Devon Summit1

Speaker 2: [00:00:00] Welcome to the Peaceful Parenting Podcast. I'm your host, Sarah Rosensweet, mom of three young people, Peaceful Parenting Coach, and your cheerleader and guide on all things parenting. Each week, we'll cover the tools, strategies, and support you need to end the yelling and power struggles, and encourage your kids to listen and cooperate so that you can enjoy your family time.

Speaker 2: I'm happy to say we have a great relationship with our three kids. The teen years have been easy and joyful. Not because we're special unicorns, but because my kids were raised with peaceful parenting. I've also helped so many parents just like you stop struggling and enjoy their kids again. I'm excited to be here with you today and bring you the insight and information you need to make your parenting journey a little more peaceful.

Speaker 2: Let's dive into this week's conversation.

Sarah: Hey, all welcome back to another episode of the peaceful parenting podcast. Today, I have something really special for you. It's actually not an interview that I recorded for the podcast. It's an interview that I recorded last year. For the flourish with your complex child summit. [00:01:00] It's with Dr.

Sarah: Devin price, who has a book called unmasking autism. He has another book that came out this year called unlearning shame. He's really an expert in the field. And I felt really lucky that he said, yes, To being in the summit last year. If you don't know what I'm talking about with the summit, if you missed it last year, We have been feeling over the years, that a lot of people with what we are calling complex kids, that's kids that are, Sensitive strong-willed spirited and or neurodivergent

Sarah: a lot of those folks feel like peaceful parenting, just isn't working for them because they're doing all the things and their kids aren't responding. Like the. Instagram reels or the books or whatever, say that they should be responding. And we really wanted, all those parents and caregivers with those complex kids, but those kids who are a bit more challenging or just a bit more, those of you who do need to really work on your parenting and your own regulation and all of the things we really wanted to put together, some [00:02:00] resources just for you.

Sarah: So we developed a flourish with your complex child summit. Last year, we brought together. Over 25 experts and we are back this year, some familiar faces, but mostly new people that I have been interviewing madly over the past few months. And it's good. Just shaping up to be such a wonderful, summit with so many great experts talking about everything from. Supporting ourselves with our own self care as parents to complex kids or as complex parents ourselves. That sibling dynamic that can be so complicated.

Sarah: When you have complex kids to talking about sensory challenges, ADHD, autism, creating neuro firming spaces. Parenting sensitive kids, we're learning about non-coercive parenting. PDA parenting, low demand parenting. It's just such a wonderful Group of people that I've brought together.

Sarah: One of our summit attendees last year wrote to me and said, who else feels seen? I'm slowly working my way through the videos while trying [00:03:00] to catch the live events, but I already feel so seen. When there is a limited real life connection with like-minded people, you questioned your path more. I followed my kids lead from the start and do what I can to be a team with a child while helping them grow and navigate life in a world that isn't built for them.

Sarah: When everyone around you has neuro-typical kids and some formative opinion. And some form of opinion on your path or compares their neuro-typical kid to your neurodivergent kid in parenting approach. It can result in those little cracks of doubt. Let's be honest. It's not always easy to close those cracks and not feel like you're misguided in what you feel, the summit is amazing.

Sarah: I've just scratched the surface of the available resources, interviews, et cetera. Insert sigh of relief. We got so many comments like that last year, it really made us happy to know that we created something that was helpful for you all. So I hope that you will join us.

Sarah: What I wanted to do , for you today is share an interview from last year.

Sarah: So you can get a sense of the things that we are that we're covering. So we have Devon price today. [00:04:00] You're going to hear him from him in a minute. And we're talking all about masking. And even if you don't have a child that fits into any of the categories that we've talked about and you love learning, I think you would love the summit, or if you have anyone else in your life. Who's complex.

Sarah: Or anyone who has complex kids. Be sure to tell them about this summit. You can sign up as of today for free. It's all free access to all the interviews is free. And if you want ongoing access, you'll have a chance to upgrade to a VIP all access pass after you grab your free ticket.

Sarah: So that's just something you want to have in the back of your head. That you can access to get all access pass, to get all of the bonuses and ongoing. Access to the summit interviews, plus a whole bunch of other resources that we've put together for our pass holders. But if you just want access to interviews for free, you can also do that.

Sarah: We want to make sure that it's accessible for everyone. We're also gonna have audio versions, transcripts. So that is fully accessible. Today Dr. Price is talking about masking which is something that it's really [00:05:00] interesting to learn about.

Sarah: You can go to re-imagine peaceful parenting.com/summit. To sign up today for free. We start on October 15th and the summit runs for five days. So I really hope to see you at the summit. We also have live events throughout the summit where you can interact with me and Corey and our other guest experts.

Sarah: So go to re-imagine peaceful parenting.com. Slash summit to get your free ticket. Now let's meet Dr. Price.

Sarah: Hello parents! Welcome back to another interview on the Flourish with Your Complex Child Summit. I'm so excited to have with me today Dr. Devon Price. Devon Price is a social psychologist, professor, author of Unmasking Autism, and proud autistic person. His research has appeared in journals such as The New Yorker, The Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, and the Journal of Positive Psychology.

Sarah: Devon's writing has appeared in outlets such as Financial Times, HuffPost, Slate, Jacobin, Business [00:06:00] Insider, Lit Hub, and on PBS and NPR. He lives in Chicago where he serves as an assistant professor at Loyola University Chicago School of Continuing and Professional Studies. Welcome Devon.

Devon: Hi. Yeah. Thanks for having me, Sarah.

Sarah: I'm so excited to have you here because this is something that comes up a lot with our parents of complex kids. And they don't even know that masking is what's coming up for their kids. They just are having trouble understanding

what's going on. So I thought you would be the perfect person to help parents of neurodivergent kids understand.

Sarah: Masking. So could you give us a definition of what masking is?

Devon: Yeah, so masking, in terms of, we'll start with talking about what it is in terms of individual behavior, but then we'll talk a little bit about the social context. But masking is taking steps to camouflage or to compensate for your disability with the goal of Evading being detected by other people [00:07:00] as abnormal or aberrant in some way, as not conforming in some kind of way that makes you unacceptable.

Devon: Masking can involve really simple strategies that, that might seem more obvious to us, like faking eye contact by looking at the middle of someone's forehead. If eye contact is painful for you, or practicing facial expressions in the mirror so that you learn how to smile in a way that looks more authentic to people, even though it's actually less authentic to you, but it puts non autistic people at ease.

Devon: Scripting conversations, routine kind of customer service interactions so that you aren't thrown when somebody asks you a question because you've already prepared an answer for it. But it can also involve deeper Changes to, when we look at adults adults who are trying to pass through the neurotypical world, but have sensory issues might secretly have a drug or alcohol problem to help them blunt.

Devon: [00:08:00] Sensory discomfort that they're experiencing all of the time or a person might only be able to work part time and freelance kinds of work as an adult because going into an office and being around people all the time and the socializing and the bright lights and things like that might just might not be accessible for them.

Devon: We, do usually talk about masking when we talk about autism as being this aspect of autism that makes it harder to detect and make certain populations of autistic people get overlooked. So people of color, women, queer people. older adults, people who are diagnosed later in life. But I think it's also important to think of masking as a form of being closeted, right?

Devon: Where if you're a a queer kid in the closet, closeting, being closeted isn't really a choice. You are born into the closet because everybody assumes you're going to be straight when you grow up, you have to behave a certain way and

we're going to only ever give you the [00:09:00] tools for forming straight relationships and like pursuing like a straight marriage or whatever.

Devon: And it's the same thing for autistic people. We're put in the neurotypical box when we're born just by social expectations of here's how you're supposed to socialize. Here's how you're supposed to move through the world. Here's what emotions are supposed to look like on your face and things like that.

Devon: And so for many of us, masking isn't. actually an intentional choice to camouflage or anything like that. It's just going along with neuroconformity if you will, these just standards of here's what it is to be a normal person in the world and you better not step out of line.

Sarah: I was going to ask one of the questions that I'd prepared for you is why do people mask?

Sarah: And it's clear from your, just your definition, clear to me that it's a at least one aspect of a survival like it's a survival. instinct or survival technique. Is that, part of it?

Devon: Yeah. Yeah. So the first reason that people mask again as I mentioned, is they almost don't [00:10:00] have any, have a choice, from the outset, especially if you're diagnosed later in life or if you're just an autistic person who doesn't meet the stereotype of what autism is.

Devon: And so you're just not getting services. So there is an aspect of masking that is just conforming to what everyone is telling you is how you're supposed to behave whether that's a teacher telling you to sit still, not understanding that you really need to stim and move in your seat to be able to pay attention to family members demanding hugs from you and not listening to your exercise.

Devon: Exercise of consent as a kid and having to endure that just all of these experiences that from a young age, neurodivergent people are just like bombarded with discomfort and told that our, feelings don't matter and that we're supposed to just go along to, to get along.

Devon: It is also a survival technique because when we do step out of line, we get ostracized, mocked, treated like we are incompetent or that we can't be trusted with our own [00:11:00] bodies. Condescended to all of those kinds of things. Like even just the

Sarah: eye contact thing, you're, that you're mentioning like people Oh, you're disrespectful or you're not paying attention, right?

Sarah: And not understanding what's really going on.

Devon: Yeah. Yeah. I even cite a little passage in Unmasking Autism about a court case where a man who was on trial, the judge sentenced him to The maximum sentence that he was eligible for because he couldn't make eye contact and the judge said that made him seem like he was a cold blooded killer.

Devon: And he was autistic and he was overwhelmed. It gets way harder for us to mask when we're overwhelmed in a situation like that. So it, there's a big survival component in a very literal way for many of us. Especially when you think about the experiences that black and brown autistics might have if I'm walking down the street singing along to my music and flapping my hands, the worst thing that's going to happen to me is I might get some stares.

Devon: Which might itself be painful, but I'm not going to get the cops called on me, really. I'm not going to have to [00:12:00] worry about being incarcerated or, being subjected to violence. And there are other groups of autistic people who very much do have to worry about that stuff on a daily basis. So that's also a reason why people mask.

Devon: People mask to not get fired, to not get kicked out of their housing. There's really high stakes sometimes to being visibly autistic. Disabled.

Sarah: Yeah. I was just thinking about I know your autistic and your specialty is about autism and masking, but there's also, I think from my experience as a parenting coach, like a lot of kids who are sensory who have like sensory challenges and, or, and, or ADHD, they also do a lot of masking too, I think just to a lot of for little kids, it's like they want to be good, right?

Sarah: Like they don't want to, they want to have friends. They don't want the teacher to get mad at them.

Devon: Yeah, absolutely. I think it's really easy for us to forget as adults, no matter how much we try to just how vulnerable and, confused children are in the world. [00:13:00] They don't know anything other than what's around them and what they get told is normal.

Devon: And. They're so reliant upon their caregivers for survival that even like a small eye roll or a little bit of criticism that you as a parent just slips out of

your mouth on it when you're having a hard day and you don't really think anything about it and you don't mean anything deeper by it. For a kid that can really feel like their ability to survive is under threat.

Devon: That if they are rejected,

Sarah: evolutionary perspective, it is right. If nobody cares about them, they'll leave them on a rock somewhere when the fires come or whatever.

Devon: Yeah, it really is a life or death matter. And there is like a really serious force. And that's also why kids just in research, kids pick up on social rules really well from a really young age.

Devon: They learn gender norms, even if you're trying to raise them in a gender neutral way. They learn racial stereotypes and biases, even if you're trying to have a very anti racist family. Kids brains are sponges for social rules because [00:14:00] the consequences of them not would be so severe. And I think that happens to a lot of neurodivergent kids.

Devon: They learn what they're supposed to be doing or what neurotypical kids are supposed to be doing. And they really can beat themselves up about that. Even if you're trying to raise them in a pretty like neurodiversity affirming way.

Sarah: Yeah, that makes sense. I I know we're going to talk a little bit about the sort of good at school the good at school thing that I just mentioned, but it just, I thought just occurred to me that I heard once years ago, I don't remember who told me this, but before I even was like working as a parenting coach, that it was a good sign if your child was like, quote, good at school and quote, bad at home because it meant that their home was their safe place.

Sarah: Place and I was thinking about that the flip of that. I think there probably are a lot of kids who actually mask at home because school is their, safer place, right? Like you get the kids who have some like behavioral challenges. And maybe at [00:15:00] school is the place where they. can feel like they can let it all hang out a little bit more because home is not a safe place.

Devon: Yeah, and it's, really sad to think about, but I think, we do see that where there can be lower stakes sometimes, depending on a kid's home environment, to being a little bit more messy or vulnerable or seeking help and support in school or from institutions, just as much as the flip can also be the case.

Devon: Yeah. And That can tell us that they don't really, right now, feel that they have a secure base in their family, or sometimes it's just there's too much going on in their family, and they feel like there's no space for their needs. So it doesn't necessarily have to be, like, an abusive or neglectful parent, right?

Devon: It could be one of your other kids is Severely ill and you're unemployed and life is just really tough and your kid is just taking on a lot of emotional burden to keep it all together like that can be a source of it too. But yeah, I think there's a lot of like interesting things to drill down and looking at.[00:16:00]

Devon: Where are they? Siphoning off their anxiety. Where is that getting put? And where do they, where can they not? And where are they masking? Yeah.

Sarah: Yeah. Yeah. No, it's super interesting. Can, we talk a little bit about the, that, cause I'll, often say to parents, like that if I work with somebody for long enough and then I start to see some, Signs that maybe an assessment might be useful so that we can get like the proper labels for the kid and not like the unhelpful labels.

Sarah: And I'll hear parents say but they're fine at school or they'll ask for an assessment and the teacher will say they're fine at school. Or even parents who are maybe on just beginning this. Sort of journey and they are even angry because their kids are quote fine at school, but at home They're you know melting down and having a hard time So can we just can you just talk to us about that whole like the fine at school idea?

Devon: Sure Yeah, school is an environment that really demands a [00:17:00] lot of compliance out of kids It's really built on such a narrow model of how people are supposed to learn and we really in most schooling institutions take You All of the kids body autonomy away. We control when they use the bathroom, when they eat, even maybe how they sit and where they're allowed to look which really can cause a lot of distress for any kid, frankly, but for neurodivergent kids, there's a pattern into the, in the particular ways that it's going to cause them a lot of distress.

Devon: If they have ADHD and their body wants to be moving it's going to cause them a lot of distress to be to move. Putting that all in. There's also a lot of social pressure too, right? So it's not just authority figures around them. It's also peers that they maybe want to be able to make friends with or at least not stand out around or be treated like they're lesser or that they're infantilized or treated as younger which might happen if they have a disability.

Devon: We're more visibly disabled in that environment. [00:18:00] So there's an immense lot of social and institutional pressure going on there that can lead to a kid really muting a lot of their neurodivergence and just muting their own true feelings and needs in general. Whereas they might hopefully feel a little bit more free to express that at home, but also you're seeing more turmoil at home because they're offloading all of that stress and this translates to adults who mask to a lot of us who mask in order to get by and maintain a job or get by in society.

Devon: We don't have the energy when we get home at the end of the day to cook ourselves dinner, to clean our house, to socialize. There's a lot of things that slip, and so if an adult can't juggle all of that, we really can't expect a kid to. It's really, intense. stressor to have to do all that.

Sarah: Can you help parents understand the cause I think you and I are on the same page in terms of like understanding [00:19:00] resources, but can you help parents understand how the phenomenon works where kids can I guess I want parents to come away from this with the feeling of like their kids not doing it on purpose, right?

Sarah: They're not just like being good in one area good in quotation marks But being good in one area and then like bad at home or difficult or challenging at home So can you just help us understand like the the process by which that happens?

Devon: Yeah I think,

Sarah: am I even asking the right question?

Sarah: I guess I'm, feeling like we have this opportunity to be champions of children in this moment who are doing the best they can and maybe have parents who don't understand, like, why are they like fine in this area, quote, fine in this area and not in this area. And I'm, I want us to bring a lot more compassion for those kids and understanding for them.

Devon: Yeah I wonder if it's worth taking a step back and looking at that parent and why they're feeling that way. I think a lot of times when a parent is [00:20:00] feeling some of those really tough feelings of almost some judgment or resentment or feeling like it's unfair that they're having to shoulder the worst of their kid, these can be really ugly feelings to have, but there's nothing there's nothing wrong with you as a person for having those feelings. The reality is that

parents today get so little, support and children are raised in such an isolated environment. Like the way that we rear families now is just really ahistorical.

Devon: People used to live in multifamily homes and share child care across generations, and kids used to be more connected to their neighbors and members of their community. And that meant that there was a lot more support and a lot more of a place for, a kid to just go to blow off some steam and be accepted as themselves.

Devon: And now, All of that burden is falling on to parents who also increasingly are working longer hours are much more or less likely to have support around the house in the form of a stay at home partner. Everybody's doing too much right now. So [00:21:00] I think, there's some way in which if you're really frustrated with your kid and you find yourself thinking maybe not the most charitable stuff about your kid and their behavior, it might be worth, extending some compassion to yourself.

Devon: And looking at

Sarah: you, we have a whole interview on that topic in this summit.

Devon: That's fantastic. Cause I think it's all, a system, right? Like our behavior and our feelings is influenced by these systems that we're in. And so your kid is stuck in a really terrible system. A lot of times schools that are not designed for people like them just day by day schedules that are really hard to adjust to if you're neurodivergent.

Devon: Having to go to school and then come back home and adjust to all of that change all of the time. The change itself can be really overstimulating, let alone the demands of each of those unique environments. They're not getting enough support and, also you probably aren't either. And neither one of you is each other's enemy.

Devon: in this, right? You're both really struggling to get your needs met. And of course, many of the [00:22:00] parents of neurodivergent kids are somewhere on some kind of spectrum themselves, that they have flavors of these experiences. And so you might even see a little bit of yourself reflected in what your kid struggles with that you might have complicated feelings about.

Devon: So I think it's worth, Finding ways to put more of a, of your oxygen mask on, so to speak, and get a little bit of support and compassion for those

moments and having a space to, to vent some of those frustrations. And then also, hopefully you can extend that kind of thinking to your child themselves.

Devon: They have so little power. They have a really limited number of places to turn, and they don't have the language yet, most of the time, to articulate what they're going through. And so instead, what we see is meltdowns and tantrums and not brushing their teeth, not cleaning their room. They never got much choice in any of these things, and sometimes it's just a way of a person just asserting themselves in the one way that they can by being a little bit messy or being a [00:23:00] little explosive emotionally or something like that.

Devon: And that doesn't mean you have to love it all the time, like there are gonna be times where it's gonna be really frustrating and put you in a difficult situation as a parent, but I think, Just recognizing how much kind of confusion and turmoil your kid is in and that nobody would choose to be feeling that way is, it is always a good thing to remind yourself.

Devon: Yeah.

Sarah: Yeah, no, I love that. And kids I know it sounds like you believe as I do that kids are doing the best they can. And parents too, but it's it's sometimes I think I know my, sister has a kid that, has had a lot of challenges and is one of those fine at kids, fine at school kids.

Sarah: And, I, think it's just been, it's just been hard hard to navigate and, hard to, sometimes find that compassion but it's, that's always the answer.

Devon: Yeah. Yeah. And I think it's, worth knowing that or thinking about a kid in that situation, it might be that being good at school is [00:24:00] like one of their major sources of, self esteem right now, where if you are in a home where you have some you're butting up against your parents expectations and you're being told that your behavior is a problem or that you're disappointing people, even if a parent isn't actually saying literally that, like they're getting they're feeling criticized or feeling like they're not measuring up.

Sarah: They can tell their parents are annoyed with them.

Devon: Yeah, Kids can pick up on that stuff, even if a parent's like trying to choose their words carefully. And so if you're suddenly at school and there you're treated like you what you have to say is interesting and that you're insightful, that you're doing a good job, that you're so well behaved, that might be a place where as a child, you're choosing then to put all of your energy and

your kind of quote unquote best behavior, because you really want to have something to hold onto as an anchor that says I'm worthy and I'm good enough.

Devon: And we see that in a lot of masked people we might really feel like we're bad at socializing, but we're really good at academics or we lean into the one thing that gets us praise. So a lot of us are like people pleasers to a fault too. We [00:25:00] get a lot of negative feedback everywhere that we go.

Devon: So then if there is one area of life where we are getting positive feedback, we might really, drill into it really hard and put all of our energy into it and prioritize it because, Hey it feels good to actually feel like we're doing something right.

Sarah: Once in a

Devon: while. Yeah.

Sarah: That sort of leads me to another question that I wanted to ask you which is what is harmful about masking?

Sarah: Like, how what are the, effects and the long, term effects of it?

Devon: The data on, masking's negative effects is there's not a ton of great research on autistic adult experiences, but one where we do have a lot of data is masking, and how much it really does hurt. People. So we know that anywhere from adolescence up through old age adulthood people who mask heavily.

Devon: First of all, it drains a lot of energy. You're having to put a lot of attention into, am I sitting in a normal way? How am I going to pre plan my answer to this question? What [00:26:00] sides of myself do I need to filter out? It's just really draining of energy. So that takes a toll from every other area of the person's life.

Devon: It's linked to depression and anxiety. People who mask have worse social anxiety than neurodivergent people who don't mask. So it's this awful paradox where we're trying to fit in, but actually even if we are fitting in better, we're not feeling any better about it. I was just reading a study this morning for some research on a new project and even autistics who push themselves to socialize as much as a neurotypical person would, They have lower quality friendships than neurotypicals because they're not being themselves.

Sarah: So you're saying like friendships, mixed neurotype friendships, not like friendships with other autistic people.

Devon: Yes. So, autistic people who just push themselves to socialize with neurotypicals and do conventional kind of things and be friendly in a conventional way. They, don't get the same amount of closeness as a neurotypical person doing those same things [00:27:00] in the world we do.

Devon: Because we also, I

Sarah: mean, cause they can't be themselves. That would seem to me like if you're not being yourself, you're not going to have much satisfaction in a relationship.

Devon: Absolutely. Other people can also pick up on when we're masking. So there's some research that shows that a kind of.

Devon: Creeps other people out, neurotypical people out when they can tell that we're not being authentic, which is terrible because we already have to worry about being judged in that way. But there's this element where if people can really tell you're carefully choosing your words and controlling the self that you present to the world, that's giving people the message of Oh, I need to tread lightly here.

Devon: I need to back off. This person doesn't want to be known. And so sometimes even the most respectful, like well intentioned of non autistic people might pull away from us because. Without meaning to, we're giving them the message of I'm terrified to be around you. I don't trust you. Again, we have good reasons for not, feeling trusting, but that's an unfortunate consequence.

Devon: And then probably the worst [00:28:00] effect of, masking that we see is that it is linked to an increased risk of, suicide ideation. Sorry for the ambulance going by,

Devon: but but it really makes sense when you think about just like the existential dread that a person gets from living a false life all the time. It's really hard.

Sarah: Our needs are like, our primal need is to feel that we're seen and understood for who we are. And so if you're masking your you don't, you probably wouldn't feel like you are being seen and understood and loved for who you are.

Devon: Yeah people who mask tend to be really dissociated from their own feelings and emotions and needs, so you don't even know how to go about getting your needs met or even why you're unhappy. And so that does unfortunately get some people to a very hopeless place where they're either using substances to a really destructive degree, self harming thinking of suicide, or just really [00:29:00] struggling with depression.

Devon: So, the longterm effects of it are no joke. There are a really heavy toll on basically every part of the, person's life.

Sarah: I have seen, I've seen on your Instagram page and I've seen other people talking about how, we the part of the whole neurodivergent rights movement that's going on is a movement away from old therapies basically teach kids how to mask, right?

Sarah: And try to teach them to appear more neurotypical. But I've seen you and other people point out that there are still people with like black and brown families who feel like they have to teach their kids to mask in order to keep them safe. Because of just exactly what you mentioned earlier in the interview, that as a white person, you can get away with some more quirky behavior that somebody else might not be able to get away with.

Sarah: Can you just speak to that a little bit? I guess I was leading into the question of, is masking ever useful? And that would be one way that would be useful, even if we [00:30:00] would like it to not have to be the case. But are there other ways that it, might be useful, even if it's unfortunate?

Sarah: Are there reasons why you would want to know how to mask if you're a neurodivergent?

Devon: Yeah. So, as we already talked about, masking is the survival strategy. And so there are a lot of situations where. Either the autistic person themselves or neurodivergent person themselves or their parents decide, Hey it's, really important for my child to be able to move through the world without being singled out.

Devon: And maybe they need to learn how to do this. I think. I think that's a really tough thing to talk about because you're still then giving your kid if you're encouraging your kid to mask or you're putting them through a therapy like ABA that really trains them to mask you are unfortunately still setting them up to have their boundaries violated a lot and to make them at a greater risk of being abused.

Devon: Which if they're already a marginalized child, they already have to worry about that, those kinds of things. So it's never something that I would say [00:31:00] I can full throatedly recommend, but I think what instead I think is helpful is to be able to have conversations with your child about masking, because whether they go through ABA or not, they're going to learn some element of masking or see some pressure to mask and and again, if you're a black parent with a black child, you're going to have conversations with them about here's what to do when you're around the police for example, or when a clerk is following you in a store.

Devon: And there are going to be these pressures to mask, even if it's in a less pervasive way. Okay. And I think, regardless, across the board, I think it's really useful to have conversations with your kid about, okay I've noticed that sometimes you do this thing to fit in with your friends or we know we have to do this thing in order to stay safe.

Devon: How does that feel? What are ways that you get a break from having to Be in that environment where you have to do that. Do you have people in your life where you don't have to do that? And [00:32:00] how can we make choices about when we mask to make sure that we are only doing it to preserve our well being and to really stand by what we believe in rather than masking to make everybody like us all the time.

Devon: Right,

Devon: So there might be situations where you mask again to keep yourself safe or where you mask in order to advocate for change at a workplace or a school or on behalf of someone else, where you're making yourself into a little bit more of a presentable version of yourself, but you're not doing it so that you can just be a good.

Devon: Neurotypical person and fit in you're doing it because okay. I really believe in this goal and I'm going to temporarily choose to use these tools when we feel like we're in control of using these tools, then it can be less destructive than when it's just this constant state of I need to hide who I am at all times.

Devon: The goal is to always make sure everybody likes me and nobody thinks I'm weird. That is [00:33:00] very different from okay. I, have some little diplomatic skills I can use when I need to and when I believe in kind of the end goal and I think we we can get our kids there. We can't get them to the reality where they never have to mask or never feel the pressure to mask, unfortunately,

right now, but we can have those kinds of conversations about how can you take charge of Of it and make sure you're not giving too much of yourself up.

Sarah: That's a super useful way to look at it. I think in like just that the whole idea of bringing it out into the open and talking about it, like what it is and and how it affects you and, why you might need to or choose to at some points and when, and then counter at that counteracting that with like, how can you be yours?

Sarah: When can you be yourself? Who, are your people who you can really be yourself with? So what do you think? I've actually. For years because of being in this space we heard it, it used to be, some people still call it like after school restraint [00:34:00] collapse, like that post masking meltdown.

Sarah: And I have seen like homeschoolers say if that happens to your kid, you just shouldn't, they shouldn't be in school. A lot of people don't have that. either don't want to homeschool or they can't homeschool. And that might not be the answer. And I've seen more people starting to talk about, maybe we need to change the schools so that kids don't feel the need to, hold themselves so tightly buttoned down at school.

Sarah: Do you have any thoughts on what kinds of things you think might more move the needle in that direction?

Devon: It's, tough because right now, especially in the U. S. educational institutions are kind Being attacked from all sides, right? There's just a big conservative push to get rid of schools.

Devon: And yet, and then on the, flip side, we have this more progressive kind of neurodiversity kind of mindset of moving towards things like unschooling, where you give kids a lot more autonomy over how they spend their day and what they study [00:35:00] and just all of these wonderful things that again, unfortunately, a lot of families don't have enough resources to do.

Devon: It's a really tricky political ground because just going to use my own city as an example. In Chicago, when public schools get cut, they get replaced with these charter schools that tend to be actually way more controlling of how kids behave. I, taught at a charter school for a little while that literally would not only just require students to sit still, but they had to be sitting in a position with their hands folded, eyes up like, at attention, like little soldiers I've read about those.

Devon: Oh, it's really just not an accessible environment for a whole swath of kids. So we need to be talking about these things and advocating for them. I think some places to get a foothold in are things like sensory friendly rooms or sensory breaks. You're probably not going to be able to flip the whole school to a more horizontal structure tomorrow, but [00:36:00] increasingly we're seeing You know, conferences have sensory friendly rooms that people can retreat to that have dim lights and soft music and pillows to lay down on or spaces like that for neurodivergent kids at like festivals and parades, grocery stores that have sensory friendly hours.

Devon: That's something that you can point to the existence of those things to advocate for, And potentially even collaborate with your school to get it in your kids IEP or something like that to say they should be allowed to get a break and or if they're causing problems if you want to frame it in that way, or if they're having problems, they should be able to get an escape route to this to this space.

Devon: Anything we can do like that to Open up a little bit more autonomy in how kids move around and how they can advocate for their needs. That can make a really big difference. I have a colleague who has an autistic son and the son had some really negative experiences with the school psychologist.

Devon: Just [00:37:00] really pushing just ABA kind of style treatment, things like that on them. And so as part of the kid's IEP, my, my colleague got it written in her son's IEP that that he, Never has to interact with that school psychologist and that he should not be put anywhere near her. Yeah, so there are things you can do institutionally And I'm just I just love her for that because there's our kids are gonna get really negative messages sometimes So if you can get it in their IP that this person is not safe for them Even if this person is an expert or this teacher, you know this paraprofessional whatever, you know You can put some roadblocks up and fight for That's an option too.

Sarah: We have an awesome interview that I did with a, woman who's her name's Heather Clark and she's in this summit and she's did an awesome interview about advocating for your child at school. So if what Devon's saying sounds interesting to you, Heather has given us an awesome roadmap on how to be so fierce in being your child's advocate.

Devon: Oh, that's fantastic. Yeah. The other thing I would say is don't do it alone, [00:38:00] right? We're stronger together. If your kids neurodivergent, you should be trying to find other neurodivergent kids for them to hang out with in general, I believe, so that they feel less broken, so they know their people.

Devon: And also you're going to benefit so much from knowing other parents who are navigating this stuff. If you are collectively documenting issues and making the push together and organizing for it, you can get a lot more changes made than if you're just requesting a change yourself as one individual. And I think that's also where we're going to see a really big change is the more parents are on board with this and caregivers are on board with this.

Devon: The more we're going to start seeing, more freedom in, the classroom and in the school as a whole, and more resources that actually work with how the kid functions rather than trying to make them function a specific way. way.

Sarah: I love that. Was there anything I said to you before we started taping that when I'm interviewing an expert in an area, sometimes I don't know that I've got all the right questions and were there any answers that you wanted to give me [00:39:00] that I didn't ask you a question for or anything that you think it's important for parents to keep in mind when they're trying to understand?

Sarah: Yeah. They're neurodivergent child's masking.

Devon: Yeah. I think relevant to the last point. And some of the things we've been talking about one thing that's really popular now for a lot of neurodivergent kids or social skills groups and things of that nature, they've they're seen often as like way gentler than ABA or things like that, but they're still based in this idea of we have to teach a kid how to, socialize on neurotypical terms and the goal is them having more neurotypical friends.

Devon: So that's always something I like to caution against. I think as a parent, if you find yourself still, mystified by your kid, you're still trying to figure out how they work and how to better meet their needs. Again, you both want to put that kid around as many other Neurodivergent kids, as you can find look up a local autistic self advocacy network, chapter, meet [00:40:00] adults for your own sake and for your kid's sake, find autistic adults and ADHD er adults and get to know them and hear their stories and let your kids meet them so that they can envision a future for themselves.

Devon: It's a lot easier, I think, to understand their perspective once you do hear from other people who have been through it and you see their way of being as more normalized instead of them as just the weird. One that stands out in a world that isn't built for them. It can really flip a lot of your thinking on its head.

Devon: The more you just expose yourself to as much of that knowledge and that's meeting people. It's also just reading books, watching YouTube videos by

autistic people about their lives, just like consuming as many life stories as you can and getting those people into your life and your kid's life can make a really big difference and help you like have a lot of like aha moments of insight about things.

Sarah: I've read a bunch of fantastic memoirs written by autistic adults, and they often talk about their experience as children, what it was like growing up autistic, either identified or not. And I thought that, I think that [00:41:00] would be really useful for parents. I'm partial to books myself, but I'm sure there are other good things out there, but I think that's and, honestly, probably if we're talking to parents of neurodivergent children, Probably at least one of those parents is also neurodivergent themselves.

Sarah: So they may be having some ahas as they're going through this all of these interviews.

Devon: Absolutely. Yeah. Some of the books that I memoirs in that vein that I would strongly recommend a non fiction book. Prahlad's Secret Life of the Black Aspie is really great. It does talk about his childhood in this very beautiful kind of poetic way.

Devon: Laura Kate Dale's book Uncomfortable Labels, My Life as a Gay Autistic Trans Woman is really fantastic. Again, it talks about her childhood a lot. And Fern Bathgate's strong female character, that memoir, is also just like really funny and approachable.

Sarah: Oh good, I haven't read any of those, so I'll have to add those to my reading list.

Sarah: Oh

Devon: Yeah, they're all great. They're they we're, very blessed now to finally be in an era where a [00:42:00] lot of autistic people are getting to tell our stories and yeah, so there's so much to learn and see oneself reflected in.

Sarah: Yeah. Yeah. That's great. Thank you so much. This has been really helpful.

Sarah: I think it's probably helped a lot of parents and thank you for helping us to understand masking better.

Devon: Yeah, of course. Yeah. I'm glad, to be here and I'm glad parents are, really getting, again, it's been a real tide change in the last 10 years. People are really a lot more curious and open to the idea of neurodivergency.

Devon: More and more people are seeing, are recognizing, hey, this kid isn't broken. They just have been failed on a larger scale, and things can be tough at times, but anybody who's, here and thinking about this stuff is part of that change, and that really matters.

Sarah: It totally matters. I was talking to someone in Australia who's we were talking about assessments for this, and she said, I, she said, like with a twinkle in her eye, and she said, I can't wait to see what this generation of kids grows up to be like, it's going to make me [00:43:00] cry. But like all these kids who are growing up with a much different idea of themselves as neurodivergent than generations in the past, growing up without the same at least the same number of like mental health challenges and, it's, really cool.

Sarah: It's really cool to think about.

Devon: Yeah there's, a quote circling around, I can't remember who it's by, but the idea is that we've never seen just what autism looks like, we've only seen what autism and trauma looks like. Yes. And I think maybe in a couple of generations we'll be able to see what just autism raised in an autistic affirming community could actually look like and what it would be like to have grown up not thinking that you're broken.

Sarah: Yeah. I bet that existed. In other times and places in certain ways, don't you think?

Devon: I think so. I think, definitely the world is less accessible to us than many different [00:44:00] times in the past, just on a basic sensory level. It is just, we're, here on our computers that are overstimulation machines all the time and we don't get like contact with like physical reality and like being in the earth, and I think that's why we, part of why we see so much more neurodivergence now is just because people are crying out in discomfort in ways that they wouldn't have been, they still would have been, had the neurotype that they had in the past, but they wouldn't have experienced themselves as disabled in like the social sense.

Devon: It's the

Sarah: Environment that brings out the disability. Is that what you're saying? Or a mismatch

Devon: Like disability can be created by a mismatch between what you are and how society is built. It's the same with

Sarah: ADHD too. I think good environments, bad environments for that neurotype.

Devon: Absolutely.

Sarah: Thank you so much. It's been a pleasure. And thanks everyone for tuning in and be sure to hop over to the Facebook group where we're going to [00:45:00] have a chance to interact with our guests. And for, You, most importantly, to interact with other parents who also have complex kids and who are on this journey along with you.

Sarah: And thanks again, Devon.

Devon: Yeah, of course.

Sarah: Thanks for listening today. I hope you really enjoyed that interview from last year's flourish with your complex child summit.

Sarah: If you want to sign up for free today, don't forget to go to re-imagine peaceful parenting.com/summit. Hope to see you at the summit.

Sarah: Thanks for listening to this week's episode. I hope you found this conversation insightful and exactly what you needed in this moment. Be sure to subscribe to the show on your favorite podcast platform and leave us a rating and review on Apple Podcasts. Remember that I'm rooting for you. I see you out there showing up for your kids and doing the best you can.

Sarah: Sending hugs over the airwaves today. Hang in there. You've got this.