



FREE ONLINE CONFERENCE, OCTOBER 14-18

Debbie Reber

How to Raise a Differently Wired Child

Welcome to Happily Family. I'm Cecilia Hilkey Jason Hilkey. And we're delighted today to have Debbie Reber with us. Debbie is a parenting activist, New York Times, best selling author keynote speaker, and the founder of tilt parenting, a website top podcast and social media community for parents who are raising differently, wired children, her newest book is differently wired raising an exceptional child in a conventional world.

Welcome, Debbie. It's great to have you. Thank you so much for having me. I wanted to start a little bit by just having you talk about how you got to be in the position that you are now with tilt parenting and a little bit about your story because there are some people in the audience that might not be as familiar with your work as we are.

Sure. And I will just say this was not part of my master plan. Like when I, when I was in high school and I was like sifting through the career choices, this was not on the list, but I came to this really organically. And I'll say that before doing this work for tilt parenting, I used to, I spent almost 15 years writing books for teen girls and speaking at girls conferences and was kind of a self-confidence advocate for young women and loved that work.

It was my heart work. And then, you know, I ended up giving birth to a son and that was really confusing to me. And then, but I was still doing that work in the teen girl space. And as my son, you know, got older and was a toddler and then preschool, and we started getting this information feedback sometimes from teachers and others that,

Oh, this is an intense person. This is a complicated kid. And it was requiring a lot more of my focus and attention. And so I was kind of juggling these two different pieces and that at a certain point, my role as my son's kind of researcher, definitely kind of the primary caregiver, but also advocate and trying to figure out who is this kid and how are we going to help him thrive?

That kind of took over. And so I had all of these other skills as a, as an author and as a speaker and a content creator. And so in raising this, what I now call differently wired kid, I really recognized all of the gaps in the system, the lack of resources, the challenges for parents like me and were everywhere by the way,

parents like me are everywhere, but that we feel isolated and it's just so hard to forge a path. And so when I kind of was at a better place in my own journey, I took all of those skills from my team grow advocacy years, and I pivoted and I created something that I needed. I created tilt parenting and started sharing resources for other parents,

help them with this journey. That's awesome. And I, I love that. I, I don't know if we had this in our master plan. I can imagine that Was not an option when I was in high school either. Like I was, I had very different plans. I can imagine that there are also people in the audience that are like,

okay, maybe, maybe kids who are in my master plan, but it looks like really different right now than what I expected. So, so we wanted to have you here today to talk specifically about like educationally, how do we like support kids particularly differently? And I think that's one of the things that I've recognized for myself and many, many of the parents that we've worked with now and with the previous business where we worked with parents and kids with disabilities that I think there's that sometimes when we end up with a kid that isn't the kid that we expected to have,

like we had these hopes and dreams for a certain kind of kid. We had hopes and dreams for like what we thought it was all going to be like, and things start turning out a little differently sometimes. And sometimes that's really true for parents, especially with kids with disabilities or that have different challenges are wired differently. And I know that I still,

I'm still going through that myself. I'm like, Oh wow, this isn't the educational path. I thought that I had ideally for one of my daughters or this isn't the way I thought this was all gonna play out. Like, and I'm still kind of, there's a mourning process to go, I'm, I'm still going through. And there's also this process of like reshaping and recreating and being open to what is for the future and figuring,

figuring that out. So there's like this personal transformation that I'm still having to go through. And I think that a lot of parents that have kids that are differently wired or have that are just different in ways that they didn't expect have to kind of go through. I kind of hear you talking about that a little bit. When you were talking about pivoting and kind of reshaping,

is that, did you have that experience? Is that something that you can relate to A hundred percent? I mean, and to be fair, I think all parents go through this in some way or another, because we all go into parenting, you know, or giving birth and starting a family with this idea of what it's going to look like and how we're going to feel as parents and who our kids are going to be.

And we might have their whole life planned out for them, what sports they're going to Excel in and so on. So I think none of our kids come out, you know, the way that we expect. And so that

tension between the expectations and reality, I think is always there. And when you're raising a child who is neurodivergent or differently wired,

or has mental health challenges or struggles in other areas, the disconnect between the expectations and reality is a little bigger. And for many of us, we have this idea about the way the, like you've mentioned the educational philosophy or the kind of a school and a lot of parents, especially when we were kids, right. Our parents often were not thinking,

Hm, I wonder if my kid is a Waldorf kid or a Montessori kid, like for many parents in our generation mean we were little that not happening. It was like, this is the school down the street, and that's where you will go. And so, you know, part of this is just the challenge of being a parent in today's age,

where we do have much more awareness. We're reading so many books from these experts and we really want to be in choice about how we raise our child and the philosophy we're going to use. And sometimes those choices do not mesh up with who our child actually is. And that can be really challenging. Yeah. And then of course the experience of the pandemic has like changed all of our expectations.

And even some mourning has been involved in some grief has been involved there too. So it's like just kind of layers upon layers. Yeah. A big growth spurt happening right now, Another growth opportunity. Okay. Let's dive in and talk specifically about some educational struggles. And if you had any advice for families that are dealing with particular things, one thing that we've heard from families is kids are not doing schoolwork or they're lying about it,

or they're kind of faking it. And it's for you as a, as a parent. And as an expert, when you start hearing stories about kids struggling with schoolwork, where, where do you go? What kind of advice I want to say, like, I've heard this from not immediately, what comes to mind is usually teens or adolescents, but I've heard parents struggling with this very,

very young kids, even, especially like during the pandemic where there was so much happening at home and trying to manage what they're doing at home, what their schoolwork is. So I just want to say for parents, like, we're not just talking about adolescents here or teens, this spans a wide age range. So you asked where I go. And my kind of initial kind of default response is that we have,

again, these expectations as parents. And this is the painful part is to start to recognize that our child is on their own journey and that we can't make them be motivated. We can't make them feel excited about their schoolwork. We really can't make them do anything, you know, and that is hard to, to really reconcile. It's one thing to say it it's another to experience it and to really live it.

But, you know, so where I go with that is trying to understand, first of all, the underlying why for why a child is struggling or isn't attending to their work or has lost motivation and focusing my

area or, you know, my intention there on problem solving with my child about, around that. Why, and as opposed to, you know,

me coming up with systems and charts and plans and threats and consequences and all of these things to get the child back on the path that I think they need to be on. My underlying goal for just parenting in general, is to raise kids into adults who know themselves, who know who they are, where they get stuck, what their stumbling blocks are and how to work through them,

like how to hack themselves. And I think that work can start when our kids are really little, you know, we may seem, feel like we have more control when our kids are little, because they may be more, some of them have more of a desire to be compliant. I didn't have that experience, but many parents do, but, but at a certain point,

they're going to, even if they were these really compliant kids who wanted to please, and that was a motivator for them to please their parents or their teachers, they are going to reach a point where that is not going to motivate them anymore. And so the sooner we can create, you know, conversations and respectful relationships and have that foundation, then we'll be kind of priming ourselves to problem solve when things do come up.

So, so this is, this is an interesting conversation, I think, because I think, you know, as our kids have become teens, it's easier to see like, Oh, I can work with them. They're like big people. You don't mean like, some of it's just physically, like they're bigger. And so I think they're more capable and they use full sentences and I can have conversations with them,

but when they're younger, I really wanted to. And I think we did to some degree, but I think there there's, th I could have gone deeper in supporting them and developing that and working with them. Could you talk a little bit about what does that look like for maybe the younger kids and parenting younger kids? What, how does that, how do you do that?

Because I feel like that some parents, and I think I'd fall into this world as well. I look at I'm like, well, my job is to figure the things out for them and to tell them what needs to be done. And like, and part of that is like, I need to motivate, I like, I have these different ideas in my head that I've changed as I've matured as a,

as a parent, but also as they've gotten older, what does that look like? Does that make sense? What I'm asking and kind of talking around it a little bit here. Yeah, I think so. And you know, when you ask that question, I think about the fact that I homeschooled my son from the time he was in third grade through eighth grade.

And so I got a very close up view. What many parents have experienced over the past year and see, and really being more involved in their kids' education. But for me, it starts with there's two pieces. I'll say one is that we, as parents want to question our own ideas around what learning looks like. And so, you know, I think about the homework sheets and,

you know, the, the drill on skill and that kind of stuff. And that is not really a good strategy for a lot of, for many students and especially for differently wired students. And so we need to kind of check ourselves first of all, on what are our goals here and what is our motivation when we're really hyper-focusing on these worksheets or this kind of thing.

What we really want to do is, is ignite our kids' love of learning, or, you know, I think most kids naturally have a love of learning and school can sometimes be that out of them. So we want to re-engage that love of learning. And that looks like, you know, even when our kids are really little where we can find ways for them to drive the learning,

you know, using their areas of interest as, you know, obscure or uninteresting to us as they, they may be like, that's where all the opportunity lies. And so I really encourage parents to find ways to dive into their kids' worlds there, you know, for many of our kids it's games, right? But there's so many things that can be accessed through a game if we're willing to go in open without judge judgment and just kind of with a playful,

curious attitude. And so I think we want to find, we want to access that sense of like wonder and curiosity and, and be pushing that constantly. And sometimes that means sometimes that means having hard conversations with the school and saying, you know what, this reading log is really crushing my kid right now. And they won't be filling it out because I really want them to love reading as opposed to hating having to do it,

to check something off of the list. So I think it's a lot of us confronting our own fears around what learning and education looks like and trying to find ways to, to build a learning environment that really starts with our kids' strengths and interests. Yeah. And I love what you said about being curious about our kids and also tuning into what is our long-term goal here for our child.

And you also mentioned like letting go of the fear, and it reminds me especially tuning into kids and their interests. That reminds me of some of our experiences as a preschool teachers, where sometimes we would have the pleasure of just sitting and watching children. Not, it didn't happen very often with 21 children and like two or three of us adults, but there was one little guy and he spent months just like sticking the hose in a pile of sand and seeing how long it took for the water to come out and where the water was going to come out.

He spent like months and months just in the sand and water. And I was just fascinated because it was such a scientific discovery of like viscosity and, you know, materials and learning so much. Anyway, it was, it was really fun to watch. So we can dive into that stuff with our kids. We can be curious about that stuff, even if they're small and doing stuff that doesn't really make sense to us.

Yeah, yeah, Yeah. Use, you're saying this is just all these memories of when we were teaching came back. And one of them, the phrase was, you said at the very beginning, was looking at the

kids and looking at our kids as a fire to be ignited rather than a vessel to be filled up. And I think that much of the way I approached things originally initially was they were a vessels.

We filled up with knowledge. And when I shifted that perspective of, you know, it's just the imagination that creativity, all of that to be ignited, like it's all there. And it's just, what can we do to ignite that and let that really take off. I really, that shifted my perspective and then things just fall out of it, right?

Like we can sit here and talks about tips and tricks all day. But when we shift our perspective, then we can just come up with those things on our own. So I really appreciate that. And I think coming out of this, you know, almost a year of pandemic of where we've spent so much time with our kids, we, at least for myself,

I'm trying to think about like, what's this new normal, what's the new normal we're coming back to with our kids and how our school is and what our education is, because I know many parents have some real concerns about, are their kids behind, what are their kids gonna be doing with school? What, what has happened? Are they, are they going to be able to like,

just all kinds of concerns around that? And I like what you were saying, like really looking at the purpose behind the education. And I think that is something that we, as parents can really settle into rather than the fear of, you know, did we, did we get through all of the subjects that needed to be, you know, gotten through?

Yeah. Yeah. And that's something, you know, I know you guys have had Seth pearler in your conference and he talks about this all the time. The importance of just always zooming out and looking at the big picture and what we are doing here is raising adults. You know, and I like this idea of that our kids are on their own hero's journey and it is not our journey.

It is fully 100% theirs. It's their story, it's their journey. And we want them to, we want to be their coaches and their supporters as they kind of go through their journey so that they can, you know, come, I don't remember all the phases of their hero's journey, but so that they can kind of, you know, get to that,

that launch that adulthood, whenever it happens, because we know that kids are all on their own unique timelines, but really feeling again, like they know themselves and they have the, the tools and resources to create the life that they want. And that's probably not going to involve like the past tense of French, although it might, but, you know,

like we can just get so hung up on these little details. And I do think this is a kind of, one of the, I hope one of the positive outcomes of the year that we've all been through is, you know, I just read last week that that sat is getting not only are most schools not requiring it, but they're eliminating subject tests,

they're eliminating the essay tests. Like I think these are all really good signs because, you know, we're recognizing that, you know, the current traditional model just isn't really serving most students, no matter how they're wired. And that to me is really exciting. I hope it really opens things up for our kids. We do. I really hope so,

too. It's unfortunate that it took such a jarring experience for that to happen, but it seems like it was something that needed to happen for us to be looking at it differently. So I want to ask a question too, that's related to what we've been talking about there, I'm guessing are some parents that are like, why are we sending our kids to school anyway?

And I know you've like had some guests on your podcast recently, are there resources for parents that are really questioning school and maybe thinking that this is the time to homeschool, or this is the time to really just relook and see if this makes sense anymore, where would you steer those parents to Yeah, a hundred percent. And actually Blake bowls is kind of my go-to resource.

I don't know if he's on your radar, but he is kind of the unschooling guru. And I love his whole philosophy. And even if you're not into unschooling, which for those who don't know what that is, that is really a hundred percent student directed learning. And it, it really means having no agenda as a parent. And that might look like a kid in pajamas for six months on an iPad and being like,

huh, awesome. Curious to see where this takes them. You know, that is a hard thing for a lot of parents to wrap their heads around. But Blake has such an interesting philosophy about it. And his most recent book is called, why are you still sending your kids to school? And it's a great read. It's very provocative. So I steer people in that direction,

but I would also say you don't have to be that radical. And for many differently wired families or parents raising these kids, some form of homeschooling for at least part of their education ends up being a really great break, an opportunity to rebuild some self-esteem some competency because a lot of our kids, you know, they don't typically rocket in a traditional school environment.

You know, many of them, especially, you know, kids with ADHD or are twice exceptional kids learning disabilities, they can emerge from, you know, early elementary, really feeling pretty battered. And some have some have trauma, some know their self-esteem is in the toilet. They identify as stupid or as bad kids. And it can be really hard to undo that,

that, you know, internal message, especially then as our kids move into adolescents. And then, you know, that is like a messy time in a kid's brain. Right. And so, you know, if, if parents and I know that homeschooling is that an option for everyone, but I hear from a lot of families who even just sometimes pulling their kids out and giving them a year or six months to kind of get grounded again and reclaim some of that love of learning and a sense of agency about their education,

then that can really go a long way. And it was certainly a really powerful thing in our family when we did it. So we looked at homeschooling a lot when our kids were younger, we ended up coming across a school that was kind of an interesting combination of those things. And we looked deeply at unschooling and I, I really am a big fan of it.

And at the same time, I, I think that for me, it would really take a lot of work for myself to let go of a lot of my expectations. A lot of my, what I think childhoods like in school is like, like that was really, and that some of that was going to conferences. Some of that was reading, but like,

it was interesting how much personal work it really took for me to get through that and to be accepting of it. And I think that that's really prepared us for this time with one of our kids in particular, who has been essentially doing that. And one of those, Our kids have homeschooled at different times in their education and yeah, Well, we'll call it unschooling right now.

That's what we're going to call it. TRIBE. Yeah. And the thing that I think that was interesting is the relationship building that was possible out of it. And I could also see how it could go either way it could be relationship building, or it could be kind of tough on a relationship. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about that.

Like how does a parent find that? Because I think that we all want a strong relationship with our kids and we talk a lot about that. Can you talk a little bit about like, what's that, how do you, how do you do that when you're, when you're having school at home, whether it's in the middle of the pandemic or it's a homeschooling or unschooling or online schooling,

what, what can a parent do within, within the context of education and, and, and maintaining that relationship? Yeah. So I just wrote down three little things that I want to touch upon and I can't read the first one, but no. Okay. Now I know what it says. Okay. So first of all, I think as parents,

we really need to set good boundaries for ourselves and because we can become really inmeshed in all of it, our kids' emotional experience, their ups and downs, their moods, their own challenges with, if they're doing maybe an online class, like we can get too involved. And also it's important that we maintain the integrity of our parent child relationship, and we don't want to damage that bond or harm that relationship.

So I think kind of having boundaries, maybe going into homeschool parent mode, and then, all right, I'm timing out. Now, moving back into parent mode is important. I would say also for me, the biggest shift happened when, because our first year was kind of, it was a mess, honestly, because I had a big master plan and I had like charts and a curriculum guide.

And I, you know, I felt this huge responsibility because I'm responsible for this kid's education and he's got so much potential. And if it doesn't work, it's going to be all on me. And so I pushed

my agenda forward and that did not work well. So the sooner I think we can, and my agenda was based on my future goals and outcomes for this kid.

Right. So, you know, Jason, you've talked about doing that, that work, you know, as, as an unschooler, how important it is to question that stuff. I think we're confronted by it every day when we're homeschooling. And so we need to continue to examine, even if we think we're, we've come to peace with it, it's still may come up,

you know, come graduation time. Or we start seeing things in our Facebook newsfeed about other kids, you know, scholarship to this or that, and we might get triggered. So I think we want to constantly be doing our own work on that. And then the third thing is to just show up with full presence for our kids. So when we're with them,

we are fully with them without that agenda, without checking our phone, or, you know, getting pulled towards our email or doing other things. But we are just spending time with them. And we're curious about where today might go. We're asking them about their process, where, you know, we're just kind of showing up and some days they might need us not need us around them at all.

They might be really, Happily involved in a project and that's great too, but we can still check in, Hey, I'm here. If you, if you need anything or if you want to talk about things and just really being there for them, I think that, you know, you talked about relationship. I still think of those six years that we homeschooled as,

you know, initially challenging, but ultimately such an honor for me to get, to spend that time with my son and, you know, he's 16 and we're very close and, and I'm so grateful for that relationship. And, and I really do think having that time and just showing up for him and, and just being present is what really kind of cemented this really strong foundation that we have.

Yeah. I love that. As one of the things you mentioned was boundaries and like not kind of getting to in master overly involved in our kids' emotions, letting them have their own process, maybe not those exact words, but that's what I, that was my take home message. What do you recommend, do you have any actual practices for parents who are wanting to have like some better emotional boundaries?

Yeah. So first of all, I don't know if you're talking about self care in this conference. I have a hint. You probably are, but self care is like everything when it comes to, to being able to set those boundaries and maintain that distance. So in fact, I'm talking with my community about the importance of consciously cultivating joy. Like I really think we are so depleted right now.

It's been, it's been a year, right? And it's so important that in order for us to really feel strong enough ourselves to set those boundaries, we, we want to describe our ties, our own self-care. I think getting really familiar with our own fears surrounding our kids is a really important part about setting boundaries too, because it's, you know,

the worst version of ourselves as parents shows up when our fear is triggered. And so we need to know what those scripts are so that when it shows up, we can be like, Oh yeah, I recognize you. I know who you are. I don't believe what you're saying, and I'm going to just move along here. So, but we have to become so familiar with that in order for us to maintain that boundary and not overstep,

not, you know, and it's really, you know, as a, as someone who writes about parenting and, and, and I'm sure this happens in your own life, and I have a lot of friends in the parenting expert space, we all struggle with it. You know, we're, we're all like saying, do this and, you know,

autonomy and let your kid fail and all of that good stuff. And when you're in it, it's really hard. Like it takes a lot of effort to, to, to let them go through their journey and not cross over that boundary. But it's so important for, for their development, for their growing sense of agency. And it's so important for us to maintain,

you know, a meaningful, respectful relationship. And that's what we want. Again, as our kids leave the house, we want them to come to us and not feel like we're going to get on their case or give them a hard time. We want them to trust us and, and, and come to us when they need us. That's a super valuable and a good reminder for us to keep in mind as we're doing anything as parents,

whether it's education or just day in, day out, w w we could talk to for ever about this, there's so much here and it's, so it's so fun to talk to you about it. She has such great experiences and such a great background. Do you have anything as, as we're wrapping up here, do you have any final words or a big ask for our audience here?

Thing that I most want to encourage parents to think about is to remember that, you know, there is no right way to navigate life. Like there is no one timeline and all of our kids, no matter how they're wired are on their own unique timeline. And respecting that timeline is one of the best things that we can do for our kids, because they,

they know if, if we feel that they're not meeting, you know, milestones when they should, or that we have these expectations and they're not there yet, they get it like our kids get it. And it comes through in the energy and the way that we parent our kids. So really respecting their timeline and again, their own journey. And remembering that it's,

there is that our kids are creative, resourceful, and whole, they are no matter how they're wired, they are here exactly as they are meant to be. And they have so much potential. And our job is to really coach them and support them and be there for them so that they can reach that potential Super valuable. And I find also super challenging.

And at the same time, it's not like it's, it's kind of that weird duality of like, it's hard, but it's not hard. And so I, I appreciate that reminder unless we get in the way with our fears. And I love

what you said about when we're in fear that like the worst parts of our parenting come out, like nothing good.

It comes out of my mouth when I'm scared. So I just love that. As a reminder, Debbie, you have such so many great resources. So many of them are free. You have your books, it's, there's, there's a lot that you have that's available. How can people find out more about you and what you have out there? So the best place to tap into my resources is @tiltparenting.com.

I have, well, by the time this conference, Arizona have close to 300 podcast episodes and interviewed tons of great folks and just a lot of other free resources and a great community on the website. And I've done a lot of work around supporting parents on their educational journey, their kid's journey. So there's a section called tilt education, and you can find school listings.

If you're trying to find a school that does well, it's better, it's bedded and created by the community. So parents who have experienced at those schools, and there's also a free download for how to basically figure out if this is the right school fit for your child. And the second resource I just wanted to tell you about is I have a seven day differently wired challenge.

It's free every day. You get a short video for me with like under two minutes where I it's just one little tweak or reframe that I challenge people to incorporate in their life every day for seven days to see if that can create some big changes. Great. We'll, we'll put the link to those in the speaker notes and encourage people to check those out,

check out Debbie Reber. She's got such great people that she interviews and so many great resources. Thank you, Debbie, for taking the time to talk to us here, it's always a joy talking to you and thanks for all your work that you're doing to support parents and kids. And look forward to talking to you again in the future. Thank you.

Thank you so much. This was great. Bye-bye.