



Episode #224

**A Parent's Guide to Getting Grounded with Parent
Coach Sheryl Stoller**

September 1, 2020

Debbie: Hello, Sheryl, welcome to the podcast.

Sheryl: I'm so glad to be here, Debbie.

Debbie: This is perfect timing for this conversation we well, we planned it that way, right? Truth be told, we had a feeling this was gonna be the right time for this. And I'm really looking forward to everything I know that you're going to share our conversations in the past have been so insightful and you have a lot of, yeah, just a lot of really good things for us to be thinking about as we entered this back to school time in the pandemic. So before we get into that, I've already read your formal bio, but I would love if you could take a few minutes to just tell us a little bit more about yourself, what you want us to know about who you are in the world and the work that you do.

Sheryl: So I am a parent coach to parents of kids who are more and it turns out kids who are more are often twice exceptional. And I found out about a decade ago that that's who I was coaching. And therefore I refocus my practice knowing that and it's really especially intense for us. I have three children, and they're grown and they're all 2e, each with their own different array of twice exceptionalities. And it was a really hard road. And we went to some really hard places and crawled our way out. And so I bring my personal perspective, it's a very personal process for me that I want to be for parents what I needed back then and didn't have so being the person who has both professional academic and personal expertise, to be there with the parents to help them find how to get from where they are to where they want to be. within themselves, with their child, for their child with their co parent. It's a very life enhancing process that I am so delighted to be able to do and bring to other parents who are living what I lived.

Debbie: When I think it's always so helpful for those of us who are kind of in the thick of it with younger kids, and you know, I've got a 16 year old, which still blows my mind a little bit. And many of our listeners have kids who are more in their elementary school ages. And I know it's just so powerful to hear perspective and wisdom from someone who's further down the road and has that bird's eye view of what this journey looks like. So I'm excited about that and getting to share that with listeners. So let's kind of set the stage. I just want to kind of hear your thoughts about where we are right now. It's Such an interesting time. I'm just looking at my social media feeds and my professional relationships and my colleagues and we are all trying to show up for parents and supporting people who are just really struggling on so many levels. And I think it's important for us to just talk about that, like where we are as parents within the context of everything that's happening right now. And what does that mean for us in terms of our emotional experience, our mental experience, all of those things?

Sheryl: Absolutely. Everything. For every single one of us is heightened. I mean, we as parents have to, we, in the world have to live heightened experiences all the time. And now it's exponentially everywhere all around us. And not only are the hard things heightened, but our fundamental universal needs. our need for being safe

for being seen for being sued for being secure. Those needs are heightened as well. So we are pulling up and facing the past wounds that we have. We're facing the future fears. And we're dealing with the present moment. And it's too much like our system is blowing a fuse. And so it's helping ourselves get to the here-now moment to do what it is that we need. There are certain required behaviors that our system has to do to cope with this heightened experience of living. So I have tools and I know that we'll get to that at the end. But in essence, Help yourselves know that you're not alone in this You are enough. And in this moment, you're okay. And it's only like in the nanosecond that we can sort of buy into. I am okay. It's so true. Yeah, yeah, our brain goes everywhere. It's like no, I'm not okay. I'm not okay. And for me, I had some childhood stuff where I really felt I was not okay. With loss, and just a whole bunch, I mean, everybody has their own history of, I'm not okay. Well all of that gets churned up. So reaching out what I want to help people know is, it is critically important that when we feel alone in the world that ultimately we are alone. It is the most important time as any moment to reach out for grounding relationships. You are Not Alone. I have upped my reaching out for a therapist, because I need it. And it is really important to note, I reached out to friends I had a really hard week last week, it felt like nobody was taking care of the world, there was no adult in charge anywhere. And school was starting, and my clients were really understandably, intensely upset. And I was able to be there for them. But I had to do a lot of work behind the scenes, to be cleanly compassionately there as a safe harbor, where I was seeing them where they felt safe, where they felt to where they felt secure. And thereby, they were able to then be that for their children.

Debbie: Yeah, so you've already shared so many interesting things that I want to circle back to. So one is just this idea of what's happening right now. You said it's stirring things up. It's churning things up. And I, I think that that's so true and something that a lot of us aren't really recognizing that there is something about this time in the world this what we're all experiencing that is bringing up stuff we may not have been thinking about for our you know, since our childhoods, it's triggering some kind of very primal anxieties in us. Is that what you're seeing?

Sheryl: Absolutely, absolutely. And one of the biggest things that we can do is give ourselves the relief to be really tender and gentle with that part of ourselves. And for some of us, I'm going to talk about a bottom up versus top down approach for some going cognitive and that may be true for many of our children. The cognitive talking back to those scary parts can help when we're out of our survival mode mechanisms in our system. But for some of us, the way to be able to get out of the past stuff that's been churned up, is to help focus on our body. And remember, it's here now so whether that touching and padding the edges of your body, top to bottom, on your side to help your body kind of get back to the here now and no, oh, I'm not that little girl anymore, not that little boy anymore, who was sprayed and alone and felt afraid and alone in the world, or at endanger in the world, whatever it is that our childhood experience got registered in our body. We get to be really compassionate with it. Use our body to help us come back To the here now, so that we don't take those past rules and create future fears. just assuming everything's going to continue to be horrible. It's easy to do. And the way to do that is you get to use our body to help us get grounded back

into the here now. And later, we can talk more about details of that. So that we can almost use this as a bizarre opportunity. I mean, we did not need this opportunity, but too much. But it is an opportunity that all that stuff gets churned up, to give us the chance to clean it and refile it out of trauma state into a coherent narrative of our story, an arc of our life and we got through it. And there was one aspect of when I was young, where I felt like in a moment, I might have been an orphan. And when my mother actually did die a few years ago, all that stuff came up. And my self talk was, I'm not that 19 year old anymore. We don't need my mother the way we needed her then. So her death became an opportunity. And so in other words, the trauma of our current times is an opportunity to remind ourselves, we got through that. We don't need the world to be perfect the way we needed effect then we're here now, there are relationships here. Now there are helpers and people behind the scenes that we don't that don't get the news coverage. That will help us know there are people who are helpers who are going to help make this okay. And helping ourselves, tenderly with compassion and I have some compassion exercises, awareness, body and compassion, we just sort of going to give the overview that ABC is really a fantastic sort of framework within which to help our body as well as our mind and our heart, get to the point of creating our own safety being seen by ourselves being soothed being secure. And that also includes reaching out for relationships for co-regulators.

Debbie: So I just have to ask, have you been talking to my therapist because really, so much of what you just shared? I mean, I, I have gone back to therapy, I'm a fan of therapy. That's no surprise, but I've gone back to therapy for the first time in a long time because I really recognize Okay, I need some extra support right now. And that idea of so many of us are doing this work cognitively and we are not connected to the physical experience we're not connected to our bodies where especially as adults, you know, I think kids are much it's easier in many ways for them to kind of get back into their bodies because it's they're just younger they have less time of pushing that away. But so I think, personally, yeah, I'm saying yes, yes, yes to everything that you're sharing here and I do want to get into the ABCs but I also just want to circle back on something you said about us recognizing that we are okay. And you said in this nanosecond because it really has to be sometimes that small that base because I agree with you, you know right now I'm sitting in my Office, I'm talking to you, I'm here, everything's fine. In this moment, my life is fine, I'm safe, my child safe, and everything's fine. And so I guess part of this work is helping ourselves stay in that space as much as possible and not kind of spin out to the, the future, whatever and the unknowns. And the other thing is this idea that, yes, there are so many opportunities here. And as painful as these opportunities may feel in the moment, because I know I certainly didn't want all this stuff turned up, it was a lot more comfortable without having to kind of address those things that I'm currently reflecting on. But I guess, and maybe you can answer this question then. Do we have to embrace it as an opportunity or is it just important that we do our daily work? Trust that there's something that we can learn from this.

Sheryl: Yes.

Debbie: Sorry, that was a really roundabout question.

Sheryl: No, because it was an either or. And that either or is not an either or. It's both. It's both. And it's in any given moment. It's what is the positive potential of this moment. Now what's the positive potential of this moment forgetting about whether the past one I felt like I totally exploded on somebody, for example, or I just totally collapsed within myself whatever it may be. It's in this moment. What's this moment calling for me? Do I take a step, put a step in front of the other and clean a dish? Do I Take a step and put one foot in front of the other by giving myself the chance to offend? And I also want to bring up authenticity. Authenticity is absolutely critically important. I don't mean in a way that scares anybody. I mean in a way of owning and voicing, my energy is really like off the wall right now. I need to figure out a way to take care of it. And I don't want it to leak on to you. So I'm going to take care of myself and I'm dealing with the stuff that turns up there are times where I use what I share with you and sometimes what I need one of my tools helps get to the point of asking my system What do you need? Sometimes it is to have a complete meltdown cry. Sometimes it is to scream at the top of my lungs. I have taken up drumming. And it can be lap drumming, you don't have to have a drum to do this. And it's a very integrated approach to using rhythm because that has been a universal method of helping our nervous systems get equilibrated and know whether we're safe or in danger. Having pleasure or pain, so are taking our each moment at a time will give us the answer.

Debbie: So interesting. I want to get to the tools because I think a lot of listeners are, I'm assuming, they're where I am like thinking okay, what do I need to do? Tell me what to do, to better integrate, connect this experience to be able to show up and be in And know that we can weather the storm. So can you walk us through your I guess your ABCs?

Sheryl: Yes, ABCs. A is for awareness. B is for body. And C is for compassion. And we ABC ourselves. Awareness is really who we are. Because if we were aware of what we see or what we touch, or all the five senses if we weren't aware of each one of them like that there's an exercise in The Untethered Soul where he has you take one at a time and imagine that you don't have each of them. Are you still alive? Are you still a life and when you take away all of them, that your awareness of it, it's all there, but you're not aware that it's all there? So ultimately, our awareness of what our system is experiencing in this world is who we are. And our body becomes this tool for us that sending messages to us that it's a tool we can use to give our messages and are attuning to ourselves, our bodies, is a phenomenal starting point. So there's something called the first feelings fingerprint. Notice where in your body is the earliest sign that your system is sensing that there might be danger. So attune to that. Now, some of you might say your shoulder, some of you might say your jaw, some of you might say your chest. I want to invite people to attune to the heart to the best degree they can become. They've hooked people up to a zillion different things and said, I'm giving you a stimulus. And as soon as you have a reaction, let us know, before people are aware, conscious that they have had a reaction their heart has shifted. The heart is the earliest. And in fact, there are machines that can pick up our electromagnetic

heart beats five miles away. So imagine how strong it is in the presence of somebody else in the room. And so when we can attune to those earliest shifts in our heart, you can catch when you catch things early, there's a whole lot less in the pipeline, that's going to have to come spill out if it waits until it's built up. The pipeline of hormones and emotions is so far gone that even though part of us knows I remember my mother once saying to me, I knew it that shouldn't have come out of my mouth, but I couldn't stop it. When we can attune to our bodies and are aware of our bodies early, we will save ourselves so much stuff to clean up. That said, it's important to know it's okay to not catch it early to blow up and to repair, rupture and repair because we're not perfect. Our kids need to know how to not be perfect, because they're not perfect. They're not going to be perfect. So, our attuning to our bodies and helping here it's messages, like I get headaches. And my question to my headache is what am I feeling that I don't want to feel that you're holding back that you're trying to help me not feel? and usually that question will end up in a flood of tears, incredibly cleansing and or I know to help Myself shake so they're, our bodies have to discharge. So back to bodies aware of what our bodies need. Many of our kids I don't know of those who are listening or what your circumstances were with Asher. But they have these unusual body movements that are actually their bodies taking care of them. It is discharging that emotional energy that is really healthy for letting it pass through them. So ironically, you can join your child in whatever their agitate agitated by the physical responses. And then that does so much. It's soothing because they're not alone. They're seeing they're not being judged. Shaking is discharging that energy. Crying is discharging that energy and one of the most powerful things I've been learning in my drumming is to put your hand on your chest and do a heartbeat that like heart. Heart. So you start with a calm rhythm that you're tapping your chest with and then you kind of shake and make silly noises. Suspend your breath while you make these shaking hands or do horse lips. I don't know if you want me to do that on air because I think that would hurt people's ears. What you do a little bit of that random move, shaking stuff throughout your body, and then come back to the heartbeat.

Sheryl: And that's your body telling your system. We discharged it and we're okay now. So we get to use our body and so many Waves cross midline movement. I used to invite one of my children to play ping pong in silence. I invite them to play and I've required zero talking. And I sincerely really was happy with zero because I knew the cross midline movement was good for him no matter what. And every single time this non talker talked. Cross midline movement helps the two sides of the brain open up. It helps the system integrate the gentle lifting up and twisting to one side and then lifting up and twisting to another. Whether that's in ping pong or it's a conscious yoga. There's so much in yoga that is so incredibly powerful. And I would invite everybody to notice what your body already does for yourself. Like when I lay my hand, I mean my face on my hand. I'm taking care of myself. And the more I'm conscious of my body doing it, the more powerful and effective it's soothing to my nervous system. You're already taking care of yourself. Like if while you're listening, everybody, notice what your body's doing, what position it's trying to take care of you. And when like, I'm right now, intertwining my, my fingers. It's like, Oh, look at that. I'm kind of doing a cross midline here and I noticed my fingers touching the pads of the other fingers. It's a

grounding. My body's doing this, like, Oh, I am okay. I've got me. So that's a huge part of the body. Another part of the body part is helping it. Feel ourselves gently hold ourselves. I mean, we can literally help ourselves, there's a lot of work that Peter Levine as a result of Steve porges polyvagal theory, helping literally hold ourselves as a container so it knows it's solid and it's here. And that holding ourselves leads me to the sea, the compassion. Sometimes we don't have time to go through the process of giving a huge chunk of time to this awareness, body compassion. But what we can do is put one hand on our heart, the other hand over it, and are somewhat crossing. So you've got the cross midline, and saying aloud, I see you. Now whoever's in your presence might hear you. And that might feel great to them, but I'm talking about talking to ourselves. I see. For compassion. That is a shortcut. Because sometimes the compassion script that I've used I mean there, there are different ways to go with it. Kristin Neff,, there are different ways of doing these compassion, self talks. I find that when I, in the moment say to my body, thank you for letting me know. In essence, it's so understandable. I'm here for you. I've got this. So that's the in the moment when I have a little time to myself. That last statement is what do you need Sheryl? And that What do you need? It is amazing. What will surface I mean, there was one time the biggest surprise was I thought I was going to need another crying session. It was playing. And I went out and I got art supplies and I played. And having access to things to play, to bring pleasure back into our life to know, there still is, those outlets and those experiences that are good, and that we can actually feel them as good. So once we get to the sense of having had compassion for ourselves, we're back in our heart. And when we're in our own heart, for ourselves, taking care of ourselves, not needing our children to be convenient, and do what we want them to do, because they're experiencing their own experience. But once we're back into our own heart, having been there for ourselves, we are able to then think about doing and helping and guiding our child through what we just did for ourselves. And sometimes when they're in the middle of meltdown thinking about and I've done this many times. Sending out heart loving, smooth heart waves to my child, that I create this rhythm of love, sending out my heart waves to them. And remember, a machine can pick them up, five miles away. They are strong. So when we consciously say the energy we are going to send out to this person is love because remember those things that I said are heightened our need for being seen, for being safe, for being soothed, for being secure. Our presence in clean, loving heart energy, that is the most powerful thing we can do for them. It's the most powerful thing we can do for ourselves. Set a lot here. So those that's my description of ABC,

Debbie: So good. You know, I wrote about this in *Differently Wired*. I had a kind of profound experience about recognizing the impact our energy has on our child. And it was that exact thing of really just surrounding a very dysregulated angry little boy with love and, and I was like, Oh my gosh, this is a superpower. And of course, at the time, I thought, cool, I've got this, I just have to do this every time and I'll never have any more tantrums, which is not really how it unfolds, because I'm not a superhuman. But that is such a nice reminder. I love the language that you gave us to be in the moment of those situations. And then I wanted to circle back and ask that question, what do you need that you reflect on later? How do you do that? Or how do you recommend people do that? Is that

something you suggest people journal about? Is there kind of a formal way to consider that question?

Sheryl: There are many different ways to do it, it literally can be, say it aloud to yourself. I mean, the more modalities a system uses, the more different different aspects that will get drawn into it. That said, you can only be where you are. You can't, you can only start from where you are, you can't start from a different spot. So whatever you need in that moment, is what you do, if it's tacitly saying it to yourself, and seeing what floats, if it's saying it allowed. If it is journaling, if you have that as a resource that you're willing to just sort of do one thing and there sort of say, you know what, I'm just gonna give it a try if you haven't done that before, and or you're finding yourself knowing that it's helpful and resisting it and saying, Wow, look at you, listening to what your body needs, right? Now that's not okay. And being there with that gently, ironically, because you don't, you're not making yourself wrong for not journaling and it opens up the option to journal. So, whatever, in this again, in this nano moment, whatever is going to work for you. There's no one right way it's truly the attuning to yourself, what is your body telling you? My body is trying to send me some messages. What are they? And how do I help myself. I'm blocked by the knots that are in the way of the flow of me hearing those messages. And sometimes it is literally as an in breath through your back, like breathing into your back into the lower back and letting yourself run. up as you do that, your, your whole core holding yourself higher, and then a gentle twist as you exhale to one side, and then do it to the other side. So your body, you're literally twisting out the knots and the blockages and you're opening up space between vertebrae, and you're opening up space between different parts of your body that allows for it to float. So use your body. And whether it's writing, whether it's using your voices using your body using your body is this phenomenal thing. And if you're an artist, draw, if you like doodling doesn't have to be in everybody's artists. They also want you to know that you can create feelings that don't look like anything concrete that we could say, Oh, that's this. You get to throw a ball against the wall. You get To Go to a corner of a room and press out with your legs and your arms with all your light. There are many ways you can say to yourself, and places you can say to yourself, What do you need?

Debbie: So, I love this, about the body, I think, you know, and even just thinking that so many of our kids, this is something they do, like I remember learning from an OT many, many, many years ago that swinging or spinning, these are ways that so many differently wired kids reorganize their brain, and I thought that was so fascinating. And so they instinctively know to do it. My question is if we're doing these things with our bodies, like, I'm really good at following orders, right? So if Cheryl says, okay, Debbie, this could be really helpful. If you take some deep breaths and you spend side to side and go stand against a wall push like I will do all of those things. But does the act of just doing those things help reinforce and help the shifts happen? Or do you have to be mindfully doing those things?

Sheryl: Basically the way I look at it, it creates it. Like with gas, there's regular gas. And there's what's the next level up high octane and the consciousness superpowers. So we add to the power of the doing, by watching, language matters. And no,

that's not the question. But I do want to just squeeze in here because the consciousness in essence, when we say I am, let's say, angry. That makes it really hard to not be angry because the word am implies present and future and past whereas when you say, I feel angry, It's helping already disentangle from the feeling Oh, that's a feeling and it doesn't affect the fact that I am fine. I am okay. There's this feeling going through me. But it helps me stay grounded. So consciousness of that awareness is part of the ABC. Yes, absolutely heightens everything and enables us to, as you say, use these marching orders. Because what it's telling the system is and I often say this aloud to myself and encourage clients the same. Look at me taking care of me. Look at me, I've got your shell. And when I am conscious of like when I just did that earlier with me, noticing that my fingers were interlaced there was part of my system that can be taken care of me. And that's the consciousness you're at it superpowers.

Debbie: It makes sense and I imagine too it's building, it's like anything we do, right? We're building muscles, we're cumulative, and it becomes maybe a default mode eventually. And I mean, not that we don't have to consciously choose to do it, but it's, we may just become where we go more quickly.

Sheryl: Exactly. And we can practice it in little increments of just watch yourself. Take your next breath, just notice your breath, and watch yourself doing it. And that was like doing a push up to build your arm strength for your awareness muscle. When you try and say, Well, you know what, I'm gonna do it for five breaths, let's say, and you notice your mind wander. The fact that you noticed your mind wander is actually doing the push up, because it was your awareness that let you notice. So mind wandering doesn't mean that you're a bad meditator. For example, it's just the practice of Noticing, Oh, look at that. Look you like, I see you. Okay, let's try to come back. Right.

Debbie: So as a way to kind of wrap up our conversation, knowing that parents are now we're always engaging in this new learning for most parents, I think it's remote. I know many of us white knuckled our way through it in the spring. And we're really wanting this to be a more positive experience. And we want to show up in a way that is best going to serve our families and support our kids as they are dealing with their own anxieties, fears, worries, stressors. So any kind of last words of wisdom for us, as we kind of re-enter education.

Sheryl: Yes, it truly is helping yourself. No, we can do this. It's not going to be perfect. And I can do the second, I can say, Oh, you got your first day of school and I'm sure many people listening might already have started. Like, okay, you know, we're gonna sort of do a kind of a restart, and do the things we used to do when we started in terms of if we had had rituals for the first day of school, and we do it and then instead of the kids going off to school, or going into the, the rooms, or wherever they're going to get to be online for the remote. Help yourself, this ABC for you and that energy is your superpower. And your knowing that you are their co regulator and you for you to be there in the way that it can optimize whatever any given moment for school will be. Whether you're talking with your child, whether you're talking with a teacher, whether whomever you're with You get to get your own co regulators. So reach out for support. Whether it's to a friend, a

one, you know, who can hold space for you while you just sort of disintegrate and, like, try and tell why the world is impossible and how it's you'll never get out. And that release, hey, I hear you it is that hard. You're not alone. I know. Sometimes just saying I know. Anyway, you resource yourself. Get all the resources you need is my, my key message so that you can look back however many years from now and say, Look what I did. I did what I needed to do to come to each nanosecond of a moment, took the best that I could in that moment. That's my suggestion.

Debbie: Yes, it's just such an important reminder and I hope that listeners are feeling that sense of, you know community and that we are all in this. And there's so many of us out there who really know what you're going through who understand the anger, the frustration, all those emotions you might be cycling through. So I hope that this podcast episode helps you feel less alone and that this is a resource as well. And Cheryl, before we say goodbye, could you let listeners know how they can connect with you and learn more about the resources that you offer?

Sheryl: Sure, Sheryl Stoller Parent Coaching is the best way to get in touch with me. And I will be happy to be there for you. This is too hard and too important to do alone.

Debbie: Well, thank you so much. Thank you for everything that you shared with us today. The ABCs the strategies, the language that we can use with ourselves and I have some new tools in my toolbox. So I really appreciate you sharing all of that with us today.

Sheryl: Wonderful. It's been wonderful to share with you with all of you listening.

RESOURCES MENTIONED:

- Stoller Parent Coaching
- Sheryl Stoller on Facebook
- *The Untethered Soul: The Journey Beyond Yourself* by Michael Alan Singer
- *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma* by Peter Levine
- Stephen Porges / Polyvagal theory
- Dr. Kristin Neff