



A Heart For All Students

Podcast Episode Transcription

AHEART #29 Christian Parenting ADHD & Autism Through Relationship

Hey, momma. In today's episode, I am going to talk to you all about the number one most powerful tool that we have as parents in order to equip our children to thrive emotionally, mentally, spiritually, behaviorally, academically, all the things. And you know what it is? It's called *relationship*, girl. When this clicked, it was night and day.

And if you've read my book *Behind the Behaviors* or if you've started to take the online course, "Barely Surviving To Outright Thriving", you may already be familiar with this. I cannot tell you how powerful *relationship* is and influencing our children for good, just like God does when he shows us his love through relationship with his son. Friend, I am so excited for you to hear some of the earlier conversations that I had with the Heart For All Students, momma tribe, about relationship and how to use it to equip your child even in the roughest meltdowns and situations. Be encouraged and connect with me at <https://www.aheartforallstudents.com/>.

Hi and welcome to A Heart For All Students podcast. I'm your host Lindsay Livingston. Each week, we're going to discover how to parent and educate our uniquely designed outside-the-box, kids to thrive as the people God has designed them to be. If you are a mom raising a child who simply doesn't fit into the box of the world's expectations, this is a place for you.

One mom at a time. We can change the narrative for kids growing up with ADHD. ASD are no acronym at all. Let's do this. We're in it together.

All right. So we have a couple questions. We had one question about the four year old's melting down because he's just in that stage where he's not getting enough attention. And we have Big Brother, who is nine, and he is freaking out all the time. We had a question about a fifteen year old who

definitely has some diagnoses and she is doing like an online home school program and parents pay a lot of money for it and she is just not willing to do it. Sounds like she's really struggling. And then we have someone who is struggling with quiet time to make quiet time happen for her kids.

So, first of all, I just wanted to tell you that I spent last night working on a bunch of content for the course that "Behind The Behaviours" course. I also was on a different Facebook group. I'm on a lot of different Facebook groups, particularly sensitive to our children, the kids that are struggling, the kids that are not doing exactly what the world wants them to do.

And unfortunately, what's happening is, that our system is set up in our culture to look at children's behavior. As always, it's always through the lens of *willful disobedience* as opposed to perhaps, just perhaps there is actually a different approach that would be much more effective with our children.

To give an example, let's talk about the four year old. Unfortunately, I don't know the details of why this four year old is what setting him off. But the very first thing I would say to any parent is that we need to look behind the behaviors so I can give an example for my son. My son, he is five years old. He has a lot of cognitive stuff going on. A lot of people know that. And so sometimes he behaves in a way that is to the outside world totally inappropriate. But the reality is, we need to start looking at our children in a way that we look behind the behaviors to try to figure out what's going on so that we can equip our children well.

So with a four year old, I'm not quite sure what's setting him off, but I would highly recommend, the first thing I would do with any child is give your child access to language. But the four steps that I recommend always with any child are: One first is relationship. Two providing your child an emotional vocabulary. Three is offering physical input. And we can all talk about these real quickly. And for the fourth step is, for lack of a better word, we're going to shift the attention off the child. And this works for absolutely everybody.

So if I have a four year old that's melting down and I think it's probably because this particular family, they have a nine year old boy. Then they have a four year old boy, and then they have a brand new stinking cute as can be baby girl. And baby girl is getting a lot of attention and the fours (years) are very, very hard.

And so what I would do with my four year old who is losing it, the first thing I would do is I would bend down. I would take a deep breath, momma, take a deep breath. And the reason is, because if we

bring in a bunch of emotion and baggage and we look at our children's behavior as if they're doing it on purpose. And that we are somehow failing them because or failing the world or failing as a mother, because my kids screaming again. If we bring that in, it's not going to go anywhere. It's going to make things a thousand times worse. So first thing, your kid starts freaking out. He doesn't want to eat breakfast that you gave him.

Deep breath. Mom comes down to his level. I'm just using it as an example, buddy. It sounds like you are feeling really frustrated right now, because I see you look very angry. Your face is like this. You seem angry, buddy. Are you angry because you don't want to have your breakfast or are you feeling sad because you want mommy's attention?

Now, I'm just projecting that maybe he's navigating that middle child syndrome, which is very, very common. But the first thing you want to do is you want to lower yourself to your child's level, because reality is, there is a "fight or flight" system which is totally automatic, which has been created by God. This is how we are wired.

Our fight or flight system is always developed faster than our executive functioning part of our brains, which would be like the prefrontal cortex, the executive functioning type part of the brain. This is the part of the brain that helps us to stay in control, the part of us that is able to override our desire to scream when our children are flipping out for the 15 billionth time. The part of our brain that does not respond to the way that we feel as mom. That part of the brain in a child is not even developed until the third decade of life, that's in the 20s.

So it's unrealistic to expect if we can't keep it together, for our children to be able to keep it together all the time. So the first thing, get down. Why do we get down? Because instinctually your child perceives any sort of, especially when they're in a heightened state and they're upset.

"I don't want to eat my cereal." OK, I'm making this up, but I'm just assuming we're going to go with it. "I don't want to eat my cereal." He's already agitated. You can tell, you as the adult can see, that there's behaviors that are coming out to indicate what's going on up here in his head. So because you can see that you bring yourself down because you look less threatening to that part of the brain, which is wired to protect itself.

When you bring your body down now, you're less threatening automatically. Your child is not thinking, "oh, mommy standing up," she's threatening me. That's not what he's thinking, but that's what his

brain is receiving. We have all different parts of the brain. And then you bend down and then you're going to provide your child with the language that he needs to learn in order to use his words.

We tell children all the time, use your words. But the problem is, is we don't equip them with the words to identify all the craziness that's going on inside of them. And so it's very important that we do this. And then if your child is still freaking out, the third step is offering physical affection. And I can't go through all the steps right now and I go through them in greater detail later. But I think those first two steps will really help you. So I would highly recommend for every single parent here.

So even the mom that asked about the fifteen year old that is highly, highly resistant to doing the schoolwork, I guarantee you, if you come at the child this way, at least you will be heard. So the most important thing I always say in relationship doesn't just have to do with step one, which is bringing yourself down. So it's bringing yourself down eye contact.

But here's the deal. If you are in a situation with your child where the dynamic has been so frustrating and so stressful and you go to bed at night, you say, I love my daughter or I love my son, but we're constantly like this because he's always making mistakes and he's always doing the wrong thing. We have all been there. I get it. I still get it. That is me and I mean, I still to this day, I have to check myself. I don't want to be this way because what I know as a teacher, as an educator.

I've been working with children for more than twenty years is that the most effective teachers are the ones that have the relationship with children. You are your child's number one teacher. So that means your relationship with your child has to be number one. I'm not saying we let our children do whatever the heck we want. That's what they want. That's not what I'm saying.

It's not permissive. It's not permissive parenting. But relationship is always number one, because when you have relationship with your child, when your child feels loved and valued by you in spite of how he behaves, trust is formed. And when trust is formed and when the child knows, hey, mom, dad, they are really in my corner, they love me, they're on my team, they're not fighting against me. That's when the doors of communication open. That's when your children's defenses, that fight or flight piece, that's when those defenses start to come down. And then they want to talk to you. They want to please you. They want to honor you. So that's a huge piece of relationship. So I would use that even with a 15 year old.

Now with a 15 year old, I also think that there's some other things going on. And a lot of times our children that are wired differently, whether they have ADHD, whether they're Asperger's or high functioning autism or just regular autism, I mean, it doesn't really matter, most kids are diagnosed with something. The reality is, we as human beings are just choosing vocabulary or words to assign them in a certain place because it gives us direction with where to go.

So I never, ever, ever hesitate to get diagnoses. But I used to. I totally used to. But if there's such value in getting a diagnosis because you can keep the information to yourself, but to allow you as a parent to understand more how that child works. You will be better able and better equipped to equip that child with what they need to live a healthy life. But if we continue to approach our children with a one way, which is this more traditional reward and punishment type of rewards and consequences, that doesn't work for everyone.

And there are some people in here that are not believers. And we want to hear and we love you and I love you. I just happen to be a Christian and my faith. I know that God has designed all of us individually and unique and even our culture in general, in theory, believes that our children are unique. Right. But yet we have one way to educate and we have one way to discipline. And the reality is, is discipline.

The root word for discipline comes from the Latin, which has a student teacher dynamic. When we discipline our children, we cannot think about punishment. We have to think about equipping. We have to think about teaching our children how to behave. So I say this all the time. We so often in the past, we would say to our children, if they did something that was disobedient or was unacceptable behavior, we would say, go to your room until you can behave.

It's not very helpful. Why?

Because we have not equipped them with the tools and strategies to know how to behave when they have these humongous sensations. So your first step, I would say, for anybody is relationship first. I always think relationship first. So even with a 15 year old, with a four year old, with the nine year old that is struggling, navigating his brother's behaviors.

And then there was the other question about quiet time. And I can try to get to that one, too, with all of our children relationship first. And sometimes you might have to really focus your energy on one goal,

that your number one goal is relationship first and your might have to let go of some of the outward behaviors because relationship has to be first. So your child needs to know. I can trust mom.

The reality is that our children need to know that we hear them and that we get it. So when our children have been constantly been getting in trouble for everything they do, because that's how we as parents have been trained, it's like we're going to nip it in the bud. But the problem is, is even if we nip it in the bud and we have a child that acquiesces and just does what we want. The reality is nine times out of ten, those feelings and sensations that are causing the inappropriate behavior, if we do not allow them the tools to be able to process them appropriately, if we don't help them identify, hey, you know what, you're feeling that right now.

I mean, that's the basics that you might start with your four year old or your two year old.

You're feeling bad right now with my five year old who has a lot of cognitive issues. I'm telling you, he now is able to identify nervous as opposed to scared. He's now able to identify rejection instead of just sad. And that's because we started with the foundation, the words mad, sad, scared and then happy, of course. We started with those. And then we identify with them.

Maybe for your daughter that struggling with doing her school. Hey, girls, talk. "What's going on?" Like, tell me what it is. I can tell you don't want to do this. And I understand that there's so many things I don't want to do. And I remember when I was in school and I hated X, Y, Z. So you want to help say I can tell you're dreading it. I can tell you don't want to do this. What's going on? I start having a dialogue and listen, listen, listen, listen, listen. And then try to relate with her and help her to understand that you get it and that there's nothing wrong with her feeling that way. But the reality is you, we want you to succeed. You want to succeed in life. Right? So that's just like a taste of the vision.

Just remember that we melt down too, as mothers, as adults. Adults mess up. They behave inappropriately all the time. And yet we want our kids to fall in line as these immature children right away. And we come at them in general, in general of the school system, the way that we discipline our kids, the way that we put certain kids on colors.

Oh, no, no, no. And I was a teacher and I thought that's what you did.

But then it's not effective long term because our goal isn't just right now. Our goal is long term. Our kids are going to spend, what, seventy five, eighty percent of their life as adults. So if we don't equip them now to understand what's going on inside of them and therefore come up with strategies so that they can cool down and therefore appropriately behave it, OK, if we don't do this now and they grow up, they can think that everything they do is wrong and like, oh, I better watch it. And if I have this feeling, I better keep it inside. It's still there. It's just going to come out when they're older. And then that's when we got lots of stuff right. We have lots of mental health issues. That I'm on. I'm on a mission. I know you guys are on a mission to, like, equip your children. I just I'm grateful for every single one of you.

Hey, friend, are you exhausted and overwhelmed by your child's big emotions and meltdowns? Girl, I get it. For years I struggled in complete desperation, brokenness and isolation, navigating my son's volatile behavior. Nothing I knew to do as a good Christian momma worked with this kid. We lived in a cycle of shame, chaos and confusion for years.

But by God's mercy, he allowed me to learn so much in this season. And I can tell you now that we are in a completely different place. That's why I've created the free five day devotional video teaching series for the exhausted mama, who knows deep down inside that there has to be a more peaceful and life giving way to parent her outside the box child. Sign up for the devotional series at <https://aheartforallstudents.com/>.

Hey friend, guess what? You just finished an entire episode. Give yourself a pat on the back. In this season of parenting, where we are barely surviving, every accomplishment is a victory. So take it. And while you're at it, if you found this episode to be helpful, please consider leaving a review on iTunes or wherever you listen to your podcast episode and don't forget to subscribe, so you never miss a thing...

And if you're looking for more practical tools and encouragement as you homeschool and parent your outside-the-box child to thrive, go to www.aheartforallstudents.com. There are tons of resources, freebies and lots of extra support over there. Don't miss anything. I don't do this thing alone. Friends were in it together and together we can change the narrative for our neurodiverse outside-the-box kids.