10 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW: TRANSCRIPT

Take a Pause

Hey there, I'm Debbie Reber from Tilt Parenting. And if you're watching this video, there's a good chance you've recently gotten new information or insights into how your child is wired, or you've learned that your child is neurodivergent. Or maybe you don't have any concrete diagnosis for your child, but you recognize that your child is in some way differently wired, and you're realizing that your parenting journey is likely going to come with some additional challenges or considerations you weren't prepared for.

You might be feeling overwhelmed right now, you might be feeling afraid, you might be experiencing sadness, you might just not know what you're supposed to be doing next. Maybe you're overwhelmed with information, or maybe you don't have any information at all and therefore don't know where to start. So where I would encourage you to begin is by TAKING A PAUSE. Take some time to digest new information you've learned or what it is that you're coming to understand about your child. This is so important because I know that when we start to identify that our child has some unique needs, or that they're going to need supports that we weren't anticipating, we can quickly get caught up in "fix-it mode."

It's quite possible that you received information or feedback from some sort of professional — a pediatric neurologist, a neuropsych evaluator, an occupational therapist, a psychologist, an educator — and that that information came with recommendations for things you should start doing *immediately*. And it can all feel incredibly *urgent* and we may believe we have to get on this right away or it's going to be too late.

And so I just want you to know this — *there is time*. You have time to take a pause. You have time to take a breath. You have time to digest and research and take the time you need so that you can be thoughtful about how you want to proceed, and do so in a way that is in alignment with your family's values, and in a way that feels supportive and positive for you.

When we *don't* take this pause, we are likely to dive into frantic fix-it mode, and that approach is often rooted in fear, and probably isn't going to feel good for anyone involved. So let me just say this again — there is time. There is time for you, and for your child, and if you parent with a partner, for you and your partner, to take the time that you need. To connect with others who might offer insights, to figure out where your values are, to really work to understand who your child is and where they could most benefit from supports right now.

So take the time that you need and don't let anyone force a timeline or agenda on you that doesn't feel right to you. *You* are in the driver seat here. And you deserve to take that pause so that you can move forward in a way that feels good and can be most positive for you and your family.

Your Child is More Than Their Diagnosis

If you're participating in this series, it's likely that you already have some sort of a diagnosis for your child or you are seeking more concrete information in the form of a diagnosis to give you more insight into your child. And diagnoses can be tricky because they can feel big and ominous and complicated. And we can look at a diagnosis as if it's the answer to our questions or the solutions to things that feel hard. So I think it's really important to get clear on what a diagnosis actually is. And I'll start by talking about what a diagnosis is *not*.

A diagnosis is *not* a blueprint for our kids. It is not a solution. It is not the be-all-end-all of what matters about who our child is. And a diagnosis doesn't define who your child is today, who they'll be tomorrow, and what their potential is for the future.

What a diagnosis *is* is information. That's right. Information. A diagnosis can provide information about how one's brain functions, and give insights into neurological variations our child may have that can result in challenges, or deficits, or weaknesses in certain areas. Diagnoses can also provide insights into our kids' gifts and strengths, strengths we may not have even known were there.

I believe that diagnoses can be very helpful because they can provide information about your child's unique neurobiology, and this information can help you better understand areas where they may have lagging skills, and areas where they struggle, and perhaps even more important, *why* they struggle in those areas.

It can also provide *context* for behavior that may be perplexing, because now that we understand that the behavior is a child's way of communicating and is connected to their brain wiring, we can be better prepared to respond to that child in a way that supports their development. Diagnoses are often a key part of getting your child accommodations or supports in school and beyond that could help them strengthen their skills in those lagging areas. Diagnoses can also be helpful when it comes to getting certain types of therapies covered by health insurance.

So those are some practical things to know about diagnoses, and I think they're worth knowing. And again, I am a proponent of evaluations that thoughtfully and responsibly assess both a child's strengths and weaknesses. But ultimately, any diagnosis or diagnoses that our child has, or another way to say that is, any neurological differences that our child has been identified as having, is *information*. It is *not* who your child is. The labels associated with your child's neurodivergence do not define your child. They do not tell your child story, they do not predict your child's future.

What they do do is offer context, and information, so that you and others who interact with your child, can better understand the way in which they experience the world, and better know how to support them in growing in their areas of both strengths and deficits, and gaining the skills that would support their ability to live self-actualized life.

You Are the Expert In Your Child

Depending on where you are on your journey with your child, you may be getting lots of advice. You may be in touch with experts who are sharing what they believe is going on based on their professional experience, and what they think is the best course of action moving forward. And I know that this can feel incredibly overwhelming, because suddenly we have other people, other people, other people with letters like PhD or MD behind their names, who often have very strong opinions about who our child is — this child that we have spent years and years caring for, nurturing, feeding, comforting, playing with, and loving with all our heart. And yet, we can be filled with doubt about what we know to be true about our child when we start getting information from other people who believe they know better than us.

Now, I want to be clear — it's really important to find and access people who can support us through this journey, and I'm actually going to talk about that on another day of this series — but it's also really important to remember that *you* are the most important expert on who your child is.

No one will ever know your child like you. And because we are the expert in our child, it's important that we trust our instincts, and that we work to tune into our intuition and our inner wisdom when it comes to navigating this path. Because when we give our power away to other people, or we trust their advice against our own better judgment, we may make decisions regarding our kids' education or therapy or other interventions that aren't actually in alignment with what we believe and know to be true.

And so it's really important that you know that these words are true: You are the ultimate expert in your child. There is no thought leader or author or a parenting coach or therapist who knows better than you what's right for your child. So trust yourself. And trust that you have what it takes to support the child that you are raising.

And if you're feeling overwhelmed with decisions you have to make or you're having trouble accessing your intuition, go back to the first day of this series, and remember that you have time. You can take a pause. Slowing down and taking that pause can give you space to get clearer on your thinking and what feels right for you.

All Behavior is Communication

If you're raising a differently wired child, then I can say with almost absolute certainty that you have experienced or are experiencing some behavioral challenges with your child. In fact, there's a good chance that behavioral challenges were the first clues that your child is moving through the world differently. And actually, that means that the behavior did its job. That behavior communicated to you that your child has needs that aren't being met, or skills that haven't been developed yet, or that the way they're moving through the world requires more support than they're currently getting or a different approach.

That's because all behavior is communication. Absolutely everything. Every tantrum, every meltdown, every tear — it's all providing us with information about what our child needs right now. Dr. Ross Greene, who wrote a wonderful book called *The Explosive Child* and is the founder of the nonprofit Lives in the Balance, beautifully states that: *Kids do well when they can*. And in saying that, he means that when a child is *not* doing well, it's because they *can't*. It's not because they won't. They don't have the skills necessary to do differently yet.

And so we want to remember that every behavior, even the incredibly challenging, tricky, disruptive, difficult-to-navigate behavior, behavior that very likely brought you to explore Tilt Parenting in the first place, is there to let us know that there's either an unsolved problem, or an unmet need, or a lagging skill. And that's it.

This is such an important reframe to make, because the current parenting paradigm tends to value compliance and "good behavior" over everything else and encourages parents to address behavioral challenges by using consequences or rewards or punishments to get unwanted behavior to change. But those approaches don't actually help our kids *learn skills*, or address the actual underlying problems that their behavior is communicating.

So when we can look at tricky behavior and think to ourselves, "Hmmm…I wonder what the unsolved problem is here?" Or "I wonder why my child's nervous system is being triggered right now that's leading them to respond in this way?" Or "I wonder what skills my child needs so that they can stay emotionally regulated right now?" then we can get curious about how we can support our child in developing their skills rather than making them feel bad for things that are beyond their control or are simply their bodies' responses to navigating a world that isn't set up to support their way of being.

The idea that all behavior is communication is truly a game changer. And so I encourage you to take to heart that phrase that Dr. Ross Greene popularized which, again, is *Kids do well* *when they can*. And remember that if your child is not doing well, if they are exhibiting behavior that is challenging or difficult, it's because they don't have the ability or skills to do it differently yet.

Neurodivergent Children Aren't Broken

So in today's video, I want to talk about the idea that our children are not broken. You might be thinking, *Yes, I know my kid's not broken*. But you also may feel that there are things about your child that you want to "fix." And I'm using air quotes when I say *fix*. First of all, if this is you, I'm going to say right upfront: No judgment from me. We live in a culture and a society where anyone who deviates from the "norm" is perceived as broken. We live in a culture where fitting in and conforming, being unique but still "typical enough," is more valued, and more accepted.
When people have neurodifferences or disabilities that don't easily allow them to navigate society or that require extra supports in order to do so, we may see those neurodifferences as problems in need of fixing. We might look at our kids and think that they are in need of fixing, too.

I wanted to talk about this because along the path of raising a differently wired child, there are going to be plenty of books, articles, and experts who adopt this "fix-it" mentality. They will be talking about *cures*. They will be talking about eliminating behaviors that could stand out so that a child can better blend into or fit into neurotypical society. You might read and hear that pathologizes neurodiversity. For instance, talking about an "epidemic" of autism or the "risks" of having ADHD. Even the word disorder is pathologizing with negative connotations. It sends the message that this is a problem in need of fixing.

But neurodivergence, being differently wired, means that a person's brain is wired in a unique way that deviates from what is considered to be "typical." And I have to just say that there are lots of people these days pushing back on the idea that *normal* even exists. In fact, one of my favorite book titles in recent years is Jonathan Mooney's book *Normal Sucks*. Side note: I highly recommend checking that book out.

But what we want to do is shift our perspective from this idea that there's something wrong with our child, or something that we need to cure or fix, and instead respect that our child has a unique neurobiology, and that the way they experience and interact with the world is a direct reflection of that wiring. When we do that, we can think about best supporting this unique human so they can navigate the world in a way that allows them to be the best version of themselves, rather than trying to change who they are so that they can better fit into society or appear to be more "normal." And this is also critical to do because we don't want our children to grow up believing that there is something wrong with who they inherently are.

So this is an important reframe. And I understand that there are likely aspects of who your child is and the way that they're wired that makes certain things challenging, whether that be school, or sports, or friendships, or just navigating family and siblings and the busy lives we all have. But even if there are skills we'll want to help our child develop and areas of growth, we want to be sure that our intention isn't to try to "cure" or "fix" their neurodivergence.

You can find lots of resources on Tilt Parenting that lean more deeply into this idea of parenting with a strengths-based lens and in a way that respects and embraces who our child is. But the bottom line is that our kids are not broken.

Find Experts You Trust & Who Respect Your Family

If your child has been newly identified with some sort of neurodevelopmental difference, it's likely that you've been given a list of recommendations for different types of therapies or next steps. I want to acknowledge up front that this can be incredibly overwhelming and daunting. There's figuring out who the right people are, finding these people, navigating insurance systems, extensive intake processes, filling out tons of forms. And then, of course, there are the waitlists, which can be months and months and months long. And all of this is extra challenging because we can often feel a sense of urgency, like we need to figure this stuff out now, and that we don't actually have time for a waitlist.

What I have found is that our kids will need different types of support during different phases of their life. And there may be times in their childhood and teen years when they won't need any outside support, depending on what's happening with them and where they are on their developmental journey.

Regardless of what the specific support looks like, what's crucial is that the people who interact with and support your child and your family, do so *respectfully*. I talked about this a little bit in the third video about *you being the expert in your child*. And that is still true! But we often do invite other people into our worlds to support our kids, and us as parents, and because these people will be engaging with the incredible humans that we're raising, we want to be sure that we trust these people. We want to be sure that they respect our point of view, that we don't feel like we're being talked down to, that we aren't in a relationship dynamic where we don't have a voice or we feel pressured to defer to their expertise even when it doesn't feel right.

The right people are people who take the time to really understand who our kids are, who aren't using cookie-cutter approaches to address our kids' unique deficits or challenges. The right people are those who truly see and respect who our children are. Because relationship and connection is really at the heart of our child's ability to engage in meaningful growth.

And because we want our kids to feel good about themselves in whatever kind of intervention they're engaged in, whether that's occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, tutoring, executive function coaching, or whatever.

One last note on the experts we work with — you may be pointed in the direction of therapies that are rooted in behaviorist models, and that use rewards and consequences in order to try and change a child's behavior. But as we talked about earlier in this series, behavior is just giving us information about a lagging skill or an area where a child doesn't have the ability to do something yet. So we want to support our kids through therapies that help kids develop skills while supporting their nervous systems, and that respect their unique neurodevelopmental profile as opposed to those that are focused primarily on outward behavior.

We want our kids to build on their strengths, while also developing in their areas of weakness, but in a way that preserves their self-confidence, their self-worth, and their sense of agency. So be sure the people who engage with your kids and with your family are starting from a place of respect, and with a genuine understanding of your goals for your children and your family.

How to Navigate School

I know that one of the biggest questions people on this parenting journey have is: *What should I do about school?* And just a heads up, this video is a little longer than the others in this series. Because I have a few things to say about it.

If your child is not in school yet, you might be wondering how you should go about finding the right school for your child. If your child is already attending a school, you might be unsure about how much information to share with the school about diagnoses you might have for your child, especially if you've just received new information.

Navigating school is undoubtedly one of the trickiest parts about raising a neurodivergent child because most schools, especially traditional public schools, aren't set up or designed to support differently wired kids in a way that works really well. And I know that what inclusion and support looks like in schools varies by country, and so depending on where you live, your experience may be very different from someone else's who is watching this video.

With that said, if you are in a public school in the United States, or you plan to send your child to public school, the good news is that there are safeguards in place that are *theoretically* designed to ensure your child has the accommodations and supports they need to be successful in school. In *actuality*, it often doesn't quite work out that way, for a variety of reasons. And it can be challenging to advocate for and get the types of accommodations that we know our kids would benefit from. Many schools are under-resourced, and in large classrooms, which tends to be the case in many public schools, it can be very difficult for teachers to implement every aspect of a child's 504 plan or IEP. But again, if your child is in the public school system here in the US, there is a path for helping our kids in school, though it can be a lengthy and frustrating process. And I know different countries offer different types of support for neurodevelopmental differences and it will look different depending on where you live.

If your child is in a private school setting, or if you intend to go that route with your child, you may be wondering whether or not you should disclose information you have about your child's neurodivergence. I hear from a lot of parents who are concerned that their kids either won't be admitted to a private school, or that they will be asked to leave a private school, if they are transparent and open about the diagnoses they have for their kids. And I completely understand that conflict over whether or not to share. It can feel very vulnerable. And many parents are concerned that if they share too much information, their child will be perceived differently by the teachers in the school, that they're essentially sending them to school with a target on their back. I understand that, and honestly, that can actually be true. It's a valid concern.

But, if we have information that we know would support our child in having a successful school experience, we owe it to our kids *and* to the school to give them the best chance of success. The truth is, if a school is unwilling to respect and support a child's neurodivergence, then that school will be a safe environment for our child. Not sharing pertinent information could set up our kids for getting in trouble, for being labeled as disruptive, to struggle academically, to feel frustrated and confused, and so on.

So I advocate sharing enough information about our child to provide context for behavior that may be misunderstood, situations that can be especially challenging, and strategies for re-regulating after difficult moments. We don't have to use labels if that doesn't feel right, or give schools a binder or handbook on our child. But giving them a heads up about areas where our child may need extra support, challenges they're facing, or skills they're still working on, can be incredibly helpful. And it's something teachers appreciate as well.

So I have a lot more to say about navigating schools, but for now I'm just going to wrap up with this: I know that sometimes parent-teacher relationships can be complicated at best and combative at worst, but try to assume the best intention for the educators who are working with our kids. We want to try to design a positive alliance with our kids' teachers so that together we can help our child have a good school year.

And I just have one more thing to say about school, and that is this. Because navigating the education system is invariably one of the most challenging parts of this parenting journey, it's important that we work to be flexible in the way we think about their educational path. Many differently wired kids attend multiple schools over the course of their education. Many parents find themselves unexpectedly homeschooling for some period of time. Sometimes the perfect school ends up being a disaster. Sometimes the neighborhood public school ends up working out perfectly, at least for now. So knowing this, I encourage you to be curious and open minded about your child's educational path, and that with every school year, you take the time to reevaluate and consider whether or not this is still the right school for your child. And it's not, explore ways to make a change or advocate within the school to make it a more positive experience for your child.

Your Mindset is Key

At the end of my last video, I encouraged you to be curious and open minded. What I was really talking about is mindset. And mindset deserves its own video because the way you think about parenting a differently wired child is going to affect how it feels for you, and as a result how your child is going to feel. This is really at the heart of all of my work at Tilt Parenting; it's important that we as parents and caregivers do our own deep inner work to address our fears and concerns and other tricky emotions that are wrapped up in our parenting life. We need to do that work on ourselves so that we can show up for who our child is.

In my book *Differently Wired*, I talk about parenting from a place of possibility rather than fear. And I acknowledge that many of us, perhaps most of us, find ourselves spending a majority of time in that fear place.

We can find ourselves worrying about just about anything, most often some form of future unknowns. But fear is the very thing that keeps us stuck. Fear creates a culture of apprehension and anxiety in our families, and affects the way our children, many of whom are already highly sensitive and anxious, feel about themselves. Operating from fear leads to more limited thinking and fearful energy, which both we and our kids will feel, and it will create a barrier to our child uncovering and experiencing their extraordinary possibilities.

So we want to do our own work to actively cultivate a mindset of curiosity and possibility. I'm not saying this is easy to do, and if this resonates with you, I encourage you to explore the resources on Tilt Parenting and in my book that are very much designed to help parents do this work.

But one way to begin doing this, even today, is to just notice when you're feeling stressed or anxious or worried or afraid about some aspect of your child's life or a future. And once you notice it, try to take a pause, take a breath, and remind yourself that your child's story is not written yet. Tell yourself that no one can predict the future. And see if you can shift that stress or anxiety into *curiosity*.

You can even write down or say "I'm curious to know how this is going to unfold" or "I'm curious to know what this is going to look like." Because if there's one thing I know about our kids, they will keep changing, and they will keep surprising us. Our job is to show up for who they are right now, and hold on for the ride.

Self-Care is Not Optional

I am not going to bury the lede… I am a big proponent of self-care. I talk about it in my book, I talk about it on my podcast, I talk about it in nearly every interview or talk that I do, and yes, I'm going to talk about it here. I think that the idea of "self-care" is often misunderstood, or it seems like it's indulgent, or it's something only certain people have time for or access to.

But I am here to say right here and now, that self care is *not* indulgent and, in fact, it is 1000% not optional. Self-care, and actually I like to use the phrase conscious maintenance, is one of the most important things you can do in order to support yourself in showing up as a parent with the kind of energy and confidence and clarity that would best serve you, your children, and your family.

Let's just break down the term self-care: Self, meaning us, and care meaning to tend to. How can we be the parent or caregiver that our child needs, and have the capacity to respond to the demands of raising a neurodivergent child, if we're not tending to ourselves?

During these past few years of Covid, there have been a flurry of viral articles highlighting the general sense of depletion that we as a society are experiencing…this idea that our emotional reserves are empty. And that's tough because in my experience, parents of differently wired kids tend to *already* have low reserves as a baseline because of the demands and stresses that can be part of this journey.

So it really is critical that we take care of ourselves — our emotional lives, our mental state, our physical selves, our spiritual selves. Because if all we're doing is giving and doing for everyone else in our lives, especially for our kids, we are going to burn out. You may have already burned out.

Not only do we deserve to take care of ourselves, but our kids deserve parents and caregivers who model the message that we matter. We want our kids to see us intentionally supporting our own well-being, so that they grow up understanding that being a human means taking care of oneself.

Again, I talk about self-care a lot on Tilt Parenting, so I'm not going to go into all the things in this video, but I do want to leave you with a few thoughts. First, I wanted to share my definition for self-care: *self-care is something that is both intentional and just for you*. It's about intentionally choosing an action or perhaps an inaction with the goal of supporting your mental, emotional, physical, and/or spiritual well being. That's it. *You* get to decide what that looks like for you, what actions of self-care meet that criteria. *You* get to decide how much time you devote to it, where it happens, when it happens.

But I hope that you take intentional time every day for some small act of conscious maintenance, even if it's just 2 minutes. Some small act to remind your whole being that you matter. To do something to fill up your reserves so you can best show up for whatever happens today, wherever your journey with your child takes you next. In fact, I'm going to end this video with a challenge. As soon as this video ends, which it's going to in about 20 seconds, write down on a Post-it note or a piece of paper one thing that you commit to doing today that is intentional and it's just for you and will support your well-being. Okay…go.

You Are Not Alone

Hey there! There are so many things that I want to share with you about this incredible journey of raising differently wired kids, but I'm going to wrap up this 10 day series with something I hope you remember and know to be true and that is that you are not alone.

There may have been times in the past, and there may be times in the future, or maybe you're feeling this way today, where you feel overwhelmed and completely alone. Like no one else knows how truly hard things are; that no one else has ever been in this exact situation with their child; that no one else really gets what you're really going through; no one else understands the stressors that you're dealing with; no one else really gets your kid.

Parenting a differently wired child can be very isolating, because we, and our kids, often get feedback telling us that we're outliers. That normal is "here" and we're on the outside of that.

But that is simply not true. *Millions* of people…no, strike *that…billions* of people in the world are neurodivergent. Because we know that at least one and five people are in some way differently wired. Also, it's way more than that. So you're not alone, and in fact you're in fantastic company.

But despite the magnitude of our community, it can still be overwhelming and lonely. So I encourage you to find and connect with people who really get what you're going through. And if there are people in your life who don't get it, perhaps don't get it in an aggressive way, meaning they question your choices, or judge your parenting or your kids, or simply don't approve or believe what's happening in your world, consider creating some buffers between you and those people.

It's really important that you find your people — people you can turn to for advice, people who will pick up the phone and listen after a hard day, community groups where you can share specific challenges and hear from others who've been there and can share some of their hard won wisdom.

So whether it's Facebook groups, or an in-person group, maybe a small group of parents at your kids school, maybe my Differently Wired Club, maybe another parent group — find your people, create your village. A village made of parents who truly see you, and can truly see and embrace who your kids are.

Honestly, this is the main reason why I started Tilt Parenting, even though at the time I felt like no one else understood what I was going through, I knew that my people were everywhere. And the fact that you are watching this video shows me that I was right.

So I just want to say thank you for being a part of my community, thank you for being part of this growing movement of parents, thank you for helping me feel less alone. And I hope you found this 10 day series helpful, and that you feel like you have a more solid foundation from which to move forward with this journey.