



TURN AUTISM AROUND
WITH DR. MARY BARBERA

Transcript for Podcast Episode: 039

Autism and Speech Delay Warning Signs & AAC Devices with SLP Mom Deidra Darst

Hosted by: Dr. Mary Barbera

Mary Barbera: You're listening to the Turn Autism Around podcast, episode number 39. Today's episode we have a speech and language pathologist, who is also an autism mom, and we'll get to that introduction in just a second, but before we do that, I'd like to give a listener shout out to Katherine, who left me a five star rating and review on Apple Podcasts. She said, "I am a behavior analyst and listen to your podcast every week. I appreciate your up-to-date information and I learned so much that I use in my weekly therapy appointments. I send parents to your podcast for extra parent training. You are amazing. I also have your book and lend it out to parents when they ask for more information. You are making a difference. Keep up the hard work." So thank you so much Katherine for taking the time... probably take takes about five minutes to leave me a five star rating and review. Thank you so much. I love it that you are listening to the podcast every week and that you're acknowledging that it is a lot of hard work to produce these podcasts. So every review helps to spread the word to get the information out to both parents and professionals worldwide. So thank you so much Katherine.

Mary Barbera: Now let me get on to introducing Deidra Darst, our guest for this episode. She is a pediatric speech and language pathologist, an author and a blogger. Deidra has two sons, one who is diagnosed with autism, severe autism at the age of three and in this interview, in this episode we talk about the early warning signs of a speech delay in her older son as well as the signs of autism in her younger son. We talk about the fact that she didn't like ABA in the beginning. She didn't like the thought of ABA, but when she saw what ABA did for her son, she really turned the corner and is now a huge advocate for ABA. We also talk about augmentative alternative communication devices and all kinds of things. So I know you'll enjoy this episode with the Deidra Darst.

Welcome to the Turn Autism Around podcast for both parents and professionals in the autism world who want to turn things around, be less

stressed, and lead happier lives. And now your host, autism mom, behavior analyst, and bestselling author, Dr. Mary Barbera.

Mary Barbera: Okay, I'm so excited today to have a new friend that I just met online, Deidra Darst. So welcome to the podcast.

Deidra Darst: Thank you so much.

Mary Barbera: Yeah, it's exciting. Well, we met on a closed Facebook group and Deidre also recommended another podcast called Adventures In Autism. And so I listened to that podcast with Megan and Deidre and I'm going to have the host of that podcast on the show very soon as well. So I'm glad to be connecting with people through Facebook groups and online. So I'm, I am, hopefully we'll meet some day in person, but it's very nice to have you on the show, Deidre.

Deidra Darst: thank you so much for having me. I'm excited.

Deidra Darst: Yeah. Good. So, um, you are a speech language pathologist and then you had a personal fall into the autism world, too. So can you tell us like how long you've been an SLP and then describe how you fell into the autism world?

Deidra Darst: So I've been an SLP now for nine years. And I've always worked with kids on the spectrum; it should have been a sign, I think my very first client I ever had was on the spectrum; my first big girl job. I had a lot of kids on the spectrum and I had kids and my younger son, Collin, he's now five and he was diagnosed with severe autism at three.

Mary Barbera: Okay. And you have an older son, too. And Finley is just a year older than Collin.

Deidra Darst: Findlay is 12 months and six days older than Collin. So they're very close. And Finley was a late talker, so I was concerned about that. And then Collin, well don't if you want me to get into this yet, but he was hitting milestones, so I kept, you know, I would check that off. Oh, that's okay. He's crawling good. And then as he got older, then I started to realize, oh, language, speech. So yeah, I worried about both of my kids. I guess by the time Finley was two, almost two and a half, he just took off and you would never know now that he was a late talker. So.

Mary Barbera: So you have a lot of experience with kids that are slightly delayed with speech and kids on the spectrum and, there is a lot of variability. What's normal? And there's a lot of worry, especially today when the autism rate

is about one in 50, as back 20 years ago when Lucas was diagnosed, the autism rate was about one in 500. So lots more kids on the spectrum and lots of worry. And my boys are 18 months apart, a little less than 18 months apart. And that complicates things too because you just don't, you don't know if you're like going nuts and just to having two kids, or if there's a problem.

Deidra Darst: Well, and that was... I saw things with Collin, hindsight being 20, 20, he was six months old, and that was the first appointment with the pediatrician and I said, there's something going on. Because he was a happy baby then he was a fussy baby. And, you know, we realized there were some belly issues and things like that.

Deidra Darst: But when he was about a year old, that's when I really started to notice he didn't have interest in toys, just little things like that. But when I would say that to my family, they'd say, you're crazy. You just, you just know too much. Just don't worry. He's fine. My grandma actually said, there's nothing wrong with that baby, I love him. I love him too, that's why I'm concerned. So yeah, for the longest time it was just me knowing too much and he was okay and he was gonna outgrow it. So...

Mary Barbera: Like Finley did. I mean, yeah, like Finley outgrew his speech delay. So, you know, it gets really confusing. So at what point did you, you said you started to have concerns about autism maybe when he was about one... And then then how long did it take for the doctors to take you seriously for you to, did you wait in line for a diagnosis or how did that work? Because a lot of people are waiting nine months to two years for a diagnosis and this is three years ago.

Deidra Darst: I was mentioning it at visits, actually my best friend is an OT. So when Collin was about 15 months old, I asked her to do a developmental assessment and everything was within normal limits except for language, which I knew that and I thought, I'm not going to call in birth to three to do what I'm already doing. I will just do what I'm doing already and keep going. And I would see things, but I would talk myself out of it. Like I would say, well, but look how social he is. He doesn't have any sensory issues. And then I would say he doesn't always respond to his name, but, and it was this constant back and forth that I drove myself crazy.

Deidra Darst: And when he was two and a half, almost two and a half, it was like a light bulb moment that, oh, he does have sensory issues. That's outside of anything I understand, so I called in birth to three. When he was two I asked his doctor, you know, I said I have autism concerns. And the pediatrician said to me if he can point, he's not autistic.

Mary Barbera: Boy.

Deidra Darst: And a few other things... we don't see that pediatrician anymore. But...

Mary Barbera: Did he point back then?

Deidra Darst: He would point that it wasn't always consistent. He was always kind of a hit or miss, you know? And even on screenings, I would answer 'sometimes' to some of the questions and I would ask his therapist, do you think he's on the spectrum? And they would always say, well, maybe, but he does this or he doesn't do that. And he was three before I really said, okay, you know what, this is autism and we need a diagnosis. And I think we got lucky and we got in on a cancellation or something. We waited a month or two, but I do know people who wait 18 months and travel hours away to get their diagnosis.

Mary Barbera: Yeah, you did get lucky with only a month. Okay. So then at that point did the physician recommend ABA? Did you start ABA, or did you start something else?

Deidra Darst: Well, I knew what speech therapy looked like and I knew he could not do that. He was not going to sit at the table. He was not going to attend to anything he didn't want to do. So actually when he turned three, I put him in music therapy and OT and the music therapist was a friend of mine and she recommended ABA. And I can't remember if I mentioned this on the other podcast, but I was not a fan of ABA. I didn't really know what it was, but I was pretty sure I didn't like it. And I was almost offended when she said ABA, like, Ooh, no, that's, we don't want that. No, thank you. And she said, if you go to this clinic, they're going to change your mind.

Deidra Darst: So we went for a visit and it was like angel saying and answered all of my prayers. It was just everything that I knew he needed. And so, I mean I guess doctors were saying, Oh, autism ABA, but I didn't necessarily get information on resources: where to go, how to get ABA. I just, because I work in the field, I knew how to find it, that I could see where other parents would feel completely lost.

Mary Barbera: And you're in which state?

Deidra Darst: I'm in West Virginia.

Mary Barbera: West Virginia. So you were able to get into a clinic that does ABA and you shared with me before we started recording that your ABA clinic uses my book and my resources and my online courses and they do my quote

unquote flavor of ABA, which I totally love this clinic in West Virginia. Shout out to them. Because not all ABA clinics are doing that same thing. And so some ABA and some professionals like speech pathologists and teachers and OTs have a negative reaction when they hear ABA because they are thinking of kids screaming at a table and drilling them not in a nice developmental way and not pairing and not... All the things that we works well with kids. So I can see how you may have had a negative reaction, but once you started ABA then did you start to see progress then?

Deidra Darst: It was immediate. I mean it was like magic. I told them, I said, I don't know what kind of magic wand you have, but it's amazing. I document everything and I keep all of his little notes that we get every day. And I went back and when he had just had about 25 hours of ABA, he was already a different kid. He had learned to wait. He could sit. He, I mean, it was just amazing the things that he could do. And when I read your book, that was also like a moment for me to really understand what ABA is. And it was all those things that I knew he needed. We had talked about this, but I had left my job when he was three because I knew he needed this one on one intensive intervention and that we could help him, you know, he would, I knew he was in there, he had potential and he could learn. We just had to get in there. And when I read your book I'm like, Oh my gosh, this is exactly what he needs. But yeah, it started out he was getting about two hours of ABA a day and even at just two hours it was life changing. So I was sold.

Mary Barbera: Is he still going to the ABA Clinic?

Deidra Darst: Hmm, he has a full time schedule now. So he's at 30 hours a week.

Mary Barbera: And is that covered by insurance?

Deidra Darst: It is. So we're very fortunate that the state of West Virginia actually passed legislation... I can't remember, seven or eight years ago. So it is covered. We still pay a lot for premiums and all those things, but it is covered.

Mary Barbera: Yeah, a few weeks ago, maybe a few months ago, I had Laurie Unum on the podcast and Laurie was really the autism mom that spearheaded... she's also an attorney, who spearheaded all the autism legislation through Autism Speaks. So people can go back and listen to that podcast. But you, you also got a little bit involved with advocacy and legislation. Is that correct?

Deidra Darst: I had a position this past year, I was the state director of the Mountaineer Autism Project and that is the group that got legislation passed years ago. I stepped down from that position in the summer because I realized I had just taken on too much and I'm still working with them, but just not in an official capacity. But it's so important because when we look at our state, we do not have the providers, I think in the whole state of West Virginia, we have between 30 and 40 practicing BCBAs. So with prevalence the way it is now, that is nowhere near covering the need. So we know that we need more professionals to be here because I get really fired up about this because I see how much it's helped my son, and then I see other kids and I think, it can help them too. And it, his life has just been completely changed. He is on this new trajectory and it's because of ABA and people think that I'm exaggerating when I say that, and I'm not. He is just a different kid and I see the potential that other kids have but they just don't have access to it. So that's why it's really important to me to speak out and write and share his success story because I want other kids to have that too.

Mary Barbera: Do you think that his diagnosis and what you know now about ABA has changed you as an SLP?

Deidra Darst: Yes, absolutely. I feel like before I looked at a kid and I saw, okay, you have goals A, B, and C and we are going to work on these goals and this is, this is my goal right now and I have to do this. I feel like Collin has made me see the whole child and I see, yeah, I know I might really want to work on following directions, but if you're in the middle of a meltdown, we have to get through that first. And I feel like my focus was so narrow before and now ABA has just... and his diagnosis in general has opened a whole new world to me of, you know, there's a lot of other things going on here and behavior is communication and it's all connected and I have to look at all of that.

Mary Barbera: Yeah, definitely. I'm always a big proponent of stepping back, looking at the whole forest, not the trees. I really am very big on not being tit for tat, not programming. I talk about some of the goals, some of the... When Lucas was two, he had a diagnosis of speech delay disorder and he'd go to speech therapy and the goals... This is before we knew he had autism, and the goals were, you know, he would request bubbles and you know, that part of the session went great. You know, she'd pull out bubbles and I'd be like, okay, this is, this is good. I mean, neither of us knew what a mand was or anything. But then she also had goals for some versus all versus none, which is a very abstract mathematic question. And that's something that, you know, decades later he still probably would struggle with that goal.

Mary Barbera: She also had a goal in there for him to say yes or no for items: like is this an apple, is this a pen that's a yes, no tact, which again, I had no idea about. And it was years later when we finally figured out how to teach Lucas that till he mastered that. So you know, I am a big proponent of, of seeing the whole child and making the plan and the goals based on the child, not some standardized tests for in chronological age of three. And I see that happening a lot with participants in my online course. They come in with maybe with services, very well meaning professionals. And I'm not trying to throw anybody under the bus or say people don't know what they're doing. It's just that when you go to school to be a speech pathologist, you don't learn all of this about ABA and we need more people to have a behavioral focus.

Deidra Darst: And I think that's a disservice that we're getting in grad school. You know, we didn't learn about ABA. I remember hearing the words discreet trial training once. I don't really remember learning what that was or even that, you know, we, we just didn't get that background. And I feel like when I read your book and you know, you described tacting and manding and echoic and it was like a light bulb. I feel like as SLPs, we should use words like that because it explains, you know, somebody can tell me that the kid has 50 words, but how are they using those words? What does that mean? And I definitely see things like that differently now. And I was explaining this to a teacher I work with and she said, wow, you're a deep thinker. And I said, no, it's just, you have to read this book. It's not me. I'm not a deep thinker. It's, it's science. And it's definitely changed the way I see things.

Mary Barbera: Right. And just for anyone out there listening, if you aren't familiar with my book, it's called The Verbal Behavior Approach. And I didn't come up with these terms, mand, tact, echoic, like actually BF Skinner did in 1957 and through that book then Dr. Jack Michael and Dr. Mark Sundberg and a whole bunch of PhD type behavior analysts came up with really how to use BF Skinner's work in order to teach kids with language delays and autism to speak and to follow directions and to do all kinds of things. And so, yeah, it is a different quote unquote flavor of ABA. It isn't the original traditional Lovaas approach. It is ABA plus Skinner's analysis of verbal behavior or the verbal behavior approach, which is really moving the needle for these kids. And whether you start to move the needle at three or at 18 months or at 13 or 30, it's never too late to incorporate these strategies.

Mary Barbera: Incorporating these strategies doesn't mean you need to or is appropriate to sit at a table and drill intensively for hours a day. But it also you can't just keep doing what you're doing if it's not helping the

child reaches fullest potential. So, it sounds like you and I are, are on the same page in terms of our beliefs about looking at the whole child. What do you see are the main struggles with... let's just do parents first. What are the main struggles that you see with parents of kids with autism?

Deidra Darst: Obviously access to services. But I think the biggest thing, and this is a soapbox of mine right now, but I feel like pediatricians don't recommend testing. They don't recommend therapy. And people will go to their pediatrician and their doctors and we love them and you know, we appreciate them and all those things. But they'll go to their doctor with a concern and they say, well, don't worry about it. They'll talk when they're three; they'll catch up. It's okay, don't worry about it. And that's a complete disservice because they need that early intervention and we see how important that is to get in there early. And like you said, you can still do things later, but if you can get in there early, you're gonna effect so much more change. And I feel like if your doctor tells you, Oh, don't worry about it, then people don't worry about it.

Deidra Darst: And then they wait. And then they wait until they're four and they go into preschool and then the teacher says, Whoa, what's going on here? And then we've waited till four to get anything... Once you get the diagnosis, then there's that whole emotional process of, you know, grief and acceptance and all those things that you go through and that's hard. And if you feel like you're doing that alone, it's even harder. So I think there's the getting, finding what you need, actually having access to it and getting it. And then also just dealing with the emotions of the diagnosis and the worry and all those things.

Mary Barbera: What about for professionals? What do you think they are struggling the most with in the autism world?

Deidra Darst: I think we need to collaborate. I think now that I have seen ABA and I have a pretty good grasp on it and I see how effective it is, I feel like we all as professionals, SLPs, OTs, PTs, BCBAs, if we can all work together, how beneficial is that gonna be? You know, because I know I can bring things to the table, language-based. If we can get teachers on board, I think if we can have everybody on the same page and working together, then that's just going to benefit the kids. But we're not always given those opportunities. And that's the hardest part is that you're dictated by schedules. An I think a lot of it is just education, you know. I'm an SLP and I didn't really know what ABA was until my son needed it. So I think there's that education piece that we have to keep working on too.

Mary Barbera: Yeah. And I think part of the collaboration problems, at least with the early intervention field is funding. Like you can't be there at the same time. So the OT comes on a Wednesday morning for an hour and they recommend, oh well they need a pacifier for sensory issues and blah, blah, blah. And then the speech therapist might come on a Friday afternoon and she's talking to mom about the pacifiers maybe impeding his speech and, and you shouldn't give a crying baby a pacifier or crying toddler pacifier. And it also affects their teeth then and you know, and then the poor parent is trying to listen to conflicting advice, neither of which is probably from a behavioral standpoint. And so it really does... I think it does all come down to collaboration. And that's part of my mission too is to try to get everybody on the same page. To educate...That's why I wanted this.

Mary Barbera: I mean, the podcast is for parents and professionals together. My book is for parents and professionals. My courses are for parents and professionals because you know, we all want what's best for the child to reach his or her fullest potential. And we can't work in silos, working on you take the sensory piece and I'm going to take the behavior piece and you're going to take the language piece. Because that's not going to work for the child. We don't, we have limited time. We've got to help the child catch up as best we can. And if we're all just kind of stuck in our silos or have egos that are trying to take credit for our goal, God forbid, you know, it's like leave the ego at the door. I don't need credit for this. I'm just trying to literally get the kids in a lifeboat.

Mary Barbera: And so, you know, and I, you know, I don't mean to be argumentative. I, you know, somebody's got to take control. And I think that's another problem in the early intervention field is like nobody wants to step on other people's toes. Everybody has to have a seat at the table to discuss it. It's like this kid is drowning. We need to save him. I'm gonna get in the captain's seat and then I'm going to get, as quickly as possible, the parent in the captain seat. Because the parent is the one who is going to be able to drive and coordinate services for life. And so that's my whole, my whole stent.

Mary Barbera: So, you know, I think if you are out there, you're listening and you're struggling and you want to learn more how to kind of get rid of your struggles or have less struggles... I would not, not only read my book, my book is now 12 years old, and I've learned a lot more in the past 12 years and I would really consider, joining my online course and community. And you can learn more about how to do that by attending a free workshop at Marybarbera.com/workshop. So it's a free workshop. It gives you some tips to get started, but it also gives you some ideas about

how or when you should join my online course because as you know, Deidre, it is a long way up a very steep mountain.

Mary Barbera: And so let's talk about how Collin is doing now. He's five years old and, you told me he started out not speaking at all, but now he's starting to speak to some degree. And can you tell us how he's doing now in terms of his functioning level and kind of where you're going from here?

Deidra Darst: So yeah, he was non-verbal a year ago, literally just screams and squeals and then he turned five and it was just amazing. He just took off and he was using... Well he still uses an AAC device. He uses Lampwords For Life on his iPad.

Mary Barbera: What is that again? What, what type of device?

Deidra Darst: It's Lampwords For Life.

Mary Barbera: Okay. Lamp as in a light lamp? L. A. M. P. Okay.

Deidra Darst: It stands for Language Acquisition Through Motor Planning. And he is really good on his device. Carries it everywhere, wants it with him. But then he just started to talk, and it was just little tiny words here and there. And the first day he would count, it wasn't very clear, but we knew what he was doing. And one day we had a documentary on about sharks and I heard him go, shark, shark. And I was like, he's going to talk. And that was probably six or seven months ago. And now, I mean he will repeat anything we say, but he has spontaneous productions and it's just amazing that he'll... I went in to wake him up yesterday and I turned on the light and he went off and told me to go. And it's just little things like that that I'm like, oh my gosh, you've come so far.

Deidra Darst: But yeah, my favorite thing he says, he says his brother's name now and he calls him Finley. But yeah, he's, I think he's kind of in this language explosion right now and it's just so exciting. And I sat down cause I'm a nerd and I wrote out all of his words the other day and he has probably 120 words that he spontaneously, so, he's following directions. We can leave our house, and that's such a big thing because we didn't go anywhere. We, we would take turns and do it in shifts. If we had to go to the grocery store, I would go and my husband would stay home with him, and then the next week we would switch. We can go places, he will hold our hand in public and not run from us. He's playing with his brother, which is so big because that's a whole another side of this but having a sibling who's typical, he just wants to play with his brother. And he doesn't always understand why Collin doesn't play. So now that he'll

come up and he'll say, "run Finley, run". And then they play chase. It's just, it's the best. So he's doing amazing. He learns new things every day.

Mary Barbera: And some people think that augmentative communication devices, sign language, picture exchange, that they will, there's a myth out there that that will all pretail language; that that will prevent language and that's not the case. Actually every study that I'm aware of shows that that can often be a springboard like in your son's case where using that Lamp, augmentative device has really helped. On the other hand... And I would assume you would agree that, you know, as a speech pathologist, you know, you want to kind of dispel that myth. On the other hand, in my online courses, I am a big proponent on not going to a device too early, you know, cause there's a lot of energy... If the child has any kind of pop out words or we might want to spend a month or two trying to get words vocal words because it's easiest, you know, there's no upkeep on the device. It's completely with you at all times.

Mary Barbera: But there are, I think there are a lot of parents' concerns. I know somebody in my online community just posted that her speech therapist for her son wanted to start picture exchange and she felt like that just cut off his language. And he did have some vocal language as well. And she wanted to focus on vocal language. And the speech pathologist in this case wanted to focus on the picture exchange and it shouldn't be, you know, all or nothing, but in the end, vocal language is the best, you know, the best alternative. But sometimes you need to start sign or pictures or a device just to kind of get them spring-boarded.

Deidra Darst: Well, and I think that's something that I always tried to tell parents to AAC, there's alternative, but there's also augmentative and yes, they might just need it to supplement. And that's where Collin is now because you know, speaking is the easiest and that's what he prefers. So when he wants something or wants to tell us something he's going to say it. Now we might not always understand it, particularly if it's maybe a three syllable word or something that's a little harder to say, or if it's a new word for him, so then he will go get his device and use it. But I always look at that if your child has no way to communicate and you can give them hex or sign language, anything that gives them communication and yes, I know you want them to talk and I want them to talk too, but until that happens, we need to give them a way to communicate.

Mary Barbera: So you also went on to write a blog and so it's called The SLP Mom. Is that correct?

Deidra Darst: It is.

Mary Barbera: So, SLPmom.com

Deidra Darst: TheSLPmom.com.

Mary Barbera: And so is "The" in front of it? Okay. So it's TheSLPMom.com. When did you start it? Why did you start it and how often do you do it?

Deidra Darst: So Colin was diagnosed with autism is almost two years ago. And I didn't really talk about it because I thought this is private, this is, this is his life. I'm not gonna put this out there. And I started the blog just for myself to process. And that's how I worked through emotions is to write. And a few months in to that, he had a diagnosis and I hadn't made it public. I thought I'm doing him a disservice because I am his voice right now. And if I don't speak up for him and share what's going on, people won't know. They won't understand. And I thought, you know what, I'm going, I'm just going to share this. So probably a year and a half ago I just said, hey, I started this blog. If people want to read it, go for it. And I've just had a lot of messages, mostly from other moms who just say thank you because you feel alone sometimes.

Deidra Darst: I mean, I know you've been there, you understand that and you just need to hear from somebody else that it's okay to feel sad or it's, you know, it's okay, your kid's struggling mine is too, you're not alone. So I have the blog, I created a Facebook page for that recently, just in the last few months. I just kind of right when something strikes me, I guess. I don't do it. Maybe a couple times a week I'll write something and then I might go a week and not do anything. But it's just my way of processing my emotions, but also reaching out to other parents. I do try to write some things. I've done some blogs on AAC and using augmentative communication and how it's not going to hold back language and all those things. So I do talk about that too.

Mary Barbera: Great. And you also wrote a book or two?

Deidra Darst: I have them here. I wrote my first one, it's called "Buy" One Then Get One "Free": Our Journey from Infertility to Autism, that's a very specific population that would read that book. But again, that was me as we went through infertility, as we started this autism journey, I felt alone and I thought, I don't want anybody else to ever feel that way. So I'm going to put this out there. And if one person reads this and feels like, wow, I'm not by myself in this, then that's what I wanted to do.

Mary Barbera: So your kids, your kids are only 12 months apart. So I'm assuming that with Finley you did infertility treatments, and then surprise, surprise with Collin.

Deidra Darst: Bingo. That's exactly what happened. And so I sat down just to write people like my blog and I said, you should write a book. So I sat down just to talk about the autism part of our story, but then again, infertility just kept coming up because it was such a huge part of, you know, I thought I was never going to have kids, and then I have this baby that I'm struggling to help. And then it makes me question, maybe I wasn't, you know, was I supposed to have kids? I'm horrible with this mother thing. And you know, it was all just a part of also I love and appreciate my babies so much because at one point I thought I would never have them. So that's that book.

Deidra Darst: And then Finley, my older son, he started kindergarten last year and I knew he knew autism, because he lives it every day. But I thought of his classmates, who maybe had not had the opportunity to meet anyone on the spectrum yet. And I thought, what if they want to come play at our house and they start to ask questions about his brother and why does Collin not talk? And why, why does he do this and why does he do that? So I wrote a children's book, Artie is Awesome. And it just talks about how we're all different and celebrates our differences and then goes on to explain autism in a way that kids understand. It's a rhyming book again because I'm a speech nerd, but both of my books are available on Amazon.

Mary Barbera: Awesome. "Buy" One Then Get One "Free", and Artie is Awesome. Is that right? Okay. All right. We'll link those in the show notes as well so if somebody wants to, uh, can't remember the names, just go to the show notes for this episode and we'll be able to hook you up.

Deidra Darst: I was gonna say too, for Artie Is Awesome, I have a Teachers Pay Teachers page. And my goal with that was that every teacher would read this book to her class, even if they don't have a child on the spectrum. Just because to me, if we talk about it early and make it a part of the conversation when they're young, it won't be a big deal when they meet somebody with autism and they'll understand that it's okay that they're different.. So I have some resources on there, mostly geared towards speech and language, but just some little worksheets too. Like if you had a friend with autism, what could you do to help them? Those kinds of things. So, if you just go to Teachers Pay Teachers and you search my name, Deidre Darst, that comes up.

Mary Barbera: Cool. Okay. So we are almost at the end of our time together and I like to, at the end of our episodes, talk about ways where parents and professionals can be less stressed and lead happier lives. So I was wondering if you as both a parent and professional have tips on ways that you can control your stress and be happier?

Deidra Darst: Well, the first thing is I do try to exercise. I've been doing zoomba, which that's like a big stress reliever. Plus I feel like with a runner, I need to be in some sort of shape to be able to chase him. So I feel like that's kind of dual role there. But I have learned recently I have to say no to things, and particularly as moms, we feel like we have to do everything, and I've learned I can't do everything. So I stepped back from some positions that I had and I realized I'm a lot less stressed and it makes me a happier person.

Mary Barbera: Nice. Nice. I like that; learning to say no. Because you can definitely spend all day, every day thinking and worrying and writing about autism, and it can really consume your life, especially with us being both autism professionals and parents. And so you have to also take time for yourself and time for your family, for your own individual interests so that autism doesn't rule your life completely. So I think that's great advice for our parents and professionals as well.

Mary Barbera: I really appreciate getting to know you better Deidre. I think we have many more years of collaboration and getting the word out to help each child reach his or her fullest potential. So thank you so much for spending your time with us. For more information about Deidra, you can look at my show notes or go to theslpmom.com. And if you'd like information about how you can learn more about joining my online course and community, you can go to Marybarbera.com/workshop and I hope you tune in next time for another episode of Turn Autism Around.

Thanks for listening to the Turn Autism Around podcast with Dr. Mary Barbera. For more information, visit Marybarbera.com.