

Welcome to Empowering
Homeschool Conversations,
your authority in
navigating the world of
homeschooling diverse learners.

Featuring Peggy Ployer from
Sped Homeschool,
Annie Yorty from AnnieYorty.com,
Leilani Melendez from Living with Eve,
Stephanie Buckwalter from ELARP Learning,
and Dawn Jackson from Dawn
Jackson 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.

Welcome to Empowering
Homeschool Conversations,
a podcast where we bring hope, help,
and resources to families
homeschooling children with
unique learning needs.

I'm your host, Peggy Ployer,
and today we're exploring a
topic that touches the
hearts of many parents,
teaching a nonverbal child
without reading or writing.

Joining me is co-host Stephanie Buckwalter,
a veteran homeschool mom
and curriculum creator who
truly understands this challenge.

She's the original developer

of the eLARP method,
now rebranded as Adapted Home Education,
and
and the creator of Spell As You Go,
a reading, spelling,
and communication program
designed specifically for
nonverbal students.

Stephanie's journey is one of faith,
persistence, and innovation.

She's walked through the
confusion of isolation of
trying to teach a child who
couldn't speak or respond
in traditional ways,
and she's come out on the
other end with wisdom and tools to share,
and she's sharing with us today.

Welcome, Stephanie.

Hi, Peggy.

Thank you.

Welcome.

I mean, welcome.

Thank you.

Yes, I'm happy to be here.

Being the guest instead of the host.

That's right, got to switch.

Yeah,

but we're going to have a very

insightful conversation

today and one that is just

not addressed enough in the

homeschooling realm, but so,

so needed because as you know personally,

and as I've known with my own child,

not having the nonverbal part,

but the lack of resources is

And just how desperate we

feel as parents when we

feel like there's nobody

out there that really understands.

At least we feel that way.

We feel like there's all these resources,

but nothing quite fits.

And how do we navigate

something that we know God

has called us to?

Or we feel like we've been

pressured into it out of, you know,

the lack of nothing else.

And yet...

There doesn't seem anywhere to go.

So I'm excited for all you

have to share today.

Thanks.

I'll give a spoiler alert based on that.

There is nothing that fits, but...

There are things we can do

to make things fit better.

So just look at that spoiler

alert right up front.

Absolutely.

And that's kind of a nice

reassurance because it's

not like I'm selling you

something and you've got to

spend thousands of dollars

on my program to make this work.

There are ways to work

around what's already out
there that isn't going to break the bank.

And I know we talk a lot
about that on this show.

And so, yes,
just know we're not here to
sell you something.

We're here to just encourage
and equip you with what you need.

So, Stephanie,
share a little bit of your
backstory just as we get
started with your
homeschooling and
especially with your daughter,
just so our audience has
kind of an understanding of
where you're coming from
and your history.

Okay.

Well,

I've been homeschooling for over
twenty years.

I'm still homeschooling.

I have five children, four boys,

and then a girl.

The boys,

and I homeschooled all of them

different lengths of time.

One of the boys I

homeschooled all the way

through high school,

another one through eighth grade,

two through fifth grade.

And my daughter,

who is moderate intellectual disability,

special needs, nonverbal,

I started homeschooling her

along with the boys.

And then we had a family

crisis and I put her in

school for a few years and

then we took her back out

and we finished homeschooling at home.

We finished high school at

home with her and now she's

officially graduated high school,

but I'm still working with her.

The nice thing about it is

I'm not having to work on, um,

the things that I think I should work on,

I can work on anything I want to work on.

And that's so freeing.

Yes,

you don't have to follow the state

standards anymore.

You can just do what needs to be done.

Yeah, that's great.

Yeah, that's...

And that's encouraging that

you've been at this that

long and you stuck to it.

And we're going to talk a

little bit about that, too,

and what that process was

was like for you as an

encouragement as well.

So to definitely stick around.

Also know that we this is live.

I know sometimes we broadcast recordings,
but this is a live conversation.

So if you are watching us
either on Facebook
um youtube or instagram just
know that you can comment

and we will see those and
we can include them as part
of the conversation too so
um so don't feel left out

we we want you to to be
part of this too um so

non-verbal children are
often diagnosed as having
intellectual disability

what does that label really
mean and can it be misunderstood

Well,

it can in the sense that intellectual
disability,

I found this out when I was
attending a program at the
Family Hope Center,

and I started learning
about all the different
ways our bodies can be
neurologically disorganized.
When it comes to coming up
with an IQ score, most of test designed,
even those for nonverbal kids,
are really designed for
kids who also know how to motor plan.
And we're going to talk
about that a lot today
because motor planning goes
right alongside with apraxia,
not speaking.
And when you can't motor plan,
and motor planning can be speaking,
writing, pointing,
it could be any of those things.
If you can't motor plan,
you can't give a true uh
measure of what's going on
in your head your cognitive
skills and so intellectual

disability intellectual

disability where they give

you an iq score that iq

score is really for kids

who are non-typical a

measure of their

neurological organization

not of their intelligence

it's an it's not so it's not

It's not helpful in the sense,

but the thing that's positive about that,

if you think about it that way,

is you can work on a

child's neurological organization.

You see all these brain

training programs and

reflex integration programs.

Those are all designed to

work on the brain.

and neurological organization.

And when you start doing that,

then you can actually get

better outcomes because

you're improving the brain function,
which would, as a result,
eventually change the IQ potentially.

Wow.

So IQ is not helpful,
except as a clue that you
need to be looking for the
right kind of therapy.

Right.

There's something else in there that, yes,
it's just not coming out.

So being nonverbal is often
accompanied with other diagnoses,
which you're kind of
leading to or challenges.

How does that complexity
affect in teaching?

Well, yeah.

And like you're right,
I just mentioned that the
motor planning part of it,
because apraxia is a
disconnect between the

brain and the body.

And so you have a motor planning problem.

And, you know, I've mentioned pointing,

handwriting and speech,

but it's also typing, drawing,

putting numbers in a column.

There are a lot of things

that your child may want to

do and may in their brain know how to do,

but can't motor plan those things.

Or when they motor plan it, actually,

especially if they're

pointing or even if they

have verbal tics kind of

come out because my

daughter can say yes and no.

And yesterday we were at our

spelled communication therapy and

And we asked her a question

and she loved shopping and

it was about going shopping.

And the first word out of

her mouth was no.

She was so disorganized that
she wanted to say yes, but no came out.

And that happens a lot with these kids,
especially under stress.

And so it also means that, okay,
to demonstrate knowledge,
three things have to fire
at the same time.

And I got this through
talking to my daughter's OT and that's,
the sensory system has to
receive the information.

You have to have the cognitive process,
the thoughts,
and then you have to have
the motor plan on that.

You want to express those thoughts.

And if all three of those
are not firing together,
then your child is going to
look like they don't know
how to think when they may
actually very well have a

high IQ or a normal IQ,
but they just can't motor plan answers.

So that really affects your
teaching because, um,

It's just it looks like
learning is not taking place.

And that's why we get stuck
in perpetual elementary
school or perpetual kindergarten,
even because it looks like

they're not learning,
but it's not a learning.

It's not a cognitive problem.

It can very easily be a
motor planning problem.

That's so helpful in understanding.

It takes like that frustration.

When you gain understanding,
you tend to like lose that
anxiety of my child's not learning,
I'm not teaching right.

You know,
all those questions that have

gone through your mind,
they've gone through my mind, you know,
they're prevalent in our community.

I know in the past I've
talked to you about this.

I'm throwing this little
question in here off the side.

But assumed intelligence,
can you talk a little bit about that?

Yes.

I have read enough stories of kids,
especially in the autism world,
but also other diagnoses who have
learned spelled
communication when they've
gotten older and they're
able to express their thoughts.

And several of these kids
actually go on to college
or they finish high school
or they can do things.

They just didn't have the
means to communicate.

And the way that works,
just as a quick aside,
the way that works is they
get things out of fine motor,
which is all that speech
and the handwriting and
stuff we were talking about,
and they put it into large
motor movements.

And that eases up the body's
cognitive load,
which allows them to think
and spell and get it all out.

But anyway, that's a whole nother thing.

But the, all of these,
a lot of these young people,
young adults have written books,
or even when they're teenagers,
written books that say,

I knew what they were saying.

Some of them teach themselves,
a lot of them teach themselves to read.

And so when they're older

and they start doing the
spelled communication,
it's shocking that a lot of
times they already know how to spell.
quite a bit and or they've
taught themselves to read
and it's because we don't
believe it but they have if
you think about it you have
if you don't speak because
I see this with my daughter
all the time we're sitting
at the table the dinner
table and all this
conversation is going
around because you know we
have a big family and
sometimes people are over
but she rarely gets
included and when she does
it's just like a yes or no
answer so her whole life is
spent observing

And she is picking up just like,
just like little kids, you know,
when you're a parent,
little kids are picking up
stuff that you don't want
them to pick up.

I can't, I just, I was just horrified.

Like when she learns how to talk,
she learns how to spell communication.

She's going to start saying
all kinds of things.

I'm like, Oh no, I really didn't mean that,
you know, from ten years ago.

But that's what happens is
they're learning all the time,
just like you and I do.

They just can't express it.

They might not be learning
what you want them to,
but they're learning and
they're observing.

They're good observers.

So that affects your

teaching in the sense that you want to
be aware that they can learn.

So just treat them that way.

Right.

And all of that's going in.

It doesn't mean just because
it isn't coming out that
it's not going in.

And it's just a really,
really good reminder that, you know,
whether we see evidence of
the learning or not,
what we are doing is making a difference.

And I think parents just
need to hear that over and over again.

You are making a difference
whether you see it or not
and just keep going.

So yeah.

So communicate, go ahead.

I was going to say another
thing about that comes out
in those books that I want

parents to know you're
talking about encouraging
them is these kids know
that their bodies are not
doing what they want them
to do and they feel bad about it.
They feel just as bad about
all this stuff going on as you do.
So they,
So they, but they want a vibrant life.
They want to be able to
communicate what they're thinking,
but they also understand
what their behavior looks like.
It's not like that's some kind of secret.
You don't have to keep that
a family secret between them.
And so when I realized that
I started talking to my
daughter and saying, you know,
I understand that your
brain is telling your body
one thing you need to help

your brain calm down.

You know,

I talk about her brain is like a

separate entity, her thoughts.

She can apply her thoughts to her brain.

and the nervous system,

brain meaning brain and nervous system,

to get it calmed down.

So we've started working a

lot on that since I realized this.

But it's just another thing

I wanted to let parents know.

Yeah, yeah,

that's great advice and

encouragement as well.

Yeah, so as far as communication, you know,

that is obviously a barrier.

If they can't speak to you,

you don't understand.

So what types of

communication tools are

available to students and parents?

There are actually a whole lot,

but they're kind of divided

into three categories.

One of them is no tech.

So that would be gestures, body language,

crying, screaming, yelling,

hitting all of those things.

The first go to is often.

Yes.

Yes.

Frustration runs high with them.

Facial expressions,

sign language is a more

formal way to communicate

or vocalizations of any kind.

Like my daughter maybe has

ten or fifteen words that

she uses all the time.

She can kind of say her color.

She can say mom and dad and she can say no,

of course.

And so those kind of fall

into the no tech thing.

And we can talk about each

of these a little bit more if you want to,
because each of them has.

pros and cons and kind of my story.

Yeah.

I think that would be really
important because I think
parents who are listening
to this are definitely
looking for that information too.

Okay.

Yeah.

I'll go.

Cause we hit all of these
and then low tech.

Picture communication boards.

Those are the ones just a
thing with just pictures on it.

Your child can point to them.

PEX is actually individual
pictures that you move
around on strips of Velcro,
but they use the same type of pictures.

Alphabet boards,

which are the ABC boards
that you see for spelled communication.

You'll see them,
the little stencils and
that kind of thing.

Core word boards.

So if you want your child to at least,

if your child,

has low cognitive function

and you can just put a few

words up and let them

communicate through those

few words like thirsty, bathroom, tired,

no, yes.

And then using tangible symbols,

like the keys,

like your child may go pick

up the keys if they wanna

go somewhere or they may

point to the door, go walk,

take you over to the door

if they wanna go outside.

And then another low tech thing,

visual schedules,
you can communicate through
those and they can communicate back.

Yes, no, did it, didn't do it.

So those are the low tech options.

And then there are high tech options.

And those are a very simple

one is called the big Mac

or little Mac and their buttons.

They're just single message devices.

They just say yes or no.

And that's it.

And there are also go talk devices,

which you would have a,

thing of buttons and each

one has a pre-recorded message.

And so it's like the child

is speaking in sentences.

There are quick talker devices,

the thirty-two message communicators,

battery operated devices

with simple speech functions,

the AAC devices.

These are all kind of AAC
devices and AAC stands for
assistive and augmentative communication.

So it's any, in this case,
technology device that you
use to assist in
communication is an AAC device.

And insurance will pay for
some of them and some of them won't.

That's good to know.

It doesn't hurt to ask.

Yes.

And if you go to a public school,
the school can actually
evaluate your child for
which one of these is best
for your child at the stage.

You may have to fight for what you want,
but they can at least do
the evaluation and tell you
what they think.

Right.

Yeah.

Because we have that.

That's awesome.

Yeah.

So you talked a little bit
about pros and cons of some of those.

Can you go over at least a
few and maybe some that you
have personal experience
with or in any stories you
have to share with that?

I'll go through my journey
with communication.

Okay.

That would be really helpful.

Yes.

Because we started with low
tech and no tech and moved right through.

So one thing we did early on
was we learned sign language.

I had already
done through like the baby
sign language with my boys
when they were little.

So I was aware of sign language,
which helped.

Right.

And it was right around the
time signing team,
signing time came out signing time.com.

It's a woman who had a deaf child.

And then a year later,
her sister had a little boy.

And so they learned sign
language together and they
made all these cute little videos.

And the thing I like best
about these videos, well, two things.

One is they showed a bunch
of different kids doing the signs.

So it gave me comfort to
know that an approximation
of a sign is just as good.

Like if this is dad,
she doesn't have to do this.

As a matter of fact,
because she has proprioceptive problems,

dad was back here because

she proprioceptive.

Oh, wow.

Your sense is you don't know

where you are in space.

So this hand, instead of being dad here,

started back here and then

eventually like over months

and move forward.

And then it finally ended up

on her forehead.

So that's so,

but seeing what was a good

diagnostic tool too, in itself.

Yeah.

Good point.

So those seeing all those

little kids doing these

approximations of these signs,

like no two were exactly alike.

Right.

It was very, very helpful for me.

And the other thing that's very helpful,

because if you go to their website,

you can,

Back then,

I had to go to the library and get CDs.

Oh, yes.

I did the same thing.

Actually, I think they were VHS tapes.

Oh, we had graduated with CDs.

And we had to,

you could only keep them for a week.

So whatever was there,

we'd get one or two.

And then we'd return them.

And we just cycled through them.

And I think the first ten

videos were out at the time.

Now you can get them online

and you can rent them.

But if you rent them like that,

if you do the subscription thing,

At the end of those videos,

they have a five or ten

minute sections that is just the signs.

So as a parent,
you don't have to watch the
thirty minute videos all
the time with your child.
They do it a few times.
But at the very end,
there was just a summary.
So if I forgot a sign,
I could just go back there
and look at it.
I didn't have to try to find it.
Yeah.
So it's very helpful.
So sign language was helpful.
My daughter from signing time alone,
she learned over the years.
It took years.
I'm not talking about a week.
Remember, she's out of high school now.
So this is recently out of high school.
But so this was when she was really young,
preschool age into early elementary.
She learned three hundred signs.

And then what I did was I

got I got books of sign

language signs and or

there's also some things

online that I used.

And I knew when we were going to church,

I was trying to learn sign language too.

So I would ask them what

songs they were gonna sing.

And I would look up all the

words in all the songs.

And I was doing signing exact English.

I was not doing American Sign Language.

So I would look up all the

signs and I would try to

sign to the slower songs.

I couldn't do the fast ones

or the way I practiced.

She also learned the alphabet, A, B, C, D.

Both hands.

You got to learn both hands

because you never know

which one you're going to have available.

And I would just spell
things like we were driving
down the road and I would
just spell whatever I saw on signs.
And that's how I got to practice.
So I was practicing along with her.
Whatever communication
you're doing with your child,
you're probably going to be
their primary communication partner.
So it's not something where
you can like send them off
somewhere to learn this stuff.
We've got to learn it with them.
So that's what we did.
So we learned another three
hundred signs that way.
So if I sat down and gave
her a list of words and, you know,
I give her a word that she could sign,
she could do up to six
hundred at one point.
So this was like my third grade,

third or fourth grade.

And then when she got then

that was about the time we

put her in public school

and they didn't want to

work with sign language.

they wanted to work with the

AAC device and that's okay

because that's what I wanted to.

And so we mutually agreed

that she would switch to an AAC device.

The problem with the AAC device.

Oh, we also tried PICS,

the picture exchange communication.

Let me go back.

So the low tech stuff that we did,

The picture of Pex, I actually, you know,

laminated all the things, got the Velcro,

got the binder, you know,

the three inch binder with

all the pictures.

That was really hard for me to learn.

Like I said,

you have to learn along with them.

And Pex was just so

difficult for me that we

didn't get very far with it.

Maybe she could have, but I couldn't.

So that was like a non-starter for us.

Right.

Well, it has to work for everybody,

not just the child too.

Because like you said,

the parent is the main

communicator with the child usually.

And if it doesn't work for you,

it's not going to work for them.

Right.

And that was a,

that was a pretty much a no.

Although we did use the

symbols and I used the

pictures and I would use

them more as a communication board,

not the official PEC system.

and the way they explain how to use it.

Core words, visual schedules.

We use those kinds of things.

So we did use that low tech stuff.

The visual schedules are

very helpful for her.

Even today when she's having

a really hard time,

like she has been these last few days,

she just cannot process

what you're saying to her.

And so I will grab an index card.

I always have a stack of

index cards and I draw

pictures of what I'm saying

or even write out the words

in some cases.

And if she sees it,

then her brain can say,

Again, the brain is a separate entity.

Her brain says, oh, and then she gets it.

But sometimes that just,

I just have to do that.

So I use, you know, hand-drawn,

learn how to sketch.

And here's the key when
you're doing this sketching stuff.

It does not matter what your
drawing looks like as long
as communication takes place.

Yes.

It's so true.

You don't have to be an
artist to make that work.

That's right.

Because when my boys were older,
they would go,

mom but you didn't say blah

blah blah and I said did

communication take place

and they would always say

yes so that's why as long

as communication takes

place it doesn't matter

what you look like what

your dogs look like and

then so then we moved into

the high techs moving from
the sign language to all
the picture stuff the low
tech to the high tech and the problem
That was fascinating for me.

Uh,
the school really supported me and
helped me and they sent me
to the teacher training for the,
for the AAC device,
the software that she had and everything.

So we actually had a pretty
good relationship,
but the one thing at that
training was there was a man there,
a young man who was using an AAC device,
communicate using lamp words for life.

That's the one we were using.

And he could communicate in
sentences and thoughts and
all that stuff.

But one thing that caught my
attention that he said was,

That eventually, okay.

So the device has only like

two or three thousand words on it.

Eventually he got to the

point where he would think

in those two or three thousand words.

So it wasn't free open communication.

His communication was still

limited by that.

And that kind of gave me pause.

I still tried to work with

her on the AAC device,

but she wasn't becoming

fluent in sentences and stuff like that.

The other problem with

working with an AAC device

I found is often

And I have friends who are

speech therapists and

occupational therapists.

And so I don't want to,

if you're a speech therapist listening,

I don't want you to feel

like I'm attacking you because I'm not.

But often the people who

were tasked with teaching

these kids on the AAC

device are the speech therapists.

And what I have observed,

and this is my personal experience,

is that most speech therapists are,

they kind of move speech

therapy onto the AAC device

They don't,

they haven't learned how to teach.

It's not,

but it's not speech therapy on a device.

It's communication,

which is to me a whole

different approach in a way

of communicating on that device.

And so if you're searching, if you're,

you know,

shopping around for a speech therapist,

or if you have, you know,

the opportunity to look for

one who has had some kind
of training and understands speech
that this is communication
and now this was in the
early days mind you because
when I because everyone was
getting ipads back then and
so it was becoming more
prevalent in school that
people were using devices
whereas before it was too
expensive cost prohibitive
and you know you're just
kind of look but um so this
was now our experience with
all this with the speech
therapist stuff was in the
early days so that was maybe
five to ten years ago, five, yeah,
between five to ten years
ago during that stretch when AAC devices,
because my daughter got an
iPad six months after they

came out because that's
when the communication
software came out and we're like, oh,
we're getting that.

Yeah.

So she was,
she was ready for high tech and she could,
because she could maneuver it.

But I'm sure by now a lot of
speech therapists have
figured out or have maybe
specialized in it.

Maybe that's the word I'm looking for.

So look for a speech
therapist who specializes
in AAC communication and is
not primarily a speech
therapist using the physical, you know,
manipulating the face and
stuff like that because
they really are two different skills.

And so just, I mean,
it makes sense that they

would put it with speech

because it's kind of speech.

And the speech therapists

have a lot of background in

what needs to happen in the progression.

But just look for one that

specializes in AAC is my

recommendation on that.

That was our experience with AAC.

So now we've come full

circle and we're back to no tech.

So we're using an ABC board.

We're using a letter board now.

And I didn't bring it.

I didn't bring it with me to this area.

But it's very,

so it's no tech at this point.

And then eventually, hopefully,

it'll transfer to a keyboard,

which then would be high tech again.

But to learn, the way those things work is,

and this is why we're doing it,

is we learned that it gets,

remember I talked about the

three things that have to

fire at the same time.

The sensory, the cognitive, and the motor.

And by putting it on,

what they do is they don't

just stick you on a twenty

six letter board.

They put you on three boards

with just a few letters.

Like I think it's nine or

ten letters on each board.

About nine letters.

Eight, nine, and nine.

I had to add up twenty six real quick.

I'm not good at the math.

And the letters are bigger.

They're spaced out further.

If you only have to search

eight things at a time to make a decision,

it loses lessens the cognitive load.

And it also gives you a bigger target.

So when you're motor planning,

so because the cognitive is less,
the motor planning is easier.

It frees up space to do the motor planning,
which is the problem.

And, you know,
usually we're trying to do
it in a fine motor sense,
but by using pointing or
using large motor.

So all of those things are
reducing the cognitive load.

And the motor load, the load on the brain,
the overall load,
so that you can scan with your eyes,
you know, target the letter you want,
think that's the letter I want,
and then hit it.

And doing that takes a lot of energy.

And I know that because my
daughter has brain problems.

And we have been doing this
therapy and we switched to a more intense,
the next step up,

which is more intense therapy.

And she just started falling

apart in her life.

And it's because the cognitive load,

the brain load was too much.

So we have to step back from

that and do it in smaller steps,

which is kind of the whole thing,

nonverbal apraxia.

That's what I just said now,

if you didn't catch that,

is hate to all my moms.

That's the key is hate.

sometimes the steps are just

too big and you've got to

find ways to make it smaller and smaller.

And I know I've heard Peggy

say before that when

people,

curriculum developers want to help

our community.

And they say, well, what can we do?

And Peggy, tell them what you always say.

Oh, yeah.

I always say, well,

just give us more to do in

the curriculum you've already created.

The problem is our kids

can't take as large leaps

as they mentally think that

kids can take from one step to the next.

It's that scaffolding in

between and those extra activities,

those extra hands-on things

that you can make a

one-year curriculum into

two or three years.

And that's really what our kids need.

And so, yes,

I say it over and over again

to the curriculum developers.

And actually there's one big

curriculum company who's

going to be doing a summit in November.

I'm not announcing it yet

because they haven't announced anything,

but they're bringing in a
whole group of people that
I gave them a list of and said,
we want to have a summit
and we want to hear what
you guys have to say so we
can change what we do and
make it more adaptable.
So things are changing rapidly.
because people are listening
to what we've been talking
about for years.

But yes,
it's a very exciting time in the
homeschooling industry and
for parents who are really
seeking for something to
help them along that isn't
taking large leaps and
bounds that their kids
mentally can't take.

And Stephanie,
you've done a great job of

really helping us to

understand that better.

Because I think we just,

we get frustrated because we're like,

well, why aren't they getting there?

And to understand from the

child's point of view that

they want to get there,

but it's just not mentally,

they're not mentally

capable of making that leap.

And we have to figure out

how to help them get there.

And that's where I would say

with my new understanding,

this is a new understanding.

Yeah.

So fairly recent.

And that's it's not really

even the cognitive.

It's getting them all to

fire at the same time.

And that's what I'm learning

through this communication stuff,
which we've only been doing
since last September.

So this truly is new information.

For me,

that slowing by slowing down the
curriculum,

like you're talking about

having the curriculum to

give you more to do,

then you have time to work

on those motor plans,

the motor planning part.

Yes.

And manipulating that

sensory input so that they

can express themselves.

But you need the curriculum to be,

you need the curriculum to

address the cognitive part.

So that's that's one hundred

percent right.

And that's what because we

can't ask them to do all

the other things.

Those are separate things.

Those are therapy type things.

But yes.

So now coming full circle saying, yes,

you were right.

The the the curriculum

developers can help

tremendously by producing

curriculum that is in small steps.

so that the parents have

time to work with their

children on the other two pieces,

the sensory piece and the

motor planning piece.

Absolutely.

Yeah.

So that brings us to things like subjects,

you know, like learning to read.

I think that in general,

even for children who don't struggle,

is like one of the biggest

stressors for a homeschool parent.

I remember when I hit that

first roadblock with my oldest and went,

I don't even know how this works.

And yet now if you have a nonverbal child,

how do you teach them how to read?

What, what approach, you know,

can you take?

And then how do you know if

they actually are reading

and can't show it?

You know, that is,

that was my biggest

question in the beginning.

Cause like reading is so

important because the rest

of the school relies on you

being able to read.

And it's like, well,

how do you know if they're

reading if they can't,

read out loud you know and

no one could actually no

one could answer that
question for me I asked all
over the place and even now
most people won't have an
answer so I may not have a
good one but but you have
one I have a a clue I have
a clue I don't know if it's
an answer I have a clue to
the answer when we uh we
went for intensive speech
therapy at one point
when my daughter was at the
end of fifth grade,
getting ready to go into sixth grade.
Oh no, she was already in sixth grade.
So she was in sixth grade.
We went to Arizona for a
couple of weeks for
intensive speech therapy.
And while we were there,
the therapist gave her a
nonverbal reading test.

And I had never seen this before.

And I know they existed,

but they don't like to put

examples online because

they don't want anybody copying it.

They're all copyrighted and

that kind of stuff.

But what it was, it was a picture.

She would have like two

sentences and a picture and

it would be like a boy and

a dog running across the

field and the sun was close

to the horizon.

Is that right?

Yes.

And so you would show the

child the picture,

have them read those two

sentences and then answer the questions.

And the questions were like,

and the picture would give you clues too.

Right.

But it's like, is the,

Oh no, I'm sorry.

There was the picture and

then you had to answer the question.

So there were no sentences

describing the picture.

It was just the picture.

And then you had to read the question.

So if you could read the

question correctly,

they knew you understood the question.

So which sentence is

describing this picture?

The boy and his dog are

going home for lunch.

The boy and the boy is going home for

know to fix the car or

something or the boy and

his dog are going home for

dinner and the child you

couldn't say any of it they

would read those three and

they would have to pick

they're going home for
dinner and the clues from
the picture are that the
sun was going down it was
close to the horizon it
wasn't noon so they wasn't
going home for lunch and in
one sentence the dog wasn't
with him it was just the
boy so they would change up
different elements so you
knew that the child was
reading all three to get the right answer
And found out she was
reading at a first grade level.

And I was like, and I told the school,
they're like, no, she doesn't.

And I was like, oh.

And then they tested her and like, oh,
she does.

And I said, yes,
that means I taught her that,
not the school.

If they didn't know it,
that means they weren't doing it.
I was doing it.
So that kind of made me feel
good as a parent.
It's like, okay,
I can homeschool a special needs child.
I was, I did,
I taught it to read the first
grade level.
So that's,
so the clue is you have to give
them ways to express how they know,
and you can do it through the pictures.
You could do it through words.
You can do it like that,
where you show them a
picture and then you write
out some sentences and you kind of,
that's not how you teach them,
but that's how you know if they are.
So that's kind of the testing part of it.
Right.

Um, so that's my clue.

And the way I,

the way we got to the first

grade level was I was using

the SOMA rapid prompting method.

I just got her red book or the red one,

I think was one of the

first ones she wrote there.

I think she has six or seven books out now,

but it was a red one.

And she, uh, said,

and it was basically all I

did up to this point.

I wasn't even doing the spelling boards,

even though that's what the

method eventually ends up as back then.

I was just, as we would talk about things,

when I came to a word,

I thought I want her to know.

I would say it take a little

index card usually cut into

four because she could read

smaller text write out the

word as I said it and then
say it again and then keep
going and then after we
finished talking I had all
those words I had spelled
and I would give her you
know a couple of choices
and then she would choose
the answer without me
having to read the word
back to her and I believe
that's how I believe that's
how she learned just using the
pre-letterboard stage of the
SOMA rapid prompting method
where you just, you're always.
And so that's why my program
spell as you go,
because if you just spell stuff as you go,
and now if we're out in
public and I don't have
something to write on,
she knows the twenty six

letters in sign language.

So I will spell it with sign language.

And it's a visual because if I just say it,

their auditory processing

is kind of an issue.

So I will spell it like the word is lamp.

L A M P. And it's funny

because when she's spelling

words on her letter board,

sometimes she'll be

pointing with her right

hand and she'll be spelling

it with her left hand.

Wow.

And the other, the other advantage,

by the way,

going back to our communication options,

the teaching the sign language alphabet.

And we also worked with phonics, you know,

assigning sounds to those letters and,

That if she wants to go somewhere,

she can often,

she can't spell the words

yet with sign language or on the boards,

but she can give me the first letter.

Like if she is a person, if she goes A,

I know that's Miss Anita.

And if she gives an A,

I know that's Miss Shannon.

So, and if she does this, you know,

that's the J. J up here is a guy.

J down here is a girl.

And so I know if she's

talking about a brother or

a sister-in-law because one's up here,

one's down here.

proprioceptive has improved

getting in the right place

so it's so there's a huge

advantage so any

communication you work on

with your child is going to

be helpful and you will not

regret it and it also gives

your child multiple options

because if they're they may

be moving forward in their
communication skills but
they're going to have bad
days especially you know
when they're like there are
days when they are more
neurologically disorganized disorganized

Whether it's stress or they
ate the wrong thing or whatever.

We all are.

Good point.

Then they have a fallback.

So you want to give them as
many fallback positions as you can.

So teach them all the ways to communicate.

But I'm sure eventually
we'll talk about adulthood.

But I just want to talk
about teaching them to read right now.

So that's my clue is they can.

And just spell things for them.

And I was actually watching Andrew Putawa.

He has a video out on YouTube on spelling.

And he was talking about how
he was taught to spell.
And his mom would spell to him.
However, he said, you know,
back in the day,
back in the early nineteen
hundreds before paper was too expensive.
They didn't like have
workbooks for every kid.
You spelled everything orally.
You worked orally.
And so his mom,
having grown up in that generation,
you know, was teaching.
I don't know if she was that old,
but in the early nineteen hundreds,
you know, like the mid nineteen hundreds.
she just, whenever they were out, you know,
drive around the car,
she would just spell things.
And so I would encourage you
to do the same thing.
And one thing he said in

this talk that he gave was

that you hear it.

And if you're spelling it with the,

is that, you know,

hearing it like a kid can

see if a kid is just doing sight words,

they're learning kind of

the shape of the letter.

And if the shape looks wrong,

they know it's dispelled.

But if it has a similar

shape to another word,

You can't really tell.

Right.

So his point was when you

also spell it out loud as

you're spelling.

It reinforces the sequence

of the letters in the word.

So it's helpful.

And I think with this thing I was doing,

the early stages of the SOMA method,

SOMA RPM, was she was seeing it.

She was hearing it.

And she was able to touch it later,

like physically touch the

piece of paper it was on.

So it was bringing in all the senses.

And it really, it made a difference.

I mean,

I didn't know she was reading at a

first grade level,

but she was just from doing that.

That's awesome.

So when you were talking about that,

as well as Andrew's method,

both of those methods also

bring those words into context.

They don't just, you know,

they aren't just these words in a list.

Like we often see that how

kids learn and they're not

associated with how that word is used,

what it really means,

how it's used with other words.

So,

so you're teaching a whole lot more by
using those types of methodologies rather
when you're out and about or
when you're using it with
other words and a text.

So it just makes them more powerful.

And as homeschoolers,
we have that ability to teach like that.

So that's some awesome advice.

Yes,

I am a big believer in context-based
learning.

And the other thing is,
because our nonverbal kids
can't ask questions,
if you're talking about
something sitting at a
table at home and they
don't know what it is and
they can't ask what it is,
That lesson is partially lost.
But if you're out at a
museum and you're talking

about this exhibit in front of you,

they have the context and

the visuals to see it.

And even if they can't answer the question,

you're likely to get more

learning out of that

experience than sitting at

a table with a list of words.

You're right.

Yeah.

So right.

Absolutely.

So can we talk a little bit

about building

relationships without words?

Because, you know,

we don't want our kids to be isolated.

And but yet how do they

connect with their peers?

How do they build

relationships when

communication is very limited?

You know,

that's a really hard question and
that's a really hard topic
for parents to think about
because many times our kids
don't have friends because
they're nonverbal.

It takes a special kind of
friend and I found two things.

One,

if I want her to have peers who are
friends,

I have to spend time teaching
either the parent or the
child how to be her friend.

But there's no guarantee that
the friendship will last or
how long it'll last.

The younger they are,
the easier it is because they're probably,
you know, they're not so far behind yet.

They're just a little bit
behind in most cases.

And a lot of cases they're,

they're close enough to
where they can play for short periods,
but the older child will
get bored with the
abilities of your child.

But it takes a lot of
training and prompting on
the parents part.

And then when they're older,
But it usually ends up happening.
So that's one scenario.

The other thing is your
child's friends will just
be their caregivers and
their older people in their
life who are adult enough
to understand what's going
on and have the willingness
to take the time to get to
know your child and to work
with them and to try to
understand their communication.

Just like any relationship,

it kind of has to be a two-way street.

And most kids in general are

pretty self-focused.

And they can't put

themselves in another

person's shoes long enough

to develop a friendship.

I mean, it's just the reality.

Right.

I mean,

they're working on so many things

from their own perspective

just to be able to be in

that type of setting.

And so there's so much that

they're trying to manage

when they're disorganized

that they're doing their

best just to hold it together.

And so it is hard to be

other focused when you're like that.

And yeah,

but when other people understand that,

and like you said,
they have to have the
willingness to understand
and the ability to be
outwardly focused and not on themselves.

And so that takes maturity too.

So it's a lot of things
involved with that.

But yes,
it's not a happy answer because
the answer is either you do a lot of work,
which you're already doing
a lot of work with the kid anyway.

It's just like one more thing.

Right.

So I didn't often go that route, if ever.

Other times you just, you know,
you just accept the fact
that your child's friends
are going to usually be
older and then your child's age,
whatever that is.

sometimes a little bit older,

sometimes a lot older.

And they just, you know,

your child's friendships

will not look like yours or

a neurotypical friendship.

It's a hard reality to face,

but you get to face that at some point.

Yeah.

Yeah, absolutely.

So, you know, just in general,

our children and us as well

have a lot of isolation.

And can you talk a little

bit about that to be

encouraging to families?

Sure.

I know you have a lot of

wisdom in this area and struggled a lot,

probably sought God a lot

on those journeys yourself

and just what you've

learned through that process.

I mean, not being discouraging,

like saying, ah, it's just life.

So yeah,

your world becomes smaller when

you have a special needs child,

if you've been in the

you know, spend any time on this journey.

You already know that.

Yeah.

So the trick is to accept

the smaller world and make

it rich because what happened,

what often happens and

happened to me for a long time was,

you know,

I felt the isolation and I felt

all that stuff, but I didn't fill it up.

I just stayed isolated and

kind of resented my life

for a time and what was going on and,

you know, not being able to go out.

I couldn't go out for years

because of shoes in restaurants.

So I didn't go out to eat with the family.

We didn't walk into church

together for years.

That has recently changed.

Yay.

She was almost over.

And the, and just, you know, the friends,

even other,

I have this other really close

friend and she has a

special needs daughter and

but her daughter's a little

bit more higher functioning.

And when I would go visit her,

I would kind of resent that

she always let her daughter

hang around with us, not realizing that,

you know,

that's the only friends her

daughter has kind of.

And then when my child is

older now and I went to see her,

she was experiencing

resentment because my

daughter is vocal and was
being disruptive in a restaurant.
I went to go see her recently and,
you know, and she's older than I am.
So she was,
it was stressing her out.
I could tell.
And she was kind of like
wishing I could tell she,
and we're close enough friends.
We can talk about this.
Right.
It was.
So even when you have
friends who have special needs kids,
they're not their,
their kids' problems are
not your problems.
And that could be stressful too.
It's like, you can, you know,
you want people to accept your kid,
but then you don't want to
accept theirs either.

And that's, I mean,
That was very, very stressful for me.
But really the thing is just to make it.
So what I finally decided to
do was just to make our
lives rich in whatever way I could,
whatever scenarios in life
she could tolerate.
She loves going out.
And so my husband,
so that I can work on certain nights,
he will take her out to our local little,
we have like a little
downtown area that's kind
of built up and it's got
some nightlife going on.
So there are always people
down there and it's and
there's a train station and all that.
And he takes her there and
they walk around.
And so she gets to see people.
So that enriches her life.

She loves her church friendship club.

So that enriches her life.

So we find things that enrich her life.

And for me,

I actually like doing a lot of

this technology and stuff.

So having time to work on

the adapted home education

site and things and

products that's enriching for me.

And the hardest thing still

for enrichment is my husband and I,

we have downtime and now

we've gotten to where we

can tell my daughter, okay,

you need to entertain

yourself or you need to go

to your room and, you know,

do some things up there for

a while so we can have downtime.

But that wouldn't have been

possible in the early days.

But at that point,

the boys were still living at home.

So we could say,

go play with your brothers.

So you find ways where their

life is still enriched.

Yes.

Even though it's limited or

isolated is it's isolation

compared to what you're used to,

but it's really just.

Well,

or compared to what the world says

that your kids should be

exposed to and all these

activities they need to be involved in.

I think we need to redefine what normal,

healthy, you know, you know,

just our sphere is.

is for our family.

And that's very different

for every family and every child.

Instead of saying, you know,

I have kids coming into my studio,

they're involved in an
activity every night.

And it just makes me
overwhelmed thinking about
their schedule because then
they're in school all day on top of it.

And I'm like,

When are you home?

When do you get to talk as a family?

You know, I,

and those are things that I

think if we have kids that

have these struggles, we,

we're much more intentional

about limiting and creating that,

that safe space that is

healthy for all of us.

Because if we get out of whack with that,

it, it shows up instantly.

Yeah.

it's not something you can say, yeah,

you know,

we'll pass that on to another day.

It shows up in temper
tantrums or meltdowns and, or, you know,
a whole lot of other things.

I've had a few of those myself.

Yeah.

Oh yeah.

Let's look at my planner
today or this week.

That's why I feel that way.

And my downtime is,
before everybody in the house gets up.

So I would rather go to,

I'm a morning person in general.

So I'd rather go to bed a
little bit earlier and wake
up before everyone else and
have a couple of hours of quiet.

And if I don't get that,

I really can't function very well.

If after,

if I do that for like a week or
two and miss that time, I,

I really takes a toll on me.

So finding, yeah, making space.

Yeah.

It's another good part of it.

You just have to have space

within the isolation.

You have space.

So,

Space, rich experiences,

the ones you can have.

And just embracing that

that's your new life.

And it's not bad.

It's just different than

what you had planned or were used to.

That's a very good perspective.

And we have so much to be thankful for.

And I think we're always

looking for the next thing.

It's just,

just naturally the way our

society works instead of

appreciating what we have

and how we can build on

what we've already, what we already got.

And, um, yeah, it's,

it's very counter-cultural,

but it's actually how God

asks us to live.

Um, he asks us to be thankful,

to worry about today.

Tomorrow has worries of its own.

And, um, and,

I know you're probably the same way as me.

I homeschooled for nineteen

years and I know that those

years changed me because I

was forced to change in who I was,

how I thought about things,

how I perceived my children,

how we interacted, all of that.

But coming out.

it was much better on the

end than I ever expected it to be,

especially on how I have

changed and how God has

just used that to be kind

of a very refining experience.

I don't see the changes.

I mean, it's been so many years,

I'm sure it did, but

Recently, the past few months, I guess,

over the past year,

I've had people like make

comments about me to my

face or like in a little thank you card.

And they say things about me that I'm like,

whoa,

is that really what they think of me?

It's like very positive

things they're saying.

I'm like, oh,

that's not at all how I see myself.

And no one has ever said

that about me before in my life.

Like using the word kind.

That was never in the past.

This special needs life must

have softened me.

Now I'm a kind person.

Yes.

Yes.

Well, it's the fruit of the spirit.

So, yes,

you're exhibiting the fruit and and,

you know, it really does.

This lifestyle pushes us to

be closer to the vine, you know,

and and to be pruned, pruned greatly.

And yet you bear, you bear more fruit.

I mean,

it's so in line with how God works and,

um, and it's beautiful,

but it is very difficult.

It's, it's a hard, hard path to take.

And I just want to thank you for, you know,

just opening up your life,

sharing from your experience and,

and giving parents a lot of

hope and some very

practical applications to,

especially how to teach because, um,

Like we talked at the beginning,

this can be very frustrating, very scary,
and one of something you
just want to run away from.

But hopefully not now.

That's right.

You can do it.

You can do it.

Yes, exactly.

Do you have any closing
advice for parents as we wrap up?

Well,

the thing I would say is just like

reading, writing,

and arithmetic are

considered core skills for academics.

communication is a core skill for life.

And so do take the time,

set aside some of those

other things if you have to,

because here we are, my daughter's,

you know, late teens,

and she's still not able to

communicate her thoughts with people.

But I remember one time when
she was about six years old, when we,
it was when we got the iPad and I said,
we're going to teach you
how to communicate.
And she came over and her
little six year old body,
grabbed my knees and gave me the biggest,
tightest squeeze for the
longest time that you could ever imagine.
So I know that she wants to
communicate and she has for
a very long time.
So don't think that
communication shouldn't be
part of your homeschool.
It should, it should be primary.
It should be right up there with reading,
writing, arithmetic.
And it doesn't matter what
the state says about that for practical.
The one thing is this is,
why did people go to school

to train them for being
productive society life
after high school along the way, you know,
you get all the character,
character building and all
these other things.

Yeah.

So that's why communication
is so key in the homeschool years,
because you're trying to
prepare your child for adulthood.
So use the community,
any communication method
that your child can do, start with that,
but work towards one where
your child can openly communicate,
with other people to the
best of their ability.

One thing I didn't talk
about was like eye gaze technology.

So even if your child can't
point at things or can't
type or spell or write, you know,

using eye gaze technology,

there are all kinds of things to do.

And I'm happy to answer any questions.

You know, you can email me,

Stephanie at adaptedhomeed.com.

And I'll, you know,

I'm happy to talk to you

and help you or answer questions.

Yeah,

and your website link will also be in

our show notes.

So if you want to connect

with Stephanie and her resources,

you can go to

adaptedhomead.com and find those two.

Just click on the link.

It's a little easier than

trying to figure out how that's spelled.

So, yes.

Well, thank you so much, Stephanie.

This has been just another

amazing interview.

And so Stephanie is also a

co-host here on Empowering
Homeschool Conversations.

She's popping in and out
often and don't know what's
coming up next.

I know next week we're going
to be talking about
managing parenting overload.

I pre-recorded that a while ago,
just on your own nervous system,
mom and dad,
and how to take care of that
and maybe help with the
calm in your house.

starting with you.

So, so yeah, absolutely.

Absolutely.

Yes.

Something I needed a whole lot.

So you'll hear about that
story a little bit too.

So I just want to thank you
all for joining us on this

powerful conversation on
empowering homeschool conversations.

I hope today's episode gave
you not only some practical ideas,
but also the encouragement
to know you're not alone.

If you're feeling
overwhelmed or unsure about
how to teach your unique learner,
especially if your child is nonverbal,
help is available you can
visit stephanie's website
at adaptedhomeed.com and
also invite you to visit
spedhomeschool.com where
you can find access to
experienced consultants who
can walk with you step by
step diagnostic tests and
learning tools to help you
understand your child's
strengths and struggles a
growing library of

resources tailored to
homeschoolers with
extraordinary needs and
most importantly a
community of support
encouragement and wisdom
from parents who have been
exactly where you are

We believe every child can
learn and every parent can teach.

You're doing important work
and you don't have to do it alone.

Until next time,
keep homeschooling boldly and confidently,
and we will see you next week.

Bye, everybody.

This has been Empowering
Homeschool Conversations
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a nonprofit that empowers
families to home educate
diverse learners.

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