

82 - Parenting and Autism

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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. www.uagc.edu/ece-center/chatter-podcast

Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Host Dr. Shipley: Hello everyone and welcome to Early Childhood Chatter with Dr. Shipley and Dr. Heald. We will upload a new episode every other week on Wednesdays.

Host Dr. Heald: Twice a month we will come to you with a 10-minute professional development with new ideas for you to try.

Don't forget to subscribe to the podcast for notifications about future episodes. We are so, so excited and thrilled to have Dr. Jada McGlothin here today. And Jada is a military spouse and a mother of four. 11 years ago, her three-year-old son was diagnosed with autism, and that changed their entire family dynamic. She's been a stay-at-home mom ever since, continuing her education online and ensuring that her son gets the best care and therapy, which has paid off tremendously. Today, Dr. McGlothin is going to talk to us about parenting and autism.

Dr. McGlothin, thank you for being with us.

Dr. Jada McGlothin: Thank you so much for having me.

Host Dr. Shipley: Dr. McLaughlin, I'm super excited to talk to you today because your topic is important.

And as Dr. Heald said, parenting and autism, that's something we're going to talk about today. And you're going to talk about some practical strategies that you can use at home to help with daily challenges. So why did you choose this topic? Why is it important to you?

Dr. Jada McGlothin: Well, I chose this topic because, again, my son was diagnosed with autism at three years old, and I had a lot of difficulties managing his emotions, behaviors and meltdowns. And I wanted to shed light on some of some of those behaviors and also share with other parents who may be going through some of the same things, some of the strategies that I used in my home to help work through those behaviors.

Host Dr. Shipley: Okay, so you talk about the things that you used and the strategies, can you break those strategies down just a little bit for us? So if there is someone else going, having the same things going on at home, that they could maybe incorporate them?

Dr. Jada McGlothin: Yes. So in my home, I really like to focus on positive reinforcement and incentives. And throughout the years, I've created various social stories and chart charts to help manage his behaviors.

So I, you know, I had issues again, I had issues with meltdowns and behaviors and a lot of a lot of it stemmed from him not being verbal in those early years. When I couldn't understand him, he would have a huge meltdown, and I wanted to avoid that at all costs.

So one of the first things that I did in those early years was I went around my house and I literally took pictures of everything that he was interested in. I also took pictures of places, our church, school, you know, grocery stores, everything. And I had them developed.

I laminated them and I put Velcro on the back. And I also had a piece of laminated construction paper that also had Velcro on it. So whenever I would notice that he would start to melt down, I'd just go to, you know, grab one, grab the box and I'd go through all the pictures to see what it was that he needed at that time.

And we'd literally just sit there, go through all the pictures, you know, do you want your cookies? Do you want your water bottle? And that helped. And it also let him know what was coming up next in that day. So, for example, if it was a Sunday, you know, I take the picture of our church.

I take the picture of our lunch table. I take the picture of his favorite toy or the picture of the park and I create my own social story for him to let him know what that day would consist of. And I'm not going to say that that completely eliminated his meltdowns, but it definitely lessened the amount of meltdowns.

And for an autism mom, what's that meme that's going around on social media? A win is a win. A win was a win for me. And it definitely made my days less stressful.

And I'll give you an example. You know, in those early years, he stopped himself from melting down. There were times when he'd go into his box himself and grab the picture that he wanted and come find me in the house and give me the picture, letting me know that this is what he needed or this is this is what he wanted.

And so, you know, that's one thing that that's that helped me during those younger years when he wasn't verbal. Now that he's a lot older now and I want to say like this started around maybe third, fourth, fifth grade. I switched it up a little bit.

First off, with ABA therapy, his communication is like night and day. So I discontinued the pictures and I created what I call the star charts. And it is the most simple strategy ever, but it's been so effective in my household. And all I do is take a whiteboard. I put it where he can see it. I write his name and I put five empty stars near his name. And at the bottom, I write down some sort of prize or reward that he can earn.

So he has five opportunities to earn a star, whether it be within the day or within the week. And once he earns his five stars at the end of the day, he gets that reward. And, you know, in terms of gifts, it doesn't have to you don't have to spend money.

Like I don't spend money. It doesn't have to be like this big, tangible thing. I use simple things like five to five to or 10 to 20 minutes of extra iPad time before bed or an extra scoop of ice cream or, you know, I give him three options and he can choose what we're having for dinner.

So I make it fun and I make it engaging and I gear it to whatever he's interested in at that time. And I also want to mention that just as he can earn stars, he can lose stars as well.

So, you know, it's going to help him be accountable for his actions. And so, for example, I can say, you know, hey, dude, you know you hit your sister with that toy. You know, I want you to go over there and go erase one of those stars. And of course, I use that as a teachable moment.

We reflect on that unwanted behavior and I reassure him that he can earn that star back. So that's just two strategies that I love that.

Host Dr. Shipley: I love that. And you are winning. You are winning.

Host Dr. Heald: These are great ideas. And I think, Jada, you've you've gosh, you've shared so much already with us. I just envision what it's like in the home. And I would imagine that a lot of what you're saying, setting the expectations, using a routine, following through consequences, all those things can actually work in his education or or a child who has autism education environment. Can you maybe elaborate on what you would say to our teachers? Because we have a whole bank of teachers that are listening about how they can support you, I guess you as a parent, but then also, you know, students with autism who would be in their setting.

Dr. Jada McGlothlin: Oh, yeah, absolutely. And I can also speak from personal experiences. Teachers can absolutely incorporate these strategies in their classroom.

In my situation, they kind of tweaked it a little bit. So instead of using it was pretty much the same. But instead of using stars, I think they use tokens.

And I can't remember how many tokens that he would have to earn. And I also want to mention that it was also more of his paraprofessional who administered those tokens and who gave him his rewards. And the rewards for in the classroom are, of course, going to be a little different.

They would reward him with going to the life skills room and they had like a little jump. Like a little small trampoline, he can go in there for about five minutes and jump, he could walk around outside.

Transitioning from kindergarten to first grade was really difficult. So another reward was his parapro would allow him to go in the kindergarten teacher would allow him to go back for about maybe five minutes. He can partake in whatever activity they have going on in that class. And another incentive or reward was I would get a big bag of cheese puffs and it would literally last for at least two quarters, maybe even more, because that incentive was he can go to the life skills room and get three.

It was only three, three cheese puffs. And that was it was really effective for him because he would try to work really hard to earn his tokens so he could, you know, get that reward because it was difficult for him. You know, he stims, you know, it's hard to sit and focus. And so it was really helpful.

Host Dr. Shipley: I'm so glad you're sharing this with us, because my next question was, you know, there's other people out there in the same situation you're in. And what are some of the challenges that you have to face raising...raising your child? And, you know, what are some positive things that you're seeing that you that you could tell others about?

Dr. Jada McGlothlin: Well, one of the main challenges I face was regulating those emotions and those behaviors.

So, for example, if we if we if we planned a trip, let's say we plan to go to the zoo and we pull up to the zoo and for whatever reason, they closed early that day. It was, it was just a disaster for him. And, you know, even even minor inconveniences like me skipping through the credits. He loves the credits at the end of a movie. Or, you know, commercials. He didn't understand the concept of commercials or, you know, if I ran out of milk and he couldn't have his favorite cereal, he just got very, very upset. And so I really tried to explain to him, like, oh, it's okay to be upset. You can be upset. And I explained to him, is this a small problem or is it a big problem? And nine times out of 10, it's a pretty small problem. And I just try to redirect him. "Okay, you know, you can't have your favorite cereal today, but, you know, you like toast, too. Let's make some toast with some jam. Oh, I really like how you're sitting and eating your toast with your jam. You know, I'm going to give you a star for that." You know, because he, you know, and it just it just it really helped.

And I want to say another another challenge that I had to overcome personally was I found myself trying always trying to regulate his behavior to appease people in the public, like the brown public, like, oh, I don't want them looking at me. And I had to kind of get over that. Like, yeah, I don't you know, I don't want people to have negative experiences when he's in their presence. But I focus more on how he can have a good experience in public.

Host Dr. Shipley: Right.

Dr. Jada McGlothlin: So I just don't you know, I just kind of, you know, put the focus on him. OK, I love that.

Host Dr. Shipley: Ok. Thank you for sharing that. Oh, no problem.

Host Dr. Heald: Yeah. And I am processing through everything you said and how it and how it impacts the home environment, but also the educational environment. And I think there's such an overlap. And I just really appreciate you saying that.

So as we wind down, can you provide three takeaways for our listeners?

Dr. Jada McGlothlin: Oh, absolutely. I believe in I think it's important to have some sort of visual aid incorporated into your home to help your child with transitions, with changes, with behaviors, with chores, with dinner time and so on. Any, you know, just something to help them through just daily life at home.

And secondly, I want parents to understand that, and you probably already know this, that but but you are your child's biggest advocate. And you can request to have some of these strategies incorporated into your child's IEP. I've done it and it's helped.

And lastly, ABA therapy has worked wonders for my son. And I just think you should I just think parents should try it. And I know all children with autism are different. But just I believe I believe wholeheartedly in ABA therapy.

And I think parents should try it.

Host Dr. Shipley: Well, Dr. McLaughlin, thank you so much for being here. And this is a topic that you can come back and talk to us again later.

And we just cannot wait to hear from you and hear about how he's growing and changing. So thank you so much.

Dr. Jada McGlothlin: Thank you so much for having me.

Host Dr. Heald: Thank you, Jada. Thank you.