

00:00.00

theautismhelper

Hi Dr Tay I am so excited to have you here on the autism helper podcast.

00:04.24

Dr_ Tay

Thank you so much for having me I'm excited to be here today too.

00:08.65

theautismhelper

I think we're going to be touching on such an important topic today that we really haven't covered a ton on the podcast and I think will be really valuable for both families but teachers supporting parents and caregivers as well. So today. We're going to be talking about Taylor's whole family approach. And why do you feel so passionate about bringing the whole family together and really changing the narrative of autism care.

00:34.64

Dr_ Tay

Yeah, so let me give a little history because I think this really shapes the work that I do now as a psychologist so my brother and I are 10 years apart and when he was twenty three months of age he was diagnosed with autism. He's now 23 so this was over two decades ago. But I was 12 at the time so I was very aware of everything that was going on and you know just beginning to build an understanding of autism and he was really fortunate that where we lived he had access to wonderful services. And I think you know at the time that was pretty rare but what I realized through this journey is there was very little support for the rest of our family for my parents for myself in navigating what this autism journey looks like and the reality is it did impact.

01:16.50

theautismhelper

Um.

01:30.84

Dr_ Tay

Us on a day to day basis I I say a lot now professionally that an autism diagnosis doesn't just impact your child it impacts the whole family and so basically you know long story has i. I knew I wanted to go into the autism field kind of navigated a few different ways decided on a ph d in clinical psychology but I was planning to go into research I went into academia um, once I got my ph d and was just feeling you know like. I don't know it. It felt misaligned. It felt like I missed having that impact for families and so when I launched my own private practice which was a little over a year ago at this point. I just decided I wanted to do it different and that we needed

to focus on the entire family unit and providing the support so that you know parents felt supported parents knew how to support their other children. And also at the same time that the autistic child was getting the highest quality of care.

02:35.95

theautismhelper

Oh my gosh I Love this so much I'm like smiling ear to ear hearing you describe this and I love kind of hearing your your background and what brought you to this place because it feels really organic right? You have this like background professional background and this personal background which come together so beautifully.

02:51.91

Dr_ Tay

Absolutely thank you I really appreciate that and yeah I don't I mean I I don't think I knew when my brother was diagnosed where this would lead me necessarily but it does feel full circle and you know it's really cool too to be able to share. My story I think for so long I was a little hesitant to share. You know what it was like growing up as a sibling because I was like well autism is my brother's story. It's not mine. But then once I really learned like no. It's our family's story in it. It absolutely shaped me into the clinician I am today but it also shaped me on a personal level as well.

03:30.48

theautismhelper

Yeah, a little bit anecdote on my end I'm the former teacher and we used to do a family field trip once a year we started doing this I don't know when I was like five years six years into teaching and we would go up to a camp in Wisconsin and all the siblings would come and that was actually 1 of my favorite parts of the day. Seeing the siblings connect from different families and parents connect from different families. There weren't many parent groups in our area or things where parents could get to know other families that have a child with autism but seeing the siblings really have that space to watch their their sibling feel safe but also. Be with other kids and teenagers who understood what their what life was like in such a unique way and I just don't think we have enough space for that and we're not talking about that enough.

04:14.69

Dr_ Tay

Yeah I think that program you guys did and that field trip day is so rare I mean I think that's incredible that yall did that. But yeah, there isn't a lot out there like that and I think you know what we typically hear too is that there are support groups. And while I think support groups can be incredible I Also hear a lot of reports from parents that they sometimes don't feel supportive. Um, and and I think some of that is this idea of you know you're at different parts of the

journey and if there's not like a skilled facilitator to really help.

04:43.11

theautismhelper

Um.

04:53.12

Dr_ Tay

Be able to implement and make change that sometimes yes, you can feel not alone. But then the I have heard parents say the other side of it almost feels hopeless or you know sometimes too. It doesn't feel like my child and what their needs are fit with the rest of the group in terms of what. You know other parents children need.

05:13.79

theautismhelper

Yeah, finding that like sweet spot of a support group that you said has that skilled facilitator can really provide those connections is super challenging and even though we hear like they're out there. Not not that often either. So being able to.

05:25.73

Dr_ Tay

Right.

05:29.20

theautismhelper

To connect with families in the way you are I'm sure it has such a positive impact on that whole family dynamic including those siblings.

05:35.96

Dr_ Tay

Absolutely. And yeah I mean I will say this is one of the reasons I started a group therapy model and so it has this community element. It's all parents of autistic children. But the advantage. Ah. Of it is. You're working with a psychologist who can give you you know tips and strategies and then the way that I design it as well. Which is part of the whole family approach. You know at the end of the day things don't happen on weekly intervals. You know it's it's awesome to be able to get any services. But what I find is all these things happen throughout the week and parents don't always know how to navigate them. So as part of my group therapy model as well. I built in you know, unlimited support. So there's a chat that parents can connect with other. With each other but also at the same time I'm stepping in and giving support strategies and interventions and answering questions and all of that.

06:26.99

theautismhelper

Oh that's great who we please scale back for a second can you kind of

give your elevator pitch of what the whole family approach is and what your services and your model looks like.

06:36.86

Dr_ Tay

Yeah, absolutely so I run a concierge practice and what's really cool about it is psychology. You know without going into too many details because I'm licensed in 1 state that is part of this compact. It allows me to practice in 40 states currently so. I have a telehealth based you know program where I'm able to do diagnostic evaluations and provide therapy services. But at the core at the center of everything I do is this consideration. Of the whole family and you know what this actually looks like in practicality is your child is you know if you were on the intervention side is going to get you know evidence based principles that are going to be able to support them meaning. That they ultimately we know from research that these are effective but I also incorporate because this is super important as well neuro divergent affirming approaches and helping parents learn about neurodiversity. But I take it one step further in that you know parents are able to. Have space for their own emotions be able to process this you know be able to ask questions be able to share their worries and their concerns and get the support they need and a lot of times too because of my personal you know background. But also I think it's super important. We're talking about.

08:02.73

Dr_ Tay

You know interactions with siblings and how we can support that and how we can help siblings understand you know that their autistic siblings brain is wired differently but that doesn't mean it's a bad thing and being able to learn how to connect with their sibling as well.

08:18.61

theautismhelper

Oh That's so valuable to have that coaching on those you know sibling dynamics because that's something there really isn't any manual guidebook training on regardless ah you know what types of children you have. But. Especially when we have Neuro divergent children included on on how we can't support those kids having a strong relationship.

08:35.36

Dr_ Tay

Right? right? Yeah, you think about something like emotion dysregulation or difficulties you know with regulating emotions having big feelings. That's a common example that comes up with autistic Children. We know the large majority of autistic kid Kids have difficulty regulating their emotions but a lot of times the situations that are most dysregulating are with their siblings and so it is

trying to find this balance too Of. What is just you know sibling Rivalry versus where do we maybe need more education about neurodiversity and like helping you know each you know sibling to understand how their siblings brain thinks differently than theirs and also then thinking about how do we Balance. You know, sometimes like sensory sensitivities. How do we balance? you know that but we also too want to make sure that the non-autistic sibling isn't the one that's always adapting and changing. Because the reality is at the end of the day they're still a kid and they still have support needs as well. Yeah.

09:40.44

theautismhelper

Yeah, and and kids still fight. You know siblings are going to are going to argue and engage in those in those same kinds of behaviors. But you're right? It's that balance of figuring out when we need support and education and when we can let some independent problem solving happen so you use the.

09:54.71

Dr_ Tay

Totally totally.

09:58.98

theautismhelper

Phrase neurodivergent affirming approaches for those that aren't familiar with what that means can you explain what that means and what that looks like when you are coaching families and caregivers.

10:06.56

Dr_ Tay

Yeah, so the idea of neurodiversity is that all brains think differently and it's really about building acceptance around these differences and so really a lot of times we think of within this neurodiversity umbrella. There's neurotypical individuals. These are often the individuals that you know don't have any you know identify disabilities you know may you know are also growing and changing along a quote unquote typical trajectory. But then we also. Have this like group of Neuro Divergent individuals these are the ones that often have disabilities autism being one of them also can be Adhd or learning disabilities. You know, but we also might see developmental delays and so there is this difference and at the end of the day we live in a very neurotypical world. Where you know all of our benchmarks and what we say is you know, socially acceptable, right? versus wrong are based on these neurotypical standards and so with neurodiversity what we're doing is we're really expanding our. Our understanding that just because it's different doesn't mean that it needs to be changed or fixed and so when you're using an intervention approach that you know has these affirming principles or neuro divergent affirming principles. What that means.

11:33.81

Dr_ Tay

Is we are focused on number one. How can we promote in my back I Just sorry I saw something pop up that said I disappeared no ok I'll start over? Ok um, how we can support the autistic child's strengths.

11:40.65

theautismhelper

Um, yeah, oh no, oh no, you're good. Yeah oh no, perfect. Yeah, you were on a good roll. Yeah, that was great.

11:52.61

Dr_ Tay

And also be able to you know provide those support need areas more support but we're focusing largely in terms of support needs on what is going to promote that child's quality of life. So We're not teaching a skill simply because it's not a neurotypical skill. But instead because we know that it's going to help them navigate the world. Um, a great example of this is eye contact. You know in our neurotypical World. We're used to people looking at us you know and we equate when someone looks at you that means they're attending to you. And within Neuro divergent affirming Approaches. We're not going to focus on eye contact at the end of the day. There's so many different ways to be able to attend and engage and so instead what we're going to do Sometimes it's you know as. You know, parents or providers or teachers shifting our understanding and were the ones making the change of ok you know this child might not be looking at me but they can just tell me everything that I just said and being like I don't need them to look at me. But then an example, you know on the child's support side is we might give different modalities of them being able to communicate their needs and focusing on that and that's going to help with their self advocacy skills.

13:12.89

theautismhelper

Those are great examples and what advice do you have when parents kind of struggle with let's stick with this example of eye contact on I'm kind of overcoming that hump of like it's okay that this looks different These are Supports. We're gonna give and let's think about yeah the end goal for this child because you know I've definitely worked with parents I know teachers. Listening have as well. They're like well we need this skill and it's more on the the person who needs it as maybe the adult not necessarily the child.

13:38.71

Dr_ Tay

Yeah I mean I think this is an indicator a lot of times that you know learning more about Neurodiversity is really going to open up this understanding because this understanding of we need eye contact that

is coming from these neurotypical standards because. You know, deep wired deep in our brains. What we're saying is eye contact equals attention equals learning and that is that neurotypical sequence and so I think what happens is we're so used to that we're programmed to think that.

14:03.95
theautismhelper
Are.

14:14.57
Dr_ Tay
Then when we don't see eye contact like a teacher might worry like oh my gosh This kid isn't learning or a parent might be like oh they're not hearing me and so some of it is doing that internal learning to basically Deprogram What's previously been programmed in the the parent or the teacher's mind. Ah, being like wait a minute that's not True. You know for this kiddo this kiddo learns differently and one of the things to think about too is you know in terms of a learning environment if we're.

14:38.23
theautismhelper
Um, okay.

14:47.35
Dr_ Tay
Wiring a child to give eye contact as an indicator that they are listening and attending and learning to things can be happening number 1 autistic individuals autistic adults in particular have reported that sometimes making eye contact is very uncomfortable and so. That could be dysregulating their nervous system and so if we're forcing it. Their nervous system could become dysregulated which isn't optimal for learning and then number 2 the thing to think about as well is. You know our brains can only be able to do so much at once and so if you are telling them that they need to make eye contact with you. They're going to have to spend a lot of focus and energy being like I'm supposed to be making eye contact right now. And then they're still not learning. They're still not being able to take in that information at full capacity so something as simple as you know we ideally want this It's more a mindset shift on the adult end of. How does this child really learn. What do they really need and knowing that that is ultimately going to help them thrive and one of the things we do often see with eye contact is that when we really are following the child's lead and engaging them in activities that they enjoy and their bodies are regulated.

16:10.74
Dr_ Tay
We often tend to get eye contact more naturally but we are never

requiring it. We're never prompting for it because we know you know how that just disrupts the whole learning process.

16:23.67

theautismhelper

That's a great example and I'm sure that really resonates with parents and caregivers when you kind of dive into like well why do we need really need this and what would this help and let's look at what's successful right now and like you said really kind of instigating that mindset shift that maybe sometimes. Educators or parents might need to get to that place of those neurodiversity neurodivergent affirming practices.

16:44.27

Dr_ Tay

Right? And I I also want to say that it is okay if as the adult as the parent as the teacher you feel discomfort with this because you're like but I really feel like they should be making eye contact like it is. Okay, if this doesn't come intuitively to you. You know where you're just like okay I'm ready to drop this It's going to be a process because for so many years you were given all this information that again eye contact equals attention equals learning and so be patient with yourself. Give yourself grace in this. And I really encourage you you know I love tiktok and Instagram for this start, you know, just reading about neurodiversity and this huge mindset shift that is happening and I think. I find most times when parents learn about it that it actually matches on to their parenting style even more because ultimately they just want to make sure that their kid is happy and healthy and thriving and neuro divergent affirming approaches put that at the center.

17:49.80

theautismhelper

Yes, and that's I think great advice for educators and Clinicians too especially because you know maybe what you were taught in in school ten Fifteen twenty years ago is now different than best practices and evidence-based strategies right now and and that's a change and you know changes.

18:03.78

Dr_ Tay

No.

18:07.92

theautismhelper

Uncomfortable for everyone you know I'm a bcba and the field of aba is I think going through a very much needed shift right now and you can definitely see practitioners kind of be in that discomfort a little bit that we were taught escape extinction and these were strategies. We were taught and now we. Hopefully shifting towards a more trauma

informed approach so it's it's very needed in parts of of the community but it might feel uncomfortable or different at first.

18:25.91

Dr_ Tay
And here.

18:33.55

Dr_ Tay
Absolutely and I wasn't trained on any of this I graduated with my ph d in 2020 so that wasn't very long ago I literally never heard of any of these concepts and then when I you know launched my practice and honestly like. Started sharing about autism on social media I also started listening so one of the best resources is going to autistic adults and listening to their lived experiences. That's not going to be published in the research you know we just we haven't caught up is is the reality of it and also the way that. Research works and interventions are designed but I think we can take the knowledge that we have and really incorporate different perspectives and this is one of the reasons on the child side too. I talk about you know I use a lot of evidence informed principles. Um I do still use cbt you know, for example. But I'm also willing to pivot and navigate and bringing in more of these affirming approaches approaches as well and I have no problem like a great example of this um is I was trained in early start Denver model which is a naturalistic developmental behavioral intervention following the child's lead. And that does prompt for eye contact more. It does it in a really naturalistic way. But honestly I just choose not to focus on that part and I educate parents on what I just talked about and what we do see is again by following the child's lead and engaging them.

20:05.66

Dr_ Tay
You know? Ultimately, we are getting more eye contact. But we're not putting that as a goal so it is also okay to take an existing intervention and be like you know what really is working here.

20:15.62

theautismhelper

Yes, especially with how different every child is and there's so many different skills we could look at you know, what's what's age-appropriate what's in line with their interests. What's in line with their personality and unique needs that there's really not going to be 1 perfect solution for any any child. So.

20:31.14

Dr_ Tay
Totally.

20:34.97

theautismhelper

Kind of going back because we had talked about the siblings which I love this concept of including the siblings in the work that you're doing Why is this Why is education important for the whole family including those siblings during the diagnosis process and beyond.

20:47.33

Dr_ Tay

I mean I think ultimately getting a diagnosis of autism is hard and I think you know this is one of the things even as a professional I'm going to share openly I struggled with this idea of neurodiversity for a little bit of like ok we're so used to. You know as clinicians and I think teachers often are trained in a similar way of thinking of autism in terms of the medical model of everything is deficit based and what neurodiversity talks about is that there are differences and again we don't have to fix or change them and I think that you know that was. A huge shift that works well that is a huge shift. We are starting to see but we also have to keep in mind that all of our systems have that medical model concept in mind. So if your child is at school your non autistic child is at school and learning about autism. They might be learning about more stereotypical presentations of autism and they might be going wait my siblings autistic. This doesn't seem to explain how my sibling is so that's 1 thing to keep in mind and you as the parent you go to you know, get the diagnosis and. More likely than not when you read that diagnostic report. It's telling you everything that is quote unquote wrong with your child everything that doesn't match on to our neurotypical standards and so you know it's easy too to go into that mindset of you know some.

22:18.81

Dr_ Tay

What's wrong with my child. How do I fix them if we constantly are focusing on the deficits and so I think really two things are important here is number 1 getting a diagnosis of autism is hard and I think really acknowledging all of the emotions that come with that are so. So incredibly important I see a lot of parents take on the diagnosis and hop into intervention mode and understandable. You want to help your child and your feelings don't disappear and the reality is is. It's easy to pretend to push them down but all of your children are going to be able to sense this. You know your non-autistic children are going to be able to sense a shift and also your schedule might fill up more where all of a sudden you're having to take your autistic child to all these different appointments and that might leave less bandwidth for your non autistic non- autistic children. So. I think addressing the emotions is really important but then also like I talked about earlier I think you know neurodiversity doesn't just start with learning about your autistic child's brain. It literally is every brain. Everyone's brain thinks differently and we need. All kids to understand this concept to be able to be more accepting and I think on the parental level too. It's going to help you understand your

child but it also can help you understand your reactions and how your brain is wired and everything is interconnected with the family.

23:48.53

theautismhelper

Yes, and and if you miss if you kind of don't include that piece the emotion piece for the parents. The emotion piece for the siblings I Just imagine there being such a big void and all I kept thinking when you're talking is like potential sources of like resentment Guilt. You know. Lack of confidence in your skill as a parent that all these things could really build up and become such an insurmountable problem.

24:11.84

Dr_ Tay

Right? Yeah and I think it's crazy to me that the field hasn't shifted in this way but I will say I talk with many parents as part of my diagnostic evaluations like we talk about parental emotions Really really explicitly. And even if a parent's like yep I knew this was autism like most of the time they're still crying during feedback because it's different when a ah provider confirms your child's diagnosis. But also you might walk out of that appointment feeling good about it. But. We're human our emotions change constantly and so just having that conversation and giving yourself permission to feel. It has such a huge impact and it's crazy. How little that that is addressed and so what I find and you hit the nail on the head is a lot of parents then. Are feeling shame and guilt over their child's diagnosis and wondering what they did wrong What they need to do better. You know and constantly questioning themselves is this the right decision you know and when we can actually recognize all of the complexity of the emotions. It's also going to allow you to make decisions with a more clear mind and understanding the full picture.

25:26.14

theautismhelper

Yeah, absolutely and I was thinking as you were talking about. You know I spend most of my days talking to teachers and you know teachers are oftentimes the the kind of point person with a parent and maybe even a parent that got a diagnosis later into elementary school or. Shows up at preschool three years old with this new diagnosis and hasn't had an early intervention and they're their person. They might be the person that gets it all and you might feel like you know part of your role as a teacher now is is therapeutic with that parent but and and that that parent might need that that support and that.

25:58.22

Dr_ Tay

Um, yeah, so I have a couple thoughts for teachers that actually came to mind is you know I talk a lot with parents about you need to be collaborating with your teachers and coming at it from.

25:59.39

theautismhelper

Person to connect with because they might not have anyone else.

26:14.32

Dr_ Tay

Okay, here's what's happening at home. You know what's happening at school. How can our minds meet together to really support this child and I do think that sometimes parents because of the natural just hierarchy that exists in systems are afraid to sometimes speak up. And so I invite you as a teacher to and I know it can be nerve wracking from a teacher standpoint too. But you know, just inviting that conversation. You know, asking How how can I support your child.. What do you know about your child at home that would be really helpful for me at School. Um, and the more that you can collaborate with parents I and I listen I understand your time is limited and you have a very very full schedule and so this does take extra effort. But I often I Love this metaphor I use it in so many things this idea of slowing down to speed up that sometimes laying this foundation slowing down taking the time to ask is actually going to make everything else. Go so much more seamless and quicker and easier. You know on the back.

27:20.88

theautismhelper

Yes, yes, yes yes I mean that that metaphor is so so perfect to explain I think that parent teacher relationship because if a teacher can give more time upfront to build rapport to build that connection.

27:22.13

Dr_ Tay

And um, so the more that you can have that collaborative conversation.

27:39.44

theautismhelper

You can avoid a lot of those potential misunderstandings down the road and have just such a smoother path with that family moving forward which is what we all want whatever side we are on.

27:40.50

Dr_ Tay

Something just.

27:49.35

Dr_ Tay

Ups Absolutely and I know it's hard to because to end teachers and school districts have different rules about this too. But I will say I get a lot of parents and I I explain why this happens but a lot of parents being like well why did the teachers never say anything about

Autism. And I talk about you know how certain systems they're not able to. But even if you don't ever bring up the word autism if you see concerns in your classroom at least initiating that conversation and I will say I've seen the opposite for teachers that do this, it creates a cascading effect. Where parents start to be like huh. Ok The teacher's concerned. Maybe I have been a little concerned. It can be really validating to what the parents experiencing at home and I love coming at this from a a question type approach of hey here's what I. Noticing in the classroom have you noticed any of these at home. So it it Again. It establishes that alliance that you guys are in this together and not being like here's what's wrong with your kid or here's what they're doing wrong or here's what you're doing wrong as a parent that's causing this. So I Love asking these. Open ended questions to get their input and then you guys can put the data together and I find a lot of times parents will be like well do you think I need to get them evaluated and ultimately you have to follow policies you have at your school.

29:16.98
theautismhelper
Um.

29:17.66
Dr_ Tay
But I think that that starts to plant the seed.

29:20.91
theautismhelper
Um, but you're right that validation piece might be what a lot of parents need too that like I'm the only one that sees it. Maybe it's just me. But when someone else even just an open-ended. Question could be like oh my gosh I shouldn't ignore this you're right.

29:31.58
Dr_ Tay
Yeah, exactly. So yeah, and so just to touch on this like I talk about the whole family approach but this is also where you know having this entire team is so incredibly important and so I place a really really big emphasis. On care coordination like all of my patients I'm reaching out to their teachers I'm understanding. What's going on at school and how I can help to facilitate that relationship because you know teachers and or other clinicians like speech language pathologists occupational therapists if they're working with the bcba. You know the more that we can have all the minds meet together. This is going to support the family even more in this really holistic way so that there is also consistency across environments which is important for the kid. But it's also important so that the parent knows what to focus on.

30:25.69

theautismhelper

Yes, I my God we could have a whole other episode on that like that team collaboration fees because so many poor parents I think are are forced into that role of being the point person between everyone and it's it's too much for them. Yeah yeah.

30:25.91

Dr_ Tay

Um, at home right? yeah.

30:34.99

Dr_ Tay

Yes, it's hard. Yeah, they need to be the parent Absolutely and that's what I kind of realized it was like wait I can take this over and it's It's one of my favorite things that I do being able to you know, bring this team together and.

30:46.69

theautismhelper

Ah.

30:53.48

Dr_ Tay

I will say like the parent is just like a lot of times is like thank you and to be honest, sometimes with the school system I think parents can go and advocate for their kids and it can pretend. There's a lot of emotions that come with that more often than not and so then sometimes schools aren't listening to the parent.

30:59.00

theautismhelper

Are.

31:12.59

Dr_ Tay

I Wish it wasn't like this but sometimes coming in as the psychologist and being like here's what I see here are my concerns I do find that schools tend to be more responsive to that.

31:20.17

theautismhelper

Yeah I could see that definitely well. Thank you so much we have I could like chat with you all day we have covered a lot in a half an hour so I So appreciate you joining me where can people go to learn more from you and and learn about your practice.

31:25.74

Dr_ Tay

We have.

31:35.94

Dr_ Tay

Absolutely so um, one of the main things I love just providing ah autism education. So I do that a lot on Instagram in Tiktok. So. It's just the period. DRPeriodT so the doctor t with periods in between. Um, my website is currently you know getting revamped. But it's Dr. Taylor Day dot com and then also Sasha I'm going to I have a free resource for parents to learn more about. Neuro divergent affirming care and how to be able to navigate the system to build a collaborative cooperative team. Um, so I'd love to share that link with you as well. So parents can have that free resource.

32:15.31

theautismhelper

Perfect. We will put that in the show notes as well as a link to your Instagram and Tiktok and website. So thank you again so much for joining me.

32:21.31

Dr_ Tay

Perfect. Thank you! This was wonderful I appreciate you giving the space an opportunity to be able to talk about this topic today.