Transcript

The Resilient Kid Podcast

Season 7 – Episode 12

The SATs, what to expect and how to be calm and prepare your child before and during the event.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Have you been worried about SATs? Are you a parent who's got a student in year six? Well, have we got the right person for you? Welcome to the Resilient Kid podcast with me, Ashley Costello, psychotherapist at the Resilient Kid, and I have Joanne here from Growing Young Minds, and I'm going to let Joanne introduce herself, and then we're going to talk.

All things SATs. Hi, Joanne. How are you?

Joanne - Growing Young Minds: Hi Ashley, thanks so much for having me on the podcast. It's great to be here to talk about SATs and use all of my experience from the years that I have of teaching and supporting parents through SATs. Growing Young Minds started in 2016 when I left the classroom and I had been mostly in year two and year six, but had other experiences as well. And Growing Young Minds a tuition company, that empowers children and parents through understanding the systems and the processes and feeling confident so that they can make the right choices for themselves.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: And I think that's really important. And one of the things that really attracted me to Grown Young Minds is because here at the Resilient Kid, we talk about the one-to-one work we do with the students, but actually it's really important that we support the parents through it. And I know that you do that as well, because just before we hit record,

you and I were saying that actually some parents got no clue what SATs looks like. So just before we go into that, and actually what does SATs look like for a year Six student and their parents. Tell me a little bit about kind of why you got into teaching in the first place, and then I guess why you wanted to set up Growing Young Minds.

Joanne - Growing Young Minds: I think I've always wanted to be a teacher. I remember fondly sitting in my year six classroom looking at my teacher thinking one day I'm going to stand at that board and that is going to be me. But I come from a very, difficult learning background. So I am diagnosed dyslexic. I was diagnosed at 18, which meant I struggled the whole way through my education career. And I fought very, very hard for every GCSE grade, every college grade and to get into my degree. So I just never wanted children to have to ever have to fight like that or feel that they weren't good enough or that their learning was not going to be, the way that they had to be taught. And that's the problem with schools. And I love schools and I still work with schools and all of our staff here at Growing Young Minds are teachers, but we are passionate about delivering the curriculum in a way that suits your child. So we're really

bespoke. We're groups of four, so that you're not feeling under pressure to kind of feel that learning. And you can bounce ideas around in a really safe and fun environment. I think that really, kind of supported why we set it up in the first place. I love my time in school, but I got to the point where I was thinking I was basically not learning anything myself. And I was moving through kind of management.

I was on senior leadership team and my head had asked me if I'd be interested in applying for the assistant head job, you know, would I be interested in taking on the assistant head job and I would have really loved it and I loved supporting the school community, but I also felt that I could give more and I could not just support the few hundred children in my school, but also support families and children in a much wider context. And that's what we've gone on to do. We also support lots of home ed families through our home ed resources. And again, it's just been great to kind of empower parents, empower children and to tackle learning from their starting point. And not from the point that the school curriculum states that we have to be at.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Do you know what? I absolutely love that. One of the values we have here is around meeting children where they're at and parents, you know because often parents struggle as well and, struggle to be able to support. So I absolutely love that. You know, really love that. We're so aligned in those values.

Do you know what? I really liked what you just said there as well is, I'm a trained teacher as well. And I think often we go into teaching because we want to work with kids because we want to make a difference and things like that. But actually what you said is I stopped learning. I love that because I think life is boring without learning, but also as well , the more I'm sure in your job, you're constantly learning as am I,

different courses that we take on or research that we do keeps us at the top of our game. And I think anytime that we get to a point where we're not being challenged or we're not being stretched, you know, we're not giving our best. So I love, you know, that is one of the contributing factors to why you decided to set up Growing Young Minds, which is brilliant.

So Joanne, when it comes down to kind of SATs week, what does it look like?

Give, kind of a, auditory representation to parents, because I think parents get a little bit anxious around this. So what does that look like for their kids?

Joanne - Growing Young Minds: So, the SATs stand for Standardized Attainment Tests. And many parents, I guess, probably don't know, but they do them in English, is in SPAG, so spelling, punctuation, and grammar. And there's a spelling test in that first test as well. Then there's a reading comprehension test. And then there's actually three maths papers. Which is, one is an arithmetic, so just that kind of pure question, you know, your addition, your subtraction, your multiplication type questions. And then there's two reasoning papers. The first, Reasoning Paper Two, as it's called, because it's the second paper they take, is actually slightly easier in terms of reasoning. And then Reasoning Paper Three, which is the final test that they take across the week, is, has got some slightly more challenging questions in there. Okay. So, but then English as in writing is still assessed and a grade is given for that as well and

that is teacher assessed and actually, we don't need to submit those grades until the June of the year that they're in, year six.

Everyone thinks that by the end of the May testing week we're done. But actually, our children are still writing for their lives, bless them sometimes, every week, rolling out some more and more writing just to really concrete that writing grade and to do that. And then also we have to, as teachers, submit a science paper grade which is all teacher assessed as well. So there is a lot to be done either in that week or around the combined grade that parents do see at the end of the day. There's lots of discussion around why children will do these kind of SATs questions and what's the kind of relevance for them. There is a focus on whether your child is meeting the age-related expectations. That's how schools refer to it and, and obviously we want our children to be meeting the age-related expectations for themselves so that they can Go into secondary school and thrive and be at a level that's going to help them understand and to keep progressing forwards. So it is really important for children, but it's not kind of the be all and end all and children do learn at different times. The results are also used to assess the school's level, and whether the children have made progress during their time at school. And the higher the grades, the greater the progress. Kind of, in a sense, the better the school looks. That's quite important for schools, and why they find it really important to kind of keep driving the learning forwards. because ultimately, they are being tested and assess themselves ahead of Ofsted. But the teachers I find when I work with teachers in school now, or when I was a teacher in school, we ultimately want the best for the children during that week. And we want them to feel confident and in this first exam experience, but we also want them to leave our primary school at the right level, knowing all the foundations that they need to know ahead of secondary school.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Brilliant, , I think you're really right there. And one of the ways that I speak to my year six students is this is a test to see how well your teachers have taught, you know, so that the onus is not all on them because as we know, like you say, Joanne, a lot of the schools are assessed on pupils making that progress, which is, really important for things like Ofsted and, to attract new pupils coming to that school as well, for sure.

Just before we move on to kind of what parents can do to help their children physically in SATs week, what does it look like? They walk in on the Monday morning into school. Yeah, I'll let you kind of take over just to describe that to parents.

Joanne - Growing Young Minds: Yeah, lots of schools offer breakfast clubs that first week, and that's a great way to kind of get the kids in early, iron out any of those kinds of questions or nerves and just make sure that everybody's kind of together and they're in it together and no one's late for the test. And then you tend to go up to your classroom and you get there and, all the tables are either sometimes they do it in the hall, but mostly lots of children still do it in the classroom,

so it's in their natural environment. Everything's kind of covered up. All the displays are covered up. Any kind of key posters that had terminology on is all covered up so it's slightly different. And the tables are laid out so that children sit facing each other kind of at a furthest

point of distance. Normally the register is taken and everything is kind of tried to keep relatively calm and normal and then any children that are leaving for extra time or to go into smaller rooms tend to leave. And then the test papers are given out, and the teachers take a really long time to read the front cover of the test, to explain to the children what they're doing, to go through the instructions, and just to remind them to look at the key features, like how many marks is this question worth?

You know, think about your timing. We talk about how long you're going to have. We talk about the start time and then what will be the finish time. And then we write those start and finish times up on the board so that everybody knows what to look for and the kind of pace of that. Once everybody's settled and we've checked, they've got sharp pencils and they know where they are and we kind of feel that everyone is calm and ready to go, then the test starts. And the test last for very varying amounts of time, but within an hour or so, everybody will be done and we will have collected the test books in and you just feel the sense of relief after that first, definitely after day one, that kind of sense of relief. And then we normally give them extended play time, and then just have a very much more chilled day. Sometimes we do revision ahead of the next day's exam But then in the afternoon we do just try and do something really calm, some art. Something that they enjoy, extra P.E., those kind of things and then the next day it starts all over again So we have that breakfast club and then we have kind of go into that room That's now all set up and the tests kind of starting and we go through all the instructions again and it's the same repetitive pattern so we find that once day one's out the way everybody's kind of feeling much more prepared they know what it looks like lots of schools do mock tests ahead of these and they do try and replicate some of this so that children are prepared and know what to expect on the day

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Brilliant. And I think there's a couple of things there that you've said. I love that, you said earlier is it is about also prepping them for the future. So, you know, exactly like GCSEs, they write up on the board, the start times, how long you've got, things like that. So that's brilliant because it's just a little bit of a, it's not a shock when they get to high school then when they've got that kind of thing.

So I thought, I think that's really important to say. And also then, you said something else around that kind of repetitive and, whether they do it in mocks or whether they, after day one, they understand what's expected. So that's really good as well, because, you know, I always find that children that understand what's expected, they will deliver to that. It's when they don't know what to expect, that where anxiety grows, isn't it, when they don't actually know what to expect. So that's brilliant. Joanne, what can parents do to help prep their year six students?

Joanne - Growing Young Minds: I think the biggest one is just to stay calm. There is no chance your child can fail the SATs. And that's one of the biggest questions I'm asked. Can my child fail? No. What schools are looking for is the magical 100 number. If you're just below that or above that, it doesn't really matter. No child is going to fail , so please don't use that language at all with your child.

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Please be encouraging that you can never fail your SATs. We just want to see where they are and, help with their gaps in their learning. Then there's lots of things you could do. Reading is key. The more we read with our children, the better understanding of comprehension and maths word problems that they will be. And I really encourage parents in years five and six, where the reading might slip off a bit and they just read on their own, just read one page with them a night and you spend five minutes talking about that one page because that's that comprehension, that you really need to work on. That's what we really want to encourage into our kids, the understanding of the world around them, about what they're reading, about the maths questions, and that all comes through reading.

So I really, really advocate parents to spend five minutes reading and then five minutes talking to their child, if nothing else. I know Bedtimes are busy, family life is busy, but please do keep reading with them even into kind of years five, six, seven. That's so, so important. As you mentioned earlier, Ashley, that kind of healthy mind, healthy body is a really key thing. So lots of preparation around water and sleep, proteins, the right kind of slow-release breakfast or food around that. And then little and often practice. So if you do want to do extra work with your child, or if you do want to get a tutor, it's about small, regular things. It should not be from Easter holidays.

You're doing an hour or two hours every night on top of school. You need little and often focusing on the core areas that they need to practice. You might want to choose to buy some mock test papers from companies or you can find previous ones from online. And just Allow your child to see those at home and to be able to give them that exposure and to look at the kind of key bits.

Why is this bit in bold? What does that mark at the side tell you? If it says three marks, what is that telling you to do? Just so that they're used to the formula and format and just preparation slowly building up. But please don't put loads of pressure on to rush. You know, right now, little and often, and you get done what you can get done in that time, and anything else can be filled later. And then I think the last thing is that really final treat. What are you all looking forward to? And this should be a family thing. Is it a day out? Is it a meal? Is it a special takeaway or carpet picnic or whatever it is that you're going to do as a family to celebrate kind of the end of that process and everybody's hard work but also, they've got something to look forward to. You know, the end of the SATS week or that kind of period of time can feel like a real slump. The teachers will have talked about it all year, you might have been thinking about it all year as a parent and as a child. And then you get to the end of that week, and yes, you've often got to look forward to the end of year show, and other events that are happening, but sometimes it can feel like a real kind of like, that's it, I'm done, you know, that's year six done now, all people talk about is the SATs in year six, and I've done them. And it's really important that we keep that high and that momentum. Going post SATs, that's not the be all and end all in life. It's important to have something else to kind of hold on to and to look forward to and to be celebrating together with. So I think they're kind of my key tips.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: That's brilliant. And who doesn't love a carpet picnic? I always hear that from families, like, you know, especially if they sit around the table, you know, most nights to, to then celebrate with , a carpet picnic is just brilliant. And I think it's really important.

Some of the stuff that you've said there, Joanne, about, you know, as parents, yes, of course, we could go through time tables, and I think, you know, reading is really important like you've just said, because actually we don't realize the impact it has on maths problems as well, that if they've not got the comprehension or they've not got that practice in reading.

So I think they've really brilliant. But thinking about like slow-release breakfast, like porridge or eggs or things like that, that's just going to give them that little boost of energy at the right time. Looking at making sure they have water. I have A lot of students who take in GCSEs and A levels and we talk about the research paper that says if you have water with you, you are likely to get 5 percent higher on your exams than if you don't.

And I think that comes from a number of things. One, because if you're a little bit stressed, you take some water that just helps calm your nervous system down. Also, it's a bit of thinking time if you're stuck on a question and things like that. So yeah, definitely hydration , and eating and sleeping, you know, making sure that they get plenty of sleep.

You mentioning in that it's absolutely brilliant. So fantastic tips by the way. But she's actually also got some tips that she was saying. She'd give to me ahead of time, which I think is really good. And you talk about if we can do those top tips now, Joanne, you talk about practice doesn't need to be in a book.

I love that. Can you, explain that a little bit more for us?

Joanne - Growing Young Minds: Yeah, sure. Lots of parents rush out to well-known book companies and buy lots of books, which I find just as a battleground. And then that's a conversation we have a lot at work is, you know, my child's not engaging. They won't do these books with me. And it really doesn't need to be. You could do some baking and change the recipe so that your kind of factoring in some kind of ratio in there. You could be walking down the road spotting the prime numbers or adding the numbers up as you get and practicing that mental maths. You could be sitting in a car journey and rather than playing I spy, having a debate or giving , you favourite book recommendations with a reason why, those kinds of things.

So just lots for things that you could be doing outside of just a book work, even things like games lots of card games and things like that work really well just sudoku or boggle or all of those kinds of fun things that just keeps your child's brain active and then you go to go. You come up with a really good word.

And then so they say, I dunno what this means. And then you challenge them to look it up or stick it on the fridge and then see who can use it the most in that week. And that just pushes your child's vocabulary and makes it fun and creative. And nobody needed to use a textbook to do any of those kinds of things.

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Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Yeah, one of the things that we always used to do is because we had to drive, you know, kind of 20 minutes, 25 minutes to school is we would listen to an audio book in the car as well, you know, cause it's great to have music on. Of course it is. And that helps us get in, you know, a really, depending on the music, really good learning state, but actually listening to that

story, hearing words that are being said, just stretching those vocabulary, just almost by stealth as well. So I love like the cooking tips and, and things like that. Just as we're finishing, I think for me, one of the biggest things that, you've said that I think as a parent,

we need to kind of take on board because it is an anxious time, I think, for parents because they probably didn't have SATs. I know they've been going quite a while now, but most parents probably didn't do SATs themselves. There's kind of two things. one is it's being used for a variety of reasons.

As you say, that just helps us feel calmer about the whole experience, but I think if parents don't take anything else away from listening to this and, there's been lots of golden nuggets that you've shared, Joanne, is that children can't fail at this because I just think that is so, so important.

Joanne - Growing Young Minds: Yeah, I think that's the, one of the biggest conversations I have with parents is they ring me up and they say, I just really want my child to pass their SATs. And I stop them there and say, no, your child is not going to pass nor fail. So this is not a conversation that we need to be having. What we are here to do and what you are there to do is to ensure that they feel confident and that they feel calm and that they leave their primary school years happy with great memories. And that they start their secondary journey with a fresh outlook, a ready, a go getting, I can deal with anything because , I've done it and , I'm great. And we want that positivity. We want them to start year seven content and ready to, try new things and meet new friends. And year six is a way, a bridge, between the years of learning and that preparation for secondary. And SATs is just one of those. So never think that your child's going to fail. It doesn't matter what that result is. It's about how we can start from your child's starting point and help them thrive through their school years. And that's what's important. We want them to leave happy, healthy adults once they finally finish secondary. And Year 6 and the SATs is just one small road along that journey.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: I love that. And I think it's so important I often feel that the students themselves, handle SATs much better than us as adults and parents. So I think it's really important that this is just a stepping stone along their journey, their educational journey, which is brilliant.

Joanne, is there anything else that you feel that either as parents or maybe other teachers out there that we might need to know, anything at all that we might've missed? Because I mean, to be honest, you've given so many top tips today. And I really appreciate that. And I think, you know, the audience listening will really appreciate kind of not only the top tips that you've given those golden nuggets, but your whole attitude towards SATs is just fantastic.

So is there anything at all? And if not, because we might've covered everything that you wanted to cover today, but where can we find you?

Joanne - Growing Young Minds: I think my last point is just a question I'm often asked is about how do schools then use this? Do secondary schools use this information? And they're worried that their child will start secondary school with a lower score and this will look negatively on them at secondary. And again, it really doesn't.

Schools often see these results but you've got to remember that when they join secondary school there's now thousands of children joining at the same time and they're not analysing each one. Secondary schools often do their own testing and make their own decisions, so please don't feel that these SATs results are going to hinder your child or progress them in any way.

Quite often it's completely irrelevant most of the time as to what school they get or how that's going to impact. So please, that's my last kind of plea to parents, is please don't think that that's going to have any impact on them. We are a South London company we are in Tooting and Earlsfield and Collierswood and we also support home ed families and parents that are looking for more creative resources during school holidays through our Etsy page there. You can find us on www.gyminds.co.uk and we're on socials under Growing Young Minds. And I would love to be able to answer some questions and to kind of talk to you more about how to kind of embrace the SATs experience as a positive one for your children and for it not to be stressful or worrying for any of you.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Joanne, I cannot thank you enough on behalf of kind of our listeners, but also me, because I feel, you know, I've, I've been around this game a long time now, but actually I felt like I learned some today and just your attitude towards them and your approach is so refreshing. It feels like

you meet the children where they're at, but also, you're there to support parents as well. , as usual, I will put all Joanne and Growing Young Minds details in the show notes they'll be in the transcript and also please go and find them on the socials and follow because there's some amazing top tips that they put out there.

And also just so you know, you're not alone going through this journey. We're going to put a little package together on our website as well to prep for SATs. And I will put this podcast with Joanne and her details in that as well, so that you've got access to that. Joanne, thank you so much for joining us today.

I really appreciate it. I was excited before you came on, but actually speaking to you, I just feel like there's support and help out there for our year sixes who have, got this part of the journey to come. So thank you very much for meeting our kids where they're at.

I really appreciate it.

Joanne - Growing Young Minds: Thank you, Ashley. It was great to be part of your podcast.

Transcript

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: So go and check out the show notes, go and follow Growing Young Minds on the socials and lots of love from Joanne and myself to you and your family and take care everyone. See you soon.