

# Diana Heldfond: Online assessments & the future of empowered...

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

adhd, diagnosed, parallel, child, diagnosis, students, assessment, testing, kids, feel, learning, psychologist, point, evaluation, teachers, starting, medical diagnosis, services, talking, life

## SPEAKERS

Diana Heldfond, Katy Weber

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Diana Heldfond 00:00

If you just peel it all back to the core, right, no child is showing up to schools wanting to be the, you know, anxious one in the class or the disorganized one in the class or the lazy one in the class. And I think that that's what we definitely take for granted. And I also think that's where, starting with such a comprehensive view of what's going on with your child is also helpful place to start.



Katy Weber 00:27

Hello, and welcome to the women and ADHD podcast. I'm your host, Katy Weber. I was diagnosed with ADHD at the age of 45. And it completely turned my world upside down. I've been looking back at so much of my life, school, jobs, my relationships, all of it with this new lens, and it has been nothing short of overwhelming. I quickly discovered I was not the only woman to have this experience. And now I interview other women who like me discovered in adulthood, they have ADHD and are finally feeling like they understand who they are and how to best lean into their strengths, both professionally and personally. Okay, we're gonna get right into it this week with Episode 96, in which I interview Diana Hellspawn. Oh, for those of you who have been listening to this podcast for a while, you'll know that most of the women I've interviewed who are moms were diagnosed after one of their kids. That wasn't the case for me. I was diagnosed with ADHD first and then I started looking at both my kids and the traits I saw in them. I have a 15 year old girl and an 11 year old boy. And I've been watching them thinking Are you wondering is this also ADHD, you know, going over everything they do with a fine tooth comb as one does. I've spoken a lot about this journey of how to seek a diagnosis for them how to go about it, where to go for one, I wanted to make sure I didn't screw this one up. I've wanted to go about this with a lot of intention. Well, I finally settled on an online company called Parallel learning. Both my kids completed their comprehensive learning and psych evaluations recently, with parallel, although at the time of this interview, neither of them had been diagnosed yet, they have since both been diagnosed with ADHD. I have been absolutely impressed with so much about parallel learning from the moment I stumbled upon them. And it

was no surprise when I found out that the founder of parallel was not only diagnosed in childhood with dyslexia and ADHD, but that she started this company at the age of 26. Diana is now on a mission to make psycho Educational Services widely available across the nation. So as founder and CEO of parallel, Diana is building the first tech enabled integrated care model for children with learning and thinking differences. We talk all about the online assessment process for kids, which is a relatively new option for families and schools. We also talk about empowered learning and the importance of positive framing and teaching kids about the strengths of ADHD at an early age. Rather than simply diagnosing this as a disorder. I was really grateful to get the chance to sit down with Diana and hear her personal story and also chat all about this incredible business that she has started and how much it has already impacted and benefited my family's journey. And I'm sure so many other families too. Okay, enjoy. Diana, I first want to give a shout out to whoever does the SEO for parallel, they need a raise because I have to say like I found parallel, I literally was at my wit's end. I didn't know what to do about getting my kids diagnosed or at least going through an assessment because I know that both of them I didn't want to just do the traditional route like with the with their pediatrician, I knew that there was like a lot more nuanced stuff going on with it, which we'll talk about later. But I literally just googled on my phone out of frustration, psych evaluations near me, and parallel came up. It was like the first thing that came up and then here we are. I know right? Like I wanted to let you know that that happened. Because I feel like it was just it felt like fate intervened. And it was such a like this moment of relief. And I've just been so happy with the all everybody I've dealt with. And and I can't I can't gush enough about how wonderful the company is. So I'm so thrilled to be able to sit down with you and not only to be able to tell you this face to face, but also just to hear your story and kind of how this happened and this company that you've created, it must be such a whirlwind at this point. So let's start with your own childhood diagnosis. I know on the website, you said that you vividly remembered having one of your peers proclaim that he finished a Harry Potter book and you feeling like oh my god, what was what's wrong with me? So talk about like your diagnosis as a child what was going on? And what were some of the signs that your parents or your teacher saw that that got you that diagnosis and how old were you?

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Diana Heldfond 04:51

Yeah, well first off, I just got off my marketing team. So I'll have to get back on with them after this to give them that feedback and I'll be happy to hear that It's always so great to connect with, you know, parents that are involved with the company and students that are actually interacting with the platform and our providers. So I'm so happy to hear all this and excited to dig in more. But, uh, in terms of yeah, my personal story, you know, as I say, on the website, on the about page, yes, I do have that very vivid memory, you know, it was reading time and first grade, and I was reading, you know, picture books that had maybe one or two words per page kind of thing, trying to, you know, sound out cat and hat kind of thing. And there were kids that were, you know, finishing full chapter books. Right. And that was a mortifying, when you're seven years old, right. However, I would say that those those certain kids, that one kid in particular was probably far more advanced than majority of the classroom. But it was very clear that I was, you know, progressing at probably the slowest speed of all the other students, and that was very isolating when you're seven years old. And, you know, you're not super aware right at that point of kind of how much extra work it's going to take to get through school. But it was just very, it was clear, right, that I was progressing at a different pace than than peers at that point. That was kind of my earliest memory of kind of self identifying as maybe, quote unquote, different I actually ended up being diagnosed with dyslexia that same year, I was very lucky in that my parents were pretty aware of what the symptoms of of dyslexia and learning

differences more broadly looked like. And so they really intervened early to make sure that I did get tested and got extra support. And so I also mentioned, you know, in that little story on the about page, that I am kind of one of the lucky ones, right? Most students unfortunately, throughout America are really struggling before anyone ever really intervenes. And of course, learning differences can mean a lot of things. And they also can hit students at very different points or manifest in different ways, right. So things might be all smooth and fine, one year, one grade, and, you know, really, really shift by by the next year, right. And so that's where I feel like, again, I do feel very lucky that I was kind of a product of that early intervention, was able to have a lot of resources in place to ultimately help me I guess, stay somewhat in line with some of my classmates, I would say that I always felt like I was working a lot harder and putting a lot more time in to my studies in order to complete my assignments and get good grades, and do all the things that you know, I wanted to achieve in my academic career. And I think the other thing I'll just note is, when you are diagnosed that early, and actually get real interventions put in place, whether it's working, you know, one on one with a learning specialist, or working with an executive function coach, or whoever the specialist is, right that's needed for that specific diagnosis, you still don't totally process what that means, right? When you're you're seven, or eight or nine, even frankly, all the way it wasn't until I was in high school that I even remotely began to take note of what dyslexia actually meant, or tried to really understand how I was different from my peers. And that was only because I found myself really having to advocate for myself in the classroom, to get certain accommodations and so on, that I did actually truly have to be able to explain to my teachers, you know, this is why I need 50% extra time, or this is why I need to say in the front of the classroom, right? And it is just kind of a crazy thing I think a lot of parents struggle with and teachers struggle with is how do you even talk with to a seven year old or eight year old about why you have this kind of scary medical diagnosis and why you're working harder than your peers and why you know, it's good to work with this specialist or so on or get this extra support. But yeah, you as a child want to be, you know, in soccer practice with friends, right? So a lot of takeaways, I guess from from being diagnosed early, but definitely be like I had a very unique story and wanted to be able to make my reality a reality for more students across America. And that's really where parallel came from.



Katy Weber 09:07

Yeah, you know, I feel like from all the conversations I've had with women, most of whom were diagnosed with ADHD in adulthood, you know, I've interviewed more than 100 Women at this point. And I feel like for me, the trends that I'm seeing, we have a lot of differences, but one of the things I've noticed is that women who are diagnosed with some other learning disability at a young age, usually dyslexia or dyscalculia, dysgraphia had a much different experience, even if they weren't diagnosed with ADHD until adulthood, but they at least it was instilled in them at a very young age that there was nothing wrong with them, right, that they had a learning disability that they needed extra help, and that when something wasn't working, they would get the help and the accommodations they needed. And that was almost like a switch that went off in certain kids and then for other kids, myself included, who weren't diagnosed who were only diagnosed with depression and anxiety in adulthood. You know that that idea? Have that, like, the onus was always on me to figure it out, the onus was on me to, like, get my act together. And to work harder or study harder, you know, all of those messages that I received from my parents or my teachers that it was like I was the problem. And I feel like that is like a real dividing, you know, fork in the road for a lot of us with when it comes to. And this is, you know, not I'm not, you know, a researcher or anything, this is just my own observations from these interviews, but I feel like that makes such a huge difference. And, and I feel like also with

parents who are concerned about, like, I don't want my kids to have to live with these labels of these diagnoses. You know, I, you know, we all talk about all the labels we ended up with instead of the diagnosis, right? So I ended up with all these labels of being lazy, being unmotivated, being disorganized, or you know, no, you name it, we're gonna get labeled, no matter what it feels like, it will be so much more beneficial to have this like more of a medicalized diagnosis, and to be like, Okay, now, this is what I need. This is how I'm going to get the help I need and not just always to be like, Well, I just need to figure it out. I just need to get my act together. I just need to not be insert piece of shit, you know, adjective? Do you remember the assessment process? Do you remember any of that from that? Because that's pretty young, seven,

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Diana Heldfond 11:19

I Well, I've been assessed on many times throughout my, my childhood, given that I have my first one, I was seven, and you're supposed to every three years in order to actually get those accommodations. And also, it's really important, right? As I made that earlier, comment, so many things change, grade by grade and expectations of students. And so even within parallel, right, I see this all the time where child's diagnosed when maybe they're 789 years old. And by the time that they're stepping into middle school, these conditions have manifested in very different ways. And the struggles look very different, right. And so it is really helpful to go and get reassessed and work with that psychologist to really understand what's going on at that point in time also know from my own personal experience, right, is that even with dyslexia when I was seven, but I wasn't diagnosed with ADHD until high school. And that is because, yeah, frankly, I, to your point, I have a lot of the resources in place, and was working really hard. It wasn't until frankly, you had all of these different subjects to handle. And a lot of work for each of those subjects, that I would just short circuit, I couldn't get anything done, because it just couldn't bounce around that much from subject to subject. And to this day, it still weighs on me Xeo, I have a lot of very long to do list of things. And it gives me comfort if there's like one large project to tackle, as opposed to 20 different little things that you know, apply to different parts of the business, because that's truly when you know, the anxiety kicks in. And I just know that I'm just gonna be all over the place, right? Like those little tasks. Throughout my life. I've always been the toughest things to get done. Because you know, I'll get started on one thing, and then all of a sudden, 20 minutes later, I'm you know, bouncing around to the next right. Yeah, it's been an interesting, interesting thing to navigate over the years. But yeah, I will say, I don't think I ever realized that ADHD was the issue until, like I said, I got to just a different point in my academic career, and the expectations were different of me. And all of a sudden, it was very clear, right? Like, I want to go get retested for dyslexia. I actually was the one that was talking with my parents and was talking with the psychologist asking, you know, can you test for this because it's something that's it was very clear to my teachers, it was clear to my parents, it was clear to myself that I was having a really hard time just completing tasks, even though I considered myself a doer, like a type A person. And that disconnect exactly like you said, right? You start to really question like, you're like, is this laziness? Or what is this right? And like, why can't I get over these barriers? And it can be really, really discouraging for any student, or also any adult, right, that's going through it and self labeling themselves as a result of you all have these struggles, as opposed to going through this more formal diagnosis process. It's a larger conversation, I think that just needs to be had. And luckily, I do think society is starting to have the conversation.



11:19



Katy Weber 14:22

Yeah, right. I mean, I'm constantly questioning all of that, even with this diagnosis, the number of adults who are getting diagnosed and kids who are getting diagnosis locked down, it says the pandemic is so crazy that I'm like, is this ADHD is something else happening? Are we just going through this, like collective trauma? Is it like, you know, and then the answer is always like, does it matter? And then I'm like, I don't know it does, for whatever reason, it seems to matter for me. And then I'm like, Oh, right. That's the ADHD talking. So but it's such a crazy time because I think we're going through this period of time where thanks through social media and Tik Tok and the internet, the demand for diagnoses are, is getting higher and higher and higher as the conversation is changing around mental health. And as people are starting to recognize, ADHD doesn't just look like a little boy who can't sit still, ADHD manifests in, you know, emotional dysregulation, and paralysis, and you know, all of the ways in which we're kind of starting to understand how it manifests in, in, especially in women and girls. And so, but here we are, everybody wants to get diagnosed, and they, you know, either they're finally getting to see their brick and mortar, local doctor and the doctors, like, don't be ridiculous. So you did fine in school, you're just tired. I think you're just depressed, or all the things that are happening to especially to adults, or there's a waitlist of, you know, year. And so I feel like that had to have had something to do with when you add, you know, how old are you now?



Diana Heldfond 15:59

Actually 26.



Katy Weber 16:01

Okay, so you're still 20. So it goes in and say it's so this is when you kind of have this idea that you wanted to bring, you know, get into the telehealth field. So walk me through what was going on in terms of starting parallel and this light bulb moment, this light bulb entrepreneurial moment, we're like, Oh, my God, I have an idea. I'm going to start a business. I'm sure you went into a hyperfocus fog and came out with all of this PC and everything. Yeah, I



Diana Heldfond 16:25

mean, as I said earlier, right. Like, I recognize that my experience, even just having parents that were aware of what symptoms to look out for, or being willing to do this testing in the first place was unique, right. And when you dig in deeper, right, even parents that are trying to get their kids tested, or get services for their kids, once diagnosis has been made, it's really difficult, right? To your point earlier, you know, waste waitlists are very long, it's very expensive to get a private evaluation costs 1000s and 1000s of dollars, right. And if you're going through the school district, frankly, you could also be waiting for months, and you might not even ever get an evaluation. And I think schools are also under just an immense, immense amount of pressure right now, because they're also extremely short zapped. And you know, I'm sure, school districts wish that they could be doing a lot more for special ed students. But I do think that during COVID, it's fair to say that special ed students are probably disproportionately affected, because so many of them services fully fully cut off. That nonetheless, the idea for parallel actually had come earlier than COVID. But COVID was kind of the big change agent, which I was like, alright, this really vote for my life personally, but also for the larger idea, it

was very clear that this was the right time to start exploring, right? Because the virtual model really has become just the main mode of Health Care Services at this point, coming out of COVID. But pre COVID, a lot of the folks that would need to buy into the virtual testing had kind of been wishy washy about it. So the American Psychological Association, National Association of School Psychologists, the testing companies that published all the testing materials, you know, no one had really forged into, you know, can't can we actually do this in a virtual setting, and have it be accurate, right, because keep in mind, we're doing very intense, thorough evaluations and using real clinical measures that were historically built for in person testing. And we're actually very lucky here at a parallel the head of our clinical team, Dr. Jordan Wright is actually the researcher who did all of the studies to actually equate online testing, or virtual testing with in person testing and to be able to say that those norms actually do line up. And that has been the research that has really been the go to over the past two years, as many psychologists start to use virtual therapy, or tele assessment, you know, in their practice. It's what you know, American Psychological Association has pointed to, for the last two years. And so you've seen this kind of validation of tele assessment as a practice, which is really exciting to see. And, frankly, one of our other clinical advisors, Dr. Damon Korb, who's based out in California, he's a behavioral pediatrician. And when I first approached him about parallel, he was like, you know, a year ago, I would have laughed in your face. If you told me we're gonna do a virtual testing model. And he was like, but now COVID app, and he's like, I'm totally on board. Let me know how it can be helpful. That goes to show right, just how much has changed. And so I, you know, be remiss to say that the timing of COVID did not or has played a big role in to why we launched our services. is now and ultimately being able to provide, you know, much greater access to both testing as well as you know, all of these different we bucket as support services, right, but really trying to reach as many students as possible with all of the different services that you would need to really be successful both in the classroom and in life, right, because a lot of these executive functioning skills and mental health, you know, support and so on, are so highly relevant not just to the child, here, and now when they're sitting in the classroom in seventh grade, right, but also the skill set that they're going to carry into, you know, their careers and the real world, right. A lot of my drive to start this company came from also really wanting to shift that narrative, from, you know, these being disabilities, right, or this idea of children being different, and then negative light to really celebrating uniqueness, right of how children, and all of us, frankly, think and learn, right, because I don't think it's a controversial statement to say like, there are visual learners and there are auditory learners. But the second you start putting a medical diagnosis like dyslexia and ADHD on the table, all of a sudden, you're really isolating students. And historically, and this happened to me even personally in school where it was like, all their kids would be like, you're not, you know, you're so stupid, you can't even be in the normal classroom with us when you know, it's like reading time, right. And that should not be the case, through info. So you know, that is really the the ultimate motivator here is to be able to provide the support to these students so that they feel like they really can go out and do anything that they want to do in life.



Katy Weber 21:39

That's so beautifully said, I'd like to take a moment to thank better help for sponsoring this podcast. If you're a regular listener of this podcast, you know, I am a big proponent of therapy therapy provides me the best opportunity for verbal processing something that is so important for my kind of brain and my sense of self. What I love about BetterHelp is that it's not a crisis line, it's not self help. It is professional therapy that's done securely online, from the comfort of your home, they assess your needs, and match you with your own licensed professional therapist, and it's available for clients worldwide. So you get access to a broad range of

expertise that might not be available to you locally. It also tends to be more affordable than traditional offline therapy and financial aid is available. If you visit their website and read their testimonials. There are actually quite a few reviews that specifically reference help with ADHD as a special offer for listeners of the women and ADHD podcast, you'll get 10% off your first month, simply sign up at [betterhelp.com/women ADHD](https://betterhelp.com/women-ADHD), that's BetterHelp [h e l p.com/women, ADHD](https://betterhelp.com/women-ADHD), and there's a link in the show notes. This podcast is sponsored by BetterHelp. I speak to a lot of women who came to their ADHD diagnosis after their kids were diagnosed. And they started to be like, That's funny, that reminds me of my childhood, I should look into this or they were like looking into ways to help their kid from after an ADHD diagnosis. And they're like, Oh, this is all ringing true to me. So I'm in a different situation where I was diagnosed, and now I look at my kids constantly, it'd be like, do they don't they do they don't they? And I have a girl and a boy. And my boy was like, you know, and neither of them really falls into the stereotypical mold of ADHD. And, you know, they're both incredibly well behaved. They have their teachers always, you know, they have they're always do really well in school, their teachers are like, they're so great. And I see, you know, I start to see a lot of the anxiety that underlies like how much work they're putting into presenting themselves that way, right. And that's what and so the more I've sort of looked into ADHD, and the more I've talked to women and formed this idea of what it looks like in children, especially the inattentive type, right, which is just, I see more and more of it so much in them. And yet, at the same time, like I was really dragging my feet on getting them assessed, because I was worried, like I said it earlier, like, I'm worried that if I go through the school district, if I go through the pediatrician, there's gonna say, oh, no, I don't know what you're talking about. They're fine. They do well in school, and then they rattle off all of these positive traits, that as evidence of the fact that they can't possibly have ADHD. And so I was like, I don't want to fuck this up. I want to like, make sure I do this, right. And so that's why I wanted to go through like a full on psych assessment to everything because I'm like, even if it's not ADHD, I see a lot of that anxiety building up, and I see a lot of the dysfunction. That's executive dysfunction that's happening, especially now that my daughter's in high school and there's bigger, more expectations for her to organize. She's just falling apart in terms of like her organizational skills. So I was like, I need to do this right. I want to do the absolute like, you know, most thorough assessment I possibly can. I live outside of New York City. I was calling the big centers in New York City, which are like you said 1000s of dollars. Like I think one of them I called was \$7,000 and There was a waitlist until the fall anyway. And I was sort of like, oh, like I was just at my wit's end because I, I could see that my kids also that was the other thing my daughter was like, when she saw me not looking into a diet, she saw me as not looking into a diagnosis for her. And she was like, What do you not, do not think I have it? Do you not care. And she was starting to see my indecision as me not caring. And I kept saying to her, I was like, No, you don't understand, I care so much, that I really, really want to do this, right. But I also know that like, maybe it wouldn't be caught, because it's so nuanced. And I get really, like, befuddled over the whole thing too, because then I'm like, am I am I seeing something that's not there? And then I'm like, What even is ADHD? Because, because then I think, like, you know, I think like you said, like, really what we're talking about is just the sort of nerve divergent ways of thinking. And oftentimes, it's when you're in an in an environment that is not beneficial to the way that you think you are going to have these deficits. But for the most part, if you have all of these wonderful traits as well, if you're in an environment that is helpful to that, right, and so it's like, school is just an environment that is never going to be really very beneficial or hospitable to a neurodivergent brain. And so, anyway, you know, they're they're both in different like, as of this interview, they're, you know, both a different like places in the assessment, my daughter has already gone through all of the assessment testing, she's waiting for the the big reveal, the way you know, what is going on, my son is about it, we've we've had the initial assess initial conversation with the psychologist, so he's about to go through the testing. So it's just like, I

don't know, we're also excited because it's like, what is it going to be, but there is a part of me that is terrified that if it's not ADHD, then I'm like, then what, and that's where my daughter came in, and was like, You know what, it doesn't matter what I'm diagnosed with, or if I'm diagnosed with anything, it's just like, knowing who I am how I work best at like, she like, talked me off the ledge, she was so sweet. And she was like, it's really I just want to know, and then be able to get what I need to succeed, right? And I was like, Oh, it's so true.

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Diana Heldfond 27:21

Like, if he ever wants an internship it's amazing. And I think it's really amazing. By the way, when a child is so self aware, your daughter, I guess, is a teenager, right? But to be so self aware to really want this right. And I actually always equate it, do you see so many other brands popping up where it's like, you know, whether it's your Apple Watch tracking how much you walked or everlywell telling you what you're allergic to? Right? I think there is like a human nature to kind of want to know how to, like, optimize for the best performance. Right? And to your daughter's point, right. I mean, who knows what the formal diagnosis comes out to be. But I think one of the things that's really exciting about the way that we've set up the parallel assessments, and what you'll see in the final report, right, is that we go through all the good and the bad, right? We go through every cognitive function possible, to really say, okay, these are strengths. And these are areas of weakness, right. And what I found, in my own experience, right is where there are areas of weaknesses, where you may learn to compensate, right, or how to cope, right and work around those right? But also even just knowing then the positive of like, where are you really strong, you can really start to lean into those skills. And it's extremely empowering, when you shift the conversation to that framework, as opposed to here's a scary medical diagnosis, you're different from all of your friends and your peers. Right. And you have a problem, right? And I think that that is historically I mean, psychological evaluations are not a fun process to go through for a number of reasons, right. But I think that that is where we really try to put the student first right to make this an empowering experience for the student and, frankly, for parents like yourself, right. So to your point, whether it's ADHD or something else, or maybe it's really minor forms of certain things, right, you're still going to get this really robust understanding of still, where are her extreme areas of strength? And then, you know, where are you know, areas that yeah, maybe the school district is going to say, by there's a weakness that she needs, you know, specialized teaching or something, but like, nonetheless, it's still real, there's still areas of challenge for her, and she can ultimately, you know, lean into the strengths and also get the strategies to kind of work around those weaknesses, right.



Katy Weber 29:49

Yeah. And I think that has been such a tremendous shift for me and my own mentality as a parent since my own diagnosis, which is like I no longer look at any situation with my children with that mindset of like, well, you just need to try harder, right? It's always about like, what I know you want to succeed, I know the desire is there. So what do we need? What help do you need to succeed? Right? And that's such, it seems so obvious when I say it out loud. But it's a huge mindset shift. And I think so many of us fall into that category of like, this system is not broken, the system works. So you just need to try hard to figure out how to work within that system.





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Diana Heldfond 30:33

Right? And the reality is, is, you know, our earlier conversation, right, like, you start to identify students, as you know, lazy or disorganized or disengaged, right, all of these really negative terms. But the reality is, is no child shows up to school, not wanting to succeed or do well. And they don't want to be any of those things, right? There's usually some other underlying factor, whether it's learning difference related or mental health, behavioral related, right? There's something else going on, it's inhibiting that child from succeeding, right. But if you just peel it all back to the core, right, no child is showing up to schools, wanting to be the, you know, anxious, one in the class, or the disorganized one in the class, or the lazy one in the class. And I think that that's what we definitely take for granted. And I also think that's where starting with such a comprehensive view of what's going on with your child is also a helpful place to start, right? Because you do get that whole picture, as opposed to saying, Oh, I think my child might have ADHD, let's just do an ADHD test. And to your point, then what happens when it's not ADHD? But you didn't do any of the social emotional behavioral testing to say, oh, maybe there's actually anxiety? Or maybe actually, you know, we should have done the cognitive achievement testing, say, like, there's something completely different going on that we never saw coming.



Katy Weber 31:56

Yeah, right. Yeah. And, uh, you know, when I was in high school, I got so much of that messaging of like, you just need to try harder, what's wrong with you, that I stopped going to class and then I ended up, you know, I feel like so sad for that girl who just gave up on herself, because I just stopped with that I ended up with an attendance issue. Because I just didn't know what else to do. Like, I just was sort of, you know, God, I felt so lost and alone back then. And I just desperately don't want that for for my kids. Right. And, but I am, uh, you know, to be honest, as a parent, knowing all I know about ADHD, and how much I wish I could go back and like, you know, there's so much of that grief around like, oh, the signs were there. And nobody knew and the life I could have led, if anybody had seen the signs, I go through all of that. But I still worry if my kids are diagnosed with ADHD, what how they're going to be viewed in the classroom by their teachers, like you were to your point earlier, like, are they going to end up being put into IEP classes? Are they you know, the stereotype right now is you can't have ADHD because you do well in school. So if you do well in school, if you have ADHD, or go, will the assumption be that they are a certain type of kid or a certain type of student, and I can't, like I talked myself out of that. But at the same time, like I, you know, it is a worry that I face where I'm like, maybe we don't have to tell people, you know, I've like, you know, not only is there the diagnosis, but then there's like, do we get a fight before? Do we go in that room? You know, there's so many of those issues that I'm like, why am I stressing over all of it?

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Diana Heldfond 33:32

Absolutely. I mean, I, like I said, I was a student in the system. That was, I mean, it wasn't often but I definitely do have memories of people, you know, making comments or teachers, you know, not wanting to abide by the actual documentation that I was showing them that said, I needed certain accommodations, and so on, right. And I will say, on the flip side, right, even though that in its own right can be isolating what's much more isolating as being the child that's getting being heard, right, or not being understood and classes or, you know, different treatment from your teacher, so on, right, but the skills that they will learn, I think, from going

through that, and also getting the support that they really need, which it sounds like your daughter is very self aware already. But I think that ultimately, like if I look at my own experience, I think a lot of that that advocacy that I had to do for myself and taking it into my own hands to understand what these conditions really meant and what it meant for me and how I learned best and so on, meant that I was 10 times more mature. By the time I was, you know, going through college and fully independent by myself. I knew exactly. I joke about this all the time, but like, I was like, I'm not buying this textbook, like I know I'm not going to read it. Instead, I went to every office hour and became really close with all my teachers and I think I got more out of college than probably most college students did as a result. I also saved a lot of money. But the reality is right. Like, I think actually, when I talked to so many other people that have grown up with with these conditions, right? So many people have learned to cope and really interesting ways that I think they end up actually learning life skills that really set you up for success in life. And like is that I mean, it's always gonna be isolating, there's no perfect solution. But I do think we all need to normalize like talking about these differences more, because it shouldn't be that, you know, you as a parent don't want to give your child for this kind of knowledge, right? Or put them in a learning environment that's suited better to needs because we want them to be treated in that way.



**Katy Weber** 35:43

Yeah, yeah, self advocacy is so important. And I think it's drilled out of kids in a school environment too. And I hear it over and over with my kids, you know, where they they've asked for an accommodation from their teacher, something simple, like I, you know, I like to sit in the front row, because it helps me focus. And they need a fiver for for that fucking thing. Because the teachers like won't do it, you know, the, you know, my daughter, our last name is w. So my daughter has to sit in the back of the classroom, because most of her teachers prefer to put everybody alphabetically I'm like, that is so ridiculous. And, you know, and I, and I'll say to her, like, no, stand up for yourself, this is something you need, you need to you know, and so this is something that you are allowed to ask, and she's like, No, you don't understand, like, I'm not allowed to ask, and that's the reality, right? So I think, regardless of what the diagnosis is executive functioning, coaching, and just being able to, like teach kids how to advocate is something I think is so important, you know, and I was I love like, seeing that in parallel, as the services that are offered, just like simple things like coming up with, with organizational schedules, or learning how to write emails, and like all of these things that are so important to how you show up in the world, and how you, yeah, advocate for yourself. And these aren't things that are just going to like, you just, you don't just inherently know these things. And so it's right, I think they're so valuable.



**Diana Heldfond** 37:05

Exactly. And we've actually, so I will also be transparent, we work with a lot of school districts, right. And we actually do serve in a special ed department so that they can ultimately provide services to all the kids that that need this extra support or different support, right. And they will notice that some of our school district partners actually have been using the executive function coaching for general education students too, because the reality is, those are skills that regardless of whether you have a diagnosis of ADHD or something else, right, like, executive function skills are just core skills, right. And everyone can definitely, you know, benefit from from some extra support there. And it's something that I never never had growing up. But boy,

I wish I had, right, because, as you mentioned, right there really true real life skills. I mean, even as I explained, right, like when my to do list gets too crazy. Oh, my God, there's too many things all over the place. That's where like, I've now learned the skills to figure out how to like, pare that down into digestible, how to get this actually done. But that's the type of stuff I could have been learning super early on. Had a service like that available.



Katy Weber 38:16

Yeah. And not only that, but I think through my own diagnosis, I now realize that there are methodologies that work for other people that don't work for me, and that's okay. And it's not a judgment on who I am. Right. Another thing that seems obvious, but it never occurred to me it you know, that, that there are methods that work for people that don't work for me, and that I it's not a matter of trying to fix, you know, jam my square peg into a round hole that it was really about finding the methodologies that do work and not feeling like a total failure in the process. Like that's the other thing. I feel like we need to teach kids from a very young age. As you know, this theme has been going out this whole conversation right, which is like you are not the problem. You just need to find the tools that work for you. No, absolutely. I couldn't agree more. Hey, it's Katie here, I want you to let you know I do not get any money from parallel learning to endorse their services. I have just a very happy customer. And I'm also happy to announce that parallel is offering women and ADHD listeners a special back to school offer to get a psycho educational evaluation or educational support services for your child call parallel at 914-377-5655 and mentioned discount code women and ADHD for 50% off your first month of services, and \$150 off an evaluation parallel simplifies and streamlines the psycho educational process by significantly reducing waiting times costs and inconveniences through its virtual testing process. It has a world class team led by Dr. Jordan Wright, as well as a team of licensed clinicians to conduct a psycho educational evaluation that determines your child's learning needs. And the best path forward. Parallel also has a team of executive function coaches and licensed learning specialists are certified in Orton Gillingham, Barton Wilson. and more multi sensory methods of tutoring. Establishing a support system for your child at the beginning of the school year can help build their confidence and ability to thrive in a new environment. If you're interested in learning more about how parallel can help your child, please call 914-377-5655 or visit [parallellearning.com](http://parallellearning.com). And remember to use the discount code women and ADHD for 50% off your child's first month of services, and \$150 off an evaluation. And you'll find all those links in the show notes. When I was diagnosed with ADHD, it completely turned my world upside down. I looked back at so much of my life, my grades in school, my multiple careers and hobbies, my friendships, my marriage, motherhood, my relationship with food and my body, like all of this with a new lens. And it was overwhelming to say the least, if you've been diagnosed with ADHD, and you're feeling blown away by this new insight into your brain and how it operates, I totally understand I can help you begin to sort through this chaos, explore who you are and how your brain operates. So you can finally start to lean into your strengths and begin to use them to your advantage moving forward together, we can work to identify what obstacles you've been facing, and create strategies to help you start living a more fulfilling gratifying life, head over to [womeninadhd.com/coaching](http://womeninadhd.com/coaching), to book a 30 minute initial consult with me. So we can figure out if my brand of one on one coaching is right for you. Again, that's [womeninadhd.com/coaching](http://womeninadhd.com/coaching). And you can find that link in the episode show notes. And I also wanted to go back to the the wording and the messaging and parallel I think is spot on, you know, just in what you were talking about earlier about, like wanting families to feel like it's comprehensive and that there's like a holistic approach to these assessments. Right, I felt that it's one of the another reason why I was so drawn to the company right away, because I feel like I've done so much exhaustive research. And I just felt like, you guys just

checked off every box in terms of like, what I was looking for, even just like your fonts and your color, the color, like the color palette, and everything is just for me and my own, like Germany and searching for the proper way to have, you know, get my kids assess, it just felt like you guys were like delivered from on Hi, I really I'm so grateful. And that the environment of COVID. Like how random it's all has been over the last few years that we've been going in this direction. And, you know, I'm not a fan of two tiered health systems in this country. But I'm also just like, so grateful for the different price point options that are available to different, you know, for families based on their needs, and how are you able to keep it so inexpensive?

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Diana Heldfond 42:44

Yeah, but as the go to question, you know, at the end of the day, as being a tech company we're going through, right, it's not just that we're putting the services on Zoom, right, there's a lot more that goes into the assessment process and a lot of administrative work and so on. And, frankly, a lot of the reason that the main reason, actually when we broke it all down for why assessments cost so much, and why they take so long why there's those crazy long wait times is that they're super inefficient. Like honestly, if I was a psychologist, I would not do assessments, either purely due therapy hours, because the most administrative awful process you're writing like 30 Page reports from scratch, there's like no software that exists to help you with that. You're completely like at your own whim delay. Everything about it is just it's really, really inefficient. And I got really excited early on to be talking with these psychologists about you know, how can we make your life better, right? Like, what are the processes within the full evaluation, right, that are just painful, and you're talking to the psychologist and they're like, Oh, I record the scores for separate times, like I write it on Scratch, and then I put it into Riverside or Pearson, and then I get the norm scores, and then I write it down again. And then I have to put it in the final report. And I'm like, Wait, how many hours time is that and they're like, probably like at least one to two hours. And then what that translates to, for a family is like \$400 an hour of report writing time that they're getting charged for. So that was where honestly, the assessments have been like probably the most exciting thing to break down from a product perspective of like, Where can we just make clinicians lives better, as well as you know, increase the actual, like output for our actual students and families that we're working with? Because it's just wildly inefficient, right? So a lot of it comes down to automating a lot of processes around the assessment itself. And then we use kind of, we have this very collaborative model for actually doing the testing as you've experienced can with your daughter where we have multiple folks involved to really be able to get the most robust answer by having different professionals involved, right, so the educational part nationals as well as the child psychologist, we have a care specialist that's dedicated to the team, just to help navigate, you know, through those sessions and so on, was a very high touch service and a lot of ways like we can we hear out every family we talked to, during that initial consultation, we can match them with the right psychologist based off of all of the information that we're gathering, right? There's parts where we're like, we don't want to automate any of this, right? Because it's so important that there is that human touch. But then those parts would like report, right? Like, or the scoring is a perfect example of like, this is a waste of everyone's deck. Right? So that is kind of the long winded answer of like, what goes on behind the scenes. But yeah, ultimately, we want to make it so that clinicians can focus on what they want to do, which is what they went to school to do. And that's seeing and serving these students, right, and being able to provide real outcomes to these students, and not have them deal with like the administrative burden of scheduling sessions and buying custom materials and writing out like where the child goes to school six times and different pieces of information.



Katy Weber 46:09

I love it efficiency. That's what we're good at. Finding the fastest route, right? I feel like impatience is such a great quality for efficiency, right? You just like what's the fastest way we can get this done?



Diana Heldfond 46:21

Right. It's a lot about the collaborative nature, I'll know about it. I mean, like to be able to work with different psychologists, for example, like all of the intervention strategies that go into that learning plan that you have yet to receive, but I promise will be very exciting. That goes through a bunch of different strategies, right to cope with various different symptoms that will come out during the testing process, right, just to have different strategies, right, from different psychologists within our network, right, and to have this open forum for all of our providers to be able to work together and interact with each other. It feels like we're also kind of pushing psychology along, which is really cool place to be.



Katy Weber 47:01

Oh my god, yeah, right. They must love working in that environment as well, too, because it's like they feel heard and understood. And that reminds me of like, all of the communication is so clearly written by neuro divergent, like, or at least neurodivergent friendly, because it's like, you know, the important things are highlighted in red. And I'm told very explicitly, like, this is the action plan. This is next step. First, you do this, and then you do this. And like, every time I open an email, I'm always so grateful. Because I'm like, Thank you, you write emails with bullet points. And so that's been entertaining



Diana Heldfond 47:35

things with the reports that we also feedback, really early on. There's this really awful with private evaluations. In particular, there's this thing where it's like, the longer the report, the more you pay for it, basically. The more I was talking to families, the more these parents were like, Look, I've never necessarily been diagnosed with ADHD or dyslexia or whatever. But my child, you know, is clearly going through this evaluation process because they're struggling, I've never liked reading, I don't want to read a 30 page document of medical jargon, I just truly want to know what this means for my child and like plain English, right? And that is exactly what we've tried to do. And the way that we deliver these, these results to families, right, is really making it so that it's actionable, it's understandable, and that it really gets at your core questions that you walk through in that first clinical interview with the psychologist.




Katy Weber 48:29

Yeah, I know, we often talk about this podcast how like, the diagnostic process could not be more unfriendly to ADHD in so many ways. So I do really appreciate. And I've been so hyper aware through this whole experience with the company just like seeing how, how, like you do


check off all of these wonderful boxes as somebody with ADHD trying to go through this incredibly overwhelming process with my kids. So I always appreciate it. Kudos to my care coordinator, Sarah to she's been amazing and answered a lot of us she's talked me off the ledge a few times.

 Diana Heldfond 49:08

There are some really great people behind her character, for sure. And they're really there to make sure that you know, everyone's having a great experience. So I figured,

 Katy Weber 49:17

well, I am so glad I found you. And I will shout from the rooftops because I think it's such a wonderful service. And I'm so glad it exists. And yeah, I wish so much success for the company. And one thing I asked all my guests before I before I let you go if you could rename ADHD to something that's a little less confusing and problematic. Is there something you would rename it to?

 Diana Heldfond 49:42

Well, it's a great question. I don't think this will come as any surprise. I think I would take deficit and disorder out of the title. Just because I, as you've heard over the last hour, definitely take offense to you know, a lot of his language of medical diagnoses and labeling and all that good stuff. So I would say, that would probably be my main piece of feedback to whoever is writing DSM five diagnosis.

 Katy Weber 50:11

Right? Yeah, just make it like five exclamation marks, and then we'll be done. Yeah. Well, it's, it's an interesting conversation, because I feel like I, most of the people I interview will say, Yeah, you know, take away the disorder, take, stop pathologizing it, but at the same time, there's also that understanding that like, in order to advocate in order to have your needs met, their does have you do have to go through this whole process of the fight before and like, you know, it makes it much easier to get accommodations when you have a diagnosis. And also, it makes it validates for us that need to say, you know, I don't need to go to somebody and say, I have to sit in the front row, because I have ADHD, I can just say, I need to sit in the front row flat out like that, you know, but often a diagnosis will will validate that for me, and for the person who, you know, for the teacher, and so,

 Diana Heldfond 51:02

yeah, I mean, it's also literally to your daughter's point, the only way to get things done. Yeah, exactly. And that is why God exists, right? To be able to make that actually a reality more for more students.



Katy Weber 51:16

Yeah. Awesome. Well, thank you so much for sitting down with me and sharing your story and your perspective, I was so excited to pick your brain and like I said, just get this opportunity to gush over this wonderful company that that came in my life. It's such a wonderful time it was has been so meaningful. And like, I'm just so excited. So you better not screw this up. No kidding. I hope the reports everything. Well, there is no part of me was almost like maybe we should maybe I should wait to interview Diana after the fact just in case. But I like the fact that the jury's still out.



Diana Heldfond 51:54

You won't have to publish this until after you receive the final report.



Katy Weber 51:59

Well, like I said, I mean, even I feel like the the whole experience has been so important. And I think regardless, like I'm already at a place of peace, where I'm like, regardless of what this diagnosis ends up being for either of my kids, because I'm still on this understanding journey of like, what we're even talking about when we talk about ADHD. So I think it'll just be, it'll be fascinating to me either way to find out just a little bit more about who they are as kids, and what's the next step and how we can best help them. So I really appreciate all of that, you know, all of that information, and just the feeling so held, you know, in the way that I think we really desperately need as neuro divergence in this kind of assessment process. So thank you.



Diana Heldfond 52:43

We've been able to live up to that. And no, thank you so much for having me on. It's so wonderful to meet you. Really appreciate all the feedback. Any other like more critical feedback, please also also shared, we're always, you know, looking to improve our services. But you know, I'm just so happy to hear that. All the core reasons that we exist, really are coming through. I'm really excited to hear so appreciate you having me on today. And it was so fun to chat.



Katy Weber 53:11

So all right, well, thank you. And there you have it. Thank you for listening, and I really hope you enjoy this episode of the women and ADHD podcast. Also, you know, we ADHD ears crave feedback. And I would really appreciate hearing from you the listener, if you're a fan of the podcast, please take a moment to leave me a review on Apple podcasts or audible. And if that feels like too much, and I get it, then just take a few seconds right now to give me a five star rating. Or share this episode on your own social media to help reach more women who maybe have yet to discover and lean into this gift of neuro divergence see, and they may still be struggling and don't even know why. And if you'd like to find out more about me and my one on one coaching for women with ADHD, head over to [women and adhd.com/coaching](https://www.womenandadhd.com/coaching) and you can

always find that link in the show notes. I'll see you next week when I interview another amazing woman who discovered that she is not lazy or crazy or broken. But she has ADHD and she is now on the path to understanding her neurodiversity and finally using this gift to her advantage. Take care till then