



Episode #175:

Kathryn Haydon Talks About Creatively Parenting

September 17, 2019

Debbie: Hey Kathryn, welcome to the podcast.

Kathryn: Hi Debbie, it's great to talk to you.

Debbie: It's great to have you back. This is, I don't know what number this is going to be, but it's going to be up probably in the high one seventies low one eighties and we talked probably in my first year of having the Tilt Parenting podcast and it was such a great conversation and I'm excited to just catch up and hear what you've been up to but then have this new conversation that's really aimed at parents instead of our kids. So can you take just a few minutes to introduce yourself, who you are in the world and what you do?

Kathryn: Yes, absolutely. So my name is Kathryn Haydon as you've introduced me and I am a creativity and innovation strategist, an author and a speaker. And my interest has always been with regard to learning and business and I really say now that I work at the intersection of learning and work. And whether it's work as a parent, whether it's work at a job or in our entrepreneurial work, projects that we have, I study and work with people to harness their best thinking and their creative thinking, which is their best thinking, in order to do their work more powerfully and productively. So I've worked with students in the past for many years and this has led me to the whole trajectory of life and moving from working with kids to training teachers, and to working with businesses, business people, professionals in all capacities. And that's where my focus is right now.

Debbie: And so you also have a new book that has just come out. Could you just take a minute to tell us about that?

Kathryn: Yes, it's called The Non-Obvious Guide to Being More Creative No Matter Where You Work. And this book, it's, it's fun to be a part of this project. It's a book that is part of a business series of individual books on topics like employee engagement and small business marketing and emotional intelligence, and mine is on creativity. And my book is the fifth in the series and it's, it's just about to come out and it is supposed to be like having coffee with an expert. That's the, that's the tagline of the book. And the idea is to have a quick, fun manual and guide on the particular topic. So I have looked into my past and everything that I've done in terms of training people to enhance their thinking, their creativity and all of my best tips and best work is in this book, sort of like a guidebook that you can take and open anywhere and grab an idea and apply it right then.

Debbie: Awesome. Well congratulations on the book and I just thought it's so interesting, you know, we've been emailing back and forth about doing this episode together and in the past, I don't know, maybe four or five months ago, I did a webinar for SENG on how to bring more creativity into your parenting, how creativity can support you as the parent of a gifted or 2e or differently wired child. And so when, when you shared your new book with me, I was like, this is such a great

topic and it's not an obvious topic. And so it's probably going to be a different conversation than many of the podcast episodes, but I think it's about self care, it's about taking care of ourselves so we can better show up to support our incredibly creative kids. So let's just start with the concept of creativity. I would love to even know how you define it.

Kathryn: So in, in the field of creativity, which is my background, there are many ways of looking at creativity. And in this book I'm looking at it as the following. And I coined this, this definition that's based on the academic definitions of creativity, but adds a few layers to it. So I define it as breaking through the inertia of no, by seeking new possibilities and finding valuable solutions. So from this sense, creativity is a process. It's a thinking process. But the breaking through the inertia of no piece means that we have to overcome some resistance to actually doing it. There's this inertia that keeps us from thinking differently and doing things differently and looking at ourselves and using our strengths. It's just life, and many things about life keep us from doing that. So we have to break through that inertia of no in order to think differently, in order to come up with new solutions, new ideas, new innovations, and to grow.

Debbie: So, you know, just to tie it back to parents raising atypical kids, even as you're giving that definition I can think of even many tilts in my book of how, that are directly weaved into creativity. You know, just tilt one, which is to question everything you thought you knew about parenting, requires some creativity. So talk more about the connection between creativity and parenting and, and I'd love to know your thoughts on what the state of creativity is even for today's parents. Like is it something that most parents are doing a good job of incorporating into their lives?

Kathryn: So you do know, because we've talked about this in the past, that when I read *Differently Wired* for the first time, I absolutely saw those connections between what you were putting forth and creativity. And I think that's why I love the book so much and just from the fact of the way that you define differently wired and saying, if you think your child is differently wired than you're in, that's great. You are. And I love that because it's the same with creativity. Everybody is creative. Everybody has the capacity to think differently. And we develop these thinking skills that, and we develop character traits as well, that support our ability to think differently. And a lot of those tilts were helping parents do that very thing in connection with their parenting. So *Differently Wired* is right on with the connection between creativity and parenting. But in terms of creativity in parenting, creativity is understanding the deepest part of ourselves.

Creativity is understanding how we think, it's understanding, as I mentioned, these characteristics that support our ability to think differently like openness and empathy and perceptivity and originality. Many, many words. I could go on, but these character traits and these thinking strengths are who we are as human beings. And in order to parent fully, we need to recognize as parents who we are and define ourselves from the standpoint of our strengths and define ourselves from the standpoint of this universal ability that we all have as humans. And if we start with ourselves, we are able to model for our kids best practices. Just in general best practices of life. We are more engaged, we are more satisfied. And

when we have challenges raising our differently wired kids, we're primed to think differently and come up with new solutions, use humor and put in all the tools that we have by nature of our creativity to help things move forward and not get stuck and not blow up.

Debbie: Well I love that explanation and you know, just that idea that everybody is creative. I think, you know, you hear the word creativity and you think, oh, I'm not a very good artist. Or you know, I don't play an instrument. Like we have this idea of what it is. But when you say that everyone is creative, that it's, it's who we are, like we're meant to be creative beings. First of all, that feels great. And I hope that it's resonating with listeners as well. And it also feels like it's not the way most of us, at least not in the US, are living our lives as parents. It's not kind of our, our status quo or our default mode is to show up as creative parents. So I'm wondering do you agree with that? And if so, or if not, I'd like to know why or why not. But what do you think gets in the way of people being more creative in their daily lives?

Kathryn: Well, I think the biggest thing, as you alluded to, is not understanding what creativity really is, because creativity isn't limited to art. And we have that myth in mind, it seems at all times, that, oh, you're only creative if you're doing art or music or something that's quote unquote in the creative sphere. But the fact is we all apply creativity. We use creativity in our daily lives. An example I love to use for parents is cooking. When you think about what you have left in your pantry and you don't have much and you have to think about what you're going to cook for dinner with your gluten free kid and then your kid who doesn't like vegetables and then maybe your other kid who, who will only eat bread. So you know, what are you going to create with those ingredients? That takes creative thinking.

And we can look at micro examples like that throughout our lives. Just, you know, in the ways we respond to our kids, the way we respond to our spouses in our households, um, how we go about our lives, our outlook. And in the book it's structured with basically four learnings, four major overarching learnings. So the first is understanding creativity. So I start with that foundation. So people really understand that they are creative, it's a universal process. And now more than ever, we need it to be agile in the face of change. So that's number one, having an awareness of what creativity really is. Number two is understanding your own creative strengths. And I have a survey in the book that people can take to see what their thinking strengths are. Once you know what your thinking strengths are and your creative strengths are, it's much easier to see them in others and you're coming from a place of fullness rather than a place of thinking, well, I'm not creative.

And then it's harder to see how other people do it. So number one, understanding creativity. Number two, understanding your own strengths and gaining a mindset, a strengths based mindset that understands what creativity is. And that sets you up for the third step, which is interactions. Our interactions determine so much how people respond to us. If we are fostering interactions that are in line with best practices from the science of creativity, we are almost guaranteed to elicit new thinking and growth in the people we're interacting

with. So there's understanding creativity, mindset and understanding our strengths, interactions and finally creative process. So that is going bigger. Many people have heard of design thinking or creative problem solving. There are actually processes that mirror the universal problem solving process that we can learn and we can use to deliberately tackle problems that arise in a creative way. And these are all things that we can teach our kids. In fact, kids can read this book too, and understand the tools, but it really starts with us and making our own understanding clear and bringing very naturally little things into our interactions that make a big difference.

Debbie: So interesting. And, and even just to go back to where you started, that answer is just this notion that we are all creative. Not only is that who we are, but we're doing it every day. I love the example of the cooking. You know, we're constantly creative in how we get our kids out the door or you know, and it's just a, a way that we are moving through life whether we've called it that or not. So I like that idea of just understanding what it is and then noticing how we're showing up that way. So I want to talk about how bringing more creativity into our lives can specifically help parents who are raising differently wired kids. So you talked about a couple of things, you mentioned modeling. Let's, can you give us an example of that? I think modeling is so important and I talk about that a lot as well, that our kids are watching everything we're doing, but can you connect that with creativity and how that benefits our kids?

Kathryn: Yes, and specifically differently wired kids. So we are put in a position that we have to advocate for our kids and we might be the only ones advocating for our kids, right, if we have kids that are outliers, that don't fit into the regular systems. And we take our jobs very seriously. We are passionate about this. We want them to be safe, we want them to thrive, we want them to have amazing, wonderful, growing lives. And so we give our all to this work, as we should. However, sometimes as parents we forget to take that time for ourselves and we forget that in order to do this job of advocacy and raising intense children very well, we need to understand what makes ourselves tick. We need to take the time that we need in order to replenish ourselves or else we will be depleted. And we cannot do our jobs of raising our kids plus work plus everything else we do if we are depleted from a creativity standpoint.

So I think especially for when we're raising differently wired kids, kids who are intense, who have specific needs that we take care of, we are constantly on the run and we have to figure out, even within the constraints of very, very, very busy and demanding lives, how we can put our foot down in the most loving way for the time that we need to replenish. And that has a lot to do with creativity. Not only by understanding our own creativity, it helps center us, but it also leads to learning processes and ways of asking questions and ways of coming up with ideas that can lead to solutions that we may not have thought of to get out of that busy-ness and to take time for ourselves. So that was a very circular but on purpose because creativity is very circular. I like to think of it more as an infinity symbol. But you know, as we put the work in to understand our creativity, it just leads to more options. It helps us become unstuck. So any frustration that we

have, we can apply creative thinking, creative process and tools from the science of creativity to help us get unstuck.

Debbie: Yeah, I love that. And it was circular in that it shows how everything is so related. So you talked about essentially like self care, taking care of ourselves, which helps us avoid being burned out. It's good modeling for our kids to see us doing that and it also puts us in a space where we're better able to approach the problems that come with raising our unique kids. So it is, when you talk about it that way, it really shows just how critical that one aspect of our lives is and why it, we don't want to ignore it. Instead we want to actually find ways to nurture it.

Kathryn: Absolutely. And I think when I, I'm involved in the homeschooling community and when somebody new comes to homeschooling, I always talk to, and it's usually moms that I'm talking to, but I'm just, I'm asking questions. What, in what ways are you going to make sure you care for yourself and take time for yourself? This is a big change. It's a big shift. You don't have that time where you're home alone very much. And it's imperative that you find ways to mark off your own time or to become involved in things that replenish you and rejuvenate you. And that has a lot to do with creativity because through creativity and understanding ourselves more, we can be led to those activities. Or, um, it doesn't even need to be an organization. Maybe it's just taking a walk every day, but just absolutely being sure that you do get that time to take that walk.

And I've seen moms, and it's very sad, when they don't take that time and just say, no, I'm just too busy. I can't do it. Well, we are all very, very busy, but we all can set limits for ourselves. And when our kids see us doing that, it helps them grow and it helps them learn to set limits for themselves down the road. But when we don't do that, and when we just say, oh no, I don't have time, and we become further and further stressed out, they take that as the model and then we're setting them up to become depleted in their lives. So I think that again, it's a win, win, win. Sometimes it's hard to take the first step and say, I'm going to dedicate this time to myself, but when we do it, it makes a world of difference.

Debbie: Yeah. As you were sharing that answer, I was thinking about Julia Cameron's book, *The Artist's Way*, you know, which is, I'm sure many listeners are familiar with it, it's been around forever, but it's a 12 week program to nurture creativity. And she talks about doing artist dates and that once a week you're supposed to spend time by yourself. And I did this probably 20 years ago and my favorite artist date was just walking through a new neighborhood and looking and you know, just kind of observing the stoops or a stained glass window here or looking in a store front there and just exposing yourself to different stimuli really can spark creativity in you. So I like that example so much because it's a reminder of how simple this can be.

Kathryn: Yes, exactly. And some of the suggestions that I give in the book, for example, are how you ask questions. So here's a really, really easy and simple one and this, believe it or not, leads to more creativity and better solutions. So simply replacing 'no' with 'why'. So anytime your kid or anyone has a request for you, instead of saying no, even if it doesn't seem right to you, say why. Of course not if it's a dangerous situation. But I even put an example, I think this might've gotten

cut from the final version of the book, but I put an example of a child saying, um, I was trying to think, there are still times when we say no, sure there are, but then I was trying to find a good example and I thought of one and it was, mom, can I run across the highway?

Obviously no, right? But what if you replaced why? So I tried it. Mom, what if I, can I run across the highway? Why? Because my ball went across the highway. Oh, okay. You may not run across the highway, but we can go drive around to the other side and we'll retrieve your ball for you. Right? So the mere little teeny little shift of replacing no with why uncovers the real problem that needs to be solved before we shut down the conversation. And that leads to creativity. These are very, very simple things that we can do. And I will mention, just for other people who have a different perspective on *The Artist's Way*, I had that book a long time ago and I tried to do it, I couldn't get into it. I know a lot of people love it and I love the idea of it, but I didn't see myself as an artist.

I'm not an artistic person, you know, in that way. And it was about art, in a way, and about kind of finding that art piece of you, which did not resonate with me. So for those people who haven't felt that they've found a tool to help them, but they still have a feeling like, yeah, I want to grow my creativity, a book like *The Non-Obvious Guide to Being More Creative* is not focused on art. It's more about applying it to your day to day life, applying it to your job, which we can say parenting in this case, but it is about direct application to things that you're working on now, to problems that you're solving. And little things like what I just said, replacing no with why, other ways in which we ask questions, how to give good feedback. So there are tools and tips we can use in that way. So I wanted to draw a distinction, because I love the idea of the other book, it didn't resonate with me and this could provide an answer for those like me who haven't felt that they could get into the typical book on creativity.

Debbie: So say more than about, you know, you've given a couple examples about what this can look like. I, I like the, the ball across the highway example, whether from your own experience or from parents that you've talked to or how you've seen this play out. What are some other examples about what being a creative parent looks like or how infusing creativity into a situation that a parent of a differently wired kid might find themselves in, could benefit them.

Kathryn: So creativity in general as, as I mentioned at the beginning, is seeking new possibilities and finding valuable solutions. So it's finding new opportunities, new possibilities. So if we dwell in a realm of creative thinking, in a mindset for creative thinking, we are able to find possibilities that we may never have thought of before. So when we're raising a differently wired kid, I mean, think about schooling. All of the situations we find ourselves in, they are not black and white. And when things are not black and white and we need new thinking, we can apply strategies from the science of creativity. So for example, if we're trying to think about a schooling situation for our child, we can apply the creative process. And in the book I do have a workbook that's a download that you can get and it takes you through the creative process.

So you can use a series of tools to understand what your vision is, what would be the ideal state of my child's education, for example. Um, and you're looking at your vision. You're looking at what challenges stand in the way right now. Then you're creating questions that are styled in a particular way that invite new thinking. And you're able to go through this process to generate new thinking to respond to the question. So new ideas that maybe you hadn't thought of before in terms of what might solutions be for a particular class or going to school, not going to school. Maybe there's a whole new hybrid solution that you hadn't thought of, but going through this process can scaffold it for you to be able to draw it out and get as many ideas as you can. There are tools for bringing ideas from good, from a seed of an idea, to a really excellent solution.

And then tools to help overcome challenges of implementation. So who are the people that are going to help us implement this solution and who might resist and who might be blockers. And we can again, use these tools to overcome those blocks and move forward. So that's what I love about the science of creativity and creative process. When we're stuck up against something and we just feel like, oh, I don't know what to do from here, we can take out a roadmap, which is called the creative process and just kind of dive into it. Even if we don't know where we're going, we just go the first step and start thinking and follow the basically the recipe and move forward from step to step. And at one point, I've found, something clicks and we're really into it, we find that passion for solving the problem. But even if we don't have it when we're trying to start, we can take the steps and move forward.

Debbie: That's great. Very cool. All right, so for listeners who are vibing on this conversation and you know, want to infuse their current parenting world with a little more creativity, do you have any strategies or maybe quick tips that they can start to play with?

Kathryn: Yes, there are some really fun things in this book. I have to tell you that the way that the publisher designed it was very fun. It was almost as if the design was a collaborator for my writing because it's fun, there are little, you know, tip boxes and story boxes and you know, drawings and, and things like that. And so I had a lot of fun and it really brought out some of the best tips that I've given even to kids. So for example, one of the things that that inhibits creativity is perfectionism. Fear of making a mistake. And there's a book that I recommend in my book, which is called *Mistakes That Worked*. And it's a book of little vignettes, little stories about inventions that happened because they were mistakes. And I have found that book to be amazing at overcoming perfectionism or fear of trying, fear of thinking up new ideas, for kids and for parents alike.

It helped me, to be honest, when I read it. So there are little tips like that. Something else that inhibits creativity is impostor syndrome. We always compare ourselves to the, the most creative person we can think of or the most productively creative person that we can think of, like Monet or Steve Jobs. And we say, oh, I'm not creative, can't be me. And this is something that, that is termed impostor syndrome. So we feel when we're coming up with new ideas or trying to quote unquote be creative that we're an imposter. You know, we don't

know enough. We're not good enough, we're not creative enough. I have something fun in there called the gallery of quotes from famous fakes, I think I called it. And what we find is that the most famous creatively productive people felt the same way. They felt like imposters.

So just knowing that people like Maya Angelou and John Steinbeck and Lady Gaga all have these feelings of being an impostor and being not good enough to be creative, helps us, again, get over ourselves and move forward and say, okay fine if, if they, they were like that too so these thoughts that are trying to inhibit me, I too can overcome them. So we have little things like that. Part of creative thinking, as I talk about quite a bit, our creative thinking strengths, and there are 16 cognitive processes that we use that are part of mostly divergent thinking. So that type of thinking that helps us come up with new ideas. And one of those is flexibility in thinking, being able to make connections among many different disparate ideas. And one of the stories I tell is of this woman Lauren Singer, who has a website called Trash is for Tossers, and she has figured out how to reduce her trash into one mason jar, one single mason jar every year. And yes, that's how much trash she has. And she's a single, um, at least when she started this, she was a single woman just out of college.

She didn't have a family, but she was modeling her, her desire to do this after a family, I think out in Marin county or somewhere in California that was doing this as well. So a whole family had done this and made their trash in one mason jar. So she has this whole website about reducing your trash. And I have long admired her and thought to reduce your trash in our world, takes the most flexible thinking that I can think of. So one of the tips is reduce your trash. Think about what are all the ways I could reduce my trash. I could use something differently. And that is actually using your flexibility of thinking and your divergent thinking in order to come up with new ideas. So there are so many interesting ways that we can improve our creativity and start to train ourselves to live in a creative thinking mindset. And these are just a few of them, but, but they're fun, right?

Debbie: Yeah. And they also are all things that you know, you can do with your kids, which is what I love. So you're creating more of a creative culture in your family. You're helping your kids learn about flexibility, which let's face it, a lot of these kids are pretty inflexible in their thinking. So, and dealing with perfectionism and all of these things, the failure. Uh, so, so I love that this is something that can really be a family activity as well. And it sounds like part of this too, you know, even just to get started, is just owning, you know, saying to yourself, I'm a creative being like, that's who I am. And just kind of owning that.

Kathryn: Absolutely. That is the key first step. And so many people don't feel that way or they don't see it clearly. They might intuitively get that, but they don't know because there's so many myths surrounding creativity, as we talked about, and so many misconceptions, that we don't realize well actually just the way you thought right now, just that pun you said a few minutes ago when you, you didn't actually make a pun on this podcast.

Debbie: I was like, so does that mean that dad jokes typically like they count as creativity? Cause that means that my husband is incredibly creative. I'll just put that out there.

Kathryn: Well they do. And here's the thing, Debbie, here's the thing. So this brings us into another point, which is often times atrophied creative strengths come out as behaviors that we don't like, annoying behaviors. So we actually can pinpoint someone's creative strengths by looking at the behaviors that annoy us. So if your dad or your husband tells really annoying puns all the time, in fact, they might be crying out. They really want their humor to be used and acknowledged and humor is a creative strength. And if your kid does that, the question then becomes, how might I provide legitimate ways for this person's creative strengths to be used? And from a business standpoint, I've said things like, well, you know, if you're designing a product, what are all the ways that this product might have an element of humor for the customer experience? So that's an idea for that.

But if you have a kid who has a particular creative strength and there are many of them that are detailed in the book, how might you figure out ways in the course of a day that make that humor legitimate rather than it becoming an annoyance? How might you say, hey, you know, you are just so funny. You have such a great strength for humor and that's so important to creativity and will you help me come up, I have to write something funny to this friend, um, will you help me come up with something? And they may or may not do it. But as you start thinking that way, more and more avenues come out that allow you to find ways to incorporate these strengths in the daily life of your house.

Debbie: Hmm. So cool. I love that. So, well, before we say goodbye, do you have any parting thoughts? You've shared so much with us today, but any last piece of wisdom or thought that you want to leave us with?

Kathryn: Yes, actually this is perfect for, for this podcast and for differently wired kids and parents in general. So one of the things I say in the book, it's a, it's a tip, and the tip is walk around the edge of the party. And the reason I said that is because people who are on the edge, who are not in the crowd, have a very different perspective to offer. And their experiences are different and we can learn so much from those experiences. I've talked to a lot of differently wired kids and adults over the years and one guy, I remember hearing a speech that he was giving, and he said it was because I was different in school, and I think he was dyslexic, he said, you know, I was never in the mainstream and you know, I was always kind of in the back of the class or or, or whatever, making jokes.

But because he was different, he honed this skill and he honed this independence of thought, this originality. And I think that if we think of differently wired from that context to say, wow, our kids, because of who they are, they're having different experiences and those are really valuable. Those are valuable for solving problems in the world. Those are valuable insights to understand how other people feel and how they, they see things and we can get a lot of new thinking from people who have different experiences. So I think that's something

to talk to our kids about and to show them how valuable it is. Success in this world of change comes down to harnessing your differences and harnessing the unique value that you can bring to the table. And our kids are having these experiences and have these perspectives. So I think that's something to keep in mind that so often the world is trying to get differently wired kids and differently wired people to be the same as everyone, to be in the mainstream. But what if we just said, no, this is actually, this is an asset, let's value this. And that has a lot to do with creativity.

Debbie: Love that. Yeah, that's fantastic. Thank you so much for that perspective and for sharing with us today. Definitely lots of food for thought, as always. I always get sparked when I talk with you. So can you just take a minute to tell listeners where they can learn more about you and connect with you?

Kathryn: Yes, they can connect on my website, which is sparkitivity.com and it's three i's, sparkitivity. And I do have a secret parent page on my website, which we can put in the show notes. And I do have a great treasure trove of blog articles. If you go to my blog on my website and you click outlier thinkers, I think that's a category on the top right, there are articles about essentially differently wired thinkers. There are lots of articles for educators and parents on there and everyone's welcome to sign up for my email list. And if you do that, do it on the top of the home page where it talks about innovator strengths because you will get instantly connected to my resources page where I have some tools on understanding creative strengths, on checking your climate, you can do kind of a back of the napkin climate check to see how your climate even in your family is in terms of supporting creativity and you can find different areas to work on or different areas of strength. So there are a lot of resources on there and you can get them by signing up for our every other week spark report on the homepage.

Debbie: Awesome. And listeners, as always, just go to the show notes page for this episode and I will have a summary of this conversation, some of the key takeaways. And then all of the resources we've talked about, including how to connect with Kathryn. I will also have a link to that first podcast episode, which I'm realizing was in the very first year of Tilt Parenting, and we talked about the powerful connection between creativity and neurodiversity. It was another great conversation, so definitely check that out as well. So Kathryn, thank you so much. Always a pleasure and a joy to connect with you. And again, I just appreciate you sharing this with us and congratulations on the book.

Kathryn: Thank you, Debbie. I'm so grateful to be here. It's always such a treat to talk with you, and I'm also leaving inspired.

RESOURCES MENTIONED:

- [Sparkitivity](#)
- [Kathryn Haydon's website – secret Parent Page](#)
- [The Connection Between Creativity and Neurodiversity](#) (podcast episode)
- [The Non-Obvious Guide to Being More Creative \(No Matter Where You Work\)](#) by Kathryn Haydon
- [The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity](#) by Julia Cameron