

THE RESILIENT KID PODCAST

Season 2 – Episode 16

Discussing Neurodiversity with Helen Davies

Ashley: Hello and welcome to The Resilient Kid podcast with me, Ashley Costello, psychotherapist of over 25 years. I have a guest today. Very excited. Helen Davis from Practical Wisdom, who is. We only met recently and I was really, really excited because, a lot of kind of parents and people that are coming through my therapy service absolutely, you know, recognizing traits in their children.

Are recognizing traits in themselves. And just before we kind of hit record, Helen and I were having a conversation about that, so we'll get to that in a moment, but first Helen, welcome. Can you introduce yourself to the lovely listeners, please?

Helen: Absolutely. Yes. So, I'm Helen Davis and I'm the founder of Practical Wisdom.

It is a not-for-profit organization that supports neurodivergent adults and the organizations they are in. And that could be adulting cause that's a little tricky parenting and also trying to help organizations being neurodivergent friendly inclusive. So that's the kind of thing that we, we do with Practical Wisdom.

Ashley: Brilliant. And one of the conversations we just had off air, because we were getting quite excited to hit record. Was that a lot of parents now there's lots of kids that are, you know, we're recognizing traits because I think one, we're all more aware of neuro divergent traits and needs and behaviors.

So, there's lots of that happening for kids, but actually a lot of the parents and I told you a little story about, you know, as, as we're recognizing that. The mums and dads are going, hold on a minute, I do that. So, are you, do you see a lot of that, Helene?

Helen: Yeah, I know, we definitely see a lot of that.

And also, I think it's because when we were at school, it wasn't always recognised. There wasn't the same. Like you said, the awareness has increased. And so, there wasn't the same knowledge. Unfortunately, a lot of people might have experienced being told they were too lazy or like pull your socks up or whatever it was.

And you kind of learned to mask and then, you know, at different points in your life, you might realize you actually are neurodivergent for whatever reason, whether it's a new job, it can be a relationship or indeed being a parent. And then you notice. Oh, I've got all those traits when they're saying at school, you know that your kid might have ADHD traits or autistic spectrum disorder or, you know, whatever the neuro spiciness is.

So, it's really common, but it's a bit of a shock to be honest, because then you realize they've got it. And I think I do. And where do I go from here? Well, that's completely changed how I look back on my life. And I also need to help and support my child now.

Ashley: Yeah, and I think that's really difficult. I mean, I think there's one thing there, the term that you use, That I really love is did you say transition points and when you were talking about kind of getting a new job or, you know, when your kid gets diagnosed or menopause, we spoke about before that idea of actually those transition points are really highlight when you're struggling and can highlight that.

So, I think that's a really. Good thing. But the other thing is, is what you've just said, which I think is really important is it's not just about trying to support our kids, but actually now you've got to cope when life just suddenly looks different. It's like almost, you know, Alice in Wonderland looking through a completely different glass, isn't it?

Helen: Yeah, it really is. And, and I don't know about you, but it's really common for parents to always put their child first and forget their needs. But actually, you almost can't because you suddenly have to reframe everything and you're trying to support your child. So, you know, I think one of the key things I always say to people, particularly parents, basically, is that self-care is not selfish and that you also need to look after yourself.

And there's nothing stopping you both being on a journey where you explore together and depending how old they are, that you both know that. That's okay too because also you're then like giving permission to your child to understand that,

you know, you can learn things together as well. Sometimes I think there's a lot of pressure as a parent to be the perfect parent.

And actually, I think we shouldn't let. Sort of perfect to get in the way of good.

Ashley: Absolutely. And one of my things that I bang on about to my parents that come to see me is that we only, according to science, we only have to get this parent in malarkey right 30 percent of the time and they'll still turn out okay.

You know, and it's such a relief, you know, for some parents it doesn't have to be Instagram parenting, but think you're so right with that, that actually, we know as particularly as moms, you know, I think if I'm not in a good space, the house is not in a good space, you know, whether that is Whether that is for, you know, is dinner going to come out?

Is the house upside down? Is it, what about the kids? So, we have to make sure that we look after, you know, ourselves first. Because we, we've got to give a bit of ourselves away to, to our kids. So actually, to make sure that we are. Good in a good space.

Helen: Yeah. And I don't think, I don't think it's based in science, but I certainly know that when, whenever I'm not on form, like I think that's when my son knows and goes up a gear, it's like, why would you do that now?

Whereas he's been like final week. And so also, I think there is, it's because they're unsettled. So, I think it's also by making sure you are okay. And being kind to yourself. You're also helping bring things like down a level which I think is important too.

Ashley: Yeah, absolutely. So, what kind of tips and, and kind of strategies do you recommend for parents?

Particularly parents who you know, maybe facing a, you know, whether they go for diagnosis or they just recognize that they might be neurodivergent. What kind of things do you, I was going to say to make life easier, but Helen, I'm not sure that's always the way, but certainly help out.

Helen: Yeah. So, there's a couple of things because one thing that is particularly coming up because we're supporting people on the waiting list for autism and ADHD at the moment, I, it's really.

obvious, the high level of negative self-talk in our heads. So, one of the things is about being kind to yourself and like, the way you speak to yourself, would you speak to your child in that way? And you probably wouldn't. So, I think a certain amount of self-kindness. Also, it's okay to look for strategies that would actually really.

give you a hand. So, it depends what your neuro spicy favourite. So, for some, like having a set routine takes where you don't even have to think that you know, this is what you do in a Monday or Tuesday. That kind of helps. If you're prone to like memory issues, I'm shockingly bad. I have two bank accounts because I know I'm going to lose a debit card. There's no maybe it's just when. So, it's what, what do you regularly come up against that you could have a specific strategy on? So that means might mean that you need a certain routine. So, you don't have to think that might be the, if you're going to lose things, you always have a spare set of keys, for example, with the neighbour you know, that you have different things like that in place.

For, for some people it would be about. Being kind to yourself, actually remembering to take a break. Also stop trying to be, like I said, the perfect parent, and also fit with your natural rhythm. So, some of us are morning people, like we are and other people are more like night owls. So why would you do all the most difficult things at the opposite end of the day, which don't fit with you?

It's okay. To what I like to say, own your weird it's all right to be different because truthfully behind closed doors, people are all, you know, there's a lot of uniqueness, not this Instagram world, which looks perfect, which is lovely and so realizing that other people haven't got it perfect, taking the pressure off yourself a little bit and just seeing what are the specific things, reach out to various organizations. There are things out there, but they can, I've noticed that they can be quite difficult to find, which is why I'm trying to put more and more resources on the Practical Wisdom site so that we can actually help people.

So, it, does depend on your type of neurodiversity. If you've got dyspraxia, so I, I break things all the time. I only buy wooden ornaments now and it's because I

know I'm going to break them. And I did have a chat, you know, the other afternoon, just don't get them offended if I break something you buy.

So, your kind of also manage expectations. Now, the other really important thing is If we, if you look at your family, there's a high chance it's a whole family thing of neuro spiciness, so you might, but it won't present in the same way, so you need to find ways that you can live in harmony together, because sometimes somebody who wants freedom and somebody who likes order might be in the same household, and that's like fire and water, so instead of trying to create this perfect compromise, find ways that you can take Turns or ways that you can actually, you know, know whose need is higher at different points.

So, like you want to try. People not to completely spin out because once they have, then it's harder to sort, but further down the line is when you want to, so you don't want to be at breaking point when you ask for help. So, try, if you can, think of what is your challenges before that and what you can actually get the support on.

Ashley: ,

Yeah, and I think that's really important. Because I think, well, first of all, you kind of giving support on your website, which is, I'll put in the show notes, which is practicalwisdom.uk. Is that correct? And, but I'll put all the details to find Helen and stuff in the show notes anyway, but actually I find that and any, I love, I love that you say neuro spiciness.

That's, that's just brilliant. But actually, I find that trying to get that information. Is, is difficult and then that's a barrier. And if you have got any neurodivergent traits, you're going to give up before that anyway, you know, most of the time. So, I think the fact that you'll make kind of spotlight in those areas where you can get help or, or maybe charities that help is absolutely brilliant but I think that's really important because I find it managing expectations is a big one, you know, especially with grandparents who, you know.

I've, I've had it with clients where grandparents have got these huge expectations. And when they've started talking, actually, granddad's probably neurodivergent as well. He's done it in such a way that it's my way or the highway kind of thing. And I talk to parents all the time about teachers and parents' grandparents or aunts and uncles talk about what their expectations are and how, you know, we're never going to live up to that because their expectations and what your kid wants to do

are two, two very, you know, vast different ideas. So, I think the expectations is a really, really good kind of topic.

Helen: Yeah, absolutely. And also, because if you're say, for example, if your autistic child doesn't like surprises, Christmas can be proper stressful for them, and then they're for you. My son, definitely, has, like, autistic traits, and he, he does, he said to me, I don't, don't like surprises, actually. And so, we've got an agreement that, like, if it is a surprise, say, like Christmas, it's from a certain list of things because otherwise he's like, well, I didn't want that and that's not on my list, you know, and he's not, he's not being rude.

He's actually being factual because he like, well, if it's meant to be a gift and a present, why would you get me something I actually don't want to do or have? And it's proper stressful Christmas is. Because of the mixed expectations and this perfect family, like how you're meant to be.

Ashley: Do you know what, though?

I absolutely love that. That should be kind of just life goals. What, you know, why, why do we think that we are the experts when we're buying a gift for somebody else? Do you know what I mean? That to me, I don't know what your son's called, but I absolutely love it. And it's going to kind of. Excuse me, be a little kind of real now.

Why would you buy something that's not on the list? Yeah, I like that. That's so cool.

Helen: Yeah, it is actually very funny because he's so I'm, I've ADHD traits and he's got all, we're literally fire and water in different and we, we can't compromise. I've got to own that. So, we take turns because I literally do not want to watch, but that might not be it.

Just a neuro spicy thing, but like for example, I might not want to watch, you know, something about anime for the hundreds of times yet again. But I will if it's that's our allotted thing and therefore I he gets to be dragged around walking around the Brighton lanes That's my thing and so I it also and we've got obviously neuro spicy friends and you know, because we do like to hunt in packs.

So, like, so also it works with the other kids as well and then they can get their head around that. That's a rule that they can get and, and you know, for like ADHD people who are impulsive and stuff like that, you can also you know, make sure that they get a bit of freedom because the other thing is if you're like an autistic child or adult, Christmas, if you're meant to go around to a relative's and it's like, they're boring, sorry anyone, but sometimes it's really boring, like, what can you actually do to make it more interesting for the kid, other than the tablet, obviously that's a quick win, but slightly addictive, but, but there are other things, like, can you actually, in advance, say, Like, you know Alice really likes to play Monopoly, can we do that?

Because the other thing is, we're also expecting children to conform to the adult expectations. And I think adults think that they need to be a certain way. So, you, so it's like... That's why I talk about adulting a lot, it's because it's okay to have fun, it's okay to be silly, and actually, if you're just serious all the time, that's what you're teaching your kid.

So, I, I always think it's no one's an adult, is the truth. I think we just... learn to mask more and more and more and how to be socially acceptable. So, I also think permission to have fun is actually really important. And, and, and have a laugh. And, and that's why I also say about how you do your thing, because each family behind closed doors, like I've been in this for 35 years, when you go into people's homes, they have their own ways of doing things.

There's different standards of where you, how you keep your... You know, how you like your furniture, how tidy you are and different things like that. If you're an ADHD person, by the way, if you put it in a cupboard, as soon as you shut it, we have object permanence issue. It doesn't exist, right? So, I can't show you right, but I have open, like we're in my kitchen, I have open plan shelving.

Thank God. It's the first time I've done that. I can find things now. Because I literally, all I do all the time is open a cupboard, trying to guess which cupboard it's in. You know, so you, it's like how to live your life how you want that actually is a match with you instead of how you think you should be.

Because that's what Instagram told you. Or even your family, because like you were saying about the grandparents, it's like there's a certain expectation that it's impossible. Yeah, I'm sorry. You

Ashley: just dropped out then for a second. Oh no, sorry. No, it's all right. I'll edit it so it's not an issue. Oh, okay.

What, where you were, was, you said about

what was it now? I was just writing down what the thing was and it's gone out of my head. It was about the cupboard.

Helen: The cupboard, yeah.

Ashley: Yeah. Okay. You said, you put stuff in a cupboard and then that was it, it went. Oh,

Helen: okay. Yeah, so I put stuff in a cupboard and as soon as I shut the door, it doesn't exist.

I literally have no idea what's in the cupboard. And so, for myself having a kitchen that's open plan and that actually have open shelving, it may not look nice and neat for other people, but for me, I can find stuff quickly. It's so much easier. It's so much faster. It's less stressful. My son's room used to be that.

And then and then we said, wouldn't it be nice if we put like little doors and everything. So, we, because we got those, you know, little cube boxes that we all get, you know, cause they. We do love Ikea but there's, I have no idea where anything is now though. And it's really hard because I'm like literally, can we not put like a little picture in front of it, so I'll know.

So, there's object permanence is a real problem for people who have, you know, some executive function issues, particularly ADHD. And so, like you, you, it is okay to create your home. In a way that functions for you, whatever that thing really,

Ashley: absolutely, and I think, I think that's I'm smiling to myself because we have literally just bought IKEA wardrobes for the kids that the hubby is getting in and they've got these beautiful sliding doors on them.

And I said yesterday, can we buy a label maker? And they were like, they just looked at me and went, why? And I said, because I had really like you and me to know socks go in that drawer. And, and it was just one of them because actually

mine is kind of almost the opposite. That if. If I give like a, you know, here's your washing returned, go and put it away.

If I walk in and open their wardrobes and it's all a mess, it gets me a little bit stressed out. And I think because then I feel like I've got the responsibility to tidy up. I will not be doing it by the way, I will fight that urge and I'll make them do it. But it is that if I know and they know socks going there, then it just takes out the argument, the sting, whatever you want to call it.

So, it's like, for me, it's brilliant. But one of the things I wanted to say to you is we do often have our homes for guests. We do not have guests every day. Do you know what I mean? And it's got to be practical and functional for the family that actually live in it, not for your, you know, your Christmas day guests.

Helen: Absolutely. I have to say, though, I do like guests coming around. One, because it's when I'll tidy.

But suddenly my little... ADHD hyperfocus will kick in is like, oh yeah, this is very funny, right? On my 50th birthday, two days before true ADHD fashion, I was like, let's whitewash the floor. I don't know what I was thinking, but I thought it was a brilliant idea. So, there I was like two days trying to put like the white, varnish and stuff on the wooden floor and it said two coats.

What it meant was 12. So, I also had to keep getting up in the middle of the night to do the next layer, so that it would dry in time for the next layer before the party. Yeah, that's a classic ADHD.

Ashley: Yeah, it's funny. Actually, my hubby is he's got massive Irish family and a couple of cousins came over and they walked into the house and went, oh my goodness, like, because they'd never been before.

And we've built our own house. Anybody who's listened to the podcast will know we built our own house. And, and they walked in and they went, Oh my goodness, it's like really tidy. And I was thinking you cheeky, you know, and I went, what do you mean? And what they actually meant is there wasn't, it was quite minimalistic because they, like they said tidy.

So, I thought, oh, you meant. What, did you think we were scruffy? Did you think it was untidy? Is it in my head? Because I, yeah. And actually, they said no,

because actually there's a lot of you know, particularly in their family, there's lots of stuff, like lots and lots of stuff. And I, and I started laughing and I said, Oh, okay.

Now I realize what you're saying. And so, for me, it's because I don't have lots of stuff around because that again, would, would be a thing that I would go, I need to tidy that, or I'll get power blindness. If I don't sort it, it can sit there for ages because I don't see it anymore. You know, so it's for me, having to keep it quite minimalistic.

Helen: That's such an interesting thing. And there's a lot of shame about tidiness around. There is OCD neuro spicy. family too. And sometimes you can get a splattering of that with your other things, whether it's, you know autism or ADHD. But or you can swing the other way and then keep a lot of stuff and clutter is a particular, you know, it's got a psychological issue connected to it.

You might have trouble. Like you keep everything because. You've got a poor memory, for example. So that's like a memory hook to a nice time. Or you've got executive function issue where you can't make a decision. You just don't know; do I get rid of it or I might need to keep it? And there's a certain amount of anxiety that if I get rid of it, what?

What if I get rid of it and I need it again? And yeah, there's quite a lot of psychology actually connected to tightness truthfully and, and where even to start. So, with ADHD, people are like, if you can't, if you don't start, then, you know, you're just overwhelmed with it. And so, like one of the techniques we have for people is we call it may as well.

So, if you like, you've got one little. Don't, you know, stop looking at the whole room. Just look at one little corner and say, I may as well, instead of like, I must do, like a gentler voice. And then you just start off with a little bit. And if you just get a little bit done, you're still winning. But it might, if your interest kicks in.

You might end up doing much more than you planned. And, and so that's quite a common technique that works. And like a little bit often works for some people. Other people, they're much better to hyperfocus than like blast it. But the first bit getting started can be tricky.

Ashley: Yeah, absolutely. I speak to a lot of students about who will procrastinate or, you know, procraste-nap or procraste-scroll and.

Research will show you that if you do something for five minutes, you're 80% more likely to continue if, like you say your interest hooks you. Yeah, it's, it's funny you should mention O C D. So, my mom was fanatical, like she, she had O C D around cleaning and stuff. And it's really funny because if we have visitors. I'll see it through Leslie. That's what I say. I see it through Leslie's eyes because then I'm starting to look what visitors will see rather than, you know, me. But funny story. We used to have a Labrador and we had a sheep skin rug. You remember when they were a thing in the eighties? Yeah.

And in front of the fire. And none of us worked on this rug. Because my mom would be like meticulous and she would shake it every day and everything. And even our dog used to walk round this rug, like, hello, which is actually really funny. And it's kind of, I've maybe taken after mom a little bit on that.

My sister's gone the opposite because she just couldn't stand it. So yeah, funny, funny.

Helen: So, I went the opposite.

Ashley: We've got to go one way or the other, haven't we? Yeah. Helen, tell us, why would somebody come to you? Why, like, what kind of things would they come to you with?

Helen: Yeah, so at the moment we've got like four programs that we're one is to help with planning and organizing, harnessing your emotions, like, because some people, some of us, like me feel big.

The other one is about increasing attention and focus. And interestingly, you can actually do a lot if you focus on something called your vestibular system, so basically physical exercise is going to increase your attention and focus if even just after a couple of weeks, we're doing that and also improving your sleep.

So, at the moment there are the four main courses that we'll run. I'm always interested in what people need and want. So, the other thing isn't quite approachable. If ever somebody thinks like, I really need this, could you create something for that. I would because I'm, you know, I'm more than happy to do that.

So, we've, we've started with those and, and they're really well, we used to parent thrive. So that will be coming back maybe December or January. And that is a little bit about what I said about self-care, about giving that a go, along with practicing gratitude and different things like that. And that's going to be low cost or free thing that we're going to be developing as well.

Because I think parents, we can, you know, you know, we need to kind of leave feeling guilty all the time for actually having a rest. So, yes, that's another one we'll be developing. We're also going to be looking in the new year about talking about the challenges of parenting. It's, people don't like to talk about it, but for example, when your child hits you.

Like everyone seems to talk the other way, but actually there's quite a few cases where, where kids act out and how to deal with that can be really difficult and I've heard a lot of parents talk about that, but obviously we want to make sure we get that robust and right, so that's something that will be coming out as well next year.

Ashley: Excellent, that's brilliant. And What we'll do is we'll put you, because I know you're on Facebook and stuff like that. So, we'll put all your socials in the show notes. And yeah, is there anything that as we finish Helen, that you want to say to kind of parents out there? adults out there, you know, I love the term adulting because I think, you know, when it comes to bills and feeding everybody and stuff like that, yes, we've got to be adults, but actually, I think a lot of the time we miss out on the fun sometimes.

So yeah, I love what you said about that, but is there any, anything that you want to kind of just share before we finish?

Helen: Yeah. The last thing is message to anyone who's feeling a bit insecure and you know, and I'm worried that they're not doing enough, not are enough just to say you are good enough and it's okay not to know things.

It's all right that you've got parent L plates on. Remember you are good enough and it's okay to ask for help.

Ashley: Absolutely, I just think, I think that's such an important and strong message to give out to parents because it is hard. You know, it's, it's the hardest job in the world. Helen and I, you know, are both parents.

We've been doing our job for a long, long time. Parenting, I don't know if you'll agree, Helen is still the hardest job I ever do because our kids push hard.

Helen: They do, and I was overconfident, like, because I'm a good nurse, right? I don't mind saying that. And I felt I can do, like, a long shift. I'm used to doing double shifts.

I'm working with no sleep whatsoever. And I thought, I have got this. I love kids. I'm brilliant with them. And then I had one. And I was like, oh, that is the hardest thing I ever did. And I didn't feel equipped and it was nothing like I thought. I always felt like it was a conspiracy. And I absolutely adore my son, I really do.

But I felt like nothing had prepared me for how it really was. And I'm kind of struck like, why would you teach algebra but not parenting? You know, I just think that we need to start having honest conversations about, you know, how parenting is, but also what really helps. And what, like, resilience things you need to have in place and, you know, the other practical things that make a difference.

But that's a whole other, whole other session.

Ashley: Whole another podcast, yeah, absolutely, absolutely. Thank you, Helen, for joining us. today. Everyone, you can check out the show notes. I'll give you all Helen's details in there as well as where you can find me, but just please comment underneath the podcast or the video, however you're watching.

If you've got any questions and I would forward them to Helen. Take care, everyone. Thanks again, Helen, for joining us.

Helen: Bye

Ashley: Bye for now.