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The Resilient Kid Podcast

Season 8 – Episode 3

Ever wondered about the 11 plus journey

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Have you ever wondered what the 11 plus journey looks like? Well, our podcast today on the Resilient Kids, Sabah, is going to tell us all about it. Hi Sabah, how are you?

Sabah: I am very well thanking you, Ashley.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: It's lovely of you to join us here today. Introduce yourself to our listeners. Tell us a little bit about what you do and kind of yeah, a little bit about this 11 plus journey.

Sabah: Right first of all, thanks a lot for having me here. I help guide and mentor parents who are looking to put their children forward for selective tests. For grammar schools and independent schools. And it all came about when I was preparing my children for their tests um, so that's what I focus on the whole journey, the whole aspect of the process.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: And I imagine for parents, and particularly parents, because I don't know if this is true, but my kind of experience is that a lot of people say, we'll go to, you know, the state primary school and then look to going for 11 plus, kind of as we hit that year six and might decide to, you know, go to a selective school or go to a grammar school.

Is that your experience at.

Sabah: Yes, absolutely. And I think that's the experience of many, most parents. Like they, their children go to state primary schools and then when it's time for secondary, they start to think what they could put their children forward to and selective schools are a good option, and that's also the way I saw it.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Yeah, I think, I think that's, you know, experience. I mean, I, I work kind of in a various selection of schools, actually. I'm really lucky and privileged to be able to go into many schools to, you know, support students there. So tell us a little bit about what does the 11 plus look like? What's the process if a, if a parent was thinking about, you know, putting their child forward for the 11 plus when ideally should, should a, they be looking to do that, like preparing for that and then also what is the process for that?

Sabah: Okay, so this depends on parent to parent differs, but what I would say is look at the 11 plus as a journey itself because yes, you want your children to do good, and to go to a good school, but it's very hard to say when you start that. And my whole idea is that the main crux of the prep is in year five. That's what I did with my own, both of my sons. I've seen that they, they start quite early, even as young as year two and three. And then year four is something very,

very, very common nowadays. I understand that the competition has become really fierce nowadays. I, it's not wrong to say that, to use that even though the 11 plus was meant to be for more able children who did not need tuition. Now it's such a very tuition focused prep that the competition is getting bigger and bigger every year. So that is why family start earlier. But I think time to start the prep. But having said that, laying the foundations from the very early years is a great idea without thinking of the 11 plus, but just laying the foundation for skills in English and math, but also just form this attachment with your child through academic spending time together. And I look at it, that this prep will be more spending time together and doing all these things, amazing things, and getting children ready for that. So that, I think in a nutshell, that's what I believe in.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Yeah, because I know, I remember talking to you and obviously I follow you on socials and stuff, and one of the things that you said with your boys even though they were both quite different, is that kind of having that attachment and I guess relearning some, some of the stuff on the way with them really helped you A, as a parent and also B, to prep them for this journey.

And actually today I had a conversation, because I was observing in a classroom, which is part of some of the stuff that I do in supporting the young people. And they were doing a whole new method of long division called have to remember it now, does McDonald's sell burgers? And I was like. Oh my God, I'd never heard of that.

Now luckily my children don't need my maths help or I would be in trouble or they would be in trouble, shall I say. But it was a way of using that kind of sequence of divide, multiply, subtract, and bring down. And I watched the teacher do it and I was sat there mesmerized by this method. So do you think that kind of,

helping our children and kind of learning some of these new techniques really helps not only with that attachment and that connection between the two of you, but obviously helping to prep as well.

Sabah: Oh yes, definitely different techniques, different ways of tackling a problem. They're all very good and it just sharpens critical thinking and you know, trying different things in different ways. And I think it ties into the fact that if one way doesn't work and we can always try another way. And that makes you stronger, more resilient, and it just helps overall you know, development of the child. And also even the practical things, not just vocation knowledge, but practical things like taking you know, children's shopping and doing the math's there.. There is a very, very good way they learn without realizing that they are learning. so yeah. It interesting, you, me, the division what year was this in?

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Year six.

Sabah: Oh, amazing. Yes. and, and how has your experience been in these schools? When you go in, how do you feel that There is a very big focus on, you know, preparing for the 11 plus and selective tests.

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Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Yeah, so because I am lucky enough to go into a, a very large selection of different schools. You know, if they're not preparing for SATs, then it's 11 plus. But actually what, what I'm finding is that there are some families that are opting to do SATs. But then get tutors like yourself to help prep them for the 11 plus journey as well, so that they're kind of almost like edging the bets to, you know, so that they're still gonna go forward for SATs.

And see how they get on there. But actually if they can you know, if their children do well at the 11 plus, then they'll either choose to go to grammar school or, you know, an independent school. So yeah, it's quiet, it's quite a mix at the moment that I'm seeing.

I.

Sabah: Amazing. Yes. And you know, I think 11 plus prep whether you want your child to go into a grammar school or a selective school or not, I think the 11 plus prep is a really good way of upskilling everything, academic skills and all the other skills, teamwork. Because you do things together, at, at that age, a child is very small to do things independently in 10 years and nine years if you start early. So I very much come from the view that it's a great way of working on teamwork negotiation because children say, I don't wanna do work today, maybe tomorrow and next week. So all these things, I think, make it a very holistic and it'll give the child a heads up no matter what school they go to.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: So tell us a little bit more about and we'll put a link in the show notes, but Sabah is an author as well, and I was very lucky to receive one of her books. Sabah, but tell us what made you write the vocabulary book.

Sabah: So the vocabulary aspect is one of the big chunks of these steps. And it is something that doesn't come naturally unless we focus on you know learning the words, you know, way that use them or even, you know, regularly. Because yes, children read books. I know what it's like to read books without understanding a very tough word that I read, I may just skim over the word and then just make sense of the story, enjoy the story, and want to get to the end of it. so, so sometimes what happens is, oh, which times reading books, but then they will collaborate not as good as it should have been. So that is why I saw parents struggling with this aspect a lot. I thought, why not put this idea together? It's just a very simple game. It's called what's my word? We have got at least two players. One thinks of a word, gives clues to the other person such as how many syllables, opposite, or the meaning of the words and synonyms, and then ask the other person to guess the word. It's as simple as that. And I, and yeah, so that was the whole idea behind the book.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Do you know what? I loved it. My children are a little bit older now. One is about to sit their A levels this year and the other one's in year 10. And actually we, often you know, play word games just kind of in the car or we are very quick to pick up a word that we are not expecting them to use, you know, so if they suddenly, you know, I can't think of a word off the top of my head, but if they were to use a word that I wasn't expecting, we will always comment on that and go, oh, I'm really like, how articulate is that?

And I think I kind of work in the, other end of that, in emotional literacy, you know, and, and helping them with their emotional vocabulary with the students that I work with and it's really lovely to hear and, and to see your book. And actually, I just had to confess to Sabah before we started that I ran downstairs to get

the copy of her book and I'd lent it to one of my coaches because it is really, really good. So if you, you know, if you can get a hold of a copy, then please do. 'cause it's brilliant. But just like having it written out and, and realizing you know, how important vocabulary is because a hundred percent I would do that.

You know, when I was younger, I would be reading something and I wouldn't want to look up the word because I wouldn't, want to stop the story. And now actually I'm, I'm the complete opposite. I would go and look up the word on purpose because I'd want to know the meaning of the word, even though I could probably guess the gist.

So yeah, I think it's such a lovely book and such a, you know, simple game like that, how that improves their, you know, not just vocabulary for something like the 11 plus, but actually for life, you know, this is life skills, a hundred percent.

Sabah: Yes, absolutely. I totally agree with you on that and even the emotional literacy aspect. just so glad that you like the book and that you Yeah, and giving it to your coaches as well. That's a very huge privilege for me. I totally resonate with you know, the word games. I remember playing Word games with my children. And I have to tell you this, which I haven't told to many people my younger one literally took it all very literally. One day he, he is moving about his shuffling in the seat and it was going on. Ali, he says, I'm stifling my thought. Which is the most laugh it. We try not remind, but yeah, you do pick up things and then you try to apply it.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Yeah. Oh that is so funny. That is just brilliant. And how articulate as well. I mean, how many children would say stifling? I love it. So that's absolutely brilliant and just goes to show you, doesn't it, how children pick up very easily words and, and can use 'em in context really, you know, really quickly. Yeah. That's brilliant. I love that. I love that. So one of the questions that I wanted to kind of ask you is how do you, how do parents' kind of, if there's one bit of advice that you can give parents who are thinking about the 11 plus, where do they start do you think?

Sabah: I think where to start. You start by spending time with your child, being more interested in them in their life, playing games with them, if it is the, and for the other the, the real aspect of selecting schools and so on. Start researching, spending more time in finding out what school will be suitable for your child and making a short list, and then going a little bit further and doing some research on the admission rules because schools, each school has their own admission school rules regarding catchment area, sibling criteria, the kind of tests they test children on, and so on and so forth. So I would say start researching. And that could be as early as year three or four even. Definitely in year five and work with your child in spending time to improve on their English and math skills and just work on attachment because that plays a very

big important part, because it's quite a tough process at the end if you look at it. And you don't want to overwhelm your child.

You don't want them to feel like if they don't go through it and are successful then they are a failure, which is, is something that is very common in this space, and I think it's a very negative part of the whole process. A child should have that grounding and foundation that no matter what, they'll be fine. So I have an approach with or without their scope, it doesn't matter. And it really helps to focus on the journey and not the outcome.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: And that sound all sounds like excellent. Can I ask you; how do you support. The children and the parents through this process.

Sabah: So we have programs for a year four and five where we facilitate two aspects. So children's prep and the parents' guidance. We have a guidance for parents, a course where they look at the whole process of what do they do, how do they cover the syllabus, how to research schools, and how to really make sure you are covering your base and also supporting child And then, the second aspect is children's tuition, which I, I don't tutor myself, but I have excellent tutors who do that. So we have lessons, weekly lessons, cover the whole syllabus in the whole year. So that yeah, so that's what I offer parents, and it, it has been a very, we have got really good feedback on that as well.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: And I think that's one of the things that kind of, made me think about reaching out to you and getting you to be a guest on the podcast because at the Resilient Kid we are very much around you know, not just one-to-one with the children to help whatever struggles they're going through, but also supporting the parents as well.

And I knew that. That was something that you did. You know, you, you help the parents, you guide them through that process as well as doing the tutoring. So, you know, that for me, just felt like it, it aligned quite a lot in our values. You know, it's not just around that one-to-one with the children, but actually how do you help, how do you help the parents as well and guide them through that process?

So that's, yeah, that's lovely. That's, I really liked that.

Sabah: Yeah, absolutely. I think it's very important that we support parents so that parents can support children, especially at that young age. Children are not gonna be motivated enough to do their tests on their own or the prep on their own. But even though, as I said, it's not about the school, it's about just your child too, you know?

Be better, do better. Always aspire and have ambition. But yeah. And absolutely agree with you that we need to have a good family system and in that, by that I mean that, you know, supporting parents is a very big part of what I do, and I believe that you can't outsource parenting to tutoring or to any other thing. Thats very important.

Even if I have, a tutor for my child, I am responsible for facilitating that tuition and getting feedback from the tutor, working on that feedback and then, you know, checking and everything. so I totally believe it that, and even, you know, when the children grow up. So we

are now you know branching out to helping parents support their children for GCSEs and A levels and so on. I still tell them that sometimes you need to support them for a little longer, and that's totally okay. Some children are more independent earlier than others, and that's totally okay. And I somebody told me, at an event you know, when I was saying that my son does not really do anything independently, and he was in year nine or 10, he said keep supporting him because the penny drops eventually and sometimes you don't even hear the penny drop. And that really resonated with me.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Yes, and I think, so it, this is a discussion that we've had this weekend in the Village, which is my Facebook community. And I say my, it's our Facebook community. And it's, you know, it's been really lovely. And one of the things that I'd said is, do you realize that the brain doesn't stop developing until they're in the twenties?

And somebody put in there, please tell me, it's early twenties asking for a friend. And I was like, laughing. And I, I know this person really well. I know that she's got a girl and a boy and I said, good news is it's early 20 for girls, but for boys it's late twenties. So I know you've got two boys Sabah.

So yeah, hate to break that to you, but you are totally right. I think there's times when, you know, I've got two different children that you know, and I always think that about when you have a child, if they gave you a manual, you know. and then you have another one, you'd have to throw that manual in the bin because no two children are the same, are they?

And I think for me, it's around meeting them where they're at. You know, my eldest will be at university in September. You know, everything goes according to plan. And I know for a fact that she will be a hundred percent independent. She will probably come home once a term if I'm lucky, you know, whereas the younger one, he, he isn't as independent. He does need, you know, more support and that's just where he's at the moment. And so, yeah, I think that, you know, eventually the penny will drop and it will and it will drop with various different things. It's like a friend of mine once said, how do you get into have a shower?

And I was like, it will happen. Honestly, it will happen at some point. You don't have to nag them to have a shower every day or brush their teeth every day. It will happen; however, they probably will be in high school before that happens. Whereas I think you know, some kids just caught on a bit faster.

That's all.

Sabah: Yeah, I totally resonate with that. I've got two sons, very different just like yours and. The older one is someone who gives me sleepless nights. Even now he is in, he'll be 21 soon and yeah, I hope his early twenties, I do hope so. And the younger one is so independent. He started university this year I literally had to beg him come home he, he just loves it there.

And when he comes home, he takes care of the dinners so I don't have to think about cooking, and the older one doesn't go near the kitchen at all,

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Ashley - The Resilient Kid: yeah, a hundred percent. So just before we finish, is there something that, some advice or some tip that you could give to parents who are thinking around going on this 11 plus journey? You know, is there some, like a top tip that you would want to give them that would help them? Apart from, come and check out the, the 11 plus learning journey, go and check Sabah's socials out, and check out her website and stuff.

But what is the top tip that you could give to a parent who's thinking about embarking on this?

Sabah: Is, difficult question because there's so many things I can think of, but if I were to give one tip, it would be um, never underestimate your child because the 11 plus comes and goes, your child's confidence, their mental health, their ability to rise up after disappointment is going to make all the difference in their lives. So I would say spend time with them, and I'm not a big advocate of being a friend of your child. My mom tried to be a friend of mine. I never agreed to it, so I never tried to be my children's friends. But your children know sounding board where they can come and speak to you, what they feeling to have that attachment and bond, spend time with them, whether it is doing work, playing, cooking, baking, and, and I would say start with that. I think there's a great starting point is to start having a bond, have an attachment, and then things get easier. And definitely this 11 plus is going to be tough, but it's great for if we have, if we approach this with balance and with, a little information as well as well as an understanding that it's not the be all and end all, it can work out for you. For me, it has been like it has opened up whole different way of life. And I think it's not just the schools, but it's a way of thinking that you can aspire, you can, you can just go and try new things and learn new things.

And even if you fail, is always something that will be there for you. So my top tip would be to spend time with your child, getting to know them and yeah, forming an attachment with them.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: I love that. Just making that connection and you know, I'm a big advocate of connecting. Before anything, before you're asking them to do homework, before you're asking them, you know, to do a job around the house. You know, having that connection, having an interest in, you know, what's going on in their life and just spending time with them and you find, I find that actually then they want to do things and they want to spend time with you and they want to do the things that you're asking.

So I love that. Thank you. Can I just say, so I had somebody who came on as a guest, Joanne, and we talked a lot about SATs and that's why one of the reasons why I wanted to look at kind of the other side of those families who were gonna go for 11 plus. And I feel like today, you know, we've had an insight into what that looks like.

And so please do go and check out Sabah at the 11 plus journey. And 11 is one. One. So the number 11. The rest of them. So the11plusjourney.co.uk, please go and check her out and reach out. And if you have got any questions and you want to, you know, ask Sabah, then you, you know, you can always email in asking the community or

the village or also just reply on where you get the podcast because we always pass those questions on as well. And check out her book. It's amazing and it's really good fun. So Sabah, thank you so much for joining us today. I feel like we've had a real insight into that journey.

Sabah: Oh, I hope so, because it's so, it's so very vast that it's very difficult to you know get everything in 30 minutes. But yeah, as you said. Attachment is such an important part. It, it, it makes everything easier. Even making the child sit down and do work becomes easy. And yeah. And thank you so much for having me. And if there's any away, I can help anyone or guide them or even a sounding board, I'm more than happy to do that. Thank you very much.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Thank you Sabah. Take care everyone. Thank you for joining us today. Go and check out the11plusjourney.co.uk. And follow Sabbath on the socials if you want some more information. Take care and lots of love from us to you. Bye for now.