



FREE ONLINE CONFERENCE, OCTOBER 14-18

Dayna Abraham

Raising a High Needs Child without Losing Yourself

Welcome to Happily Family I'm Cecilia Hilkey Jason Hilkey. And we're delighted today to have Dayna Abraham with us. Dayna is a national board-certified teacher with a background in early childhood. And she's the founder of Lemon Lime adventures. As a teacher, she always figured out ways to love the most intense and challenging kids in our classroom. But after becoming a mother herself and seeing her own child not fit into school,

she chose to homeschool and help other parents of challenging and intense kids to find their own superpowers. Welcome, Dayna. It's always great to have you. I Am so excited to be here. You know that I could talk to you all day every day. It's always fun talking with you and I've, I wanted to talk to you because I don't know about you,

but the, a lot of the moms that I've been talking to recently, probably including myself, are dealing with feelings like feeling guilty or feeling worried. I'm feeling stressed, a bunch of stuff that's happening. And so I figured you could help us in figuring out what to do in tough times, especially when you have a more challenging and intense kid and to be with those feelings and not just completely lose yourself.

So I wanted to start with something that I do, and that's like, I'm kind of naturally a warrior and I tend to catastrophize and like make everything like into the worst case scenario. And if my kid's not doing their homework, then oh my gosh, they're going to become homeless and not be able to get a job. And it just ends badly.

So what are we can, what can we do if we find ourselves in these situations where we know we're just worrying way too much? Well, first and foremost, I want you to know, and any other mama that's watching this, that it's okay. And it's a completely normal human experience to be worrying and to be thinking about what about this and what about this?

And what about this? And just to be honest, I have one of those last night balling watching marriage or mortgage, and I'm just, you know, spiraling into all the, what ifs. So I want to just normalize it first and foremost, that it is something that all of us go through, even when we have all of the, all of the knowledge and the information,

and we teach others how to get out of these situations. So everyone take a deep, big, deep breath, totally normal. And the second part is we are all coming out of nearly two years by the time that this is kind of going off right now, it's, you know, been over a year of a really intense time in our world.

None of us have ever experienced anything like this before. And so one of the things that I want everyone to realize is that, you know, I know you've got other speakers who were probably talking about this about like above the line and under the line, right? Of like what's above the surface and under the surface. But we talk about that very first piece under the surface is basic needs.

And all of us have had that basic need of safety and security shaken from us. And we haven't known like what's going to come next and what if this happens? And so we've all had to kind of regroup and get clear on what it is that is important to us and what it is that we know what we can control. And so it's just your brain trying to protect you.

So it's trying to tell you like, okay, all these things could happen. So you know what? You should probably just sit still and do nothing. And that's just your brain. You can calm your brain down with a couple of thought exercises. So if you don't mind, I'd like to pull out my friends, the thought monsters and super slops to share kind of some of the ones that we work through,

especially over the last year and a half or two years with the pandemic, the ones that I saw come up the most. Is that okay? Yeah. So the first one that I heard you talk about, isn't actually one that I have a card for, but I have one similar. So it's the always a never beast. So the always a never beast,

he makes you think about this always happens. This never happens. So let's say your kid doesn't do their homework. And you're like, okay, we always fight over homework. And it always takes three to five hours. And then it always turns into a fight. And then you always end up going to bed without like us cuddling. And then the next day you're always mad at me and then,

right. So that always and never, it just continues to spiral spiral spiral. And so that first is just recognizing, oh, that's always a never right. The other one is I call it the all or nothing. And so what I heard you say is like, everything's awful. All the things are terrible. The whole world is exploding, right?

Like it's all, or it's nothing. And I like to think of like a, and I don't have a cute picture for him, but I, I think of the all or nothing a lot. But I like to combat the all or nothing with thinking about like an a to B, like a, a road from a to B and all or nothing is it's either a,

or it's B and there's nothing in between. And it's like, what if you just took a little step away from a then becomes possible instead of I have to go all the way to be for this to be true. So that's

kinda how I would swap that one for always a never, I love this guy, just fact-finder Freddy. So I call on fact-finder Freddie to look for facts.

So is it true? Like truly factual that every time you do homework that you end up in a fight? No, probably not. It probably is frustrating for both of you, but it's probably not true. It's probably when it's math homework, it's probably when you're over. It's probably when you've been touched out, it's probably on days where you left your coffee in the microwave too many times and you didn't get enough caffeine that day.

Right? Like there's other things going on. It's not just when they don't do their homework. So those are some quick like swaps that you can make. If your thoughts are going to catastrophizing, or they're starting to just what I call spiraling out of control. You want to stop that spiral before it gets too deep. And at the beginning of this,

you talked a little bit about above the line and below the line, but just, could you talk a little bit about it just so I don't want to assume that everyone knows it. I've heard it before I've talked to people about it, but I think it would just be good to review that. It's always a good reminder for me, if anything.

Yeah. Cause I could use that all the time. I've actually had a little reminder on my monitor for that thing. Well, There's actually, there's two things that I want to talk about. I had a good friend just remind me of something yesterday when I was on a meeting with her and I would love to share this. I haven't ever shared it publicly.

So I'd love to share that in just a minute. But what I was referring to is iceberg theory. Can you guys see that? Right? So what you see above the line is just one seventh of the full iceberg and what's under the line is so much more so you're seeing the behaviors. You're seeing the stress. You're seeing the worry. You're seeing you crying.

You're seeing you yelling, but under the surface, there's so much more. Now a lot of times people talk about all these things that are there, like the worry, the fear, the anxiety, the depression, whatever it is, or lack of skills, you know, there's, there's a myriad of things and I'm sure many of your speakers are going to have different things that they point to.

But what I found is a lot of times as mamas who are out there soaking up all the information that we possibly can, it can feel overwhelming to try to pick which thing is it, that's under the surface. And so for us, we have developed what we call a behavior funnel and it works for our own behavior, not just kiddos. And so under the surface,

there's a funnel and the top one is basic needs. So the very first thing, when you're putting a problem or a struggle through it, always ask the questions about basic needs. Are you getting enough sleep? Are you, and most of us haven't over the last year and a half, you know, are you hungry? Are you feeding your soul with like walking and getting fresh air?

Like for moms who are struggling, are you getting enough? Vitamin D are you getting enough? Vitamin B, have you had your hormones checked or your adrenal glands checked? Like all that health stuff that us women go through, especially as we get older, a lot of times that's not actually checked. And a lot of us don't actually know that that could be the cause of us constantly losing our cool.

And so basic needs is number one. And number two is connection. And we just came out of a very long period of us not being connected to real humans. And you know, just yesterday or last two days, there was a event I could have gone to and Denver and I stayed home to get ready for this move we're going through. And I could see and feel the energy coming from the people that got to be in the room together for the first time in so long.

It's just a different feeling. And now we've got to get used to that again. And so all of us are lacking some of that connection. And then the third one, I won't go into all of them, but the third one is sensory. And I feel like us mamas get sensory overloaded, like really fast. So too much sound too much input,

too much, touching, too much pulling, being bumped and pushed on accident. Even kind of like as kids walk by, they kind of step on your toes and they don't even realize you're there. And over time it just builds up and you end up exploding and then you feel guilty even though it's part of how your body is designed. That makes sense.

Kinda at the beginning of the, had a story from a friend that you hadn't shared before, did you want to, Oh my gosh. See, thanks for pulling that back. Okay. So she was sharing this awesome thing. She is a psychotherapist and she was sharing about above the line and below the line in a totally different way than I really ever heard it.

And it's this idea now it's going to go a little deeper. Are you guys okay with that? You can totally cut. Okay. So as human beings, it is our human nature. So this is us in the middle, right? We wobble between being and doing right. So being a mom, being a caregiver, being a friend, doing,

doing the laundry, helping with homework, like the, the actual actions that we're doing, picking up after everyone and all of us as human beings have this desire to leave a legacy. So this desire to leave a legacy, which is like for us as mamas as to be a good parent to, to be not just a good caregiver, but to change our kids' stories for when they become grownups.

And they have their own kids to leave the world a better place than when we came there. And that's all above the line. But what happens is below the line you have over here and over here, you have survivalism and, and then avoiding things. And when our health is kind of diminished and that could be physical, mental, that could be social.

That could be your, that could even be your, I D said, physical, oh, intellectual health, like anything has been is under the line. Then all of this is impossible to do. And so that basic needs

part. We've all been in survivalism for how long now. And so we've, we dip under the line. And I think us,

sometimes we think something's wrong with us when we dip below the line and just knowing that all human beings dip below the line, but we can all go above the line, I think is incredibly powerful. And so it just gives a different perspective to iceberg theory. And I liked that because it helps remind me to check in, this is actually the reminder I have on my,

my computer monitors to check in, like, where am I today? Am I in like that survival mode? Cause I'm, that's five more. It's hard for me to do that stuff above the line. And I think that having that awareness, that mindfulness around what's happening has really helped me to decide like, okay, one, I might give myself a little more slack and also help me decide when to be working on something that you know,

and what to be working on. Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. And those of us who have intense GEDs, it can be incredibly difficult to stay above the line. And you may find yourself kind of trying to bow your, your life will naturally try to balance it out. So you may go heavy into work because you know, the like caregiver side is not feeling so great or you might dip in work because you're,

you're trying to work so hard on the caregiver side. So you can see how really taking notice of that. And like you said, being mindful of it and paying attention to it, doing a daily check-in on that can really help when you're starting to be like, what is wrong? Why am I in such a bad mood? Where is this coming from?

Just doing that check-in can be really helpful. Okay. So I love the direction that we're going here, checking in, figuring out like my basic needs. What's going on. What's the next step? After that? After I realized like, well, of course I haven't had enough coffee or I didn't sleep well last night or I was like, worry too much and had some thought monsters happening.

How do we even like take care of ourselves enough that we can go and like start shifting things with our kids. So I think there's a misconception that it's either or instead of. And so I think that a lot of times as parents and it even goes with this above the line and below the line, we think we've got to take care of the kids.

We got to take care of the kids. We got to take care of the kids. And if we're constantly getting drained and pulled down, then we're not actually going to be able to be the best parents that we need to be. And so we've developed something that we teach our students called the spark plan and it's just a five minute daily routine. Is it okay if I share that?

Okay. So the spark plan, the idea behind this is you hear so often about habits and morning routines at nighttime routines and pack and still feel really overwhelming. If you've got a kid who's, you know, schedule is always changing or you're going to appointments or transitions are hard for them. And so it can feel like you're right. That's great for the perfect people.

But for me, like, I can't really do a whole like meditation in the morning. So that's what this is for. So first before I share, you may even be thinking I don't have five minutes. I can't even get to the bathroom without my kids, like knocking on the door or coming in and interrupting me. So I hear you. I want anyone who's hearing that to know that I've been there before.

And so this plan can be done throughout the entire day. It's not a shutter or a Coda, or like something to add guilt to your plate of things that you should be doing. It's how can you take one of these pieces and start layering it on or do one throughout the day, one minute at a time. So we want to look at this kind of holistically and see what works for your life.

That's number one. So it's spark S P a R C. Can you see that? Yes. Spark. So the first one is shift. So we already did that at the beginning of this is recognizing that negative thought, that thought monster that's kind of creeping in for the day. So is it always or never, is it a dooby? Do like I've got so much to do.

I don't even know where to go is at like, not yet Yeti or negative Nelly, like what's taking over your thoughts, just recognizing one of those and then swapping it for a more positive thought or a more empowering thought that's going to help you get through the day. So as for shift, I'm just going to doodle it down. All right. So then the next piece is prioritize.

So a lot of times as mamas, we've got this long, long, long, long list of things to do, and we feel like we have to do it. All. One thing that I have discovered is that we can do anything. We are like powerful women, right? We like popped babies out of us. It's pretty amazing. So we can do anything we want.

We just can't do it all at once. So we have to pick the number one domino, that's going to knock the rest of them down. So if on a daily basis you are picking one thing to prioritize and knock down the rest. Then it's going to make you feel better and feel lighter. And you're going to have that 1% change every day,

instead of trying to do it all every day and getting nothing done. So prioritize is the next one. So I like to think of like a little checklist. All right. So for the AE, we're looking at activate. So this is where we're activating our body. We're moving, we're getting outside and walking around the block, we're walking up and down the stairs.

We are doing a little bit of yoga stretches. We're doing something to move and activate our body. That doesn't necessarily, it could be with the kids. This could be like a dance party, whatever you want. But this is just to get moving just a little bit more today than you did yesterday. So this is your body and my body doodles are not super cute.

So just so you know, we've got a little round man over there. All right, I'm alive. The R is for recharge. Now recharge is recharging that battery or recharging your energy. And so for each

and every one of us, that's different for you. It might be doing five minutes of meditation for someone else. It might be, you know,

playing air guitar on their bed and jumping up and down. Like it could be different for every single person, for some people it's doodling or writing for other people. It's learning something because this is just something that helps you recharge your battery. Because when you're in survival mode, when you're stressed out, when you're worrying a lot of times, you will shut things out.

So you'll find yourself scrolling on Facebook or binge watching a new season on Netflix and shutting out the world instead of actually participating in the world. So recharge helps you kind of build up that energy. So you have some energy to go forth with your intense kiddo. The last one is connect. So as you might have noticed, all of these are feeding into that below the line of your basic needs and your connection and your sensory needs.

And so it's helping you kind of get charged up and above the line each and every day. So that last one is connect with a real human. And I like to say connect with someone that isn't just a kid, but a lot of the mamas that I work with connect is just snuggling in bed at night with their kids, reading a book at night.

But I find that when you like text a friend every day, or I use an app on my phone called Voxer. And so I voice record something to a friend, a different friend to every single day, and then to hear them talk back to me, it just kinda lights me up and charges me out and gives me an energy that I don't have when I feel isolated behind a computer.

Those are great. I like Those. So let's go through them real quick here. Let me see if I can, I don't know. Okay. Thank you. Shift, prioritize, activate recharge and connect. You got it. Look Awesome. I'm going to try air guitar, Air guitar lately. We've been on the trampoline a lot. Like I'll just,

we were doing a team meeting and it was getting really intense. I was like, you know what? I know what I need. And I got on that on the trampoline just started jumping bombs and we were good to go. I love it. That's awesome. So just Like, I want to put this into context. So what we were talking about was how to take care of ourselves,

how to do that, and also be doing parenting and, and how they feed each other and how that helps us move from below the line to above the line, like this all ties together. And I think that this is it's. I love acronyms. So I, I think great to be able to remember spark. And that's part of that's something that you have as part of lemon lime adventures,

is that right? It's Part of our calm, the chaos program and our framework that we teach, because what we find is when parents join us, they, they typically are focusing on all the things that are wrong. So they're focusing on my kid, won't do this. My kid can't do this. This doctor told us this, this therapist told us that,

and they've tried accessing mindfulness. They've tried accessing, you know, yoga and positive thoughts of affirmations and it just hasn't worked. And so spark has been really helpful for a lot of these women and, and men and the kids try it as well. But as just like this little daily reminder in this habit builder so that they are shifting that thought they are focusing on a,

when a day we had a group of our mamas during COVID. They called them Corona wins and they started posting one win a day and wins aren't praise. This is not the same thing. It's more looking at it. And changing perspective. One of our thoughts swaps is perspective, Pete. So looking at the situation differently and really saying, okay, this seems kind of bad,

but what is it providing me? What opportunity is it giving me? Or what do I get to do? What do I, what do I get to choose during the situation? And so just looking at it differently and saying, okay, this could look like a really terrible wind, but this is what I'm choosing to look at it today. And a lot of times that's the shift that people are choosing on a daily.

I like that. I like that it can be something done over the day, too. It's not like you have to do it five minutes in the beginning of the day. Yeah. I have enough stuff to do beginning of the day though. Usually things start slipping through the cracks there. And I love that. And I, I think about like the spark activities as being really good for prevention and just keeping like maintaining some more equilibrium,

it's more balance giving us more energy to, or whatever we need to be great with our kids. And the other thing I'm thinking of that people listening might be thinking, they might be like that. What about those emergencies? When I, maybe I have a mommy meltdown or maybe my kids has had a meltdown, what do I do in those times when it kind of all falls apart?

Yeah. So one is give yourself permission. So yeah, you you're human. Like I always tell my mama's who have their own meltdowns. I say, kiss your brain. Yeah. You you're human. Your brain is doing exactly what it's supposed to do. So it's going into fight flight or freeze. And for a lot of our mamas, they find that they might be fought.

They might go into Fon, which is people pleasing or doing what others expect of them. Especially if they're raising kids who are autistic or ADHD and, and they may not have even realized that that's what they naturally do when things are going bad. And so first is just to say, all right, like there's nothing wrong with me. This is a human experience.

This is part of being human. So my brain is in check. My brain is working. Yay. That's a good thing. And then to just allow yourself to feel it, there is nothing wrong with feeling sad, feeling upset, feeling frustrated. And then once you've had those emotions, you've let yourself kind of go through those. Then it starting to go through that thought swamp of,

okay, what are the, what is the information that I have in front of me? And then what is the thought that I'm having about that? Okay. I'm thinking that, you know, our life is ruined, right? So

maybe the fact is your kid got kicked out of school. So which has happened here lots of times. So then the feeling might be like,

I'm a terrible mom or the thought might be, I'm a terrible mom. Our life is ruined. Like he's never going to get into school. And you go into those, like those spirals. How does that make you feel? Well, that makes me feel really sad and really guilty for not being a better mom to him. And so what actions am I taking?

Well, I'm crying on the couch and I'm wallowing. And I am thinking backwards about all the things I've done wrong up to this point that isn't going to get you anywhere because that's going backwards. So what you have to do is you have to, when you're ready, you have to start saying, okay, here's this thought? Or is this? My kid got kicked out of school.

Okay. What is another thought that makes you feel differently? So another thought could be, well, that was not a school that fits his needs. So how does that make me feel? Well, it makes me feel like my kid is unique. It makes me feel a little hopeful that there is a school out there that does fit my kids' needs.

It makes me feel like kind of empowered. Like I know my kid and I know what he needs and those people just didn't know him. So my actions are going to be different. My actions are going to mean that I'm going to start researching other schools. I'm going to start documenting the things that I love about my kid and the things that help him and the things that don't work for him.

And I'm going to start setting up supports for him. That is going to get me totally different results than just looking backwards. Instead, I'm looking at what I can do to change this situation. That's great. I think that's super helpful as a, as a, as a means to shift where we're at. And I like what you also said, that it not just shifts what we're thinking,

but it changes our actions and the decisions that we're making and what we do next. Dayna, this is super helpful. I mean, this is stuff that we could talk to you about for a long time. You have a lot of material about all of this. So as we're wrapping up though, is there any final words that you have, or do you have a big ask for the audience here?

So my big thing that I want anyone who's listening to this, if this spoke to you in any way, I just want you to know you're not alone. You are exactly who you're meant to be. You are reacting exactly how your body is designed to react, and you are not as arable parent. Like I want you to know that and you are in the perfect community.

Jason and Cecelia have such this amazing, amazing ability to gather people together in the resources and the experts that you need. And so you have found yourself at home. And so I'm super excited that you are here with them and just know that if I was right there with you, I'd be reaching out and giving you a big old hug for that connection.

And then my big ask would just be, give yourself some grace, go easy on yourself, get a little post-it note out and go ahead right now and write down something that you can look at and believe every single day. So it might be that I'm, I'm, I'm resilient, or I can do this, or I can do hard things, or I'm not broken.

I'm exactly who I need to be, whatever it is. You need to hear every single day to do that shift. Go ahead and write that down right now. And every morning, I want you to look at it and I want you to just take a big, deep breath and just tell yourself I got this. That's great. I liked that.

Dayna, thank you. Good reminder for all of us, I think, and you know that you have a lot to offer you. You do a lot for parents who were very kind what you said about us, but you also really provide a fantastic place for parents and you have a lot of free resources and you have some great programs. How can people find out more about what you have online?

I Think the easiest way is to go to lemonlimeadventures.com. We've got all of our different offerings there, but w if this is what you're struggling with is your own outburst and your own, you know, mom, meltdowns, whatever you want to call it, then I would encourage you to go to, we have [meltdown mastery.com](http://meltdownmastery.com), and that will help you as well.

Awesome. We'll put a link for that in the speaker notes, and thank you for offering that to our audience here. And thank you for spending the time here with us and talking with us. We look forward to future conversations. It's always great to have you appreciate you spending the time with us, and we'll talk to you again in the future. Okay.

Awesome. Thank you so much for having me. Sure. Thanks. Thank you. Bye-bye.