

Kat Watson

Michelle Andrews: Hey there, I'm Michelle Andrews and I'm your host for the Pep Talk podcast. This episode is all about targeting safety in the community with school-aged children. All children need to be aware of basic safety knowledge, sometimes dangerous or uncomfortable situations happen and you can't predict when. The best thing we can do is prepare ahead of time for how we will respond and teach our children what to do as well. My guest speaker today is Kat Watson, who is my wonderful sister-in-law. She is married to my brother. Um, so let me tell you a little bit about ka. She graduated from Baylor University with an all level special education degree. She was a K through five. Alternative learning environment teacher for three years, a PPCD teacher. For two years she worked with any baby can of San Antonio as their autism education specialist, and she currently is a volunteer and coach with Kinetic Kids [00:01:00] Gymnastics.

Michelle Andrews: First we need to go over some formalities for the course by going over our financial disclosures. My financial disclosures include, I have a Teacher's Pay Teachers Boom, Learning and Teach with Medley Store Under Pep Talk llc, I am also the founder and manager of Pep Talk and the Pep Talk podcast. Teach With Medley is also a sponsor for this podcast. My non-financial disclosures include, I have a stock participation plan with Teach with Medley.

Michelle Andrews: Kat's financial disclosures include no financial disclosures, and her non-financial disclosures include she has no non-financial disclosures. Now here are the learner objectives for this course. You'll be able to identify three basic safety knowledge targets for children. You'll be able to identify three reasons why basic safety knowledge is important to a child's wellbeing. You'll be able to describe a way to incorporate basic safety knowledge into speech therapy goals. Okay, let's get started. So this episode of the Pep Talk podcast is all about targeting [00:02:00] safety in the community. I am thrilled to introduce today's guest speaker, my sister-in-law, Kat Watson. Hi there Kat.

katya: Hey y'all. I'm so happy to be here. Thank you so much, Michelle, for having me on here.

Michelle Andrews: I am so excited that you agreed to come on my podcast and talk about all of your expertise when it comes to safety in the community, and especially as an Autism Education Specialist.

Michelle Andrews: So Kat, I told everyone a little bit about you, but , how about you go ahead and tell me a little bit more about yourself and how you have accumulated all of your knowledge about safety in the community.

katya: Well, hi y'all. So I actually started in special education when I was about 15. I was a gymnast and at my gym we had a wonderful gymnastics program where different learners were able to come and learn gymnastics. So I started volunteering with these amazing gymnasts and some of them I still have today, which is great. [00:03:00] Um, and so that really sparked my love and interest for the community. So I went to Baylor University. I graduated with an all level special education degree. I was, I did ACRA and tumbling there as well, which really, really fun. Um, and then once I graduated, I came back to San Antonio started at my former district that I grew up in. My first year, I was a, um, alternative learning environment teacher. Really for more individuals that were medically fragile. And that was such a a good learning experience for me. I learned a lot about AAC which was great. Um, I had individuals that were using Gs, the dinox, so that was interesting it really helped me, especially my first year of teaching. [00:04:00] Speech is such a big. Factor kids are learning and when they are in school. if they don't have an ability to communicate where people can understand them, then behaviors are gonna increase, they're gonna get frustrated. And it's really the center around education. Um, so I really worked hand in hand with my speech and language pathologist and was very lucky to have very, very great ones that we worked very cohesively together. After that, I kind of had a mix of kiddos for my last two years in ale. Um, about 10 kids of all different varying abilities. and it was just so much fun. After that I went into pp c d so the littles, the three to five year olds and that's really so great cuz that's our first time in school. Um, that's where I saw a lot of [00:05:00] safety concerns from parents, you know, kids bolting to the car, parent pickup, um, things that, you know, they'd never been in school before, so they were scared of them riding the bus. They were scared of them going to school and not being around them. so working with the parents collaboratively was extremely important to make sure that they were in a safe environment at school, but also they have those skills to take home with them and really learn at home.

katya: So it's super important to create that environment for the parents as well. After that, I became an autism education specialist at any baby Can where I actually. Did trainings for teachers, and first responders. So I got to work collaboratively with the first responders in order to create presentations for them that would help them when getting to experience. Sometimes not the safest situations for our kids and adults because our kids [00:06:00] do become adults later on in life. Um, but overall, it really sparked my interest in having goals are based on safety that also kind of contribute to academics. Cuz we all know that we have to tie 'em to the tes, right?

katya: It's always in there. We have to tie 'em to achieve. And sometimes you just have to be really but you always have to think of the student first and safety comes first in all of that. Um, if they, if you cannot be safe, then they will not learn. If they don't feel safe, they're not going to learn.

katya: So it, it really is the. The starting point. what sparked my interest in safety wholeheartedly was my, time with Abby. She was one of our moms at the nonprofit that I worked at, and she really wanted to start this training. It was, it's very, a very sad story, but it is impactful. her and her son [00:07:00] who had autism, Rudy, they were in an apartment fire and she was able to get him out and then unfortunately got away from her and ran back up into his apartment and hid.

katya: He was scared. That was his home and she tried to go after him unfortunately, um, he went and hid and he did pass away in. his apartment. They found him days later. She was, while she was in the hospital, um, recovering from severe burns and heartache. Um, he was scared of the firefighters. He didn't know what to do in case of a fire. hadn't, you know, it hadn't been practice. That's not something you always think about at home to practice fire drills. You think of it in school, but not at home. Um, so it was her passion to really bring this to the community. And I have to say, she's done an amazing job, really [00:08:00] people aware of this situation. My nephew also has autism. Um, and really what I want for him most is to be safe. I want him to be safe, really just like any other member. You want them to be safe and productive and happy. Um, but the way that we teach safety neuro divergent individuals, may just be different than the way that we teach neurotypical. We really have to practice in so many different areas, not just school, just at home. We have to make sure we're generalizing. today we're gonna talk a lot about generalizing, how you can incorporate speech and safety into goals to really help them. And you, we wanna think this is, we're teaching something that's not gonna matter in five years, then why are we teaching it?

katya: These are things that we need to continue to always teach.[00:09:00]

Michelle Andrews: That's so great. Thanks, Kat that story is so heartbreaking, but it's amazing what she's done with something so devastating that she's brought, um, so much knowledge to her community about the awareness for safety, safety knowledge and skills for kids. I think that's incredible what she's done. So let's get started. So let's start off with, uh, let's just, let's just go over. Basic safety knowledge. Kat. Let's list out some of the main safety skills to target.

katya: so one of the big first things that we think of is fire drills, right? We do them at school, but we need to be doing them at home too. But it's not just fire drills, right? We're wanting to. Receptive in their expressive language. Using visuals, using role play, how to teach these safety concerns. Um, asking for help if needed. We really need to look at pain communication. something every child needs to be able to communicate where they hurt, [00:10:00] not just that, Oh, hey, I see they're acting differently. I'm noticing that, but can a stranger know that? How do you, how does our kid who eventually becomes an adult, how do they communicate that they're in pain or something is feeling off, they're feeling sick. So knowing the body parts, using visuals or their aac verbally telling someone. Also first responder interactions are going to be extremely important when we're talking about safety. Because it's not just our kids' safety, but it is also officer safety as well. How we in a positive way that we are working together to create a positive environment and positive So with that, you know, we're gonna talk about really identifying first responders, their roles, even looking at their uniforms. Cuz we wanna make sure we're not [00:11:00] just targeting the littles, right? The three to five year olds, but this goes to high school. How, what happens when you're pulled over in a car? do you say? What do you do? What are the steps for that? Um, and that all goes back to communication. So we'll talk a lot about that. Um, even. Individuals who not be verbal, but can they in a way either using sign gestures or pointing, but will they them as safe helpers know what a safe helper is and a non-safe helper?

Michelle Andrews: That's great. It sounds like you could really spend a lot of time on each one of those. I know a speech therapist, I can already, all these ideas are running through my head of whether, whatever you're working on, I feel like you could incorporate these and so many goals. You know, even just vocabulary body parts, you know,

katya: BS

katya: everything

Michelle Andrews: responders, there's so many [00:12:00] different goals there.

Michelle Andrews: So many different, um, aspects of that.

katya: with the special ed teacher as well, because really speech is all the time. So the special ed teacher really needs to be collaborating with speech so that y'all are creating goals that can be worked on all the time, not just with the speech teacher, not just with special but really all together as a unit.

Michelle Andrews: Right. Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Okay,

katya: Okay.

Michelle Andrews: why are these skills so important to teach with children? I think some of, some of us can think of the obvious reasons, but I think you have even more reasons to go off of,

katya: so specifically individuals with, with autism or any neuro divergent person, they physically look like they're neurotypical peers, right? Um, however, they may have different needs. They're gonna have different strengths, different needs, um, but that may include communication deficits, needs, challenges, sensory challenges, [00:13:00] and learning challenges. This is going to be extremely important, especially once they get older. When they are when they're adults. after talking with a lot of res first responders, certain things that individuals that are neuro divergent do stemming is an example. Everyone stems differently, but because certain stems, they're just movements that are over and over and over again. That can be portrayed an individual, that might be on a different medication, on something. And the officer is not gonna necessarily think, they're, they may have autism, or they may have a learning deficit. They may something, , a communication They may automatically think that they're doing something wrong, which isn't the [00:14:00] case, but that brings everyone's walls up, which puts everyone kind of in this weird little limbo in danger. So we really have to teach to self-advocate that I, Hey, I have autism. need extra help. I may have communication, I need space. Um, talking about their needs how to communicate effectively is gonna be extremely important. Um, but individual is gonna be d. No matter if they're neurotypical or neuro divergent, but every child eventually becomes an adult.

katya: And if we don't consistently teach these safety skills that when they're adults become laws, they're not rules in school anymore. They are laws. And when you break laws, they're consequences to that. Um, and we don't want individuals to get hurt to have a traumatic experience when that's not needed. , but [00:15:00] unfortunately it does happen. And it's no one's fault. It's just it is reality. And so if we can prepare our kids for when they are adults to be safe and to for themselves, but to also know what to do in a situation where, okay, I go this way every day, but now it's blocked off. I can't just walk through it.

katya: There's caution tape. Knowing that caution tape means no, no. It's very black and white. We're not going there, is going to be very vital for safety. Um, running into the street, you know, you can't just bolt the street. There's cars, um, and a, very, very large amount individuals that neuro divergent. They're

attracted to water, they're attracted to cars. Impulsivity is at the height, right? So if they need to leave a situation, they're going, They're not necessarily thinking, Oh, there's a car coming, [00:16:00] they're just gonna go. So that is extremely scary when we're thinking of littles to adults eloping. Um, I've had a lot of parents that I've worked with that have had locks the way up their door, our kids grow, they get tall and they're able to get those locks off and they're, they're gone. Standing on chairs, finding a way out. So those are ways to help for now, but they're not teaching them something.

katya: We have to teach them that, okay, this is why it's not safe. And what are other replacement behaviors that we can when we're stressed or this, Can I ask for a break? That is something that is communication. need to ask for a break. I need to say, Mom, dad, I need to, I wanna go to the park instead of just running out of the street and go [00:17:00] into the park. It's not safe. we have to break it down. always thinking of, we have this skill, right? And not just tie your shoes, it's okay. Grab the shoelaces, tie it. There's so many steps. when we think of safety, there's even more steps. So we have to start at the very. Little things like answering your name, knowing what stop means.

katya: Oh, stop. There's so many things that we need to go into that. And maybe they're hurt, hurt themselves, and they're unable to communicate that. Um, also being taken advantage of. Um, we always teach our kids when they're little, Oh, follow your peers. Do what your peers do, You know, stay in line, do this. But as they grow, being able to understand that this is safe and this is not safe. This is something great for [00:18:00] me to follow. This something not okay. that decision making process being able to talk to people and knowing sarcasm, knowing if someone's being serious or not, it all goes back into speech and safety. Um, even asking for help seeking medical assistance, not even just for themselves, but for the people that they're with. And also sensory needs. If when are in a stressful environment and we're all, you know, stressed and heightened, everyone's language goes down when they're stressed. so we're like, Oh, they don't need visuals anymore.

katya: They don't, They can do all of that. They can talk, they can communicate. However, when it's stressful, we may have to rely on those certain devices that we may have not needed for a while we're stressed. So we do need to remember of that, but we [00:19:00] have to teach these individuals to communicate what they need first and to know themselves and to be able to even point to something, something, whatever it is. Um, that safety comes first and it starts from the. From the, they're little, we really need to ingrain safety in them, because that's gonna be the most important thing.

Michelle Andrews: Exactly, and I love how you explained all that and that this is all about their needs and keeping them safe. You know, we're not telling them not to stem, We're not telling them not to be who they are, but it's that, that advocacy for themselves that, you know what?

Michelle Andrews: I am going to have these type of movements, or I am having trouble communicating and this is why. And I think that's so important. The, the why and the reason that this is needed for individuals

Michelle Andrews: that, um, that, it's for their safety.

katya: Yeah. And we have to remember, you know, they're police officers, firefighters, they're all doing so many trainings. [00:20:00] However, when maybe they just got trained or every person's different, so they're gonna experience something different. if our individuals are able to say right away, I have autism. I need a minute. An officer's going a little more understanding and be able to react in a different way than thinking, Oh, what's going on? And have their guard up. Um, you

Michelle Andrews: That's gonna save time cuz the officer, you know, may have training and may may be trying to figure that out. But, you know, in these type of situation, let's save time. Let's go ahead and, and try to get to the point, Hey, I have autism or these are my needs. This is what I'm. I may do, this is what I need.

Michelle Andrews: Just right, right away. That seems to be the safest thing you can do.

katya: Yeah. And it doesn't always have to be verbal. Some of our kids are going, or in [00:21:00] adults are going to have an AAC device, some are going to sign, others may, you know, have a card on them that says, I have autism. Here are my needs. That's a way of communicating. Communications comes in all different forms, as long as we teach the child based on what they are doing and what works best for them, that's what's most important. Safety isn't gonna be taught like a blanket thing, like has to do it the same way. We still have to think of the child or the adult as an individual and know what their strengths are, what their needs are. but we still have to have the expectation of being safe. I'm not saying that. Oh, okay. Yes.

katya: You know, I understand that we are playing with Legos right now. You can play for five more minutes while this fire is burning. That's, that's not gonna work at all. So have to learn teach our children, okay, when it's, [00:22:00] it's

go time, it is go time, it means done. But we're gonna leave and go to a safe place. And then we have our Legos. You might pack a bag that has our, it's our safety bag and we grab it. We bring it everywhere we go. We have the kids, medicine. We have everything in it. Right? They know what it is. Um, but they also know the dangers of staying. You want that safety to be at height of what they're thinking, which will also help when we're talking about impulsivity we're teaching them to think about things before we do them. Um, but it starts. By doing little things first, and we hope we're never in that situation, but unfortunately, you never know if you're going to be

Michelle Andrews: Right. Yeah. Being prepared for all types of situations and, , having the child who will be an adult to be prepared for all sorts of those, all sorts of situations. Um, alright, so when we're talking about all those things, what are some ways that [00:23:00] you teach these skills to children and especially children with communication deficits?

Michelle Andrews: what are some ways, what are your go-to ways to instruct these?

katya: so I'm gonna kind of break it down. So we're gonna, when I'm gonna talk about fire drills first, like when we're talking about fire drills, the first thing we're probably gonna do is really talk about what a fire is, what a fire drill is, we're doing it. Using books that even if you make them but are in interesting characters that they like certain that they like. Um, bringing those types of characters in and reading stories about them teaching that of gives them that overall of just introducing it. Then we're gonna go visuals. what a stop, you know, Stop, drop and roll. Why are we doing that? If you have a fire on you? But having [00:24:00] that visual posted and then role playing that you're gonna role play, not just with your teacher, not just with your speech pathologist, not just with your para, you wanna do it with your sub parents, uh, principal, whoever it is.

katya: We need to be practicing that with. All different types of people in all different places. Not just the classroom, not just the speech room. We have to generalize because if not, they're gonna know, Oh, I know what to do if I get a fire on me in my classroom. But what happens when they're at the movie theater?

katya: What happens if at home they've never practiced it there? So these types of safety goals, that's why I said it's super important that we involve the parents in these as well, so that they buy in because we need to make sure we're

generalizing, um, not, you know, we're doing the role play, but also knowing [00:25:00] that receptive language first, following one step directives.

katya: What does stop mean? What does drop mean? What does role we're going to be doing all of those. Um, we wanna make sure that we are also identifying first responders. So when a first responder comes in to help them, um, we know what their uniform looks like. We know that they, you know, have the helmet, they have the suit.

katya: They might look a little bit scary cuz they have a gas, like those little on, but what does that look like? making sure that it's a experience. That they know they're safe, outburst, they're not there to hurt them, they're safe, even though they may look scary. So really talking about that and being able to identify when they're little.

katya: We wanna be able to identify, okay, that's a firefighter. then also building on that, what does a firefighter do? They put out fires. They keep [00:26:00] us safe. Everything that they do when they're in P B C D, having them dress up as a firefighter, making it fun. Um, I think it's extremely important to, especially for special education classrooms, to to your local firefighter firefighting department and seeing if they can come, not just once when they're in kindergarten, multiple times a year. We wanna make sure this is something that they see often including parents, have them take them their fire Every firefighter I've talked to, they love it when kids come. They want to show them fire truck. They wanna show them what they do because it makes their job also a million times easier when kids aren't scared of them

katya: and to them. It's super important, but that role play is going to be [00:27:00] essential we're talking about that. Um, We tend to do it once or twice, once a month. Make it easy with our kids. We have to do it every day at the beginning, and then we can move to once a week and then we can move to once a month. But it's not something that you ever wanna stop. If you stop, think about it when you go off summer break, right? There may be regression. We make sure that it can be recouped in a certain amount of time. there is an emergency, that's amount of time think, Ooh, well maybe I should have been doing this more often. We never wanna be in that situation. So even if they've mastered it, does that mean they've generalized it? Does that mean that they can do it here in the park at the mall? If they can't, then it's not mastered. So always kind of have that in your brain that we can attach it to So many [00:28:00] different goals like. So many different speech goals, it still can be safety related. We can be talking during role play. We can switch roles, we can reverse it, it's really important that role play, we're doing it so

Michelle Andrews: and I love how you mentioned the mask. Like for example, the firefighter. I think a lot of cute cartoon pictures or maybe even real picture visuals that we might be teaching kids, they often look, they're not always wearing all the gear that they would wear in a very dangerous situation.

Michelle Andrews: So I think it is good to identify that and to really talk about that. Cuz I think that could be a huge factor in. A child being scared or nervous in that type of situation to know that that is a safe person. That that is what they're supposed to wear, that's a safety, safety gear that they're wearing.

Michelle Andrews: It's nothing scary,

Michelle Andrews: though it might look different.

Michelle Andrews: Yeah.

Michelle Andrews: I think that's a great point cuz I think even before we talked about this, [00:29:00] I was thinking about different, uh, community helpers and thinking about d like different products or something I could make and, and yeah, I think I definitely wanna find visuals of them wearing the mask and, and all sorts of situations.

katya: is really important part about the visuals. We love cute stuff,

katya: we love the cute stuff. However, that's not going to be realistic to our kids.

Michelle Andrews: Mm-hmm.

katya: about uniforms and we're talking about first responders, you can do little cute activities where we have the cartoons, real life examples are gonna be extremely important when we're talking about safety.

Michelle Andrews: Right. Those real pictures.

katya: real

Michelle Andrews: Mm-hmm.

katya: look at your area that you're in. If you're in San Antonio, if you're in Massachusetts, if you're in. Tim back too. Everyone has different like uniforms,

right? And they're gonna be different colors and they're gonna look differently. Try to find what is around [00:30:00] you that you're going to, so that if you do this little cute cartoon character and they have the little red firefighter hat and they don't have the mask, that's gonna be really difficult when we're in the moment trying to teach them that's safe that's a safe helper cause they look scary sometimes. Um, so it is really important that we're using real pictures when we're talking about safety. Even safety signs. We have to think about it. It was, so, this is really weird example, but at my old apartment complex, they love to match the buildings, right? It was like a sage green And so they made the stop signs, Sage green, I don't know about you, but when I'm driving and I see green, I think go, That's what I imagine it as.

Michelle Andrews: Oh, a green stop sign. What?

katya: so many times I just would run through that stop sign and I was like, Oh my gosh. I see the words that say stop, but green means go. And you think

Michelle Andrews: Right. That's so confusing.

katya: [00:31:00] It's so

katya: when I realized we do that to our kids all the time. thinking of visuals and I'm like, Oh, this looks so cute, but it's not realistic. So taking a real stop sign, taking a real exit sign, what do they look like? And important You know, there's so many different community helper things everywhere, right? But if we're recycling's important, yes. when we're talking about safety, we really wanna make sure that we're looking at caution tape. We're looking at do not enter exit, you know, where the stairs are. Um, of those that are gonna be the most that's what we need to put as not necessarily like yield something that a three year old doesn't need to know what yield is. They're not driving anytime soon. So make sure it's age appropriate [00:32:00] realistic. It's not just a goal that we're checking a box off. is safety. It's something that they're dealing with their whole life. So we need to make sure that we're putting, we're treating them like they're our own kids.

katya: Oh, also areas to go when there's a fire. That's huge. Um, one of the biggest things that may not necessarily be a speech slp. Teacher's job, I guess. But it's always good to bring up with parents is having them create a blueprint of their house, of where they would go how they would get out.

katya: Like an exit plan of their house. You can do it also in the school. Where do we go? It's a way to teach the fire drill, but even more, we're going a step

further. We're knowing that when we, we line up, we always go this way, we're leaving this way and then teaching those pop up surprises. Sometimes our kids [00:33:00] really struggle when there's change and when there's a fire.

katya: We don't always know where that fire's going to be. We know where the nearest exit is, but what if that exit is blocked? Where do we go now? having backup plans, teaching a fire drill, not just from your classroom, but from the music room, from the outside. When I was a teacher. Which my first year, I was so grateful.

katya: I was a new teacher. I didn't know, I don't feel like I knew any better, but my principal would always give us like a 15 minute heads up, Hey, there's gonna be a fire drill. And I was like, Oh, awesome. Okay, we're gonna get ready. We're gonna go way. My kids can avoid the loud noises. They're good. And then I realized I'm not teaching them by doing that because they're not experiencing it. And so it takes a lot of prep. It takes a lot of work, but if we're not putting them in those real situations, then they're never gonna be able to do [00:34:00] it. Right. Um, so we really need to make sure that even if we really,

Michelle Andrews: Okay.

katya: it may not always be best. Um, and that's tough. But we've, we have to start from day one, teaching safety and practicing. And going through those really tough situations of the really loud noises. Um, that's when teaching kids saying, need headphones. I need this. Communicating their needs of what they need in a fire drill when they, there's a fire, we need to things very quickly on hand. They're not just drills, they're for real situation.

Michelle Andrews: Right. Like maybe part of the drill is grabbing the headphones or grabbing whatever is needed in that situation or um, whatever is the safest route for sure. But yeah. That's real. Really great.

katya: Okay, So then pain communication. [00:35:00] Um, first you need to identify the body parts of yourself. Um, it's great when people use dolls or or talk about body parts, but we need them to understand that this is my elbow, this is my knee. Understanding those body parts are gonna be really important even if it's just pointing. , so what we used to use was, it was like a key chain visual and it had all the body parts and then it had in the corners a green Yes. red no. it does this hurt. Yes. No. And you could touch their knee or you could touch on the visual, but having them understand body parts are, it's gonna be really important, not just for pain communication. But also as they get older, knowing that, you know, these are special areas that are just for me, there's only safe

people that can change me. There's only safe people [00:36:00] that can help me dress. Um, it's not just if they get hurt. There's so many of safety that we wanna make sure that our kids that become adults aren't taking advantage of. Um, and using age appropriate terms, age appropriate body parts. this may be very awkward, but not calling their private parts like a cookie or something

katya: just not cookie. We want to use appropriate so that if something does happen that they're not, they're not comfortable with it and they know is not okay, that they're able to verbalize that or communicate in some way that. someone hurt me here.

Michelle Andrews: Mm-hmm.

katya: even from when they're little, it's really important for all kids that we're teaching appropriate terms in terminology and

Michelle Andrews: Right. I've been [00:37:00] using that with my own kids. Just I, I've read plenty of stuff about that. Just saying like, if they know the correct words for things, that they're less likely to be susceptible to something that happened in them not being able to communicate to an adult that something wrong happened.

Michelle Andrews: Mm-hmm.

katya: And it's something that you don't always think of. Like even in toilet most of the time women are the ones who potty train their kids. Right. We're the ones who doing it. Most teachers are women. Moms are the ones that a lot of times that are potty training. with that are neuro divergent, Even the bathrooms are different when you go to a public restroom, girls, we talk to each other. We have conversations, we do all of that. It's normal. It's very normal. You pass toilet paper into the stalls. You make friends, best friends in the bathroom. It's like a normal thing. If that's all, [00:38:00] Let's say you had a son and that's all your son learned how to do, and now they're at the age where they can go into a men's public and they started doing that. It's not very normal. They don't talk to each other that much in the bathrooms. You don't stand next to each other. You definitely don't pass toilet paper. It's a very, it's a very different world. And if that's all they know, unfortunately things can happen. Either fights can break out, um, they police can be called, um, or even just things that aren't wanted happen. so it. We're talking about all different body parts, what's safe, what's unsafe, and how to act in certain social situations. And that's where speech pathologists can come into play. A lot of teaching that social, what's socially

acceptable. And it is different bathrooms, gender norms. It, it does happen [00:39:00] and we

Michelle Andrews: Mm-hmm.

katya: really teach it.

Michelle Andrews: Right. Be specific about it for their safety. Yeah.

katya: that comes with role playing. Role playing is going to be a lot in a lot of our training, um, with our kids. Um, another thing that we're gonna talk about is, you know, with first responder interactions, , but

katya: first responders in their roles, not just, um, you know, firefighters, but police officers and a sheriff what a police officer might look like in their uniform.

katya: But what an off duty police officer is, we don't really talk about that much. Um, but it's important. to know perk police there's so many a paramedic, What they do, Knowing all of these community helpers and knowing that they're safe people to go talk to is important, especially with individuals. Um, that elope we have, it's a staggering number [00:40:00] of neuro divergent individuals that elop, where it's 55% of parents ha who have a , neuro divergent child, have had their child missing for long enough to call police. That is a massive of kid.

Michelle Andrews: Yeah.

katya: And so have that, we need to make sure that we're teaching them that if a police officer comes up to them to not be scared and run away, right?

katya: To come up to them to feel that they can talk with them, um, that goes to the point of teaching them their name, knowing that when a police officer says, Stop, it means stop. those one step directives. And then we need to build on that to two step directives. It doesn't mean just sit

katya: your chair, It means stop.

katya: It means walk with me. It means what does hands up mean? And you can make it fun, especially when they're [00:41:00] doing the Simon says, and of those things. Those are great ways to start teaching one step directives, but we always wanna pair those visuals and then we can eventually decrease the

visual help. It's great to really teach those skills. Also responding to questions about themselves, like knowing their name, their parents' phone number, um, their, at least their street. Maybe not their full address, but at least their street that they live on. But we need to make sure that we're really careful like who we share that to.

Michelle Andrews: Right.

katya: specific because it,

Michelle Andrews: We're not sharing that to everyone.

katya: to

Michelle Andrews: Yeah,

katya: the garden store and be like, Hi, Ka I live here come to my house you want. That's not safe, So we have to be super specific and that's when. I think charts are very good [00:42:00] for kids sorting mats, and we can teach safe, unsafe.

katya: Having the red and the green that color coded is very helpful at the beginning when we're teaching these things. Um, knowing that, here's who I tell my address to, or my too. then here's who I don't. I'm not gonna tell a stranger that I just maybe met at the grocery store, my name, my address, and my phone number.

katya: That's not safe. But telling a police officer where I live is safe. They're gonna help me. This is why it's safe. Um, those sorting mats are gonna be extremely helpful. Even talking about safe and unsafe Safe is when we use oven MITs to get stuff outta the oven. We're not just touching a hot stove, we're touching the oven. Even though we're curious about it, we're not, um, it's safe to stop when we get to the crosswalk. [00:43:00] It's not safe to run Categor categorizing them showing them very much like, this is a rule and this is what's safe. Um, helps a lot with making sense and making some of these abstract kind of concepts more manageable. So always incorporating visuals, activities the day, which goes along with IEP goals. There's so many social studies, math goes along with math. It's sorting so you can tie into tes through everything, and that's how you can. help get your IEP goals done, but also safety. And we're not just checking boxes, we're making sure that they're learning it. Um, and being more detailed intentional, I think with what we're doing for every kid is [00:44:00] gonna be important. if not looking you when your, their name is

cold, I'm not saying like they have to have a straight eye contact like staring at you, but they turn their head to look. is one of the first, steps of, Hey Cam, come here. At least if they look at you, you know, they attention. It gets them to also stop what they're doing. So it's kind of two things in one and then we can work on, Okay, come here. when you hear this, you need to already know to come here. Having feet, um, by the front door every time we go, you know, to leave.

katya: We stand on the sticky feet and then we can go outside. Um, but knowing those, that receptive of, I'm understanding that when dad, teacher says, line up at the door, I know [00:45:00] where to go. I'm not just lining up with my forehead on the door. I'm standing where I need to stand so I can stay safe.

Michelle Andrews: Right. That's so good. You really painted a great picture, and I think I'm gonna get some sticky feet or little sticky circles.

Michelle Andrews: Put in front of my front door cuz my kids are always like, Yeah. Forehead to the door. , fighting over who's like right up by the door and I, I can't even open the door.

Michelle Andrews: I'm always like, You have to scoot back. I can't open the door.

katya: having that space, you can even do a visual of like the, you know, the colored tape. And have the colored

katya: then the sticky feet. That's not, not where we stand. Um, and having a stop sign on the door, even if it doesn't always work, it's still, they see it.

katya: It could be a deterrent of just running out, um, playing

Michelle Andrews: a pause could help

katya: even a pause Yeah. It can, And it gets them to think too, We're teaching, all of this is teaching. We're not [00:46:00] trying to trick do anything. We're trying to teach those skills of I'm thinking before I do something.

Michelle Andrews: Mm-hmm.

katya: impulsivity is a really hard thing to kind of not get over, but control, I guess. So we wanna make sure that also in their adult life, they're able to use those accommodations that have been put in place for them. And they're picking stuff out that works for them. They're picking out, hey, I know that when I'm in

a stressful situation, I need these visuals, so I'm gonna already put them in my house, or I'm already gonna put them where I work or what I need to do. gonna have my identification card on me. Um, when a kid is starting to drive, or when they're 15, once they're 12, they can get a Texas identification card, and on that card you have to get a note from the doctor and it will say communication It's not necessarily gonna say [00:47:00] autism Down syndrome, but it is going to say communication that it's gonna be extremely important for parents, um, to know that so that they can apply for that because it's another way to show and protect their kids. Um, Our kids do drive. You know, just because they have autism doesn't mean that they can't drive. So knowing that in high school speech teachers them what to do when they're pulled over, what the script is, Okay, hands on the wheel, What do I say? I have autism. may need extra time. I am not okay with driving off right now.

katya: I'm flustered. But understanding how to communicate that it's always okay to communicate our needs. it's way better to do that than to not, And then it builds up something catastrophic can happen.

Michelle Andrews: Right, exactly. Communicating [00:48:00] our needs and letting them know ahead of time or in the moment as, as soon as we can , is crucial. Um, you gave so many amazing examples. This was, this was great. I feel like, and we could still probably talk about this for hours more, but do you have do you have

Michelle Andrews: materials, um, or resources that you use to teach these? I know you did mention some, but if there's some that you left.

katya: So one of the best things I think of is also video modeling. Um, this is something that can be used, you know, even when you're role playing, you could record yourselves doing them, and then they can practice it at home for homework. then using YouTube videos to show them real life examples and what you're going to do.

katya: Those are video modeling is really, um, and it shows a lot of success with our individuals. So those are, that's really good. Also, teachers pay teachers, the ABCs of autism Teachers Pay Teachers [00:49:00] has a huge safety bundle where it has. Key chain visuals for first responders, not just for our kids, for first responders as well.

katya: So if you go to local pricing, give us 'em to them and teach your kid, great if they, you know, the first responders know how to use them. But if our

kids don't, then it's, we're not, we're not together, right? We have to be in sync. So we always wanna make sure we're teaching our kids to use these visuals.

katya: It's not just showing them and be like, Ooh, learn it. We have to teach them how to use it and teach them how to use it independently. Um, because when they're lost or they're afraid, we're not gonna be So if they have these things on them, they have the, their little toolkit that they can lean back on, going to help them be very successful.

katya: So the ABCs of watches, it has it on their teachers pay teacher store. It's really good. You can make [00:50:00] your own as well. I would definitely recommend that, especially when we're talking about identifying police officers, firefighters, especially in your area. You can go online, literally look at your precinct, take pick, Google has pictures, take those cuz you're gonna have those uniforms of what they're gonna look like when they come to see you.

katya: Great. Take pictures. Also. Go to your local go to the local stations. field trip, whatever them being there is going to be the best possible. And involving the parents as well. The parents can fill out different forms. At least in San Antonio, we have a form that they can fill out to give to. Our local sheriff's department that has all the information, the address, and it's flagged in our system so that if their [00:51:00] child goes missing different things, they can go and they know they have their, a new picture of them, they have their likes, their dislikes, um, different ways that they communicate.

katya: That's extremely important. There's also some really cool features that you can get online. It's a thing and you in and you can order these little stickers and you can put 'em on zipper tags.

katya: You can put them on like little shoe things, um, bracelets, and then. They have actual ones where you can put 'em on bracelets, but what you is actually the QR code, it links and it has everything about them. Allergies, medical issues, um, the ways they communicate, things that are triggers that, things that we wanna avoid, right?

katya: If they really do not like having their hand held, but they can have their [00:52:00] wrist held or vice versa, that gives people more information and ways to stay safe. Um, especially when they're little and they may not be able to communicate their wants and needs yet. It gives another resource. Um, it's extremely inexpensive as well, but you can also reach out to local non-profits, to see if they will cover it. and I will try to, Michelle, I'll try to find, um, what it

was called again. Cause I cannot remember off the top of my head. But it's a great resource

Michelle Andrews: Okay. Yeah, that sounds amazing.

katya: It really is. It's great for especially with littles, if you're going you know, it's great to have. But little things like even teaching kids to be able to have a bracelet on, um, we want them to not necessarily have to have like a necklace or a t-shirt.

katya: Like we would really like to have a bracelet because we wanna teach the kids. Like when you [00:53:00] are things like put your hands up, you have a medical right? so that is helpful for first responders. Um, even when you are, if you get in a car wreck with your kid having a seatbelt strap that says, My child has. So and so and so and so, and you open it up and it has everything that they need. If they're unable to verbally communicate or that they know that on the back of their, you know, car that child has autism, so that if they are impaired where they're not to communicate and their kid bolted and eloped that they know to go find them. There's just so many things that we can do that we can think of. but my biggest, you know, push is to really get the parents involved because it needs to be avil, it takes a village, and especially with safety, it does, we really have to make sure we're generalizing [00:54:00] because we don't want it just to be learned in schools or just to be learned at speech.

katya: We have to make sure it's everywhere or else we're not really learning.

Michelle Andrews: Right. I was just thinking how a lot of these skills need to be addressed with the parents. Like, like you said, um, a lot of explaining to parents and all those resources, like the seatbelt strap that they could have, you know, ways that they can keep their child safe if something were to happen to them that they couldn't, if they're usually the one who would communicate to, to someone in an emergency that if something were to happen to them, that their child could remain safe.

Michelle Andrews: Or if their child Yeah. Bolted.

katya: Mm-hmm.

Michelle Andrews: Exactly.

katya: I think it's really good just. Even get ideas from the parents asking them when you're, you know, having maybe that pre meeting, talking the parents

about what are some safety concerns you're seeing at home. We can't just think about what we're seeing in school. And i e P is not just for this year, what [00:55:00] they're learning in school, it's for a lifelong and how can we help them to succeed after we are not there anymore? So involving the parents, asking them, What are you seeing at home that we may not be seeing at school is gonna be very, very important. making sure you're breaking it down. Okay. We want our student child to be able to wait at the door instead of just running out of it. Okay, well we also have to teach them what weight means. We need to teach them what Stop. We have to break it down. We can't just think of this big, lofty goal, but we have to think of the objectives and we have to think of what we're gonna have to do to get there, and the materials that are needed.

katya: There's so many out there, need to use them make sure they're realistic, make sure they're meaningful. Don't just put these cute little cartoons that are very, very cute. They're really fun

katya: is it teaching them anything? think that's the [00:56:00] basis of what we always have to go back to.

Michelle Andrews: right? no green stop sign. . This has been so great. I am really pumped up about this. I feel like I wanna incorporate safety and just every single session, it just, it could almost work. You know? I, I,

Michelle Andrews: was just

Michelle Andrews: thinking like, and, and anything. Yeah. No matter, even all teachers could do it.

Michelle Andrews: Yeah. Like just incorporate. Get that repetition in there, you know, as a, as a speech therapist, you know, if you're working on wh questions, you know, the story that you read could, could be a story about community helpers

Michelle Andrews: or fire drills or follow directions. That's an obvious one. Prepositions, even the words could be, or the visuals could be vocabulary that have to do with different

katya: Yeah Stand on the feet. Stand off the feet. You know,

Michelle Andrews: Yeah. Yes, yes. Very needed

katya: time and that

Michelle Andrews: all the time. Yeah. The verbs like, yeah, stop, roll,

katya: Yes.

Michelle Andrews: sorts of things like that. And even, you know, articulation [00:57:00] the words, maybe you're far you can find, you know, I know you're limited with whatever their target sound is, but I think there you could still do a lot

Michelle Andrews: with, with finding different words.

Michelle Andrews: Right. Or especially if you're at the sentence level, you could you make a sentence that has to do with, with anything about

katya: Mm-hmm

Michelle Andrews: yeah, I just like you said at the beginning of this, that I think anyone, when presented with an emergency or a very critical situation, I think our language everybody.

katya: Mm-hmm.

Michelle Andrews: clam up, you know, not be able to communicate well. Like I even just, I can think of one time I got pulled over, I, I, I did the smallest thing

Michelle Andrews: I like, didn't, uh, put my blinker on when I was, um, changing lanes or something and I was just in tears. I could barely speak and it's just like I, you know, see, I can't imagine, you know, any child or if there are any issues communicating how much more difficult that would be, Um, or any type of situation [00:58:00] that that could be, stressful or scary for them.

Michelle Andrews: Yeah. That this is so, so needed. I think you explained all this very, very well, gave us examples. I'm very excited about all of our listeners listening to this and incorporating this into their speech therapy sessions and talking with the parents and caregivers about this topic as well.

Michelle Andrews: I am so thankful that you came to share all this information. I think this is so important mean, parents, anyone, um, could benefit from , thank you for listening.

Michelle Andrews: We hope you learn something today. All of the references and resources throughout the episode are listed in a show notes and also listed on the Pep Talk podcast for SLPs website. If you've been listening while you're driving, cooking dinner, walking your dog, this episode is transcribed for you to refer back to easily.

Michelle Andrews: Kat thank you so much again for joining me today. I can't thank you enough. Thank you so much.

katya: Well, thank you so much for having me