

Welcome to Empowering  
Homeschool Conversations,  
your authority in  
navigating the world of  
homeschooling diverse learners.  
Featuring Peggy Ployer from  
Sped Homeschool,  
Annie Yorty from AnnieYorty.com,  
Leilani Melendez from Living with Eve,  
Stephanie Buckwalter from eLARP Learning,  
and Dawn Jackson from Dawn  
Jackson Educational  
Consulting and Tutoring.  
with over seventy five 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 Empowering

Homeschool Conversations.

Today,

we are going to talk about

advocating for your child,

navigating co-ops, field trips,

and public spaces on your

homeschool path.

And today,

I've got three of my four

co-hosts with me.

Leilani Melendez, Annie Yorty,

and Dawn Jackson.

Welcome, ladies.

Hi.

Good to see you all.

Yeah,

it's been a while since we've done a  
broadcast together.

We're missing Stephanie tonight.

But hopefully we'll be doing  
another group discussion soon.

And hopefully she'll be joining us then.

She had other things going on.

That just happens.

We've all got really crazy lives.

So to get even four of us  
together is a feat in itself.

So, so yeah,

so I'm going to just ask some questions,

direct them at you ladies and,

and then I'll have give you

kind of the spotlight to

answer the questions and

we'll take it from there.

And,

and then we'll kind of wrap it up at

the end if you have

anything at the end that you're

you're thinking of that you want to add,

make sure to note it down

so we can finish that up in the wrap up.

So I guess we're going to

start with Leilani.

I'm going to ask you about

just what does advocating

in general for your child

mean to you personally?

And how has it shaped your

homeschooling approach?

So it's actually funny

because I thought I had the

answer and then I realized

I want to make sure I know

what advocating if

everybody's on the same

page with what that means.

Is it okay to ask that question?

Yeah, that's completely fine.

Yeah,

let's start out with that as a group

discussion then.

Yeah, I know,

because I was like advocating,

I should look that up,

and then I never did.

Because I was not advocating.

I know, I've got to look up my terms.

It's important.

Let's ask the book learners, Annie, Dawn,

because I would not be the

first person to answer that question.

I did look it up.

I'll cover us now there's a

few definitions that I feel

like are important for our

advocacy in our families

for our children and um one

one definition is a person

who defends or maintains a

cause okay a second

definition is uh one who

pleads the cause of another

So speaking up for someone

who can't speak up for themselves.

And then another one is where is it?

Yeah,

one who supports or promotes the  
interests of a group.

you know so I used to have a

title of an advocate for an

organization that I help

out with and volunteer with

so um that would be me

supporting and and uh

promoting that cause so I

think all of them come into

play when we're advocating

for our children

Yeah.

Thank you for sharing that.

Yes.

And it makes a difference.

Yeah.

Okay.

You're ready to answer now?

Yeah, I am.

No,

it's funny because I just was thinking

about that word and I was

like advocating.

I always think being a voice

for my daughter when it

comes to shaping my homeschool is

realizing that not many people,

like getting involved with

co-ops and support groups

and stuff like that,

understanding that there's

a lot of other people that

don't understand Down

syndrome or ADHD or sensory processing.

They don't understand those things.

And so I have to kind of fill in the gap.

And I've also noticed a lot

of people don't know, you know,

they don't understand it.

They don't know how to

respond to her because she

has certain mannerisms that

people aren't normally used to.

And I have to be able to

teach them and show them.

But at the same time,

I should not take my

daughter into my home and hide.

But I need people to see who

she is so they can

understand or not be afraid of her,

not be afraid of Down syndrome,

sensor process, all the things.

So just advocating is just

me stepping outside of my

home and doing home and not

holding back just because

of the disability.

Yeah, that's so, so good that it, I mean,

we forget just the fine line that we walk,

you know,

in that and how much people don't know.

And I just remember the

first time that one of my siblings,

one of my adopted siblings

came into my house and we

added a wheelchair and just



how scary that seemed, you know, and now,

you know,

that's just a normal commonplace

thing for our family.

And so, so yeah, that's,

that's really good.

Really good.

I'm getting used to the looks like the,

the weird looks or the stares and the,

but I also learned that

it's not them judging me.

It's them trying to learn.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Good.

So Amy,

why is advocacy important for

homeschool parents,

especially when dealing

with unique learners or

those with disabilities?

Well, I think,

I'm a big picture person.

So the first thing I would  
say is advocacy is  
important for any parent  
because the Bible tells us  
that we have an advocate  
and that's the Holy Spirit  
of God who is advocating  
and defending our cause and  
explaining what our needs  
are and things like that.

So that's as parents,  
we are the human representation for God.  
for our children until they  
get old enough to transfer that to him.

But basically,  
we want to imitate God in this.

And so the Bible uses a  
Greek word for advocate,  
which I'm not going to try to pronounce.

But what it is,  
it has the idea of being so  
aware of the need of someone

And because you're close in

proximity and then helping  
that person get that need met.

So it's got to do with this  
knowing so intimately.

And of course, as parents, as moms,  
we know our children's  
needs probably better than anyone.

So we can apply this.

And so I'm just going to  
take the three definitions  
that I gave a minute ago.

The first one was  
the one who defends the cause of someone.

And what we want for our  
children is for them to  
grow up and and develop and  
use whatever gifts they  
have and whatever talents  
they have to become a human  
being that can just use  
those gifts and talents for  
the glory of God.

So we use our advocacy to

help our children do that.

One of the things that we do specifically is to find and understand their learning needs and get curriculum that works for them.

That's kind of an internal advocacy, but we're trying to meet those educational needs.

We also will go ahead and advocate for them outside of our own homes and teach other people what their needs are and search for places for them to have those needs met, like educational needs, social needs, emotional, spiritual needs.

All of those are things that we advocate for our children.

And so we have to go out and find those things and help our children to tap into those types of things,

whether it's sports or  
dance or church activities  
or school co-ops like we've talked about.

But that's part of this type of advocacy.

And then the second

definition was one who

pleads the cause of another.

So many times our children

are not necessarily fully

able to or maybe even able

at all to express

themselves and tell what they need.

So we would help them speak

and let people know about

them and what their needs

are so we can be their

voice when they have no voice.

And that doesn't mean that

they will never have a voice,

that their voice may be developing.

And we're working on that.

We're advocating for that as well.

But we as we do that for

them and advocate for them,  
then we are teaching them  
for future advocacy for themselves.

so they can watch us and we  
can bring them into it when  
it's appropriate.

And then they're going to be  
learning for themselves as well.

And then the third definition,  
which was the one where  
you're supporting or promoting a cause,

I think Leilani already touched on this,  
where she said she's got to

go out and teach people  
about Down syndrome or  
about the ADD or whatever,  
and we need to do that too.

We will go out and it does  
mean you have to step out,  
which isn't always comfortable,

but go out and interact  
with people and be willing  
to sort of put ourselves on

the line a little bit so

that we can teach other

people about our children.

And it's just going to help

the community to grow more

inclusive as we are able to do that.

Yeah, I don't know about the rest of you,

but I know just how

thankful people have been

when you've taken the time

to actually inform them

instead of just expecting

that they would know what to do for you.

Yes.

Definitely.

So, you know,

let's let's talk about co-ops

for a while.

As far as like getting going in a co-op,

I know it can be kind of scary sometimes.

And

I know from experience that

communication is,

and that whole  
understanding of advocacy  
that Annie just ran us through,  
it's a lot about  
communication and being  
able to communicate  
effectively and precisely needs.

And so how do you do that, Don,  
to communicate effectively  
with individuals that maybe  
don't have that  
understanding like Leilani  
was talking about?

And so that...  
you don't feel like you're  
constantly teaching and  
that you're going to get  
somewhere instead of just, you know,  
talking to people that  
maybe don't understand or  
don't want to understand.

How do you establish that  
relationship to make it



effective and work?

I think it's a challenging thing.

I just was coaching with a

family not that long ago

and their ABA coach,

like about sending kids,

the child into a situation

that the parents weren't

really comfortable with anymore.

Basically,

they've felt afraid to step out

of their comfort zone and

to put their child in a situation where

things could go haywire, a little haywire.

And we were discussing, well,

how do we approach that with the leaders,

with the teachers,

with the co-op in general?

And some of the ideas that came up were,

one, how much information do you share?

How much information do you

share from what he's been through,

what he's gone through,

where he could go in a  
situation like that if he's  
not comfortable?

And from my opinion, it was...

Share as little as you can,  
but share as much as you need,  
if that makes sense.

So in other words,

what are the academic goals  
that you're striving for?

What are his strengths?

What is it?

What is your child's  
strengths that you can share?

What are the things that  
they really enjoy doing?

What are the accommodations  
that the child needs in a classroom?

And that sort of thing.

If there are behavioral issues,  
those do need to be shared,  
but I wouldn't go really,  
really in deep with that.

I wouldn't share psychological reports.

I wouldn't share past

history of IEPs or anything like that.

Just keep it minimal.

And mostly because a lot of the,

I have worked with co-ops

before where I was trying to help them

you know,

learn to acclimate students with

just diverse learning needs.

And because the parents were saying,

we don't know what to do.

We don't know how to accommodate.

We don't know how to share

and or connect really.

And so just having a more

simplified approach,

I think is better to start

with once the child is in the setting.

And then because every child

is different in every setting, right?

Like sometimes they just really flow.

And in other situations, there's

A lot of behaviors could

serve as behaviors or

anxiety or other things.

And so I I'm more like share

as little but share as much as you can.

I don't know if anyone agrees with that,

but that's just kind of my my idea,

because I think you can

overwhelm the teachers and

I think you can overwhelm the leaders.

And co-ops,

if they get this giant report

and now they're like, what?

What is what is a psych report?

What is what is all this data?

You know, like I don't need all this.

Right.

And so just keeping it simple,

but keeping it clear.

And you may need someone to

help you write that up or compose that.

Maybe a friend or someone,

even a teacher in the past

that you've worked with  
that could maybe come  
alongside and help you.

Yeah.

Do any of you have anything  
to share on that,  
experiences that you've had  
in that realm?

I've always liked the idea  
of having a person meet and  
know my child a little bit  
first before they see any  
written documentation, any IEP,  
any of that kind of thing.

because they get an idea in  
their head that isn't  
always accurate from an IEP.

And that's all they see in  
the diagnosis or, you know,  
the strengths or the weaknesses,  
but don't know the whole child.

And so I, I would, I try to do that.

And I guess it depends too.

We're talking about co-ops  
and that type of thing,  
but it's there are  
different types of co-ops somewhere,  
you know,  
you and the other parents are  
kind of just banding together and,  
sharing the load and then  
other types where you may  
pay to send your child or whatever.  
And there's different situations about,  
and you would perhaps  
handle those a little bit  
differently based on maybe the, you know,  
the,  
I hate to use the word professionalism,  
but you know what I mean,  
that whether you're kind of  
just as a group supporting  
each other versus,  
you are going and paying for a service.  
Right.  
You're not paying a teacher.

Yeah.

And I know Leilani,  
you've had a lot of  
experience with co-ops and  
you're currently in one.

What are some typical  
situations in co-ops where  
you found advocating  
necessary and how have you  
navigated that?

Well, so just a little bit.

So I actually teach what we  
actually call it a home education program,  
because now they're like what Annie said,  
there's so many different  
things now that they have  
to home education program  
is one that you would pay co-op is just,  
you know, parents banding together.

And then, of course,  
like there's other things, too.

But I taught at a co-op that  
transformed into a home

education program because

it kept growing.

I've been there now for, I think,

twelve years.

Naomi's been involved,

the daughter that I have

with Down syndrome,

and I do have two boys with

ADHD and the sensory processing.

I can come from a parent

perspective as well as a

teacher perspective.

Where with the co-op setting, you know,

an IEP would probably scare

another parent because they

wouldn't know what to do.

So, like, I kind of agree, like,

don't show them paperwork.

A lot of the times I have to

come alongside and it's

almost like a coach.

So I'm kind of coaching him,

but also at the same time



advocating for him,

trying to get him to kind of speak.

And I've also been in situations, you know,

especially with kids that

do have ADHD or even just

neurodivergence.

crying they will like they

they get so frustrated

because they cannot express

themselves that they will

cry and then you know the

other kids see that happen

and they'll pick on them

and it but it's and I know

it's like okay we're

homeschooling we're in a

co-op and if you get a good

co-op the parents will come

alongside you you know and

and talk to their kids and

say like no that's not you

know it's not cool but kids

can be kids um one other

tiny thought too and that is um I think

I get it with paperwork and

stuff like that.

Maybe not to share all that paperwork.

And I do definitely agree

because who can even

understand it half the time, but I mean,

really, I mean, yeah,

I write a lot of IEPs and I

know it can be,

we try to keep it as simple as possible,

but it's difficult.

The lingo is difficult.

The percentages, the goals, everything is,

this doesn't make sense sometimes, but,

but it's not fair in a sense,

if you want to say that,

to these teachers and

leaders of co-ops if they

don't have an idea.

And I love what Annie said.

I want them to meet my child.

And I even go take that a

step further saying,  
go and observe the group  
yourself or ask if your  
child can do a visit day,  
like for half the day or one hour.

And that's what I  
recommended to this parent as well,

Um,  
but she just emotionally wasn't ready  
because there have been, you know,  
some bad situations in the past,  
but every group is different, you know,  
and, and every teacher's different.

Some kids really are very  
different with different teachers.

So I always say, keep trying,  
but I do agree.

Don't overwhelm them with  
too much information.

But then again,  
it's not fair if you keep  
withhold pertinent information,  
if that makes sense.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Well, we got you back, Ilani.

So we want to hear the rest.

I'm blaming that hurricane.

I don't think we're a

hundred percent up and running.

So yeah.

From Milton.

So I'm in that area.

I'm in Tampa.

So yeah.

Yeah.

It takes a while to rebuild

that infrastructure.

Yeah.

I don't think everybody has power back.

So I think what I was,

I think where I left off

was just where I was saying, you know,

my son can't really speak for himself.

I don't know if I got that far.

And I have to come alongside

and coach him as they are.

And I was thinking to my  
daughter when she's been involved,  
she literally cannot speak for herself.

And so kids will, just kids are kids.

They'll point their fingers  
and they'll say the things.

And I mean,

I guess humans are humans  
wherever you go.

And you have, I don't know,  
you have to stay positive.

You have to rely on the Lord.

You have to stay positive  
and just keep being that  
light everywhere you go.

Yeah.

And these are practice  
situations if we look at them, you know,  
with our kids too,  
is these are the things  
they're going to meet in  
life on a regular basis.

And how much better that you  
are in that process with  
them at the beginning and  
helping them to navigate that.

And that goes back to that  
word advocacy we're talking about, Annie,  
that you are being that advocate,  
you're being,  
you're kind of guiding them  
through that process.

Yeah, absolutely.

Yeah.

So one day they're going to  
have that voice and speak out and be like,  
right.

Exactly.

Yes.

Or they know who to turn to  
when they they're like,

I'm a little confused.

I remember when my my oldest  
went off to college and he he said,  
you know,

I don't want to have a diagnosis.

I want to die.

do it without.

And I said, OK,

that means you're going to

have to advocate without

letting people know what

you struggle with.

And he had some professors

that actually graded him

very badly due to just

their perceived notion of who he was.

And he had to take it all

the way to the dean.

And I remember the texts as

they came in and, you know,

just how upset he was.

And I was like, well, you chose

Not disclose, you know,

how you struggle socially.

And this has is basically

about your social skills.

And so now you've got to

take it to the dean and  
explain without using your  
diagnosis because you chose  
not to get re-diagnosed  
about why this was unfair.

Right.

And he got his grade change  
both times that he did that  
because he effectively  
advocated for himself.

And it taught him a lot of  
lessons that he now uses in his career.

But yeah, they choose their own paths.

But thankfully, as a homeschool parent,  
we're close enough to them  
that they know where to turn.

Well, on a positive note, my son,  
through one of the co-ops  
that we were part of,  
because we're part of two right now,  
he met his best friend who also has ADHD.

And the two of them, they get each other.

They're like,



I wonder sometimes if I had twins.

They're so similar.

And they have so much.

Just like when one is struggling,

the other one will help

support him and then vice versa.

And it's just a really,

really beautiful thing.

And it's actually a blessing

because we just he was

supposed to move to Alabama

because his dad got another job position.

And then now we found out

he's not moving to Alabama.

So it's been like this huge

thing in the family where

it's just praise God.

Because we hardcore prayed.

Oh, wow.

Because they're so close and

they spend almost every day together.

So they're just helping each other out.

And I feel like because it's homeschool,

they've created this  
connection with each other  
that I don't know how to explain it.

It's just such a strong,  
they'll probably be lifelong friends.

Yeah, yeah.

I think that that's something we forget.

And my middle son had the same thing.

He met another boy through a,  
they were both in a play together.

And his friend actually was  
on the spectrum, just like his brother.

Um,

and the two of them have hit it off and  
they stay in contact as adults now and,  
um, are each other's, you know,  
some of the best friends.

So it's, um,

it's amazing when you create  
those opportunities,  
the doors that you open for  
them to have those relationships to, and,  
and to work on those

relational skills with  
people that are a little  
more understanding when  
they're trying to just kind  
of work out the kinks of  
how do I advocate for what I need?

Yeah.

Well,

I know we also want to talk a little  
bit about field trips  
because a lot of times when  
we are together with other homeschoolers,  
we're at field trips, we're at playdates,  
park times, all of those things.

And I noticed none of you  
grabbed those questions  
when I put them out.

So we'll just have a group discussion.

But, you know, what can come up?  
in those types of scenarios  
that we probably need to be planning for,  
for our child to be  
advocating that may be

different than the co-op  
setting or any other kind  
of setting where we are, you know,  
like going to church on a  
weekly basis or those types of things.

I think,

I think like a lot of other things  
in advocacy,  
doing some homework before  
you get into the situation is pretty key.

And I know that's work, you know,  
that that's going to take  
some of our time.

But if we know what to  
expect on that field trip,  
then we can kind of think  
through how our child might  
have challenges there or  
things they might think are  
really cool there or whatever,  
but you have some idea of  
how your child's going to  
do if you get some

information beforehand.

And so we can't always cover

all the bases with that,

but we do our best.

And then, you know,

we get into that situation.

Now, in my experience, we're always...

parents went on field trips.

And if I didn't go,

it was my child went with

someone else that I trusted with her,

them, I should say.

And they, you know, knew them well enough,

my kids well enough to

handle whatever might come up.

So it wasn't like, you know,

you had a couple of

chaperones who didn't

really know your kids.

We were there.

So I don't, you know, that may vary from

place to place, you know,

family to family.

But it's always helpful if  
you're there because you  
can we have that radar, you know,  
where we're always watching  
or listening and we see  
things coming so we can  
head it off sometimes.  
But basically just being  
ready to pull like  
to see when a problem is arising that, OK,  
we might need to step away, take a break.

You know,  
if there's a lot of noise  
involved or something in  
your child has sensory  
issues to be prepared for  
that ahead of time or, you know,  
help them

Like I would always coach my  
kids ahead of time.

You know,  
here's what we think is going to happen.

Here's what I expect from you.

Here's how you can behave.

Those things are important.

And it helps them.

It certainly doesn't

guarantee a good outcome.

But, you know,

those are some things that I have.

I also, like part of this field trip,

it's about social life.

friendships and things like that.

And so I do keep my eyes

open for where kids seem to

sort of like have an

affinity for one another.

If there's someone that

seems like they might be

interested in a friendship,

make note of that and see

if you can help connect

kids that want to get to know your child.

Yeah, that's really good.

That's really good.

And meet with their parent

and connect and say, yeah,

that's really good.

Yeah, because you I mean,

the one boy I was talking

about that made friends with my son,

his mom and I are even better friends.

You just don't know, you know,

the support you're going to

get for yourself as well in

those types of situations.

Yeah,

we did a we did a lot of like social

stories, you know, acting things out,

sometimes like touring the

museum like that.

virtually before we got there.

So we understood that.

I would call ahead sometimes and say,

when are the school groups

going to be there?

Because that's not the day I'm going.

You know,

just trying to reduce the



conflict or any other  
scenario that we could just  
so that that wasn't a  
barrier that we would have  
to be dealing with.

Yeah.

Anything else that you guys  
have about field trips or  
outings and to like unfamiliar places?

It's usually, you know,  
it's not like the typical  
places that you visit on a regular basis.

My thing is we're always  
either late or we have to  
leave early or we end up  
being the last ones there  
because I can't get Naomi  
to leave because she'll  
throw herself on the floor  
because she's having so much fun.

well Leilani I've discovered  
I'm always sort of out of  
step you know with the rest

of the world it seems but  
we that's okay you know  
there's I think I would add  
too just that we don't have  
to do every activity you  
know every field trip we  
can decline some if it's  
just like you put us over  
the top but like we're all kind of  
kind of talking about,  
we do need to be willing to  
go out and try some, you know,  
but keep it within reason, like within,  
it can be challenging,  
but not overwhelming, you know, as,  
so you just have to kind of  
pick and choose.

You,

you may not be able to do everything  
that the co-op does for field trips,  
but right.

And I would say, yeah, pick and choose.

Yeah.

And the,

Oh, am I back?

Oh, you're back.

Yes, you're back.

Whenever you're gone, I start talking,

and then you're back.

Okay, keep going.

No, I was thinking about siblings, too,

because she has four siblings, and,

you know, they all have each other.

But, I mean,

the kids want to do things differently.

And sometimes mom can't

because it's not easy.

Right.

And I have to remind myself

sometimes I have to say no.

And yes, the siblings will be disappointed,

but they have to learn they

don't have to do everything either.

And at the same time,

I think it's good for them

to make those sacrifices

for their sister because

it's teaching them how to

make sacrifices for others, right?

Yeah, so good, yes.

And sometimes you can swap

with other parents too, you know?

Yeah, that happens sometimes.

I would do that sometimes, but not always.

I mean, I like to go too.

I'm surprised at how many

parents are so willing to take my kids.

They're like, I'll take them.

No problem.

I'll drop them off.

I'm like, okay.

I'm not that willing.

What did you have to add, Dawn?

You were going to say something earlier.

My thoughts about it are have a plan B.

Because your expectation is

we're going to ride the bus.

We're going to get there.

It's going to be a beautiful day.

Just have a plan B. Just have a backup.

Maybe don't ride the bus.

Maybe drive separately or

have grandma on standby

who's going to come pick you up if,

you know, you want that bus experience.

But I don't know,

just kind of like keep your

expectations realistic and just enjoy it.

for whatever parts you get

to enjoy and not don't get upset,

you know,

just kind of be just grateful for the,

even if it like Leilani says,

sometimes we have to leave

early and get out of there.

And we've had, we got to the front door,

but now we have to go back

and don't beat yourself up for that.

You know, life happens.

And,

but it's that stepping and there's a

lot of behavioral studies

out there that say it's  
that getting up and starting and,  
You may not get to,  
like if I come in here and  
get my trampoline out,  
I might just stand on it  
and bounce a little in the morning,  
but that's the beginning.  
And then tomorrow I might go  
a little further.  
So it's just that walking in  
that direction,  
but to just not try because, oh,  
it's too much work.  
I don't know.  
I just can't make myself.  
Just try and just get as far as you can.  
And if you need extra support,  
Make sure you bring that  
grandma or your friend who  
can watch the other kids if  
you have to step outside or  
do other things.

Just back up ideas and plans.

Yeah.

Yeah.

So a lot of you have been talking about,  
you know, leaning on others.

Let's talk a little bit  
about building community,  
because I think that is an  
area we all struggle with  
is just letting people in  
because our lives kind of are a mess.

And it's difficult because  
you want to put on this  
good impression when you're making,  
you know, new friends.  
acquaintances, friends,  
and yet life throws you  
curveballs and you just  
can't hide the mess.

So how do you navigate that?

And how have you navigated that?

I think it's a

Well,

I know Leilani is going to have a lot  
to say about this,  
but I just know in general.

Is that because her life's a mess?

No, my life is a mess.

No,

she just has a lot more experience  
personally than I do.

I mean, my mind's different, but I, I,  
you know, I don't have a, you know,  
a child necessarily with a disability.

And so that I had to struggle with,  
I had my struggles in different ways,  
if that makes sense.

And so,

But what I was going to say  
is that I think we each  
come into this world  
carrying this idea of who we should be.

And we think that, you know,

I need to be super mom or I  
need to be really strong  
over here and make make it



look like I have it all together.

I mean,

it's just I don't know if that's

for everyone.

I know that has been my struggle.

Have any of you ever struggled with that?

Trying to look good.

We all want to be somebody else.

Yes.

I mean, yeah.

And not ourselves.

And we, you know, I've had people say,

you make it look so easy.

I'm like, are you kidding me?

I'm dying inside right now.

I have so much anxiety about this.

It's not even funny.

But I think, I wish,

I wish that we could all be

more genuine and authentic

with each other with where we are at.

But it's terrifying.

It's just terrifying.

And if you're a parent that  
Say for example, you tried to homeschool,  
but then you walked away.  
There's shame in that, right?  
There could be shame in your own heart.  
It may not even be coming  
from your community, but just to be,  
I think the more authentic  
and real that we can be like,  
this is hard.  
I can't do this by myself.  
And reaching out to your church,  
reaching out to coaches, reaching out to,  
you know,  
other parents that have walked  
that road and just say,  
I really can't do this.  
Like it's such a great feeling.  
I'm kind of in a situation  
right now like that with my work.  
I'm like, I don't know what I'm doing.  
And it's embarrassing  
because I have years and

years and years of experience.

But these are new things and  
they're things I've never done.

And I'm just like, hold my hand.

Hold me because I can't.

And I think.

It just depends on who you,  
how you see yourself and  
what the expectation is.

But if you can remember that  
we have almighty God who is, you know,  
he is our provider.

He is, he is of a father.

He has,

he has walked before us and laid  
the path already and he  
will provide for you.

But you have to ask,

I think you have to ask  
whether you start with God.

And then I've had to do that with God.

I'm like, God,

please bring me X. And he is amazing.

brought that for me and I'm  
like oh wait I prayed for  
that you know so just  
asking God first and then  
checking around with people  
doing a little bit of  
research and saying do you  
know anyone do you have a  
teenage daughter that can  
come in and go to this  
field trip or help me  
homeschool while I'm still  
sorting through curriculum  
and trying to figure this  
out it's a lot yeah  
don't know I just put myself  
out there I think that's  
what I do and I I think  
Because I really do put myself out there,  
even at like my  
congregation or co-ops and  
stuff and home education programs.  
And I know that there will

be people that will hate me

and not like me and not

accept me or my family.

Some people don't even want

to try to understand.

But then there's people that do.

And then there's people that

are similar to me.

And it's, you know,

it's just it's interesting.

Just getting to know

different personalities and

different people and trusting God.

He's, you know, in every situation,

good and bad,

like we're going to learn something.

And I just, I don't know,

I just keep pushing through.

I've had some really, really bad, you know,

friendships.

I've had some really,

really good ones that come

out of the co-op.

I've had some people exceed  
expectations that I'm like, wow,  
they get it and they don't  
even have a child with a  
disability or I find  
someone who has a child with a disability,  
but I've also gotten the  
people that are so  
incredibly wonderful and  
then they turn around and  
they say something  
that you're like,  
that is so ignorant what you just said.  
And then you think to yourself,  
how do I handle that?  
Like, so it's you, it's,  
it's just a learning process with people.  
Cause I,  
right now I would need like an  
entire three hours to tell you,  
like to go on and on about  
all these experiences that  
I've had with all these different people,

but I just put myself out

there and trust the Lord.

He's my identity.

He's where my identity is found.

My identity is not found in

what other people think about me.

And I think that you're

giving to other people who

can come alongside and help.

I mean, just by saying, yes, I'll,

I'll receive that.

I'll take that.

Or can you help me?

And then they help you.

That's, that's such a,

we're called to serve one another.

We're called to do that.

And that you can receive.

Yeah.

I mean, it's hard, but it is in your day,

you know, your day will come,

your children will be grown

and then you'll be on the other side,

you know, maybe where you're helping.

But I don't know.

I think it's a blessing both ways.

It can be a great blessing.

See, and that happened with Milton.

I noticed that there are so

many people willing to give, give, give,

give, give.

Nobody wanted to receive.

Like even I'll just be frank.

Like we got to the point

where I literally had no

food in my refrigerator, I mean,

or to feed eat.

And the only time is when we,

we didn't have a generator

for awhile and then

somebody let us have the generator.

And then I was able to, you know,

use the stove eventually,

but we didn't have it.

Like I was rationing,

but I didn't want to tell anybody.



And I just, you know,  
I just jumped on the  
podcast and told everybody,  
but it was that pride.  
Like I don't need help,  
but just it's okay to receive.  
It's good to receive.  
Yes, absolutely.  
Yeah, there's definitely, well,  
a humbling that comes from that.  
And we need to be humbled.  
There's, you know, you're vulnerable,  
you're taking a risk when  
you put yourself out there.  
And you're actually risking  
your own child too, you know,  
because they can be hurt in  
these situations as well.  
And that's even harder than  
risking yourself.  
But as someone who  
didn't enjoy putting yourself out there,  
you know, and, and I,

and I did just kind of suck

it up and try it on my own.

That that's not, that's not the way to go,

you know, just, just be yourself.

I say everyone else has taken.

Right.

you will,

you will have to have a whole bag

full of grace to give to people,

forgiveness and grace to hand out.

But we're called to do that too.

And people are giving us grace as well.

We,

we may not even really realize some of

the dumb stuff we say or do,

and others have given us that grace.

So, you know,

that's the attitude to approach it with.

And,

we've already talked about

some of the fruit that

comes from what we do put

ourselves out there.

There are some lifelong  
relationships that develop and, and just,  
we do get our needs met.

That's one way that God  
wants to meet our needs is  
through people.

So, you know, it's worth it.

It's hard.

It's a struggle.

It's uncomfortable.

I totally understand all that,

but it's worth it.

And you can meet your best friend,

you know, like Peggy did,

like meet your best

lifelong friend who walks beside you.

I mean, wow.

But if you don't put

yourself out there and try,

you are on the other end.

Yes, you're risking, you know,

the bullying or whatever,

but you're also risking

something really beautiful

in those relationships.

And that's what it's all about.

I think Leilani,

you brought up a good point

a little while ago.

You talked about people who

didn't even have a child

with a disability who surprised you.

And I think we need to stereotype people.

Well, they're going to be helpful because.

They've been through this.

They've had this experience.

But then we close the door

on people that have open hearts,

that want to.

And we should not prejudge.

God tells us not to prejudge people.

But again,

to just keep asking and seeking

and knocking.

And so that is what we do

when we put ourselves out there.

I mean, we moved forward.  
three times four times when  
we were homeschooling um  
lived in our rv twice I  
mean I ended up having to  
make so many new friends  
over and over and over  
again um and so so I was a  
lot like you leilani I'm  
like oh this is the new  
city okay how are these  
people going to treat us here we are um  
And in some places it wasn't  
so hospitable and others, you know,  
it was hard to leave  
because we did make good  
connections there.  
But yeah, you just,  
you kind of have to get over yourself.  
And I found that.  
It's not about me, really.  
It's the learning process.  
What are we going to learn

while we're here?

What are our kids going to

learn while we're here?

And how can we make the best

of this situation and where God has us?

I just want to add, too,

we are the vessels of love

to teach the world how to

love our children and

children like our children

and people like our children.

I don't.

I never, I didn't really, um,

have a child with disability per se.

Uh, but I grew up in a family that did,

and I grew up in a deaf family.

So when I was very little,

I was around that family all the time.

My aunt took care of me and

my cousins were deaf.

So I was immersed in that at

a very young age.

And I remember sitting there

when I was five,  
watching them sign and thinking,  
when am I going to learn my language?  
I have to understand what they're saying.  
I have to like interpret.  
And that's,  
I think where I learned to read  
facial expressions and all that,  
but that became a part of  
my culture and my life and my growing up.  
And it was a real thing.  
And then, um,  
eventually I became a teacher  
of the deaf and it was, it was the,  
it was like being home.  
It was just so beautiful.  
But so yeah,  
someone doesn't necessarily  
have to have that component.  
but they can have the heart  
to advocate for children and teach others,  
you know,  
to have that empathy and that

gentleness and that love that God has.

Right.

Right.

And, and Don,

you do bring up a good thing

then that Leilani touched on too,

is that our kids go through

difficult things.

And that isn't a bad thing.

Right.

That we have to say no,

that we have to change plans,

that things just don't

happen the way that they

anticipate they're going to happen.

That's life.

Those are good lessons to learn.

And yeah,

Yeah, it's still it's hard because,

you know,

I have kids that have come to my studio.

Their parents are like, well,

they're just not having fun



in this activity anymore.

So they're going to go on to  
something else.

And I'm like, well,  
you're still going to pay me.

But it's so sad that so many  
parents give their kids an  
out to do whatever they  
want because they want to  
just make them happy.

And instead of saying these  
are the hard things of life.

Sorry, you're going to find out.

I had a student that I was  
working with recently and  
she wanted me to spell a word.

And I said, well, why don't you tap it out,  
you know,

like with your fingers and tap  
out the sounds that you hear.

Let's start there.

No, just tell me how to spell it.

And I said, no, we're going to tap out.

What are the first three  
sounds that you hear?

She had a complete meltdown.

I said,

has your family always spelled  
everything for you?

And she's in sixth grade.

And she said, yes.

And I said, well,

that's going to end here.

And she had a complete meltdown.

crying.

This is like,

I'm the most horrible person

because I'm going to teach

her how to spell.

And no one else wanted to put up with that,

but it was painful for her.

And I said, you know what?

Someday you're going to thank me.

Someday you're going to thank me.

I know it hurts right now and it's awful.

And she just wants it like this.

You know,  
she doesn't want to go through  
that tapping out the sounds  
and let's start, let's remember, you know,  
the bossy R's or, or, you know, our,  
you know, long A, what does long A say?

And things like that.

It's, it's tedious.

It's painful.

It's worth it.

It's worth it.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah.

It brings up a good subject though, too,

to a lot of parents

listening to us and going

to what we're saying is hard.

And they may be feeling very

overwhelmed by the prospect

of changing how they take

their child out in the community,

how they, you know,

advocate or maybe start advocating.

Give me advice for somebody

who's maybe struggling with that.

Just starting out with prayer.

If you're really fearful or

overwhelmed or whatever,

you need to just ask God

for help because it's difficult.

There's a lot of emotions

involved with it.

And there's a lot of energy

that can be involved.

So you have to find...

a balance.

Just like we were saying earlier,

you don't need to join

every single thing.

But if you really are in nothing,

and you haven't gotten out at all,

start with one thing,

one thing that seems maybe the easiest,

you know, take that first step,

and pray about it.

And just, you know, make yourself do it.

But don't try to do like

The ten co-ops may have a

lot of different activities.

Just pick a small thing to

start with and then always

try to keep in mind just

having a balance of where

you're not overwhelming your child,

where you're not overwhelming yourself,

that you start small and

work your way up to

wherever you think is a good balance,

not to where you're doing everything,

but to where you think you

can still maintain a good balance.

Yeah.

You know, Leilani,

you had something to say and I know Don,

you have to go in a couple of minutes.

Is there anything you want

to say before you?

I just wanted to say that

I've noticed a lot that the  
parent might be an  
introverted person who  
doesn't have a need to go out and to be,  
you know, I don't need to be social.  
I don't need all this or la la,  
but you may have an  
extroverted child that really needs,  
you know, it's like a little,  
little golden retriever child that really,  
really thrives on,  
meeting other kids and  
learning their social cues  
from those kids.  
And if you're going to be selfish, sorry,  
I'm not saying you, Annie,  
because I know you're not like that.  
But if you're going to just say,  
it's all about me,  
you have to strike a balance.  
You have to strike a balance  
between what does my child really need?  
And if you can't do it,

find someone else who can.

Find someone else, like Annie said,

to fit in for you.

to sit in because our kids

gain so much by being with

each other in good situations,

not in negative situations,

not in do or die or survive,

but really in beautiful

situations and safe places like co-ops.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Very good.

All right.

And so Leilani,

I'm going to get to you now.

I know you really wanted to

answer this question too.

Oh, no, it's okay.

No.

Well, no, Annie was saying a lot of,

and so same with Dawn,

they were saying a lot of

the same things and just

baby steps to do one step at a time.

Yeah, that's the best.

I mean,

I just my heart sympathizes with

those people that really

struggle to get out because

it is scary and it is hard.

And there is a lot of

outside pressure that they're feeling.

And, you know,

it's then they feel like

they're missing out,

but then they don't really, you know,

it's such a struggle internally.

And

And then guilty, all the feelings.

And just the baby steps.

And, I mean, yes, pray, definitely.

But, like,

just inch out there a little bit.

Try one thing a week.

Try maybe, yeah,



I feel like church is almost, like,  
the best.

Mm-hmm.

she was about to say

something really good

exactly and I know

stephanie when she messaged

me too said oh don't ask me

about church she goes I

still have so much healing

to happen there too so

there's that again it's

yeah it's unique

experiences and well and

you don't have to have like

a huge group either right

you know if if you find one

or two kindred spirits

among your homeschool group

Just run with that and enjoy it.

Yeah.

And that's what we ended up doing, too,

is we had two other

families and we created our own pod.

And, you know, that that was community.

And it really helped kids to  
really develop deep relationships,  
which is what you want to  
teach them in the end.

Anyways,

it's not so much having lots of friends,  
but it's learning how to  
have those really deep  
friendships that you're committed to.

We had one family and they  
had four and I had three  
and that was plenty.

And those kids are all still  
friends to this day.

They're in their twenties and thirties.

And so, yeah, I mean, it doesn't have to,

I love that.

That's a great idea.

Annie, you said that, right?

Like you don't have to have big groups,  
just find a family.

Hey, do you want to get together?

Do you want to have an art class or,  
science.

Let's do a science thing together.

Matter of fact,

one of the families that I work with,  
mom does not want to teach art.

That is not her thing,

but it's her sister's thing

who homeschools.

So now she just kind of,

in a conversation we were having,

just thought, hey, we could collaborate.

I could collaborate with her.

That'll give my son some

social peace he needs and

other interactions as well as

conquering the arts and

crafts thing that I don't want to do,

you know?

So it's a win-win.

It's a win-win.

Yeah.

I do have to go.

I'm so sorry.

Yeah.

Well, thanks for joining us.

Yeah.

We're just going to kind of  
wrap up with a final question,  
but thanks for joining us, Dawn,  
and we'll see you next time  
that we have a group conversation.

All right.

Yes.

I hope to see you all very soon.

Okay.

So I would love to, Leilani,  
did you have anything?

You kind of disappeared for  
a little while.

I know.

This is crazy.

That's okay.

Hurricanes do crazy things.

And yes.

No, I think before I disappeared,

I was like at the close,

but I don't know where it cut off.

So I think, okay.

All right.

Well,

the last question I really wanted to

address was, you know,

if there's one message or

one piece of advice that

you want to leave parents

with about advocating for

their child in the homeschool world,

what would that be?

Just do it and trust God.

So concise.

Yes.

Trying to think of a slogan.

I'll be slightly more wordy, perhaps,

but I would say this.

I've come across a couple

different kinds of parents

who have kids with disabilities.

Some of them are sort of militant, like,  
these are my rights.  
My kid's got to be accepted here, you know,  
very militant.  
And then you have ones that  
are sort of like,  
I don't want to put anybody  
out with my kids or whatever.  
And what I found is in homeschooling,  
I know these people.  
These are people that I have  
personal relationships with.  
It's not like, you know,  
that third party  
professional school or whatever.  
This is like my relationship circle too.  
And so what we're trying to  
do when we're advocating,  
other than to meet the needs of our child,  
we're trying to win hearts  
and minds to this cause, you know,  
to see the beauty of  
including all individuals.

So I think we need to try to  
step back outside of our  
own emotions sometimes when  
problems arise, because they do arise.  
They always do somewhere along the line.  
Step out of our emotions a little bit.  
We are hurt.  
That's legitimate.  
Our kids feel hurt or whatever.  
But try to look at it a  
little more objectively and  
think about how we can be  
winsome rather than demanding.  
and help people.  
Our task is to educate those  
who are willing to learn.  
There are some people who  
aren't willing to learn.  
Leilani mentioned that earlier.  
We're not going to maybe  
make a breakthrough there.  
But if someone seems at all willing,  
educate, be winsome about it,

not adversarial.

And I think you'll find that

there's a lot of receptivity.

People want to

to enjoy all our kids, you know,

in these situations.

So that's my piece of advice.

Yeah, that's a really good one.

That's really good.

Yeah.

Yeah,

I've met a lot of those parents when

they call and they're like,

why am I not getting

everything on my child's IEP?

Or I requested this and this and yeah,

and I have that right.

And it gets to a point, oh,

Leilani's gone now.

So I guess it's just us.

And then there were none.

Yes, exactly.

It's nothing about you, Peggy.



I know.

I don't take it personally.

But, yeah.

So,

but you really have to soften your

heart and be willing to be hurt.

I mean,

and Leilani brought that up a lot tonight,

is that we just have to put

ourselves out there.

And that really is hard,

especially when we wrap so

much of our identity around our child.

around um how other people

see us with our child um

and and instead just be you

know find that contentment

with who god made you to be

who god made your child to

be and um and and where

where you're at right now

you know in all of that so

welcome back leilani thanks

It's okay.

Any closing thoughts?

Just do it.

Trust God.

Yeah, exactly.

I missed like the whole thing, Annie.

That's okay.

But I know it was good.

I trust that it was good.

I think you spent a lot of

good takeaways for people.

Just, you know,

Some of what we said won't

apply to everybody, but you know,

I think different people

take what they need and

God's going to use that for good.

Yeah.

Absolutely.

Well, thank you, ladies,

for this discussion.

And I hope you that are

listening or watching have

just been encouraged by the  
things that we've had to share.

I know we all want it to be  
the smooth road.

And unfortunately,  
you've seen through our  
lives that it's not.

But that God is good in and  
through it all.

Um,  
and we've all learned lessons that we  
probably would not have  
learned any other way.

Um, our kids as well as ourselves and, um,  
God always makes everything good.

And, and so just, um, take that step,  
take that leap of faith.

Wherever he's leading you,  
pray and follow his  
direction and you'll be  
thankful that you did.

And I don't know what the  
next podcast will be since

we're recording this.

I'm not sure where I'm going

to put that in.

But just check the schedule

on [spedhomeschool.com](http://spedhomeschool.com).

You can look on the calendar

for upcoming shows or you

can just check out the

podcast and look at the

list and see what's coming

next or what we were

up there before that.

And, um, always have different,

interesting conversations, um,

that relate to your

homeschooling journey and, um,

raising a child who's a

little outside the box or

maybe way outside the box.

We love them all.

Um,

and so we just want to encourage you in

your calling to,

to homeschool or consider

homeschooling and, um,

and to walk that journey with you.

So thanks for joining us.

Thanks ladies.

And it was another great conversation and,

um,

We'll see you all again here

next time on Empowering

Homeschool Conversations.

And I'm going to find my...

This has been Empowering

Homeschool Conversations

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a nonprofit that empowers

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diverse learners.

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