

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 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, my name is Stephanie Buckwalter,
and this is Empowering

Homeschool Conversations.

Today, our topic is looking ahead,
exploring independence for young adults.

Our guest is Mary Underwood
of What Empty Nests.

Mary Underwood has been
involved with the special
needs community for over a decade,
as well as having friends
and family who are walking
this journey with their young adult.

She's an author and blogger
at What Empty Nests,
where her mission is to encourage,
equip and empower parents
of young adults with
disabilities who are entering adulthood.

Welcome to the show, Mary.

Thank you.

Glad to be here.

Hi.

So let's get started.

I'll let you know.

Mary is a person.

I know her in real life.

So she's a personal friend.

and I've observed up close

uh her work that she's

doing so this is really
exciting for me to be able
to interview her so that
she can share her
information and her wisdom
with us so let's start with
how did you get uh into
working with special needs
young adults um well it
really started um at my
church about uh 15 years ago when my
my youngest daughter was on
staff and she was actually
running their access
program and she needed
volunteers and she said, and she asked me,
she said, mom,
could you volunteer on Sundays?
And so, you know, being that kind of mom,
I said, sure,
I can do that for a little
while and ended up, um,
in there for over 10 years
and just really enjoyed it.
And now most of those kids
that I had in church are young adults.
And so I'm still connected
to most of their moms,
including Stephanie,

and just see these kids as

they've gone through life.

And it's just been kind of

exciting to keep going with that.

That's funny.

You know,

your daughter is a very good

recruiter because another

person who was at a respite

retreat for special needs

parents said that your

daughter came up to her and said, Hey,

do you want to work in the

special needs ministry?

And she's like, well,

I don't think I'm qualified

thinking she was going to get out of it.

And she said, you only need two things.

She goes, love God, love others.

And she's like, Oh,

and then she ended up

working in the ministry for many,

many years.

So your daughter's a very good recruiter,

apparently.

She is.

She can talk anybody into

anything pretty much so.

And a bonus.

Mary's daughter is also just
got her doctorate and as an
occupational therapist.

So it's so her family's
really serving our community.

And I appreciate that.

So what is your definition
of independence when we're
talking about these special
needs young adults?

Well,

my definition of independence is not
a one size fits all kind of thing.

The interesting thing was
back in the spring,

I was doing a seminar.

And the first night of the seminar,

I was speaking to young
adults on the autism spectrum.

And I asked them the question,
when you think about being independent,
what is one word that comes to mind?

And all of these kids were
between the age of 20 and 25.

I think was kind of the
rough framework and to
a kid, they all said freedom.

And so we talked a little

bit about freedom from what,
what does freedom mean?
And we had a very good
discussion about that.
And then of course we flesh
it out a little bit more.
And then the next day was
the parents turn to meet
with the parents and speak to them.
And so I asked them the same question.
I didn't tell them that I
had already asked their children.
I just said,
so when you think about independence,
what is the first word that
comes to your mind?
And all the parents said, freedom.
So we all have this idea
that being independent
means I can be free from something.
And so for myself,
I think that kind of how I
instruct the young adults
is what is it that you want freedom from?
Do you want freedom from boredom?
Do you want freedom from mom and dad?
Do you want freedom from the
same old routine?

What is it that you would
like to have some independence from and
most kids can articulate
what they mean by freedom,
what it is that they would
like to be free from.

And so what I encourage them
to do is to take that word
freedom and just keep
putting words to it so that
they can kind of get a
picture for what it is
they're looking for when
they're talking about independence.

I also tell them that
independence does not have
to mean that you have your
own apartment and you live
all by yourself.

Sure, that's an option,
but it doesn't have to mean that.
You can be independent at home.

And that's, I believe,
the first place that we
need to start at for kids
that have different
disabilities or special
needs is how can I be
independent while I'm at home?

And so that's kind of the
focus of what I do.

I'm curious,
what kind of things did they
say they wanted to be free from?

Some of them wanted to be,
boredom was a big thing.

Others, their parents was another thing.

And we talked about that.

We talked about, well,

what is it about your

parents that you want to be

free from don't you still

want them to be connected

to the to your life oh yeah

absolutely but I want to be

able to make decisions I

want to be able to decide

what I'm going to do and

when I'm going to get up

and when I'm going to you

know what I'm going to eat

I just want to be able to make decisions

And so we just talked about

different things like that.

I'm trying to think off the

top of my head what some of

the other ones were.

But what I wanted to try to
have them see was you can
be independent and still
reliant on others.

We all need a support system.

And let's face it,
your mom and dad are going
to be your biggest
cheerleaders and your
biggest support system.

So how do you take that desire
to be your own person, to be autonomous,
but still use this great
resource that you have,
which is your parents.

Now,
what about if a parent is afraid that
once their child is out on their own,
that they will cut them off
and then they won't, not that they won't,
Just that the child will cut
off all communication, won't answer texts,
won't answer phone calls,
won't answer the door,
even though you just
mentioned that the parents
are going to probably be
their biggest support,
the foundation of their

support structure.

What do you tell parents who
are afraid that that might happen?

What are the chances?

Do you have any idea?

Well, I haven't actually ever seen that.

I think all of us, even with typical kids,

worry that our relationship

is going to change

drastically and that our

kids aren't going to want

to hear from us and be a

part of their lives.

I don't think that's what

actually ends up happening in most cases.

But I think as parents,

if you really believe that,

you need to stop and examine,

why do I think that?

And is there something I

need to change so that that

doesn't happen?

I think typically that's

going to happen more likely,

and this is just my thinking,

to the parent that has the

iron grip on their child.

And basically that young

adult doesn't have any say
for themselves.

That's going to be where the
rebellion comes in with, well,
now I'm on my own.

I don't need you anymore.

And we have that.

But I think that as you
prepare for independence,
that's one thing the parent
probably needs to work on
is the letting go.

and letting go in the way
where the child is still safe.

Child knows that home is
where one of their biggest
support systems is.

And there's just a really
good dialogue between the two of you.

That's really good.

And that's helpful because
when I was asking the question,

I was thinking of a particular
family where the child had
mental issues and they were
afraid that the paranoia would kick in.

And I guess that's a
completely different topic
is working through mental

issues in this process.

But I do know what you said

is true because we just had

a son who went to college

And he kind of did the cutoff thing,

not completely.

He couldn't do that because

we were helping him with school.

But he did.

There was definitely a, it wasn't,

I wouldn't call, for him,

it wasn't really a rebellion,

but it was a definite

distancing and then having

to reset the boundaries.

So that's,

I guess that's the process of letting go.

And it's so hard with our

special needs kids.

Yes.

It is because it's a, it's a sort of, you,

you want to let go,

but then you have to pull

back because you think, well,

what if someone's going to

take advantage of them or

what if they don't remember

what it is they're supposed

to do or what if, and that's, you know,
that's, that's typical.

And that's also something
that parents of typical
children struggle with just
knowing that talking to my
friends and so forth, I had to let,
my son wanted to join the
army in the worst way.

And I didn't want him to
join the army because I
thought it was dangerous.

And

So we actually started, you know,
and we just,
we couldn't talk about it
together because we would just blow up.

And so we started kind of a
little writing dialogue
back and forth and I would
ask him questions and then
he would answer them.

And those are now some of
the sweetest papers that I have with his,
you know, well,

here's 10 reasons why I
think this is a good idea.

And he did eventually go.

And of course his first

thing was off to Djibouti, Africa.

And I was like, I told you so.

as parents are wont to do, but he grew.

He grew in all kinds of ways

that he needed to grow.

And I think that that is

going to be the same for

young adults with disabilities.

They just have more struggle

for the most part,

and they have more

obstacles that they have to

learn how to go.

And so that's where

we start with the journey of

independence as we start

with helping them to become

as independent as possible

while they're still at home,

just kind of letting the

door open a little wider, a little wider,

a little wider.

So yeah, I guess that's the difference.

But I guess there's a point

if they move out of the house,

Because at home,

you can do the little wider thing.

But like when my son went off to college,

it was all of a sudden it
was it went from, you know,
instead of there we go, doing this,
it was from this to this.

And then this went back and
forth until we found where
the new boundaries were.

And I think that's the
hardest part to think about is, you know,
at home, we have that control,
which is what they what
they're saying they don't like.

Those are good things, by the way,
that was really good
insight for me as a parent
to see what's going to happen.

what they might be thinking
if they don't have the
capacity to explain things
as well as some of the more open kids.

That was very helpful.

So I know one of the phrases
you like to use in your
materials is maximum independence,
and you just referenced
having the most independence possible.

What do you mean by maximum independence?

Maximum independence to me is the goal.

Now,

you may have a young adult with a disability that lives at home and think that they're independent because they have their personal care, they know how to do that, they know how to do their laundry, they can cook up a snack. So they're, quote unquote, independent.

But is that the maximum independence that they could have?

You know, maybe there's just a little more.

What's the next step?

And then after that, what's the next step after that?

And that's how we teach and build life skills.

Really functional life skills is, you know, first we teach them how to make a snack.

Next, we teach them how to cook with ingredients that we've provided for them.

Then we teach them, do you know how to grocery shop?

Let's read this recipe and see what it needs.

And you just go a little

further and a little further.

And maximum independence to me

is where they are then able

to survive on their own um

you know the possibility of

them going out on their own

is is there where you have

a much more comfortable um

feeling or basis for that

kind of a decision they're

more comfortable and have

you know have have

jump through a lot of hoops

to get to where they're at.

Um,

so maximum just means that we've taken

it a step further and, you know,

probably with all of us, we would say, oh,

you know,

I am at my maximum independence right now,

but I probably could figure

out how to be a little more independent,

you know?

Yeah, that's good.

And then how do you balance that with, um,

Well,

I was going to say balance that with

community,

but I'll hold off on that

question right now because
I think that's going to
take us in a different direction.

And I want to stay focused
on on your independence
thing because it's so good.

Now,

on a case like that where you have if
the parent is really far
behind in this independence,
the child really wants to be independent,
but they really don't have
a lot of those life skills,
executive function skills.

independent skills that they need,
where does a person start?

How do they figure out where to start?

Well,

I have a parent's guide that I have
developed.

It's called, Do You Dream of Independence?

Oops, got to go this way.

Do You Dream of Independence?

And basically,

in this little free guide
that you can get on my website,
we ask some questions.

We ask the question, why, what, and how.

So

And both the parent and the young adult are answering these questions.

So the first question, and there's worksheets in here to do this, the first question with why is asking your child, why do you want to be independent? And they might have a list of reasons, like we were talking about, well, freedom.

Well, freedom from what?

And you just keep exploring this why until you kind of get to the bottom of, what they're thinking independence means.

But mom and dad have to do the exercise also.

Why do I want my young adult to have independence?

Or why don't I want my young adult to have independence?

And just really explore this why.

And then we can move into the what.

What does independence mean for our family, for our specific situation?

Again, looking at the big picture, and there's no right or wrong answer,

for your particular situation.

Now, one person may have a child that really lacks in social skills.

And so they're concerned about them being out there on their own.

So what does independence look like for that child?

Well,

independence is going to look a whole lot easier if we work on developing some social skills.

And so that might be a route that they start working on to get towards readiness.

And then the same question then has to be asked of the young adult with the what.

is what would be the benefits and what would be the drawbacks of being independent?

And what do you see as your strengths?

What do you see as your weaknesses?

You have to sit down and you have to put this whole picture out because there's not one solid answer that works for every single child.

And then the how,
there's a lot of different
ways to do this.

You know,
a lot of kids with disabilities
stay in the school system
until they're 21 and they
gain some of that
functional life skill training.

Some of them don't and they go into jobs.

Some of them have a
really hard time finding or
qualifying for jobs.

So maybe jobs is something that has to be,
you know, worked on for a while.

And the parents that I work with,
I always we sit down and we talk about,

OK,
what would a five year plan look like?

This isn't something that's
going to happen overnight or, you know,
next month you can get your
own apartment.

This is not what that's good to know.

You know,
we're talking about a five year plan.

And if you're if your
child's disability is perhaps
maybe they're more mild as

opposed to moderate or severe,
you might be able to put
into a three-year plan.

It really just depends on
where your child is.

So the first step then after
asking these questions,
the next step then is
asking the who question.

Am I really the person that
should be working with my child?

And I've had parents tell me,
I am not the person that
should be doing this with my child.

And I see you laughing.

So if you're not the person
to work with them, then who is?

And so then we explore that,
what programs are out there?

What curriculum is there?

How could we work this to
make work for my child?

So once you've asked those
important questions and

you've kind of gotten it in
place for your specific need,
your specific family,
then the next thing that

we're going to do is we're
going to do what I call cast the vision.

Okay.

We are going to work towards

X. Maybe that's,

more independence at home.

Maybe that's,

we're going to find a group

setting or a roommate or, you know,

you name it.

Or maybe you're working towards,

I really want my own apartment.

And you understand or you

agree that your young

person is capable of that

with some skill building.

So we've passed the vision.

And then the next step

really is to prepare a timeline.

And that's where the three

years or the five years come into play.

I have a question about your first step.

What was the exact step again?

What's it called?

Cast the vision.

Okay.

So when they're casting the vision,

how involved is the parent

in helping them cast the vision?

At this point, the parent's very involved.
They're asking their questions.
They're asking questions like,
you know, in five years,
where do you see yourself?
You know, what's your dream job?
What's your dream as far as independence,
you know,
get the big picture and let them dream.
We've all had dreams and
those dreams may or may not be realistic,
but let's just get it out there.
And then we can ask the next
questions that help to
narrow it down a little bit.
What I have found with, um,
certain of our kids is they
can't really envision a
future other than independence.
That's the most they can think of.
How do you get them to think
in these bigger terms?
Do you have to just ask them
a lot of questions to break it down?
And if they're overwhelmed
with a lot of questions,
do you break it into several sessions?
Do I sound like I'm seeking

from experience?

Well,

this isn't something you want to beat them over the head with.

So what I suggest is that you have a specific day or maybe two days a week where you have that time where this is what we're going to talk about and work about for the next half an hour or the next hour, whatever time span is going to work with your particular child and their focus and that kind of thing.

And in the meantime, then they're going to have some goals and some things that they're thinking about and hopefully working on.

The first book in the course that I've written is called Executive Function Practice.

And the executive functions are things that most of our kids struggle with.

And so we need them to continue to practice things

like practice focusing,
practice planning.
practice metacognition,
all of those executive function skills.

And in the booklet,
there's exercises for doing that.
And it's things they can do on their own.

Some are just role playing
scenarios where if you were
going to do this next week,
how would you plan for this project?

Just, you know, things like that.

And so they're working on that.

They're working on how to
make a great impression is
the next thing.

They're working on understanding, you know,
looking at themselves and saying,
what's my body language?

What do people see when they see me?

Or, you know,

what do people say when they see me?

Just different things like that,

which are all skills that

sometimes don't come so

easy to some of us and to our kids.

OK, good.

That's helpful.

Yeah.

And so your beauty and then your next one,
your step step to step two
is to set up a timeline.

And this is where, you know,
once once you've gone through the various,
you know,
ideas and sometimes our kids are
very stubborn and they
don't want to listen to how we tell them,
you know, well,
let's break that down a little bit.

No, I want this.

This is all I want.

So that's why it takes some
time to get that vision.

So once you've decided what
that's going to be, then you talk about,
okay, timeline.

Do you think we can do this?
in three years, five years, one year,
you know,

what does this look like for us?

And once you break it down,
then you have to start
fitting in the things you
know that that child's
going to have to learn,
whether that's functional

life skills or it's, you know,

just specific things.

I kind of break that down

into four different categories,

but I don't want to get ahead of myself.

So it's kind of like being a

career counselor for your child.

Yeah, pretty much.

And it's letting them make mistakes.

When you're starting to work

through different kinds of

things and they insist that

they can do this and you

don't really think they can,

let them try it.

What if they fail?

When we fail is how we learn.

That's, that's our biggest learning place.

So let them fail.

And there's always on the

other side of that.

What if they don't fail?

What if they surprise the

heck out of you and do a

fantastic job at it?

You know, that's a possibility.

That's a risk.

Yes, exactly.

But we we've all taken risks.

I mean,

I'm sure you took some risks in

career building and

everything else and some

worked out and some didn't

work out and that's where we learned.

I changed my major five times in college.

Well, there you go.

I changed mine three times.

Okay,

so that's a good lesson for our kids

is look at us as your examples,

but it's okay to change

their mind because I think in some sense,

learning never goes to waste

no it doesn't and even in

my my majors I don't want

to rattle them off but even

in my majors I used

whatever which I completely

flunked out of was computer science uh

That was back when it was like the thing.

Everyone was majoring in it

because it was brand new.

And I ended up with a

literary studies degree.

And you would think those

are exact opposites,

but they're not because
what I ended up doing was I
had taken enough computer
classes to where I became a
technical writer and doing
documentation and training
for an IT company,
one of those big IT companies.

And I was using...
my programming knowledge
because I was actually a
really good technical
writer because I understood programming.

I didn't just understand writing,
I understood programming,
and that made me a better
technical writer.

So nothing really ever goes to waste.

Right.

Right.

And even when they're failing,
they're learning something.

And as they start to pick up
some various skills and things,
they're gaining things like pride,
they're gaining some autonomy.

That does so much for any young adult
on any playing field in terms of, you know,

realizing what their potential is.

So, you know, I just, I mean,

I'm sure I held my kids back.

And if my kids were listening,

they'd probably say, oh, mom,

you didn't do this right.

That's fine.

They're functioning adults.

So somehow we got there, right?

That's right.

Probably through a lot of failure.

Yes, exactly.

On both sides.

So were you going to go over

more steps or do you want

to shift the conversation?

It's up to you.

Because you have how many steps total?

Well,

there's there's three big steps to

cast the vision, determine your timing,

get a timeline down.

And then the next step is to

prioritize is to just sit down and say,

what?

you know, what are your skills already?

What are the things you need to learn?

And that's where I was saying,

I divided them into four

different sections.

One is about personal care,
how to take care of yourself,
which includes things like hygiene,
but it also includes things
like what I referred to earlier,
making a good first impression.

You wanna make a good first
impression when you're
going on a job interview.

You wanna make a good first
impression when you're
going on a first date.

If you have, you know,
a girlfriend and you have
to meet their parents,
you want to make a good first impression.

You know,
so that's that's something under
personal care that I think
is so important is learning how we speak,
our tone, our facial expressions,
how all of those things are really saying,
here I am.

Excuse me.

And then so after personal care,
which I take as one of the first things.

I have a question about that,

about the personal care one
and the making the good impression.

What happens if the child
can't or the young adult
can't really see the
impression they're making,
even after it's been pointed out?

What if they don't?

They're not self-aware of
what their impression is on others.

Well, I think that, I mean, I don't,
I don't really have a
specific answer to that.

But that's where practice just,
it takes time.

If things didn't go well, you sit down,
you say, okay, well,
why do you think they didn't go well?

You know, first,
their first answer is going to be, well,
I don't know.

So then ask,
there's questions in the guide
on making a first impression.

Well, did you, were you able to do this?

Do you think you did this part well?

Just kind of narrowing it into, well,
what's the area that I need to work on?

And- Oh, that's good.

It's like,

so you're working on self-awareness,
sorry.

You're working on

self-awareness even before
you're able to work on that.

Sometimes you have to take a

step back and work on,

uh a skill that's remedial

to the ones that you that

you're that you want to

work on for instance making

eye contact you think well

that's simple well it's not

simple when you're not used

to looking at people and

you look down all the time

and you have to consciously

look the person you're

talking to in the eye and

and talk to them engagingly

like that that's a skill

that has to be learned for

a lot of our kids um it just doesn't

come naturally to a lot of

people to do that.

It feels like you're being

too bold or whatever.

So there's little things like that.

And then you just continue
to work on those skills
while you move into the next section.

The next section is social skills.

So it's learning things
about communication and
when it's appropriate to
interrupt and when it's not
appropriate to interrupt.

And if you have to interrupt,
how do you do that?

Just, you know, little things,
little nuances of social skills that,
you know,
some of us just take for granted,
but they're all things that
at some point we had to learn how to do.

And then the social skills go into,
you know,

how do I act when I have to be in,
you know, working with a team or,

How do I do when I'm just
one-on-one with someone?

And how do I do when I'm in
a very large group setting?

And just kind of
understanding and realizing that.

And once those basic skills

are mastered and you've
worked through the personal skills,
then we can go into
and go two avenues.

One would be if you think
that this is the time to get a job,
that would be the next one
that we would go through is job skills,
how to interview,
how to put together a resume, how to
act on the job,
what to do with your paycheck.

All of those kinds of skills
are important to know.

The other avenue,
if a job isn't really where
you want to go yet,
it would be the home skills,
the skills of home management.
taking care of my belongings,
which actually starts in personal care,
but how to take care of, you know,
bigger belongings, how to clean,
how to organize, how to cook, how to shop,
how to, you know, do, you know,
little maintenance,
how to change a light bulb, how to,
you know, if electricity isn't working,

how to know what to do with a circuit box,
that kind of thing.
So those are the...
four different areas, you know, that,
that we're going to work
through over the course of
those three or five years,
or if your child already has, you know,
a lot of this,
then it might be just one
year to kind of brush up.
I like that because when you
were first started talking about this,
all the things they have to learn,
how far, you know, thinking about, well,
my daughter now who's,
she's moderate special needs.
So she was,
she would be independent at home,
just all the things, but you made it,
It's nice that he said, okay, well,
you know,
forget about all these other things,
you know, you're going to have to work on,
but just like,
it's okay to just work on
the personal skills and
it's okay to just work on
the communication skills

and to build up to these other skills.

So that was,

that gave me a big sigh of relief inside.

I'm not going to have to do

everything all at once

because that's what I tend to do.

I'm like, ah, I get, you know,

just try to do everything

and it never works out.

Well,

and the other thing to keep in mind too,

like you mentioned that

your daughter is moderate,

would most likely be independent at home.

Her goal might just be,

I want to make friends.

I want to learn how to have connection.

And so learning those social skills,

learning those personal

care skills so that she has, you know,

some idea of how to respond

and act in different

situations will help her

towards that goal of making

friends or making

connections or having a

place where she belongs,

that kind of thing,

aside from just at home.

So anyway,

there's so many avenues you can go down with that casting a vision, you know, kind of thing.

Oh, that's good.

So it works for everybody, not just...

Not just we're not just thinking jobs.

We're thinking life.

Right.

Right.

There's a very good

possibility that some of

our kids may not be able to

hold a job to live on their own.

But maybe there's a job that

they can do on a volunteer

basis that they've worked

towards that so that they

have something that they

are proud of being a part of.

So let me,

we had a couple of questions

come in from viewers.

They have a chance to send questions in.

So let me go ahead and ask you those.

Lori G writes in,

what is the age to still be

considered a young adult?

I don't know that there's a
hard and fast cutoff.

I think that when we look at
our kids and we look at
other young adults,
probably in the mainstream of things,
a young adult is probably
between 18 and maybe 24, 25,
although that seems to be
getting further down the spectrum because,
you know,

Kids are doing things very
different than they did
back in our day where we finished college,
got married, started a family.

That's just not happening on
the same kind of timeline
that it did back then.

But I would say we also have
to take into consideration
their emotional abilities
and their mental maturity
kinds of things.

So a young adult could be 30, 31, 32,
and just be on the young
side of having those kinds
of responsibilities.

With that said,

a 30-year-old should

definitely be further along

than a 21-year-old.

But if they're not,

They can start where they're at.

I mean,

that's the important thing to

realize is you're never too

far behind and you never know it all.

There's always something else to learn.

So while that maybe didn't

answer the question because

I'm not going to give a specific age,

again, it's not a one size fits all.

If your adult,

if your child is in the

older range but still has a lot to learn,

they are on the young side

of what is expected from a

responsible adult.

Tamara Hemmerlein- Maybe the

flip side of that question.

Tamara Hemmerlein- would be

when is it too late to

start something like this,

and the reason I'm asking

this is because I happen to

know that Mary works with a

program in another state

and they were working with
kids in the age range that
you were talking about.

Tamara Hemmerlein- and
they have decided to,
it's a facility in Pennsylvania.

And why don't you talk about
that a little bit,
explain what the place is
and what it does.

And you know,
you can tell the name and all that,
where it is, that's fine.

But the question I was
asking was I recently made
a shift to working with younger kids.

And so my question is the
flip side of the one that Laura had asked,
which is when is it, does it ever,
is there ever a time when it's not, uh,

worth going through this
process if that's the right
way to say it well let me
tell you a little bit about
hope learning center um

it's a non-profit up uh
north of philadelphia uh
that my brother and his

wife started they have my
nephew is on the autism spectrum
And so after having worked
with him and then my
sister-in-law also was an
aid in the public school
system and had special needs aid.

So she had kids that she
followed through school with.

They wanted to open up a
facility for kids on the
autism spectrum to learn
skills towards independence,
to find connection, make friends,
and then

The third one just went
right out of my mind,
but it'll come as I chat.

But anyway,
so they started out with kids
basically 21 and older.

And I think the oldest that
they had in the group was in their 30s.

Actually, that's not true.

They had one that was older than that.

But what they found was that
on the older side,
the ones that were still living at home,
but older adults,

between where they were at
and where their parents were at,
it just didn't seem like
they really wanted to move towards
independence outside of the home.

But they also found that
there's a lot of skills
that are missing from some
of these older kids that
really could be started to
be taught at a younger age.

So this year they're opening
it up to middle schoolers.

They're going down to 13
year olds and they're
starting out with a social
skills program.

I actually wrote the curriculum for them.

And so it's a 10 week
program where they're going
to be learning about social
skills and with, you know,
with the hope that when
they complete that,
then they would go into the next,
level of the program um but
what they found is that the
the biggest thing that the

kids and the young adults
and adults have gotten from
the program is the
connection they have a
place where they belong
they've made friends that
are like them and so you
know they understand each
other better um and it's
been it's really been a
neat program to work with um
and watch the different things.

I go up and speak there on
different topics pertaining
to independence.

And they do parent workshops as well.

And it's just really interesting.

So I think to answer your question,
when is it too late?

I don't really think it's
ever too late because I
think the one thing that,
and you and I have talked about this,
is we're not getting any younger.

And as we get to, you know, a certain age,
for me, it was when I turned 60,

I was like, hmm, okay,
my time is limited.

Now, you know, whatever that means,

who knows?

But when we have children at home still with special needs, we need to be thinking about what are we going to do, you know, if something happens or what will our child do when we're gone? and you know for many of you this might seem like a premature discussion but it's really not because we don't know you know when we'll go we don't know if something would happen that would make it even harder for us to help our young adults and we're doing them a disservice if we're waiting to the last minute one thing that our young adults that have these skills, that we're able to teach them these skills, is they will be better prepared to move into the next phase when we're no longer there to help them. Whether that's living with a

sibling or going into a
group home or whatever,
we're giving them every
advantage that we can
possibly give them to be
responsible adults.

That's a big motivator for me.

for my daughter because she
just graduated high school.

And so now we're looking at, you know,
we're facing that.

We're staring that down.

We're staring down that road thinking,

what can we work with her

on that will give her

maximum independence,

bring it home and make it

easy for the next caregiver,

her next guardian.

because she'll need guardianship.

So that's a really big motivator.

And I think when our kids are younger,

especially when we're

homeschooling them and

we're all wrapped up in the

academics and the state requirements,

what's required of us to do

all these things,

what we end up doing is we get,

we kind of think, oh,
we'll get to the life skills.
We do the ones that are most
urgent because they'll make
our lives easier.
But what you're saying is we
really need to,
especially the more severe
their disabilities,
the more likely it is we
should be working on these
things that you were talking about,
which are the skills that
will lead to their independence.
And that's helpful to think about because,
of course, it's too late for me now.
She just graduated.
But she's still young.
And we now have the world open to us.
We can work on anything we want.
We don't have to have proof
of progress for academics.
can really work on those
social skills and I know
most states have
accommodations not all but
most states have
accommodations where if you

have a special needs child
you can you can send in
alternate forms of proof
and you can have an iep or
an sep that shows what
you're working on things
like that but it's really
hard to to manage that to
manage like because for
regular for neurotypical
kids or typical kids
they can kind of their
mirror their mirror neurons
are working and if they see
you doing something they
can turn around and imitate
it and it's so much harder
I know sue patrick who came
up with the workbox system
I love this quote from her
it was in her materials
that she sold with the
system and she said our
kids can learn anything but
they have to be taught everything
And I think that's where the
struggle comes in for
parents is that having to
teach everything,

like we were talking about earlier,
you're thinking about, oh,
we're going to be teaching this.

And it's like, well, no,
we need to take a step back
and teach a precursor skill
to the one we really want
to be working on.

And that's what makes it so hard, I think.

Yeah.

I mean, it, it sort of probably feels like,
well,

I thought we were talking about
freedom and instead you're
telling me I got a
full-time job teaching my
kid these skills and you know,
that's where I want to encourage you.

Yes.

but it doesn't have to be a
24 seven kind of a teaching environment.

It can be, you know, Tuesday, Thursdays,
or on Saturdays,

we're going to do this together, you know,
whatever,

whatever you have planned for Saturdays,
plan it to be something, you know,
whether it's cleaning or

it's laundry or it's out in
the garden or it's going shopping,
plan on it being something
that you can do with them, um,
to help them to learn and
make it as fun and as
engaging as you can.
Yeah, that takes a little bit more time,
but the goal here is to
give our children some independence,
some maximum independence for them,
and it will benefit them
way more than it will benefit
you temporarily.

It just does.

And as a mom,
that's what you want to see
in your child.

You want to see them happy and thriving.

And, you know, once you start teaching,
you know, well, when we do A,
then we can do B easier.

And then C is right around the corner.

And that gets things fired
up in their heads with, you know, well,
if I sit on the couch all day,
what am I going to have?

You know, nothing.

But if I get up and go and do this,

I might have, you know, this,
that kind of a thing.
So, and there's,
there's no reason if we have, you know,
young adults at home that
have even moderate abilities,
there's no reason why we
have to be the ones that are, yeah,
of course we're serving them,
but we don't have to do all
of the cleaning and all of the,
cooking and all of the
picking up and we don't have to do that.

It gives them,
it empowers them to be a
contributing member of the family,
which then moves into being
a contributing member of a community,
which moves into being a
contributing member of society.

And so I just think those
things are really important
to think about.

That's, that's really good.

It's almost like you have to
think of it as a five year
transition to freedom for
both parent and child.

Yeah, exactly.

Exactly.

So we had one more question from Kimberly T. And her question is, what is the best way to set realistic expectations for both my child and myself regarding regarding what he or she can achieve?

I think that the best way to set realistic expectations is going to be to try.

And if you have an expectation that's set and you're trying for it and it's just not happening, then step it back and see where you are and see what has to happen at level A to get to level B. Things are always learned in a gradual progression.

And that's going to be the same for your child.

And those progressions may be a little bit longer than they are for, say, a typical sibling.

But the best way is the old adage that my mother used to say to me is, if at first you don't succeed, try,

try again.

And who wants to hear that?

None of us want to,
but it really is the truth.

If it doesn't work, then
look at, look at the situation and say,
okay,

what's one small change I can make
that maybe will help this
to be more successful the next time.

And you know, your,
your child may have no
expectations or they may
have the sky's the limit expectations.

And it's just all about
finding that balance to
what is it that can
actually be accomplished.

It may take a little longer than you think,
or it may happen faster than you,
than you believe.

And if you've been homeschooling,
you may have a pretty good
idea of how much your child
can achieve or how much you
think they can achieve.

But I would say, assume competence,
assume intelligence,

assume they can do more

than what you think.

Because a lot of times the

problem comes in motor planning.

It's not that they can't

think complex thoughts.

They just can't motor plan

what their answer is in my motor plan.

I mean, answer a question,

correctly like they may

struggle to process the

thoughts coming out of

their mouth you know making

those thoughts come out of

their mouth when they

actually have a perfectly

formed thought in their

head they just can't say it

or can't say it under

pressure if their fight or

flight kicks in right and

things like that I forgot

where I was going with that

can you help me

Well, I can't help you,

but what I was thinking as

you were saying that was

there's always more than

one way to do something also.

So if the child is not able
to express that,
then let's look at it from
a different way and maybe
their answer or their expression to that
will kind of help us as the parents say,
oh,

I realize that what they really want
to do is this and that this
is how they'll need to do
it to begin with.

So just being open and homeschoolers,
you know,
probably know this more than
than anybody else is you adapt,
you find the different ways
to get to the point that
you want to get to.

So.

Oh, so I had a new question.

So we kind of covered the
steps to independence planning for it.

And you talked about the
important the skills that
are important for young adults to know.

So how do you determine
readiness to actually move
out of the house?

If that's their goal,
if their goal is to be
independent away from home,
how do you know when it's ready,
when they're ready?

Well, I think I think that as parents,
we don't ever think our
child is going to be ready
to actually do it.

But there comes a time where
you're going to have to say,
I have taught them
everything that they need to know.

And so now it's time to give it a try.

One thing that I suggested
to a parent was and this
may or may not work for everybody.

But if you have in your area,
there's always there's there's so many.

This could sound crazy, but here I go.

There are so many Airbnbs
out there that why not rent
an Airbnb that's just down
the street for the weekend?

Let your child go there and
live by themselves for the weekend.

Have them prepare for it by
choosing some recipes and
just have them as if they

were living in an apartment
or in a little house all by themselves.

See how it goes the first time.

If it was a total failure,
then we may need to work a
little harder back at home.

But kind of give them,
and you wouldn't do that.

If you're on a five-year plan,
you wouldn't do that the first year.

You would do that the fourth year,
four and a half years into it.

Let's just try this.

Or go with them.

Plan a week-long vacation
where they take on most of
the responsibility and go somewhere and
just let them go for it.

But I think really with readiness,

I think as parents,
we know when our child has the skills,
the next step is just letting them fly,
see what happens.

You know,
maybe that's not a really
profound answer.

But, you know,

I certainly wasn't ready for

my kids to go off to college.

And I thought, oh, my goodness, you know,

this is not going to work

for either of us.

They survived.

I wasn't ready for my kids

to go live on their own,

but they they did it and they survived.

So anyway.

Yes, I can relate to that.

And that is that is a cool

idea about the Airbnb

Because we do have we have

one that's kind of like out

in the country close to us.

And it's it would be that

would be perfect.

And I like the idea of or

just having them do all the planning,

do all the meal prep.

Basically,

they're serving you instead of

you serving them all the time.

And they're proving.

they're proving to you that they have,

they have actually learned these skills.

Cause you know, let's face it.

A lot of them are going to, you know,

if you say, Hey,

would you please plan
dinner for tomorrow night?

Probably their first
reaction is why I don't want to.

But anyway, that's,
that's how they're proving that they've,
that they've got it ready.

And most of them, the motivation,
if the motivation is to be
out on their own,
they're going to prove to
you that they can do it.

Okay.

And then I have one last
question and this is,
probably the biggest one of all,
what happens?

What are,
what are the blind spots of
parents trying to let their kids go?

Like what,
what problems do you find with
the parents?

Cause we've talked a lot about, you know,
the struggles the kids have,
what are the struggles
you're seeing with the
parents and them being able to let go?

And what would you tell them?

I, I would say it's a mindset.

Um, it's a mindset issue.

We want to be super
protective of our kids and
we're afraid of failure.

We're afraid of embarrassment.

We're afraid of a number of
different things.

Really,

what it comes right down to is
learning how to phrase it
in a positive way and to go
for it that way.

The simplest one is the what if they fail?

And the saying goes, what if they fail?

But what if they fly?

What if they succeed?

You know,

think of what that's going to do
for them and for you.

Another one that I have used

when I have a booklet

that's called the empty nester blues,

the not so empty nester blues, I'm sorry,

because we don't have empty

nests because we have young

adults at home.

Sometimes we get to the point where we say,

I'm so tired of parenting,
or we say things like, well,
that might work for your child,
but it's never going to
work for my child.

How do you take those
phrases and flip it around?

And again, that's a mindset thing.

But one of the other ones
that we talk about in one
of my seminars is,

are you a dream squasher?

Does your child have a dream
that they really want to
see come to fruition and
you're just squashing that
dream and you're saying, no,
I just don't think you can.

Why be a dream squasher?

Let's be their cheerleader instead and say,
okay, if that's what you're after,
you tell me,

how are you going to get there?

What can I do to help?

And let me be your supporter
standing by your side, ready to help.

But this one's on you.

And I think that any adult,

young adult that wants
something bad enough is
going to figure out how
they're going to be able to get that.

So that would probably be
the one thing that, you know,
with the whole just flip
the narrative is don't be a
dream squasher, be a cheerleader.
and help your kid get to
where they want to go.

Wow.

Very convicting.

I was like, oh, stab to the heart.

Stab to the heart.

Because I have,

because I've probably done
that with a particular one child.

I'm the dream squasher.

One of the seminars that I

did on that topic,

after when I opened it up for questions,

I had a dad stand up and say,

I never thought of it that way,

but I am a dream squasher.

My child is asking me for

this and I'm telling him, you know, no.

When really all I have to do is say, okay,

let's go for it and let him do the work.

So anyway.

That's excellent.

That's,

I think that's a great way to end

this because it's, uh,

puts it back on us to be

there for our kids and to

be that encourager, trust God for,

you know, our kids' future,

because we aren't going to

be here forever.

He loves them more than we do.

So we can put, you know,

it's really not about us.

It's about the kids.

And that's hard to,

after so many years of

doing all the things to

help your child as much as possible,

now it's time to do all the

things to let them go.

And that makes it really hard.

So tell us about the resources.

I know you held up a book earlier.

Tell me about all the

resources you have and

where people can find them.

Okay.

Well, if you go to my website,
which again is whatemptynest.com,
you will see links to a couple of things.

The first thing is the free
guide that I had showed you,
which is called Do You
Dream of Independence?

And it's just a small couple
sheets of paper guide, but it will
start you on the journey of thinking,
thinking things out.

It'll have the questions
that both parent and young
adult are going to need to
answer as they get on this journey.

And then the next thing that
is available to you is the,
what I was just referenced
about the not so empty nester blues, the,
you know,

when we've come to the point
where I just don't want to
do this anymore, how to,
how to change our mindset,
how to flip the flip the
narrative so that

we are empowering our young
adult to get the job done.

And being their supporter,

being their cheerleader,
we're not leaving them to
do this on their own,
but we're also not doing it for them.

And then the other thing
that's on there and it's on
sale right now is the toolkit.

It's an assessment toolkit.

It's called...

exploring independence.

It's the first phase of the
program that my website offers.

It's it's basically are you ready?

And it has parent guide.

It has questions.

It has the three things that
we know that our child is
actually ready to move
forward towards independence.

And it has

Sorry, assessments.

It has some assessments that
both you and your child can go through.

And then it has the first book,
the executive function
practice book that I talked about.

That's also in that toolkit.

And then from there,

navigating independence is phase one.

And that is the curriculum

that has 14 books on

functional life skills.

And that's what's available

to you right now.

Great.

The thing I like about your,

I've seen some of your things.

The thing I like about them

is you address both the

parent and the young adult.

It's not all on the parent

and it's not all on the child.

There's a good balance between that.

So that is it for today.

Our next episode of

empowering homeschool

conversations will be it's in two weeks.

Uh,

The one I'm hosting, Lori Chuba,

and it's going to be tailoring success,

crafting effective

educational therapy for

homeschool students.

And that's about using frequency,

intensity,

and duration in therapy and in

education to get better results.

So until then, take care, God bless,
and we will see you then.

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