



**Episode #222**

**Cherina Williams Neurodivergence in the Early  
Intervention Population—the Must-Knows for Families**

August 18, 2020

Debbie: Hello, Cherina, welcome to the podcast.

Cherina: Thank you so much, Debbie. Thank you for having me.

Debbie: Well, your email landed in my inbox at such a great time and I saw the work that you do in the world. And it's really a perspective that we haven't had on the show. So I'm excited to talk about, well, I call them the little ones and the younger set because we just haven't really talked about kids under the preschool age here at all or under early elementary. So before we get into all of that, I would love it if you could just take a few minutes Introduce yourself. I always love to know people's personal wife for the work that they do in the world and anything else you want to share.

Cherina: So my name is Cherina Williams and I am a licensed speech and language pathologist by trade. I specialize in early intervention, which is pretty much the Birth to Three population, but I do go up to like preschool. I started getting interested in this population, probably, it's probably been a lifelong thing. I was really early, I think I was like nine or 10. And one of my nieces had Down syndrome. And so I grew up being a part of her life watching her journey. And I think that kind of like sparked my interest. And as you guys would say, your neurodivergent population. But once I went into graduate school, and I really started seeing different populations, I still was really interested in the neurological side of things, but I also had a love for the little bits. The little sugars is what I call them, and it just kind of sparked from there when I finished my Cs, which is our equivalent to doctors' residence, I started becoming even more interested in that population. I remember, like some of my initial sessions, just be horrible. I had no clue what I was doing. I tried to guide the therapy, I quickly learned that none of that works and that everything that I learned in my entire approach to that population does not work, did not work. And so I had to reshape and reframe my thought process on, what does it look like for a little person to go through this process of acquiring language? What does it look like for this little person to have, you know the world around them when they are making these attempts, not understand them and not just from us. verbal perspective but also from a neurological perspective, from a behavioral perspective. What does that tantrum mean? What does it mean, when the lights are too bright, or there's humming sounds that nobody else hears, but you don't necessarily have the words to express it. And so I just, I started listening to my parents a lot more. And even following their lead, and picking up on some of the trends that they were saying, and I just started writing about it. And I started becoming increasingly concerned with the level of education the parents were getting early on, or the lack thereof, that providers like myself, were not giving. And I just started advocating and communicating different things to my families, so they would know not only what I do, but how to do what I do and how to understand what their child does and how to connect with them on a different level.

Debbie: It is such important work. Because, you know, when our kids are that little we are just clueless, especially if it's our first child, and we don't know what's normal, and we're getting conflicting information so often and we don't trust ourselves. And I hear from so many parents who say that, you know, the pediatrician isn't concerned yet the parent has this gut instinct that something is going on. Can you talk about, you know, what brings parents to you with their little ones? What kind of things are they noticing so that listeners who have toddlers or I'd like little sugars, as you call them, and what they might be noticing that would warrant further exploration?

Cherina: Absolutely. Great question. So, a lot of times parents will come to me and they will say, My child is stubborn. They're extremely stubborn, stubborn, they won't follow through with anything that I asked, a simple, daily task, for some reason always feels like a fight. Or I'll hear something to the effect of, they're talking but I can't understand anything they're saying, or I'll hear, they're not talking at all. They're ignoring me. They don't want me in their play space. They don't really attend to the world around them. So a lot of those things are happening early on. But the main one is usually my child is not talking. And I noticed that they're not using as many words as other kids around them. Or the other big main one, like I said, is they're just not paying attention and following through. And as parents, especially first new parents, you got to think that For one, you're still tired. You're still in a fog, like you're just now probably starting to get some sleep because you've been in like zombie mode the last 18 to 24 months. And so everything is still extremely new for you. And when our new kiddos come along, a lot of times when kiddos are older the parents will say, Well, I thought it was because they were the first child and adults were around that they weren't picking up language. Or I thought that because I wasn't using a lot of language directly with them, that that was impacting their language. Like it's so many different factors that come into play with what my parents are seeing and what they're observing. In some cases, it's the pediatrician who's saying, Hey, your child isn't meeting these milestones. I need you to just check in with a speech therapist to make sure that they're on track, but the parent may not be as concerned until they speak with them. If one of us and they're like, Oh, I didn't know. And so you find that there are a bunch of different reasons that parents end up in my office, especially for parents of little sugars who don't have anything that's congenital or something that they were born with like a Down syndrome or like if you knew that they were born with some kind of like Fragile X, or they were born with some kind of mutation that was discovered when you have that test around three or four months during pregnancy. And so a lot of times what happens is that we see our children hitting milestones, and of course, they're getting some type of milestones in most cases, especially if it's not something that's been identified when they were in utero. But it may not be up to par with like typical developing children. And it's hard sometimes to distinguish, which is because if you see your child making progress, then you automatically assume Well, they're making progress, but it might not be at the same pace, or in the way that it should be developing.

Debbie: So when parents come to you, I'm curious to know what their state of mind is. Because, you know, I, you know, I just think that, especially again, and we don't

have to just focus on new parents. But there is this sense that you know, there's I call it like lots of wiping your hand on your forehead and going phew, passed that phase, or we know this isn't happening. And so I think as parents, we're always looking out for those milestones. We're looking for evidence that our child is developing, quote, unquote, normally. And so when they end up in your office, whether it's because they recognize something might be going on, or a pediatrician refers them, what is their state of mind? Like, are they overwhelmed? Are they scared? are they feeling anxious and curious about how they show up and how you work with them on that level.

Cherina: Absolutely. frantic. Usually frantic panic, especially if the pediatrician is the one who's done the referral, then you get a 50-50, a mixed bag. Some are completely panicked, frantic. Let's fix this whatever is going on ASAP. And then the others, on the other hand who are not, who believe that they'll just kind of naturally develop. In many cases when the parent is reaching out to me on their own, they just there's that gut feeling that something doesn't look right, feel right, or smell right. And so they're like, Hey, can you help? What can you do? What can we do? I'm starting to find that a lot more parents are coming with a little bit more information and understanding as to what should be happening, but the general overall disposition, a little bit of anxiety. A lot of panic. And what I like to do with my parents is, one educate. And not just from the standpoint of, what's the diagnosis, but from the standpoint of, let's look at this as a person first. Your child has character, they have personality, they have purpose. And our role as parents is to get them there. And whatever it is, wherever that gap is, between getting them to relate to the world around them, or getting them to communicate with the world around him, we have to find different avenues to do that. And so my role is to simply come in and observe and figure out where those gaps are, and help guide to where parents are able to help make that connection with their child. And so a lot of times once you hear from the parent like what it is they're feeling, whether it's fear, whether it's anxiety, whether it's complete panic in like overwhelm like, my goal is to get them comfortable and get them on track and on board with what needs to take place because at this at this agent stage, our little sugars are still picking up on their parents emotions, they're still picking up on their parents anxieties. And so if you have a parent who's anxious and they're approaching their child anxious all the time, then guess what, you're going to have a child who becomes anxious because they're feeding off of that. Remember, we're our biggest models for our little sugars. And so whatever you're doing, if you're acting in fear, or if you're acting and just, you know, panic, that's how your little sugar is going to behave as well. And so a lot of times we need to undo those anxieties and know, A our child can learn, B, we have to find a new way for them to learn. C, I need to understand my role as a parent, and how much power I have as the parent to help them along. And once they have those assurances and a few victories, then it becomes a lot easier for them to handle whatever is thrown in front of them.

Debbie: I love that... a few victories, we all need a few victories along the way to keep us going. But I love that reminder about the role of our energy. And I think it's something I talk a lot about on the podcast is that our energy is infectious. And these kids are really sensitive. But again, I've always done it in an older context,

but it's such a good reminder that even the 18 to 36 months old, the little ones are picking all of that up and it's probably, I mean, it's been I have a 15 year old so it's been a while now, but when kids are that young, their emotional regulation skills are really lagging typically and often times these parents are probably dealing or might be dealing with some explosive behavior to which can be really challenging. How do you support parents whose kids are intense in that way, and still maintaining that positive? You know, those victories that you talked about

Cherina: Those sticky moments? That's what I like to call it. Those are the sticky moments in life. And we have to keep in mind that our sugars at that age are doing one of two things. They're communicating either with their words, or with their bodies, words or bodies every time like it never fails. And what happens is around 24 months, no matter where the IQ is, no matter what the level of severity may or may not be, there's a few things that hold true. A child is going to use something to communicate their thoughts and ideas. They know, around 24 months, they know like it's innate that they know they're supposed to be communicating. And when they're not able to when they're not able to get those thoughts in those ideas across, then we start seeing more behavior. And you have to keep in mind that when children are infants, what are they using to communicate their wants and their needs? Right? Right. And so around 12 months, we see that shift of where they start picking up and making that real shift where the babble becomes first words, by 18 months, it becomes 10 words, by 24 months. It's up to 50 words in five to seven words every week thereafter. And so what happens is that as the vocabulary grows, the behavior usually subsides in most cases. But when that behavior does not subside, our sugars are still trying to communicate something. And so it could be a few things. One, if they don't have the language, or using language is hard, or the world is always in, when I say the world, I mean like mom, dad, grandma, grandpa siblings are answering their needs, then language becomes secondary. And if I can use my behavior, over trying to tempt language, especially if it's hard, and it's not coming naturally, then I'm going to use behavior. And what happens is, and that's what we see the sticky behavior, and the tantruming, and the meltdowns, because now we're using the meltdowns to get through the day. Instead of making the attempt to use the language, we replaced that with behavior. And so what happens is, so much of that throughout the day because nobody wants to hear or watch the meltdowns all the time. Nobody likes it there. Everybody has a filter. And there's only so much that we all can take is that what happens with the adults around is that they start walking on eggshells and start trying to meet their needs faster and faster. But what happens is when we meet those needs, during that tantrum, we take away the opportunity for our little sugar to try to use language to communicate their thoughts and ideas. And so then the whole household ends up frustrated, because the little sugar hasn't made the attempt and now we're trying to always meet their needs. And it feels like the day is it's like a cycle to where the day is being led by these tantrums or I'm trying to avoid the tantrums or I'm trying to avoid the sticky situation, or I'm trying to anticipate what this child needs without placing the demand on them for language when in reality, we need to ignore the tantrum, ignore the behavior, ignore the meltdown, let them learn how to self regulate, and it's a hard thing to grasp. It's a hard thing to grasp

because we're like their babies and they need me. Yes they do. They need you to support them, to help them learn how to get some grit, and be able to use a different way to try to employ the language, even if they're not going to be a child who can use verbal language, we can teach them signs, we can use picture exchange systems, we can use whatever type of modality we want to use to help them communicate their thoughts and ideas. Because the last thing that we want to do is allow this explosive behavior to continue to happen to where they're 15 and 16. And they still can't quite cope. Because we haven't allowed them the space to learn how to just get through the moment, get up, and then we help them through.

Debbie: So what I'm hearing you say which is just it makes so much sense and makes me wish I had to do over, is that how we respond to meltdowns in our little ones, in the fact that we are maybe responding to them, we're reinforcing that behavior. So we're doing I used to call it accidental parenting. And then next thing, you know, 10 years later...

Cherina: ...it's still happening. And so what I always encourage my parents to do, especially at this age, we have to think about reinforcement, right? Every time we reinforce a behavior or allow it to happen, or we respond a certain way, it becomes reinforced, and it becomes natural, and then it becomes the go to. So now I'm in a position to where my sugars are not even trying to use language, because they're automatically going to meltdown, which means they're automatically getting frustrated. And as, as humans, we're not meant to always be in that space, or default to that space.

Debbie: So I'm wondering just how you work with kids and parents to help parents know how to not reinvent That behavior, while also living through what could be a very difficult period of time, you mentioned walking on eggshells and you know, just living in an environment that can feel hostile to the parents. How do you help parents balance that and support them in supporting their kids.

Cherina: So what I've tried to do is a really simple basic model. I teach my parents that we need to find a new way to connect. And through that connection, we're going to have to undo some things. And the reason that I tell them that we're going to undo some things is because we want to take out the things that are not necessarily helping us connect as mother and child, as father and child, whatever is keeping us from making that strong bond that's happening during that time because when you have a sugar, who is exercising and operating in meltdown all the time, it's really hard to connect and bond. And it gets in the way of the parent being able to tune in to seeing the person. Right, you start to see the behavior and you stop seeing the person. And so what I like to tell my parents during this time is that, it's okay. You know, the meltdowns in the tantrums are okay. And it's something that is happening naturally. And I explain as to why it goes back to our sugars are either using their words or their bodies, their behaviors to communicate with us. And if we see them using their bodies in that way and their behavior in that way to where it's, you know, always defaulting to a tantrum, then we have to ourselves develop that grit and learn how to ignore the behavior and so I've sat through sessions, and I've watched video, hours of this behavior

happening. And watching parents go through this process and I always tell them a few things. A, don't watch your child during the tantrum, it's just not a good thing to do. Remember, they're using it as a means to communicate to get what they want. But that's not the way that we want them to communicate with us. And so we have to get a thick skin during this time and learn how to ignore and let them self regulate. And let them learn how to self sooth, through that moment. Get up. Let's try again, let's try to use language. And if you think about it, like this, I always ask them not to try to negotiate during this time, not to try to communicate why, because Have you ever been upset?

Debbie: A few times a few times.

Cherina: Has anyone ever tried to come to you while you were upset and try to reason with you?

Debbie: It's a big mistake.

Cherina: Yeah, it is the worst thing that you can do during this time. And it's true and we forget, like we forget, because we just want it to end right? We want the behavior to end, we want the crying and we want the tantrum to end. And so we try to negotiate, but that's the wrong time to negotiate when they're frustrated. Leave them be and just Breathe it out. And I mean, literally Breathe it out. Sometimes I'll ask parents to get earbuds if they can't take it anymore. I'll ask them to look away but you can look in the child's direction but maybe be looking at the ceiling. Make sure that they're safe, make sure that they're not you know, self harming to the point of where like damage is happening to them because that can be a thing as well to where some kiddos will start to self mutilate to get the attention because a lot of times the tantrum the core of It is I want your attention to get me to act, or I don't know how to communicate what it is that I'm feeling. And so I'm using this as a means or I don't know how to get through this moment, it's too much. And so I'm doing this. But even still, there's nothing that we as the parent can do during this moment to help them. They have to soothe themselves. And then once it's over, then we can provide the reassurances that they need that we're here as a tool to get them to what they need. And so a lot of times, I'll have the parent either ignore the behavior, I'll talk them through the behavior. We'll talk about journaling, we do a lot of journaling, a lot of journaling. In fact, when we're going through this stage of ignoring the tantrums and learning how to undo this behavior. That's usually the only goal that I'm having my parents work on. So in many cases, parents will come to the office and they're like, well, they're not talking and they're doing this and then I see the behavior and the parent will describe the behavior and I'm like, We have to work with that first, because we don't want to be in a position to where and I've seen this happen over the years, which has helped curve and shape my learning that I can put language into a little sugar. But if they're still defaulting to tantrum behavior, because it's been reinforced with mom and dad, but they're using verbal language with me, then I have not done a good job as a therapist, tooling my parents up to help them get through these moments. And so I had to learn how to start teaching parents what I do, in many cases, I ignore the tantrum until the sugar is ready. And I teach the parent how to do the same so that way once the child is ready, and they've gotten

through and they know that this is no longer a viable means to communicate thoughts or ideas, then they can try to come to me and learn something different.

Debbie: So this is super interesting to me and I had, I have some thoughts and I hope they come out clearly. Cuz they're a jumble, and I have not had my afternoon coffee. But as you were talking about, you use the word connect a lot, the importance of the connection and the bond that we as parents want to have with our little ones. And I can see how if your child, your toddler is being explosive, that can really damage that connection, because we may not want to be around them. And so then I was thinking, gosh, it's so important that our kids feel attached and that we show up for them. So that's one piece. But then you're also talking about ignoring the behavior, which is, which is what I did and was advised to do. And I agree with that. We don't want to reinforce that behavior. But can you talk about that? I guess I want to be sure that those aren't contradictory... that actually by ignoring the behavior, we're not harming connection, but we're actually creating a healthier foundation for it. I don't know. Can you talk me through that a little bit more.

Cherina: Oh my gosh, I love that you bring that up, because that is so real. And it's so true. And so when we think about connection, we want to think about how we're connecting. What is it that we're doing to connect with our kids, right? We want to connect by teaching them about the world around them. Remember, our goal is to get them to adulthood, to be functioning, happy, hopefully fulfilled adults. And a big part of that comes with how we teach them, how to cope with the world around them, how to use communication as a means in the world around them. And so, to me, it's not necessarily a contradiction, because it goes back to try and to connect with someone when they're upset. It's probably not the best time So what we want to do, when we're not having those sticky moments, is provide affirmation during those times. And even when they come out of those sticky moments, automatically Good job calming down. I'm so proud of you for getting through that moment. I know it was hard. That's where we give that affirmation. That's where we give that support. And that's where we give that confidence of let's try something else, buddy. I know it was hard and I know you really wanted this to happen. But we're going to have to try it like this. Can we try with our words? Can we try with our signs? Can we try with our sounds? And so we're giving them the affirmation that it's going to be okay. And I have another means for you to try to communicate your thoughts and your ideas with me. And I feel like when we get into again, this cycle of when and this is you know, extreme cases when our kiddos are deflecting only To behavior, then it takes away that ability for us to help them through to give them a better way to give them, you know, tools. So they can actually use their thoughts and their ideas in their own way, and not feel like they're not being heard. Because a lot of times these meltdowns are happening, because there's some kind of miscommunication, either on their end or our end, but we have to be intentional about how we deal with miscommunication. I can't help you if you're always frustrated. But once you get through that moment, I can give you the reassurance that I'm proud of you for getting through that moment, and let's try something else.

Debbie: That's helpful. Thank you for walking me through that. So I have a couple more questions. One of the things I'm just thinking a lot about right now, and maybe it's because as we're recording this, we're still kind of in the middle of COVID-19, and I know that there's so much strain on families, and I hear from a lot of parents in my community, where the couples if people are in a, you know, a partnership in co-raising their child, sometimes not on the same page. And so I'm and because you're working with families who are new to this journey, I'm just wondering, if you have thoughts on how parents can create an aligned foundation as they move forward with their kids, I imagine, you know, even if you're if you see more of one parent than another, or if it's typical in your work to see that parents aren't on the same page.

Cherina: Great question. So I try my best to work with both parents. And I try to have both parents present. The reason being is because I'm working on my doctorate and a few semesters ago. I had interviewed some parents, some moms, because they were primarily the ones who were bringing their sugars to the sessions. And there was a trend, no matter socioeconomic status, no matter ethnicity, no matter background, no matter what. Professional, unprofessional, it didn't matter. There was a trend with moms feeling like they were the ones who A always had to take the lead on the therapies. B, were responsible for coordinating everything. And C were the only ones who were executing therapeutic goals in the home and having open lines of communication with the therapist. And as a result of that, they were feeling like islands and it broke My heart, and it was a qualitative study. So this was like interview-based. And this was not something that I was expecting. And sad enough. I admit, I wasn't necessarily consciously observing what that would be like putting the shoe on the other foot, you know, seeing things from their perspective and how they're feeling, just assuming that they are the ones who want to be the ones who are in charge of this when in fact, they actually wanted that partnership. And so it really changed the way that I approached therapy. Because now I find myself spending a lot more time with mom and dad, and making sure that they're not only tooled up when learning how to connect with their friends. But also totaling them up learning how to connect with each other. And not just on the level of, you need to convince this person or change this person. But reminding both parents that they both have something really special to impart. Not only do they have something special to impart on their child, they both come from very different backgrounds and very different homes. And in this new home, in this new community, they're going to have to set up a new foundation, new culture, new new trends in their house, new whatever it is, that's a fit for their family. And by doing that and being completely aligned, then it makes them approach how they work with their child, how they see their child, how they see their role in working with their child much differently. And I also remind both parents that there's going to be some compromises on both ends. Everybody doesn't get to get what they want all the time, it just doesn't work like that, not even in the home. And so learning how to collaborate, instead of take complete control, or contradict or just do things that are contrary to growing together as not only a couple, but also as a family, and also when working with their neurodivergent child like these things we can't ignore, because working with children who are neuro divergent in and of itself, having children in and of itself is a huge job. But having a child who has

specialized needs, or you know, they may be quote, unquote, atypical from same-age peers is another job in and of itself. And so having that understanding unmasking the guilt, unmasking the shame, unmasking all of those feelings that we may have, you know, the guilt. What did I do? Where did I go wrong in a lot of cases, these things are unfounded. But having someone in that safe space to talk it through, whether it is going and seeking out, you know, a third party for help, or connecting together, and just being intimate and vulnerable enough, and not just the moms, but the dads as well, to say, this is happening. I don't always like it, but this, this is what we can do. We're not powerless. And it's when the parents feel like they're powerless, or they feel like they're an island when we see you know, the divorce rates go up because the divorce rate is really high in this population for that reason, because they're just not connecting. And as therapists we don't ever really talk about it. And we focus on the child and the child is extremely important, but it does me no good if my little sugar comes in and does an amazing job with me, and then they go with mom and dad, and the same things are being reinforced, or mom is the only one on the hook reinforcing. And dad is doing the same things. And so it takes us as therapists taking that time to have not only a heart for that child, but a heart for connecting with the parents and giving them tools to make sure that they're connecting together by communicating by again, sharing their feelings by deciding what works and what works, but deciding what they value and what they don't value and what they want and even looking at, what is our role for this child? And what is it that we're supposed to be doing to get them to where they need to go?

Debbie: I love that you weave that into your work. I think it is lacking for sure. I mean, what you described that you discovered in doing your research is certainly the composition of my audience. You know, we certainly have men and and dads who listen to the show and who are part of the tool community, but overwhelmingly it is moms and I hear from a lot of moms who feel that they are struggling to get their partner on the same page. And I just love that that's a focus of the work that you do. And I think it is something kind of a bigger call to action that in general, parents need more support in figuring out how to be in alignment and to best meet their kids needs.

Cherina: Yeah. And it's so interesting to see because for the families that I have seen, where they're really partnering, where they're really getting the support, and I'm not just talking about you know, grandparents. Grandparents are amazing people too, but I'm talking about true partnership, even if the parents aren't together. But having like that true partnership we have this person and we need to support them in this way. What does it look like for us to team up and give them that support? What does it look like for us to team up and support them together and again, not for one parent to be right over the other. But for two people to truly become allies, and look at this, this person and say, This is what we're doing. And sometimes it also just takes, honestly, parents reconnecting absent of the child and even figuring out relationally I find, you know, and it's completely unrelated. So I'll tell my family's like, Hey, your homework this week, your homework this week, is to do something, just you two and not talking about the kids. And I don't care if it's 30 minutes. I don't care if it's 10 minutes. I don't care if you go somewhere. I don't care if it's before bed. I don't care how you connect.

I just need you guys. Connecting and Communicating because sometimes when a child is so young, and parents are finding out that there's a diagnosis, and maybe there's multiple therapies, it's so much being thrown at them at one time. And it's almost like in a lot of cases, life stops, it almost feels like life stops and takes some kind of turn to where whatever life was before is no more. And definitely a part of that is true. I've changed how things go, but not to the extent where you guys lose yourselves. And you lose your own personal connection, because at some point in time, in most cases, in most cases, the sugar is going to leave. We're finding now that our kids with diagnoses are going on to college. They're going on to work, they're going on and living happy, productive lives. They're going on to do stuff, right and it's outside the home, and you guys are going to be left with each other, as in a little sugar, they're gonna be a big sugar by then, and they're going to be gone. And so just making sure that families are still connecting in that way, to where, yes, we need to work together to get our sugar through these sticky moments. And yes, we need to find different avenues for their learning. And yes, we need to find different avenues to how they relate to the world. But once that's all said and done, then what?

Debbie: Yeah, that's great. It's great. So what would you say if you were to kind of just give one word of advice or wisdom or one thought you want to leave listeners with who may be new to this journey who are just discovering that their toddler is differently wired or they suspect he or she is. What's one thing you'd want them to keep in mind.

Cherina: I would say, first things first. See the person, not the diagnosis. Try to find ways and avenues to connect with your child. Try to find the beauty in them. How do they play? How do they interact? What's their interest? What's their likes and their dislikes? What makes them smile? What makes them just giggle? What brings life? See them as the person before you see the diagnosis. The next thing I would give my parents is make sure to have regular check ins with yourself. How do you feel along this journey? Do I feel like my child is capable of learning? What do I feel like my child is capable of? Do I understand my role? Am I in a community that helps me understand my role? Am I getting the support I need to support them? And am I still in all of that, finding ways to be a tool for them. And not only a tool for them, but that I'm getting the tools for myself. And understanding the more that I know about my child, the more that I understand my child, the more I can advocate for them. And what I mean by advocate is, finding what's the best fit for my child based on their personality, on their character, how they learn how they adapt, whatever it is, because it's so important for us to know that different therapists, different schools all operate differently. And not everything that is amazing is an amazing fit for your child. And so the more that you learn, know and understand your child, the more you can find the best resources and tools that are a fit for your child. And so that's when I say, connecting, and making sure that you're observing and making sure to look beyond the diagnosis and really see them and know that your, your sugar doesn't have boundaries on their learning. Everyone can master something at some point. I don't care what it is, you know, we have to celebrate the small victories, we have to celebrate the big victories. So whether it's, you know, your sugar coming out of a 20 minute tantrum on their own, that's a victory. They did

it themselves. And so maybe the next one is 10 minutes, you know, them attempting to use their words instead of their bodies to communicate, that's a victory. Then trying to sit side by side with a peer and play without monopolizing all the toys, that victory and so if we ignore these little things that it'll take away from seeing from a big picture perspective that they're trying. And as long as we as their world, as their parents, as long as we help them try and we cheer them on and we love them through, then they're going to keep trying. So don't ever lose hope. And don't ever, ever, ever ignore or discount the role that you play in their lives.

Debbie: So much good wisdom there. I love all those reminders. I love that reminder to just look at all the victories because I think the bright spots with these kids or when you're looking for them are so phenomenal and the littlest thing can be just such a huge, bright spot like when I reflect on my child's journey. I definitely like the moments that brought me to tears that really stuck out in my mind or something. Things that would not you know, they wouldn't bring any notice or Attention to a parent with a with a typical kid because it just wouldn't be a big deal. So I love that reminder.

Cherina: Yes. And they have to work so much harder. And that's why it matters. So much like we take for granted how hard these babies work. They work so hard and not just the little bits. The big ones too. They're working hard. And we have to see that. And we have to honor that and just tell them from time to time, all the time. Good job.

Debbie: Yeah, love that. So, before we go, I would love it if you just take a few minutes where people can connect with you. You have a podcast called I've Got This Kid, which is great. I've listened to a few episodes and if you could just tell listeners where to find that and how else people can stay connected.

Cherina: Absolutely. So yes, I have a podcast. I've Got This Kid. And you can find me on just about every podcast station. I also have a YouTube channel if you want to watch and listen Cherina Williams slp I also have a website Iheartspeechtherapy.com. And I believe that we'll be linking the podcast where you can go to the website and it's a one stop shop and you can get to everything from there. But for now, everything is still separate. There's some blogs there. I blog once a week just talking about my own different life experiences with my little sugars who are no longer that little anymore, but they're still my little sugars. So I talked about those different experiences and just different perspectives on things. I'm also around to answer questions on Instagram at Ivegottthiskid\_podcast. And you can also find me on Facebook at Cherina Williams licensed speech and language pathologist.

Debbie: Excellent and listeners. As always, I will have all of those links in the show notes page. So you can just head over to that and click through and check out everywhere that Cherina is on social and her podcast and website. So Wow, thank you so much. I told you we talked for about a half hour and I think we're close to 50 . minutes But Sorry about that. But it was a great conversation. So um, I just really appreciate that you do this work. I'm always so happy to be

connected with people who are, who are supporting our amazing kids and you're doing such important work with the littlest ones and to usher in this new generation of parents to this awesome club that we're in. So thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us today.

Cherina: Thank you so much for having me. It was an honor and a privilege.

## RESOURCES MENTIONED:

- [Cherina Williams' website](#)
- [I've Got This Kid Podcast](#) (on Podbean, Apple Podcast, Google Podcast, Stitcher, I Heart Radio)
- [Cherina's YouTube Channel](#)
- [Cherina on Facebook](#)
- [I've Got This Kid on Instagram](#)
- [Cherina on Twitter](#)