

Genia: Welcome to Good Things in Life. The podcast that helps kids with intellectual disabilities lead fulfilling lives. Today, I am here with Dr. Rhoberta Shaler, The Relationship Help Doctor. Dr Shaler provides urgent and ongoing care for relationships in crisis. Her mission is to provide insights, information, and inspiration for clients and audiences to transform relationship with themselves and with other humans to be honest, respectful, and safe in all ways. Even the US Marines have sought her help. Now, usually Rhoberta focuses on helping the partners, exes and adult children of the relentlessly difficult toxic people that she calls "high jackals" to stop the crazy-making and save their sanity. Today, Rhoberta is graciously agreed to come on the podcast to talk about how parents can work through the relentlessly difficult toxic people that they sometimes have to deal with while advocating for their kids with disabilities. Thank you so, so much for joining me here today.

Rhoberta: Oh, it's my pleasure, Genia. I've had to do exactly what we're talking about today because I was a teacher, I was a school principal and my focus was on children who had special needs.

Genia: Yeah. It's, it's, you're just such a perfect fit for this conversation. And I'm really looking forward to your input. You know, we've had my, when I think back over the years, my first experiences with advocacy and teachers and principals was when my sister, who's three years younger than I am, you know, was entering into the school system. And then as a teen in my high school, you know, I got into quite a bit of trouble advocating for friends and my sister. At one point, I got banned from the school property of my sister school for threatening the professionalism of the teachers. I was asked never to come back. And as a parent, I have had, you know, a number of situations where I've been sitting in an IEP meeting or other school-related meeting with people who are just, it feels like they are just set on blocking me essentially.

Genia: And often there's like an element of like gaslighting that goes on as well. And as parents, when we're working through IEP season, as we're working with schools throughout the year, we are often trying to get things for our kids that either the school doesn't have to offer, like the, it's just not there, um, or they don't know how to offer it. Or sometimes they're just refusing. And so I think you might experience of struggle with really difficult people in the school system is definitely not unique. And I honestly don't have a lot of, well that's not true. I do have some thoughts about what people can do that is helpful and how they can work through that. But I've never, I definitely don't have any thoughts from the perspective that I'm grateful that you're going to bring around just sort of understanding toxic people and whether, you know, what to do about that.

Rhoberta: Yeah. Well sometimes you're going to meet actual toxic people - people who have patterns, traits and cycles of personality disorders. And why you're going to meet them, Genia, is because they love to get into professions where they have power over other people. So there's going to be that element. Like I can withhold something from you, I can deem to give it to you, you know, I have that power. But the toxicity often comes from their complete inability to provide something. They know it and they may get an edge to themselves because they can't do it. One of the big things, because we want to talk about positive strategies, one of the big things to do is to begin your conversation with

some kind of empathy statement about their situation. You know, I know, I know that there are funding cuts.

Rhoberta: I know that sometimes in this arena, special education or special needs gets pushed to the side. I know that. I know that you care. I know that I care. I'm wondering what "we", always the "we", could do to make this happen? And when you make an inclusive thing, like using "we" instead of "you" or the system or the demanding other, you begin to create a collaborative conversation. Now, some people, don't get me wrong, it's not magic. Some people are not going to be able to engage no matter what. But it is a good start and it is a good way to approach humans is to already believe that you have something in common, a feeling that you have in common or a desire you have in common. You know, just to say something like, I know you want to provide the best for my child. I do too. And maybe there's a few limitations that are happening right now, but how do you think we can make it happen? When you get that joining in language, that can be very powerful.

Genia: So, okay. So trying to establish a sense of, I was going to say rapport, but I guess it's not necessarily just establishing rapport, it's sort of establishing a sense of us-ness.

Rhoberta: Exactly.

Genia: Yeah. Yeah. I can see how that would be helpful and really appeal, like really want, yeah, I can see how that would be helpful and would make people want to be a part of this collective us rather than maintaining an us-and-them kind of camp feeling across the table. Right.

Rhoberta: And when you say something like, "I know how committed you are to these kids and I know how it can be very difficult", when you acknowledge that, when you were empathetic about that. Yeah. There's going to be times you're going to have to be very affirmative, very assertive. You may have to not use this technique. But in general, particularly one-on-one, even if you stand up at a meeting and you're speaking on behalf of all parents or whatever, if you take the approach of "we" and "us" and bring up the positive attributes of what could happen and how it could look and what we could achieve, you can get people to buy into the dream of the "we" that maybe we can do something. And when you acknowledge that it's difficult or that it's been off the table or somebody just cut the funding, you speak to the elephant in the room that they were going to use as their reason why they couldn't. And you've already stated, "I know this and I believe that you have some power in this situation to help me."

Genia: Yeah, I can see that reflected in my experiences as well. I had one principal who, you know, we ended up getting into such conflict and disagreement that he basically said that I wasn't allowed to come to, I wasn't allowed to meet with anybody at the school unless I came alone. Which was well, totally inappropriate, of course, especially because like tell me, you know, a very, very tall, intimidating man telling a woman that the only way I could have a meeting was behind closed doors by myself is also just a little bit creepy.

Genia: But that was not his intention. But, you know, it was that we were in such conflict and then over time I had to sort of let it just settle for a little while because it felt like I was

in a completely locked situation. But then we were able to sort of work this from, work at it from an "us" perspective. And the "us" perspective, actually all it did was let me talk to other people and find solutions with other people. Like it never, it never, it never ended up with him actually doing anything, but he stopped blocking. And the, but the reason he stopped blocking is because instead of it being a real us-and-them situation, we were able to find little tiny ways of making "us" statements. And it was enough to get it out of gridlock.

Rhoberta: Well, the collective is powerful. You know, when, when there are more than one of you want something and one person is blocking it, yes, we'll reach toxic people who are just enjoying blocking it, but that's a small minority of people. I just want to go back to something that you said, Genia. When he said, you know, you can only meet with me alone, that's a moment and I think we all can use this little bit of wisdom is when somebody says something outrageous like that, step outside the conversation and simply in a neutral tone, repeat back what just happened. So I'm hearing you say that I as a woman can only meet with you alone as a man behind closed doors about this issue. Do I have that correct?

Rhoberta: Because when you shed light on something like that, when you don't let it slip by, when you don't let it go on acknowledged, it can build in things. But if you step up back from whatever your needs or wants in the conversation at that moment and just say, "Uh, let me clarify. Did I just hear this correctly?" Obviously just in my restating it, you can hear that he wouldn't be able to say, "Well, yes, that's what I said."

Genia: That's exactly what I said. Yeah, yeah.

Rhoberta: Yeah. Good. Yeah. Important for everybody to know though because your outrage might stop you from actually defining what was just said and clarifying.

Genia: I think the number of times in my life where my outrage has stopped me from being productive in a conversation is too many to count. Like your, I think your point is so valid not just when somebody, not just in that moment of like stating the did you just say that? But just in, I feel like that's like a really helpful thing to talk about or to hear more from you about because I have been in situation, countless situations where my, I'm so outraged. I'm so upset. I feel so threatened or feel like my child's being threatened so I'm vicariously threatened. That I'm, I'm, I can, I can sit here a pretty good strip off people. Like I can get going and I can like point out all the reasons why they're outrageous or why it's wrong or whatever. But I'm often working at cross purposes to what my actual goal is when I'm feeling, when I'm that dysregulated.

Rhoberta: Well, let me make a distinction that you made and I don't want to let it go by. There's a difference between being in that situation with the principal and saying, "You just said this. Do I have it right?" And saying the wiser thing, "I just heard this. Do I have it right?" Because when you make a statement about another human, you run into the potential difficulties. Now you talked about my work with the hijackals. They, the toxic people. Well, what your responsibility is, is what's going on within you and toxic people do not like to be challenged and they don't like to be spoken of in any negative form. So if you simply get in the habit of talking about yourself, then here's my definition of

assertiveness because I think it might really apply and help people understand. Assertiveness to me means to know that you have the right to take up space and draw breath. And from that right, you have the right to say what you think, feel, need and want as long as it does not mention another human by name or pronoun.

Genia: Can you repeat that?

Rhoberta: Yes. Assertiveness is knowing you have the right to take up space and drop breath and therefore have the right to say what you think, feel, need and want as long as you do not mention another human by name pronoun. So if I stay in that place, I'm just talking about my perception, my needs, what I want, what I heard, how I perceive a situation, what I think the statute means. You know, if I'm just speaking from that point of view, nobody can question that. They might try, but they can't because that's me. And you mentioned gaslighting earlier. If I am very, very clear about what I know, what I think, what I feel, what I need, what I want and what I remember and I say it, that is me, that is mine. That is me speaking about me and no other human knows what's true for me.

Rhoberta: So you're in a much safer lane when you learn to channel your communication from that place. You know, I've written many books, but in my book Kaizen for Couples, which is book to help people in relationship. There are two chapters on this strategy that I'm talking about. I call it the personal weather report and it is so very valuable at every relationship in your life. And when you can practice that, just speaking from yourself, you can channel that when you're feeling that outrage. When you want to get into the "you do when you never" and "you want" and "you won't" situation, you can just feel immediately you're saying, you know, "I'm outraged", "I am disappointed", "I feel that my child is not cared for", "I feel disrespected", "I feel marginalized and isolated", when you speak that way, no one can take that away from you.

Genia: Right, right. I think, one of the thoughts that comes to mind when you say that is, when you said the weather reports, that's actually something in my home that we try and do more and more. Like I feel like it's something we're growing into as a family. Recognizing that it's very difficult to be around people who are, you know, unhappy or grouchy or, you know, they, they, you know, walking around with that sort of like dark cloud and energy kind of thing. But it becomes an awful lot easier if the person walks in the door and says, "I'm really struggling." But like my, I'm, this is where I'm at right now. Like, here's my weather report. And they've kind of put it out there, which means it has nothing, it sort of points out that it has nothing to do with the rest of the family.

Genia: It's nobody, you know, it's nobody else's. And it also tends to ground, I have found it tends to ground the person who's giving the weather report as well so that that it tends to rain on other people less. You know, when they've sort of like, they've, they've stated it. So how does that then, I get that people can't argue. Like if I'm saying, "Listen. I really feel like this situation is a threat to my son and I feel, you know, and I'm outraged." It's, nobody can argue with it, but it doesn't necessarily take away the threat to your child. It's not necessarily like how does it, how does this approach help us as a advocacy tool I guess is what I'm getting at?

Rhoberta: Well, first of all, you're going to have a better outcome in the conversation if you start that way because you haven't put anybody back up as if you had accused them of anything. Right? Secondly, you're speaking from your own truth, your own experience, your own moment. That's why it's called personal weather report is what's going on within me and I will share that. Then you can take the next step. You know, you can give your personal weather and then if they persist, you can say, can you understand why I feel threatened because you've already said I feel threatened. Then you can ask them if they basically you're asking if they have any intention of empathy for your situation or your feelings or the needs of your son. Find that out.

Rhoberta: If they don't, if they're going to come down on this side of, here are the cold hard facts and the dollars and cents and they're not going to get into it, you need to know that. Right? You need to figure that out. So if you speak up personal weather report and they ignore it or they choose to focus on the dollar and cents value as opposed to your feelings and your needs that are emotional or you know, not based in dollars and cents, bring it back to it. You know, that can you understand how deeply I feel the need to advocate for my son right. So you just bring it back to that because they're justifying and rationalizing and excusing and doing everything that they possibly can in order to feel good themselves. Like they're justified. And so you get into that situation where there's a battle going on. Because each person is trying to stay safe in there.

Rhoberta: You know, they're trying to talk about what would I feel safe with. So you would feel safe if somebody did something for your son. They would feel safe if you understood why they can't do something for your son or they won't do something for your son. And then you go to that distinction. Am I understanding that from a fiscal perspective or a staffing perspective at this moment that it is impossible or am I to understand that this is something that is just not a priority at the moment and you won't do something? You know, distinctions like that. Anytime that you can back down your outrage in terms of your interaction, know that the outrage will fuel you to keep going and communicating and advocating. But the outrage spilling out your mouths has to be very, very carefully thought through because it can just blow up something and entrench the other side, right? They dig their heels in.

Genia: Yeah. Yeah, for sure. And the, one of the things that I think makes advocacy in school situations tricky is that, you know, we, our identity is wrapped up in being a parent and in advocating on what is best for our kids and our, like our sense of self, our identity, our sense of self-worth. Maybe not self-worth. That's not quite right.

Rhoberta: They're doing a good job.

Genia: They're doing a good job. Exactly. And the teacher or the prin-, like the educator are equally wrapped up in their identity as an educator doing a good job and doing the right thing. And often if you are advocating for like sometimes it's a money thing. I mean at some level it's always a money thing, but sometimes it's a money thing. But sometimes it's a, like it's a paradigm conflict, right? So the school system, you know, offers self-contained, segregated classes, you are advocating for inclusive education and you are saying these are all the reasons why, not just these are all the reasons why I want inclusion, but these are all the reasons why I don't want what you have to offer, which is

a threat to the identity and the sense of self of the educators. And I've, I don't know what to do about that, honestly.

Rhoberta: Well, it is a tricky situation and it's because you're dealing with a system rather than a human who is the, just a representative of the system, it becomes a more difficult situation because that human may or may not have power to do anything. That human may have all the empathy in the world for you but be fighting city hall just like you are. And yet they're the face of the organization at the moment that you speak with them. And it can be very difficult. So this is again, why I say, you know, go in and present the "we" because if you say, you know. There are philosophical differences between marginalizing, isolating and segregating versus inclusion and socializing and normalizing. Tell me where you stand on that. Tell me how that works for you.

Rhoberta: If you say something like that to someone, they want a platform, they want to speak about that. And if you open that, particularly in a new relationship, if you open that conversation, say, "I just want to learn all about you." And, and you truly do because you're going to have to know where you can have entry points with this person to the system. You want to generalize in the sense of we're on the same team advocating for my son, right? And so there are approaches to new relationships that matter. There are also, completely on the other side, approaches to when you've burned a bridge or two and you're trying to get across, you know. You still have to work with as difficult person or this person who just wants to turn and run when they see you coming.

Genia: That's never happened to me, of course. I've never, no, ever.

Rhoberta: No, of course. No, no. I understand that completely.

Genia: I have never burned a bridge or offended anybody or yeah. No.

Rhoberta: No. When you've never had anybody who was too busy to see you or couldn't quite manage to fit you into their schedule or saw you when you went to the bathroom.

Genia: Of course that happens all the time. Yeah. That stuff happens all the time. Just, but not because of anything that I've done poorly, that's for sure. I'm just kidding. Of course I have a long, long, long laundry list of all my, all the things, all the times I walk out thinking, "Well, that went poorly." And you know, because of me, like I thought I could have managed that differently and better. So this is hugely helpful. Okay. So what do we do when we burn bridges?

Rhoberta: You paint, you paint the space red and say, "Hey, I completely own my part and burning that bridge." Right? And I would love to rebuild it with you in a new fashion that would make us both feel better. Would you join me in doing that? And that's the contrite moment that everybody is not really excited about happening. But you know, if, if your feelings have erupted and you're just at the end of your tether and you're not sure you have the strength to tie a knot and hang on. And maybe you say something, you do something or you accused something. We all have those moments. Yeah, they're not wise, but we're human and they spill out of emotion. And so it's important for us to paint them red and say, "I apologize for my part in it. I acknowledge my part in it".

Rhoberta: I use words to say, "I know that I sounded as though I were being demanding in an unrealistic fashion", or "I didn't mean to personalize you for a system that I'm angry with", or, you know, "Can we get on the same page again and be safe together to work for the children?" Again, going back to, I messed up, will you join me in getting back on an advocacy path for my child or children? And then you speak to that higher desire and see what's possible. You know, working in the school system for 28 years as I did, you know, as a teacher and then became an administrator and then trained teachers for a long time and particularly train them in conflict management and team building and communication skills because they were lacking. You know, many times, education is about focusing on the children. And we don't train teachers enough to know how to interact with parents.

Rhoberta: Not only to know how, but to build their confidence and communication so that they don't get their backup when somebody comes. Like when I was a teacher and I'd come out of my classroom at the end of the day and I'd see that parent coming down the hall, I decided that I would greet them with a smile and say in my head only concerned parents come to school. I am going to take a moment, take a breath and say okay this parent is concerned they care about their kid because there's a whole lot of parents who aren't coming to school. So the teachers don't have any training about how to view the whole situation of parents who are feeling left out. Parents who are feeling unheard. Parents who have a grievance. You know, there's training that has to happen there but we can't be responsible for their training. But just that caveat that they personally main feel that they don't have the communication and conflict management skills to handle the conversation.

Genia: Yeah. It's true. You could be at a whole table, like a meeting with a whole table of people who lack that skill set.

Rhoberta: Yeah.

Genia: Yeah.

Rhoberta: And often having a child who has special needs is isolating.

Genia: Yeah. Yeah. Oh, for sure. Yeah. I just want to loop back to what you were saying about, you know, if you've burned bridges, how you can, how you can respond. And there's a couple of things, I can almost hear parents listening to this and some of the responses, the knee jerk kind of responses. One knee jerk response, it's going to be, I shouldn't have to, like when I, I shouldn't have to kind of, you know, approach in that situation. And one of the things that I'm very frequently talking to parents about is that it doesn't really matter whether we ought to, have to, you know. Like the bottom line is that sometimes we need to look at what's going to be an effective strategy, whether or not we ought to have to use it or not. And building or like mending fences and rebuilding rapport is an effective strategy in moving towards your goals. The other thing though that sort of comes on the tail end that I want you to speak on is, that moment where you sit down with somebody and say, I'm sorry. You know, I recognize my piece in this and I'm sorry.

Genia: If you, you mean, you may not be yet. Like, how do you get there? How do you get there when you are like, we're talking about enraged bears here, right? Like we're talking about parents who are literally feel like their children's safety is being threatened. And so, and often the schools, when parents really are in conflict with the school, there's very frequent negative input, right? So it's like, it's not like you can go away for two weeks and calm down and come back because every day your kid goes to school and every, you know, like it's a, like the poking of the bear happens a lot. So how as the parent, how do you get, do you have advice for parents around getting to that place where you can take it deep breath, sit down at a table, look somebody in the eye and say, I'm sorry for my part in this?

Rhoberta: I do. First of all, every single one of us as humans needs same thing. We're going to say or do something. We're going to have lasting feelings. We're going to to be an arousal well after the event and still have to go back in and deal with things. So yes. So first of all, get great skills, learn to understand what's going on within you, why you respond in a certain ways to things. What it is that triggers your outrage. And you know, immediately everybody might say, "Who's listened to this? Well, I know what it is." But maybe, maybe back in your life somewhere, something unfair happened. Maybe there are things that need healing in your own psyche. So that's one thing that I would say. The second thing is that they also are afraid when you go in and your afraid. You know, they're, the next day comes and there's another issue with the child, another issue with the system.

Rhoberta: They see it coming and they're not happy and you're not happy, then you have to come to it. So sometimes just doing the "us" thing again saying, "Oh, it is frustrating that there's constantly something that we have to talk about. I know that and you know, I'm still not over what I went through yesterday and here's what's happening today." You know, the more that you can take ownership of what your emotional state is, the more that you can say, here's who I am and what's up with me right at this moment. And then add to it. And you may be feeling something too. And yet we have to deal with this very immediate issue. As soon as you demonstrate that you see the other human and you see this situation, you put the likelihood of being able to resolve something way up. But if we bring our outrage self with the leftover remorse of what I said and the anger at what that person could or couldn't do or, and what they did or didn't say,

Rhoberta: If I just start talking, there's all this stuff around us that is still, you know, needing a name and is most effective to be able to say, "Yeah, I know we have unresolved stuff, but today's thing is this." And learn to breathe yourself down before you go into any of these situations. Use techniques that allow you to take control of your body. So four, seven, eight breathing is a really powerful thing to do. That's when you breathe in deeply for a count of four through your nose to get as much oxygen and as you can. Then you hold your breath for a count of seven and then you exhale your mouth as forcefully and completely as you can to a count of eight and do it at least three times. This allows your body to be real oxygenated. And when you take in that big breath through your nose, you're getting the maximum amount of oxygen.

Rhoberta: Interesting fact, it takes 20 seconds for that oxygen in that one breath to go all the way around your bloodstream and it will pick up carbon dioxide, which is what's going to be

the downer in your body and expel it when you exhale through your mouth for that eight count. So it is going to take your shoulders down from your ear lobes. It's going to refresh your brain. It's going to give you a clear mind and an ability to come into it with less tension. And we can take responsibility for our internal state in that way so that what comes out of our mouth is something that we feel better about.

Genia: Yup. And the holding of the breath, I use this technique as well with people who are having babies like in the middle of labor and with the exact same purpose, right. Is using breath in order to bring yourself down. And the holding of the breath also lowers your heart rate because if your heart continued to beat that fast while you're holding your breath, you would use up that breath of oxygen too quickly and your body knows that. But as your heart rate comes down, it also lowers your feelings of stress and anxiety and you know, all the uptight kinds of feelings. It works really well. Even if you're doing it like I need, I need to walk into the, it doesn't have to, like you don't have to want it to feel loving or calm necessarily in order for this technique to work because just the, just the, just bringing your body down actually feeds back and helps you be calmer.

Rhoberta: Yeah, it absolutely does. And when you're doing it, when you're also doing it, what you're trying to do is to get your body to stop being in the fight or flight cycle.

Genia: Exactly. Yup.

Rhoberta: And when you're in the fight or flight cycle, you reduce your capacity to think straight. And so what you're doing is trying to get your head on straight and your body relaxed so that you have a chance of saying something that will get something accomplished in a positive way.

Genia: Yeah. It's really a win, win, win type of strategy for sure. I think that's, I think it's kind of funny sometimes when we, when we talk about effective strategies for advocacy. You know, the two things that you have talked about is establishing a sense of us-ness and connection with people and just keeping yourself calm. And it sounds like that's not very targeted. Do you know what I mean? Like it sounds kind of, I don't know, like a little bit, it's sort of nice and sweet, but a little bit airy fairy and not very targeted as far as like strategies. But it's incredibly effective and I and I think it's also I dunno. I think that there's something like particularly powerful in what you're saying about the absolute sort of foundation of effectiveness being establishing a connection with the people that are sitting across the table.

Rhoberta: Yeah. Never underestimate small talk. Never underestimate asking someone how they're feeling. Never underestimate speaking about the elephant in the room in a neutral way. These things actually bring us together and if we want to get something done, we need to be together. We need to find ways and we want to have an attitude when we go somewhere that I'm in the best shape possible. Not you know, going in as though we're going to take them down, rip them apart and make them see, right? You know, which is because that level of anger clouds your thinking. And it can take you down a path that might take months to come back from. So we're really talking about things that are very present moment. They're not woo woo to use your breath. If it were

woo woo to use your breath, just stop breathing for 10 minutes and see how you do. Right?

Genia: Yeah, totally. Totally.

Rhoberta: So taking charge of yourself and being your most skillful self, your most self-aware self, your clearest self. You brought up something a few minutes ago, Genia, I just wanted to highlight and that is know what your priorities are. You know, I teach negotiation at the MBA program at the University of Texas and you know, I'm always saying to people, when you go into a situation you need to take charge of yourself, but then you need to know what is my ideal settlement, what is my acceptable settlement and what is my walk away point? Know what you want. Know what you're willing to give up. Know what you're willing to give to the other person so that they feel like you were actually participating in a collaborative venture. And when you do that, people get a sense that you're going to be fair. They may not be able to give you what you most need or want.

Rhoberta: You can give them attention, you can give them respect, you can allow them to be the authority. You can ask them questions rather than make statements, you know, this is something that happens. I remember when my youngest son was a teenager, you know, he's six foot five and you know, well a lot bigger than me. And he would say things like, "Well, I know you're not going to let me go out on a Friday night." And I'd say, "Oh, okay. So there's no question in there. You've already figured that out." And he was looking at me and say, "Well, I just, yeah." I said, "Okay. Then I guess that's how Friday is going to go." But if there were a question in there, what would it be? And he would get, you know, all weird. And then he would say, "Well, can I go?" Oh, a question, possibility of yes or no. Now we can talk. And it's important for us to realize that then don't go in expecting a no. Expect the possibility of yes or no and generate as much information as you can that doesn't take anybody to a conclusion too quickly.

Genia: Yeah, that's really helpful. That's really helpful. At one point when you were talking I was, I dunno, I think remembering myself in meetings where I felt really incompetent at even the small talk that you were mentioning. You know, like the, and I know it's like very kind of fear-based, right? Like I'm so nervous, I'm so fearful of what's going to happen. I'm so uncomfortable. I've had so many negative experiences that have sort of prepared me to feel that way that even the, my basic social skills of sitting down, smiling at somebody, looking them in the eye saying, "How was your day going?" I get, I lose some of that. But what you've suggested around making sure that before I walk in, I'm really clear about my, you know, my biggest priorities, my, you know, things I would like, but I can waver on and the mountains willing to die on kind of thing.

Genia: And then, you know, essentially starting with a personal weather report, like I've never, I've never had this fail where if I walk into a situation and say, "Ooh, I'm feeling really nervous about this", that I don't get a compassionate response from people. And also the fact that I've named it makes it less powerful. So you know, a personal weather report. Then, you know, establishing connection and you know, establishing or expressing interest in how the other person is doing.

Rhoberta: Yeah. Acknowledging the other person's there with feelings too.

Genia: Yeah. Those things likely would dramatically, first of all, those are things that I can plan and be intentional about. So I can just make those things happen. And then using the breath work that you were talking about, that combination, knowing that that's actually like steps in my meeting agenda or my, you know, the including the prep would make me a lot more competent or bring my comp, you know, bring my competencies out more compared to how I have often felt in high stakes meetings.

Rhoberta: Just sit in the car for a minute before you go in and do this. You know, plan to go early, sit in the car, collect yourself. You've come from whatever you've come from dealing with life, dealing with kids, dealing with, you know, whatever it is. Navigating traffic. At any time, we're going to a meeting, whether we're expecting difficulties or not. Use that what I call transition time. Take the transition time. Know that you deserve the transition time to bring your head in your body and yourself to this moment. Leave all the other stuff behind. Gather yourself for now. Breathe and then take yourself in as a present, purposeful communicator.

Genia: So, so valuable. The other day I went from one meeting that was stressful, not because of the, we just had a problem that needed to get solved and it took a lot of solving. Like it took a lot of thinking. It took a long time. It was, you know, mentally frustrating to try and solve the problem. And then I called a colleague to pass on some information and request some information and she was saying to me, "Are you okay? Like, are you all right?" And I was saying, "Yeah, I guess I'm fine." And so she was feeding back to me the energy that I had brought in to that conversation. And I had brought into that conversation all of the energy from the meeting that was over. The meeting was over. The problem was solved. Like the problem was now not a problem anymore, but I hadn't yet taken time to remind myself that I was okay. You know what I mean? The problem is [inaudible]

Rhoberta: Well, you had integrated the expense. Yeah. You had integrated the experience. And that's the time I'm talking about, Genia, is, you know, that transition time.

Genia: Yeah. Yeah.

Rhoberta: Like, okay. That's over there now, here's where I am. Here's what I'm going toward. And you know, this is a wonderful thing for everybody to know. If you work and you're going home, have a conscious transition time. Leave work, you know, sit in your car. Leave work behind. Get your head around alright going home to my partner. I'm going home to my child. I'm going home to my dog. I'm going home to a place I feel safe and take that person with you home. Not the person says, "You'll never believe the day I had." Because when you deal with your own transition time, it is a mark of emotional maturity to deal with your own transition time. To be able to walk in and not have all that emotion.

Rhoberta: You might say, "I've had a really difficult day and I would really appreciate just being able to have a bath in a half hour before I enter into any meaningful conversation. But come here and give me a hug." That lets people into your world. Right. And we don't value transition time enough. Right. So that in your example, "Okay, I got what I wanted. Maybe not all of it, but I did quite well. The problem is solved. We have a plan moving

forward." Decompress. "Good job, Genia. You did that. That's great. You're, you're handled that now let me bring myself to what I'm going toward." Okay. Who am I bringing into this place that I'm going toward? Gather yourself.

Genia: Yeah. Really valuable. Really valuable. I'm just conscious of your time. Dr. Shaler. Looking at the clock here, if you had any, is there anything we've missed? If you had something that you just really wanted to impart to parents of kids with disabilities who are having a difficult time working with school teams, is there anything that you feel like we should offer?

Rhoberta: Well, I think the most important pieces we've actually discussed, but I would like to emphasize the fact that remember you're all in the boat together, right? They're trying to provide things. You need things. They don't know exactly what you need until you tell them. They, you don't know exactly what their limitations or their plans are until they tell you. So you need to keep that communication very open. If you're going into an IEP meeting or something, go into it with the "we" mentality. What can we create that's in the best interest of my child? Now, open yourself to those kinds of feelings. Like just steep yourself in that.

Rhoberta: Like this is something where I have the opportunity of creating something together and I'm going to go in generating that attitude and then I'm going to have an open mind to hear what the limitations or the considerations of the other person are. And see how I can calibrate that to close the gap between what I want, what they have and how we can make it happen. Always stay in that generative space of us and we, when you're, we're dealing with his system because other than that, what do you have? You just have your child at home with you out of the system and did you really then give your child what you wanted the child to have? No. Your frustration level took you to that place where now you get much less, so know what your priorities are. Know what the bigger picture is and play into that.

Genia: Thank you very much for that. Dr Shaler, where would people find you if they want to learn more about you and continue to learn from you?

Rhoberta: My website is transformingrelationship.com. Singular, transformingrelationship.com. I have a podcast twice a week called Save Your Sanity: Help for Toxic Relationships. You'll find that on my website, but you can also find it anywhere you like to get your podcasts, Save Your Sanity. And I have a YouTube channel. It has over 500 videos and that can help you as well. And it, the channel is called for For Relationship Help, H-E-L-P.

Genia: And presumably there's a link to that on your website as well.

Rhoberta: Yes, when you click on the podcast and videos link, you'll get everything that you need to know that I've just mentioned.

Genia: Wonderful.

Rhoberta: So everything at transformingrelationship.com.

Genia: Great. And I'll make sure that the links to the website but also individually to the podcast and the YouTube channel are included in the show notes today. I've created a list of 14 questions that parents can bring to meetings with schools or school programs to help them get a sense of what the school program is all about, which may also help in preparing strategies for advocacy around inclusive education. And I'll include that link in the show notes as well. And thank you so, so very much, Dr. Shaler. This has been incredibly valuable. And it's been valuable to me and I know that it will be valuable to my audience as well. So thank you so, so much.

Rhoberta: Oh, you're so welcome. And I think that every parent who advocates for their child is a hero or heroine, so keep it up.

Genia: Thank you. Thank you very much.