to Communicate.

And we live close enough to

the Speller Center in San

Diego that we can drive there every day.

We also are close to

Autistically Inclined in Hemet,

California,

and the Speller Family Camps

up in the mountains of Idyllwild.

We do that each year.

And we met Erin Clarelli of

Sunrise Therapy.

She's an OT who specializes

in non-speaking people.

kids and apraxia in severe

autism and trains other OTs.

It's actually her birthday today.

And so she's very visible in

our community and very helpful.

She's like the autism whisperer.

She can,

she and her staff can knock out my

son's meltdowns in seconds, seconds.

Like they immediately know

what the problem is.

I'm sitting there going, is it your body?

Is it your feelings?

Are you mad?

And they just instantly know and can like,

you know, do the squeezes or the just,

they instantly know what he needs.

And so we are so blessed

that we have the Speller Center.

Aaron shows up at all of the

surf days and stuff,

and we can completely relax

both me and my son,

just like everyone here is

well-trained and knows

exactly what to do.

And so,

Oh, earthquake.

We're having an earthquake right now.

I'm not kidding.

Huh?

All right.

The initial rock is over.

Okay.

All right.

That was it.

I think.

All right.

I think we're all right.

California.

Yes.

We actually live like right

on the San Andreas fault, but

on a big slab of rock.

And so all of the maps of

like what would happen in the big one,

we would just get shook,

but we'd be okay.

Okay.

You might be a special needs

mom if you have an

earthquake and you're like, oh, fun.

Yeah.

Let me info dump on you

about what I know about earthquake.

So anyway,

I'm so lucky to have all of them

in Southern California.

It's an amazing community

for non-speakers.

I would love to reproduce it

everywhere in the country.

Yes.

I know so many people do not have any, any,

like even like one of those

resources and you've got multiple.

And so that is just huge to

have that much support and

to have that many

connections for your son.

So as far as your son goes,

how does he connect

socially and communicate with his peers?

I think a lot of parents

kind of wonder how,

how do you navigate that?

Well,

a lot of his friends are non-speaking.

And when you get two

non-speakers together who

have been friends for a long time,

they just click, they groove, you know?

And like he has one friend,

my son is very physical and

kind of rough.

And he has a good friend who

has a few words,

but is also impulsive body

and kind of rough.

And they will roll around like,

like a cartoon of just, like,

stars and marks, you know, and laugh and,

like,

have each other in a headlock and

just be giggling like maniacs, right?

So he's able to relate to

his non-speaking friends very well.

I'm lucky.

I'm lucky in that he is very

aware of the world around him,

and he's pretty good at matching his...

behavior to what's around him.

Like when he's feeling great,

he can move through the

world kind of undetected.

So it's, you know, but of course he's big,

he's five, ten, two hundred pounds.

So in the event that there is trouble,

you know,

that would be kind of difficult.

But he's he's always been

very social and friendly and

you know it's it's difficult

for him like when we go

driving around and he sees

boys his age zooming

through traffic on e-bikes

you know I can tell like he

really wishes he because he would be

the one who would be out

there zooming through traffic,

risking his life.

Personally, I'm kind of glad he can't,

but you know, he wants to be in school.

He wants to be in public school,

but he knows that they will

infantize him.

And he knows that he becomes

very aggressive when people

speak to him like that.

So he knows it would not be

a good situation,

but he's lonely and bored at home.

So I,

try to get him together with

friends and get him out as much as I can.

It's,

it's difficult to get two

non-speakers out at the same time.

Usually one guy's ready to

go and the other one's having a bad day,

you know?

So that makes it kind of rough.

But he just, he really shines when,

you know, we have our local get togethers,

the Speller Center in San

Diego has little monthly

social events to the,

You know, when we go to the camp,

he's very, so it, I would say,

try to find your non-speaking student,

other non-speaking friends.

You can't just assume that

just because they're non-speaking,

they're going to be the best of friends.

Right.

And other kids I've tried to

pair him with.

And he was like, no,

I don't like that kid.

It's normal, right?

You have to presume competence.

To presume competence is to

understand that they're not

going to be best friends with everybody.

That's a tough one, especially as teens.

Because they want to be social,

but they're also easily

embarrassed and very

self-conscious and very

aware that they're different.

My son had a meltdown once

in Target because

as he was walking in, he made a noise,

an autism noise.

And there were two teenage

girls walking out and they were like, Oh,

what was that?

Oh,

and they kind of laughed at him or

whatever.

And that was really hard on him.

Like we had to leave.

So there's that, you know, there's,

there's so many like normal

teenage things that autism complicates.

you know, that.

Yes.

Yeah.

Well,

normal teenage things are complicated

anyways.

Another layer onto that.

Middle school isn't pleasant for anyone,

you know, right.

So what would you say to the

mom who feels like

nothing's working right now

and is questioning if

homeschooling is really the right choice?

I worked with a lot of

parents on expectations and,

We have this Pinterest image

in our minds of what

homeschool looks like.

And that is not the reality.

And I'm lucky that we have

Mr. Sims as part of our group.

Mr. Sims comes on this time

of year and says, oh,

we're not getting anything

done in the classroom either.

Like it's spring.

Nobody's killing it at school right now.

So when we have brand new students,

students who are young,

or are new to the

expectation of academic performance,

sometimes you might only

get twenty minutes of school a day.

Three activities.

We advise to start with three.

Do one, take a break.

Do a second one, take a break.

Then if they can get that third one,

they get a big prize.

Go to the, you know, go for a drive.

we're making cookies,

whatever your kid's into.

But just those three things

per day can be a full day.

And it doesn't have to be

sitting at a desk,

doing a worksheet with a pencil.

My son does math in my chair here.

We do history at the airport.

We drive to our little local airport.

We park out at the end of the runway and,

And I read to him history

and sometimes we do a quick

spell to communicate lesson.

And then we regularly take

breaks to watch the little

airplanes take off and land.

And it's a perfect rhythm

because we both have ADHD

and we both need something else, you know,

every couple of minutes.

And so,

and for some reason he can sit

still in the car much

better than in a chair at

home or standing at home.

So he's more of a captive

audience in the car.

So we do that.

We do science on the patio

and we do like others spell

to communicate literature

and stuff out on the patio.

He also is really into physics this year.

And so, yeah.

And so I let him watch

physics lectures and,

on the back patio on the iPad.

And he,

a lot of times we'll pace around

the yard and rip up the

lemon tree leaves while he listens.

But I just let,

I just let him take that in

because that's a college level lecture.

Yeah.

Oh yeah.

It makes smoke come out of

my ears and he's,

he's walking around going, yeah, yeah,

yeah.

Like he totally understands all of it.

So, you know,

I would say expectations are,

as far as the amount of work

and also what it looks like.

Right.

Yeah.

And, and also just respect the season,

you know, I mean,

this year we're crushing it, but in, in,

in, in, in, in, in, in, in, in, in, in,

in, in, in, in, in, in, in, in, in, in,

in, in, in,

none, you know, he couldn't, he just,

he couldn't safely be

within six feet of him most of the time.

And so, you know,

our kids do well and then

they get sick and then they do well.

And then dad gets deployed

and then they do well.

And then grandma has to come

live with us because she's end of life,

you know, like,

Right.

Yep.

Success is not a straight line.

But it's the academic

success that we're often looking at.

We're not looking at what

they're learning in the

process of all those life

experiences and how we're

handling them and how

they're integrated into that family,

just kind of, you know,

navigation of that whole experience.

So they are learning.

It's just not they're

learning what's in the curriculum.

Well,

they could even learn the curriculum

receptively.

So we, I did homeschool with my son,

but it was all verbal and

he just listened.

And, you know, during those,

during that time, I was like, just,

just listen to me.

I'll speak really softly and

you can just listen.

And now this year, now that he's able to,

once again, expressively show mastery,

he's showing mastery of all

of those things that I only

exposed him to, you know, yeah, possibly.

So, yeah.

The receptive learning is

real and it works.

I was going to say,

in the span since you've

started homeschooling until now,

what's one thing that you

would have just never

dreamed that your son would

be able to do when you

first started that you've

now seen happen?

It's spell to communicate.

And I have the same story as every parent.

I always presumed my son's competence,

his intellectual competence,

because he's always been

able to show it pretty well.

I presumed that he had

average intelligence.

Spell to communicate has

shown that he has superior intelligence.

I mean...

the kid has understanding of

things I never thought I taught him.

Like he must just pick up everything.

And he has such an

understanding of history

and other cultures and just

a respect for things

happening in the world.

And so to be able to discuss

tariffs with him,

He gets it like he and he's

interested to know all of it.

You know, as a former journalist,

I I watch documentaries for fun.

Like I just I want to know

everything about everything.

I don't care what it is.

Just give me all of the information.

And I I would info dump on

my son a lot as a homeschool teacher.

And I assumed it annoyed him.

And one day I was saying, I'm sorry,

I know you probably don't

want to know the complete

history of Wall Street, but, you know,

I'll tell you anyway.

And he grabbed me by the face.

Our kids do this thing where

they grab our face and they

put their faces right up.

And he looked me in the eye and he went,

like, yes, I want to know.

And I'm like,

you want to know everything

about everything?

And he's like, yeah, yeah, yeah.

I'm like, all right.

So now we...

I start every Monday talking

about like what the news is.

I read to him from the Wall

Street Journal headlines, you know,

and he wants to know all of it.

He watched the entire

Republican National Convention,

the entire Democrat National Convention.

He watched the debates.

He watched the inauguration.

You know,

we watched the dragon splashdown

from when the astronauts

came back from the

International Space Center.

He knows all about how the

ISS is going to be taken offline soon.

He loves all of that stuff.

So I never in a million

years thought that I could

discuss tariffs with my non-speaking,

fourteen-year-old.

But he understands it.

He has the intellectual

capability to understand more.

than neurotypical fourteen-year-olds.

That's very exciting.

That is exciting.

So as we're wrapping up,

can you tell us about the Autism Oasis,

just kind of how you started it,

why you started it,

and then what you do to

help families that are in a

similar place where you were?

So I originally started this

Autism Oasis to be a resource for moms.

Um, I was, you know,

it was the influencer girl

boss life coach kind of, you know,

it was the, the,

the late twenties tens and

that's what everybody was into.

So that's what I was going to do.

And I quickly discovered

that special needs moms

don't like to spend money on themselves.

Um,

which I should have known cause I

wasn't doing it either.

Um,

and then the pandemic hit and I saw the

opportunity for homeschool

because so many families

had their kids come home.

And number one, couldn't do online school.

Number two,

we're horrified at the lack of

academics in the online

school and we're searching

for something better.

And I already had a program

and I know how to build websites.

So I just digitized it and it took off,

took off, you know,

as a single mom with a non-speaking guy,

I don't get to work full time.

And yet the company has

doubled in size every single year.

since I started offering it

without much work on my end.

So it works.

We really focus on the

foundational academic skills,

the skills that students

must master in order to move up.

Things like understanding

that letters aren't just symbols.

They mean something.

Something about numbers, right?

So we are very focused on

getting all of those skills

up to a fourth or fifth grade level.

And then after that,

it's all just repeat and

slightly more complicated, right?

And so we take our time

getting to that fourth or

fifth grade level.

And then Mr. Sims has found

from experience that kids

often leapfrog up after

that and can catch up to their peers.

And that happened with my son.

This year, we did sixth, seventh,

and eighth grade math.

yeah and he's just zooming

through it he loves it you

know and it's because it's

because we spent two years

on place value I mean he

just placed value was so

hard and we grinding and

grinding and he finally got

it so now when we're

dividing fractions you know

it's he understands it um

right working in decimals

decimals are easy he

understands decimals because it's

We worked so hard on place

value four years ago.

So that's really what we

focus on is getting that

foundation down and

providing the support to

parents each semester program.

That I have online has about

two hundred little five

minute instructional videos

where I go clear down to

like cover this up, point at this,

say this, ask if he wants to point.

No.

OK, we'll keep going.

Uncover this.

How about this?

Turn the page, cut it up, you know,

put it on the wall.

So many little snippets of support.

And then once a week, that's on Monday,

we have a live Zoom meeting

with Mr. Simms.

And so the parents can come

on and ask him any question

that they'd like.

And I record it because as you alluded to,

a lot of times our parents are, you know,

have the camera off and are

doing something else while

they're listening.

And so I only have about ten

parents show up live.

But then I have like four

hundred watch the replay over the night.

You're very.

Yeah, exactly.

Yeah.

Yeah.

That's that's just our community.

And I mean, that's.

Yeah.

I've been there, done that.

I totally get it.

Barely show up on Monday

night and I have someone to

take care of my son.

Right.

Yeah.

Yeah.

So, well,

this has been really encouraging and,

and yes,

you can go to the autism oasis.com.

I had that up on the screen,

but also in the show notes,

there'll be a hyperlink so

you can just click on it

and then find Heather and

her resources and

and reach out to her if you

have any questions about that.

So thank you so, so much.

This has been such an

encouraging conversation

and thank you for sharing

your heart and your story with us today.

What a gift it was to hear

what's possible when we

keep showing up for kids,

even when their path is

anything but clear, which is hard.

And so just, just thank you for,

for keeping on keeping on

and being that example.

Well,

thank you for sharing your story as well,

Peggy.

Like I, I feel better talking to you now.

And I, you know,

I've always respected you

as being a mom kind of like

me that can't just do the

homeschooling the mom that has to.

build something as well.

And so thank you so much for

sharing your format with me.

I appreciate it.

Absolutely.

And thank you all for joining us.

If you're in the thick of it right now,

we know, just know you're not alone.

There's hope, there's healing,

and it's possible.

It may not look like someone else's story,

but it is worth pursuing.

Be sure to check out the

Autism Oasis to connect

more with Heather.

And don't forget to visit

spedhomeschool.com for practical support,

encouragement,

and some great freebies to

help you on your homeschool journey.

And if this episode was encouraging you,

take time to scroll through

our other conversations.

There's so many amazing

guests who have walked this

road and have wisdom to share.

Thanks for spending time with us today.

And remember,

you're doing wholly important

work at your home.

Keep going.

We're cheering you on.

Until next time,

homeschool boldly and confidently.

And we will see you next week.

Bye, everybody.

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