

RealTalk for Parents: Season 2, Episode 1

Language Matters, featuring Sarah Wayland

Yvette: Hello and welcome to real talk for parents the podcast brought to you by The Parents' Place of Maryland. And I'm your host Yvette Young-DeCosta and today we are going to be talking to Sarah Wayland. We're going to introduce you guys to Sarah because we are going to be talking in a series of our podcasts. Welcome to the show Sarah.

Sarah: Thanks Yvette

Yvette: Sarah and I have known each other for eight years and we're both parents of children with disabilities we met at the Children's Developmental Clinic, which is an awesome program brought to you by University of Maryland and Prince George's Community College. And at the Children's Developmental Clinic the parents are in a parent class and the children are with a clinician dealing with reading, motor and social skills. So both Sarah and I started out in the class as parents. I ended up teaching the class and Sarah ended up going into leadership in the SECAC and starting her own business. I'm going to let Sarah toot her own horn so Sarah, tell us a little bit about yourself.

Sarah: Thanks Yvette I started my life out doing research in cognitive psychology study people who have had language problems after a stroke and I had my own kids and it turned out that they had their own language problems and they both ended up being on the autism spectrum and they both have their alphabet soup of diagnoses. And in the process of trying to figure out how to support them then I had to learn a lot, how to translate information from the research world into the world of working with my own children. And I feel like I'm a fairly smart person and but it was really crazy hard, it was really crazy hard to do that. I was very resourceful and kept thinking this is hard and I would love to have other people benefit from the hard won knowledge that I had gained with this. So I decided to start my own business Guiding Exceptional Parents and I work with families

helping them navigate the process so they will not have to go through as much pain and misery that I did.

Yvette: I'm sure they're very happy to get some guidance. What we are going to talk about today is Sarah has this awesome class, Put on Your Oxygen mask, I've taken the class. I'm going to let Sarah talk to you about what the class is about and what are the components and we are going to continue talking about the topic in Podcasts to come. Tell us a little about Put on Your Oxygen Mask.

Sarah: So I came up with the idea for this class because I was participating in a research study at the University of Maryland it was for depressed mothers of children with ADHD. At that point my kids did not have a diagnosis of Autism but they did have a diagnosis of ADHD and I was definitely depressed. This was run by Andrea Chronis-Tuscano at the University of Maryland. And she wanted to figure out if providing the parents with parenting classes and cognitive behavior therapy would improve outcomes for the kids. So she set up a research study where she had two groups: one group got parenting classes and the other group had parenting classes but the other group had cognitive behavioral therapy incorporated into the parenting class. By the way the parent class was based on Russel Barkely's "Parenting Your Defiant Child" curriculum. She taught this class and the strategies I learned from cognitive behavior therapy were incredibly helpful, pretty life changing for me really helped me understand why I got sad about things all the time and it gave me tools to help me control my emotions so I could be more fully present with my own children.

Yvette: So I think this is important because we have talked about this, to give you the explanation for the metaphor of put on your oxygen mask. If you are on an airplane and the flight attendant lets you know that if there is a change in cabin pressure that oxygen masks will fall down and to put on your own mask before helping others. I think it is really important as caregivers, or providers and advocates with the community that we have to take care of ourselves because it is very stressful managing our children with their disabilities and helping other families that we have to pause, that one of the things moving into the new year is helping families balance, you know the needs of their children their own personal

needs and the welfare of the family as a whole. So I think this is really timely about putting on your oxygen mask. What kinds of topics do you talk about in the class?

Sarah: I talk about, it's a seven session class, and the first class is called know yourself. And actually I use a questionnaire developed by Dan Shapiro for his Parent Child Journey parenting class, which I also teach. He developed that questionnaire to help parent's understand who their kids were. But what I found as I was teaching that class is that it was actually important for the parents to know what their profiles looked like, so you could talk about places where your profile was similar to your child's or different from your child's. So the first class is basically on knowing yourself and there are some behavior management strategies incorporated into that section. The second is called improve your mood and that class is aimed at helping people understand the cognitive behavior therapy framework. Which involves thinking about how you have feelings and those feelings can be altered depending on how you're behaving, how you are thinking about things, how your body feels and so what cognitive behavior therapy says is that you can't change your feelings but you can change how you act in a situation. You can change how you're thinking and interpreting what you're hearing. You can change whether your body feels good or not to some extent. And by changing all those things your feelings come along for the ride. So by improving the way you think about things or by improving how you feel by getting exercise or eating right and things like that you're going to feel better and your moods are going to be better. And that's the second session; the third session is on pleasant activities so that talks about how to get your body feeling good. The fourth session is on constructive thinking, so we dive into more constructive ways of thinking about the things you are encountering in your daily life.

The fifth session is not cognitive behavior therapy but is on the stages of your journey. And for that one I was using the Elisabeth Kübler-Ross stages of grief, she developed these to help people dealing with terminal illness and I found this wonderful book by Mary.. something. It's by this awesome person I can't remember.

Yvette: What we'll do is find out and we'll put that in the resource section and all the books Sarah mentions we will have listed and linked so you can kind of check them out for yourself.

Sarah: Anyway this book is called "Not What I Expected" Not What I Expected: Help and Hope for Parents of Atypical Children by Rita Eichenstein and it talks about the stages of your journey when you have a child that is different from the child you were expecting. So we talk about the different stages of your journey and how you revisit them. The next one is called overcoming your fears. Sometimes we have ideas about how things are going to play out, we can face those head on or we can run away from them. So that class is about how to face your fears and deal with them in a more constructive manner. And then the last class is on effective communication and that's about how to communicate your wants and desires and thoughts with people more effectively so that you can actually have some hope of addressing them, the issues you are facing.

Yvette: I participated in the class and I think it is very very valuable. And what I want to do is talk about a little in detail about the first part of the class where we are talking about knowing yourself and improving your moods and feelings, and I think it's important and cause what I found because I went through Dr. Shapiro's class as well that as parents when we can calm ourselves and our children how we react to their behavior in turn calms down. So us being less reactive because they are going to have different behaviors, so we have to kind of be able to take that moment and pause. And when we do have those feelings, kind of reframing our thought process and I think it's important, sometimes we even have to have reminders on a post-it a friend of mine talking about changing your stinking thinking. It's very easy to start I'm a bad parent I'm not doing this and you get in that downward spiral.

That we see it in our kids and we try to you know turn the situation around. That a lot of times your upset and then you can say you say let's talk about what we're thinking and let's do some deep breathing, so with the deep breathing then we are changing our physiology we're physically changing how we are feeling and will then enable us to be calm and calmly approach the behavior. I've tried that with

my youngest child that had some developmental delays and has ADHD. So he you know very...impulse control high energy and I've found that, there was one instance when we were out an about that I had him close to me and I was touching him and so the physical closeness he was able to calm down and I am talking to him calmly and also just getting him to count to ten and getting him to breath and believe it or not I've even gotten him to do some yoga with me. So I think it's important those are the skills that we really, we have to kind of remind ourselves to use you know we have our toolbox. And those are the skills that are really important to teach our children because and we are going to really kind of talk more about what we need the tools in the toolbox and that's one of the things here at RealTalk we want to we're giving you real perspectives from real parents, we're giving you practical information giving you the tools that you need to kind of put in that toolbox to be successful.

This is the end of today's show and we are going to be talking more with Sarah about her amazing "Putting on you Oxygen Mask Class" and just giving you those tools and I think it's really important. So thank you Sarah, thank you for stopping by talking to us today.

Sarah: It was great Yvette, thanks for having me.

Yvette: Thanks for listening to RealTalk for Parents the podcast brought to you by the Parents' Place of Maryland. And here at RealTalk we're on that journey right along with you and remember it's a marathon not a sprint. Talk to you later.