



**Episode #134:**

**How Fathers Can Be The Dad Their  
Differently Wired Child Needs**

November 13, 2018

Debbie: Hey Jeremy, welcome to the podcast.

Jeremy: Thank you. Thank you so much for having me.

Debbie: Yeah, I'm really looking forward to this conversation. We were just chatting before I hit record and this is definitely a topic that I get a lot of emails from listeners about and just families and couples who are trying to figure out how to get on the same page. So I'm really looking forward to hearing your insights on this topic. But before we get into that, would you just take a few minutes to introduce yourself, who you are in the world and I'm always curious about people's personal why for why they do the work they do. So can you share that with us?

Jeremy: Sure. My name is Jeremy Schneider. I was born in Philadelphia and I live in New York. I got a master's degree in marriage and family therapy and I wanted to be a therapist since I was nine years old. And it's always been a passion of mine to try and help people and when I sort of understood about kind of how family therapy worked, how family systems work, how the interaction between family members can really make a difference. Uh, that's where I really wanted to focus. And then when my wife and I, my wife and I have been together for more than 25 years, um, when we had twins, all of a sudden that sort of, you know, the parenting perspective really kicked in and I started writing articles when my kids were about one and a half years old or so. And I've been writing articles for about 13 years on them.

And what I would do is I would write them every morning on my train ride into work after I had left them. And I have a 40 minute train ride. And so I was able to turn that into a book. The book is called *Fatherhood in 40-Minute Snapshots*. And each article was written on my 40 minute train ride and it's essentially a snapshot of what I was struggling with, what I just experienced, what kind of momentous event happened in our lives at that moment. And I think it's a, I think it's a really nice book to share with people because it does give them a chance to get to know me, but it also gives them a chance to sort of see another perspective of parenting about why it's important to be so involved and why I think I make such an effort to be involved because it, it means so much to me. I don't want my kids to have to go through what I went through when I was a kid. And so there's this kind of line in the sand that I've drawn to say, you know, what's happened in my family's past is not going to happen to my children.

Debbie: Wow. So it's very personal work for you.

Jeremy: Absolutely. Yeah. It really is.

Debbie: I love that you were nine when you realized you wanted to be a therapist. That's incredible. You don't hear that so often.

Jeremy: No, I mean, I, I, you know, I can remember being even younger than that and you know, wanting to make people smile, you know, wanting to make people feel better and that sort of understanding what I can do with that. And then

somewhere around nine I really started to understand, oh, wait a second, there's a whole career that I could do that would help people feel better and that's therapy. And I, you know, I remember being disappointed in high school when they didn't have a psychology class and that was the main reason I went to college was because I just wanted to study psychology and was so excited to go to the, my master's program in family therapy because that was it. You know what I mean? It was all, every class I took, everything I did was all about the stuff that I had cared about so much since I was a kid. It was uh, it was actually really exciting.

Debbie: And you still like the work today?

Jeremy: I do. I still like the work today and I still like, I mean, it's obviously very different than what I envisioned when I was nine. Um, you know, I didn't, I didn't really see my career taking this turn into parenting as strongly as it did, but you know, you have kids and things change and all of a sudden your perspective on what you think is important and what really matters to you shifts. And you know, I, I did a lot of research on fatherhood involvement and kind of what that meant and what the benefits were and that was really impactful for me. I didn't, I didn't understand before I was a dad how important the role that fathers play in the upbringing of their children. Uh, and so it's, it's neat when life kind of takes you down a different path and yet that path isn't so different from what I kind of always dreamed it would be.

Debbie: That's so cool. I'm always so curious how people got to where they are. I actually wrote a book called *In Their Shoes* where I interviewed women about their careers, 50 women. And I was always so excited when I found someone who was doing the dream job they had when they were a kid. So sorry, little tangent there, but very cool.

Jeremy: No, but that's exciting.

Debbie: So alright, so you just mentioned the word involvement, so I actually just want to pivot and go right there because you know, one of the things that I hear from a lot of moms, and again I get a lot of emails about this, when I was doing my book tour this came up in every single conversation in every city, uh was this situation of, of a mom. And again I just want to, I always have to preface this upfront and say I know there are many, many dads who listen to this podcast and who are really involved in their kids. So I don't mean to stereotype, I'm just sharing what I hear from a lot of moms is that their husbands aren't as engaged with what's happening, especially with their differently wired child. They might not be, you know, maybe they're not on board or they might be in some sort of denial or they're just not showing the same kind of interest in terms of really understanding what's going on and reading the books and kind of diving more into that. So I'm just curious, why do you think that is? You know, is that your experience as a therapist in the families that you work with? And I'd just love to know your thoughts on that, you know, that disconnect or that lack of fully immersing oneself into what's going on.

Jeremy: I think the male female, and again, I don't just like you, I don't mean to generalize. I do think from the moment a woman is pregnant, it becomes a little bit more of a different experience for her than it is for him. Right? And I think even as men who want to be more involved and more engaged, there's still a bit of a disconnect during the pregnancy experience, right? Because, you know, for a woman there's something literally changing about her body, whereas for us men we're a little bit disconnected from that. We don't, it doesn't feel a part of us yet, right? And we can be involved in and participate in the, you know, doctor's visits and sonograms and that's helpful and it certainly brings us closer to that end part where we want to go. But I think even from the beginning, that distinction is there.

And I think for some men, absolutely there, there is a sense of loss and I don't mean that cruelly or meanly but you know, we have an ideal of the way we thought our children would be. And when a child is born differently, whatever that difference is, I think there's a sense of, well, I'm missing out on what I could have had instead of sort of being able to understand, woah I have all of this now. And I think there is an adjustment period for men. And I think when that, that adjustment period ends up taking too long or that adjustment period doesn't have some sort of reality check to it, I think unfortunately it's easy for some men to go on the path of least resistance. And I think there's a absolute sadness to that because, you know, while it may not have been that ideal in their head, you know, childhood is, you know, have raising a child is never that ideal in our head.

You know, it is so much more challenging and fascinating and interesting and stimulating than we ever imagined. Even if you think you are prepared, it's just so different of an experience and I think, you know, one of the things that I have found that's really helpful for men is, is education, right? You know, even for me, right? I mean, I desperately wanted to be an involved dad and even in the beginning when the kids were babies, I found myself not feeling really connected to them and really struggling with that. Like what does that mean? What does that say about me? That must mean there's something wrong with me. And thinking about like, oh, I, maybe I should just take the local train home instead of the express because it doesn't really matter if I'm there or not. And that kind of mentality I think is more common among men.

And I think what really helped me was one, understanding that my wife needed me there. Like if, if I wasn't going to be there for myself, I at least needed to be there for her. I think there was that piece. And I think two doing the research, learning about the effects that we dads have on our children. You know, the fact that when we're involved, kids tend to do better at school. When we're involved kids tend to have a better emotional experience. They tend to have a little bit higher emotional intelligence. They tend to have a higher life satisfaction when they're older. That our involvement really makes a difference. And I think one of the things that happens is that when men start to think that maybe they don't need to be part of the process, they forget how important they are, they forget the role they play. And I think it's easy for them to kind of drift away because they think, well, I'll just make the money. I'll just provide for my family the way

that my dad did and my grandfather did and my grandfather's grandfather did without realizing what they're losing.

Debbie: So fascinating. So there's a couple of things I want to circle back on. One is, you know, you talked about the sense of loss and that's something that I write a lot about and talk about is the importance of being honest with yourself about mourning. And I use that word consciously, but you know, mourning the journey that it, that you're not having, you know, that that vision that you had of what you would expect with this to look like. And so as you said that I even am just thinking it's probably more acceptable in some ways for women to, to experience that sense of sadness or, or express it and maybe for men they don't feel as safe leaning into those emotions. Is that. I don't know if that's true or not.

Jeremy: I guess I would even argue that, and again, it sounds, I don't, I am in no way demeaning men. Obviously I'm, I am one. I'm, I'm pretty happy about that. But I do think that because women are a little bit more conditioned to be connected to emotions, that that awareness of mourning, that awareness of loss is a little bit easier to identify and then process. And I think for men, the idea that that we might feel some loss doesn't necessarily maybe be recognized as loss. Maybe we're not identifying it as loss. We're identifying it as something that's wrong with us, that we're not good enough to make the adjustment to our new child and I think that's where it becomes difficult.

I think if men felt a sense of loss and identified it, it would be a little bit easier for them to say, oh, that's really sad. I'm really missing out on something. Let me, let me work that through and then understand that I still have a gift. You know, I'm still lucky to be able to have a child and that I can love this child just like I would love any child. But because it doesn't necessarily get interpreted as loss, it gets interpreted as I'm not good enough to love the child I have. That's where we start going down that path of distance, you know, and that path of maybe I'm not good enough. Maybe I'm not of value. Maybe I don't bring anything to my family. Maybe it's better if I step away. Maybe it's better if I just work. And I think that's how that plays out more often than not.

Debbie: Yeah, and I can imagine that it becomes a kind of self fulfilling prophecy. I mean, I, I've talked about this openly about the relationship that my husband and I have in our journey together of, you know, me feeling a need to control things and kind of take over and you know, the way you were just describing this, it sounds like, and I'm sure many co parents do that or many moms do that. They just decide, well then I'm just going to run this project. I'm going to be in charge. And then the man doesn't feel as needed and so they, that creates more distance and then it just becomes a cycle. Is that how this works?

Jeremy: Yeah. It's exactly how it works. And it's not necessarily that you're doing something wrong to say, hey, if he's not stepping up, then I will, but it's more of just there is a need that we have, right? We have this child, this child needs us. If our child is not getting what they need from our partner, then I'm going to do everything I can. It's just unfortunate that when you do everything you can, it compounds to the partner that well yeah, see I'm not needed. She can do it all

without me. And that's not the message you mean to send. It's just there's a need that needs to be filled and you're going to take care of your baby or your child.

Debbie: Right. So the question that comes up a lot is what do we do about this? So again, you know, Darin and I did our best to at least share what we did to get back on track and to create a more aligned connection where it felt more that we were both on the same page and we were both working towards the same goals and it wasn't me holding all the cards. But this is what you do. This is your profession. So tell us, for couples who are listening to this and they're recognizing, yeah, this is kind of where we are right now. How do you even begin then to get in alignment and what does being in alignment actually even look like? Because I think many of us imagine this kind of perfectly synchronized relationship where everyone's reading the same books and everyone, you know, and I don't know that that's what it looks like either. So I'd love to know what are we going for and how do we get there? Big question.

Jeremy: Yeah. I would agree with you that it's been, you know, I like to think of it as parenting as a team sport. That's one of the articles in the book, you know, being a team sport doesn't necessarily mean we're all doing the same thing, but it means that we all have this role to play and we're, we're, our role makes us better as a team. And I think, you know, as silly as it sounds, these kinds of sports analogies when it comes to parenting can be kind of helpful because it puts something that may feel very foreign to a man into something that might actually be more easily understandable. Oh, we're talking about not that mom is the coach and I'm the player because that's not the dynamic we're looking for. We're talking about both of us being on the same team with each of us having an important role to play and each of us making a difference to the success of our team, which is our family.

Right? So, so part of the way you do that, right? One is communication. And obviously the man needs to be willing to do this. I mean dad needs to be willing to be involved and so we're making the assumption that it's not so much that dad doesn't want to be involved, but dad is either worried about it, anxious about it or lost, just doesn't even know how to begin. You know, maybe that this differently wired child has just kind of thrown him outside of his comfort zone in terms of what he anticipated. So you know, I think one of the first steps is communication and that communication really ought to be more in terms of how do we help each other do better. Not hey, you said you were going to be involved and now you're away, right? That kind of more attacking approach is going to make it much harder for him to admit his vulnerabilities, to open up about the challenges that he's facing.

So I think obviously communication is one of the most important keys. I think the second key also is education. And I think there's two pieces to this. One in terms of involved dads, right? I have seen time and time again when dads begin to understand that their role actually makes a difference, when they see that having a good relationship with their children leads to them doing better in school. You know, in fact for for girls, dads who are involved with their girls who have a good relationship with their girls, sometimes they will even have their menstruation later. They will tend to have sex later in life because they already have that

connection with their dad. And I think when dads begin to understand that yes, there is some pressure there, like, oh whoa, that's a little scary. I really do matter. But it also means I need to be there because I do matter.

Right. My absence isn't going to go unnoticed. And I think it's easy for dads to step away when they think that they're not important or they don't matter. So I think that education, that side of it about the importance of involved dads, can really make a difference. And I talk a little bit about that in the beginning of my book *Fatherhood in 40-Minute Snapshots*. But the other education piece, and this is particularly for what we're talking about in terms of differently wired kids, is to sort of understand how our children might be different and what their more specific needs might be. Right. And being able to see examples of that so that it's not a theoretical discussion for dad about, well I should be involved, but what does that actually look like when they're a baby? Right. One of the things that babies always need is just they need their nails to not be sharp.

Right. Like for me, that was like, okay, I will, I latched onto that. Okay. They're are baby, I don't know what else to do with them, but I'm going to use a nail file and I'm just going to make sure that their nails are not sharp. Right, so they don't scratch their faces. But having that kind of concrete thing was so helpful to me because then before I knew it, I was constantly in this situation with them where I was holding them in some way, right? Either on my lap, in my arms, whatever it was, and I was filing nails, but then sometimes it was just like, oh, well now I'm just holding them and we're looking at each other or we're playing with our fingers and it gave me a couple of ways to start thinking about, okay, here's a concrete way to be involved, to make a difference. And then before I knew it, that kind of made it just easier to deal with a baby, which frankly for me was a totally foreign concept.

So I think we're talking about communication. I think we're talking about some education, both how important dads are, but also education about what kids really need and some real concrete examples as to how that can happen. And I think when couples start to talk about it, maybe that's as simple as dividing up some of the responsibility. So in my, in my case, for instance, you know, when our kids hit toddlerhood, which you know, is a thoroughly enjoyable experience, they started doing this mommy do it thing, which made me crazy because I would change a diaper and they would scream, mommy do it, mommy do it. I would start to tuck them into bed, mommy do it like, you know, and they just didn't want any part of me. And that was very difficult because I thought I had been involved and you know, it really didn't matter. And what my wife and I agreed on was that I would put them to bed at night. And it just made such a big difference.

You know, the first couple of nights they really complained and really cried. But after a while it was like, oh, okay, this is like special time with daddy and that became it, right. I would read them their stories at night and I would tuck them into bed at night and then I became what I like to think of as the nightwatchman, which is when they woke up in the middle of the night, I was the one that went up there and soothed them. And these were like concrete things that I could do to build a connection with them. And it really made a difference. But if you had said to me, oh dad, you know, importance of dad is really, you know, it's really

valuable, that makes a big difference, without telling me or helping me understand how to do it, I think it becomes a lot harder for men to be involved.

Debbie: So okay, this is super interesting to me and I really love the, the idea of just, you know, it's almost like dividing and conquering, you know, and I love the metaphor of the teammate. I mean, obviously it just makes total sense, but just somehow the way that you explained it, it seems even clearer that, what I'm hearing is that maybe this isn't about us expecting that the books that we leave bookmarked on our partner's bedside table, that they're going to devour them. Or that's not necessarily as important as knowing that, hey, if you can cover dinner the nights that I'm taking our kid to a social skills group or just kind of giving them something concrete to do and letting go, you know, I think for moms letting go of some of the control to think of what those things could be is more of what we're looking for then.

Jeremy: Yeah. And I think the other, the other challenge I have found with moms is, and I'm trying to figure out a delicate way of saying this -

Debbie: Just say it, just say it.

Jeremy: They, there's a belief that moms know how to do it, right? And I frankly agree that they do, but it doesn't mean it's the only way to do it. And therein lies, I think the difference, right? There are things that I did that were very different from my wife and sometimes that made her extremely anxious, but it didn't mean that I did it wrong and it just meant that I was finding my own way as a dad. And I think that that's important. I think we men need that freedom, so to speak, to be able to say, okay, so I'm going to put them to bed. We have a certain routine for doing that. Yes. And we should kind of try to do the same routine in the sense of, you know, if bedtime is 8:30, we're not putting them to bed at 9:15, we're getting them upstairs to bed at 8:30. But if we want to read three books instead of four or five books instead of four or whatever it is, if we want to spend a little extra time cuddling together or if we end up telling our own story because we think they might enjoy it or you know, whatever that sort of variation is, that's totally okay.

And what it's really allowing us to do is come into our own as our own parent versus being a parent that our wife wants us to be or even being a parent that we saw our parents be, right. I mean when kids are babies, we're learning this on the fly and we want to have some flexibility to be able to learn how to do that in the way that works best for us. And I think sometimes moms can have a real challenge with that because it's not done the way that it's always been done. But I think there is some real value in letting dads not just fail but try to find their own way because that's what's going to build our confidence

Debbie: And it's also going to build a stronger relationship between the dad and the child.

Jeremy: Yeah, absolutely.

Debbie: I, you know, as you're sharing that I, I remember, you know, I homeschool my son and I remember that first two years, Darin used to be a substitute teacher for

me. But initially I used to plan the whole day and this is what we do at this time, you know, and I, it was so hard for me because I had devised this, you know, perfect, in my opinion, homeschooling and then by the end of the second year I was like just do whatever you want to do, I don't really care. And they would get into all kinds of stuff together and have a great time. But it again, it was about, it was about me letting go of control and I think that that's a, it's funny I'm just reading William Stixrud's book *The Self Driven Child* and he talks about why self control and just having control is so critical to, to a kid and growing up into a self actualized adult. But it's important to all of us. I've just, that seems to be the theme here that um letting go of control and giving other people room to, to show up as they can show up is really important.

Jeremy: And, and to be completely honest, I believe the research. I've read a lot of research about the importance of the involvement of the dad. It's not that, obviously it's not that moms don't matter because mom's obviously do matter and it's not that dads make the difference that if, whether moms are there, it doesn't matter. It's that some of those benefits are really because having two parents who are not exactly the same is really valuable for a child. Having two parents that interact differently, who interact in unique ways, who encourage the kids to do different things in different ways really adds a flexibility to the child's personality that makes it easier for them to function in school, to have a social relationship to, to you know, grow up a little bit more adjusted. And I think what you were just talking about kind of lends itself to that. Right? Like your child had you as a regular teacher and then your husband as a substitute and that kind of gave him a chance to have this whole new flexibility, right? Of how school is taught and that whole experience. But really having two parents, and from my perspective, it doesn't matter the gender of those parents, but having two parents really helps a child learn different ways of interacting, different ways of engaging in the world and also experiencing the world. And that's where the real value comes from for the child.

Debbie: So one of the things that you have said is that what is important to a dad doesn't need to be important to his children yet what is important to his children does need to be important to their dad. Can you elaborate a little bit on that?

Jeremy: Absolutely. I mean, to me the best example is sports. I'm a huge sports fan. I am a gigantic football fan in particular. Uh, and I, you know, I tried to get my kids into sports and it was very clear from the get go that there was no interest, none whatsoever. And so I was really left with this, well, I could make them, I could force them, but it was clear they didn't want to. And it's not like eating vegetables, you know, what am I, what do I get by forcing them to get into sports when they don't care. And so that to me is like a good example, right? It's really important to me. Not important to them. They don't lose anything by it not being important to them.

But another good example is, the flip side of that, is my daughter loves Broadway. She loves Broadway musicals, she loves being able to go to shows, she loves learning all of the music. She's an incredible singer and she's really getting good at dancing. And I was really left with a choice of I could either be a part of her passion, right? I could learn about it and I can listen to it and I could go to these

shows with my family or I could not. And be like, well, you know, it's not, it's not something that I'm into. I don't really care that much. And thankfully I didn't do that. And you know, we've sat next to each other in shows and just, you know, she radiates this passion. She vibrates with enthusiasm. And I'm so lucky to be a part of that and yeah, that's not my thing, but it's certainly more my thing now after having learned so much from her than it was before.

And to me, I think that's what's important, right? It's, I have this, I have passions, I try to share it with them, but if they're not that into it, I need to be okay with that. But if they have passions I need to be into that, I at least need to make a concerted effort. And I think the bonding over that makes a difference. But I also think there's real power in my daughter being able to teach me something you know about, something that she cares so much about. Right? We don't give kids enough chance to teach us as parents. We're always in that, we're trying to teach you and get you to where we want you to go. Well, you know, some of that confidence comes from being able to teach us something that is so important to them. And so not only did I get that, but I also learned about something that was frankly completely out of my purview.

Debbie: Yeah, absolutely. I love that. So. All right. I'm going to ask you one more hard question here. I think it's a hard question, but I know that I know that I have listeners who are like, okay, this all sounds great, but my partner is not even willing to take that first step. Like there's such a disconnect and they don't even know where to start. What advice do you have for listeners who have a partner who doesn't appear to be willing to take that first step, the communication. Who just, they can't seem to get them interested in changing the status quo. What thoughts do you have for that?

Jeremy: I mean, my first thought is that that's, that's painfully sad. You know, we don't, we don't get many chances to be a dad and I can't imagine what it would have been like if I missed out on this opportunity. And I, I honestly am not, you know, I think because of the situation, I don't know enough, I think. I guess I have a couple thoughts. One is, you know, what's the status of their relationship? Uh, the partner relationship. Because I, I gotta believe if the partner relationship is good, that we ought to be able to figure out a way to connect to him. I think if the partner relationship isn't good obviously that's a sign of a much bigger problem. So if we're really assuming the partner relationship is good, I think it's really a matter of different, coming at it from a different angle. And again, I don't know what angles have been tried, right?

But sort of making sure that we're coming at it from a few different directions and maybe some of that is as simply as you know, let's say that mom is going to a yoga class or going to some class for herself to take care of herself and knowing that they're leaving dad home alone with the child. Doing that on a regular basis. Almost kind of kind of leaving him there with the child to kind of have to sort of figure out what he's doing on his own. It's one thing to try to get somebody to do something, it's another thing to try to educate somebody to do something. It's a whole other thing to sort of be like, okay, well, uh, I'll be back in two hours and let them be by themselves. And I know that sounds risky for someone like, for a mom who's feeling like the dad really isn't involved, isn't really invested.

Again, it's really hard for me to tell without more specifics. But to me I think it's that we think about the different ways we've approached this person in terms of trying to elicit some change within him and we want to try and come at that from as many different angles and if, you know, leaving an article is not effective, if sharing a book is not effective, if listening to a podcast is not effective, if watching a specific show is not effective, you know, like what different ways can we come across and sort of reach this man who hopefully is more in the state of wanting to do this and just scared or terrified or anxious or just kind of ignorant about what to do. You know, completely unknowing about how to be a parent. I'd like to think that there's just 10 to 15 different types of media and angles that we can reach out to this man to welcome him into the process of being a dad.

Debbie: That was a really good answer to what did turn out to be a very hard question. Yeah, I knew that I, I know there's no simple answer to that, but I know that that is something that a lot of parents are struggling with. So I really appreciate you sharing that and it's, it's insightful. So before we go, I would love it if you could just share where people can connect with you and learn more about your work and about your book.

Jeremy: Sure. Thank you. My website is [www.jgs.net](http://www.jgs.net). And so my name is Jeremy G. Schneider, so [jgs.net](http://www.jgs.net). So that's the place that you can find me and, and purchase my book. I also post on Twitter and Facebook and LinkedIn, all sorts of studies I find and my perspectives on that. Usually one or two a day trying to just sort of give other parents and people insights into parenting, mental health issues, things like that. So the easiest way to find me is on Twitter at [jgs\\_author](https://twitter.com/jgs_author) again, so Jeremy G. Schneider, [jgs\\_author](https://twitter.com/jgs_author). And please feel free to reach out with any other questions that you might have.

Debbie: Excellent. And listeners as always, I will include links to Jeremy's website and Twitter and to his book on the show notes page so you can just head over to that and you will be able to track him down. And I'm going to start following your Twitter because I'm super interested in the research angle and I think that that is, uh, something I hadn't really been thinking about is what the research has to say about the benefits of, of having an involved dad. I mean, I think it's something I read about a long time ago, but, um, I appreciate you bringing that up again. So. Okay. Wow. This has been super interesting. Lots of insights, lots of strategies and nuggets. I hope it's been helpful for our listeners and thank you so much for coming by and sharing all this with us today.

Jeremy: Oh, it was my pleasure. Thank you so much for having me. This was really, really interesting.

## RESOURCES MENTIONED:

- [Jeremy Schneider's website](#)
- [Fatherhood in 40-minute Snapshots](#) by Jeremy Schneider
- [Jeremy on Facebook](#)
- [Jeremy on Twitter](#)