



Episode #243

**Debbie Reber Answers Listeners' Questions About
Regulation, Remote Learning, and More**

February 23, 2021

Debbie: Okay, I'm just gonna dive right into question number one. This listener wrote, I have a question about how and when. And if you should tell your child what their diagnosis is, we are waiting back on results of our evaluation for my oldest child, and I will soon have to wrestle with this. We got the evaluation because he wants to go back to school, unlike my seven year old, who was also differently wired, and they had taken away his IEP in the middle of last year. I've never gone for a diagnosis because we prefer to focus on his strengths and not label, but we needed for talking to the school and getting the right supports in place.

This is such a great question. I get asked this a lot, actually. And I guess I'm going to start my answer by just saying that it's complicated. Much like some people's relationship status on Facebook, it's complicated. If we think about labels and diagnoses, especially for younger kids, they're really about identifying areas where a child could use additional accommodations or supports in order for them to thrive in school and be successful. I love that in your question, you talk about preferring to focus on strengths. And I'm sure listeners know this is very much the lens through which I suggest we see differently wired children. So I think it's important to recognize that we do focus on strengths. And we also want to recognize that there are some very real challenges that come with all kinds of labels and diagnoses. And our kids also deserve to get the kinds of supports and systems in place. So they can tap into their strengths, despite those challenges. So those challenges, don't hold them back. So you asked when, how, and if you should tell your child about their labels or diagnoses. And personally, I think part of the way that we remove the stigma associated with many labels is by talking openly about these different ways of being neurodivergent. And normalizing them. So in that way, the bigger deal that we make out of these, whether we try to hide a label or a diagnosis, or we don't disclose when our child is probably already aware, there's something different about the way they're moving through the world. This can give them the idea that there's something actually wrong with them, you know that this is a secret, this is something that's bad, or that's negative. I also know that when not given information, and a child is not thriving, or they're getting in trouble, or they're really struggling in school or with friends or with emotional regulation, not understanding why that's happening for them, they might make that mean, there's something really wrong with them.

So giving them information can be really helpful. And helping them to see that actually, this is why you have a really hard time regulating your emotions, or this is why you feel things so intensely. This is why you sometimes struggle when you're in this environment, because of X, Y, and Z. When we share this information with our kids in a way that is supportive and calm, that's not often the difference, but rather, you know, is focused on brain science and the neuroscience and more of that place of Wow, isn't this interesting? This is what's going on with you. And this explains some of the things that can be hard for you, that can be so empowering to a child. I don't know that there's a magic age for when to tell kids, often they know, long before we tell them that there's something different about their wiring. You know, I have shared the story that before I disclose to my son that he had ADHD we were reading a book together. And I think he must have been seven and the character had ADHD. And he asked

me, Oh, do I have that? And I turned to him and I said, Well, why are you recognizing some of yourself and this character? And he said, Yeah, I am actually, you know, our kids often know. And so maybe thinking about this in terms of not just, you know, one big conversation that you have about where you sit your child down, and you explain this is what we've discovered about you. But rather, this can become part of your family culture, you know, talking about strengths and weaknesses and neural differences. Also, we know that many of our kids do not fall far from the tree. So maybe we as parents have our own learning disabilities and other ways of being atypical, and we can be talking out loud about our differences. So again, it just becomes normal. It doesn't become a big thing. It just is part of who we are. And we embrace it in that way. I want to acknowledge that I know there are parents out there listening who do not want their child to have a label associated with them. They are concerned about stigma. They're concerned about their child's self esteem. They're concerned about a lot of things.

And I'll just say that from talking with so many neurodivergent adults, what I hear overwhelmingly is that understanding and having their parents really accept and name, what was going on with them, helped them in the long run better come to terms with their own neurodivergence, and also just really embrace who they are. So I guess in summary, my answer is that I am pro sharing labels and diagnoses with our kids. I'm pro making this a part of our regular conversation, not a kind of once and done big talk, but rather just this ongoing dialogue about learning styles and brain science and strengths and challenges. And I'm also pro starting this from a pretty early age. I hope that's a helpful answer.

Okay, I'm going to move on to my second question. This listener wrote, my five year old ADHD, odd child can become verbally and physically aggressive when she can't get her way. We are mindful of our triggers and make sure we're sensitive to transitions, etc. But she goes from zero to 100. In a split second, when she's raging, we try strategies like giving her space acknowledging the big emotions, removing ourselves, this makes her even more mad. Nothing we try seems to work, any advice or suggestions would be appreciated.

Okay. So before I answer this question, I just want to say that I feel you. I have been there. Many times people listening to this are probably nodding right along with you, this is really difficult when our kids are explosive, and we can kind of predict things that are going to set them off. But the strategies that we're using don't seem to be working. And we also really want this behavior to change because it's hard. It's hard for our kids, it's hard to see them, so dysregulated. And it's so hard to be on the receiving end of the really big explosive behavior. So I'm going to share two ideas with you. The first is probably something that's on your radar already, but I'm going to talk about it anyway. And that is Dr. Ross Greene's work on the collaborative and proactive solutions model. So Dr. Ross Greene, of course, wrote the book, *The Explosive Child*. And in that book, he talks about a way to work with kids who are easily frustrated, and chronically inflexible. And in his problem solving approach, he talks about something called Plan B, this is really proactively planning around what he calls the unsolved problems. So the behaviors are really signs that there are some unsolved problems. And that is where we want to focus our attention. So in the case of your daughter, it's clear that you know that certain transitions can set her off no

matter what you do to prepare or plan for them. So continuing to get really curious about what are the lagging skills there? What are the unsolved problems, and then working with your daughter to try to come up with some solutions together. I also want to acknowledge I know that five years old might seem like a young age to start trying to do this, but I don't believe that it is too young. I was looking at the Lives in the Balance website. That's Ross Greene's website where he talks about this in great detail. And speaking to the question of how young is too young, it says Plan B includes ingredients that are crucial. The instant a child is born empathy, trying to understand what's making a child uncomfortable or unhappy, and trying to find realistic and mutually satisfactory ways to address whatever is getting in the kids way. Ross Greene says that when we focus on solving problems, rather than on modifying the behaviors that are byproducts of those unsolved problems, we're addressing the real issues setting in motion, the challenging behavior. And when we get those problems solved, we reduce the challenging behavior at the same time. So I will just say I think that Ross Greene's problem solving model is fascinating. It is something that we've used in our family for many years. If it's not on your radar, I encourage you to check it out. You can of course, start by reading the book the explosive child, you can go to the Lives in the Balance website, which has a lot of free resources and PDFs and videos where you can learn more about this model. There's a great plan B Facebook group if you're on social media, and you can really learn how to apply this problem solving model to very specific situations that you might be going through. In a nutshell, the collaborative and proactive solutions model is a way of collaborating with our child to identify the unsolved problems and then working with them to come up with solutions. Of course, it's more involved than that. But I will just say that it's a respectful approach to dealing with challenging behaviors. And I am a big fan. Also, I've had Dr. Greene on the podcast maybe three years ago. So if you want to listen to that episode, he walks me through this approach. I will have links to that episode to the book to the lives in the balance website, all on the show notes page for this episode, and you can find that at tiltparenting.com/session243. Okay, so that's Plan B, and collaborative and proactive solutions.

The second thing I wanted to talk about in relation to this question is to speak about what to do in the moment. Because, again, when explosions happen when the big meltdowns happen, and we're faced with a child who is incredibly dysregulated, it can be so difficult. So I also just want to offer this, it is really important that we as parents and caregivers, take care of ourselves, not just before, not just after these meltdowns happen, but also in the moment. And when I say take care of ourselves, I'm talking about our emotional well being our energetic well being, as well as our physical well being. So if we can have a plan for ourselves in advance for how we're going to respond when this happens, not if but when it happens, this is really going to help us out, because I don't know about you. But this has been the case. For me, I hear from parents all the time, many of our bad decisions as parents are the poor choices we make are because we have that deer in headlights moments, you know, we're faced with an upset child, maybe in a public space, we don't have a plan for what we're going to do. And so we default to bribes or to punishments or to time outs or other ways of reacting, that not only don't help the situation, but they may escalate it. So it is so worth coming up with some strategies ahead of time. And sort of briefly touch on mirror neurons. So you know, this is something that Tina Paine Bryson and Dan

Siegel talk about in their book, *The Whole Brain Child*. And as Dan Siegel says, “We are hardwired to perceive the mind of another being.” And so as Dan and Tina write about in their books, our kids are reacting to what's happening in our brains, right there basically matching our moods or our energy. I'm just going to share a quote from Dan Siegel. He says, “When we attune with others, we allow our internal state to shift to come to resonate with the inner world of another. This resonance is at the heart of the important sense of feeling felt that emerges in close relationships.”

So I wanted to share that because these mirror neurons can play a big role when we are dealing with a dysregulated child. And it's really just important to understand why in the moment, we want to have our own coping strategies to stay calm, or to return to calm. And to make sure that energetically what we're putting out there is calm, still safe energy. I also wanted to share what I learned from Dr. Becky Bailey, She is the founder of the Conscious Discipline method. She is phenomenal in this space. And when I had her on the show, and I asked her this very question, I wanted to know how do we, in the moment, take care of ourselves? How do we tap into our own inner calmness so we can support our child when they are having a really hard time? And I loved her answer. And again, this is another podcast episode I highly recommend going back and listening to. I will have the link in the show notes page. But she talks about a couple things. One is deep belly breathing, you know that really deep breathing where when we inhale, our belly goes out. And when we exhale, our belly goes in. I just want to acknowledge that you might be listening to this and thinking Yes, I get it. Breathing is important, but don't discount this. science shows us that deep breathing profoundly changes our wiring, it profoundly changes what is happening inside of our bodies.

So Dr. Bailey says do that deep belly breathing, you know, she suggests that we do that deep inhale, maybe for a count of four, and then exhale slowly, even slower than the inhale maybe for a count of six or eight. And when we do that, We do that deep inhale and exhale a couple of times, that actually engages our parasympathetic nervous system, and that will calm us down. While we're doing that, Becky encourages us to literally talk to ourselves, you know, to just tell ourselves, I'm safe, keep breathing, I can handle this. You know, just saying that to ourselves calmly, I'm safe, keep breathing, I can handle this while we're taking those inhales and those exhales. And lastly, she says that we really want to open our hearts, she actually recommends that we touch our heart with our hand, that helps bring our awareness, our attention to our heart, and that when we do that, that also helps us be really present in that moment. And when we do that, our children can actually feel the intention of that shift. Our tone will change, the way that we're responding to our child will change, our face will soften our voice will soften. And in that moment, Becky says our child will have that felt sense of safety. And that's already going to help them start to calm down, while also taking care of ourselves in that moment, nurturing ourselves. I'm just going to share one other tip that Becky Bailey shared with me. It is something she calls the Q tip method. So q tip stands for quit taking it personally. And I just love this because it reminds us that when our child is dysregulated, or they're having a meltdown, they're having a really hard time. And it's not about us, it may feel like it's about us, but really, our child is having a really hard time. So when we quit taking it personally, we can remind ourselves that it's our child's struggle. And when we

kind of separate ourselves from their struggle, and we don't get wrapped up in it, or enmeshed in it, we can put ourselves in a position of how can I support my child? How can I help my child get regulated again, as opposed to how can I control my child? or How can I make them do something? or How can I fix this, right? So looking at their behavior through that lens of support for what is really hard for them right now. And again, for listeners who want to dive into all the things I've been sharing more, I will share resources from Dr. Becky Bailey from Dan Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson in the show notes. I've had all of them on the show. We've talked about these concepts in more detail. And so the show notes again, for this episode will be at tiltparenting.com/session243. Also, Dr. Bailey's website has a lot of great free resources and videos where you can kind of watch how to use this approach with a dysregulated child. Before we move on to the last question, I just want to say one more thing with the big behaviors and the meltdowns. I know that parents and caregivers are often looking for quick fixes, right? We're looking for the answer that's going to stop the behavior that can feel so very challenging. And while I wish those quick fixes existed, the reality is that with all children, but especially differently wired kids, this is a process. And it's a process of relating to our children, to seeing them for who they are, and really supporting them and developing lagging skills. And this happens over time. It happens because of connection and relationship that we have with our kids and consistency and continuing to show up and be that steady force of love and calm for them. So hang in there. And I hope you found these suggestions useful.

Okay, I'm going to tackle one more question in this episode. It is a long one. But I wanted to share the whole thing because the context is important. I also think it's something that many listeners will relate to in this time of remote and hybrid learning. Here's the question. My nine year old son used to be excited about doing worksheets and generally interested in doing work. He was always averse to writing but in the beginning of the pandemic, it started to improve. We had a routine where he would start working in a certain time, and with breaks, he would get what he needed done for school and other worksheets. Every day wasn't perfect, but for the most part, we had a system that worked this year, it didn't work as well. And at this point, it's a miracle if I get him to complete his work for the day, his screentime has increased dramatically. He used to hardly have any and we were all finally with it. Now he's always asking for more. And there are lots of arguments about it. I tried implementing routines for work, both routines he recommended and once I thought would work, there's a fight every day about writing, and he has become more and more adverse to it. What's worse, he started to trigger me. And of course, the more I push, the more he resists, it usually ends up with me frustrated, and him nearly to tears feeling bad about himself, which makes me feel awful about myself. Underneath I fear, if I don't push him to write, he won't do it and will get worse and eventually be unprepared for later grades is screentime to blame. What am I doing wrong? And how can I find a system that works for both of us? He sees that if he perseveres, he can do it, but it never gets easier for him. He has ADHD, sensory processing disorder and anxiety. I know he's sad about the pandemic, and his school has not been very supportive in the way he needs help. I need a reset or different ideas.

Okay, so here's my answer. And I actually love this question, because this is what I'm hearing from so many parents these days, not always about writing, but definitely this idea that the motivation is plummeting, and our kids are getting

more off track, spending more time on screens and just generally struggling to get things done. And it is creating a lot of conflict. So I have a couple of thoughts about this. I don't have a perfect solution. But I have a couple of things I want you guys to think about. One is that I think it's really important that we just recognize our kids have hit the wall, right? I've just been reading so many articles, just this week, even about the state of parenting and our families these days, and how we as parents and caregivers are so spread thin and burned out and hitting the wall and just feeling incredibly overwhelmed with everything on our plate. And it's really important that we recognize our kids are in the exact same space. They have been doing this for our remote school or hybrid school or disrupted school for nearly a year now. And they don't have that context that we as adults have to know that this will pass and there will be something better beyond this. In many of our kids, even as young as nine are, you know, they're having existential crises. Why are we here? What is the point of this? Why should I care? So I think it's really important just to recognize and honor that experience, and to know in a deep way that our kids are burnt out, they are feeling unmotivated. And for very good reason. Zoom school is no fun, not seeing their friends is no fun, not getting to do sports and activities that they love to do is no fun. I wanted to start with that. Because what I hear so often is parents who want to know how to make their child feel more motivated. And the truth is, we can't, we cannot make another human being any human being whether it's our kid or somebody else feel motivated, or care about something that they don't care about. What we know about motivation, what the science says, is that motivation or drive, as Dan Pink talks about in his book *Drive* really comes from our own internal experience and what feels good to us, what sparks our flow, what gives us a sense of competency and agency, how we feel we're contributing. So it's important to know that when we try to push our kids to do things that they are already feeling a lot of resistance around or that they've determined they don't care about, that's likely to backfire. It's likely to ramp up the resistance they have around it, it may create a long term dislike of that subject or activity. And, of course, that's the exact opposite of what we want to do. To the person who sent in this question, I love that you are acknowledging that this is triggering you. You're aware that it's sparking your own fears about what will happen down the road if your child doesn't make progress with this writing right now. Love that you recognize that because I think that's what we all do, right? We project out into the future, and make all of these things that we perceive as challenges and play them out to some really limited future, right with no potential. And so that's where I would encourage you to do some of your own deep inner work. I know you asked me for strategies for your child, but I really want to talk about us as parents, right? Question those beliefs. Maybe make a list of all the things you are most scared will happen if your child does not keep up or progress with his writing development right now. And I mean all the thoughts and beliefs, even the super irrational ones, if they're in your head, write them down. Because what we want to do is just acknowledge that those fears are real to us. And then we want to come up with different ways to view them and come up with some reframes for how they might actually not be true. So in the case of your son in his writing, I imagine there's a lot of evidence we could find, you know, we could probably Google that I should have done this before I hit record, but we could probably Google Pulitzer Prize winning writers who hated writing as kids, and find some writers there who were not good at writing, or maybe had learning disabilities and writing was laborious and painstaking. And now they're prolific writers,

right. So just because a child is struggling with something now doesn't mean that it's something they always struggle with. So it's important that we want to do that work around our own fears. Because when we show up to support our kids, with their schoolwork, or really any activity, they have resistance around, we don't want our own concern and worry and fear about, you know, the stakes are so high, and we don't want that to come through because our kids are going to feel it. And it will likely make them feel more anxious, and probably build up the resistance even more.

Just a few other practical suggestions. So you may have done this already. But if you haven't, I would talk to your child's teacher and see if there are other ways your child can demonstrate their learning right now. Because if there is a way to just back off a little bit, you know, lower the bar, take some pressure off our kids around these areas, specifically these areas where they are really struggling or super resistant. I am all for that. Again, we are in a really difficult time. And I believe that way more important than academic growth right now is helping our kids come out the other end of this pandemic with a deeper understanding of who they are. And we want them to still love to learn or be excited about learning. So if we're prioritizing worksheets, or assignments that feel meaningless, or a type of learning that completely disengages them, or if we try to force them to learn in ways that feel, you know, just super stressful, or uncomfortable or that build up that resistance even more, it's really going to be hard for us to achieve that bigger outcome. So if schools are willing, some aren't. But I would start the conversation to accept something in a different form, right, it could be a drawing, or a video project, maybe an art project, an audio project, maybe there's even a way to incorporate. You mentioned your child's into video games, maybe there's a way to incorporate your child's favorite video game into something that he needs to deliver for school. There are so many ways to be creative about this stuff. And if there's a way to tap into your child's interests and use that to achieve learning and to work on these skills, that would be the ideal right now. So see, if they're just assignments that you can get whittled down. So they feel smaller, the deliverables are smaller, they're less daunting then. And just as I wrap up, I want to share one more thought. And that is that I can't overstate how important it is that we don't compromise or create unnecessary conflict in our relationship with our child over battles around schoolwork. I will fess up -- I have been there, I have been that parent sitting next to my child when he's had a paragraph to write and I've just been ready to pull my hair out because hours later, there was still nothing written and I just couldn't understand what the block was. You know why? Why is this so hard? But this is not how we want to show up for our kids. And you know, this is especially tricky now. Because so many parents are really in the trenches with their kids learning. Their kids are doing remote or hybrid learning. It's not great. It's not great for us as parents. It's not great for our kids. And it is certainly not great for our relationships with our children. And our relationship with our kids is the most important thing right now. Prioritizing our kids mental and emotional well being. That's it, that is number one above everything else, we want to be their soft place to land, we want to have that strong, loving, connected relationship with them. Okay, just one more that really this is the last one. Our kids have so much time to learn skills. I talk about this all the time, they are on their own unique timelines. So you know, going back to motivation, when a child is intrinsically motivated to learn something, if it has purpose for them, there's a reason to learn it, they can learn

something pretty quickly. The thing is that that may not happen on our timeline. So if I can just end this episode on this note, it would be to remember that the most important thing we can do for our kids is to help them understand who they are, help them understand what their strengths are, how to leverage those strengths, how to recognize their areas of challenge, help them understand how to ask for the support they need, so that eventually when they launch, they have a good sense of self and they feel like they know how to navigate getting what they need to create the life that they want. Right. That's what we're doing here. We are raising humans who become self actualized adults. So I really encourage listeners who are feeling a lot of fear, or worry over what's happening in your kids school or academic world now, to focus on connection and relationship with our kids. And look for opportunities to help them better understand themselves. To not stress so much about the worksheets, not worry so much about the little assignments, not let school work interfere with the emotional well being of our kids and our families.

All right, well, that is the end of this solo cast episode. I want to thank everyone who sent in questions. If I did not get to your question I'm holding on to it. I will try to get to it for a future episode. If you have something you want me to tackle for an upcoming Ask me anything podcast, you can always email it to me at Debbie at tilt parenting.com and I will try to get to it in a future show. Thanks so much.

RESOURCES MENTIONED:

- [*The Explosive Child: A New Approach for Understanding and Parenting Easily Frustrated, Chronically Inflexible Children* by Dr. Ross Greene](#)
- [Lives in the Balance \(Dr. Greene's website\)](#)
- [*Lost at School: Why Our Kids With Behavioral Challenges are Falling Through the Cracks and How We Can Help Them* by Dr. Ross Greene](#)
- [*Raising Human Beings: Creating a Collaborative Partnership with Your Child* by Dr. Ross Greene](#)
- [Dr. Ross Greene Explains How Collaborative and Proactive Solutions Benefits Kids \(Tilt podcast episode\)](#)
- [The B Team Facebook Group](#)
- [Dr. Dan Siegel's website](#)
- [The Mindsight Institute](#)
- [*The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind* by Dr. Dan Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson PhD](#)
- [Dr. Dan Siegel on Helping Our Kids Develop a "Yes" Brain \(Tilt podcast episode\)](#)
- [Tina Payne Bryson's website](#)
- [*The Power of Showing Up: How Parental Presence Shapes Who Our Kids Become and How Their Brains Become Wired* by Dr. Dan Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson, PhD](#)
- [Dr. Tina Payne Bryson on the Power of Showing Up \(Tilt podcast episode\)](#)
- [Conscious Discipline website](#)
- [Dr. Bailey's TEDx Talk: Wiring the Brain for Success](#)
- [Anger: Coach Kids Through It \(video\)](#)
- [Becoming the Best You Can Be Webinar Series \(7 videos\)](#)
- [Shifting from Fear to Love \(video\)](#)
- [*Easy to Love, Difficult to Discipline: The 7 Basic Skills for Turning Conflict* by Dr. Becky Bailey](#)

- [Dr. Becky Bailey on her Conscious Discipline Methodology \(Tilt podcast episode\)](#)
- [Dan Pink](#)
- [*Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* by Dan Pink](#)