



Episode #205

**Jennifer Cook O'Toole on Asperkids,
Girls on the Spectrum, and More**

April 21, 2020

Debbie: Hello, Jennifer, welcome to the podcast.

Jennifer: Thank you so much, Debbie. I have to say, I love Tilt Parenting. Like, I love the title. I love the concept. You know, I just think brilliant. So well done.

Debbie: Thanks so much. That means so much to me. And also, we were just talking before recording about the role that our kids can play in our work. And I will say that that name was very much approved by my child. And yes, so thank you, that means a lot. So and again, as we were talking before, there's so many things that we could talk about. Your body of work is fascinating, and there's so many things that are relevant for my community. And I did want to start a little bit about just even your identification as being on the spectrum and because a lot of my parents are going through that.

Jennifer: That's my word! I love it because that's what I often say to people. You know, I use the word diagnosis when it's appropriate in the sense that you're using the Medical manual and lblah, blah, blah and I get it. And to me, I lost my best friend from college, closing it on 10 years ago, to breast cancer, and I lost my dad 12 years ago to lung cancer. So when I hear "diagnosis," I think of them, you know, I hear illness, right? And I don't know. The word I often use is identified, I try to, you know, encourage that in the sense that you can identify your favorite song, you can identify the love of your life, you know, and I did have a reader who has given me expressed and permanent permission to use this phrase. So I'm no I'm not like, you know, ripping them off. He says, you know, here, ASD, autism spectrum disorder. He said, Jennifer, what if we said "dynamic" instead "disorder" and I said I love that. I love that because one of the things that I think can be so incredibly discouraging to parents is that autism or ASD, or whatever you want to call it, is not the first step. It's not the first thing that you need. When a child is born they say, oh, it's a girl. You're just identifying what is. So it's not like you're labeling, it's literally you're just identifying that which already was. But you know, the process of course of getting to that identification usually involves going through like sensory identifications and then maybe attention stuff, maybe there's OCD stuff, but everything has a "d"—there's sensory integration disorder, you know, whether it's ADD or ADHD there's disorder on the end of that one, right? Generalized anxiety disorder. Through everything there's this ddddd. So not only are you having this ridiculous cocktail or alphabet soup, right? I mean, how are those things identified? It's going through, and with teachers, with friends, with physicians with whomever having to point out all the things that are, quote unquote, wrong. And then usually having to quantify that to some degree of somewhat, always, never, right? I mean, like, that's it, it's literally, you know, people say, don't focus on the negative, but literally, that is the process. And so you go through thinking, Oh, no, there's this, I can maybe handle this, but there's also this, okay, that's a little bit more and now there's this. I know there's this and now there's autism. And I say no, no. It is like me saying to you, Debbie, Debbie, you poor thing; you've got a runny nose. You know, and the next day, you've got a runny nose and a cough. The next day,

you've got a runny nose and a cough and watery eyes. Now you don't have three things—you have a cold. I'm kind of paralleling it to that "disorder disorder disorder disorder." It's all you're hearing, right? And so the first bit of relief I give is, you don't have 20 things wrong with your kiddo. You have one thing that is different, and with everything that we ever are, by nature, there is both challenge and aptitude. You and I, being born with, with two X chromosomes, odds are we're not going to be as physically strong as a man. Does that make us happy? Is that a deficit? I don't think so. Because you know, I think I'm a rather fabulous chick. Right? To everything there are. I don't want to say pluses and minuses...there is easier and harder. Right? And I guess that's my first thing and there used to be an ad campaign. I don't know actually, I think they still do. But the whole you know, Congratulations, you've just won the Super Bowl or whatever. What are you doing? I'm going to Disneyworld. I always thought, you know, there needs to be something that is affirming. And for a while I had actually created it just got too busy to keep doing them. But Congratulations, you're an aspie or on the spectrum kits because it I think is so important both for families and for the individual to not see this as often the world presents it. How often have I been told, you know, the whole phrase high functioning, this that or the other thing. That is a compliment, by comparison, which inherently insults someone else. And I find that incredibly upsetting and I know it's not intended that way. But really what it means is I'm not autistic like you. And the truth is that because I'm less obviously challenged does not mean less challenged. And I've been on self advocacy boards with; Gosh, there was one young man, mid 20s. And he had a lot of challenges, you know, he was in a wheelchair. There are a lot of spasmodic behaviors or activities going on. And he required an iPad to be able to verbally communicate. And one of the questions that was presented to us first was, what is the hardest thing about being on the spectrum? And it was put to me, and thank God most know, everybody on the panel agreed, but my answer was to always be wondering, how can I be so smart but so stupid. And what he said, through his iPad, was that every single day of his life, he has to explain to someone that he does not have a cognitive deficit, he does not have challenges with, you know, his quote unquote, intelligence in a typical way. In fact, his verbal IQ is in the 150s, which is high genius. But it's almost like reaching into your purse and not being able to find that dang lipstick or that dang key that, you know, is in there. He reaches into his brain, he knows it's in there, but it just can't access it. And so to me, all of this just speaks to one thing, which is that as a society we have moved so far, I think more so than I think it's more than surface deep, to not just tolerating, which is what you do with a headache or toenail that's ingrown or something, not just being aware of and not just even accepting, you know, but being very grateful for the fact that we are a species that are, you know, intensely and above all things and before all things, all on the human spectrum, and it's because of that diversity that we're worth anything at all. Doesn't mean that it's easy, but, you know, then again, everything's hard before it's easy. So anyway, that's my little spiel, then I probably just took up like half of our recording.

Debbie: You said so many great things, and I think that's so helpful. It's something I'm just thinking in 200 episodes I've not had someone say it the way you said it in terms of the fact that we do kind of get this information, the sensory issues, the

anxiety, you know, and we feel like we do have this like huge bundle or bucket of things going on...

Jennifer: Not just going on, but wrong, right?

Debbie: Yeah, yeah. So I love this idea of saying, No, you don't have all of these different things...you're autistic. And all of these things are part of that. And I'd love to just go a little deeper or maybe just get your advice on this because again, we haven't touched upon this explicitly, this idea of high functioning, low functioning. I know from the autism activists that I follow that functioning labels are not cool. And so I don't use them in any of the work that I do until but you know, I mean, it seems that parents don't know differently, and that's the way it's often presented to them.

Jennifer: Absolutely. And actually, you just did something very, very important. Number one, parents don't know differently, but then also there's, there's I think, and I'm speaking as someone, and this is important, you know, just kind of reiterate that I'm not only speaking as someone who was identified So I have three kiddos, and it was after the first two and the third one that I was identified, which I often say thank God, I wouldn't have known what to do with a neurotypical child. But no, seriously, I would not. But I think that and my background also being in teaching and in counseling, right, like we as educators, or counselors, we want to reassure parents that things are not quote unquote, as bad as maybe others make them seem. And then as the parent you feel like you're in this position of having to justify yourself. And I think that when we hear the HFA, high functioning autism, you know, I understand that was how the word Asperger's functioned, right? And it then was, you know, repossessed by Lorna Wing, who actually wrote the foreword to my first book, and she's a hoot. She coined the term Aspie and that kind of became this sort of affectionate geeky like you know little term for all of us. And when the term became Autism Spectrum overall, there were a lot of us, myself included, who worried. you know. I never would have thought about it would not have entered my mind because of the way I understood the word autism, I never would have pursued, considered, nothing you know? That wouldn't have been on my radar knowing my kiddos and so I thought well, it's a really good thing that we have the word Asperger's. But what it really you know comes down to though now and I do think this is important is that now Autism is diagnosed, although the wording is still pejorative, I think is diagnosed more by commonality. So it's you know, that sensory sensitivities etc, things that we all share. No matter where on that spectrum we lie, the danger and the HFA kind of labeling is that again, I'm going to just keep reiterating this, more or less obviously challenge does not mean less challenged. You know, that's why you see actually, the further up the know, the aptitude, cognitively, the more and more disparate are our educational and professional achievements. So you see that instead of kind of keeping time with, you know, the graph or kind of at least keeping an even keel, there's this break where when that quote unquote IQ goes up, there are much greater rates of suicide and depression, you know, employment that's not commensurate or education is not commensurate with that intelligence relationship problem, etc. And that is largely because, especially among women, but for sure both, there is a degree of, well, for for women it's

more intentional, but camouflaging...mimicking, right? And so when others see that we can do many things perhaps easier than even their quote unquote typical kids, that's when you get the "he or she's being lazy," "he or she's being hypersensitive" level—the things that are judgmental and character assessments. I mean, this is certainly from my own experience, I remember clearly sitting in AP or honors classes in high school, and thinking I have no idea what the directions are for this but dang it all the teachers never would have known that because I'm coming back with A+s while I figured out sometimes ways to get around it or not. But parents and educators miss out on resources that honestly the kiddos really need, because they're not provided with information that says, quite frankly, who else is going to speak for, let's say the folks who have a hard time accessing their words. We all have much more alike than we have different. And I think that's important. We're a society that is obsessed with labels in so many ways, right? Whether that's your North Face jacket, or whatever else, you know, and we're also told labels are bad. And so it's strange, you know, but the word the label autistic, nine times out of ten, for those of us who are identified as adults, is a relief. It's not a stigma. And presented to a child that way, presented as a "see, I told you weren't bad at this and bad at this...there's a reason your brain connects like this, what the heck are you supposed to do, right? But you can do this really well and blah, blah, blah." I think what happens is without intention, we all look at our children to some degree, I suppose, as extensions of ourselves our own egos and we don't, it's bad enough, but it happens. So I think to some degree, especially if one of those parents has spectrum tendencies to say, No, no, that's not my kid. Let's differentiate. But really, in that moment, you need to ask yourself, Why, what does that mean? Do we feel that the child will be limited, will think less of him or herself? I don't know. To me that is akin to days gone by with a child knowing that he or she was adopted thinking that he or she was less important or loved. That's archaic. And that's up to the adults to undo, not to join in on.

Debbie: You're saying so many things. No, but they're also important. I mean, I think, you know, as that last point that you made, I was thinking of the question I often pose to parents when they discover any sort of neuro divergence in their kids is 'what are you making that mean?' Because that's the work that we have to do on ourselves to understand what story are we telling about who our kid is and what their potential is based on this information?

Jennifer: Yes, I'm going to quote you on that internationally letting you know right now, I love that phraseology because that's exactly what it is. Right? You know, if you remember the concept of absolute value from math? The idea that it's, you know, a quantity is neither negative or positive, it's just a thing? So it's without judgment, right? Right. If you can look at a word without judgment, then you are making it mean something. What do we make it mean? You know, there are words. There are words now that in the English language that had incredibly different connotations, or in fact, meanings 300 years ago, the word girl used to mean child in general, not a female child specifically. Right. So it is about constructing meaning, and that's kind of up to us.

Debbie: Yeah. 100%. I want to ask, I don't know if I'm going to be able to phrase this question in the right way. But...

Jennifer: Don't worry about it. No, no, go for it.

Debbie: We'll go for it. Okay. So you were talking about balancing, you know, in that response about high functioning, low functioning, and what does that mean and the strengths and the challenges and seeing all of that. And I know that you are referred to when you own this idea of being relentlessly positive. Right. And, and I will say, you know that the language, even the term differently wired, I use that extensively because it feels positive, it recognizes difference, but it doesn't talk about it as a way that's a deficit. And sometimes I get feedback from people who are neurodivergent adults who say, You're dismissing the challenges that I have when you use terms like that, and I just wonder, can you talk to that idea of balancing being positive and...

Jennifer: Yeah, no, here's the thing. You can't please all the people all the time. And that's really what it comes down to. Just last last April, April 2019, my seventh book, so that was the memoir, Autism in Heels, had just come out and was being featured by the National Institutes of Health during Autism Awareness Month, because their their interest that particular year they were focusing on girls and women and so, so they picked this, they highlighted it, right? And so there were four of us I think on the panel. And I mentioned that ASD, the dynamic thing. And one of the panelists took umbrage, you know, had issues with that. And, you know, in the moment, I thought, I will thank you. Let's not rain on that guy's parade. But I think, to quote Forrest Gump, sometimes it can be a little bit of both. Um, you know, I think it's odd That, actually I often say this, you know, there are these quote unquote social roles that that we don't seem to fit. Nobody seems to teach us they are intuitive by the rest of the world. But the odd thing, or at least ironic is that most neurotypicals don't actually follow those rules. They follow them as they wish. And so we are known for being either or right, all or nothing, on or off. You know, I describe it as our thinking as being like a train that, you know, takes a while to stop it. And if you push it off the rails or try to change direction too fast, it's gonna crash...black and white thinking they often say. But if you look at that, it's a perfect example of, well, it's either going to be this or it's got to be that. And language, by the fact that it was created by human beings, is going to be imperfect. We're going to need a lot more words to say yes, it is all these things and when you are really encountering the hard stuff, you know, that also I think depends on where those people are in that moment. I was trying last night to explain some online content that I really want to be able to provide and I was, you know, trying like crazy to explain it to my husband who you know, is a brilliant man and here I am a professional speaker and professional writer. So obviously words should be my friend, but I over explain because I am so accustomed to being misunderstood. And he had like literally no...whatever I was trying to explain, was not coming across. And my daughter was sitting there too. And so I'm looking at her, like, are there different words you think I need? She's looking at me going, I've got nothing. And in that moment, I can say I am feeling very autistic right now. And in that moment, it's not a good feeling. By the same token, um, I don't think I could do any of the work that I do if I weren't autistic,

because it's about, you know, identifying patterns in ways that others don't. And, you know, to some degree, I suppose that's because of our hyper vigilance, we have to look out for patterns, we have to look out for similar circumstances because we are so often well, falling into trouble spots. But as a result, that enables me to have these conversations with you and say, you know, well, here's what I've noticed in this country. In this country, folks don't know about it or folks don't notice it. And that's just as much me feeling autistic. You know, yeah, you can't please all the people all the time. And I think, for those of us who find ourselves in those moments where someone is going, "Well, I, you know, take issue with you or whatever," I think the only answer is, I understand. It is never quite as simple as one word, and also might—that's my big thing, I always say, imagine what can happen if you would substitute the word AND every time you want to say BUT, because when you say "but" well, you've just invalidated the first part of what you've said. It's true, though. And so if you can say, I like to try to look at and celebrate the differences. AND also I know that language is not sufficient. And we're doing the best we can in any one moment. So thanks. You know, that kind of thing.

Debbie: That's great. Thank you for that. I'd love to talk a little bit about girls on the spectrum. I've done a couple episodes on this and just how tricky it can be for girls to be identified. And I even in the past couple years, I feel like I've just seen so many more articles and so many more women are speaking out about their experience. I know you're very involved and feel very passionate about this issue. Could you talk a little bit about that?

Jennifer: Absolutely. Yeah, I feel kind of lucky. I was just ahead of the curve, I guess with this stuff. In fact, if you look back to my first book, *Asperkds* on the cover of it, it's like a cartoon of three kids superhero kind of kids. And when they first delivered either the original cover idea, I instantly said because I have three children, daughter than two sons. And I had made it a point to discuss all three of them. And I said, No, no, no, you will have a girl and two boys, and they redid the cover. So it's my kids, or essentially supposed to be. But so I guess you know straight from the get-go perhaps it goes along with my idea of what feminism is, which is not but the AND, right? Like there is beauty and wonderfulness in male, female and like the song from *Kinky Boots* says, those who have yet made up their mind. Or you know, wherever you identify I don't really care, you know the honest truth is. So it is a passion because I realized how much harder I had to work for my daughters and my like identification. Then my son's and really I mean it makes perfect sense. If you look at all the checklists again and go back to those diagnostic criteria or going through all those you know, 'never, somewhat, always' things, we're talking about like 'lines up trucks in blah, blah, blah,' but my daughter didn't have any trucks. I mean, I wouldn't have not gotten her trucks, she definitely had cars, but you know, like, but I didn't have trucks growing up. So could I look back and say, No, I didn't. You know, I had to go back and I had ...you know, I often say it's a bit like the red dress campaign when it came to heart disease. You know, tens of thousands of women were dying of heart disease simply because those in the medical profession were not educated in what the same physiological condition, how it presented in women. They were looking for the shooting pain down the arm and etc, etc, etc, you know, if you're

having a heart attack. Well, those things are much more common with male presentation, but not with women. So women were going to the ER and being sent home and dying, right? So it was not eliminating the identification, but adding to it and saying actually, there's more. So it was it for me it was the same thing. I mean, I really had to go and sit down. The basic concept, profile of someone who's on the spectrum was largely assembled by Hans Asperger and pre-World War Two Vienna with school aged boys and me sitting in a minivan in a bra with a you know, a love of glitter, like, what do I have in common with them? Right? So what I had to do was go through those phenotypes, right? Like the way you're presenting something, the way you're showing something, those behaviors and say, what could be behind it and try to inhabit them and say, you know, no, I didn't line anything up. And again, only one of my kids did, but I sure did, put my Barbies into Tableau and take pictures of them and assemble wedding albums as opposed to interactively playing with them. The same thing, right? So achieving a sense of completion without the need for spontaneous social interaction, or, honestly theory of mine, or thinking what someone else might do and trying to, you know...So all those things I was achieving in the same exact way, only it wasn't cars, it was Barbies. And so that's why, you know, my heart sort of moved towards girls, but again, my boys, my boys I love my boys so very, very much. I tell story in Autism in Heels where I had a woman come up to me at a conference and she said 'Hey, you know I wanted I wanted to tell you that you really pissed me off you know,so I'm thinking instantly I'm like backing away Who are you crazy lady, you know? And she said "no, no, like I came to see you speak at another time a couple years ago and asked you some questions about my son, who had who was on the spectrum, and you gave me some really good tips, and it was so, so helpful." I'm thinking now I'm really confused. How did I put it - "Like, how did I upset you?" And then she said, "I talked to you during the book signing and I also said I was having some challenges with my daughter, and I talked about some of them and then you said, You know what, I think you might want to have her evaluated because I think there's there's maybe the exact same thing going on, but it looks a little different, you know?" And she said, "And I was so angry. I thought, who the hell does this woman think she is?" And I'm thinking, Why did you ask me? Like, that's my area. Why did you ask me if you didn't want to hear it? And lo and behold, it turned out two years later, finally did. Guess what? She is. And wondered, I wondered, was that closer to home because you're a woman, and so you saw yourself in her and that felt more ...does that say something to you about you and I don't know. But I just said thank you and walked off. But that has stuck with me profoundly because the reality is that among girls and women on the spectrum, the diagnostic comparison is eight to one ratio, but if you look at if you use as they more often do in Europe, a gender neutral approach of you know, assessing, it's much closer to a one to one. And the reality is that girls and women on spectrum almost universally and especially I'm talking primarily when unidentified and so therefore unsupported, right, but almost universally, experience relationship violence, and eating disorders. There's a story in Autism in Heels where a mom found me, her daughter had passed away from anorexia. She was in her early 30s. And there was a grandson who had been identified as being on the spectrum and she had read this grandmother had read an article about me in Scientific American, and said oh my gosh, it just resonated and reminded her of her daughter. Did I know anything

about eating disorders and autism? I said, Well, actually, I was hospitalized in my 20s for anorexia. So yeah. But you're talking about ritualized behavior, of trying to affect control when the world feels out of control. And the ribbon at the end of the story was she found some pictures on Facebook from her daughters. She just started going through them on her daughter's last birthday, and her daughter had been showing photos of, you know, some books that she had gotten that she had asked her father to get for her for her birthday. And one of them was mine -- it was the Asperkids Secret Book of Social Rules. And, of course, the grandmother assumed that that was for the grandson, but the grandson was in grade school. And I said, You know, I gotta tell you, that book is like, tweens, but mostly teens and up, you know, and lots and lots of adults...I call it aut-curious adults... I said, I would bet your bottom that was for her. She did in fact, ask her husband. He said, Yeah, she asked for that for herself. And the heartbreaking part is that this grandmother said to me, you know, if any of the clinicians had known to look, you might have saved your life. But the reality is that most adult women have been misdiagnosed at some point as being bipolar. And, you know, the doctors are shocked when bipolar meds don't work for us or knock us out or whatever else, you know, because we're not actually bipolar, or we're this, that, or the other thing. And so, so eating disorders to me should always, always, always, always, always 100% of the time, be registered as a mental red flag and to do a better assessment for what's going on beneath. Yeah, but self harm, unfortunately, suicide rates of depression, anxiety refusal, they are all profoundly, profoundly higher for girls and women on the spectrum, and they don't need to be. But you know, if I wear contacts and you give me a hearing aid, that's not going to help me. If you give me a visual aid, that is going to support me. You've got to give us the right stuff. And so what I basically did was, I assembled what I called the Chicklist Checklist. So it was I took the entire checklist, if you will, from Tony Atwood, who's, you know, just a wonderful, world renowned psychologist and now a good friend, but from his book on here's what it looks like in in men and boys and I turned them pink and said, Well, here's what you know, they look like for us and the response has been I'll just say profound. In one of the emails that I've gotten, you know, from women in their 20s, there's one gal who is going for her doctorate in neuroscience and was raped. And she said, my mom never understood me and it's all making sense now. And now I see that I'm not alone. You know, I was in a violent relationship in college. I tell my own stories, because I feel like that way it's the best way. I can't point my finger at other people, but I can decide to open my heart and look back and say, Okay, well, I don't need to be ashamed of mistakes that I made, or trajectories that I was on when I didn't even understand where the heck I was going. And nobody else understood me either. So for me, it's really just about equal time. It's about protecting, you know, and it's about looking forward. And for my daughter and others, what can we provide for them to help them just like we want to for our sons to help them become the very best human beings, the happiest human beings that they possibly can. And, unfortunately, sometimes that starts with the very basics of simply saving their life.

Debbie: Wow, thank you so much for sharing all of that. I think it's, it's a really important message for my listeners to hear. You know, I do hear from a lot of parents of daughters who are struggling to even get referrals because it's presenting

differently and just hearing you talk about the cost of not addressing or because so many girls may mask better because they are more invested in social relationships than boys might be. And I think this is just a great reminder for parents to really trust their intuition and if they see things or not, you know that their daughters aren't thriving in a certain way to continue to push for getting the answers and support they need.

Jennifer: Absolutely. That Chicklist Checklist that I was mentioning, I actually have that as a free download on my website because it's to me, it is so essential that when you go into any kind of evaluation, you, I was talking about how the doctors didn't want to quote unquote assign that label because it's a heavy label and you can't get rid of it. And again, I go back to that, like, give it. If you have a door that's labeled pul, it's really a push door or sometimes labels are necessary for a moment so you know what to do. So anyway, yeah, that's something I kind of felt was essential to offer.

Debbie: Great, you're doing such an important work. So as a way to wrap up because we could go on like, there's so much more I might have to invite you back on the show again, but could you you have so many resources and I would love if you could just, I don't remember if I even told this after we hit record, but I had mentioned that my introduction to you was maybe six or seven years ago when I bought the Asperkids Secret Book of Social Rules, which I loved. And you've got an Asperkids website, which is an incredible resource and now and your memoir as well, which I haven't read yet. It's on my Kindle. It's up after finishing a novel right now, but I'm really looking forward to reading that, but you're just putting out such great content for people. So can you talk a little bit about Asperkids and then maybe how people can engage with you?

Jennifer: Absolutely. So I took a step back for a little while after doing the memoir, I danced for 20 years, and I'm on the verge of back surgery number five, and I also got remarried on Christmas Day. So it wasn't it was a year...it was the year. So you know, I'm glad to say returning to all the work. So, for those who were familiar with Asperkids, and where the heck did she go? Well, I'm also doing some really cool work in long distance in Philadelphia, where they've created the very first center for Neurodiversity and Autism at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital. And I had the privilege of being their senior directorial consultant, which is the first time any hospital in the US has actually employed someone on the spectrum to advise them, which is like, Yay! The gal, Dr. Wendy Ross, who created it, I just adore her. She is a CNN Hero and deserves it in every way, shape, and form. But yes, so Asperkids, and what I'm trying to do is kind of funnel it all so that it should be easier for everybody to find. Asperkids comprises the six first books, which ended up being the best selling series in the world on and for people on the spectrum, which is like crazy. And then Autism in Heels is the seventh book. But I think the easiest way you can certainly you know, drop in. It's jenniferotooleauthor.com, soon to be jennifercookauthor.com there's all sorts of craziness. But either way you get it. It'll be redirected. So you don't need to worry about it. And that's where you can find the free download the Chicklist Checklist, that's where you can find information about each one of the books and understand who what's for whom. And you mentioned the Secret Book of Social

Roles, that that book and those that all pair with it, there are summaries explanations on on the author website as well. So you can kind of peruse and look to see what what matches with what you think. And I always say start and you know, and go from there. But, and then Autism in Heels is definitely a very different kind of story. It's certainly an adult or at least teen read, because there's some heavy stuff in there. And that's important to know about because it's my own personal experiences, but you know, and in the others there are cartoons. So there's that. With lots of emphasis on pointing out all the ridiculous things that I've done, never on what the readers have done quote unquote wrong because I feel like I got a lifetime of whoopsie step in it moments to offer...better to focus on that and let everybody else just kind of feel cool about themselves.

Debbie: Well, they're great resources and I will have links for everything on the show notes page. So definitely if you have a child on the spectrum or even a child who just doesn't understand social thinking social rules, definitely check out Jennifer's work and, and her memoir, Autism in Heels which, congratulations. Having written a pretty personal book, I know how it's a different beast to tackle...

Jennifer: It is and I just finished recording the audio book for it. It's the first audio book by someone on the spectrum and then also narrated by someone on the spectrum, man or woman. I am like, I'm blown away. I'm really excited that it's coming out in a couple weeks.

Debbie: Congratulations. Wow. Well, Jennifer, this has been such an insightful conversation. I appreciate you and everything that you're doing. For our kids and for adults and just the passion and your relentless positivity, it shines through.

Jennifer: Well, although that the caveat to relentless positivity is, you are always always, always allowed to have the moment where you just go with the stinky pants. This is stinky, be honest. And then you have your moment and then you move on. Because if I'm sitting here telling you I'm smiling all day, every day, you're not gonna believe it when it's really true. You've got to keep it real.

Debbie: Yes. 100%. Okay. Thank you again, so much for sharing. And again, maybe we'll try to have you back on again.

RESOURCES MENTIONED:

- Jennifer Cook O'Toole's website
- Asperkids website
- *The Asperkid's (Secret) Book of Social Rules: The Handbook of Not-So-Obvious Social Guidelines for Tweens and Teens With Asperger Syndrome* by Jennifer Cook O'Toole
- *Asperkids: An Insider's Guide to Loving, Understanding, and Teaching Children with Asperger's Syndrome* by Jennifer Cook O'Toole
- *Asperger's Rules!: How to Make Sense of School and Friends* by Jennifer Cook O'Toole
- *Sisterhood of the Spectrum* by Jennifer Cook O'Toole
- *The Asperkid's Launch Pad: Home Design to Empower Everyday Superheroes* by Jennifer Cook O'Toole
- *Autism in Heels: The Untold Story of a Female Life on the Spectrum* by Jennifer Cook O'Toole
- Jefferson Health Center for Autism and Neurodiversity

