



Episode #93:

**A Conversation with ADHD and Autism Parent
Coach Penny Williams**

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Penny: I felt like there was no guidebook, there's no rule book, you know, you get the *What to Expect* for Pregnancy. They have *What to Expect* books for different ages and stages now. But, you know, when we get a diagnosis of ADHD, we get maybe a fact sheet or a prescription and we're just pushed out into the world on our own to figure it out. And it's not that easy to figure out, you know, it's, it's a difficult process.

Debbie: Welcome to the TiLT Parenting Podcast, a podcast featuring interviews and conversations aimed at inspiring, informing, and supporting parents raising differently wired kids. I'm your host, Debbie Reber, and my guest this week is Penny Williams, author of the book *Boy Without Instructions: Surviving the Learning Curve of Parenting a Child with ADHD*, as well *The Insiders Guide to ADHD*, and *What To Expect When Parenting a Child with ADHD*. Penny is also the founder of Parenting ADHD and Autism, which features a blog, coaching, and the Parenting ADHD podcast, all aimed at helping parents raising special kids survive, thrive, and parent with purpose. In our conversation, Penny shares her story of raising her differently wired son, gives us the inside scoop on her books, and shares some of her best strategies for getting through the tough moments with our unique kiddos. I hope you enjoy the episode!

And before I get to our chat, I recently created a little “cheat sheet” — a one-page downloadable PDF you can print out and stick on your fridge — featuring my 10 best parenting strategies I took away from all the podcast episodes I produced last year. The cheat sheet features advice from Dr. Ross Greene, author Jessica Lahey, executive functioning coach Seth Perler, and more, and is designed to offer you a quick, helpful strategies... a little Parenting SOS if you will. I also created 6 beautifully designed wallpaper quotes from these strategies for your mobile phone so you can grab some inspiration on the go. To download those and the Cheat Sheet, go to tiltparenting.com/cheatsheet.

Lastly, I've heard from many people that they want access to the podcasts, but because of auditory processing challenges or hearing impairments, listening is not an option. So I've set a goal of bringing in enough money through my Patreon account to cover the cost of creating transcripts, not only for episodes moving forward, but for all 90 plus episodes that have come before this. I've already done a test run with the past 4, including this one, and I'm really excited about making these available. If you want to help me reach this goal, you can visit patreon.com/tiltparenting to get all the details. It's super easy to sign up, you can make as small a contribution as two bucks a month — less than the cost of a grande latte at Starbucks — to pitch in. And on that note, I wanted to give a shout out to Dr.

Devon MacEachron, Judith Geelen, and Jennie Solving, for being new supporters of the podcast. Thank you so much for helping to fund this show! Again, if you want to join them, the website is patreon.com/tiltparenting or you can find a link on the TILT parenting website.

And now, without further ado, here is my conversation with Penny. I hope you enjoy it!

Debbie: Hey Penny, welcome to the podcast.

Penny: Thanks so much for having me. I really appreciate it.

Debbie: Well, I'm looking forward to this conversation. I feel like we are two moms in the trenches and dealing with some pretty similar issues. So I think there should be an interesting conversation, but as a way of introducing you to listeners, could you tell us a little bit about your personal story? I know that's what one of your books is about, but can you share with us who you are and who your son is and what's going on in your world?

Penny: Yeah, absolutely. So about a little over nine years ago, my son was first diagnosed with ADHD. He had really struggled in kindergarten and he did start early. He is an October baby but we knew he was really smart and we didn't really realize that we had anything going on other than kind of a really active boy, you know. And so kindergarten was super rough and he was constantly in trouble. The teacher was constantly calling me, but nobody ever said, hey, there might be something to this. It was always, you didn't prepare him for kindergarten, you know, he wasn't ready for this. You need to talk to him at home, you need to give him chores so he learns responsibility, you know, all of these excuses for why he was having all this troublesome behavior and, and most of it really was hyperactivity and inattention, you know, he wanted to run around that awesome room and check everything out.

He didn't want to be on a schedule. He didn't want to do what everybody else was doing, you know, and so, it was a real issue for the teacher. And so we switched schools because that was a Charter School and they had made some decisions that we certainly didn't agree with, like the kindergarten teacher having her infant in the classroom the second half of the year, every minute of the entire school day. And so, you know, there's eighteen 5-year-olds running around this tiny cramped room and they're always hearing, watch out for the baby, quiet for the babe, you know, it just, it didn't make any sense to me. And so we decided that we just didn't really agree with some of the decisions there and we went to public school and he got the most fantastic first grade teacher. She does differentiated instruction, she's super kind and understanding and very patient and he still was having the same problems.

And so I knew at that point there had to be more to his story and so I ran him to the pediatrician as fast as I could. I'm like, please help me. I can't do this anymore. You know, I thought this new school was going to make a big difference and it's not. So it wasn't the school, it wasn't the teacher in kindergarten and there's more here. And eventually, you know, we went through the process, we went to a behavioral MD., he diagnosed ADHD very quickly and because he had a great teacher and because has done and I were pretty intuitive in our parenting approach as far as trying some behavior modification. Although we had no idea what we were doing it, you know, his first suggestion was medication and therapy. Um, and I was in complete shock. You know, once he started having the same struggles in first grade that he did in kindergarten, I immediately started googling and trying to figure out what was going on, you know, so I was reading tons of material about learning disabilities, a little bit about ADHD and I had convinced myself before we ever had the evaluation that it could not be ADHD, had to be some sort of learning disability and so I went in there with the wrong mindset and then was shocked when I got the outcome.

And so it took us a few days, but you know, we felt like we had already desperately tried everything we could think of and the physician was right. You know, the teacher was doing everything that she could in the classroom to accommodate. And he was really a very sad child. When I look back at photos of him from like kindergarten and early, first grade, he was always crying. He was always feeling like he couldn't do what people wanted him to do, you know, and it was really, really impacting his life from a mental health standpoint. And so we decided that we would try medication and if it wasn't a good outcome if the side effects were not appropriate, whatever happened, we could always stop, but we just felt desperate to do something else to really help him. And so here we are, nine years later, he has additional diagnoses of dysgraphia, executive functioning deficits, written expression disorder and high-functioning autism.

And he also has a gifted IQ, so he has quite the alphabet soup and you know, early on when I couldn't figure out what was going on, I started blogging. I said, if I put out there what's happening, maybe somebody will find us and tell me what's going on, right? Because just desperation. And nobody found me until I started using the term ADHD. And then suddenly people were flocking to the blog and I started having conversations with other parents and realizing I wasn't the only one. And you know, it just snowballed from there. And after a few years I could kind of look back and say there really was a process that would have been awesome if I had had it, if I'd had that knowledge and information that would've helped us get to that place a whole lot faster. And that's why I wrote *What to Expect When Parenting Children with ADHD* because I felt like there was no guidebook, there's no rule book, you know, you get the, *What to Expect for Pregnancy*.

They have what to expect books for different ages and stages now. But, you know, when we get a diagnosis of ADHD, we get maybe a fact sheet or a prescription and were just pushed out into the world on our own to figure it out.

And it's not that easy to figure out, you know, it's, it's a difficult process. And so, you know, I struggled for a really long time and I just, I started writing more, you know, putting these systems together and approaching it from a system standpoint to help other families not struggle so long.

Debbie: Well, first of all, thank you for sharing that story. And, you know, I think a lot of listeners, including me, relate to a lot of what you're sharing, especially that, just that sense of overwhelm that there really is no roadmap here. We feel like pioneers, you know, and when really we're everywhere, that's the thing I find so ironic about this entire world we're living in, that there are so many differently wired kids and we are everywhere but still feel like we're having to figure it out on our own. So thank you for putting that out there and sharing your systems with us. Tell me about your book *Boy Without Instruction*. So did that come before the *What to Expect When Parenting Children with ADHD*?

Penny: It did actually. The first book idea I had was the *What to Expect* book. But by the time I started trying to put together my first book, I already had this big accumulation of stories from my first blog, which was a moms who have ADHD. And so it was this chronological story of us our struggle and trying to figure things out. And I thought it would be really helpful for other parents to know they're not alone, you know, that's a big thing for us as parents of special needs kids is we feel so alone and isolated because we internalize that it must be our fault, the way things are going for our kids. And so, you know, I wanted to be very honest about our experience so that other parents could say, hey, you know, I'm not the only one. It isn't just me.

So I pulled a lot from the blog. I filled in the blanks in some places and I'm really put together the kind of chronological story from his kindergarten year, pre-diagnosis through I believe about fifth grade. And it talks about some school struggles. We, you know, we had one teacher that was the worst in the entire world. I gave her the nickname of Ms. Gulch because she is the wicked witch, you know, it really felt like it was the worst year. And that was, you know, my son had his one and only outburst, physical outburst in meltdown that year because she had just pushed until he exploded, I mean a classroom clearing explosion. And they had to get the kids out because he was shoving and throwing chairs and desks, and he's never done that. That's the one and only time that has ever happened.

He's 15 now. So, you know, teachers really can have a big effect. Parents asked sometimes, what do I do if I really see that this teacher is not the right fit for my child? And I say, you demand another teacher immediately. The principal was very good and she ended up switching him to a different classroom just for the last quarter because it had gotten so volatile once that happened, she knew he was not really that kid and she knew that he was in a bad situation and, and moved him to a different classroom. But, you know, this teacher would come to every functional behavior assessment meeting every IEP meeting and she would stand defiantly and say, 'No, I'm not doing that.' 'No, I don't agree with it.' Every time. I mean we had four and five hour IEP meetings that year over and over.

It was crazy, but that's in, there are struggle with finding the right medication. You know, my mom guilt about medication, so many things, social, some social issues, transitioning meltdowns that we had when he was younger, you know, all of that is chronicled in there and very honestly, you know, I don't sugarcoat things, which was kind of really the opposite of my personality. I have anxiety, I have pretty significant social anxiety, you know, I'm always on guard with what I say and do around other people. But with this parenthood and with ADHD, I don't know, I just am very honest about it because I think that's what we need. You know, we don't need somebody to say, oh, it's all going to be OK. You know, you need, you need that, but you need a whole lot more. You need to know how to make it OK, you know, and how to get through it in one piece.

Debbie: Well, I remember when your book *Boy Without Instructions* came out and first of all, I love the cover, so listeners check out the cover, captured this essence of the chaos that we really are in the midst of when we're trying to navigate this and the stories that you're sharing and just talking about the teacher interaction that is so true that it's just that one teacher can make all the difference and you know, when you're describing the outbursts that your son had, our kids can sometimes feel like caged animals, you know, like when they're, when they're with that teacher. We had a teacher similarly that was just the wrong fit and we were in a private school at the time and we did try to get it moved and they weren't having any of it. They insisted it had nothing to do with the teacher. And of course after we left, many parents came up and said he would've been fine. I don't know about fine, but he would've done much better with the other teacher. And I think that's just a good reminder that, you know, there are so many great teachers out there who are willing to really work with us and, and it is important that we advocate and push for a move if we know that our child is, you know, potentially being emotionally harmed and in, in a classroom like that.

Penny: Yeah. And I think as parents, we, we kind of have this generalization that we can't go against the school, you know, the school is this government powerful entity and they have their rules and we can't change their rules but we can for our kids when they need it. And it's really important, you know, and I didn't know that entire year to say 'Hey, move him to a different classroom.' And we were really afraid of socially what that might do for him because the kids were going to see him in a different room and they had already seen him have an exploding meltdown. That teacher made him apologize to the class the next day, which I completely lost my mind with her and with the principal because you don't apologize for something that was outside of your control that you're a teacher, you know, was so hateful to you that had happened.

I just, you know, I really was extremely upset about that because she called extra attention to it and it was really inappropriate. But anyway, the principal said, you know, I think we should move him, but if you think it'll be more harmful, you know, we can keep him where he is. I'm like, 'No, I don't care what the other kids say'. And he got the best teacher and it was only, you know, for nine weeks. But she was like an angel. She was amazing. She gave him so much, just real compassion and extra attention, um, with what he really needed. But he

ended up repeating fourth grade the next year because we realized that starting him in kindergarten when he was not yet five was a huge mistake. And we didn't realize it at the time because we didn't know he had a developmental delay and so he was extremely bullied.

He was having a really hard time socially. And so he wanted to repeat fourth grade after that year. I mean he knew how awful it was. He told us he was afraid to go to fifth grade. He, he, he wanted a do over, which is so sad that your kid needs a do over, you know. But so he did repeat. It took a lot of wrangling to get the principal to approve because he was on or above grade level intelligence wise. But we did. It made such a huge difference. He has done so much better socially now because he's much closer, you know, now he's older than most of his peers a little bit and that takes away a little bit of that developmental delay, you know, between his developmental age and his calendar, age and age of his peers. And so that, that's probably the one biggest and best decision we've made for him and his disability so far is to have him repeat. And it was kind of a now or never thing, you know, he was getting older and every single year at the end of the school year, I asked the teacher, shouldn't he repeat? Should he repeat kindergarten? And they all said, Oh no, he's going to catch up. He'll be fine. He's smart, you know. Well, that's everything.

Debbie: It's not everything. And especially with, with bright kids, you know, there's asynchronous development and so, so often intellectually they may be ahead of their peers, but often emotionally, socially they're below their peers. So when you combine that with him being younger than his peers, to start with that, I can see, you know, how that could be really tricky for him.

Penny: Yeah. Functionally, he was way behind his peers. I mean, his Executive Function delay is extreme. Um, when the psychologist did a brief with him when he was re-evaluated for autism about three years ago, the section of the brief for organization, you know, they plot each on the chart and the dot for that one was literally at the very tippy top line. He was almost literally off the chart in dysfunction in organization and planning skills, so you know, I mean that's huge in the school environment and so once he hit third grade, they wanted more responsibility and accountability and every year it just gets bigger and bigger and that's been one of the toughest things and trying to work with teachers and work with the school is for them to understand that yes, he is super, super smart, but that doesn't mean that he can perform in the way you expect them to

Debbie: To go back, and tell me if you're comfortable talking about this, but medication is something we haven't spent a lot of time talking about on this show. And we don't medicate. Asher, I bring it up to him as an option sometimes, you know, because he gets very frustrated with himself often for just lack of focus when he is really trying to work on something and it's something he's at this point not wanting to try. And I've said, well that's fine. I'm happy to, you know, try other approaches to see if we can support you in this way. But I'm curious to know, you mentioned you had some Momma-Guilt around that and I'm, I'm just wondering, you know, how does your son feel about it and how is that working for you?

Penny: Starting out? We had a really, really hard time with finding a medication that worked well for him and that kept working well for him. So some of the medications, he just had really, really bad side effects with mood changes, you know, he is the sweetest, kindest kid. So if he starts getting angry and volatile, I know there's something going on. And you know, there's two types of medications for ADHD in the stimulants, there's two categories, amphetamines and methylphenidate. And so most people do want well with one type or the other, but not both. For him, he couldn't take any of the amphetamines, Adderall, Vyvanse. They made him very moody and aggressive, but he did well on Concerta, but every two months like clockwork, it quit working and they would increase the dose and it would quit working and they would increase the dose and I quit working and then we were like, well, we can't increase it anymore because now we're seeing side effects from that.

I learned much later that kids with high functioning autism often have this struggle. There are often very, very susceptible to side effects, you know, they get kind of the extreme rare side effects for a lot of it. And so, you know, we were seeing a really old physician at the time and he had been in practice mental health pediatrics for um, I would say at least 30 years. He has since retired, actually saw him at the store the other day. And I went, Oh, I'm so glad he's still around because he was just great, you know. But he knew about this really old influenza medication called Amantadine that was sometimes used off label for ad-hoc. And he decided to try adding it to the concert and see if it helped. And it did, it made it last, unfortunately over a couple years time it built up in his system and started causing some severe anxiety.

But we did have to quit it. But once he hit puberty, we didn't have that same issue with the medication failing and we didn't have the issue with him not eating anymore either. In the last year and a half or so, he's gained almost a hundred pounds.

Debbie: Oh my goodness. Wow.

Penny: And about a foot and a half. I mean, he's exploded in size. It's insane. It happened so fast. It just blows my mind. But yeah, I mean when he was seven years old, I could count his ribs across the room and I would cry at night about, you know, is he going to grow? What is happening? Is this a good thing? And now I have the opposite problem. Now I need him to quit eating all the time and even though he's taking a stimulant. So you know, that journey was kind of hard for us, but it did make a difference for him and helped him to really be having an opportunity to some success.

And after a couple of years, one summer I was like, OK, I want to see where we are, let's take a couple weeks off and see if he's still really needs it. And after four days he asked for it back. He was, I would say eight or nine years old, probably nine at the time. He asked for it back because he couldn't focus on anything, you know, he couldn't sit down and build something out of Legos because he couldn't sit there long enough. He couldn't focus on it long enough.

So it wasn't even a matter of, you know, schoolwork, it wasn't a matter of following instructions or meeting expectations or anything like that. He just could tell himself that he couldn't enjoy the things that he usually did that he wanted to because he didn't have that focus. So for him so far, you know, knock on wood, he's 15 and he does not refuse medication.

He takes it every morning without even thinking about it. And I think part of that is because he's been taking it for a really long time, you know, for him it's just part of his life. But you know, we've, we tried again later and he still said no, I really want to take after a few days so you know, he sees that difference and for me it's really a matter of giving him the opportunity to have some confidence to meet some expectations and to enjoy things. And he couldn't do that stuff before medication. He just, in his hyper-activity has waned a great deal since he hit puberty. He is most of the time not literally bouncing off the walls and the furniture like he used to be, you know, he was the human Tiger. Part of that is that he also has sensory issues and his perceptive input is like zero.

And so kids crash into things when they have that issue because then they can feel where they are in space because they don't have a good sense. Which was a huge Aha moment for me when the OT told us about that very early on. But you know, a lot of that has really waned, which is good. But you know, he's still needs medication to help kind of slow his mind down and help him to be able to focus for more than three to five minutes. And so, you know, for us it really. I did have mom guilt for a long time, you know, especially when we had side effects, what am I doing, why am I doing this? But I had to remind myself that we made that decision for him and his benefit, it was not for us. And people talk about medication being the easy way out all the time.

It's harder. It is a harder way to go. And a lot of reading, a lot of respects as a parent from the parental side, it's harder, there's a lot more guilt and anxiety and watching for side effects and trying to get it just right. And you know, I felt like that was a harder choice to make on a daily basis. And you know, every now and then I have the, Oh I wish you didn't have to take medicine. I wonder if there's another way. But we've tried it all. There's not another way. We have tried everything except for neurofeedback and that was just because of financial barriers and medication really is the best thing for him and you know, maybe when he gets older he won't need it. Who's to say he might have that teen boy thing that seems to kick in for a lot of kids with adhd that they want to manage it all themselves and they don't want to take medicine and they don't want to talk about having it, you know, but so far he has not.

Debbie: Well thank you for sharing that. I think it's definitely something all of us with kids who have ADHD have to think about at some point and we all make our decisions and I think you're absolutely right. There is no easy decision and taking the medication route, I can just imagine that it is layered right with all these complications and questioning. I mean, I think we're constantly questioning if we should be doing more, if we're doing the right things, but I've heard recently from a couple of friends actually who are adults who've been diagnosed and they've started medication as adults well into their thirties and

forties saying, oh my goodness, my life is completely different and I had no idea this was going on for me. So super interesting.

Penny: Yeah, I mean it really can make a huge difference and I don't think that medication or stimulant medication is the answer for every single person with ADHD. There are some people who can regulate and do well without it, but I think, you know, on the more severe end of the spectrum and especially when you add other factors in like learning disabilities, you know, it's, I, I just, I don't like to see parents who make a decision about medication for their child, for ADHD out of fear because I think there's so much misinformation about ADHD medication out there and we have the same problem. You know, when he was diagnosed, when my husband was like, I am not drugging him because we didn't know about, or either you know, you, you hear what is the common misconception out there and you don't know any better until it's you and you have to dive in and you have to really learn more and over time we realized that it's not at all doping a child into submission. It's just helping to kind of right or wrong in their neurology to fill in the gaps where neurotransmitters are lacking or not being efficiently used by the brain and the body. So it's hard. You really have to and that's what I always encourage parents who ask questions about medication, please, please, please find reputable sources. Unlearn the facts about it because it really is different from public opinion and what everybody fears about it.

It was interesting. I didn't realize that you said that sometimes the extreme side effects are more apt to happen with a child who also has a diagnosis of autism.

Debbie: I'm curious about that connection between ADHD and Autism. You discovered that your son was Autistic later on in down the road. Was that a surprise to you and I'm just curious about how you see those two things working together?

Penny: When we initially got the diagnosis, I was told you can't technically have both, but he does. So I was like, what does that mean? Yes. The Diagnostics Statistical Manual that we had prior to 2015, which was the fourth edition, said that you could not have both diagnoses that physicians should not be diagnosing ADHD and Autism in the same patient. When the DSM five came out in 2015, that quantification was, was removed. So now physicians can diagnose both in the same patient and I'm seeing so much more of it. Um, but of course this was not something I knew before. It was part of our story and I had to learn more about it, but once he hit about age 10, which was four years after diagnosis, I started to recognize some pieces that weren't fitting with ADHD. Some really intense social issues. Um, some really intense reading. Other people not just body language, tone of voice and intention. He had no way of interpreting intention from others at all because he's a very concrete thinker, very black and white, so everything is 100 percent literal and so by the time he hit sixth grade, boys are mean to each other to show you that they like you and they want to be your friend. He was having meltdowns about this stuff every day and that was probably the biggest sign for me, but there were just a lot of little nuances that I was like, you know, if this was really only ADHD, some of this stuff, what should be getting better? And so I started having him reevaluated and it took two years

for me to find a clinician that would look deep enough to see it because he makes good eye contact. He has excellent conversations with adults and he doesn't really stem.

So all of these stereotypical pieces of autism were missing for him. And a lot of clinicians want to look past that. They didn't feel the need to look past that. And we actually. Our first evaluation was at an organization called teach, which is part of the University of North Carolina System and it's a nonprofit and they are supposed to be the absolute best evaluation for autism. We waited nine months to get in and had the pre-interview with me and pass that that yes, you should be evaluated. Then he was given the eight OS which is supposed to be the Cadillac of Autism evaluations and they sat down with us at the end of the day and said, ADHD fits better and did not give him diagnosis. And I was kind of crushed because I was just as educated as I have made myself about these things over the years. I knew there was something else there and I felt cheated that they were saying, well, this one thing fits better, so we're just going to stick to that because I feel like to understand a child fully, you need to know all the pieces and you know, a lot of people are anti label, but the label, the diagnosis is helping us understand parts of our kids and their, you know, their story, their truth, their struggle.

And so, and I also felt like autism is much more accepted and understood in the public and especially in school and that's why I kept pursuing it. Um, you know, I could see the nuances, I could work with them, you know, I understood them where they were coming from, but I really wanted that extra level of definition for the school in the hopes that that would improve our school experience for him. And so a couple of other psychologists came through our therapist office. They didn't last, I don't know why. So we would be on the books to see somebody and they w they would say, oh, well I'm leaving the practice than a week so I can't evaluate but let's chat and see. And one said no way. The other one said, yeah, probably. And um, I finally found someone here in town, a psychologist to, was really, really well versed in high functioning autism.

It was kind of her focus for many years and she wasn't in private practice anymore. She was actually running a home for kids here or like a day school and a boarding school for kids with those kinds of struggles, but she agreed to meet on the weekends and evaluate him and in the report, in her conclusion on the last page, she said that he was the clinical definition of hiding in plain sight as far as Autism. Yeah. So it was tough to get that and you know, since then there was a study a year or two ago that I wrote about for health line that showed that kids who already have a diagnosis of ADHD on average get an Autism diagnosis and average of three years later than if they didn't already have the adhd diagnosis. Because so many symptoms really overlap. There's so many symptoms of one that could be the other and vice versa.

So it's really hard to tease it apart. And so, you know, it does really take a clinician that's willing to dive very deep and look everything. I mean this woman did. I think we did at least 10 rating scales if not more. She went back and talked to the therapist that we had worked with all sorts of people and really took her

time to get a very clear picture of every little piece and then she can very clearly see it, you know, if you would meet him and talk to him, somebody like you and I who knows about ADHD and autism, you would pick up on adhd probably. You're probably not pick up on the autism. It's more of a daily functioning and a social, you know, peered appear functioning thing for him and getting stuck. That was the other symptom that I was noticing that was really beyond the scope of ADHD as he would get stuck on thoughts, not just fear thoughts, but if there was something he wanted, he would get stuck until it and beyond perseveration even. And that, you know, is a definite symptom for some of autism of getting really stuck. So, you know, there were just little signs, but it's very, very common for ADHD or autism to kind of camouflage the other.

Debbie: I'm curious, you know, you were hoping that this would make it easier for him to be understood in school and things. Have you noticed a difference or has it changed your experience having that additional diagnosis?

Penny: Not really. No, no, no. That was such a bummer because I really had high hopes for that, but it's that invisible disability thing. It's just so hard and I feel like being twice exceptional makes it twice as hard. Cause that whole seeing that a kid is smart and judging their capability on that is very crushing when you know, your kid has so many challenges in being able to communicate how smart they are in the ways that the school expects. And so we're still in that mode of struggle and I think that that probably happens to a lot of kids that just have the high functioning autism diagnosis is oh they're smart so surely they can perform and, and I think a lot in the media, high functioning autism has portrayed as very organized to a fault, you know, lining up cars, categorizing things, you know, that sort of thing. And that's not every kid with high-functioning autism. Some of them have executive functioning disability or deficits, and that's. That can be really overwhelming and pervasive.

Debbie Definitely. That's something I'm very familiar with in my household as well. I'd love to switch gears. I want to make sure we have time to talk about your other books, so you've also, in addition to play with that and instructions you wrote *What to Expect When Parenting Children with ADHD*. You mentioned that at the beginning and then you also have a book of the *Insider's Guide to ADHD* and what I know of you and from you is you're very much about supporting parents who are raising these kids understand not only how to best support their kids but how to best support themselves. So would you mind sharing with us a couple of things, couple of takeaways that our listeners could take with them, maybe some game changers for you that helps you find more peace and confidence in your own journey?

Penny: Sure, yeah. The first big aha for us was reading *The Explosive Child* by Ross Greene and I know that you are a big Ross Greene fan as well. Indeed, that completely changed the way I saw my son and his behavior and helped me to really understand him and I always tell parents, part of my online course is that you, there's a whole section on getting to know your child and I know when people first see that they're like, I know my kid, I lived with my kid, but it's about really diving deep and really understanding every nuance, getting to

know their strengths and weaknesses, getting to know specifically how ADHD or Autism affects their day to day, getting to know their triggers for behavior, getting to know their emotional intensity or sensitivity or both. Um, all of these things are really important pieces of during the best we can for our kids.

And so that was a big one because then I was able to really clearly see behavior as a function of something else as a symptom rather than the actual problem. And I just did a podcast on this a few weeks ago. I'm completely on behavior being a symptom and not your actual problem. And of course I got that from Ross Greene. And um, that was a big takeaway for me from reading his latest book recently, *Raising Human Beings* and so, you know, I think that is such an important piece and you know, behavior is communication. What is your child trying to tell you when they're exploding or when they're crying, when you know, a typical child their age wouldn't be or um, when they're refusing to do their work, when they're refusing to do what you asked, do you know, all these things feel like the problem in the moment, but they're not, they're just a symptom of the underlying problem.

So when you really start to dive deep and get to know your child on that whole different level, you can make so much better decisions about your parenting and you can be so much more compassionate and intentional in the way that you interact with your child. And, and for kids like ours, that is paramount. Like I think that's the number one most important thing is to be calm and compassionate and intentional. Mindful which plays into that intentional piece. And so, you know, my next big Aha really after that was when I started researching to write the *Insider's Guide to ADHD* and that book was born just out of a real desperate feeling on my part to know what life was like for my son to have some sort of real good feeling for what functioning with his brain is like. And I thought, well, who better to ask than adults who have ADHD, who used to be kids who had ADHD?

And I just started surveying and interviewing a bunch of adults with ADHD and ended up being 97 of them I believe in the end. And I came out when I pulled all that together, there were some very big common threads for all of these people. And one was being accepted for who they are and being allowed to be themselves. So not trying to make them fit in the box that they're never going to fit in, but to help them find their passions and their talents and their interests and to feed off of that instead another was being misunderstood, was very detrimental to them. They really and it's, it clouded their relationship with their parents to, um, a lot of them said, you know, I don't talk to my parents very much as an adult. I don't trust my parents. I don't confide in them because they never really understood me. I never got a good reaction as a child when I tried to tell them how it really felt. And so, you know, this whole thing, all of these little pieces that were very common ended up saying that, you know, our child's truth, their individual personal truth is what's most important to be our guide as parents for kids with ADHD. And it totally goes for high-functioning Autism as well. And what that means is to know your child on that very deep level to really understand every disability and how it affects them to really understand what it's like for them in school, to really understand their reactions to things

emotional, or getting stuck or you know, all of that meltdowns. Anger is a big one for a lot of people as well. And so all of these things together kind of formulate your child's truth. They formulate this picture of what your child's day to day is like for you, and it helps you then to create appropriate expectations for where your child is, because if we sat in her typical expectations for our kids, they can never meet them, and so you're a frustrated parent because they're never meeting your expectations.

You have a frustrated child who feels down and lacks confidence because they can never meet expectations. You know, so using your child's truth and exactly where they are in this moment to set expectations is huge because you get to succeed. Your child gets to succeed. You have a win-win. When you know where as as an authoritarian parent, you win and your child loses. If you have an authoritarian relationship, your child never wins ever. They're only doing what you've commanded of them. If they're even able to meet that expectation. So you know that whole collaborative approach of Ross Green's as really important, the book, *How to Talk to Your Kids so They'll Listen and How to Listen so They'll Talk*, which isn't exactly right. I don't think it doesn't sound right, but it's close and that, you know, that kind of goes into the same, you know, it's very much in the same vein as Ross Greene's teachings and all of that stuff that I had already read was exactly what all of these adults were telling me that they needed or you know, some of them had it as a child and they talked about how great it was, you know, how they felt like they could be themselves, how they were able to really find their interests and what they wanted to do with their life that way because they were allowed to explore. So, you know, it just really reinforced for me that knowing my child very intimately and why he does the things he does, why he struggles in the ways that he does was paramount to my success. It taught me the appropriate ways to approach, you know, my parenting with them.

Debbie: That's great. That's such helpful insights and takeaways. Thank you for sharing that. I obviously agree with everything that you're saying. That's very much, about you know, I call it becoming fluent in our child's language. I think that's just absolutely critical to create a secure environment, you know, where our kids can feel good about who they are. And I haven't read the *Insider's Guide to ADHD* and I'm super curious now to check that out because, you know, it really is. I think of it as kind of like Danny Raede at Asperger Experts, like getting that inside perspective is, it's really exciting to see what's going on inside the mind. So great resources and I would love if you could share with us how listeners can connect with you. Your website has a lot of great resources. I know you offer online courses, you have a podcast, you have some great videos on there that I have checked out and so how can parents learn more about the work that you're doing and find you.

Penny: The easiest way to kind of connect with almost all of it is to go to parenting, ADHD, and autism. There you will find a page for the podcast, which of course also on iTunes, Stitcher, Google, and it's called the *Parenting ADHD Podcast*. I do have online courses. I'm the complete guide to parenting ADHD is a self paced completely online course that actually walks you through the entire process that's outlined in *What to Expect When Parenting Children with ADHD*, very

useful. It's like 50 hours worth of training videos, but they're chopped up into really small chunks, very manageable. There's a link there to that and to you another small course on self care. Then I have out there information about my parent coaching program and then you know, there's a lot of free information to theirs, I think almost 200 blog posts on there now. There are a few videos. There's several free downloads and ADHD cheat sheet. There's just all sorts of stuff there that people can check out and everything is really linked up in there. You'll find a link to you to the Happy Momma Retreat that we do once a year and next year I'm also starting a weekend intensive parenting retreat for moms called *Purposeful Parenting Bootcamp*. And there's information there as well for that. So I'm spread all over the place.

Debbie You're a busy woman, it sounds like.

Penny: I really want to share everything that I learned. You know, I hate the thought of other kids and other families struggling. We, you know, all the information is there. Nobody has to, you know, sit down and start from scratch and figure it out anymore. Nine years ago when my son was diagnosed, it really was, you know, we didn't have online courses. We didn't have any sort of guidebook. We, we read *The Explosive Child*, we read *Super Parenting for ADD*, you know, when we put all these pieces together and we read a lot on *ADDitude Magazine* and you know, so there's a wealth of information now from people like you and I who have tried to pull it together in a way that parents can use it to get on the right path much more quickly.

Debbie: You can be your guide instead of people having to find their own path. You can show people the way. So that's awesome. No, it's again, so many resources on their listeners. I'll make sure all the links on the show notes page so you can check out penny's website and her podcast and everything that she just shared with us. So Penny, thank you so much for this conversation. It's been just fun to connect with you and hear your story and you're a few years ahead of me, so I'm always curious too, to hear from people who are a little further down the road in terms of where their child is and their journey because it gives me a window of what it might look like for us. So anyway, thank you for this conversation today.

Penny: Well, thank you so much for having me.

Debbie: You've been listening to the TiLT Parenting Podcast. For the show notes for this episode, visit tiltparenting.com/session93. You'll find a link on the show notes page, or you can go straight to tiltparenting.com/after the show.

If you liked what you heard on today's episode, I would be grateful if you could take a minute to head over to iTunes and leave a rating or review. We are still in the top 20 in the Kids and Family category, and honestly it's just so exciting to see this audience grow and the podcast get more attention. It also makes it easier for me to land bigger guests, so it's a win-win. Thank you so much for being a part of making this happen.

Lastly, if you aren't already part of the online community at TiLT, I invite you to sign up at [TiLT Parenting.com](http://www.tiltparenting.com) in the box where it says JOIN THE REVOLUTION. Every Thursday I sent out a short email with a quick note from me, a link to that week's podcast episode, and links to 5 stories from the news that week that are relevant to parents like us. Again, you can sign up at [tiltparenting.com](http://www.tiltparenting.com).

Thanks again for listening. For more information on TiLT Parenting visit www.tiltparenting.com.

RESOURCES MENTIONED:

- **Parenting ADHD and Aspergers (Penny's website)**
- *Boy Without Instructions: Surviving the Learning Curve of Parenting a Child with ADHD* by **Penny Williams**
- *What to Expect When Parenting Children with ADHD: A 9-Step Plan to Master the Struggles and Triumphs of Parenting a Child with ADHD* by **Penny Williams**
- *The Insider's Guide to ADHD: Adults with ADHD Reveal the Secret to Parenting Kids with ADHD* by **Penny Williams**
- *The Hidden Layers of ADHD: The Underlying Complexities of ADHD, and their Powerful Effect on Your Parenting Success* by **Penny Williams**
- **Parenting ADHD Podcast**
- *The Explosive Child: A New Approach for Understanding and Parenting Easily Frustrated, Chronically Inflexible Children* by **Dr. Ross Greene**
- *Raising Human Beings: Creating a Collaborative Partnership with Your Child* by **Dr. Ross Greene**
- *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk* by **Adele Faber**