How to Naturally Improve Your child's ADHD Challenges using Brain Development

Alma Galvan

Interviewed by Dr. Laura Markham

Dr. Laura Markham (00:04):

This summit is brought to you with love by Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids. Welcome. Hi there. I'm Dr. Laura Markham, founder of Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids and organizer of this online summit, Nurturing Hearts, Nurturing Minds: The Neuroscience of Peaceful Parenting. Our guest today is Alma Galvan, the founder of Brainworx. In 1996, both of Alma's children were diagnosed with severe autism, ADHD, sensory processing disorder and more. One doctor even told her that she should put her oldest son in an institution and move on with her life. That's where her journey began. It took her seven years to discover some powerful new techniques that were scientifically proven to promote brain development using movement. In this interview, we discuss how to naturally improve your child's ADHD challenges using brain development. Alma, welcome to the summit.

Alma Galvan (01:02):

Thank you so much, Laura. I'm very excited to get to share a little bit of what made the biggest difference in my life and in my family.

Dr. Laura Markham (01:10):

Well, you became an ADHD expert after your kids were born and diagnosed. Is that right? Tell us about this.

Alma Galvan (01:18):

Yeah, I actually became, not in a million years, let me say by that, not in a million years did I think I would be doing what I'm doing now because I wanted to become a computer programmer. Well, I had two boys in the '90s, a young mom that all of a sudden I found myself with two kiddos that had significant challenges. They didn't speak until after six years old, so we can just-

Dr. Laura Markham (01:46):

Wow.

Alma Galvan (01:48):

And I really thought, when my first son was being diagnosed and diagnosed with all kinds of things, ADHD, autism, sensory processing disorder, and I thought when he was getting diagnosed, I'm like, "Finally, I'm going to get some direction on what to do," because this kiddo had no awareness of what was danger or what was not. If I didn't have him really close to my body holding onto him, he'd be bolting down traffic, Laura, without any awareness of what was safe and what was not. And I made my heart stop multiple times. And so when he was getting diagnosed, the doctors, two in fact, suggested I would put him in an institution because by then I had a baby. And I'm like, "Oh my goodness, that's not possible. That's the solution? That can't possibly be the solution."

(02:48):

And the very first doctor that said that, I was like, "No, you're the one that was telling me that nothing was going on because the nutritionist is saying, 'No, that ..." I'm like, "There's a gut instinct that we have as parents follow that." I kept asking his pediatrician, "Something's up," and he's like, "No, he's fine," because he's hitting most of the milestones, the physical milestones in a certain way, kind of. Now looking back, I go, "Uh-huh."

Dr. Laura Markham (03:19):

You realized.

Alma Galvan (03:22):

"No." But nevertheless, doctors, they only have so much time and much of what I'm going to share with you, doctors are not really shown or therapists. And so I got pregnant because his pediatrician kept saying, "It's okay," and then all of a sudden it wasn't okay. Things got worse, but now I'm pregnant.

Dr. Laura Markham (03:45):

With your second child?

Alma Galvan (03:47):

Yeah, with my second child. And my first one became ... Things just went skyrocketed after. There's a little bit going on at the beginning, but then other external things happened that then all of what I thought or not what I thought, but certain things then really became apparent. And like I said, then it was like, "How do I keep this kid alive?" And there was no speech. Meltdowns could last up to two hours and the communication was hard. Hard. And so-

Dr. Laura Markham (04:20):

Did he understand what you were saying to him?

Alma Galvan (04:24):

We had communication, but no, it was like he was all in his own world. There was no eye contact, which there was before, but then there wasn't. And so there's a lot of different elements that came up that then really made him leave in a sense. There was just no ... I could be sitting next to him and screaming his name, screaming his name, no acknowledgement, not even like, "What's wrong with you?" Nothing. It was just like nothing and I'm like, "Come on. What's going on?" And so I can see how not really having a good handle in my home, what was going on and now having a baby, it would make a pretty hard new thing. So they're like, "Why don't you ..." That's their solution, to put them in an institution and I'm like, "Okay, well then that's not happening, but I don't know what to do."

(05:22):

And so I just started researching and searching, and in my heart, it was like, "This can't be. There's got to be a way." After I got out of my pity party, as you can imagine, I'm like, "No, no, I have to figure it out. I cannot not do that." So my second son now was in my arms in a stroller and the car seat this whole first year of life. Needless to know, I mean, now that I know, this little kiddo was only able to gain the most basic needs met. A lot of the neurodevelopment that happens that first year of life, this kiddo did not have it. So he's really the one that ... My first son just matched everything to what his diagnosis were. My second son though was the one that I am, "It doesn't match," because all of a sudden, when he was diagnosed as well at less than two years old, because by then he started showing also delays and I'm like, "Great, two?"

(06:31):

And so they're like, "Well, of course, you have one that's autistic already. It just runs in the family," and I go, "Okay, I get it, but not ... Okay. So some of the times that Adrian was also nonverbal, but yet," this is what was incredible, "yet sometimes, he would have very clear speech," and I'm like, "Wait, how? How?" And not like that, I can have a conversation, but words would come up really clear and eye contact, and then 10 minutes later, it was gone. I'm like, "That doesn't make sense."

Dr. Laura Markham (07:07):

It doesn't make sense.

Alma Galvan (07:08):

Even in my searching ... No, right? But now it does to me. And that's why I'm excited to share, because as a parent, everything we do at Brainworx has to do with what I wish I would've known from the very beginning as a parent, what would I have wanted to know as a parent. And so that would've helped my journey and my kids so much more, right? And so one of the things that helped the most, and I tried so many other modalities, we did ABA, we did speech, OT, pivotal response, discrete trial, the list, but nothing really was helping. They were good therapies, but nothing was giving any kind of significant relief or any relief until I met a teacher and she wasn't even in our district. It was just one of those coincidental [inaudible 00:08:08] coincidentally, no.

(08:11):

I met her and she started showing me some movements that she's like, "Do these movements," and it was brain gym, brain gym movements. And so I started doing the movements that she was sharing, and in like two weeks, I started noticing the edge had been taken off of our home and I'm like, "What? What's going on here? Why are these movements so special? Why are they making such an impact, when here therapists and all of these other modalities are not making an impact, yet I'm doing these movements every day and I felt calmer myself?" I think that's with-

Dr. Laura Markham (08:49):

You're doing the movements with the boys? You're doing the movements with your sons?

Alma Galvan (08:54):

I had to do the movements with the boys, because again, remember, they were nonverbal, so I had to just play with them. And in playing with them, I started

connecting with them in a different way, in a way that then it was starting to be more joyful, but more importantly, those movements started bringing our nervous system down, calming our nervous system down. And I thought, I was like, "Okay, finally, I can breathe." I really felt like I could breathe for the very first time. Then after about three months, three, four months, I saw that we had to do them every day or we would revert to whatever the meltdowns were before. And I say we because the strongest energy wins. And it doesn't mean that's the strongest regulated energy. And many times, my children's energy was so much stronger than mine, but it was dysregulated. So I coregulated to them. That was not-

Dr. Laura Markham (09:59):

It's really hard to stay calm when your kids are dysregulated.

Alma Galvan (10:01):

It's very hard when you don't have tools to help you. And if you don't understand what's happening in the big picture, we lose it. And I'm not proud of that, but that's just real.

Dr. Laura Markham (10:16):

Well, because they're in fight or flight. And so when they're in fight or flight, if they're attacking, you go into fight or flight too. It's not like you have control and your nervous system just does it automatically.

Alma Galvan (10:29):

It's reflexive, it's automatic and there's no control. And then later on, we think, it's like, "But I know better than that. I'm the mom. Why do I ..." because it's a reflex. Anyway, so then the more that I started feeling that, I really thought it was going to be amazing and then we hit this plateau. It's like a wall. And I shared with this teacher, the same teacher, I'm like, "It's fantastic. I'm like, "No, I'm not complaining, but there's got to be something else." And she said, "Funny you should say, I came across this research from Doman and Delacato and they had this idea back in the '50s," something like that, "that they were working with brain-injured children. And what they thought is like, 'Why don't we go back and start mimicking some of the movements that babies did, so creeping and crawling and different movements like that, that then see what happens?' And what they started noticing is that the children that had brain injuries started showing new abilities that they shouldn't have because of their brain injury." (11:44):

And what's fascinating to me, Laura, is that, 25 years ago, it's about the time that I was going through, I'm going to call it my hell time, science was telling us that the brain was hardwired after a certain age, after 30 whatever you got, you got. And it was fascinating-

Dr. Laura Markham (12:07):

You couldn't grow anything new. And we didn't understand the brain.

Alma Galvan (12:11):

No. And I think we're still at the very early stages of understanding it, but ...

Dr. Laura Markham (12:17):

Even now.

Alma Galvan (12:18):

... the thing is now we know that it has a plasticity ability and that is exciting and that's what their early research and their early work taught. And it showed us that the brain can change. And so I started doing because really I couldn't afford to go to their institute. I couldn't. And so we started just piecing it together with this teacher and going like, "Hey, if we do this and we do that," so started doing, looking more at their research, looking more at what was out there as much as we could and then started exploring it. And oh my goodness, in less than six months, my kids did more progress than in seven years, the prior seven years. In months, they grew so much.

(13:11):

And what I found is that what these movements do is that, when we go back and fill in ... I call them gaps, every time that there's a trauma or there's a difficulty that is a physical element that happens, there's little gaps in the development that happens and I definitely saw that so clear with my second son. He's the one that gave me the clearest picture, because again, nothing really fit, and yet, see, when I was pregnant with him, I was under so much stress because I didn't know how to keep my son alive. And so that is trauma in itself. Every single time that I felt distress, my little baby would go into, "Oop, fear paralysis reflex." I don't want your chemicals, lady mom."

Dr. Laura Markham (14:04):

Your stress hormones and your stress chemicals that were circulating in your body, like those jolts of adrenaline, every time that you're feeling that, the baby feels it. And I don't want people watching to be scared like, "Oh, when I was pregnant, I felt it." But

it is true that repeated experience while the brain is being shaped is what you're talking-

Alma Galvan (14:25):

Yes, absolutely. And the cool part of it is that we all have challenges and life is challenging, but there's things that can be done. And that's what excites me, that our oldest participant is 85, 85.

Dr. Laura Markham (14:42):

In Brainworx.

Alma Galvan (14:45):

In Brainworx. And so it doesn't matter how old we are, we can still go back and fill in those gaps that we're talking about. And so when we understand it from that perspective, for me, now it's exciting because every single time that I had an episode, then there's a little gap in the development because that time that he was trying to protect himself, the development that should have been happening ought to have been happening, it wasn't, not to the same degree that it needed to.

(15:15):

So then that's where then we start to accumulate a little at a time gaps. So things will not be able to be a solid ... We won't have a solid foundation to build on. And so then what we are left with is the brain needing to compensate, work around, utilizing energy that could be used for something else, but it's being used to just be able to exist and survive.

Dr. Laura Markham (15:46):

So you found that movement changes the brain.

Alma Galvan (15:50):

Movement changes the brain.

Dr. Laura Markham (15:51):

We know any repeated experience changes the brain, but when you did these movements, these specific movements over and over again, that changed your children's brains and it made you calmer too, changed your nervous system as well.

Alma Galvan (16:03):

It changed my brain too. This is the kicker, I didn't realize how many gaps I had in my development because I compensated really, really well until I couldn't. I compensated so good that I just thought, "Oh, my compensations were amazing that I didn't realize how much harder I had to work myself. So in school, it was like, "Oh, I could outwork anybody." Well, no, I had to, I had to, but I was proud that I have a strong work ethic. Yes, I do and it's a wonderful thing to have, but it had to be in order to just be able to manage than to get by. And so what-

Dr. Laura Markham (16:48):

So what are the movements? When you're talking about movements that change the brain, what are the movements that you specifically use and what results do you see when you do this?

Alma Galvan (16:59):

So that's a great question and there's two types of movements that I kind of share with people. One type are movements that help our nervous system calm down and change our beliefs about us. And I'm going to show you one that then you can utilize and anybody can utilize. And then the other ones are the ones that we go back to utero and very gently start activating certain movements that then start integrating reflexes and start building the sequential movements that build the brain, that build that foundation. That one takes us a little bit longer than just an hour to go through, but the one that allows our nervous system to calm down right away, those are the ones that we can do at any time. And if we do them every day, they will start to make a difference whether you do anything else with Brainworx or not. If you do ... Do you want to do one with me?

Dr. Laura Markham (18:01):

Please. Let's do it right now. And everyone watching us can do it too. Go ahead.

Alma Galvan (18:06):

One of the ones that I love is called Soothing Heart because we need to connect with our hearts. I want to have you put both hands over your heart. And what we're going to do is we're going to take a breath and we're going to also add an intention. Every movement I do, I add intention because it magnifies, it amplifies what it is that we want in this moment. And so I'd like us to do an intention that says, "I'm doing the best I can and that is enough."

Dr. Laura Markham (18:39):

Beautiful.

Alma Galvan (18:40):

Because as a parent, I wish somebody would've said, "You know what? We are doing the best we can. Knowing what we have, having our abilities, our resources, be kind to yourself. You really are doing the best you can. So this is the movement. You're going to connect to your heart and you're going to take a breath. And when you exhale through your mouth, press on your heart a little bit. And in your mind, say that ... We're going to do this three times, three breaths. In your mind, say that intention, "I'm doing the best I can ..."

Dr. Laura Markham (19:18):

I can.

Alma Galvan (19:18):

"... and that is enough."

Dr. Laura Markham (19:19):

Is enough.

Alma Galvan (19:21):

Let's do that again. Ready? Exhale through your mouth. Connect with your heart by pressing a little bit on it. I'm doing the best I can and that is enough. Let's do that one more time. I'm doing the best I can and that is enough. So let me explain why this is such a powerful little movement. If you notice my hands, they're both on ... Just even this hand, it's on both sides of my ... They're actually connecting, both sides of my brain, the left, because it's passing the midline. Now I'm doing it twice, double. When I say the intention, I'm now bringing my conscious awareness, my desire, my focus to know whatever it is that I want to know. It can be ...

(20:25):

That's the one that just came up for me because I wish every parent just was more gentle with themselves, but it could be, "I am patient as I work with my child. I am working on growing my patience." It doesn't matter what it is. I can be present in this moment. It can be something very simple, but it's so profound. There's so much that just happened in these little 30 seconds. And so let me explain. Not only are you bringing the left and the right side of the brain to come to play and to organize and get connected, becoming a whole brain, but when you press, we have little receptors in each joint. I call them little buttons.

(21:10):

So these receptors tell us ... They give us so much information, but when we press, when we activate them by connecting to our heart, feel, Laura, feel how many receptors get activated. Go ahead and just press on your heart a little bit and tell me which receptors get activated for you.

Dr. Laura Markham (21:32):

Well, when you say receptors?

Alma Galvan (21:34):

Which joints?

Dr. Laura Markham (21:35):

In the joints?

Alma Galvan (21:37):

Each joint. Each joint.

Dr. Laura Markham (21:37):

I'm feeling all the joints in my hand and in my fingers and even in the palm, I feeling the palm and everything feels warm. My hands feel warm. My heart feels warm.

Alma Galvan (21:49):

It is-

Dr. Laura Markham (21:49):

This is now warm, which I just happened to wear today.

Alma Galvan (21:53):

And all the ones in your fingers, your wrist, your elbow, your shoulders feel that and then it goes all the way down to your coccyx. And then I can even-

Dr. Laura Markham (22:05):

It travels down your spine.

Alma Galvan (22:07):

It travels down your spine. Every joint has receptors, every joint, like I said, little buttons. And when we activate them, it sends a message to the brain saying, "There I am. Oh, there I am." And so when we're connecting to our heart and our heart ... Everything is in our heart. We have neurons, we have 40,000 specialized neurons that connect us to everything.

Dr. Laura Markham (22:35):

Connect the heart. You're saying ... Oh, throughout the body.

Alma Galvan (22:39):

To the body.

Dr. Laura Markham (22:39):

And the heart is very central to the neurology, I understand.

Alma Galvan (22:42):

Absolutely. Absolutely. So when we connect to our heart ... And the HeartMath Institute and Gregg Braden, they shared a study that ... I love their research. They shared that, when you connect to your heart and you bring up a gratitude feeling about something and you breathe for three minutes, that activates your immune system for up to six hours. That's pretty [inaudible 00:23:11] magnificent. So this is one of the movements that I share with my community, that if we do it once a day, this will start to ... Because we are in this state, it turns on something that's called super learning.

(23:31):

When super learning gets turned on, that allows your subconscious to be open to what programs you want to download consciously now. So it could be as simple as this that people can start with doing, just one movement, a little at a time, so three minutes a day. That's what I start with in my community now. It's like, "Give me three minutes a day and then we'll build on that because it's really not about, 'Let me give you all the answers right now. Let me tell you how to get there.'" The brain shuts down when there's too much happening. It's like, "Whoa, this is too much. There's too much movement," and so then it goes, "I can't do it. And as a grownup, I'm going to start making up excuses, 'I don't have time. I have this,' or whatever it is."

(24:19):

No, the brain is giving you a signal, it's saying, "It's too big of a jump." So if we start tiny and we grow a little at a time and that's what-

Dr. Laura Markham (24:35):

So first of all, I love HeartMath and their research is very well substantiated and I love that particular finding that you shared about the immune system. And I think there's an important point for our listeners, which is that you have that feeling, whatever that feeling is and you hold it for three minutes because you do need to create the brain state where everything loops in. As you said, you're sending all the signals and then it activates something like the immune system in that case, so I love that. But your Brainworx work does something different that has to do with reflexes, that happens in utero and in infancy and that's what you're working with ...

(25:20):

This is great for parents and maybe also for kids and it settles the nervous system, so we can shift out of fight or flight and into a state of being open and curious and ready to learn, but tell us more about the reflexes and what that has to do with ADHD and what kinds of movements you're talking about.

Alma Galvan (25:43):

Sure. Let me settle in because this is beautiful. What happens is this, let me explain. We're going to go back to utero and start building, replicating some of those reflexive movements. Those are instinctual movements that then guide us to be able to grow. Then we're born and there's more instinctual movements that we should be doing. We ought to be doing. I like the word ought to be more than should, but we have changed. Our society has changed so much that then there's a lot of things that are not really there to support the growth in the way that's the best.

(26:25):

So let's just look at the birthing process. The baby comes, and then minutes later, they cut the umbilical cord. Well, the birth is traumatic for the baby and there's so many chemicals that are still within the baby. And by cutting the placenta, the placenta then did not have enough opportunity to bring in some of those chemicals back out of the baby's body and now the baby's left going, "What am I going to do with this?" So it's left in not a sweet space. So because we don't understand this, we don't know this, then we keep compounding how the baby's not getting all the development.

(27:06):

Well, I did not know and still not really well known, it's a little bit more known now, I should say, tummy time. Tummy time develops a part of the brain that's called the pons, P-O-N-S. It's one of the major movements, not the only one, but the major movements that develops the pons. The pons is basically the fight or flight regulator.

Our brain then will be able to perceive, "That's a real threat. That's not." And if we did not do enough tummy time, the brain thinks, "That's a threat. That's a threat. Let's turn off the TV. Let's go take a shower. That's a threat." You're the tiger. You're a tiger to that child that just feels like you're telling them to turn off the TV. The brain thinks it's a real threat because it does not have that ability to know what is the real threat and what's not. That's a big one. Automatic eye tracking comes with something.

Dr. Laura Markham (27:58):

So tummy time is something that kids need and that is now I think well known. What are the other kinds of-

Alma Galvan (28:05):

Better, better, better.

Dr. Laura Markham (28:05):

I guess what I'm really interested in is what we do now, it might mimic early reflex, but what kinds of movement now will help? What kinds of movements would we do now that would help?

Alma Galvan (28:20):

There's different ones that we can do and we do go back to creeping. In Brainworx, we do do that, but we do it in a gentle way, so I don't want to give people ... I mean, sometimes people think it's very simplistic, "We just go back and creep, right?" You can. You can do it the hard way or there's a sequential way of doing it. So I don't want to necessarily make it seem like it's super, super simple, you go back and creep and crawl.

Dr. Laura Markham (28:44):

Right.

Alma Galvan (28:44):

It's not because it needs ... And the thing is that we need to bridge our life now with what needs to happen a little at a time. For me, it's much better if we then also give everyone the bigger umbrella of why our children are having certain meltdowns. Just the knowing of it. Let me just share this. So creeping develops the pons, which is our fight or flight regulator. Crawling develops our executive functions. So if we didn't crawl enough, auditory processing, auditory discrimination, visual imagery, visual closure, being able to shift gears, being able to deal with tags, being able to

sequence things of how they should be going and I see a project, I can break it down, "Can be done."

(29:36):

So crawling is extremely important for all of functions that we need, our executive functions for, but if I didn't crawl enough, I'm going to be reactive. I am going to be impulsive. And this is where I think the education of the early brain development of how then our children and how we do certain things when we don't have these functions, it's super valuable.

Dr. Laura Markham (30:04):

So there are some kids who seem to just go from they just don't crawl as part of their development-

Alma Galvan (30:10):

And my heart hurts.

Dr. Laura Markham (30:11):

Right. And so I have a nephew who actually is on the spectrum and he did not crawl. So I see the point you're making here, but how would his parents have helped him to crawl at the time? If you have a child who's not crawling, what do you do?

Alma Galvan (30:31):

Play. You play. And that's what I teach parents. And then I'm going to share a concept that, whether you do anything else with your child, as a parent, if it's your biological child, you have a lot more power than we know. If it's not your biological child, we still have a lot of power because it's a mere neuron effect, "I'm a tuning fork. My child is going to tune to my energy." Let me share one thing that I get very excited about. It's one of the first videos that my parents when they come into Brainworx will see because it's so powerful. It's called microchimerism. Have you ever heard of that?

Dr. Laura Markham (31:14):

No.

Alma Galvan (31:14):

I love microchimerism. Harvard's done some studies on it and other people too. The simple way is this. When our child was in utero, we had traveling cells between both. Baby cells would travel into the mom, mom's cells would travel into the baby and there was this beautiful ebb and flow of wonderful sharing of cells and then the

baby's born. Well, some of the mom's cells are still with the baby. Some of the baby cell ... I still have some of my sons' cells with me, both my sons. What's beautiful is that the cells don't die. They grow with us.

Dr. Laura Markham (31:58):

Wow.

Alma Galvan (32:01):

The more ... This is why I'm adamant that we as the parent are their first focus. If we can get ourselves in a calm state, if we can get ourselves at a fight or flight, if we can get ourselves really looking at our child as an incredible being that wants to be connected with in a gentle and loving way, that is the first step that would make the biggest change in our home.

Dr. Laura Markham (32:29):

What are the biggest-

Alma Galvan (32:30):

That the parent, the mom is the one that is the tuning fork, the mom that is calm, collected, being able to see the child as who he or she really is, not who society wants them to be, not who I wish they would be, but who they really are. So through microchimerism is this, the more I work on myself, I'm changing cells inside me, right? And I'm going to say ... Let's say that my cells are now vibrating at a certain pace and they will connect to my cells in my sons because they have my cells in them. And so through quantum physics, they will start to go, "Hey, look at me. I changed over here," and they go, "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah."

(33:17):

I'm being silly about it, right? And so then they will be able to connect to me, to my cells. But, Laura, it gets better than that. What about all the cells that I have of them in me? Well, I'm physically changing their cells, but they're within me. And now through quantum physics, they will be able to share and say, "Hey, we've changed over here," and remember, strongest energy wins. So if I am the strongest, calmest, regulated, loving, supportive energy, then my kids will start to connect much more to that energy. And I've seen a parent that is really struggling and they're like, "Honey, honey, you need to be ..." They want the child to be calm. Can't be done, no way.

(34:12):

But I have seen parents that are calm and the child is going crazy over there and then the child will regulate faster to the parent's energy. It's coregulation.

Dr. Laura Markham (34:24):

And we know that with coregulation ... I mean, I've never heard of microchimerism, so I didn't know that, but I think that's a fascinating idea and I am going to do some research on it, but even without it, we know. And you said if it's your biological child, even if it isn't your biological child, even if it's an adopted child, we know you're the caregiver for that child, you're the expert on that child. And when you are regulated, your child borrows your regulation. We know that's how coregulation works. And the more that happens, if that happens a hundred times in a day over years, your child then internalizes that coregulation from you.

(35:09):

So absolutely, you're right. We started off our conversation by saying how hard it is to do that as the parent and it's still hard, which is why I love your ...

Alma Galvan (35:18):

In heart-

Dr. Laura Markham (35:19):

... heart process and other ways that parents can learn to manage their own nervous systems, but I think you're right, that if a parent can do that, it makes all the difference in the world for the child to settle their nervous system, I think. So you're about nervous systems being connected and influencing each other, which it's very clear, scientists are very clear that that happens with anyone that you're close to. And in your work with Brainworx, do you do specific ... I guess I want to go back to the exercises or activities that you have parents do. Are there specific things, practical strategies that parents should be doing at home with their kids besides calming themselves down?

Alma Galvan (36:15):

Absolutely. Absolutely. There's a 26-chapter course that I teach them very small. The videos are short because I know how the brain grows. So they're like three minutes, four minutes, five minutes in a chapter. There's maybe about 20, 30 minutes of material and then they'll watch that at their pace. And then I ask them to really take the time and learn the movements, enjoy the movements before they share them with their children. I want them to invite their children to do it, but I'll teach them how to invite them to do it. Because if a child feels like, "Oh, you want to change me, huh?"

but if the parent is like, "You know what? The reality is that this program is my brain program, so would you help me do my homework? Would you ..." For the older kids, it's like, "Hey, I'll pay you to be my coach in this program." So there's different ways to engage our children to do the movements-

Dr. Laura Markham (37:20):

So it's not about saying, "Here's something that you have to do. Here's some more OT for you," you're not saying that to your kid at all?

Alma Galvan (37:27):

No.

Dr. Laura Markham (37:27):

It's more like you learn the program and then you do it with your child asking them to be your coach, your trainer, your support person, your whatever?

Alma Galvan (37:38):

Yes. Well, you're doing it as a family. If the dad's involved in the family, then it's an activity that everyone is doing, but it's never about ... I really work hard at telling the parent, "Don't put this on your child. Don't let them know that this is for them because it's going to be one more thing." Many of our children, many of our families, they've already gone down that path of OT, speech, PT. There's just so much that it's like, "It's one more thing." And let me explain why. I'll do it really, really quick. There's something that's called tropism that, as cells, even in utero, if a cell feels that it's safe, there's something good to go towards, we will go towards that, "Ooh, what's in there?"

(38:22):

And if we don't feel like it's good, we'll back away. We won't have anything to do with that. Well, I want, and this is what I experienced more and more, the more work I do on myself that my children, I want every parent to be the safe haven, that their kiddos go, "What you doing? I want to be around you more." And not go, "Oh, God, you're going to help me? What do you want? I don't want that." And so if we understand it from that perspective and we really truly take little tiny steps, we get very far with little steps, a little at a time in a sweet and loving and gentle way.

(39:05):

And that's why I'm hesitant to say more about the movements, because in the videos, there's a lot of different variations. Not everybody's the same. So I go, "This is the movement. Now, if it doesn't feel good to your body, this is a variation. This is a

variation." That's why it's taken me 25 years to really understand how to really share this in a way that's comfortable for everybody, or not all in the same place, but we can all feel and understand, when something feels good, then that's where you need to be for now and your system will grow from there.

Dr. Laura Markham (39:43):

So you call these natural brain development techniques and you see it as going back and redoing gaps that happened in development. And we know, emotionally, I don't know the physiology, but emotionally, we know that when a child didn't have someone soothing them, didn't have the trust established that you do have to go back later and do that. The child can go back later and do it. So it makes perfect sense to me that you could go back, I don't know, but physiologically that you might go back and do these movements. Can you share with us any examples, success stories where this has made a significant difference for a child?

Alma Galvan (40:28):

Every parent that does what I'm asking them to do, absolutely. So let me share, one of the stories that I absolutely love was his name was Isaiah and she's been in our program and she's shared about him, but this kiddo was adopted and the parents ... So he had a lot of trauma. He had ADHD, autism and all kinds of other things and he had gone from house to house. And basically, when the member that I'm working with took in Isaiah, it was like his last stop. And so they started doing Brainworx and I had one-on-one sessions with her, "And creeping and crawling gave me so much information of how the brain is organized or disorganized." So they're like, "We're trying to get him to ride his bike because he should be able to ride his bike by now." (41:26):

And I'm like, "I saw his creep. I saw his crawl. He's not there. He's not there. You need to let him get to the point where then his brain truly is able to then sequence certain motions in his body to make it fun. Otherwise, can you make him ... Yeah, it will be a splinter skill the way that he's going to ride his bike. I'll tell you when he's ready." And so they kept doing the movements, and then all of a sudden," I'm like, "Go ride your bike," and he just got on it. And within just moments, he was riding his bike. He's putting himself to sleep when before it was like a two-hour ordeal. This is like-

Dr. Laura Markham (42:08):

When you say, "Putting himself to sleep," so how do you account for ... Because the reason kids can't put themselves to sleep is they don't feel safe, right? So tell us about that. What do you see that might have changed for Isaiah at that point?

Alma Galvan (42:22):

Well, the more that we're addressing the fight or flight, the more that we're building, growing that part of the brain that then can know that he's safe. So the parents were doing the movements and he was doing the movements himself. So then the brain gets the ability to be able to see, "Oh, I can go to sleep." So it's an internal ability that starts to develop because the support of our biology is there. And everything starts with our body, and as we're using our body to go back and finish the development, then we acquire functions." And this is just like the tip of the iceberg. There's so much more that happens because we're compensating constantly.

(43:12):

And so the more that then we have the support, the more that then we have the ability to truly show up as who we really are. Internally, we know who we are, but externally, sometimes we don't respond the way or we react really because it's our biology that says, "Ooh, you're under threat, so you better respond."

Dr. Laura Markham (43:37):

Right, right. And we know that any of us can feel threatened very easily and some kids spend an enormous amount of time in that state where they're triggered, where they're activated and worried about, at least in a low level of threat and maybe a high level if you've got a two-hour tantrum. But what part of the brain do you think is being changed or developed by doing the exercises that you recommend?

Alma Galvan (44:08):

The whole entire foundational part of the brain. There's a pyramid of learning that I saw that I am always teaching people. And the whole bottom part that the nervous system, the vestibular proprioceptive, all of that is the bottom part of the pyramid. And at the very top is learning. At the very top is learning and so-

Dr. Laura Markham (44:28):

So looking at the functions. Proprioceptive is about taking in information about where you are in space and balance and movement when that's what you're working with.

Alma Galvan (44:39):

Absolutely. And that gets a huge boost in development with crawling. The vestibular, the balance system gets a huge boost with crawling. And so that's where all a lot of the eyes functions come in. Eye tracking comes in with pons, but a lot of being able

to look at the board and come close, that comes with crawling. Being able to comfortably go in different places, that's crawling.

Dr. Laura Markham (45:14):

When you're focusing your eyes, you're saying?

Alma Galvan (45:17):

Yes, yes. And also my eyes get to be able to be a team with crawling. And if I didn't crawl enough, then I can even see two or three of something happening. And so what I'll learn is a compensation. I'll tilt my paper and I'll write upward. That's eliminating one of the eyes. See how brilliant we are, as a compensate massively. And if we don't understand it from where it's coming from, we think, "That is just how I am." I did, I thought it was until then. The interesting thing is that then the more that I did this work, because I had to, I didn't do this thinking that I needed help. I'm so grateful for that.

Dr. Laura Markham (45:59):

You're saying that the parent changes too?

Alma Galvan (46:02):

Yes, the parent.

Dr. Laura Markham (46:03):

The parent changes too and you realize, "Oh, this whole time ,I've been compensating in this way or developed this work around, and actually, now I've healed that thing in me," you're saying?

Alma Galvan (46:15):

Absolutely. And when you said that we do have to go back and acknowledge and take care of our little self that things were not enough, "We're not lovable, we're not this, we're not that," well, when you do Soothing Heart and you set an intention, "I am lovable," that in a sense is one of the ways and a very simplistic way that we can go back and start thickening, start putting those new beliefs in us. So then when we're not just calming our nervous system, but really are reprogramming our subconscious in a sweet and loving way. That's why if you just do Soothing Heart, just that in itself is really powerful.

(46:57):

Then there's a lot of different modalities. I like things to be simple and so I'm drawn to simple but powerful things and that's where the movements that I share. They're very simple, but don't let the simplicity fool you. They're very powerful.

Dr. Laura Markham (47:15):

Do you see ... Many parents who have a child who's been diagnosed, has been given a diagnosis of ADHD, many parents consider medication or whatever and you talk about your work as an alternative because it's a brain-based strategy using movement, but it's a natural approach. In your community of the kids with ADHD, how do you see them responding to your protocol versus ... I mean, some of those kids must also have medication or some of them don't, I don't know.

Alma Galvan (47:54):

I leave that up to ... I think that each parent, each child is a very ... It's an individual that needs to really take a lot of things under consideration and so I'm not against medication or I think that everyone needs to find what works for them. What I do is I show up and I share what has made the biggest impact for my life and for my children's life and subsequently now throughout the world, through thousands and thousands of people. So I'm excited to share my modality, but everybody has to follow their gut. Look, we have this guidance system that tells us, "That feels good," "That doesn't follow it."

(48:45):

You know what? I'll do a cherry on top of that one. In order to follow our gut, we also need to make sure that it's not tainted by our belief system, right? So doing Soothing Heart and saying, "I can connect to the true essence of who I am and follow that. I know what is best for me," I'm able to pause and listen to what I need and just keep doing these little tiny, I call them rewires, but they're really intentions that are rewiring the subconscious with movement.

Dr. Laura Markham (49:24):

So I agree with you that we can rewire our subconscious with any ... I mean-

Alma Galvan (49:31):

Different modalities.

Dr. Laura Markham (49:32):

There are many modalities that can work to do that, but we know that connecting, using the physical as well as the intention that creates the emotions gives us the most power. That makes sense.

Alma Galvan (49:47):

And it's simple.

Dr. Laura Markham (49:49):

So tell us about your kids. So your kids are now?

Alma Galvan (49:56):

Yeah, there's 32 and my youngest is going to be 30 tomorrow. Oh my gosh. They're amazing. They are amazing beings, incredible teachers to me that have … At this point, I luxuriate at seeing who they are. Both of them have jobs. Manny has a girlfriend. This is the kiddo that should be in an institution. He has a girlfriend. He creates claymation videos for us at Brainworx. That takes an enormous amount of patience. So claymation, for a two-minute video, it takes over a thousand frames to create. And they just give me such joy. I get to reexperience them as the beings that they've always been, but I was so worried at the beginning that, "Oh my gosh, what's going to happen to them?" and my fears kept adding to the distress that was happening in our life.

(51:00):

Because when you see a child that they can't do something very simple, you go, "Oh my gosh, if they can't even do this, they're not going to be able to do that. They're going to be homeless. What's going to be later on?" And so then it's like, "I can't die." And this is where, again, we're going to keep going back to Soothing Heart, because if we soothe ourselves and if we go, "You know what? In this moment, in this moment, I can be patient. I can pause and see what my child needs," not letting us get too far ahead. And the more that I saw that, I started more and more rewiring my subconscious belief, I'm like, "Oh, there's a bigger picture in this and they will be fine. They will be fine if I am calm and grounded."

(51:52):

And really what I found is that every time I saw them dysregulated, it was always about me, "If I'm not being a good enough mom," look at this, "If I am not … What is going on? Why can't I even get them to do something simple?" So it was all about me internally and bashing myself massively. And so the more I rewired my subconscious belief, then I could truly be able to hold a space when they're having a meltdown,

when they're having difficulty and it's not about me. It's about now, "How can I then notice how I can help them figure out how to move past their difficulty in that moment, not bringing me into the picture?" Now I'm their guide versus I'm adding to their distress.

Dr. Laura Markham (52:41):

I love that. And I love your long view because many of the parents watching have children who are four years old and they don't know what it's going to be like when their child is 28 or 30. And what you've just described is the future. We don't have any power over the future. The only power we have is in the present moment. And the only power we have is how we show up in the present moment. And what you've just described is, if we can show up according to our values as giving our children what they need, that calm center that they can use for coregulation, then their whole future can be different.

Alma Galvan (53:22):

And if we're calm, we have more of a possibility, an ability to see additional pieces that, when we're worried, when we're in fight or flight, we go into a tunnel vision, "I can't see more than this and now the anxiety is even higher because I don't know how to get out of this."

Dr. Laura Markham (53:41):

We can't think creatively when we are upset, of course, any more than they can think creatively when they're having a tantrum.

Alma Galvan (53:47):

Exactly. Exactly.

Dr. Laura Markham (53:49):

Alma, this is so beautiful. Thank you so much for sharing with us today. So, Alma, how can people who've been listening to us find you and find out more about Brainworx?

Alma Galvan (54:00):

So one of the things that we're going to do is we're going to give a gift of a workshop where I go much more in depth into talking about the pons, the midbrain and I will show how to have three additional movements, not just that. Actually, Soothing Heart is not in that. It's three different ones. And so that then if other people want more information, you can go to our website, brainworxinc.com. It's W-O-R-X with an X.

And if you have any questions, email us and just as a mom wanting to really share information that I wish I would've learned from the very beginning.

Dr. Laura Markham (54:40):

Great. So the link for your free gift for your workshop will be below our recording for people who are watching this and want to learn more.

Alma Galvan (54:51):

Thank you so much, Laura.

Dr. Laura Markham (54:52):

Alma, thank you. Thank you.

