

15 - Supporting Children with Special Needs in Early Childhood Education

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Purpose: The purpose of the transcripts is to provide readers and listeners with a written version of each episode of the UAGC Center for Early Childhood Education's Early Childhood Chatter Podcast so they can follow along with the audio content. URL at www.uagc.edu/ece-center/chatter-podcast

Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Hi, everyone, and welcome to Early Childhood Chatter with Dr. Shipley and Dr. Heald.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Twice a month, we come to you with a 10-minute professional development that you can quickly listen to for new ideas to use today. So please subscribe for future episodes, and let's get started. Today, we're here with Dr. Nichole Rich. She's the owner of Club Z of Cape Cod, a tutoring service and an adjunct professor of both Grand Canyon University and Ashford University*. For eight years, she spent time in the primary classroom as a special education teacher before moving into administration and was an early childhood director principal of Center Elementary School.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: I am so excited to be here with Dr. Rich today, and she is going to talk about the process of supporting children with special needs in early childhood education. So, without further ado, let's get started. Dr. Rich, can you talk a little bit about the process of having children in early childhood education evaluated?

Dr. Nichole Rich: I sure can. So, the process always starts when someone, whether it's a parent, a teacher, or the pediatrician for that child, has a concern about a child hitting the developmental milestones or just concerns in general. Of course, children will all develop at a different rate overall within each area of development. Usually, when there's a concern, it's because a child might not be progressing along as would be expected. And so, the first step is a referral to the public school system, or if the child is younger than two and a half years old, it would be to the local early intervention agency. So, the request for an evaluation is always in writing to the school district, and they have five days to respond to that request in writing.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Okay, okay. That makes sense. So, what advice or suggestions might you have for parents who, you know, they're thinking that their child might be developmentally delayed? What is, you know, what is the first step they should take or any advice or suggestions?

Dr. Nichole Rich: Yeah, so, you know, when parents have concerns or they're not sure if, you know, the child should be evaluated, they become very anxious, and it's so understandable, and they want answers quickly. But the process does take some time. So, the first recommendation I would have is to be patient. The second would be to make sure that you talk with the pediatrician to see what your options are. Then, you know, sometimes the pediatrician might not see the same things or might not be concerned. You know, they see, you know, this is their profession. So, they're used to seeing kids and knowing when something might be a cause for a concern. So trust, you know, the medical professional in this case, or if your child is in a formalized program like a child care setting, or even in a play school or a play group, talk with that teacher as well, because they're used to seeing kids at this age and seeing what is developmentally appropriate. You know, kids all, they may be lagging in one area and on target in other areas, and that one area just needs a little bit more time to come up to speed to the others. So, consulting with the teacher, consulting with the pediatrician, and remember, it's important that you shouldn't compare your child to other children or to your other children that you have. So, for example, parents sometimes have multiple children, they'll have two or three, and it's very common for that second or third child to be maybe slow to speak because that older child is speaking for them a lot. So I would also recommend get the child involved in sports or activities or play groups, because it's a great way to not only encourage independence and individuality, but to also help them work on social pragmatic skills and so many

other skills that will help develop and help these kids work on these other developmental areas that the parent might have a concern for, but realize that maybe they haven't had the experience to work on a skill to strengthen that area.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Such valuable information. I'll tell you, I'm guilty of it with my youngest. My oldest did all the talking and my youngest just kind of laid back, and I really thought something was wrong. So families who might be in a situation where the child is just kind of observing the world around them, and they're not quite there yet with their own language and communication, do you have any strategies that parents and families, you know, grandparents can try just to help maybe support language development a little bit in the home?

Dr. Nichole Rich: Sure. You know, one of the biggest strategies, Dr. Heald, is to just simply have conversations with the child. Constantly be speaking with them, asking for their opinion or asking what they think, asking what they observe, you know, bring out that curiosity in the kids and really continue to help them, you know, develop that. Because, you know, kids always ask the question, especially, you know, toddlers to three, they're, you know, always asking the question, why? And I know it can be tiresome for parents or, you know, childcare providers to always be answering why, but it's so important because that's such a key piece to the kids observing the world around them. So, we really want to keep bringing that out and not discouraging them to use their language and to also, you know, not correct them or gently correct them if they're having trouble speaking. You know, their self-esteem is so important. So, if speech is an area where they're struggling or articulation of speech, you know, just maybe restating what the word should sound like and not saying, oh, no, no, no, it's not that word. You know, and just really supporting and cheering them on is so important.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: I love that. I love the fact that you're providing strategies for the parents, but you're also really honing in on the fact that our children are curious and they're in the process of learning themselves. So, it might just take, you know, a little bit longer. Our society and our parents are just busy and sometimes the internet and sometimes that virtual environment is a starting point for resources. So, do you have any advice of where parents can go to kind of look at what the milestones might be and what the developmental domains might be and even what the process might be for early intervention and identification?

Dr. Nichole Rich: Sure. So, I have three resources that parents can look up online for some of those resources and one is Zero to Three. So that's a great parent-friendly website that has a lot of great articles, a lot of great strategies and things that parents can do, you know, and a lot of support for parents as well. ASHA, the American Speech Language Hearing Association. So asha.org is another one specific to speech, language, and hearing. And so that one has some very specific strategies and skills to work on in that area. And then pathways.org is another great one. And that actually has the developmental milestones and a brochure that parents can download and follow along, you know, if they have concerns. But I also caution families when I was working as a preschool teacher, I would always caution them when I would give them the developmental milestones because it's okay that you're not checking off all the boxes for the certain age that your child is. And that's normal because, as I said before, there will be one area or two areas that the child is a little bit behind on only because they haven't had the opportunity to work on the skills to develop that area. And then another fourth resource would be every state department of education will have resources. So, ours here in Massachusetts, it's the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Sorry, I drew a blank for a second. And on the government website, they actually have the laws and parents will be able to look that up as far as what the process is. And then we actually in Massachusetts have a specific website for early childhood education and care. And I know different states have those websites. It's just a matter of knowing where it is. But starting at the state, the government website is a great place. And that will bring them to the specific resources for referring a child for testing and what that process looks like.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: That's great. Okay, great resources. So, this can sometimes feel heavy for parents, and it can sometimes feel maybe daunting and overwhelming. And while you've given us some strategies, just maybe as we end our podcast, maybe just three takeaways for parents that just remember this during this process.

Dr. Nichole Rich: Okay, so the first would be to be patient. The children are young. They have a whole lifetime of learning ahead of them. So be patient and know that the learning will come and their developmental. If they've got delays, they will get the strategies they need and they will get the experiences they need. The second is to trust. Trust the professionals that work with children and really lean on them because they're always willing to help. And then the third would be to take action and be the catalyst to help with that developing skills at home. Use these resources. Get to understand it because you know your kids best too. So, you'll also know how to work with them. That's so valuable.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: It truly is. You are your child's first teacher and most important teacher. So, Dr. Rich, thank you for taking the time today. I'm always in awe of how amazing you're able to deliver the content to us and just in a great manageable way. Audience, please subscribe to our podcast for future episodes. And thank you so much for joining us.

Dr. Nichole Rich: Thank you.

*Ashford University is now the University of Arizona Global Campus.