

welcome to empowering
homeschool conversations
your authority in
navigating the world of
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Educational Consulting and Tutoring.
With over 75 years of
combined homeschooling expertise,
experiences and perspectives,
this group is eager to
share their wealth of
wisdom to empower your
homeschooling journey.
so grab your favorite mug
settle in and get ready for
insightful discussions
valuable insights and
practical tips give your
homeschool the power boost
it needs to successfully
educate the unique learners

in your home hi everyone
and welcome to homeschool
Welcome to Empowering
Homeschool Conversations.

I'm Annie Yorty, your host for today.

And we are going to be
discussing how to
strengthen your marriage as
you care for a child with disabilities.

And our guests today are Dr.
Todd and Kristen Evans.

So I want to give you a
little bit of background on them,
and then we will get
started with our conversation.

Todd and Kristen are
celebrating 22 years of marriage.

They are award-winning authors, speakers,
and special needs parents.

They co-authored their new book,
How to Build a Thriving
Marriage as You Care for
Children with Disabilities.

They both earned their
master's in Christian
Educational Ministries at
Wheaton College in Illinois
and have served together in

full-time ministry in church, camping,
and retreat settings.

Todd received his PhD from
Vanderbilt University's
School of Engineering,
and he currently manages
his own business.

Kristen earned her master's
in social work from the
University of Tennessee and
is a licensed master social
worker experienced in couples,
child and family, substance abuse,
and crisis counseling.

They enjoy traveling and the
outdoors together.

welcome todd and kristen um

I am so glad to have you
here today hi annie thanks for having us

You bet.

I think you will bring a lot
to the table for our listeners today.

I myself am a mom of a child
with Down syndrome who is now grown.

I homeschooled her for many
years and I know firsthand
how not just parenting a
child with a disability,
but also homeschooling can

add a great deal of stress
to a marriage if we're not
learning to manage all of that well.
I think our audience is just
going to really find some
nuggets of wisdom today from you two.

So thank you again for coming.

I would love to have you
just tell a little bit
about yourselves and why
you're so passionate about this topic.

And then we'll go into some
more specific questions from there.

Yeah, so we got married,
both planning to go into
ministry and went to
graduate school together.

And we started in the
ministry working at a
church and Todd was a youth pastor.

And when our oldest was three years old,
I became pregnant with our second child,
our daughter, Bethany Grace.

And pretty early in the pregnancy,
we knew something was not quite right.

And two days before Christmas,
genetics told us that she
had developed a severe

chromosomal deletion called

Creedy-Shaw syndrome.

And we just

were taken aback and

basically devastated to be

told that she wasn't supposed to survive.

They said she'd never walk or talk,

have any quality of life.

She did survive and she

lived in the NICU three months.

And then when she came home from the NICU,

our lives kind of flipped upside down.

Caregiving,

for her 24 hours a day with

her medical and

developmental disabilities.

And we really began to struggle.

We really began to struggle

in every single way in our marriage,

emotionally, financially.

It just got really bad.

And it took stumbling around

for years for us to learn how to thrive,

both as special needs

parents and as a couple.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Todd,

do you want to add anything about
your background, your part of the story?

Well, as Kristen said,
it was an extremely
challenging time just
trying to manage all the
day-to-day things.

Kristen had her things she
was focused on with helping
with our daughter and I had
trying to work full-time and
trying to keep up with our
finances and things like that.

And really,
it was just hard to find time
to build our marriage,
to build into each other.

And we just let that go,
just neglected it.

And it was only with...
significant effort and
intention that we were able
to kind of build it back to
something amazing at this point, really.

But it took a long time, many, many years,
as Kristen said.

But we just don't want to
see couples just

floundering out there
because it is easy to give up.
We were so close to giving up ourselves.
So that's what we're really
passionate about is trying
to get just a few of these ideas,
a couple of these tools,
because we really believe that if we can
help couples to make one
step in the right direction
that their own care and
love that brought them
together and relying upon
God is going to bring them
forward to something much
more beautiful and wonderful.
And that's what we're really,
really passionate about is
trying to just help get
couples one step on this journey further.

Amen.

I remember when I came home
with my daughter from when
she was born and talked
about hitting the ground running.
There was just a gazillion things to do,
not the least of which was
just my expectations and my
shock at the diagnosis of Down syndrome.

So there's a lot emotionally
and a lot physically that
you're doing to care for your child and
to learn all the new things
you need to learn.

It certainly is a stressful time,
but you have said in your
book that these stressful times,
these moments of crisis or
the struggles that we
encounter are actually an
avenue or an opportunity to
get closer to one another,
to deepen that marriage relationship.

So I'd love to hear about
that because most of us
don't necessarily think of it that way.

Yeah, it's definitely kind of a
rewiring or in a different
way of thinking through this.

And we can only really say
this by having experienced
it and seeing it firsthand.

But the idea is that these
stressful moments,
they can either break you or build you.

And many couples,
they let them break them.

They don't reach out together.

They don't reach out to God,
try to get through them.

But those that do reach
toward each other and work
to build the marriage,
it actually ends up,
they end up at a strong...
place,
that their relationship is stronger.

They have more satisfaction
in their marriage because
they've worked through all
these hard things together.
They've learned the skills
and the nuances and the
aspects of coming together
and doing something really challenging.

And it just helps to build
up into something new and
amazing that otherwise
might not have been there.

Yeah.

I know when I first had Alyssa,
my daughter,
and I would just try to
handle everything on my own.

And Jeff, my husband,
was going to work and we

didn't pull together at first.

And it was a lot of groping around,
trying to find our way.

So I can see where
once you get that different mindset,
things are going to change.

Yeah, you...

You hear the 80% statistic
that couples who have one
child with special needs divorce.

And that made us feel hopeless.

We had heard that.

We said, what's the point?

But even though we felt kind of hopeless,
we said,

we're going to give it one more chance.

And as we were researching for the book,

I just kept reading journal

article after journal

article that just proved

that statistic isn't true.

And it came from it came

from a news report that

actually was not based in fact.

And so then it just grew in

strength and just got spread around.

But what we found is the

research is focusing more on, yes,

you have to manage higher
levels of stress.

You have to learn new coping
skills and use more coping
skills and different coping skills
to manage the stress and to
build your marriage.

But when you do,
you do achieve this more
intimate and deeper
relationship that wouldn't
be possible any other way.

So we just want to give couples hope.

Well, we all need that hope, don't we?

And we need,
we forget sometimes that
we're not in this alone.

We have God who is guiding
us and empowering us, um, as parents.

So, um, that that's, um, important.

And we have other people like you guys, uh,
who will share the
information that you've
learned along your journey so that,
you know,
we can take that and run with it
in our own lives.

So, um,

Speaking of that,

we all know the stress of
having a child with a disability.
And you have some suggestions, I believe,
for some very concrete ways
that we can go ahead and
manage that stress as a couple,
that we can actually stay
together in managing that stress.
Yeah.

So one of the biggest
factors in managing stress
as special needs parents
and as a family and a
couple is actually building
more social support around.
And that's not what
automatically comes to mind
when we think managing and
coping with stress,
but it's actually one of
the biggest factors that
helps make these couples resilient.
And that might look like
finding someone who could
provide respite for two hours or
a support group whether in
person or online which
provides so many different

ways to lower stress and a
faith community and
building friendships
whether maybe just on the
phone with other special
needs parents all those
ways of support help reduce
stress and of course there's other
practical coping skills that
most parents never even
think about or have to learn,
like progressive muscle
relaxation and
mindfulness-based stress reduction.

I learned about this when
Beth and Grace was young
because I just could not
manage the stress, lower my anxiety,
and I began to learn about
what mindfulness is,
which is basically being in
the present moment.

So as a couple, that might look like
You know, your spouse comes home.
You've got this two minutes.
You can interact and say,
how was your day?
Well,
a lot of times we do that and we

don't really listen.

We're cooking or we're
texting or the kids are
screaming and all those
things are going on and
we're not really being mindful.

So we talk in the book about
mindful listening.

which is stopping everything else,
putting everything down and
full attention on one another.

And that might seem like a
little thing that's really simple,
but it can actually make a big,
big difference.

I can very much relate to
that idea that the concept
of multitasking as moms,
we're great at that.

And when I'm homeschooling
and my husband comes home from work,
there's still a million things to do.

Sometimes, you know, the kids have
been difficult or didn't get
their work done and we're
still trying to finish that up.

But in my own situation,
I would find myself just

continuing on working with
the homeschool things and
my tasks and not really
stopping to focus on that
moment when he came in the door,
take the time to reconnect
and to move forward into the
rest of the day together.

And I think the way I like
to think about is putting
boundaries on our
homeschooling or our
parenting or whatever.

We have to just press the
pause button and take that
time out with one another, right?

So Todd, you probably have, you know,
a somewhat different
perspective as a father in
this situation where you
may be the one coming home
into the chaos that we
often have in our homes.

And so what's your
perspective on that when
you come in and what does
it do for you in your
relationship with Kristen
when you come in and have that

attention put on your relationship?

Yeah, I mean,

I can't say anything other
than it feels great, you know,
that your spouse is willing
to take the time and see you.

One thing that's
that you realize with it,
our interactions are so precious.

We have so many things that
we're doing all the time,
whether it's the medical care,
all the other pieces that
those times we do have are precious.

And if we're multitasking or
thinking about other things
in the middle of them,
it just devalues those moments.

So to be able to come home and,
and Kristen to stop things and to say hi,
or to give me a kiss or something,
you know, those are, those are amazing.

You know, it just brightens my day.

If I've had a rough day out,

By the same token,

I know that she's had a
rough day at home that as
many of your audience

probably can identify with
when you're home all day
and doing the homeschooling
and all the stuff around the house,
you don't get away.

And so I try to be cognizant
of that when I come through
the door and kind of
reciprocate the same thing
that I don't necessarily
have to talk about my day.

I want to give her full attention as well.

You know,

I try to lay things down quickly or,
you know, if I need to,

Um, if my feet are killing me,

I need to get my shoes off.

You know, I'll say, you know, Hey,
just give me one second.

You know,

I want to spend some time with you.

I'll be right back, you know,

and just take care of
whatever those needs are
that are going to be
distracting me so that I
can focus on her.

Um,

So some days I really need

her to listen and to share my day,
and she's got that for me.

Other days she's had a rough
day at home and needs me to
listen to her.

So it's kind of when we're
able to give that direct
attention to each other and
we're able to realize what
the other person needs more
easily after building up
and lots of practice of
doing that every day.

Mm-hmm.

That's great to hear.

We as moms sometimes forget about that.

And it's just those little things.

It doesn't have to be a
super long amount of time.

But we do need to pause and
remember that our first
relationship is with our husband.

And so let me just turn to
another topic that I know I've felt
in myself and I've talked to
other parents who feel this
as well often.

When you have a child with

some kind of diagnosis,
whether you knew it before
birth or at birth,
or maybe it even came along later in life,
we sometimes feel just a
sense of loss because our
expectation was something different.

And
we may need to grieve that.
I know I have,
and it's at different points in life,
it comes back again.

And sometimes it has to do
with when we're around
other people who have
typically developing children,
we notice the differences
and it hits us all over again.

Can you just talk a little
bit about those emotional
needs that we have and how
we can support one another
and build each other up in
our marriages that way?

Yeah,
so I'd say this is one of the areas
that can have a very
significant impact on the
marriage relationship.

And it certainly did ours.

We did not understand what was going on.

And it nearly ripped our marriage apart.

We thought there was just

this acute grief.

You know,

we were devastated when we got

the official diagnosis.

We grieved together.

We're not going to have a healthy,

typical daughter again.

And we kind of went through

that acute grief.

Well, after that,

our grief journeys diverged.

And Todd was seemingly over it.

And he had grieved.

He had moved on.

And I thought something was

wrong with me because I

kept having these waves of grief.

I would go to doctor's

appointments with Beth,

see a healthy baby,

and it would just hit me.

And certain things like that, milestones,

of course, she wasn't hitting.

And then other times,

a wave of either anger or
sadness would hit me,
and I wouldn't know why.
And we really didn't
understand what this was
doing to our marriage
because Todd was like, we've grieved.
Let's move on.
We fully accepted it.
Well,
it's a journey of continual
acceptance and allowing
ourselves to grieve each time.
And it was really a couple
of years ago researching for the book.
We had an aha moment of, oh,
this is what was going on.
Especially these parents
experience a different type of grief than,
you know,
the classic five stages that you
think about when you lose a child.
And so it's called chronic
sorrow throughout our children's lives.
We will continually go through,
it's called a living loss.
And so we did not understand
this about each other that research shows,
you know, not always,

but a lot of times the moms
experience it much more
intense for longer, more waves of grief.

You're probably spouses are
not going to be in the same situation.

cycle or the same emotion of
grief and what we had to

learn was we're not going

to have the same experience

of grief and that's okay

that's expected we have to

learn how to support one

another in that grief

throughout our daughter's

life yeah that's uh

Grief is a huge topic among

us parents that are raising

children with disabilities.

But Todd, I don't want to leave you out.

I'd love to hear some of

your perspective because I

can totally identify with

Kristen as a woman.

But I think she mentioned, and it's true,

that men handle things

differently in terms of their emotions.

Yeah, definitely for myself,

I was in that camp of, you know,

like she said,
we kind of went through the
acute grief process.
And at that point,
my responsibilities for my
family overrode anything
else I felt is what I felt at the time.

You know,
that's all I had time for was to
take care of my daughter
and the machines and
all the other caregiving
aspects that I had,
plus the other things for
work and those kind of things.

And so in my mind, it was like,
I don't have time for grief.

I can't think about this.

That's an emotion that just
has to go away.

And as I've learned later
and as I hear from others,
that emotion doesn't just go away.

It still comes up.

And often if you try to push it away,
it comes up stronger and stronger.

And it can be overwhelming.

And when it does that,
it becomes this negative

force that is just kind of
behind the scenes, beneath the surface,
and impacts every relationship you're in,
whether it's at work and
definitely at home when you
aren't able to share that grief.

So it really takes some
effort on my part to be
willing to share that grief.

It's not easy for me.

Today is not easy for me.

It definitely wasn't when we
first were going through
all these things.

Really,

it's making a choice to let your
spouse in to share that grief,
making the choice to let
yourself feel that.

Rarely, you...

May feel bad for a moment,
but that's part of the
process and part of the
healing that can be there to help you.

And oftentimes your spouse
can be that person if
you're willing to share that with them.

Thinking through kind of

these generational things,
and I might be at our
daughter's bed at night,
putting her to bed, tucking her in.

doing all the things that
you would do with a two or
three year old.

And she's 14.

Well,

it looks like maybe Todd was having
some technical difficulties,
but he did make some awesome points that,

um,

You know,

we do sometimes want to
compartmentalize our
emotions and see if we can
just put them away for a time.

And like he said, I, too,
have learned that they
don't just go away.

They come out in one way or another.

So I really appreciated what
Todd was saying there about that.
trying to take the time and
be intentional about
talking about the feelings
that you're having,
that you need to take that

time together so each spouse knows what the other one's experiencing, which does bring us to the topic of communication, which is huge for any marriage, of course.

But I think when we are busy, busy, busy with whatever the issues are with our children or with homeschooling, sometimes the communication gets to be just that top level of let's take care of the business and move on.

So I bet you have some strategies that can help us to become better communicators with one another so that we are aware of one another and that we can know how to support each other in that way.

Yeah, we definitely fell into that ending up in just what we would call a business partnership.

It was who's taking Bethany
to all her appointments today or PTOT?
Who's doing this?
Who's doing that?
What nurse are we going to have today?
And there was little time left over,
especially when there were
discussions that needed to
happen that were very stressful.
maybe about a higher level
of care or financial problems.
And it can become easy for
special needs parents to
get stuck in these
conversations about all our
children's additional needs
and never get to more
relationship conversations
that are more intimate.
And so one of the skills we
talk about in the book is
Setting a daily check-in time,
whether it's five minutes, 10 minutes,
same time of day, try to stick to it,
guard that time and make it
precious can go a long way
in building trust and
intimacy in your marriage
because that time has

nothing to do with the care
needs of the kids.

It is only how are you doing
and what do you need?
and supporting one another.

And once we started to do that,
we began to build a level of trust back.

And we knew that no matter
what was going on,
we were going to have that
time to check in.

It might be at lunchtime.

It might be after the kids are in bed.

Um, but that's,
that's one of the major
skills these couples have to build in.

Yeah.

Um, I think, uh,
I remember I would just call
my husband at work in the
middle of the day just to
have a moment of conversation.

But I don't think that's enough.

I'm sure just a little bit on the phone,
it would be best done in person,
obviously.

So Todd,
what can you add to that in terms

of just...

The communication,
like we know to set aside that time.

And how do you as a husband
or do you recommend what do
you need as a husband to to
be able to talk about with
with your wife?

I'm sorry, Annie,
could you please repeat that?

It cut out on me.

I didn't hear your question.

Oh, I'm sorry.

Yeah.

We're just talking about
specifically like when you
have this time together,
it's not selfish to make it about you.

And then how can each spouse
just be very intentional
about discussing and
digging in a little bit to
those deeper subjects?

Well,

the first part is what we already
said is to give full attention,
to not be distracted by
other things that already
communicates right out from

the start that I'm focused on you.

You're important and you're

the focus and we are the focus right now.

So that's the first step

that you got to do to

communicate and to be able

to value that time.

The other thing that we've

kind of looked at and kind

of realized in our own

um,

life is the different types of

conversations that we have.

Um, and, and these things take practice,

but we realize there's,

there's very different

types of conversations you

have with your spouse.

Um,

sometimes it's the informational of

this is going on, that's going on.

You need to be here this time.

Um,

And it's easy to drift into

those kind of conversations like that,

who's doing what.

And those deeper

conversations can't happen

when you have those more shallow ones.

The shallow ones, I'll call them shallow,
but they're very important too.

But those are the ones that
will dominate the time if
you do not focus on the other.

So it's oftentimes just saying, hey,

I know we need to talk
about this particular topic is going on.

We'll get back to that and we'll.

look at that.

But tell me what, what,

what are you feeling today?

I found those simple phrases.

I'm not very good with,

with asking about emotions

or about things like that.

As Kristen laughs in the background there.

So I've had to learn these

phrases literally and

practice them and do them

to be able to have better conversations.

And it's not because I don't

feel those things.

It's just because I'm not

very good at expressing them.

So yeah,

It sounds kind of silly,

but those simple questions

of how are you feeling?

You know,

as simple and rote as that sounds,

I truly mean it when I ask that question.

But it's something that I

have to remember to say.

It's not natural for me

always to say those things.

Tell me what's going on.

Just those conversation

pieces that you kind of

learn in conversation 101.

They really are the

foundations of having a

good conversation.

And really,

if you have those couple of

things in there,

the conversation usually

picks up and it's easy to

start sharing at that deeper level.

Once you get past those, you know, kind of

beginning pieces that those

kind of phrases can help you to get into.

Yeah,

you would think since we've been

talking for many, many years of our lives,

we would be pretty good at it.

But communication is
different from just talking.
So we need to learn new
skills with communication
and learn to be intentional
about asking maybe a little
bit more of a probing
question and being ready to listen.
and then maybe having a
follow up question in mind.
So that that really does
make such a huge difference
in a marriage relationship.

I agree with that.

So

I think it was Kristen
earlier touched on the
topic of building a community of support.

And as homeschoolers,
most of us seek that type
of community for our
homeschooling journey.

And we will often join
homeschool groups where we
find like-minded people who
can support us in our
homeschooling adventure.

And we can also do the same
thing in our journey of

raising a child with a disability.

Can you talk a little bit
more about what this
community looks like?

And how do you find them?

And how big does this
community have to be?

Well, as special needs parents,
we can very quickly become isolated.

And I'd say that's what
happened to us when our
daughter came home.

And there's several reasons,
especially if you're
homeschooling your home all day.

If you have a child with a disability,
you're off at appointments
or in the hospital.

And it can begin to feel like
I don't have the time or the
energy to to form
relationships and to talk to people.

Nobody understands what I'm going through.

And it may be difficult to
find someone who can take
care of your child so you
can actually go connect with people.

And so there's all these

reasons that we can become isolated.

So what I say is it may take

a lot of extra time and

energy that you don't have,

but it's so critical.

And maybe you can't make it

to a support group for

other special needs parents,

but there's support groups online.

So there's no magical

formula to getting this social support.

It's really a combination of

just trying to build in

pieces of support in different ways.

You don't have to attend a

church with a special needs ministry.

A parent who has a child

with disabilities can go a

long way in helping support

you emotionally,

helping you see your

situation differently,

learning resources.

And so I just say,

take little steps to

building more social support,

whatever that looks like for you.

Yeah, definitely.

I'm sorry.

Yeah, go ahead, Tom.

I was going to say,
and oftentimes it's just in
the world around you and
you don't think to reach out.

I mean, that's one thing we found is that,
you know what?

all these therapies we go to
in the waiting room,
there's other parents,
special needs parents there,
special needs kids there.

And oftentimes all we got to
do is say hi and introduce
ourselves and it can start
an amazing relationship or
other situations.

You find the doctor's office
or special Olympics or
anything like that.

You find,
the connections and you have
to oftentimes step out
because the other parents
are very similar to you.

They're exhausted.

They're tired.

They're probably just

sitting there trying to get
those few minutes of
relaxation while their
child's getting therapy or something.
But when they reach out,
when you reach out to them
and they reciprocate, you find that
there's this like-minded
person there and it gives
you energy that you didn't know was there,
um,
because you're coming out of isolation,
you're talking to someone
else and finding that connection.

So it can be very simple like that.

Um,
there can be more formal things like
Chris was saying, a support group, uh,
for me, you know, I just, uh,
just joined a support group for dads, uh,
this last month.

Um,
been looking for something for a long
time to, to connect with other dads on,
and I've been so busy,
it's hard to reach out and do it.

Um, but it
you know,
I was finally able to connect

with this group and it's a,

it's a national groups.

They have dad's groups all

over the country and things

with a special father's network.

And, you know,

there's resources like that

that are out there and it

takes a little bit of time

and energy to find them.

But once you get back and,

energy and encouragement is

so much more powerful and

so much more uplifting than

where you would be just by

trying to take that few

extra minutes break to yourself.

So definitely reach out to find the group,

find someone, whether it's a pastor,

whether it's a friend,

whether it's a support group like that,

but just find something out

there because it does make a huge,

huge difference in your life.

Well,

I'll just add a little something to

that from the homeschooling perspective.

I have definitely benefited

from in-person support

groups over the years.

I have also taken advantage

of the online opportunities

because so often as parents

of children with disabilities,

we need to know other

people have walked this road before us.

And we,

have questions that the answers, you know,

not everyone can answer.

But if you can get connected

in some way with one of these groups,

then you know you have

people that you can ask

questions and hear their

stories and learn tips and

tricks from them.

But also,

I would just mention that it takes...

a degree of humility to

admit that you need that kind of help.

So we do need to just humble

ourselves and put ourselves out there.

It's a risk, too,

because somebody might just

say no or not give us the

help that we need.

But we it's best if we can

just take that risk and put
ourselves out there,
admit our need for help.

This does not all depend on
me as a mom or you as a dad or, you know,
that we have,

God does put supports in our
lives if we will reach out
and take hold of them and
ask for the help and be
willing to receive it.

As a homeschool mom, if
when I was in groups,
I would try to connect.

There's usually at least one
other family there that
might have a child with a disability.

And you don't need a huge
group of people to connect
with to get that feeling of support.

But do reach out there and
don't feel like you have to
do everything like every
other parent is doing in
the homeschool group.

Be content with where you're at and just
connect with those people
that have similar needs.

And you'll find that you can
really support each other
in your journey of
homeschooling and parenting in a big way,
even like with not just emotionally,
but with just some of the
physical supports that you might need.

You know, sharing
babysitting or you know
having someone to watch
over your child while you
have an appointment or
something like that these
things you know we have to
reach out and find that
support or um it gets
pretty grueling um if we
don't look for that help so
I appreciate that you've
added that concept to um
the information that you're
giving in your book todd
and kristen that's because
that's really important and
and we often do feel like
the lone ranger you know
when we're out there and we
don't have to and we can
also remember our biggest

source of support is god
himself he's not just some
distant up there in the sky
um being he's close and personal
and he knows all your needs
so when you need that
support start with him and
then he'll direct you to
whether he's going to
handle that himself with
you or whether he's going
to put someone in your life
that you can go to so um
anyways we're getting um
closer to the end but I i
know we have a couple other
um topics to touch on um so um

There are people in our
audience who may not have
children with disabilities
or maybe their needs are
less severe or whatever.

Can you talk a little bit
about how those families
could support people that
they know who are raising
children with disabilities?

Yeah,

I'd say the biggest thing is just
kind of know
broadly,
that those parents are probably
really stressed.

Having kids is stressful.

Homeschooling is, I imagine,
very stressful.

But having a child with an
additional need adds a
whole other layer of stress
and loneliness.

So I would just say,
make an extra effort to reach out,
just to say, hey, I'm here.

I'm listening here.

And offer, can I do anything to help?

Asking questions is a great
way to let other parents know you care.

Asking questions is better
than giving advice because
we get lots of advice.

But just anything you can do
to help take that stress
off if you're able to, whether, hey,
can I watch your child for
an hour so that you can
take a nap or just some
kind of way to offer

some way to lower that stress level.

And for married couples who
have a child with a disability,
the thing that they need
the most is often the hardest to get,
which is time alone together.

Whether that's even just on
the porch together with
their child being taken
care of in the house, you know.

So any little thing you can do makes a
a big, big difference,
especially just letting that parent know,
you know,
they're handling a little bit
more and you're there for them.

That's,
those are some good pieces of advice.

I appreciate what you said
about giving advice versus
just asking questions.

And I've noticed that
People are often afraid to ask anything.
They worry about maybe that
they might offend you with
their question.

But I think in my experience,
I have appreciated people

who have specifically just
come and opened up the
topic with me and talked about it freely.
it's you know as a parent of
a child a child with a
disability we do hear a lot
of kind of off the wall
things sometimes but we we
can learn to just let that
go and and appreciate that
the person is sincerely
wanting to know,
wanting to enter into your
situation and that they
might be able to help in some way.
And in the homeschool community,
I will mention as well that
in our support groups, you know,
we have children of all
ages usually up through high school.
And that's a perfect place to find someone,
maybe a teenager who's
very responsible who could
maybe come over you you
might just hire them as a
mother's helper to be there
while you're there even if
if you aren't sure you
could leave but they could

be there and handle some of
the things while you're at
home or maybe you like you
said sit on the porch with
your husband for an hour
while the mother's helper comes and just
holds down the fort for a
few minutes for you to have
some time together once a week.

These are some things to
consider to help yourself
find that greater intimacy
and strengthen your marriage.

Todd, do you have anything more?

I didn't mean to leave you
out on this subject.

Do you have anything more to add?

Um, I really agreed with those,
those things.

Um, it,

it's definitely knowing that you care, um,
is one of the biggest
things people can offer to us.

Um, and really practical things.

Uh,

maybe this is more of my male side that,
um,

if you're offering to help with

something practical, um, in our life,

you know, whether it's, um,

Can I come over and help mow

the yard or pick up some

groceries for you?

Those mean a lot.

But the other thing I would

say to those people

reaching out to the family,

like you were saying,

and wanting to express interest, to help,

things like that,

is we're probably going to

reject you the first two or

three times because we've

been hurt by people oftentimes.

Not often intentional,

but just people feel like they care,

they reach out, and we kind of,

like, Oh, somebody cares.

And we reach out and

reciprocate and then they

just don't ever come back.

Or they realize, Oh,

this is more than I can

handle this family or

whatever's going on.

And they're messy.

You know, it's hard to,

I'm not sure I can deal with this.

They probably don't
intentionally think that,
but that's what we've seen
oftentimes for people that
come around us that they they're like,
their child's not normal.

I don't want to be around that.

You know, just,

And so when you reach out,
we may we have a hardened shell is,
I guess, a good way to put it.

And we're probably going to say, no,
don't worry about it.

We're good.

Appreciate it.

But we're good because we've
learned to be
self-sufficient and to get
through these things.

But keep pushing through.

Keep asking.

And once you do that three or four times,
then we might be likely to
respond back and say, yeah,
you know what?

That really would be helpful
if you could just pick up

some milk and bananas for
us on your way and just drop them off.
It's been a rough day and I
just can't make it out.
That really means a lot to us.
So don't be hurt when we
might reject you the first time or two.
It's really a sign that we
desperately need your presence, your help,
your care.
Yeah, that's, that's so true.
It doesn't necessarily take
a lot of effort,
but it's those little
things that do mean a lot.
And yeah, it's true what you said, Todd,
about just establishing that trust.
Because as you mentioned,
we have been burned sometimes and,
and we need to build that up.
This is our child and we, we are,
very protective.
So but I do appreciate and
have learned to ask for help,
and to receive it.
And that's, you know,
from someone who is
typically on the helping end of things,
it's a little hard to be in

the other position,
but it's also a huge blessing.
when you do receive that and
you allow yourself to be
ministered to in that way
so um I'll just encourage
us moms and dads to to
accept the help when when
it comes our way when god
provides that well we're
winding down a little bit um

You, Kristen,

are a professional counselor.

And so there may be parents
who are thinking, you know,
we're at the breaking point
in our marriage.

Can you just give some
information about parents
who may be reluctant to go
and seek that professional
help to go that extra step forward?

Um, see, you know, how can,
how could they experience
something different if they were open to,
um, some professional help?

Yeah.

So I'll say that a lot of times as couples,

um,
we're ashamed that we're struggling in
our marriages.

Um,
but I just want to normalize that
marriage is hard in general.

You have a child with
disabilities and you're struggling.

You're part of the higher
statistic of us that are struggling.

and there's nothing wrong

with you as parents or a

husband and wife it makes

sense you're struggling

with all the stressors

you're dealing with most

couples wait years to go

for counseling I would say

if you think you might

benefit from it go as soon

as possible because as a

special needs parent at the

very minimum it can help

you learn stress coping skills

process your grief together

at the very minimum and

then and then help you grow

stronger so that you can

weather these stressors and

if you're a special needs
parent and you're
struggling with your mental
health like I did either
anxiety depression one in
in five parents who have a
child with medical
conditions meets the
criteria for post-traumatic
stress disorder
there's nothing wrong with
you I thought there was
something wrong with me
there's not you're the one
in three which I think that
statistic is actually low
and that is struggling with
mental health so I would
say go sooner than later go
as soon as you can because
ultimately the healthier
you are as a parent and as
a couple the better you're
going to be able to care for your child
and the healthier your
child's going to be.
Cause I think we feel like
it's selfish to take the

time to go to marriage
counseling or to go to
mental health counseling.

Uh, we don't have time because we got the,
if I didn't spend that time on myself,
I could do this other thing for my child.
But ultimately we have to be healthy, um,
in order to be the best parents.

Yeah, that's, um,
Our marriage relationship
does have to come first in
the hierarchy of
relationships in our lives.

That's God ordained.

The children will fare
better under a healthy
relationship between the
husband and wife.

And so I would just echo that.

Don't delay.

Don't put it off.

Make it the priority because
you want to have that long
and satisfying life with your spouse.

So I just really encourage you to do that.

We are quickly running out of time here,
but I want to just let you
tell people about how they
can connect with you.

I know that you have a website,
disabilityparenting.com,
and you can see that on the
bottom of the screen for
our listeners there.

That's one place to connect with you,
but tell us about your
other resources and things like that,
please.

Yeah,
so we have a lot of resources on our
site.

Free resources you can
download include our book
that Baker Books has provided.

You can actually read for
free the first chapter.

Um,
and then lots and lots of links to
resources,
everything from respite to
online support groups,
mental health resources.

Uh,
we just like to provide as much for
free as possible.

Uh, we're also on Instagram,
disability parenting, uh,

and we like to put out helpful,
helpful posts there about faith,
mental health, and marriage.

And, uh,

those are the two main places you
can find us.

We would love to hear from listeners.

OK,

so I have had the privilege of seeing
your book,

which I will fully endorse here.

And Todd,

can you what I here's what I

noticed about it is a

little bit like a handbook.

And maybe, Todd,

you could tell a little bit

about how the book does work.

let you interact with these

different topics and

subjects that we need to

deal with as parents.

I'm going to put onto the

screen a picture of the book now too,

while you talk about that, please, Todd.

Sure.

Yeah, the book, we really saw it,

as you said, a handbook for

for your marriage.

We kind of imagined it as couples like us,
we don't have time to sit
down and read a whole book.

We have these crisis moments
where we need to address
something specific and look at it.

And so when you look at a chapter,
you might have a chapter
on communication, like we talked about,
that you can say, okay,

I need better communication
or we're having struggles with this.

Let's jump over to that chapter,
go through it.

And every chapter we put in there,
just some practical ways
that you can implement it
into your own life.

Because we don't,

We believe it's so important
that you actually do the things.

So every chapter has a
section in it where you can
actually apply that skill
to your life and to do it.

And you and your spouse go
through it together.

And we really believe if you

start doing that,
you'll see these positive
moments happen in your marriage.

And I'll encourage you to
keep looking at more.

So really there's a number
of skills in there.

You can jump in at any point,
read that chapter.

Some of the skills build on each other,
but all of them can also be
looked at independently.

So that's really our goal
was to provide something
that you could just jump into.

We know you can't handle it all right now,
but we believe that as you
build each skill,
you're gonna start having more time,
more space in your life to
try the other skills too.

They just really connect
well with one another.

And you find that as you
build one thing in your life,
just time management, for instance,
we have a whole chapter on
kind of the practicalities
of how you do that.

Then you discover, okay,
now that I'm managing my time better,
I have more time to even
think about respite now and
spending time with my
spouse where I didn't have that before.

And it's very similar
throughout the book that way.

Yeah, it's...

It's an interesting book
because it is like a
handbook that we don't need
to race through,
that we can go through and
take our time to just try
to fully apply those
lessons that you have.

It's very practical.

And I think that we as
parents can appreciate that.

And I think our listeners
will really find something
to grab hold of and improve
and strengthen their own
marriages as they parent together.
their children with disabilities.

So with that,

I think it's time to wrap up today.

I want to thank you both
Todd and Kristen for taking
the time to come here today
and just share with the
audience about these
important and relevant
skills that we need to just
keep our marriages strong.

And I want to just
encourage our listeners to
go to your website to check
out your resources there.

And as I said,

I think the book is also very helpful.

So go and check all those
things out as you and see
how it can help you as you
homeschool your children
with disabilities.

Now,

in our next episode of Empowering
Homeschool Conversations,

we will be discussing
parenting with patience.

Expert advice on managing
challenging child behavior.

Until then, take care and God bless.

I look forward to seeing you next time.

This has been Empowering

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