

Lauren 00:06

Welcome to The LDA podcast, a series by The Learning Disabilities Association of America. Our podcast is dedicated to exploring topics of interest to educators, individuals with learning disabilities, parents and professionals to work towards our goal of creating a more equitable world. Alright, welcome, everyone to the LDA Podcast. I'm here today with Elaine Taylor-Klaus. She's a master certified coach, writer, speaker, mother and co-founder of ImpactParents, an organization that supports parents of complex kids. Elaine, thank you so much for being here today.

Elaine Taylor-Klaus 00:37

It is truly a pleasure. Thanks for having me.

Lauren 00:40

First, to start off, would you be able to give us a little bit of your background?

Elaine Taylor-Klaus 00:45

Yeah, I am the mom of what I used to call it an ADHD plus plus family of five, now six. And as a mom, when my kids were young, I was struggling with, they had a lot of complex, what I call complex kids, complex issues. ADHD, anxiety, learning disabilities. And as they were, I often say, diagnosed one by one like dominoes, at some point, I realized that maybe my husband couldn't be responsible for all of the neurology that we were experiencing in our household, and that maybe something was making life more difficult for me than it needed to be. And so I was on my path at the time, I was planning to go back and get a PhD. So I was trying to go back to graduate school. And I went and had a psychoeducational evaluation done for myself just as I had done for my kids. Because I was just curious whether that would allow me a different path in terms of taking the GRE, which was the reason I had not gone to graduate school up until then. And what I discovered at about 40 years old was that I had a lifetime of undiagnosed attention and learning issues. And it was like this huge light bulb went off, and my whole life made sense. And after I, you know, spent a couple of weeks or months crying and trying to integrate what was going on, it really changed my life and set me on a course to support other parents who were also struggling with raising complex kids, because it doesn't have to be that hard. And parents don't have to do it alone. And it was really, the impact of it was difficult at first and it has truly been transformational in my life. And I would say for my kids, and now as the CEO of what was then ImpactADHD and is now ImpactParents, we've had the opportunity to impact hundreds of thousands of lives. I mean, it's really quite amazing what that little piece did in terms of getting my diagnosis, and how that had this cascading impact for the world. Kind of cool.

Lauren 02:58

Would you be able to expand a little bit on what changed for you as a result of that diagnosis?

Elaine Taylor-Klaus 03:04

Well, you know, a number of things changed. Part of it was just when you understand yourself better, you can manage yourself better. And it allowed me to put the stick down that I had been beating myself over the head with for all these years, and to stop beating myself up for what I wasn't doing and to start acknowledging what I was doing. It gave me permission to approach a lot of things and expectations in my life differently. So, you know, I often joke the very first thing I did when I was diagnosed was I hired a

bookkeeper. Because I realized that there was a reason it was taking me so much time to just manage the family finances and books. And it really didn't need to be that, it was just very difficult for me. And even though I have learning disabilities, I also am a writer, but I struggle with working memory. And so I really learned to play to my strengths and to do what I do well, and to outsource the things that are really hard for me. And so first I changed my immediate life. And I think it also really changed how I was in relationship with my kids and their learning issues. Because I had a whole different kind of compassion and ability to support them and problem solve with them and collaborate with them. When I realized that my daughter, who was diagnosed with dyslexia, we know it's genetic, I realized it came from me. And even though it showed up differently for us, there are ways in which are very similar, the way we process language the, way we hear language. And so I was able to understand what she was struggling with when I was able to see that I was struggling too. It wasn't that I was some kind of a failure. It's that there was a reason that it was hard for me.

Lauren 04:57

Right. So there's this common misconception that you can grow out of a learning disability or that, you know, it isn't something for an adult to have. So that's definitely not the case. But have you noticed, can a learning disability change over time?

Elaine Taylor-Klaus 05:13

So that's a fabulous question. I got into a disagreement with a neuropsychologist who did an assessment of one of my kids late in high school and said, well, she's grown out of the dyslexia. And I went back and I said, No, and we're not gonna, we're not going to...let's have this conversation. Because you don't grow out of it, you learn to accommodate it, you learn to navigate it, you learn to manage it, when you're well remediated. You learn, like, I have a kid who learned to read and learned to do reading comprehension. But that doesn't change how hard it is for us to hear language. And how much more effort is required to read and process and how much went into fluency. And you know, that kid, fast forward, is now, you know, in her mid 20s, and in the middle of applying to medical school, so she's no slacker, right? But she still has dyslexia. And so learning how to navigate writing, you know, 150 essays on secondary applications and getting the support she needs to do that is very real for her. That doesn't mean it went away, I mean she still needs to find a new way to do things. When life presents her with things that challenge her the way that her brain is wired. On the other hand, she's got this brilliant mind for math and science. And I was laughing with her just last night because she can understand concepts and words, and she said something I could not understand. And I was laughing. I'm like, and you're the kid with dyslexia, right? She's like, yeah, and Mom, I can even spell this one. So she has this extraordinary capacity. And in other areas, she still needs help, and I still need help. Like, I still need a proofreader, I still need, you know, no matter how much I write, it really helps to have somebody else go behind me and say, Yeah, that's an 'l' not an 'A', you know?

Lauren 07:25

Absolutely. Well, and speaking of misconceptions, that's probably one of the largest ones. But are there some other more common misconceptions that you've heard about adults with LD and ADHD that you want to clear up?

Elaine Taylor-Klaus 07:38

Well, so ADHD, and LD when you lump it together, that's a big category. So can I separate those two?

Elaine Taylor-Klaus 07:47

So when you're dealing with LD, I think LD is very misunderstood. In adults, it's extremely difficult to find a way to get a diagnosis as an adult. There are not a lot of resources for remediating or supporting adults, most of us as adults tend to create accommodations for ourselves in our lives. And so that may mean finding a job that's a good fit. Or, you know, as I say, working in a job where you have somebody that comes back behind you, for the areas that you struggle. So with LD I think most people manage it in an accommodating environment and the misconception, you know, if someone's struggling with reading or reading comprehension, or the language, that doesn't mean that there's not an innate intelligence there, that means they're struggling with the language. I mean, I think about, we joke with my family, I have no acuity for geography at all, I can't remember where anything is, what they're called, whether I know...and unless I see it in print, the name doesn't click with me. And so, and even if I have seen it in print, I may not remember it because I struggle with both ADHD and LD, so I struggle with the working memory. But that doesn't make me not intelligent. And yet, sometimes I come across, I'm very careful because I could come across sounding ignorant, because I don't remember the name of the, you know, the president of that country or the name of...or I don't know where in the world that place is that someone's referencing. And so I think, particularly with LD and with ADHD that impacts memory, there is a misconception that not holding information that you would expect an adult to know means that that adult is uneducated or ignorant or ill informed. And it's not. For me, I understand concepts and themes and connections extraordinarily well. Really well educated in emotional intelligence. But the details, yeah, not so much. I rely on other people for that. So that's kind of the LD side, moving into the ADD side or ADHD. There's that working memory piece, right? Which comes in both areas. But very similarly, there's this misconception in the world of ADHD that people who struggle with it are lazy or crazy, or stupid, or they don't care, or they're not motivated, or they're just not trying hard enough. And the truth is, sometimes when you have some of these issues, just getting through a basic day, you're putting in so much more effort than the average American human or the average human, that people don't really realize how hard it is just to go through a normal day just to figure out what am I going to make for dinner? And what do I need to get to do that? And what do I have and what do I not have? And, you know, how do I get to the grocery store without forgetting what I was supposed to get? And that sounds like it should be so simple. But when people have ADHD or processing issues, some of the basic stuff in life can be really hard. And that's...it's bizarre, because on the one hand, that basic stuff is life and life is hard. But then we tend to be really smart. Right? And we understand how to make linkages and connections and put things together in really complex ways. And then you know, when you can't seem to like clean your kitchen, there's this disconnect that a lot of people don't understand.

Lauren 07:47

Absolutely.

Lauren 11:39

Absolutely, it almost sounds a little bit like what you were talking about before as you find your strengths. But there are still things that you need help with.

Elaine Taylor-Klaus 11:47

Right. And if you can do that, without judgment, if you can do that, and keep your self esteem intact, then you can be super successful, which is why we've seen so many unbelievably successful people with ADHD and LD, I mean, whether it's Will.i.am or, see, this is where I get the word...Richard Branson, I think is his name. Like, highly successful, and they attribute a great part of their success to their LD or their ADHD. So if you can do it without beating yourself up, without shame, then you can really create masterful things in the world. It's when we get caught up in those messages, if I'm not good enough, and I'm not worthy, and I don't deserve, or really, well, I mean, this was my story for years, you all think I'm smart, but really, I'm stupid, you don't know, the truth is that I'm really stupid. Because I had to work so much harder than everybody else. I didn't know. And so that's where I think we get, we can be really successful. Or we can really, we can internalize those negative messages and make it really hard for ourselves.

Lauren 13:03

So switching gears a little bit, to more of like the workplace and getting a job, do you have any advice for adults with LD or ADHD who are currently looking for a job?

Elaine Taylor-Klaus 13:14

You know, this is not my area of expertise. But I have definitely supported a lot of adults with these issues in the workplace. And sometimes as parents, sometimes in their own issues, supporting them. I do some executive coaching as well. I'm a believer in transparency. I'm a believer in asking for what you need, without shame and judgment. Because when I can go to someone and say, you know, nobody's gonna be able to write a better report than I am. And when I do that, I'm going to need a conference room or some quiet place to be able to focus. I believe that if we can do that without judgment of ourselves, that kind of self advocacy can be perceived in the workplace as a strength. That said, there is a lot of controversy about it in the professional world, coaching world, human resource world, a lot of people don't feel safe disclosing in the workplace. They're in a, there is a protection under law for neurodiversity, but that doesn't necessarily mean it's always honored. You know, and it's a privileged position for me to say, well, you don't want to work anywhere that doesn't want to accept you for your whole self. Like I get that. That's the best of all ideal worlds. And sometimes that's not the case. So I think it's workplace dependent. I think that there is a distinction between what you disclose before you get a job, and how you advocate for yourself once you get a job, and it's going to be different if you're in a corporate environment than if you're in a small business. Most of all, I think that if you can play to your strengths, and really celebrate what you're good at, and let that lead the invitation, when you're applying for a position, then you're in a position to be able to say: these are challenges I need some support with or this is not a great area for me to take on something, and to be able to navigate those conversations, if you're really clear about and honest about your strengths. That doesn't mean you pretend there's nothing, you know, that there's no challenges. But I do think that transparency can be really helpful. And we have to do it from a place of clarity and confidence. And not demanding, but requesting. I mean, in coaching, we often talk about the design, here's what you can count on me for. And this is what I'm asking for. So I had a client I worked with who that example was very specific, she was an adult with ADHD, she was at manager level. And she went to her supervisor and said exactly that example, you can count on me to deliver exactly what you need, to do it efficiently, effectively. And I need sometimes to be able to close myself off, and you know, tune out the world. So I can use my strength of hyperfocus to be able to deliver that. So I need you to help me create or find an

environment...this is before COVID. Now, people can just take a workday at home very often, but in those days, they couldn't. So really designing, here's what you can count on me for. And this is the support I need to be as successful as you want me to be, I think can be really powerful.

Lauren 16:47

So again, switching gears here about parenting, how can parenting look different for a parent that has LD or ADHD?

Elaine Taylor-Klaus 16:56

Well, so the short answer to that is parenting can look differently in about a million different ways. Because it depends on the LD or the ADHD. And I think what I really want to touch on here is that oftentimes parents come to me and they say, how can I help my kid if I've got this myself? How can I possibly do this when I can barely get my own kitchen cleaned or get myself up and out the door? And the beauty of having these issues ourselves as parents, and at least half of these complex kids have at least one complex parent, right? Probably more often two complex parents. The beauty is that we can be in it together, we can be collaborative, we don't have to pretend to our kids that we know everything and we've got it all figured out. We can say to our kids, okay, you're good at this, and I'm good at this, let's work together and figure out how. Let's be a team and solve it. Or I'm really working on this issue, I know you are too. Let's hold each other accountable. And let's support each other on this. When we come to our kids transparently, this seems to be a theme for today, right? And we say, hey, I'm human. And I'm struggling with this. Not to put our stuff on our kids, not as a weight. But it's an acknowledgment, as in a way of saying I'm real, and I'm not perfect, and I'm going to make mistakes, and I'm going to take responsibility for them. And so are you and you're human. And so we're going to create an environment that makes it okay to make mistakes, and we're going to learn with each other and we're gonna support each other and collaborate. And I think it can be more powerful for kids when their parent can really understand what they're dealing with, even if it shows up differently, or one has LD and one has ADHD. I remember when one of my kids was diagnosed, and by that point, I don't really remember the details. As I've said before, that's not my thing. But there was already a lot of neurological stuff identified in the house. And my middle kid was diagnosed with dyslexia. And when I told her like, now we understand how your brain works. And after she cried, and she said, Mommy, I've been trying so hard. And it was just heartbreaking. After that, she kind of said, oh, great, now I'm not left out. There was this kind of sense for her that now she belonged because everybody else in the family was kind of quirky, and now she was quirky, too. And it's like it all made sense in a way that she belonged differently. And so I think our kids, when our kids are struggling with a lot of these issues, they feel so different and they feel so out of sorts, and so when they can see that we have them too it gives them a sense of belonging and connection that's really, really important.

Lauren 20:05

Absolutely. And also to see that, you know, you're here, you've made it this far and they can too.

Elaine Taylor-Klaus 20:11

Yeah. Yeah. And that, but I'll reiterate that piece of you can be a successful, accomplished adult and not get it all right. And that's really important for our kids to see that adulting doesn't mean being perfect and getting it all right, or knowing exactly what to do. Adulting means I can figure it out, I can take

responsibility for my mistakes, and I can figure it out and make it right. That's what it is to really be an adult.

Lauren 20:43

Absolutely. So would you be able to tell us a little bit about ImpactParents and anything that you're currently working on?

Elaine Taylor-Klaus 20:50

Oh, yeah, I love to do that. So ImpactParents is an online resource for parents of what we call complex kids. So kids who struggle with life, learning, behavior of any kind. And what we've learned is that when we support parents and help parents understand these kids well enough to help manage them, that's what it takes for parents to learn to create an environment at home where they can help their kids understand themselves, and want to manage themselves. So that's our job as parents is to understand these kids well enough to help them learn to manage themselves, so that they can want to manage themselves and take ownership of their lives. And so we do that from a coaching framework. What happened when I became a coach, and when my partner, Diane became a coach, business partner, we both discovered that we became much, much better parents, and it wasn't rocket science, we could teach this. So the secret of what we do is we actually teach coaching skills to parents and professionals. So often professionals who are therapists or educational therapists or tutors or teachers, we bring the basic skills of coaching and the basic concepts of coaching, which is a very empowerment based method or approach to creating change. And so we teach coaching skills, and then we coach people in applying those skills so that they can really empower these amazing kids. The idea here is that complex kids have this really extraordinary capacity, they tend to be really amazing in certain arenas. And if we can play to those strengths and cultivate them, we can help them reach their full potential, instead of only focusing on what they don't do well. And that doesn't mean we don't remediate. That doesn't mean we don't teach a dyslexic kid to read. But as I said, you know, my dyslexic kid can read, but man, can she do math and science, right? So that's where we really wanted to focus with her when she was younger. So at ImpactParents we do a combination of training, coaching and support. And we have always been virtual, we've done it online and on the phone since 2011. And we have a whole cadre of coaches who are certified and trained, and then certified and trained by us to work with parents and professionals. We have trained certified trainers who teach our Sanity School curriculum all over the world, because Sanity School is a behavior training program for parents and teachers. And the most exciting thing we've got going, because it's now September of 2022, is in October of 2022 we're going to be delivering our Sanity School training program for parents in Spanish. And we've had a whole group of coaches from around the world. So one Mexico, one in Spain and Canada, one in Alaska, working together to create a neutral Spanish so that we can deliver it in a espanol para todos, for everyone. And my book, The Essential Guide to Raising Complex Kids is also coming out in Spanish this fall. So for the first time ever, we're going to be able to begin to serve the Latin community in addition to the English speaking community all over the world in a way that they can all relate to the dialect and the language that's being used. So I am like, super, super excited that this has come together. And it's been, part of this is through a grant from a small nonprofit in Chicago that we've been working with to try to make it happen called the Balanced Project. And all they do is raise money and pay for mental health support services for families in need. So this has been a bit of a labor of love and a great collaboration and I'm super excited.

Lauren 24:53

That's really exciting.

Elaine Taylor-Klaus 24:54

Yeah, it's really cool.

Lauren 24:56

That's awesome. Well, is there any last notes that you wanted to end on?

Elaine Taylor-Klaus 25:01

I think what I want to share is whether you're listening, whatever hat you're wearing as a listener, whether you're a parent or you're a provider, or you're an executive or an adult with your own complex issues, that there's no shame in having attention and learning issues. In fact, it's kind of what makes us interesting. And it's really, really essential to ask for help. You're not alone, even though it feels like you are. And even though it feels like whatever's happening in your office, or your classroom, or your home is just nobody else in the world can understand that, there are other people in the world that are dealing with very similar things to what you're dealing with. And there are supports and structures that can really help you manage it. From our framework, the coach approach, we have found to be magic, and helping change the dynamic in a home, changing the way that people communicate in the home and in the classroom. We have an educational therapist who uses it a lot in her work with students. So it applies in a lot of ways, because coaching is about empowerment, it's about helping people reach their full potential. And so I guess the thing I want to leave people with is, you're not alone. You can do this, ask for help. There's no shame in that. And check into the coach approach and explore some of what we've got, a lot of what we offer, most of what we offer on our website is free, and begin to think about a different way of empowering these amazing kids, because they do have extraordinary potential. And they need you to meet them where they are to help them get there. And that's what we help parents do.

Lauren 26:49

Absolutely. Well, Elaine, thank you so much for being here today. We had a great conversation.

Elaine Taylor-Klaus 26:54

My pleasure. Thanks for having us. And thanks for the work that you do. We've been involved with LDA in different ways, as I mentioned to you for many, many years. It's a super important organization and so I'm really grateful to be part of this.

Lauren 27:12

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