

# How Homeschooling Transformed Learning for a Special Needs Child

## Episode 255

Rachel Winchester [00:00:02]:

We often remind parents that no one loves your child as much as you do, and no one knows your child as well as you do. You are the expert on your own child. However, some people wonder if there are caveats, such as does homeschooling work for special needs or learning different kids? Let's talk about it. You're listening to the Homeschool Made Simple podcast. This is a podcast to help you homeschool simply, inexpensively, and enjoyably. Carol Joy Seid has been helping families homeschool for several decades now as a speaker and homeschooling consultant. If you want to work with Carole to customize your family's approach to this method, you can book an appointment at [homeschoolmadesimple.net/customize](https://homeschoolmadesimple.net/customize). Her schedule fills up quickly as we move into the summer, so be sure to book an appointment today through the link in the show notes.

Today, we are talking with a family who pulled their learning different son out of public school to learn at home and how their whole life changed for the better. Listen in.

Carole Joy Seid [00:01:02]:

We are sitting across the screen today with our friends, David and Audrey Ryan. They live near Austin, Texas, and we are so excited to speak with them because when Audrey and I were consulting, a couple years ago now, Audrey, two years ago, I just said, we need to do a podcast about your family story. And so we're just so delighted to have David with us. King David, I'm gonna call him. And, I want them to just tell their story to us, and then I'll just kind of draw some things out. But, David, why don't you start? Just tell the story of your family, your life briefly, and what brought you to today.

David and Audrey Ryan [00:01:45]:

Yeah. So we were in Lakeway, Texas for about nine years. We moved there, and paid the really high property taxes with the idea that we wanted our unborn children to grow up in the best school district around.

Carole Joy Seid [00:02:02]:

Yes.

David and Audrey Ryan [00:02:02]:

We didn't have kids then. We we shopped knowing that kids were a part of the plan and and found a house and and what we were told and and believed was a wonderful school district. We stayed there until our son, Colin, was in first grade, and he he started he he went through pre k there. He was born with a genetic disorder, that took several years to diagnose a a camp to one disorder. It's very rare. And and so, Lakeway Schools were great with the the services that they offered in pre k, the ARD meetings helping us find help to to figure out what was going on, and all of that was really good. And then he started kindergarten during COVID, and that

Carole Joy Seid [00:03:00]:

That was a joy.

David and Audrey Ryan [00:03:03]:

Yes. He was he started a brand new school. It was an elementary school, but it was their first year opening. Lots of things that we saw at the open house that were pretty eye opening, that happened in in public schools now as far as people on staff that I don't I I don't want to explain to my five year old child why, why men are wearing dresses in the library, to be frank.

Carole Joy Seid [00:03:32]:

Mhmm. That

David and Audrey Ryan [00:03:33]:

was that was the first kind of sound the alarm. And then in kindergarten, we were getting reports that were just, like, happy face, sad face, crying face. It was all about the mood that he was in each day. It wasn't about what they were working on in school.

Carole Joy Seid [00:03:49]:

Yeah.

David and Audrey Ryan [00:03:50]:

The challenges that he was having, what we could do at home to to help. And then, COVID was kind of an eye opener for our family. We I've always been somebody that wanted more space to live on some land and Yes. Kind of be outside of the city. Homes being built, people moving in, schools being built, classrooms filling up. And and so

we we decided to move about 25 miles west and bought seven acres and and put our kids in Johnson City Public Schools. At first, Johnson City was awesome. Their school sounds great.

David and Audrey Ryan [00:04:30]:

It is great. Nothing bad to say about them at all. You know, prayer at the flagpole and, community prayer at homecoming parades. And they don't shy away from from the belief in God and saying the pledge of allegiance and, a lot of really good things that we loved about the values of the school system. We were really blessed to to have a teacher's aide assigned a call, and that was and it it has become a a very close friend of the family.

Carole Joy Seid [00:05:01]:

Yep.

David and Audrey Ryan [00:05:03]:

She was awesome. But the thing that did not change was the expectations for the kids at, you know, a first grade level.

Carole Joy Seid [00:05:12]:

Yes. You mean they were unrealistic for Colin or what yeah.

David and Audrey Ryan [00:05:19]:

For Colin, tons of stress. So part of his low his his kampto one disorder is low tone and slow processing. And and so the more we learned about what he was dealing with on a daily basis, the clear, kind of his frustration and concern and nervousness getting ready to go to school every day became, coming home with shirts that he chewed on just from being nervous throughout the day and spelling tests every Friday. He would absolutely throw a fit. Sometimes I pretend like he didn't feel well as early as first grade and, like, this isn't normal. What do we do? How do we help him?

Yep. I think the crooks of it was towards the end of that year that we decided to homeschool, he was, even making some comments, on the playground about, feeling like he was a bad kid and and that he wasn't good, and he was talking about a little bit of self harm that put him in the principal's office three times. And they were calling me to have him evaluated by a, psychologist, a child psychologist. So his stress level had escalated to this point, before we met you and had studied your method, that we, we really felt out of control and sad about the situation. That's that's what pushed us to explore other options

Carole Joy Seid [00:06:49]:

Yes.

David and Audrey Ryan [00:06:50]:

What's even our daughter has benefited from now. But the amazing thing is that it had got it has gotten to such a low point in his history, but his high point now is is undescrivable. So the the 180 degree turn has been nothing short of a miracle. Wow. But that's where we were at that year.

Carole Joy Seid [00:07:16]:

Yes. What changed, or what did what are you doing differently? Or what what was the turnaround for for for Colin and for your family?

David and Audrey Ryan [00:07:27]:

Well, the school system has and you've spoken about this. They have benchmarks that they need to hit. And, with Colin, he's a slow processor. He, is a late reader, and he, you've pointed this out before. Research shows that later readers tend to be more nature driven, and, you know, he would pay attention to bugs and dig holes for hours like a lot of boys. And, you know, his his teachers and aids and his whole team, at his ARD meetings, there were maybe almost 15 people around the table. A lot of people willing to help him. Speech, OT, PT, child psychologist, math tutor, reading tutor.

They had so many people supporting him, and he's one of those kids that can really wrap it wrap people around his finger. His heart is such a golden heart. But, you know, it was this team of people that were all talking to him about catching up. And so he he spent, much of his time in special classes or with different aids, and he knew that that was different. He knew that something was wrong. And, so it really was weighing on his self esteem and making him wanna push back from learning in general because he was adopting this attitude towards learning that I'm not good at learning. Yes. Yes.

You know, we consulted with you. It was actually only a year ago. On this journey one year and the amount of time, he has changed so much. But, you know, you when we first discussed his his issues, you said, you know, I don't even care if you do school for a little bit. Step back, read some great books, and you gave me some wonderful books. We've been reading these hunting books, and, *The War That Changed My Life* is currently what we're reading.

Carole Joy Seid [00:09:32]:

Love that book.

David and Audrey Ryan [00:09:33]:

In a year's time, we have, listened to or read 49 novels.

Carole Joy Seid [00:09:39]:

And What? And, actually, The War That Saved My Life. Right?

David and Audrey Ryan [00:09:44]:

Saved My Life. Yes.

Carole Joy Seid [00:09:45]:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Which was a perfect book for

David and Audrey Ryan [00:09:48]:

for Colin.

Carole Joy Seid [00:09:48]:

Yeah. Yes.

David and Audrey Ryan [00:09:50]:

And he's just now gone back to reading, but now he's reading with a smile. And he's Oh. We're working on our, our readers with with Sing, Spell, Read, and Write, and they're shorter words, and and he's sounding them out. They were having him do a program to catch up that was just memorizing the way the words looked so that he could so he could get by until he could actually learn to sound out later. But we've, stopped putting him on this conveyor belt of excellence.

Yeah. And and our main goal is, like you've said from the get go, create a love of learning in your children. And I'm starting to see his his face light up when he's sounding out words.

Carole Joy Seid [00:10:41]:

Oh, Audrey, this is so beautiful. He's happy. Yeah. Well, you know, there are so many families with, quote, special needs or learning different children. And very often, they're like, well, does homeschool work for our child? Because the powers that be very often will make you feel like, don't try this at home. Leave the experts. And what would you say to those families?

David and Audrey Ryan [00:11:10]:

I would say absolutely go for it. Nobody knows your kid as well as you do. Yeah. I mean, that's the biggest part. So schools, unfortunately, now are are trying to squeeze

everybody into the same box. They're funded based off of standardized tests. And, you know, just because Colin wasn't reading in kindergarten doesn't mean that he's a smart kid. He's he's extremely brilliant.

David and Audrey Ryan [00:11:33]:

He teaches me something about science every single day.

And those are things that he's learned on his own, not from us. Right. And so we've really embraced and encouraging him to to follow the things that interest him, but to learn along the way. And and he has he has a a huge love of science and and wants to know about different types of bugs and animals. And, and the reading part, for me, turned into it was so much stress on the entire family and and the first half of first grade where it's like you have a test tomorrow. This is how you prepare for a test. And we're we're, you know, public school kids. We we grew up in public schools.

And so our our brains were pass the test. Let's get ready to pass the test. And and there's just so much more to learning than that. We started off, he and I, reading hunting books. He loves to hunt. Last year was his first year to get to hunt and, like, actually be a part of the hunting. And so he and I, with him being homeschooled, we'd I'd take off work on a Friday, and we'd go Friday, Saturday, Saturday, Sunday, stay in a hotel room. And when we weren't in a deer blind, we're reading books about hunting.

And and that's what really sparked it. He got so into those stories, and he learned so much from them. And now he he loves it. He'll bring me a book and say, let's let's read the next chapter of this. So it's it's been great.

I would say, for parents with children that have, a gamut of needs, and we are seeing more and more children that have those unique needs, that, those children are like any other children that they do want to learn. There's something we're built no matter what kind of needs we have, we are built with a sense of, you know, we want to learn and gather new information. So a parent that is with their their special needs child at home can be more specialized with their child than any other team of people, because we're here, and we can be intuitive and and kind of respond to the cues they give us when they're saying, this is what I'm interested in. And they may have different ways of communicating it, but they have interests. And it's really hard to to pick those out when you're a teacher or an aide that has so many other children and so many other things going on. But a a parent is right there along with them. If they're trained to look for those things and to embrace your your approach, which is an unhurried, curious type of learning, then anyone with with a child of of, you know, a a number of special needs

can can still can still foster that sense of I love learning. I can learn and the freedom to learn, you know, what your own interests are telling you that you you know, your gifts.

David and Audrey Ryan [00:14:46]:  
You can pursue your gifts.

Carole Joy Seid [00:14:47]:  
Yes. And it's a tutorial method. So getting one on one tutorial interaction with when he's with each of you and you just couldn't pay for a student teacher ratio of one to one at any school. Yeah. It's just it's the Rolls Royce of education, and it's happening right at your kitchen table for free.

David and Audrey Ryan [00:15:09]:  
Yeah. And it's a a nice thing for parents to know if you if you do step off the the wheel and do this on your own, that I think their stress level will go down for for the child and the parent because we we might have experienced more stress having a kid who was behind, quote, unquote. Yeah. Because, you know, he gets home and then it's, oh, hurry up. We have to work on these spelling words and these sight words. And and, you know, we're stressed. He's stressed. We don't have enough time.

David and Audrey Ryan [00:15:45]:  
He won't ever catch up. But he's gonna be feel really bad about himself until he learns to

Carole Joy Seid [00:15:50]:  
read. Yeah.

David and Audrey Ryan [00:15:51]:  
We're just heaping on more stress. And then you feel like you're not, you know, doing the best job parenting. These parents that are feeling like this are they don't have to feel like this. They can just say stop.

Carole Joy Seid [00:16:07]:  
Did the powers that be intimidate you about your decision? How how were you able to have that kind of courage and confidence?

David and Audrey Ryan [00:16:17]:  
Well, when we emailed the the, principal, she was actually very nice about it. She said, I'm really gonna miss him a lot. He's a he's a sweetheart, but, she said she fully understood. So for us in in our school system, it was as easy as sending them a note.

And I know that other parents, it's a a different process. But for us, it was it was good. Now we have we have we live in a small community, and he runs into his former aids and his reading, tutors and math tutors, and they all miss him, but they can't deny the big confidence.

Carole Joy Seid [00:17:00]:

That he's flourishing. They can see that he's flourishing.

David and Audrey Ryan [00:17:03]:

Absolutely.

David and Audrey Ryan [00:17:05]:

So they have good things to say about him. They say they miss him, but they can see the difference in him, just the way he carries himself.

Carole Joy Seid [00:17:13]:

Oh, that he is comfortable in his skin.

David and Audrey Ryan [00:17:17]:

He's so much more confident. Yeah. Yeah. And he'd he'll walk up to anybody and look up in their eyes and talk to them and shake their hand and introduce himself. His confidence is through the roof.

David and Audrey Ryan [00:17:31]:

And another thing, he was in OT and PT. And, my parents are, OT and PT, so occupational and physical therapists. And so they won't mind me saying this, but, you know, he would have occupational and physical therapy at school, and we were concerned, well, is he going to regress if he doesn't get these services? But he's at home, and we live on seven acres of land. Yeah. And every morning, he's the first one up. We hear the door slam at 7AM, and he's off into the wilderness to hunt frogs and

David and Audrey Ryan [00:18:12]:

To shoot his latest homemade bow and arrow or crossbow or whatever he's made before.

David and Audrey Ryan [00:18:17]:

And and big holes. So he doesn't stop moving except to come in and do a little bit of reading or games, and then he's out the door again. And so we haven't had to worry about those things. He's standing much straighter. Some of his some of his weakness was from the confinement of school.



Carole Joy Seid [00:18:37]:

That's right. It's so abnormal for any child to sit in a desk at that age. And, I mean, that they expected a a six year old or a five year old, whatever he was, to be able to read in kindergarten when all the research shows that it's detrimental to teach children to read too young. And that, and the families of course with that, the countries with the highest literacy rates in the world are the four Scandinavian countries. We have some of the most dismal reading scores of any, you know, first world country or whatever. And and it's ironic that we just keep trying to lower the reading age in our country when there's not one drop of research to show that it's beneficial, and there's buckets of research that shows that it's not. So you have a child that's already feeling like they're struggling, and then you add that burden which is completely unnecessary and harmful.

Whose idea was this? And to whose benefit is this? Well, to the teachers' unions maybe, but certainly not for the children. It's not child centered learning. Or as the priest just say, every morning wake up and ask yourself a question. What is the best thing for my child? And he would Mhmm. If you ask that question sincerely and honestly, you will not go wrong. Like, it would be hard to not know. You know instinctively what's best for your child. But when Yeah.

Hours and authority over our children outside the home have a different agenda, different plan for our kids, and they mean well and they love our children, but there's no research to back up what they're doing. And you know that it's wrong. As a parent, you know. And my dream is just to empower parents so that they get more and more confident about, just as you said David, that no one loves their children more, no one knows them better than a parent does. And and I just feel like that's the calling that God's put on my life is to deputize parents because God's callings are his enablings, and he will empower us to do the things he calls us to do. And one of the main things he does is calls us to raise our children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and that's what your family is doing.

Rachel Winchester [00:21:00]:

Wow. What an encouraging testimony to hear from David and Audrey about their son, Colin. We will be back next week with part two of their conversation with Carol. We hope you'll join us.

You've been listening to the Homeschool Made Simple podcast. If you like what you heard in this episode, please leave a rating and review on Apple Podcasts or Spotify, or share this episode with a friend. It means so much when you help us spread the

message of Homeschool Made Simple with others. Thanks for joining us this week on the Homeschool Made Simple podcast. Remember, Jesus's commandments are not burdensome. What he calls you to do, he will enable you to do. Blessings.