



**Episode #120:**

**A Back-to-School Special with  
Understood's Amanda Morin**

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Amanda: I've never really been a fan of just dropping a kid in a situation and letting them figure it out, but I'm totally a fan of providing a clear idea of what the expectations may be in any given situation, stepping back and not jumping in before they need help to meet those expectations, so I don't think we're setting kids up to fail. Just that you can build the scaffolding, show your child how to navigate it and stand back from a distance watching them scale it.

Debbie: Welcome to the to the TiLT Parenting podcast, a podcast featuring interviews and conversations aimed at inspiring, informing, and supporting parents raising differently wired kids. I'm your host, Debbie Reber. This week, I'm doing a special back to school episode to help families preparing for easing into the coming school year with as much confidence and serenity as possible. I'm grateful to be welcoming back to the podcast, Amanda Morin, a writer, parent advocate, a former educator and the content development manager at one of my favorite go to resources, Understood. Amanda and I cover a lot of ground in this episode in looking at the different potential concerns and stressors for kids this time of year, which will vary depending on their age and grade level and we'll talk about how we can support our kids through them, how to kick the year off on the right foot with our child's teachers, how much support and scaffolding our kids need, and how we as parents can best prepare ourselves too.

Debbie: After you've listened to the episode, I recommend you go to [www.bts.understood.org](http://www.bts.understood.org). BTS is short for back to school, so again, it's [bts.understood.org](http://bts.understood.org) and that's where you will find Understood's back to school toolkit which features expert vetted, tips, tools, and videos that can help you in your child. Feel more confident and prepared for the first day of class.

And before I get to the episode, if you haven't checked out my book *Differently Wired* yet, I invite you to download the first chapter and the table of contents AT [www.tiltparenting.com/book](http://www.tiltparenting.com/book). I have been bowled away by the response from our parenting community so far and I'm thrilled to hear from parents who say the book is helping them feel optimistic and confident about raising their exceptional kids. If you have read it already and you like what you read, I would be grateful if you could take five minutes to head over to Amazon and leave a review for the book. Reviews not only help people deciding whether or not the book is for them get a sense of its value, but having a lot of reviews makes it more likely the book will show up in searches when people are looking for parenting books in the general area of raising atypical kids.

And lastly, I have had the pleasure of doing some virtual book club visits with some online groups who are reading differently wired as a group. I love doing these kinds of visits over Facebook live. It's a great chance for me to learn more about what's resonating with people and it gives readers a chance to explore some of the places where they might be feeling a little bit stuck. If you're reading the book as a group online and you'd like me to join you for a live or a chat, just send me a message via the TiLT Parenting facebook page where you can email me at [debbie@tiltparenting.com](mailto:debbie@tiltparenting.com) and we'll see what we can work out and if you're



looking to read it as a group for an in person book club, I would love to find a way to Skype into your group if we can make that happen. So if you go to [tiltparenting.com/book](http://tiltparenting.com/book), you'll find a section that says is your book club reading *Differently Wired*? So just click on the learn more button there and you can learn more. So thank you so much. And now here is my conversation with Amanda.

Debbie: Hello Amanda, welcome back to the podcast.

Amanda Hi! Thanks for having me back. It's good to talk to you again.

Debbie: I know. Well we just saw each other in New York not too long ago, so it's fun to be now having this conversation which is going to be all about back to school because it's that time of year.

Amanda: That's crazy that it's that time of year again

Debbie: it just seems to always be that time of year somehow. I don't know how that happens, but before we get into the conversation, can you just take a few minutes to introduce yourself and who you are so our listeners have some context.

Amanda: Sure. So that's an interesting question. I never quite know how to start that. I'm Amanda Morin. Like you. I'm a parent of differently wired kids. I have three kids, two of whom I would say are differently wired, although I think probably all three are. I'm an author. I've written a number of books on education and special education. And I'm an expert and writer for [understood.org](http://understood.org), which is a project at the National Center for Learning Disabilities for parents of kids with learning and attention issues, which is sort of in that differently wired bucket.

Debbie: Yes. There's a lot of alignment with, with us and Understood and I so appreciate that perspective in a relationship and that's how we met as well. So I'm so happy to have you back on the show today. Alright. I think we should just dive in because this is a time of year. I know, you know, I'm homeschooling now. We have our own back to school transition. It's true for anyone, but I know that if your kid is in a more traditional school setting, this is a time of year that can strike fear in the hearts of parents. It can create anxiety for kids. So maybe let's just start there. Why is this time in particular such a tricky time, especially for our kids? Like what are the different things that we're dealing with?

Amanda: Sure. You know, and I always think this is such an interesting question in part for because for my two kids who are differently wired the summer is the trickier time for them then back to school, but I think it's for the same reasons that kids have anxiety about back to school. For them it's the transition to the unknown and for my kids, school has that predictable routine that they look forward to in summer doesn't, which may say much more about how I handle summer than anything else. But you know, for other kids at school routine is, it's so fraught with what they feel like opportunities for failure, which makes me sad to say out loud, but I think that's it. There's new teachers, new classmates, new schedules, like in all these new demands, which is like a ton to prepare for and absorb, right? It's not a place that they always feel most confident, you know, these are kids who



are working hard not only to get through the work and the social demands of the day and navigate the new spaces, but they're not always spelled out those expectations and those new demands. And I think it's easy to forget that differently wired kids they may be putting in twice as much work for the same payoff as other kids. And that's anxiety provoking and a lot of waves and exhausting I think.

Debbie: Yeah. Well I also know that a lot of kids, especially with attention issues may be on medication during the school year. And I know a lot of parents take their kids off of medication for the summer. And I'm wondering if that, in your experience, is that something that also can create some anxiety or just some unsettledness that, you know, if that's even a word unsettledness. I'm just gonna add that to the dictionary.

Amanda: Um, and I think yeah, I think that, we call that a 'medication vacation', which is just like saying out loud just as much as an unsettledness, I like 'medication vacation', I think. Yeah, I think that there are parents and kids who do take that time off during the summer from taking medication. And so there's a little trepidation about starting it back up again, not only because that may be something kids have to take at school and then that's one more way they're set apart, you know, they're going to the nurse to take the medication or whatever. But also there is sort of this, what am I like when I take medication? I may not remember that from a kid's perspective. I may not remember what that feels like. Or there may be side effects that I don't recall. Hopefully if your child's on a good medication regimen, then there aren't side effects that affect anything in school, but there is sort of this, this place where you start thinking about, am I going to be a different person? Am I going to think differently? Is this going to help? Is this, you know, all of these kinds of things. One way that I think that parents can make that a little bit easier is to cut short the medication vacation. So before you're going back to school that couple of weeks before, make sure that that's the time when you're, you know, working with your doctor to get your child back into the medication routine to make sure that everything's working smoothly.

Debbie: That's good advice. So I want to talk about what parents can do to actually support this transition, but before we get into more specifics. So we just talked about kids who are on medication and that medication vacation, which is, yes, a much better term than what I was using. Could you just talk a little bit about, you know, I know on Understood's website there are some really helpful articles regarding the transition for elementary school students versus middle school students versus high school students. So what are some of the things that our kids are dealing with in those different ages?

Amanda: Sure. And actually what's really cool is that we've put together a back to school tool that specifically deals with those things so you don't have to search through all of the content on Understood which there's actually an enormous amount of so we have a back to school tool that we've put together where you can sort of click your child's age group, what you think they're struggling with, whether they have an IEP or a 504 plan or not, and get personalized resources, which is super helpful. And I'll make sure that we give you the information for that. But so, you



know, and it varies, it varies between on the child and their age and many elementary school children are sort of anxious about things that don't even occur to us as parents. You know, they worry, they won't see their summer friends as often again and they have to reestablish school friendships or make new ones and things like the bus are a big concern for kids and I think we don't always give that the consideration it deserves.

Amanda: You know, who am I going to sit with? When is the bus going to come? Do I know all of these kinds of things? How do I know when to get off the stop? What if I forget which bus I'm on? Meeting new teachers, not sharing when lunchtime is, all of those kinds of things that we take for granted as being adults I think are really high stressors for kids in elementary school. And in middle and high school. My Gosh, that's just such a rough age anyway. Whether or not you're going back to school and it's when kids start having those different teachers throughout the day, they have to travel between classes, meet all sorts of kids. They're dealing with social pressures of group activities and and some of them, my gosh, this like makes me startled to say because I have a high schooler some of them are dealing with dating even. Right. So they're really all of these things and they may even have to do things like figuring out how to get to and from their locker between classes and as an aside, this is really interesting because I could never figure out how to do a combination lock ever in my entire career of being in school - ever. I think I left my locker open and it was really insecure, but I just couldn't do it. And so when Understood published this video and cheat sheet about how to do a combination log, I just about cried with joy because I could give it to my son instead of having to figure out how to teach how to do it.

Debbie: That's awesome. That's actually an anxiety dream that I have often is not being able to get the lock or open forgetting the combination. Yeah. That I still have that to this day.

Amanda: That makes me feel a lot better.

Debbie: You're not alone

Amanda: I'm not alone! That's part of our mantra here, right? Like everybody's mantra. I think that the other thing that I would point out is that this is that time when we start asking kids to be more independent and take charge of their own learning and not all kids are organized and emotionally ready to do that and that can cause a lot of stress. So it's daunting to have to self advocate in a time of your life when you really want to draw as little attention to yourself as possible. And those are things that I think we can help set kids up for success in really subtle ways, but I think it's worth noting that your child's trajectory may be different. So when everybody's saying, well, hey, this is when everybody's more independent, it's okay to say, my child's not ready to be as independent, but I'm going to set them up to be as independent as I could set them up to be.

Debbie: I love that. That is, I was just having a conversation with someone on facebook about this and you know, the timeline piece, uh, you know, and respecting the timeline that our kids are on and I really love that because yeah, I think there are



these ideas that when you're in third grade things really get ramped up because this is what's going on and by middle school, they have to be able to do this, this and this and by high school and I think it's great to remember that our kids are going to need more scaffolding and we don't have to buy into the message that they need to be able to do this independently by this age because that just creates so much more anxiety for everybody.

Amanda: Absolutely. Absolutely. And I think that that it's a way for us as parents to sort of let go of those expectations a little bit too, to be able to say, I know who my child is and I'm going to support who my child is as opposed to who people think my child should be. For me, that's been something that's been hard to do, but the most freeing thing is to be able to recognize that my kids are individuals on their individual timelines and that I need to support them based on who they are and not who I think they should be.

Debbie: The lesson we get to keep on learning, right. So, there's so much we could talk about and as you know, the list of questions I sent you in advance is two pages long, so I wanted to try to unfold this as logically as possible. I'd love to talk just for a moment about the younger kids like the elementary school kids because a lot of the listeners of this podcast have kids in those early elementary school years or even older preschool years. And I want to talk about this idea of having conferences with teachers ahead of time. What are your thoughts on that and how do we go about doing that in a way that works?

Amanda: That's really tricky, isn't it? And it's interesting because you did send me some questions ahead of time and I started thinking about that one and I thought about how my answer would be different now. So I have an elementary child still and then I have one in high school and then I have one who's college age, so it's ridiculous. Right? So my aunt would have been different with the older one and the middle one than it is now. And you know, I'm a former teacher and I'm a parent and I'm sort of always of the opinion that the first contact between parents and teachers should be around something positive. Right. I don't think a teacher should ever have their first contact with a parent with a phone call that says, you know, something went really badly and they also think parents shouldn't have their first contact as I need you to know something about my kid. Right? I think that there's this balance because you can set everybody up for success or you can set them up for failure. And in some ways, I think that that summer conference idea has the potential to, to set people up for failure because it's sets expectations of who your child is and they may not be that once they get into the classroom. So I mean to that end, I think it's sometimes better to do an introduction letter than to set up a meeting. And um, that's actually one of the resources we have on understood. I think I may have written downloadable introduction letters that you can sort of fill in and send out. And if it's something a lot of parents and kids do and not just parents of kids who have, are differently wired, have ADHD, have all of these things. So it's not an unexpected thing to do to send a letter. And you can keep it light. You can let the teacher know you're available to them as, as needed. You can share strategies of what have worked well in the past, which again I think is nothing another parent might not do. And then you could ask things like, you know, if you have questions about the IEP or



504 plan, feel free to reach out and that gives sort of a subtle heads up to be looking for that plan, but also not reinforcing any preconceived notions about you or your child. Right. And I think that this is one of those your mileage may vary if it works for you to meet with the teacher, I think that's, that's something you should do. For me personally, I'd like to take a light touch and then go from there.

Debbie: Okay. So that's good to know. And that is not at all what I did. I was like, we painted a big target on our kids back.

Amanda: That's totally a point. It's not what I did the first time around, the third time around, if I don't want people to go, Oh Mrs. Morin's coming into the school that I need to take a lighter touch. Yeah.

Debbie: Well, and I also, I always struggled with that balance of what is too much information, you know, and, and making sure the teacher has the support that they need, but also not wanting my kid to go into school with that target on their back or already these preconceived notions about who he or she is because as you said, they change, right? They are always growing and evolving and so we shouldn't also assume this is who they're going to be that next year.

Amanda: And they're different with us than they are with teachers sometimes. You know what I mean? That's just the nature of parent child relationships. I do think though, it's worth noting that if you have a really anxious child, a child who may be super anxious to go to school, even to the point where they may not go in the door, that's something you probably need to talk to the school about ahead of time. That's a piece that's well worth having a conversation about. So, you know, I don't want to neglect that and say, you know, if you have a child who's very, very anxious, it's well worth making sure people are at the support in place to make sure that the teacher, you're right, this teacher needs support in place but also have the supports to make sure your child can be successful getting in the door.

Debbie: Yeah, that's great. And then what about the prep that we are going to provide for our kids? And again, I know this will vary year to year and on their age, but especially with anxiety, you brought that up, right? So do we want to do role playing? Do you know how much information is too much information? You know, sometimes talking a lot about something in advance can actually heightened the anxiety. So what are your thoughts on that?

Amanda: So, you know, it's funny, I feel like this is a cop out answer but you're absolutely right that it depends on knowing your child and what's going to serve them best. And it does for some kids that beans more anxiety, but, you know, in our house, but we, I have a what if child, he always does the, you know, what if this happens, what if that happens and what if this happens. And so what I've done, if I've, I've turned it into a game that we now call the what if versus what is game in our house. So for example, if he says to me, what if I don't know anybody at my bus stop, I'll say, you know, I hear that, that worries you. Let's also talk about the, what is, you know, that there are two other guys in our neighborhood who take the bus to school. So they're going to be at your bus stop. Do you know that? Right? So we're talking, I'm acknowledging and validating what he's worried



about. Not dismissing it, but also helping him to see that there are other ways to approach the situation. It's been fairly successful. Um, it's one of those things I think, Whoa, I just tried that on a whim and it worked out really well. And I like it. But you know, I think it's important to listen to our kids and try not to transfer our own anxieties to them, which sounds super easy. Right? And now you have to ask me how well I actually do that. I'm not as well as I'd like, but instead of suggesting things that your child might be worried about, I think it's easier to ask them to tell you what they're worried about. So instead of saying, you know, are you're worried about meeting a new teacher, you can say, are there any things about going back to school that are making you anxious that you're worried about?

Amanda: And then to respect that these are real worries for them even though they don't sound like a big deal to you is really key. And then I think the other thing that I'd suggest is be careful not to solve a problem that a child's not asking you to solve. And this is something I've had to learn with having teenagers, is I'm very often saying, okay, do you want advice here? Or do you want me to just hear you? And I say it in a very sincere and genuine way. I, it didn't sound sincere and genuine when I just said it now, but I really just want to know is it about being heard or is it about coming up with solutions? So I think think you take your cues from your child and then you find ways to hear them and also help them at the same time.

Debbie: Yeah. And that's a great thing that, you know, with our partner, if we have a partner, right? I'm saying that to my husband, you know, I don't want advice, I just want to be heard or whatever. So I think that's just a respectful way to be in the world and sometimes we give our friends and partners that courtesy but not our kids. So that's a really nice reminder. And one of the things you're just reminding me that I, that's similar to that, that I've started saying with Asher is like, do you just need to vent right now? You know, just, that's totally fine. Like I can just listen if you just need to get it out. But if you also want to problem solve out, I'll do that with you, but letting them decide.

Amanda: Right. And I think that that's so powerful. Giving our kids agency is something that's really hard to do, but just in the end, we're all trying to raise confident and successful human beings. Right? That's the end goal. And so giving them as much agency as possible and empowering them while it's really hard as a parent I think is going to serve everybody well in the end.

Debbie: Yeah. It's the tricky thing, right? This is something that came up. I did a facebook live with a group yesterday about some of the concepts in my book and this idea of just the scaffolding and how much is too much. And, and I always think of Jessica Lehey's book *The Gift of Failure* and these are things I'm constantly thinking about and trying to figure out. And I. It does depend on who your child is in really knowing them so well. But you know, let's then talk about older kids. So kids in middle school or high school where there is an expectation that they're going to be more independent or just the pressure is higher in terms of what they're expected to do during the day. So, and I, I know this is going to vary depending on the kid, but do you have thoughts about how we as parents can support them and set up scaffolding based on what they need in school?



Amanda: Yeah. You know, ideally you've already started building some of that scaffolding and you have a good team around your child who's willing to let them make mistakes because that's huge. That, you know, you talked about *The Gift of Failure* and that's so huge. I love that book by the way, because it, it teaches that idea that the failure is an okay thing. Making mistakes is okay, but what happens when you make those mistakes? You propped yourself back up and you're off to a good start. So you know, I think one of the pieces of scaffolding is building the people who are going to monitor that, right? Making sure that there's somebody who's keeping track. I'm never really a fan of just dropping a kid in a situation and letting them figure it out, but I'm totally a fan of providing a clear idea of what the expectations may be in any given situation, stepping back and not jumping in for they need help to meet those expectations. So I don't think we're setting kids up to fail. Just that you can build the scaffolding, show your child how to navigate it and stand back from a distance, watching them, scale it, you know, build the systems and then give them control over the time. So I'm trying to think of an example is if my struggle is whether or not, do I remind my child to do his homework or do I trust that it'll do it or not do it and then have to deal with the consequences of it. It may be a little bit of both at the beginning of the year. Maybe we set up a homework routine that I remind him about and then slowly pull back from. And you know, unfortunately or fortunately, depending on your point of view, at some point we need to trust that our kids are strong enough to manage the consequences of their own actions, but they need to know what those consequences are gonna be and I think that's where scaffolding comes in is making sure they know the expectations and what the consequences are. And then I think having faith that we as parents are giving them the tools to navigate life. So some of it's about building scaffolding for your child and some of it's about trusting yourself and I think they go hand in hand in a way that we don't always acknowledge.

Debbie: Yeah. And I would just acknowledge this is a conversation that any parent with any child is, you know, is important to happen in their lives because this is part of parenting is helping our kids launch and letting go more and more each year and giving them those opportunities. But I really love that having faith in what you've set up, but then that trusting yourself piece, that's a really nice way to put it.

Amanda: Yeah. And I think it's all easier said than done. Like I think it's really important. I always feel the need to say that because I listen to myself and I'm like, that's really good advice. Do I take my own advice? And want to make sure that I'm saying to the people who are listening, this all sounds wonderful, but I know it's hard and, and I know that we are, we're, we're all going to fail and we need to learn from our own mistakes and pick ourselves back up and try again.

Debbie: Absolutely. I just wanted to go back to one thing you mentioned. You talked about building, you know, the support for our kids and the people who will monitor, you know, what's going on with them that isn't necessarily us. Can you give me an example of who else might be part of that support system for them?



Amanda: Sure. And I think that's often, I mean there, there are many different ways to answer that question. Sometimes it's friends for older kids, their friends are like a really good support system and I think just sort of reminding your child how you can use your friends as a support system is really helpful and then if you know their parents just sort of like saying, hey, so this year my kids working on this and if your child seems to be really good at it, let's see how that can work together as a team. But I also think that there's this team at school, right? You have teachers and case managers and social workers and principals. I mean there are a lot of people at a school who can be a good support, but all your child really needs is one that he trusts and I think that that's, that's key is making sure you know who that person your child will go to if you're not the person there available for them. Who can they go to? And just one person makes a big difference in. Sometimes when your child's switching schools. It may even be a teacher from the old school, that's funny from old school, your teacher from school who can help introduce your child to somebody at the new school who's sort of similar to them and the way they work.

Debbie: That's great. I want to talk about this advocacy piece. I know that that is a big goal that we have for our kids as they get older to learn how to advocate for themselves and that is also something that comes up a lot in the parents I hear from there is that place that a lot of kids find themselves where even if they're proud of who they are or they at one point I felt really comfortable with their difference. The middle school years, they may not be as much, but that's also a time when we want them to start advocating more. Can you talk about that self advocacy piece, like what are some of the challenges in supporting our kids and learning those skills and then any strategies around doing that?

Amanda: Sure, and I think the first thing that I want to note is that we have self advocacy scripts on Understood that I've helped to put together and write, because sometimes in the moment a child may go blank and they may not remember what it is you've practiced with them. So we have some of those sort of cheat sheet, you know, whatever. But I also, it's critical for me to see that. I think self advocacy and I think you're saying this too, is a skill that every kid should learn no matter what the circumstances of their lives. Right? So hopefully in my eyes it's that part of raising responsible confident humans who know that they're ready to take on the world. And because of that, I don't always see it as a skill that's sort of solely be taught to our kids.

Our in quotation marks, of course, you know, and I think in some ways it's part of an ongoing conversation in general about how do you talk to people about how, who you are, what you need, what you feel good about, what you'd like to improve. And I think that really clearly one of the things is it's modeling and as parents by doing this out loud self-talk, kind of sharing a better day. So for example, oh rats, so, you know, I totally forgot to write down the shopping list. I don't do well remembering things about lists. Maybe just start taking a picture of the list on my phone before we leave the house. So you're talking through what you feel like you should have done and you're advocating for what your needs are or you know, at work today I had this really kind of tough meeting and I didn't



agree with what this person was saying and I really wasn't sure if I should speak up, but I spoke up and I, I think I did a really good job of acknowledging where he was coming from, but also telling him how I do this project differently. So it's showing your kids that advocacy comes in small ways and make ways, you know, and I think with kids who have accommodations is always good for them to know what those accommodations are. And it's interesting because I don't think that parents always tell kids about their accommodations, especially younger kids and I'm not sure why we don't do that and I include myself in that, that there are times where I forgot to do that, but if you know what your accommodations are, it gets easier for kids to ask for them outright or by a gentle reminder like, oh, if I have a substitute today, oh by the way, I always type my, my assignment on the computer instead of writing it by hand, you know? So if they know that that's something that they have an accommodation for, they can just be really gentle and reminding it.

Amanda: And then there are these other little things that if we set kids up to do little things for themselves, we're setting up to be self advocates, for example. Anything from like doing your own laundry to ordering food at a restaurant that's advocacy. You're, you're starting it. So I think that if you take it out of this is just something you do at school and this is something you do in life. It's a really good way to start those skills. That was a very long answer to.

Debbie: No, I like that. Especially the restaurant piece too. I mean I think that's so important that it's something that, you know,, and I have Asher do that in Dutch here, you know, which he's not always happy about doing and then if the right thing doesn't come out or they put whipped cream and the hot chocolate and he specifically said no slagroom on that hot chocolate, you know, well then you should let them know like you deserve to have the drink you ordered. So I love that you can do it in other, in other ways.

Amanda: Yeah. My little one orders pickles without pickles on anything. So he really hates pickles. So in restaurants when he's ordering he'll even say I'll have French toast but no pickles please like. So he's clear that he doesn't want it.

Debbie: He knows he knows what he wants and who doesn't want. That's awesome. Can you just, just to, to expand on your last answer, I just want to know if you have thoughts around kids who are feeling insecure around their differences and not wanting to, I don't know, maybe even feeling like they shouldn't need to have these extra supports or they don't want to be known for them or that part of their identity. Do you have thoughts about that?

Amanda: Yeah, that one that I do and I think about this one a lot and I wish I had a really good answer for it and I don't think that I do. One of the things I do think is, you know, those are kids where we want to make sure they understand that everybody's different. You know, everybody has differences. Everybody has things they're good at, everybody has things that they're bad at. And I think those are where you put the supports in behind the scenes where you're letting a teacher know he's really not willing to speak up. He's not willing to say this, so I'm going to need your help in monitoring that and whether it's a matter of really



subtle signal so your child is not one who wants to read out loud, so maybe the signal is he just sort of closes his book or he puts a, you know, a card down on his desk or something like that.

I think it's, it's important to have other ways to communicate and I just, I think that as kids they go through phases at one point you know when kids are younger, everybody's just who they are and it's no big deal. And then as they get older everybody wants to be not noticed. Right. And then as they get older, again they're taking on that identity and I think it's really key to remember that kids just go through these phases of feeling confident and not confident and that the more we can point out that everybody's just their own person, the more it helps kids to just feel okay about being who they are. And that's why I'm a really big fan of sort of talking to your kids about who you are as a parent, not as a parent to them, but like as a person who you are and how you feel about who you are and what you wish you could do differently or wished you or what you do really poorly, you know.

For example, my husband may say I, I have a little bit of road rage when I drive. So I think it's important for my kids to know that this is not a strength of mine. You know, talking back to traffic is really not my best, but shows them that as a person I have things that as a person am flawed, things that I don't, that I don't feel good about. But then I have other things that I feel really strongly about. It's just so tough.

Debbie: Well also, you know, I love that reminder and that's definitely something I believe deeply in. It's just you know, our kids are paying attention to everything and so everything really is an opportunity to model and to share and to make an impression on them and it's also just good to know that these things don't happen overnight, you know, that we may not see them becoming more competent or vocal or you know, advocating for themselves in a couple of weeks time, but when we consistently do, as you're suggesting and we consistently model and talk openly about all these ideas that everyone's working on things and we're all on our own journey, that overtime, that message will get through.

Amanda: And I, and I think it's, I think you hit it on the head with that ongoing conversation piece. It's not one conversation, it's a conversation over your child's lifetime. Right? And it depends on their ability to where they are in their lives. And developmentally that conversation may be really short and it doesn't have to be a long conversation. I mean, we, we know when kids aren't interested in talking anymore, right? We can tell that they're just done listening. They're done talking. And I think respecting those cues is really important because otherwise you're just sort of hammering away at something and it's making it less likely that they're going to listen. So they are having these short, ongoing conversations is just so key.

Debbie: Yeah. I think the media screws us with that because I'm always looking for the Brady Bunch moments like, or the afterschool special conversations. Like we're going to have one of those awesome heart to hearts, you know, and you're right.



It tends to be in like a little comment here or there capitalizing on moments and then just kind of moving on.

Amanda: I just had this conversation with somebody about the how well she's able to speak to our kids when she's not looking at them. And it fascinated me. She said that's why it works well to have conversations in the car because they're not watching your reaction and they just tell you things that they wouldn't usually tell you. And I thought, that's brilliant. We need to take more car rides in our house so we can have a very special episode of the Amanda Show.

Debbie: That's awesome. So, you know, you talked earlier about starting a new school and I just want to touch upon that and see if you had any specific thoughts on that. As you know, I know this is a reality for a lot of our listeners that their kids may be starting a new school this year because of moving or reason where they were disinvited at a previous school where they just needed to find a better fit. So do you have any specific tips related to a new school start?

Amanda: Yeah, this one actually, this one actually strikes me very personally to. We switched school districts years ago, not more years ago now that I can say it wasn't just recently but not too long ago. And one of my sons had had such a difficult experience at the old school that he just didn't trust teachers anymore. And I thought that was very valid actually from his experience. So one of the things we had to do was let the teachers at the new school know that, you know, explained that his reasoning was valid. Ask them to give them some time to feel respected and safe enough to trust them. So that was really important. And you know, knowing a new school, you know, I always think it's important that the things that we talk about taking a tour of the school, knowing where things are, those are always key and important and I think things that parents think about anyway, but I think just that emotional tour is important too. To think through what a new school looks like and what new friends might look like. For me as a parent, the one thing that I found was really key was to give my kids a safe place to be that wasn't around school and that was home, right?

Amanda: You always have to have a place that, that soft place to land. And for awhile if new school is a tricky thing, making home sort of a school free zone. You don't have to talk about school. If it's not going well, you don't have to worry about, you know, we don't have to do this now. It's okay if you just want to be home and just be the place where you feel most comfortable. That's okay too. You know, so I think a lot in a case like that, a lot of the prep work is behind the scenes with the school and setting up a support system that believes in your child and your child's experience. And then I think the other thing is, you know, for a lot of kids social, that social piece of it is super, super hard and they worry about making new friends and all of those kinds of things.

Right. And I think to some degree it's talking to your kids about what friendship looks like is really a big deal. To me. I've always wanted to make sure that my kids understand that you can have different types of friends, that you get to decide what friendship looks like for you and that you don't have to accept anything less than what you want from a friend. Because I think that a lot of kids



are like, this kid spends time with me so they're my friend. But I think it's important to give them this idea that you get to decide what friendship looks like, you know, and that because it's naive to teach kids that all friends are all kids, are gonna, be friends with all kids such as not sort of the way life works, you know. So I think one of the things about starting new school is, is reminding your kids that there may be kids that you play with the neighborhood and kids that you play with at school and have over afterschool. There will be kids that you hang out with in school, but you wouldn't think to have over kids who like all the same things as you could do and maybe things that you only have one thing in common with. But that's a big enough thing that it can build into a friendship. So I think there are all these components to it and they're all, they're so complicated. But for me that social piece is really huge. Is Making sure your child setup for social success in a way that says like, well, I'm not expecting you to be me. I'm you to be you and you get to make the decisions about what's best for you.

Debbie: That's great. And I think there's also a lots of opportunities there for conversations about values and also self advocacy within friendships. Right? And that you get to decide as you said, who you're going to spend time with, but also what is okay in terms of how you're treated and, and that kind of thing. Lots of fodder there for great conversations.

Amanda: Yeah, absolutely. And I think as, as adults we struggle with, so the earlier we can teach it to kids, the better we're setting them up, you know, I, I know I still struggle with some of those things as an adult.

Debbie: Yeah, absolutely. So as kind of a wrapping up question, if we think about parents who are listening to this, you know, a lot of the strategies have been about helping that transition for kids. Any advice or strategies for parents who are feeling anxiety around this time of year and how they can enter into the school year and is kind of a confident, most peaceful way as possible?

Amanda: Oh, I love that you asked me that because it assumes I figured that out. Truthfully, I think sometimes acknowledging the chaos can go a long way. Right? I think acknowledging that it's not going to be easy. It may be a little chaotic that you're, you know, if you're going to count for what may cause you anxiety, you can work backwards to have fixes for that anxiety, you know, it can give you a way to have some forethought. Maybe do a run through or two if you know that what's going to cause you anxiety is getting out the door in the morning and you're all rushing to get out the door. Nobody's synchronized. Then I think it gives you the opportunity to think through what a reasonable timetable is or you know, a schedule. So not everybody's stuck in the bathroom or the kitchen nerves or things going to make you kind of crazy and more anxious. I think you can sort through.

I think the other thing is, I'm not quite sure how to say this, but I think there are things that are always going to make us anxious and I think the dialing back and looking at what you can fix and what you could help and what you can't and what's just going to be an anxiety provoker for you. It's really helpful. I make lists, right? A worry list of things that thinks that I'm worried about, that I can control



things that I'm worried about, that I might be able to control eventually and things that I'm just never going to be able to control and I've got to worry about just having an in front of me helps me a lot because I can sort through water mine what's mine to own, what's mine I need to work through with my kids and what's mine that's just something I know I'm never gonna be able to stop worrying about, that's helpful to me and I, I don't know how that helpful that would be for other people.

I just think recognizing that this is not the rest of your life. Right? This is a moment of your entire life and it's not like a test that you're going to fail or you're going to succeed at that. You always have new opportunities to always have new chances. If something goes badly, it goes badly and you can move forward and try again, and I think those things are so hard as parents for us to keep in mind that our anxiety is like we just have to get it right. It has to be perfect. It has to go well. I want my kid to be happy. I want everything to be exactly the way it should be, and knowing that you always have more chances. Tomorrow's another day, next week is another week. Things are gonna change over time. I think that's just so key and then just being prepared, right? Knowing where you can find support, knowing you're not alone, that you have a TiLT Parenting to turn to and Understood, to turn to our next door neighbor to turn to knowing that you have somebody to talk these things through with is just huge too.

Debbie: Well, I love that. Those words of advice, that wisdom and that idea of remembering that this isn't the rest of your life, just that alone because we can feel so daunted by what's happening in this moment and it is so important that we continue to look at the big picture, you know, what our ultimate goals for our kids and kind of keep our eye on the prize and not get so caught up in the fears related to what might happen on one particular day.

Amanda: Right. And I think it's something we try and teach kids that you could always have a fresh start, but we're maybe not as good at internalizing that as parents. I feel like we often feel like we, we should have it figured out by now and you know what? I don't have it figured out and if you do, I'd love to know.

Debbie: Well this has been super helpful. There's just so much that we covered and lots of good strategies and I would love if you could just share with us. You mentioned the toolkit. I know there's so many other resources on. Understood, so where can parents go to tap into those resources? So the good thing is it's really easy, it's either u.org or understood.org and on the very front page you're going to find a back to school icon that you can click on and go through the back to school kit. Super simple.

Debbie: Excellent. Well for those who won't be able to remember u.org, go to my show notes page and I'll have the links for, for all of the resources that Amanda and I talked about as well. But thank you so much for sharing all this with us. The timing is perfect. I know that when this podcast is airing, people are going to be right in the throes of it. So thank you so much Amanda.

Amanda: Well thank you so much for having me. It's a joy. Thank you.



Debbie:

You've been listening to the TiLT Parenting podcast for the show notes for this episode, including links to Understood's back to school toolkit and all of the other resources we discussed. Visit [tiltparenting.com/session120](http://www.tiltparenting.com/session120). If you get value out of this podcast, please supporting it by making a small monthly contribution to help me cover the cost of production. Here's a really easy way to do this. It's an online platform called Patreon. Your contributions and that of other supporters are helping me pay my awesome editor, Donna, who takes my recorded conversations and intros and outros, cleans them up, edits them, tags them for itunes, and uploads them onto my Soundcloud account. This literally saves me hours of time each week and it allows me to focus on all the other pieces of keeping tilt, going and supporting this community. To sign up, just go to [Patreon.com/tiltparenting](https://www.patreon.com/tiltparenting). You can find a link on the TiLT Parenting website on any of the show notes pages.

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## RESOURCES MENTIONED:

- [Understood.org](http://Understood.org)
- [Understood's Back to School Toolkit](#)
- [\*The Everything Parent's Guide to Special Education: A Complete Step-by-Step Guide to Advocating for Your Child with Special Needs\*](#) by Amanda Morin
- [\*The Everything Kids' Learning Activities Book: 145 Entertaining Activities and Learning Games for Kids\*](#) by Amanda Morin
- [\*On-the-Go Fun for Kids!: More Than 250 Activities to Keep Little Ones Busy and Happy—Anytime, Anywhere!\*](#) by Amanda Morin
- [\*The Gift of Failure: How the Best Parents Learn to Let Go So Their Children Can Succeed\*](#) by Jessica Lahey
- [ADHD Medication Log](#) (download from Understood)
- [How to Help Your Child Get Comfortable with a Combination Lock](#) (tutorial on Understood)
- [How to Open a Combination Lock](#) (download from Understood)
- [Self-Advocacy Sentence Starters](#) (article on Understood)
- [Back-to-School Introduction Letters](#) (download from Understood)