

## **Advocate and Author Jonathan Mooney on Why Normal Sucks [Transcript]**

Debbie: 0:00

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Jonathan: 0:27

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Debbie: 0:49

Welcome to Tilt Parenting a podcast featuring interviews and conversations aimed at inspiring, informing and supporting parents raising differently wired kids. I'm your host Debbie Reber and after a few weeks off, I am ready to get back into the swing of things. And I could not be more excited than to start the season off with a powerful and gut punching conversation with Jonathan Mooney. Jonathan is a self described do gooder speaker and writer who didn't learn to read until he was 12 years old. Growing up with dyslexia, Jonathan faced a number of low expectations. He was told he would be a high school dropout and likely end up in jail. Instead, he earned a degree in English literature, started his first nonprofit in his college dorm and has gone on to write a number of books including his latest title normal sucks. Jonathan has been a champion for neurological and physical diversity for more than two decades, and his award winning advocacy projects have been featured in major media outlets across the United States. We cover so much ground in this conversation all about the implications and prescriptions of normal from the painful messages Jonathan received in his early life to some of the disturbing research he came across while writing his book. But we also talk about the kind of powerful things that can happen for our kids. When we set aside typical conventions, timelines and expectations and celebrate their differences. It's not just about flourishing outside the box. It's about shattering the box completely. Frankly, I'm just grateful. There are people like Jonathan in the world doing this critical work and I was so inspired and motivated by this conversation. I hope you enjoy it. Before I get to that, I have one quick announcement. If you are a homeschooling family, don't miss out on registering for the gifted homeschoolers forums inaugural gifted home education conference, three days featuring 20 plus renowned, gifted and 2e expert speakers, lively hosted breakout rooms and more. And it's all free with your annual membership to the gifted homeschoolers forum. The conference runs this Friday, June 4 through Sunday, June 6, and I will actually be speaking about homeschooling gifted kids with confidence and joy. And then taking live

questions this Sunday morning. You can learn more and register at [ghfleasers.com](http://ghfleasers.com). And now here is my conversation with Jonathan.

Hey, Jonathan, welcome to the podcast.

Jonathan:

Hey, I'm excited to be a part of it. Thanks for having me. Oh, my pleasure. I feel like this conversation is long overdue. And I just finished reading your book *Normal Sucks*. And there were so many Yes, yes. No hints as I was reading it. It's so in alignment with what I as a parent of a differently wired kid have been preaching about and talking about it everywhere I could. And so I'm just so grateful to have you on the show today. So could we even start, I'm sure you tell your story all the time. But just you know, tell us a little bit about who you are in the world. I think so many parents are going to hear your story and feel like oh my gosh, this could be my child speaking as an adult. So I would love to just hear a little bit about how you got to be doing the work that you're doing.

Jonathan: 4:22

Yeah, well, first of all, thank you for the work that you're doing. And being a part of this movement. It's an all hands on deck moment to make the world more inclusive for folks with neuro diverse cities who learn differently. So I value you and your contribution to the field. You know, I've been an advocate on behalf of folks with atypical brains for over 20 years. And that work stems from my own experience of, you know, struggling as a result of my own learning and attentional differences. I was the kid who spent a lot of time chilling out with the janitor in the hallway. I grew up on a first name basis with Shirley the receptionist in the principal's office. I spent a lot of the day you know, hiding in the bathroom to escape, reading out loud, I was diagnosed with a continuum of attention and executive functioning challenges. In elementary school, I was diagnosed with dyslexia, dysgraphia and other winning differences around the same time. And I generally got the short end of the stick for lack of a better word. You know, I was the square peg that did not fit the round hole, American education and I got the message that my differences were deficiencies. And that message took its toll. And when I kind of came out the other end, doing okay, you know, I graduated from from Brown University, I wrote my first book as an undergraduate at Brown and I co founded i a mentoring and advocacy program at Brown as well, when I came out the other end, you know, I felt it was my obligation to make sure other folks who are differently, don't get the short end of that stick and to build a more inclusive world.

Debbie: 6:13

And that's what you've been doing so beautifully. And first of all, I just read your book, *Normal Sucks*, I know, you've written several books. That was the first of your books that I read. And it's so good. It's so compelling. You're such a great storyteller. And I'd love to hear more about, you know, the impetus behind you writing that book, which was, it's very personal, it really tells her story listeners, I really encourage you to check it out, because you will feel encouraged and inspired by Jonathan's message, but can Yeah, can you tell us how you knew this was the book you wanted to write?

Jonathan: 6:50

Well, of course. And first, I think it's important to be transparent about what brought me to writing to begin with, because, you know, I was still at a third grade level. You know, I was consistently told that, that I was a bad writer. You know, I could, my handwriting sucks, you know, spelling sucked, reading sucked, you know, all of it. And so, what brought me to sort of telling my story, and hopefully, in doing that, telling our story, as a community, a little part of it was really a teacher I had, and I celebrate this teacher everywhere, because he's a role model for me as a human. And I hope he's a role model for others. And his name is Mr. Art. He was a third grade teacher. And you know, he was so committed to the idea that every buddy has strengths and talents. And he would ask every kid you know, Hey, what are you good at? What are you good at? And I was only hearing what I was bad at. So I would tell Mr. Archer, you know, I'm not good at anything, you know. And he never gave up on me or anyone else. And one day, he came to me and he said, Hey, you know, you're wrong about yourself. You're so good at telling stories. Now, sometimes they're inappropriate stories you tell, but I don't care. You're so good at telling stories that you could be a writer. I mean, I was nine dyslexic, a writer. Nobody had ever said that to me before in my life. And I looked at the guy and I said, Are you out of your goddamn mind? You know, I can't spell man. And the guy did not miss a beat and looked right at me and said, Jonathan, screw spelling. And I'm like, screw spelling right on, you know, like, yes. Nobody had ever said, Forget what you can't do and focus on what you can do until that guy. So I, I dedicate, you know, all three of my books in different ways to Mr. R. And so normal sucks, in some ways it is the culmination of my advocacy and thinking around how we, as a culture, have developed our systems, or processes and procedures in those systems have developed around this idea that there's a normal human. And subsequently, if you're not a normal human, something's wrong with you. And that message that different is deficient, that something's wrong with you, if you deviate from the mythical middle of the bell curve, that wounds people deeply wounded me deeply. And it was a form of trauma that required intentional acts of healing. And so the book is about that journey of healing, of thriving, not despite my differences, but because of my differences. And while the book tackles I think a lot of high themes, you know, the role of normal in culture where it comes from its historical origin in medical thinking, etc, etc. It's written as a letter to my kids, I got three boys, and impetus that was one day one of my kids saying, Hey, Dad, am I normal? And I'm like, Oh, here we go. Again. You know, like, right back down the rabbit hole. again. And so I wanted to share, frankly, in a very personal way with my kids, first of all, you know how one resists normal and builds a life around it, despite it through it. And then subsequently, obviously, I think that's our challenge as a community, when we've been told that we're not normal. How do we reclaim a sense of self? How do we critique that tyrannical notion of normal? And how do we live in and thrive different?

Debbie: 10:26

Yeah, I loved that conversation. It's something I've talked a lot about in Tilt Parenting and I've talked about, you know, that differently wired is the new normal. And you know, at the end of your book, you talk about this idea of, you know, normal shouldn't really be part of this lexicon. Can you talk a little bit more about the language? I'm really fascinated by the language, the way we pathologize difference. I'm continually frustrated by how slow to change many organizations who are working with our kids are when it comes to updating the language they use. So can you talk a little bit about what you see in your work and where you think this conversation is going?

Jonathan: 11:11

Well, look, language matters. Because it informs the way we think it's the mental models that we use, to make sense of the world. And then perhaps more importantly, not only does it inform the way we think, but it informs the way we act. And you're right to name, a critical inflection point in acting differently towards young folks who are wired differently is, do we see them through a lens and use language that has its historical origin through a medical pathology model? Or do we see it through the lens of a diversity model? And those two different ways to make sense of the world leads us down radically different paths, you know, the medicalization of neuro diversity has historically led us down the path of the remediation of neurodiversity. You know, there's a problem in a person. So what do we go do? Well, we spend our time fixing the person. And that's been the sort of system that we've had embodied in, you know, special education. It's embedded in our knowledge -- I mean, the most popular course at any university is Abnormal Psychology -- is embedded in our professions, you know, the helping professions, psychology, psychiatry, and beyond. And it's not done maliciously, but I do think it has a negative effect on people. Because when you think of yourself as deficient, well, there you go. Different is a better way to see yourself. So that idea of, of a typical brains and bodies opposed to deficient brains and bodies, that idea of neurodiversity opposed to learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, you know, that is the most important shift that we can make. A lot of legacy organizations are stuck in the past. And look, I understand where that comes from. Because you know, organizations like the learning disabilities Association of America, they emerged in a time in which it was important to claim disability, and to acknowledge that young folks weren't stupid, crazy, lazy, but had a internal limitation, right. So it was helpful in that moment to carve out a space and say, Hey, this is real, you know, when I'm making it up. It's not a stupid kid. It's a brain deficiency. But the science tells us otherwise. Now, you know, the science tells us very clearly that while there's very real limitations to dyslexia, ADHD, anxiety, autism and everything in between. There's also very real strengths. And the neurobiology, the MRIs of young folks with neurodiversity shows that very clearly, that's not just my opinion, you know, that's not some mom's opinion. That's, that's the emerging science. So when we think about things to a diversity wins, it leads us to acting differently as opposed to fixing the kid. Our work is to fix the context around the kid, because we have a system that is normalist, right? It's all about trying to norm the square peg, and ablest one that privileges certain brains and bodies over others because of that idea that if you don't fit, something's wrong with you. And so when we claim that diversity framework, it leads us down a powerful path of change for ourselves, our kids, but ultimately, for our system and for all.

Debbie: 14:39

Yeah, I love that word. Normalist. I've just I've never heard that before.

Jonathan: 14:44

I just made that up right now. I like you're making up words. That's how it works. Mark Twain said, Never trust somebody who can spell a word only one way. So there we go. Great.

Debbie: 15:02

You wrote an op ed in the New York Times, I think this probably came out surrounding the release of your book, but you said, we know more than ever about the long term effects of systemic racism and sexism. But do we fully understand and condemn the effects of systemic ableism? Do we even call it that? And, you know, while listening to your book, I will just share that you talk about some of the outcomes historically, for differently abled people, and you talk about eugenics. And it's, it was painful, it was hard to read. And I'm just wondering for you, and doing the research for that, why did you feel it was so important to include that? And how, what was that like for you, as a writer to dig deep in those areas?

Jonathan: 15:45

No, it was essential for me to go to very difficult places in our history, the apex of that being the eugenics movement, partly because we don't know anything about the eugenics movement, but as a whole, you know, you pull, you know, 10, folks, maybe two or three have heard of it. And it was a global movement, for those listeners not familiar with it, that sought out to systemically eradicate people with deficiencies, not my words, their words, and it was a global movement that got institutionalized, and was endorsed by the highest levels of academia, endorsed by the highest levels of government, both in the US and abroad. And it fed a system of institutions. That's the word for it, where folks were incarcerated who were sort of deemed deficient. And it was the foundational ideology of, of Nazi Germany. And the final solution, the notion that there were good and right, normal humans and deficient humans, I'm the first group to be systematically targeted in the Third Reich, the first group to be rounded up, put into institutions, and targeted for elimination, and in many cases, eliminated a war people with atypical brains and bodies in a little talk about movement called Operation T for. And so it was really important for us to, for me to surface that history, to share that history. Because it's not just in the past, but it's in the present and could be in the future. To go back to what we were talking about a minute ago, you know, when we dehumanize a person by calling them sick and defective, it leads to the quote unquote, logical conclusion of, well, let's get rid of that less than human. So we have to be mindful of that. Always. I also think it's important for for us to understand the way that that view of which human is normal and not got embedded in policy, got embedded in systems got embedded in language and academic knowledge, in the same way that rightfully so we as a culture are naming the institutionalized practices around racism, redlining, etc, we need to name the same practices that have been used to, to push out leave behind folks with with different brains and bodies. And so it was hard to spend time with that. But it was important to spend time with that, and it was important to, to share it, you know, and as a writer, finding a way to, you know, bring it to the page in an accessible, but true way was probably one of the biggest challenges of my writing career. And the way that I engage with that challenge, specifically, as it pertains to eugenicist thinking was to really make fun of it was to use the absurdity of it, to mock it as a way to reclaim power from it. The Genesis were really a nefarious bunch, and their ideas became normalized. But when we take it out of that context, they seem absurd. And it's important for us to hold on to that, that these these, this is not right thinking. And it was followed as right thinking in the past, and we need to be mindful of that moving forward.

Debbie: 19:29

Yeah, it was just the way that you laid it out. And and as you said, within the context of the whole book, which is, it's very personal, you know, you're, as you said, you're writing this as a letter to your sons. You write with humor, and it's just a really nice blend, and it's very just accessible. And I just really appreciated the way you included that and laid out this very strong argument against normalcy in a way that I hadn't heard before, and I've been living this stuff for a while. on time, so I just really appreciated that.

I want to switch gears a little bit because I know that my listeners are parents raising kids with learning and attention issues differently wired kids with all kinds of neural divergence. And it's always inspiring to talk with grownups who share some traits with their kids and have a better understanding about what worked for them what they needed. So my first question regarding that is, you know, you mentioned this third grade teacher that really helped you see who you could be and planted that seed for you. But you know, you talked about having this internalized message that you were deficient, as you were growing up, which I know, you know, my kid has experienced many of our kids have internalized. So how did you really come to challenge those messages that others had around you? You know, was it a long process? Where did you have the wherewithal to really make that pivot in your life?

Jonathan: 21:54

You know, the way I like to think about that transformation is with a long arc. You know, I left school for a year, about in sixth grade, I plan for for suicide and self harm that year, I struggled with anxiety, depression, a number of mental health challenges. And I really kind of, for lack of a better word, got through my adolescence, because I had an outlet of athletics, in my case, soccer. And, you know, that really kind of kept me going and frankly, kept me alive. And I don't mean that in any sort of trite sense, in a literal sense. And it kept me with a sort of Northstar for my future, you know, I wanted to be a division one soccer player, that was my goal, etc. And I achieved that goal and ultimately transferred to brown. And that was a long process of transformation. So what were the steps along that I think folks can take from it? Well, there's a few. You know, number one, is that challenging of the deficit model that was embodied by Mr. are in my life, I mean, that was a seminal moment, a seed was planted, you know, young folks with with neurodiversity is here all about what's wrong with them, they don't hear very much about what is right with them. And that has to be challenged, you know, we have to flip that deficit script, and be deeply committed in our educational institutions, and then in our parenting, to be finding the good all the time, and then making time for that good to build on it. A good friend of mine, advocate named Rich Weinfeld, who used to run exceptional education for Baltimore County, said, you have to, to the strength as well, you know, we're so we're so stuck in that, like, let's fix the problem. But we got to build strength as well. Something else that facilitated that journey was me emerging as an advocate for myself, you know, and that doesn't happen in isolation. You know, my mom, you know, she's a character, you know, she's like, She's like, 411, she's a little Irish Bulldog, you know, she's got a high pitched squeaky voice like Minnie Mouse, and she curses like a truck driver. And if you were a teacher doing wrong by her son, you did not want cursing Minnie Mouse in your face, right? But that's where my mom was, you know, we knew she was in the office because every dog in the neighborhood was running away, right? My mom used to say to teachers, I heard this. It might be my own year, she used to say if my son doesn't learn the way he's taught, well guess what? Teach the way he learns. Now, I'll admit, that's a little bit of a paraphrase because when my mom said it, there were a whole

bunch of F bombs in there that I left out. But nonetheless, she fought for me, she fought for my right to be different. And in doing so she modeled my right to be different, and she modeled how I needed to fight for myself. So let's lay that foundation for young folks. But ultimately, For me, the final transformation was the seed that my mom planted that different isn't deficient. You know, I remember when I was first diagnosed, and me and my mom were called in to the school psychologists office to get the results back, right. And me, my mom walked into that office. And it was obvious. The moment we walked in that everybody thought we were getting terrible, tragic news, right? You know, the lights were turned down low. There was soft jazz music playing in the background, there was a box of tissues on the table, right? I can't say that they were given us the diagnosis of all diagnosis and it was a tragedy. And I felt that, you know, I heard that in the deficit language. And I walked out of that room. And I turned to my mom, and I said, Hey, Ma, am I normal? And my mom looks right at me. And she goes, Jonathan, normal sucks. And she was right. You know, that was the foundation, hence the title of the book, The foundation of all ultimately, thriving as somebody with differences, what my mom said to me and how she acted, that rhetoric and with that every day, in my life,

Debbie: 26:12

That's great. I'm just curious, is that who she always was, I mean, did she have to, to your knowledge, have to do her own processing and work around, really embodying that mindset?

Jonathan: 26:27

You know, my mom, you know, her parents, my grandparents, Irish immigrants, work in coal mines in Montana, moved to San Francisco to clean, rich folks homes, and my mom struggled in school, she did not get the support she needed. She spells at a third grade level, like I do to this day, she got the message that she was sort of stupid, crazy, lazy, and that stayed with her. And so it took unbelievable courage that I don't think I completely understand, in her own life, to resist that room of school psychologists and their fancy tests, and they're acronyms behind their name, because she heard the same thing. And not to mention, she came from a social class that was different from the professional class. And for her to be able to walk into that room, and overcome her own sense of shame around this. And her own sense of being less than because of her socio economic background was an act of, not just courage, but an act of unconditional love. And it was hard, it was hard for her. And it is the thing that made a difference in my life. You know, my father couldn't do it. You know, my father neurodiverse himself. You know, it was what's what's wrong with you, you know, stop it, stop it, stop it, I won't have a retarded my family, that kind of stuff. But my mom could, and the fact that she could have made all the difference.

Debbie: 27:58

You talked about advocacy, and that I know, you know, that is a big piece of what I am, I know that they are really trying to empower middle schoolers to, to grow up knowing how to ask for what they need to get what they need. And I'm just wondering, you know, when you talk to groups of students, how do you get them more engaged in having more of a participatory role in their own education. And similarly, with parents who are concerned that their kids are not advocating for themselves, maybe are saying, actually, I think I don't need

this help. And you know, which I know a lot of kids go through in high school and college, they think I think I can do this on my own. I don't need accommodations. Um, can you talk about that self advocacy piece, and how we can encourage that in our kids?

Jonathan: 28:48

Well, first, I want to be really clear that while you know that seed and others were planted in my journey, that took them a while for them to blossom flourish, the advocacy, one in particular, you know, hey, I was the kid, I left sixth grade, I left my school district and went to a different school district in seventh grade, nobody knew me, you know, so guess what I'm gonna do, I'm gonna be the normal kid, right? Like, I'm gonna, I'm not I'm not going to be, I'm not going to get any services. I'm not going to claim this, I'm going to pass as normal. And I understand that. And that was a part of my struggle in Late Middle School, frankly, all through high school, was the struggle to claim advocacy. And the way I broke out of that is kind of twofold. And this is what I share with both students and with parents. Number one, look, we can't tell a kid to advocate for themselves, get an accommodation, if they're going to be stigmatized for getting that accommodation. Let me give you one of the best examples of that I've seen, you know, I remember when I was 14. And I took the risk of, of advocating for the accommodation of time extensions on a history exam, I show up to this history exam, you know, class of 30 kids, the teacher stands in front of the class and says, Hey, anybody who needs extra time on this exam, should stand up now and leave the room? Did I stand up? No. Did anybody else have the 678 10 people who had the right to a combination stand up? No, there's a stigma on it, you know, and we have to work systemically to make sure that the accommodations are not stigmatizing. Otherwise, it's a very difficult thing to ask a young person 1415, when being a part of the group is, is everything, it's, it's a lot to ask them to step up in that context. So I think we need to do a good job of naming the practices and the systems. And I don't mean that abstractly, I mean that on the day to day, that stigmatize accommodations and services for folks with different brains and bodies, and we need to be advocates for those to change in young people's eyes. Now, the other thing I'll say, though, is even in an imperfect system, I tell this to young folks, we gotta fight for our right to be different. And one of the ways that I framed that fight, is to say that it's not an accommodation for your problem. It's an accommodation for the limitations in an ablest system. You know, I like to tell young folks, look, I didn't overcome my dyslexia. If I overcame anything I overcame a problem in the environment. And we need to fight against that, you know, and you know, what, like, you have a right to be angry, you do. You know, there's a lot of angry young folks out there, I talk to him every day. And too often, they're sort of told all, hey, don't be pissed off, whatever, whatever, whatever. But the reality is, they have a right to be angry, not at themselves, but at the fact that they're chilling out with the janitor in the hallway, the fact that we call reading smart and ignore all the other manifestations of human intelligence, they have an angry right to be angry at a system built for the normal, not the different. And what you should do with that anger is not what consumed you. And hey, I'll tell you, it almost consumed me, as you know, for the book I struggled with, with self harm and substance abuse for a while. And we have to use anger to fuel you. You know, there's a really great advocate out there. His name is Roberta Rivera, he's a, he's a friend of mine, poet, entrepreneur, dyslexic guy. And he likes to say, use your pain as propane. And I think that's the tipping point that we have to engender and support young people. And again, that tipping point is contingent upon us saying, You're not deficient, you're different. And you're

getting the short end of the stick, because we've built a system not around the reality of human difference, but around the myth of human normality.

Debbie: 32:58

So good. Alright, so I have two, two last questions for you. And one relates to a story you tell in the book. I don't remember when this I think this was earlier on when you were really starting to speak at schools. And you talk to the school with young kids who were neuro divergent, and you were kind of propped up by the school admins. And the teacher is being like, Look, he used to be like you and now he's fixed. Now he's better. And you saw these kids who were, rather than being embraced and seen for who they were, were being told they were broken, but that they could be fixed. And I don't remember exactly what you said. But I think you said you did not get paid for that speaking engagement. And I'm just wondering, you know, what you've seen and experienced, Oh, you've been doing this work for 20 years? Like, are you seeing the paradigm shift? Like where are we in terms of this sea change for how we perceive difference in our schools and in society?

Jonathan: 34:03

You know, what I said to that group of young folks, was normal sucks. And hence, the retraction of the honorarium. And, you know, I've been trying to say that for 20 years everywhere I go in those terms, and then in others. And, you know, what I, what I've seen is this, I've seen a story of, you know, one step forward, half step back, one and a half steps forward, two steps back, and two things drive that halting progress. And I do want to say, however, that I do believe we are at an inflection point where we can stop the halting progress and have a transformative breakthrough. But to get to that place, we have to understand what are the constraints that are making it so difficult to have inclusion and social justice for folks with neurodiversity? Well, the constraints are twofold, one That decision versus different paradigm, you know, you still read the academic research around a continuum of neurodiversity. And it's not neuro diversity, it's deficiency. And you look at a set of practices in the systems that and professions that feed that it's a set of practices around remediating the problem in the person opposed to advocating for changing the context. And that's holding us back. You know, it is, you know, when Dave Flink and I first embarked on on AI back in the day, and this is well over 20 years ago, this is this is, you know, 2023 years ago, we were, we were criticized, like, shamed directly by the sort of LD establishment, because the, the message we were trying to bring kids is, you know, what, you're different, and you should fight for your right to be different. And it was so entrenched in the community that you got to use the word learning disabled. And if you didn't, then you were a pariah. Now, is that changing a little bit? Sure. But as you rightfully pointed out, it's changing too slowly. So the inflection point is to understand that neurodiversity is an essential part of the human condition. We have entrepreneurs and artists, and not despite their differences, but because of them. And it's like biological diversity, we need the continuum of species to have a healthy, healthy ecosystem, we need the same with the continuum of brains and bodies. Now, the second challenge is public policy. You know, I am so optimistic about educators on the frontlines. If I've seen one change over 20 years, it's the number of educators now for the younger generation, immersed in multiple intelligences and all that, who say to me, Look, you know, this is this is the future, I want to be that Mr. are in a kid's life. And then comes the buck. And guess what the buttons, the buttons? Well, I got to teach the standardized test, I

have to do this, why lose my job, and that teacher is not wrong. And so we have to extricate ourselves from No Child Left Behind. I know, we've changed administration's on multiple different occasions. But we have not subsequently changed that policy. It's important to note that the Obama Biden administration doubled down on many, many of the core tenets of No Child Left Behind. And the Biden administration wanted to have standardized tests this year at the end of a pandemic. So we need to hold on to the fact that what's constraining education, in many respects, is the antithesis of differentiated instruction, neuro diversity, and that's the notion of a standardized student. And until we change that policy, that teacher on the front line, who wants to do right, is going to be constrained in what they can do. So we change the way we think, through our language. And then we change the way we act individually with our kids, collectively as a movement, but then ultimately, we change the way we act as a system.

Debbie Reber: 38:00

I love hearing your optimism. And you're reminding me I had a conversation with someone earlier this week. And I can't remember what was, but about education, and how hopeful and optimistic they were because so many new teachers or teachers coming into the field, we're learning about universal design for learning, which is just a whole new way to my understanding of of teaching that really is about creating flexible learning environments and accommodating the individual. So that's really exciting to consider and think that that's happening. So let me ask you one wrap up question. So my audience is primarily parents and caregivers, raising differently wired kids, the whole idea and mission of Tilt is that difference does not equal deficit, and that we have to be part of this revolution to change these systems to change the way our kids are seen and embraced. So if you could encourage my listeners to help move this mission forward, what would your rally cry for the work that you're doing be for my audience?

Jonathan: 39:11

What my rally cry would be to channel your inner cursing Mickey Mouse, you know, like, that's my, that's my challenge to you. Believe in the child in which you're a caregiver of, believe in their value as a human being not despite their differences, but because of their differences, and be that person in their life. But perhaps more importantly, more broadly, be that person who fights for every single human being right? To learn and with differently, and if I do that, on the day to day, you know, it's been 20 years, it'll be 20 more if you do that, Debbie on the day to day and if we all play our part We'll have a movement that challenges this tyrannical notion that there's a normal human, a notion that has been used to discredit folks with different brains and bodies, of course, but it's a notion that has been used to dehumanize black and brown folks, LGBTQ plus folks. It's been used to declassify and dehumanize an entire continuum of human beings. And our work is ultimately about fighting for every single human being's right to be different.

Debbie Reber: 40:31

Fantastic Thank you. So everyone, you hear that? That's, that's our work. And I hope you're all feeling as motivated and inspired as I am. And I really encourage everyone to check out Jonathan's books. *Normal Sucks* is the most recent one his book before that was *The Short Bus* and what was your first book called? I don't have it pulled up right now.

Jonathan:

It was a book called Learning Outside the Lines.

Debbie:

That's right. Yes. So what you wrote while you're in university, which is super impressive. So where can people learn more about you and connect and maybe watch some of your talks and dive into your content?

Jonathan: 41:09

Yeah, hey, most importantly, feel free to reach out to me directly on the social stuff. That's the Jonathan Mooney, all the same at every platform, you can hit me a DM, or you can hit me an email, we'll go old school, it's Jonathan Mooney, and be calm. I welcome comments, thoughts, stories from everyone, anyone. I also want to say to listeners, you know, I'm celebrating 20 years as an advocate. And in recognition of the work still to be done. I am donating presentations to communities, schools, and individuals who are on a common mission. So if that's you, and I can be an amplifier, I can be an ally to your mission in any way. Feel free to reach out to me in those different formats. And we'll make it happen together and we'll make change together.

Debbie: 42:03

Wow, that's such a generous offer. I'm sure you're going to hear from lots of folks. So thank you again, I'm so happy to be connected with you and to champion the work that you're doing. And yeah, thank you so much for taking the time to chat with us today.

Jonathan: 42:19

Oh, hey, you are so rad I love your show. I love your book. And I love what you're all about and the difference that you're making in the world than I was that was honored to be a small part of that. That work today.