

## Understanding a Child Book Interview Sabrina Adair and Judy Maddren

**Sabrina Adair:** [00:00:00] Understanding a child, the occupational therapy way, recognizing and communicating the unique potential of a child. An interview with the author, Sabrina Adair interviewed by former CBC radio host Judy Maddren

**Judy Maddren:** Sabrina. I'm quite intrigued with this book as the mother of four children who are grown clearly.

And you're the mother of four children under 14. Tell me a little bit more about you

**Sabrina Adair:** I am an occupational therapist. I specialize in pediatrics. I specialize in working with kids and parents.

I've worked in a number of settings. I've worked in school board. I've worked in home settings and community settings, friends and groups.

And so, I've been doing occupational therapy for just over 18 years now. And as well, a mom of four. Like you said, and I'm in a busy entrepreneur, starting my own company recently to buy the services to parents

**Judy Maddren:** and [00:01:00] I take it. You're pretty good at organizing your time.

**Sabrina Adair:** . Had I it's all about prioritizing and putting things what you need to do first and making sure that you do the things that are most important

**Judy Maddren:** and what is most important to you?

**Sabrina Adair:** I have a passion for, well, for my children first and foremost is making sure that children are seen and heard for who they are. And I've learned a lot as a mom of my four kids, each individually uniquely made but very different. And so getting to know them, understanding them, learning about them, and then working with all the children and families that I work with, I realized how unique individually, every child is.

And so when I, my priority is to make sure that these kids, my kids and the kids that I work with and the kids all around are seen and heard for who they are, because they're all beautiful individual people.

**Judy Maddren:** You know, the last almost two years have been tough for just about [00:02:00] everybody with our usual way of doing things modified sometimes.

Quite uncomfortable. I often just wanted to retreat with a book, but you wrote one. On top of a private practice for children to care for, and COVID-19 challenges you spoke about what's important to you, but what really impelled you to get this written?

**Sabrina Adair:** Well, one of the things I realized is that over the last couple of years, and COVID making an even greater impact, was that parents and children couldn't get the resources necessarily that they needed. We had to cut in services. We had a limit on how much we could access services and on top of it, then parents were forced to, you know, get involved in things that they normally wouldn't be necessarily a part of. So with the schooling coming home for a bit and what I realized over that is that we really need to get a sense from a family perspective, from a parenting perspective.

And even from a teacher perspective, each child was experienced this, [00:03:00] experiencing this whole situation, so different. And we need to really understand how each child experiences things experiences the world. Each child learns through the, through the things that they're doing how each child, you know, what their behaviors are trying to tell us.

And what happened is the parents began to see so much of the things that they never saw before. And so why I thought this was important is because I felt like we needed to have some guidance. For parents to be able to look at something and to be able to understand a little bit more about their own child.

And then from what they've learned, be able to communicate that to other people. So figuring out the words that can describe their child, and then when you figure out what describes your child and the people that are around them can also get to know your child or learn or help your child or support them in the best way possible.

And so just over COVID I realized that this was became more and more prominent and more and more necessary. And so I had the opportunity to write this book and I wanted to get this into the hands of parents.

**Judy Maddren:** And you [00:04:00] mentioned seeing things that you hadn't noticed before, did that happen for you in your own family?

**Sabrina Adair:** My kids would come home from school and say, you know, they're doing just fine. They were flying under the radar. Sometimes it was not behaviors. They would go to school and they would be at school. And what happened was they realized that there was a divide between. Where they were supposed to be and what they were and where they actually were.

And because they didn't have the behaviors they weren't really noticeable in the school setting. And so when I ended up spending one-on-one time with them, I noticed that there were some gaps in the learning. And when I did that, I realized some of the extra things that could help my children to succeed better in school.

And then I developed the words to be able to then tell the teachers when they go back to school or when they went back to. Be able to say to them, these are the things that he may need, or she may need to be able to support her learning and so that they can succeed a little bit better.

**Judy Maddren:** Can you give me an example?

**Sabrina Adair:** My one son has a difficulty with multiple levels of instruction. [00:05:00] So if you have, you know, three. Three things that you're telling a student to do. For example, you know, take out a piece of paper, write your name on the top and then start writing a paragraph about your favorite memory. Well, those are three instructions.

And so oftentimes my son will take out a paper, write his name on the top, but the third instruction was gone. And so one of those things was that I realized that he would sit there and sit there and wait until somebody repeated that third instruction. And so some children, and I see this often in my practice as well, some children can only do one instruction at a time.

Some can do two instructions; some can do three. And one of the things that I did with my son is I would write the instructions down at the top of the paper, and then he could just check it off as he went through. So if there was multiple levels of instructions, but that's some forward feedback that I could give to the teacher to be able to say, you know what?

He has difficulties. If there's multiple instructions, if you can write it on the board, he'll be able to follow it a little bit. Very simple, simple practice.

**Judy Maddren:** One of the things about this book is [00:06:00] this it's, it's this intriguing slant to figuring out effective parenting understanding the child, a child, the occupational therapy way.

Can you open that up a bit for me?

**Sabrina Adair:** Occupational therapy was born out of the idea that occupations are what we do every day. And occupations are not necessarily our job. It's what we, what we need to accomplish. It can be something as simple as getting dressed as part of our occupation, as a person, children, their occupation, or their occupation is play going to school as part of their occupation.

We do have a job which becomes part of our work occupation. When we grow up. One of the things that with occupational therapy is you have to acknowledge when somebody is trying to accomplish something, you need to acknowledge. That what they have, the skills that they have as a person first and foremost.

What skills do they have physically, mentally, emotionally? How do they experience the world as the person? And then you put that person in the environment that they're trying to accomplish, whatever task they're [00:07:00] trying to do. So for instance, if you take the person and the environment would be the school, and the third part is looking at the tasks that they're trying to accomplish.

So that's where occupational therapy comes in. Cause they really focus. An occupational therapist really focuses on looking at the person as a whole and looking at all the environments that that person needs to be in and then looking at all the tasks that they need to do. And when those over twine into the same location, almost like a Venn diagram, the center is what we call occupation

**Judy Maddren:**

In understanding a child, the occupational therapy way you use a lot of stories. Can you just give me one little story about this particular way of looking at a kid or something they'll do?

**Sabrina Adair:** Well, one example that I have, that I find is really poignant is, is if you are trying to teach a child how to read.

So first you need to make sure that they have the ability to read. So you always want to make sure that they can see that they have the ability to recognize letters and words. [00:08:00] That's their physical ability. And you're looking at the

environment that you're trying to teach them how to read. And if you think about the environment that you're teaching them, if you were to try and teach them how to read on a rollercoaster,

That's not necessarily as conducive. Your tasks that you're trying to teach as reading the environment, you're doing it on as rollercoaster and their physical abilities, but those don't necessarily match. So what you need to do is you need to change one of those to be able to make it so that it's conducive to the learning that you're trying to.

Changing the environment from a rollercoaster to a quiet room makes it a little bit easier for a child to be able to read in that environment. And so when I try to talk to parents, you know, about this, trying to explain this environment, it's looking at a child being in a classroom that may have 25 kids in it.

And having a lot of loud noises, a lot of moving pieces, moving puzzles to some kids that's like being on a rollercoaster. So if they're having difficulties learning in that situation, if you take them and have them in a quieter space, it might be more effective for their learning.

**Judy Maddren:** Right. [00:09:00] And I wonder if you could now tell me three things that fortify you as a mother, what are three things that help you in that role?

**Sabrina Adair:** I think one of the strongest ones, and I think I've come through this through writing this book. Even more actually in the last couple of years is, is a sense of curiosity. So curiosity, when, when children behave, I always have this sense of what is causing this behavior. What, what happened? What in the environment, what in their physical being, what triggered them, what maybe prompted this to happen?

And then you always say, is there something that could be different that could, you know, not have this happen or how can we help them resolve this and what's going on in their body. So that sense of curiosity is huge for me. The second one I have is patients. We do have to remember that our children are just children.

And so we, and I talked to parents about this a lot, depending on how old you are. You've had years and years of experience of learning, how to regulate [00:10:00] your body in all different events. And children have only been around for, you know, a few years. So, you know, if you've been, if they've only

been around for six years, they've only learned so many things in so many environments with lots of still new for them.

So having a sense of patience to let our kids be able to experience the world in different ways and that recognizing them and the third is, is just enjoyment and fun because you know, children are fun. They see the world through a different view than we do. And many times it's an exciting. Things that they experienced the awe.

And so we don't want to negate that part of their life. So we want to encourage them to experience the world in the, in that fun way and see the world through their eyes. Sometimes not necessarily through our own eyes.

**Judy Maddren:** I'm glad you ended with fun, because that was my experience. There's untold stories now that we all share.

And I think I'm going to study this and maybe give the book to all my children. So thank you so much, Sabrina.

**Sabrina Adair:** Thank [00:11:00] you so much, Judy.