

Eileen Lamb

Welcome to "Adulthood on the Spectrum." I am Eileen Lamb, I am an artistic author and photographer. I usually co host this podcast with Andrew but he couldn't make it today. So this is my first time doing it solo. In this podcast we want to highlight the real voices of autistic adults, not just inspirational stories, but we want to talk to a variety of autistic people. And today, I'm very excited to have Kaelynn Partlow with us. Kaelynn is registered behavior technician. She's been working with children and teens on the spectrum for seven years now. She was diagnosed with autism at age 10 and was a participant in the Netflix series "Love on the Spectrum, US" which I love. By the way. Kaelynn was also diagnosed with several learning disabilities as a child, and today she uses her experience with to help others with similar experiences. Thank you so much for joining me tonight, Kaelynn.

Kaelynn Partlow

Thanks for having me.

Eileen Lamb

Of course, it's an honor. But uh, what are your preferred pronouns? And how do you like to identify as an autistic person or person on the spectrum? Tell me.

Kaelynn Partlow

I use person with autism and autistic person interchangeably and my pronouns are she/her.

Eileen Lamb

Cool. Alright, to start, I would love to hear more about how you were diagnosed with autism and what that experience was like, how long ago? All of that?

Kaelynn Partlow

Yeah. So when I was 10, I was having extreme difficulty in school. I guess just note that that started shortly after I entered school, but it became really apparent to everybody around me, especially my teachers, that my academic difficulty was not getting better, if anything, it was just getting worse. So, so my uncle lives in Orlando, Florida, and he paid for me to have some pretty extensive testing done by a variety of professionals. So speech therapists, occupational therapists, psychologist, physical therapists. And after about five days, they had produced all these results from just this extensive testing that had been done. And that is where I got my diagnosis of autism and dyslexia. dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia and ADHD.

Eileen Lamb

Wow, do you want to talk a little bit about the difference between dyslexia and other diagnosis? I know a little bit about it, like with math, but yeah.

Kaelynn Partlow

Yeah. So dyslexia is, I think, the most commonly known learning disability, it's the the one with words. The classic example is that you get your B's and D's and P's and Q's mixed up. For me, personally, it makes reading comprehension very difficult. And I read very slowly, I sometimes will get stuck on

words, even if I know the word my brain for just whatever reason will not let me read it. Sometimes I have to skip it or go back to it or I'll find myself rereading sentences over and over again, which can also contribute to the slow reading. Dyscalculia is kind of like the math version of dyslexia. It's a little bit more complex than that. It affects your working memory and your ability to retain mathematical information. It makes working out numerical concepts incredibly difficult. So I never really got past third grade math. You'd be surprised what you can do in adult life without fractions. Even though they would maybe have me believe otherwise. Dyspraxia has to do with motor skills. That one I would say, I'm probably the least knowledgeable about its for me personally, it just means my fine motor skills are kind of garbage.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah, my, my youngest as the dyspraxia diagnosis from the EO team was like coordination.

Kaelynn Partlow

Yeah.

Eileen Lamb

And you know what you said about dyslexia and reading something over and over again, I feel like that's something that a lot of autistic people struggle with, at least me and my youngest are functioning. It's like, I can read so well, and was considered hyperlexia. But the comprehension on what I was actually reading, like I was reading the words, but I couldn't make out the meaning of it. I don't have any of this diagnosis. But I think linked somehow because yeah, it's a common issue I read about. I know from following you, that you like to help others by sharing your story and your experience. Can you tell us more about autism related accommodation and how you utilize them most effectively as an adult? How people can take advantage of those?

Kaelynn Partlow

Absolutely, I've got a pretty long list. I don't know how long we've got, but I've got a long list of those. I've got so first I've got a service dog. And by definition service dogs are meant to increase a person's independence. So when people ask me oh, well, how old should my child be when I get a service dog? And like I said, by definition, they're meant to increase someone's independence and children by nature disability or not, do not have a whole lot of independence. So while service dogs can be incredibly beneficial for some children, in some cases, I find that it's, at least in my experience more useful as an adult, they can be trained to do things like buffering crowds, which is where they put their body in between the bodies of you and kind of everybody else around you to create an additional physical space, they can do alarm response, this could include to a fire alarm to a cell phone alarm to an oven or to microwave just to kind of increase a person's responsiveness to it, they can do behavior interruption. So this could be anything from self injury to repetitive behavior that is potentially harmful. Service dogs can also help locate a missing item, or a missing person or a parked car in a parking lot, or retrieve items for you on command. So if you've got certain items that are coming for you, or if you take specific medication that you need to have, at a certain time, your dog can go get it for you. And those things can be really helpful for adults on the spectrum.

Eileen Lamb

How would someone go about getting a service dog?

Kaelynn Partlow

There's two main ways here in the United States. So first, you can go through an organization, it is sometimes really, really expensive. And sometimes it's free, it just depends on the specific organization that you go to. They say on average, it costs about \$20,000 to train a dog start to finish, including, you know, vet bills, and the fees to acquire the dog and training and all that by the time it's said and done. It's about 20,000, which most people don't just have on hand, so it makes them pretty inaccessible. The other way you can do it is you can train your own. The tricky part with that is you're not really cutting costs, you're still going to spend, you know about the same give or take. And you have to be able to locate a professional trainer to be able to help you if you don't have dog training experience.

Eileen Lamb

So like fundraising would be probably the best way to do it. Unless you have the means to you know, pay.

Kaelynn Partlow

Right.

Eileen Lamb

When did you get yours?

Kaelynn Partlow

I have had a service dog kind of on and off since high school.

Eileen Lamb

Wow. So yeah, you were an adult? That's what you're saying?

Kaelynn Partlow

Yeah.

Eileen Lamb

Any any other recommendations, you think for adults?

Kaelynn Partlow

Oh, yeah. Um, personally, I use a lot of fidget tools. So that helps with anxiety, sensory input, or even replacement behaviors for some like harmful stimming behavior. I talk a lot online about ear protection, I wear earplugs, I wear headphones, noise cancelling headphones, those things can all be really helpful with sensory input. And as it relates to my job, I for the longest time, it's not been something I've utilized recently. But I had an accommodation where I could ask for a break at any point throughout the day, and the supervisors were all trained on this. And they would take over whatever it was that I was doing so that I could kind of take a break and calm down and not embarrass myself at work. And I feel like that one is really, really underutilized. And I think it definitely requires a supportive work environment, which I know not everybody has, but it was really, really helpful for me when I needed it.

Eileen Lamb

That's amazing. Have you faced any obstacles to implementing accommodations as an adult?

Kaelynn Partlow

Oh, absolutely. I, especially with the dog or with headphones, anything that's like really overtly visible, the social stigma around those things. So people will stare people will ask rude or intrusive questions. Maybe you know, they won't invite you to things they won't to talk to you they want to be around you. Or the worst one, which to me is there's the rude and invasive questions from strangers.

Eileen Lamb

Do you have an example something that really annoyed you that someone said?

Kaelynn Partlow

Oh, not recently, but a lot of times with a dog. They'll be like, what's wrong with you? Why do you need a service dog? Are you training him? And you'll be like, No, I'm not training him. He's mine. Well, for what what do you have? Which is like, I don't know you? Why would you ask me?

Eileen Lamb

Oh, gosh, well do people like recognize you now from the show? Has it happened to you?

Kaelynn Partlow

Yeah, it's happened several times.

Eileen Lamb

That's always fun and awkward.

Kaelynn Partlow

It's a little awkward.

Eileen Lamb

But yeah, it's like I like it. But I also don't know what to say.

Kaelynn Partlow

Exactly.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah. You work as an RBT. So for? Do you want to explain what an RBT is first, before we

Kaelynn Partlow

sorry. An RBT is somebody who works in the field of ABA, they work on implementing the behavior plan, as well as the skill acquisition plan as written by the board certified behavior analyst.

Eileen Lamb

Just like you had the definition. Yes. What's, what's your favorite thing about your job? And why did you choose this path as an autistic adult?

Kaelynn Partlow

My favorite thing about my job is seeing the positive impact I have on the lives of the people that I serve. It's not like a small thing. It's it's really big, especially if you know what to look for in terms of helping people. There's just nothing like when you're working with a client who maybe doesn't have a whole lot of language, and you've taught them to request something that is really meaningful to them. And now that they've got this language, they can request this thing more frequently. And that really kind of keeps me going as an RBT. I think. I'm also able to problem solve with my clients in unique ways just because I've experienced a lot of their challenges in the past. So I think that makes me uniquely qualified.

Eileen Lamb

Do you tell the parents of the kiddos you work with that you're on the spectrum yourself? Like, do they know?

Kaelynn Partlow

I think so I think everybody has seen the show at this point. So if they don't know they should.

Eileen Lamb

Did you have to take a lot of time off for filming? How did that work out?

Kaelynn Partlow

Just a couple days. Yeah.

Eileen Lamb

Oh, well, that wasn't too bad, I guess.

Kaelynn Partlow

Yeah.

Eileen Lamb

So how do you? Did you ever face any difficulty in this field of being an RBT? And you know, in the workplace, how did you handle it?

Kaelynn Partlow

Oh, yeah, I have always had a lot of trouble. And frankly, still do when the people around me maybe don't follow the rules, or are maybe unaware of different therapeutic best practices. And so I coming from a place of being able to relate on a personal level, but also, I've got a lot of clinical experience working in a lot of different environments with a lot of types of autistic learners. So when I see somebody doing something that they maybe could do better, it's really, really hard for me to not want to say something or maybe not be upset by watching it go down. Have you ever said anything? I'm trying

to think. I am pretty good about keeping it in. But then I, it'll make me emotional. And so I'll have to like excuse myself so that I can fix it some other way.

Eileen Lamb

And then you can ask for your break, because you're working.

Kaelynn Partlow

There you go.

Eileen Lamb

Perfect. So you appeared in the Netflix TV show "Love on the Spectrum, US." Which is great. I promise. I was like everyone was telling me you need to watch it. And you know, I've watched a lot of shows about autism. And I always, you know, it's to me, it's always missing something. But I found it so real and true. I really, I really loved it. You are great.

Kaelynn Partlow

Thank you.

Eileen Lamb

So what what was the experience like for you like having the camera on you like for filming all of that having to follow directions, I assume like was that difficult?

Kaelynn Partlow

It was. I kind of describe it as one of the more stressful experiences that I've probably ever had. But that doesn't mean it wasn't fun. Like, I definitely enjoyed it. And I had a good time and the crew was fantastic. However, it was incredibly stressful because it's it's more demands than you maybe would have ever encountered in a 24 hour period. And they filmed for several days. So it was like a lot back to back when they were eight hour days. So it was it was a lot for sure.

Eileen Lamb

Do you feel more comfortable as time went by? Like you can get used to it? Did you kind of forget the cameras were around?

Kaelynn Partlow

A little bit? Yeah, I think you kind of get used to it after a while because the crew was very friendly. So I got to know them very quickly and the awkwardness kind of went away.

Eileen Lamb

That's good. Did you guys ever meet with the other?

Kaelynn Partlow

No, no, never.

Eileen Lamb

Just kind of separate. Speaking of that, being separate, you know, autism can be lonely. I know, I experienced it myself. Like, I tend to insulate myself a lot. Like, I never go out anymore. I don't have friends in person. I mean, you know, it's it's hard to like get put yourself out there with people. How do you, what do you do when loneliness kicks in?

Kaelynn Partlow

I would like to say that I've got a good answer, but I don't. I think right now I've been working on just kind of riding out the lonely feeling that some days are lonely, but some days are not lonely. And if I can just kind of ride out the ones that are, eventually a less lonely day will maybe come along. But in terms of long term prevention of loneliness, I don't have a great answer.

Eileen Lamb

You know, I think a good way that we both do is using our platform to kind of like, you know, be able to community and connect with people in that way. That's helped me a lot even though you know, it's not meaningful friendships, because it's like people on social media but connecting with people leaving the same thing as me. I mean, to me, it's been very, very useful. I don't know if you've connected to some people online too.

Kaelynn Partlow

Yeah, definitely.

Eileen Lamb

I watched some of your videos and I just love how balanced you're on when you share your views on social media was this morning or in the last few days you posted about awareness and acceptance and it was like oh my god, I feel like I could have said this myself. I mean, I've said it you know, like you can't have acceptance without awareness like you know, there's a lot of divide and people try to like choose a camp and all of the time is really in the middle and you need you need both and you know trying to cancel awarness it's not just not gonna work because a lot of people don't know about autism and you don't get acceptance without it. What what pushed you to to make these videos like because really, really useful.

Kaelynn Partlow

Videos in general or this morning's?

Eileen Lamb

All of them like you share?

Kaelynn Partlow

I think, when I did not, they told me probably I just don't remember maybe didn't really think too much of it when they said that your social media is really going to kind of explode overnight. I have 164,000 followers right now. And I started with 500 in May. So it's just really, really exploded. And when I, when that started happening, I guess I just realized, I've got to do something with this. I can't just share, you know, oh, I went to the beach, or I went to this restaurant, and it was great. Like, if I've got this huge platform, I should do something with it. And I think that's kind of where that came from.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah. And you are doing great things. I have my my followers sending me your videos like, like she she thinks like you you're not alone? Yeah, that's so cool. So it's really good. And speaking of social media, you know, about the divide in the community? And, I mean, there's a lot of harassment and bullying, honestly, I've gone through a lot of that. Have you how do you handle it? What's it been like? Gosh, it's like, I feel like really hearing myself and myself.

Kaelynn Partlow

I think we're very similar.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah, it's like, it's exactly. It's they're speaking from their own perspective, but trying to speak on behalf of the entire autism community, and

Kaelynn Partlow

You can't do it, I think it's kind of a two part. So sometimes when I get criticism, especially if it's just kind of some random person, and the it's just a completely unfounded criticism, sometimes I think they're funny, and maybe I shouldn't, but sometimes they truly they make me laugh. If I'm having a bad day, and I see some horrible, nasty comment online, depending on what it is. Sometimes it will make me laugh, and it probably shouldn't. But it does, just because I know it's so far from what is true. The other piece of that is personally, I only take criticism from people who have comparable clinical and personal experience to me, which doesn't necessarily mean that I'm disinterested in other people's perspectives. In fact, I seek them out, I will seek out other people's perspectives who I know are going to disagree with me, but I'm interested to hear what they have to say, however, when they come to my page to, you know, ridicule me in some way, or criticize me in some way, when they're only speaking from their own personal experience. To me, it it loses a lot of its value.

Eileen Lamb

You just can't and it really annoys me how they will, you know, go and people like parents who have, you know, they don't know any better alot of parents, their key has just been diagnosed, and they found those pages. And the autistic community hates this and hates that, you know, what are they gonna do, they're gonna listen, because they think it's really the entire community. And I don't know, what we can do, you know, as balanced people to put it in our to, you know, make parents and other people who are on the outside of this conflict, understand that, really, you know, each autistic person is only an expert on their own autism. And there is no community in that sense, because we're all individual just like neurotypical like, Do you have any idea of how to get that message across?

Kaelynn Partlow

Hmm, I don't know, I think, I think people are more attracted to my moderate beliefs than they are to extremist beliefs. I think I think that's partly why I've got the following that I do, because I'm not, I'm not in the, like the internet thing where they say, I'm coming for you. I'm not coming for anybody. I'm not here to criticize anybody. I'm not going to say, oh, this person over here, they said this, and they stuck and they are wrong and here's why. Maybe they do suck, and maybe they are wrong. And I could

probably definitely tell you why. But to make that into a video, it's just not what I want to be associated with. I don't know. I don't know if that answers your question or not.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah, no, I think it does. Maybe you're right, that in the end, we do get more people listening to us because of the "Balanced View," then, you know,

Kaelynn Partlow

No one likes to be attacked, you know?

Eileen Lamb

But it's like, you know, I look at it and like the media, you know, I've, I've been cut out of interviewing the media, I'm not gonna cite names, but if you're listening, you know who you are. And then all of the other people in the article are going to be people on the other side who have this very extreme views. And my balanced view is being cut out because I guess it doesn't sound as good as I don't know, for lack of a better word woke, I guess, you know, and it's, it's frustrating because I feel like people are walking on eggs or whatever that expression is, you know, because

Kaelynn Partlow

Oh, yeah,

Eileen Lamb

They don't want to hurt those people's feelings, you know, and then voices like mine and yours are often being like pushed out of the conversation. For that reason, I've experienced it a lot. And I guess, yeah, it's difficult to deal with. So, seeing your your accounts is, is very refreshing. And it seems like you end all the criticism well, like it's not affecting you that much?

Kaelynn Partlow

I think so I think, you know, the, the only time it will bother me is if it gets to be where, you know, one person will say something kind of nasty. And then 20 more people pile on top of that, and start to agree with them. And it, it becomes this group effort. And that's kind of where I tap out, but it's my account, so I can delete it and remove it. And it doesn't have to stay there. Of course, it'll bother me. But yeah, it doesn't need to stay there.

Eileen Lamb

Unfortunately, yeah, that's gonna what they do is they will post a screenshot or whatever, in a private group, and then everybody comes to attack. And I think we need to do better there. Because, you know, it's one thing to disagree if it's one person, and I will usually keep the comment and you know, I'm not gonna change my mind, but it's fine if they said, but once it becomes a, you know, dozens of people like it doesn't feel like someone giving feedback anymore. It feels like an attack. We should definitely not be doing this to other autistic people or to anyone.

Kaelynn Partlow

Right.

Eileen Lamb

I forgot to ask you earlier. What's your favorite breed of dog?

Kaelynn Partlow

I don't know. Maybe I'm biased, but you can't go wrong with a well bred lab. They are very versatile. They can do it all.

Eileen Lamb

Kind of like golden retrievers, right.

Kaelynn Partlow

Oh, yeah. Very similar.

Eileen Lamb

I have a golden Yeah, he's great. Oh, so happy. He knows it. Just want to please you and

Kaelynn Partlow

Oh, yeah, they'll go anywhere with you and do anything any to any day of the week. But they're also fine to just kind of nap on the couch. And I really appreciate that.

Eileen Lamb

What's your dog's name?

Kaelynn Partlow

FInnagin.

Eileen Lamb

Do you guys are ,you know, because you work all do, you guys like go out on walks like in the morning? And then at night? How do you?

Kaelynn Partlow

Yeah, usually at night, he's he likes to sleep. He'll just kind of lay on the couch while I'm at work. And then when I get home, we'll go somewhere, we'll take a walk or we'll do something.

Eileen Lamb

Do you think the kiddos at the center had the AB place who the love to meet him? Like is that an option, have you taken him? Oh my god sounds like my dog.

Kaelynn Partlow

I have you take any I have I've taken him a couple of times he when I say he's not good with kids, people get kind of nervous. But when I when I say he's not good with kids, what I really mean is that he is not very aware of his size. He's about 65 pounds, and he's very muscular. And sometimes he'll knock

somebody over or if they've got something in their hand, he maybe won't wait for them to give it to him. He'll just go ahead and take it. Which is not great.

Eileen Lamb

I'm gonna ask you some quickfire questions. Basically, I ask you a question. And you tell me the first thing that comes to your mind.

Kaelynn Partlow

All right.

Eileen Lamb

Do you have a favorite quote? And if so what is it?

Kaelynn Partlow

You know, I thought about that one for a really long time. And I do, but I don't remember it. And every time I hear a really good one, I'm like, Oh, that's a great one. I should keep that somewhere and I never do. And so when I see I don't know what it is. But no, I cannot recall one.

Eileen Lamb

What's your favorite comedy movie?

Kaelynn Partlow

"We are The Millers".

Eileen Lamb

What's your favorite drink?

Kaelynn Partlow

Orange cream soda.

Eileen Lamb

What's your favorite comedian? Who is your? Bill Burnham or Jeff Dunham? What was your dream job as a child? Was it being an RBT?

Kaelynn Partlow

No, I wanted to be a dog trainer at PetSmart.

Eileen Lamb

Specific. Not that bad. I have a friend who did training with her dog there. And she was very happy when he gets a lot of people make fun of it, but it was great. Where can people find you on social media so you can grow even more?

Kaelynn Partlow

Yeah. On Instagram and Tiktok is just kaelynnvp, and then on Facebook, it's Kaelynn's Autistic Angle.

Eileen Lamb

Awesome. Well, thanks so much for joining me today. Love you and I really appreciate your your balanced perspective.

Kaelynn Partlow

Thank you.