

Ep 152 Transcript

Sarah:

Welcome to the SLP Happy Hour Podcast. I'm Sarah an SLP in private practice in Oregon. And I'm also on teachers pay teachers. You can buy my parent handouts bundle by searching for the SLP Happy Hour store on TeachersPayTeachers.com. You can get more information about my work as well as show notes and transcript tips for each episode at www.slphappyhour.com. My co host today is Megan Stewart. She is on instagram as sensible literacy. She works in Florida for the schools and loves everything AAC and literacy. So welcome to the show, Megan.

Megan:

Hi, thanks for having me. Like you said, I'm Megan, a school based SLP, and I'm very passionate about AAC and literacy. You can find me at www.sensibleliteracy.com and on social Media as Sensible Literacy.

Sarah:

Megan, can you let me know more about the job that you do and maybe even some pros and cons about working in your setting at the schools?

Megan:

Absolutely. I am working in a public school in Florida, but the school itself is actually one of a kind because we are a center school that specifically serves autistic students and or students with related disabilities. And we have students from age three through 8th grade. And the majority of our students do have high support needs, and most of them are non speaking or don't use mouth words. So because of that, my day is filled with all sorts of AAC implementation, evaluation, troubleshooting and such and such. As far as the pros and cons of a job like mine, one con that I think holds true whenever you work is the amount of paperwork. I think that I have have an increased amount of paperwork as well with writing AAC evaluation reports and things like that. But I haven't worked with another population for a long time, so it might be the same amount. Another con that I think is very familiar to everyone is a lack of time, because there's only so many things that you can get done in a day and with so many things that you want and or need to do that can be difficult to accept sometimes. As far as pros, I think that I could list these forever because for my job, I love it so much. But I would say that the biggest pro for me is that I'm able to be a small part in helping a student express themselves efficiently and effectively and clearly for what might be their first time. I've been working with this population for over 20 years, but this part of my job never gets old or boring. I still get chills and teary eyed when I see and hear kids light up around their new device and start to be able to communicate.

Sarah:

That sounds like a position with a lot of demands and also a lot of rewards. What got you interested in AAC and literacy and also what keeps you doing this work?

Megan:

Yes, thank you. It is a very big passion of mine. I've always loved AAC ever since I learned about it in grad school and I've always been an avid reader and used books and therapy. So combining the two just started naturally happening. I'm also a very big believer in presuming the potential of all of our students and never saying that they will not be able to do something because we don't know that. So I guess continuing to encourage students who use AAC and may or may not be verbally communicating to interact with books and learn about letters, sounds, reading and things like that is my avenue to show that all kids can learn to read. What keeps me coming back to AAC and literacy again, it's the AAC users. It's seeing them pick books as something they want to do in their free time. It's hearing them talk about their favorite books on their device and then watching them discover that letters and words are all around them and that they too can use them to communicate and to write. For me, specializing and having these specific interests has been very helpful as it has helped me really know what I want to look for in a job. However, I do know that not all SLPs have that luxury. We are often asked to be a jill of all trades since we have such a broad scope of practice and often have to treat a lot of different needs with students, especially when you're working in the schools. I do think though, if you have a focus on one modality of therapy that may help you streamline your prep time, it might help you make things more simple. ^{1s} For example, if you decide to do literacy based therapy, you might be able to use one book or multiple books throughout all of your sessions and just focus on different targets based on your students needs.

Sarah:

I worked in the schools for years, and I was certainly a generalist there. It is really nice to think about maybe specializing or even having a way to streamline therapy. Like, I center my therapy around books, and I also love the intellectual curiosity you have and that desire to learn new things. So it sounds like work is going well. Now. Have you had difficult times within the profession or times of burnout?

Megan:

Yeah, unfortunately, by the end of last school year, I was pretty burnt out. We were short staffed, probably about two full time SLP positions due to overall staff shortages at my school and throughout the district. And I'm sure you all are familiar with that, as it was happening throughout the country. However, with that, it made the workload and caseload very high and very stressful. We had to cover meetings and extra things like that. And, I mean, talk about not having any time in the day. It was crazy. ^{1s} Thankfully, I had the summer off, and then I was able to relax and recoup during that time. And now I'm happy to say that we are fully staffed this year, which has made things much more doable.

Sarah:

That sounds really understandable. I've worked in the schools as a contractor, including during COVID and the staffing shortages really stressed out me. My team parents were burned out, kids were burned down. It was really difficult. So what are some boundaries? Whether there are self boundaries, boundaries

you hold with yourself or others boundaries boundaries you hold with others that keep you healthy and feeling good about your work?

Megan:

That's been something I've been working on for a long time. But I do my very best to leave work at work. What I mean by that is I don't work on school related things outside of school hours unless absolutely necessary. And so that it doesn't become absolutely necessary, I prioritize what needs to get done first while I'm at school or while I'm at work. So those would be things that were like, based on timelines and et cetera, and getting those out of the way first. So after those things are done, then I can move on to other things on my list that I need to get done. But they don't have a specific time deadline.

Sarah:

I like how you prioritize things, because things with deadlines in the schools like IEPs or evaluations, those ultimately have to come first because they're essential and many of us have more job tasks than we can reliably get done. So for example, if there's a staffing shortage, we shouldn't be expected to work 1.5 FTE. For example, just because our school doesn't have enough staff to support the current workload. We work as a 1.0 FTE if that's what we are. So what are some things that you have tried as you have maybe approached burnout or started to feel some feelings of resentment or exhaustion maybe around work that have worked and that haven't worked?

Megan:

I would say my answer to that is very similar to the last question working during my school contract hours and not at other times, such as in the evenings or on the weekends, but especially during the time when we were short staffed. I didn't want to send the message that we were quote unquote fine or handling it with the staff that we had. I wanted it to be clear that we still needed additional staff to complete everything that was on our plate outside of school. I also read a lot. Reading is one of my best tips for relaxation for myself. To me, there's nothing better than curling up with a book or my Kindle and a blanket on the couch at the end of a long day. So my best advice, if you're feeling overworked, is to do what helps you relax. No matter what it is. You have to make sure you take time for you, because the work will always be there, but you can't do the work if you are not you.

Sarah:

I love the idea of doing less and adding in fun, and I'm a big reader too, so I love that. Now let's switch up the format. So just as Megan, I asked you five questions, now you've got five questions for me. So what have you got for me today?

Megan:

All right, so my first question is, do you have a favorite area of therapy to treat, like language, arctic, AAC, or an age group to treat, and what makes that your favorite?

Sarah:

So for many years, I worked in the schools, mostly elementary level, first as an employee and then as a contractor. For me, the area of practice that seems the most natural is working with elementary school students. But I think a lot of that is just because it's what I have the most experience with. Now that I'm in private practice, the majority of my caseload is preschool age, so over time, I'm really getting used to how to do that. It's a totally different type of therapy, and I'm learning how to make it fun and make it interactive, and I'm starting to like it even more. Within my private practice, I mostly focus on autism and speech sound disorders, including childhood apraxia of speech, and for me, both gestalt language development and working with autistic children as well as childhood apraxia of speech is really fun because it's interesting. There's always more to learn, and learning about different therapeutic approaches, trying them out and seeing how they work in the clinical experience has been really fun for me.

Megan:

Okay, question number two. I think that the topics of self care and happiness that you promote on this podcast are such important messages. So what prompted you to become such a proponent for self care and happiness?

Sarah:

So I did experience burnout within the first at least five years of my career. I was probably burned out for a while before I realized what was happening for me. I can also tend towards anxiety, so mental health is important to me also. Since 2020 I've gone through some grief and loss that has been profound and has really impacted me. So I've found that I have less bandwidth than I had pre grief and I need to change my expectations of myself. I'm just not as productive as I was before grief. I also really care about this idea of being a quote unquote good enough SLP. And what that means is doing my job during my 8 hours of work and then going home and living my life because ultimately there will always be more work to do and that doesn't mean that we should give up our personal lives to get all of that done. I also have had some people pleasing tendencies and I've realized over time that that's impacted my work and my mental health. So that's been an area that I've wanted to learn more about. I also really want to be the person that I didn't have when I was going through Burnout. I thought that, you know, Burnout was my fault. I thought everyone else loved their job. I thought I was alone in my Burnout. And so I really want to talk about the fact that we should be looking out for burnout as helping professionals, and we should also not blame ourselves for it because there are a lot of things that result in Burnout. So I also want to thank everybody who listens to the podcast who purchases things in my Teachers Pay Teachers store, really, this SLP Happy Hour, this part of being an SLP is really important to me. It is really rewarding for me. And I just want to thank so much, everyone who's listening.

Megan:

And I know that I can speak for a listener and say thank you to you for putting out this podcast because it really does touch on all of those things that you talked about, and it is meaningful for us as listeners as

well. My third question is, do you have a favorite book that you use or read in therapy? And if you do, what is it and why?

Sarah:

I have a book I love to read, especially in preschool settings, and it's called Yum, Yummy, Yuck. And so it follows those three words through most of the books. So yum might be a bagel, yummy might be a watermelon, and yuck is going to be something gross like soap or sand. And I find that students really enjoy sharing with me what they do and don't like to eat. And also when we get to the yuck part of the book, there's usually lots of giggles and interaction. This book also pairs extremely well with a song that I know, Megan, you use in therapy. I think I started using it after seeing one of your YouTube videos called Do You Like Broccoli? So in that song, it's like, do you like broccoli? Yes, I do. Do you like ice cream? Yes, I do. Do you like broccoli ice cream? Or I think it's broccoli milkshakes. No, I don't. So that's another opportunity for student to talk about what they do and don't like. So that's a really effective, fun, low prep lesson that I like to use with, again, the book Yum, Yum, Yuck. And then a YouTube video of the song called Do You Like Broccoli?

Megan:

I can't believe I didn't know about that book, but I'm 100% adding it to my Amazon cart right now because you're absolutely right. I love using that song, and it does promote so much language. So thank you very much for that recommendation.

Sarah:

My pleasure. I've learned so much from you, so I'm glad I can pass it along. And really, that lesson is like peanut butter and jelly. It just goes so well together.

Megan:

Absolutely. Okay, question number four is what is one area of the SLP field that you would like to learn more about?

Sarah:

There really are so many. One would be learning more about the mental health of the students, clients, patients we work with. I would like to see more research specifically on the mental health of people with autism, language disorders, dyslexia because I think that the more I work as an SLP, the more I realize that it really is a whole person approach. And it's not that we're providing mental health counseling, but a person's mental health really impacts how well they can retain information, how much they can learn, how much they can remember. And that is an area I'd like to learn more about. I'm also still interested in mental health and burnout learning more about that. And I really think that where psychology and work intersect is something that I will always be interested in.

Megan:

Okay, last question, and this is a little not SLP related, but if you had to move and live anywhere else in the US. Or the world, where would you go and why?

Sarah:

So I've been fortunate enough to already do my dream move. So I was born and raised in Portland, Oregon, a big city, and I now live in a small town in southern Oregon near the California border. So I already got that. And I moved for a lot of reasons, and I love living here for a lot of reasons, including access to the Pacific Crest Trail, hiking trails, my husband loves to ski on a mountain that's nearby, and all of the outdoor opportunities and just the small town feel of our town. I do have a favorite place to go, which is British Columbia, and I like to go in late summer because our town does have fire season. I think anyone who's listening to this, who lives especially in the west, is familiar with the late summer hazy, smoky air, as there are wildfires nearby or far away, and the wind is bringing the smoke in. So if I could do anything, I would stay where I am right now, and I would travel during late summer instead of work, and I would probably go to British Columbia. And there are still some fires there in wild fire smoke. But overall, I love that it's near the water. There's beaches, mountains, chefs, kiss. I just love it. And let's shift gears to a self care challenge. This season of life, a really important word for me, has been edit. I can't do it all, but I can do some things, and I have to purposefully choose to be intentional and also to accept the things I just can't get done for me. I can't have a clean house and have a clinic and have a podcast and have awesome relationships with my friends and family and have the perfect summer body, quote unquote, I have to choose. And by acknowledging that we can only do so much, I feel like we can give ourselves some grace. So as you look at your to do list, it's okay to edit. In the business world, they talk about delete, delegate, and oh, what's the last one? Delay. And that has been something that I've been doing a lot of. I will have to take things that are on my to do list and straight up delete them, just take them out and be like, I can't do this at all. And then other things. There are certain appointments I've needed to make. I'm like, I have to delay. I'm not able to do this right now. So think about your to do list as a list that can be curated, and you have the power to look at it intentionally and bring some grace to how you look at all the things. You need to do grace for yourself, that you probably can't do it all, and that's okay. And acceptance of the fact that there are only so many hours in the day and there's only so much energy that we each have, and we might have to let a lot of things go in this season. Of course, there are times in life where we have energy and time and we want to do all those things, but that's not where I find myself now. So if you can relate, I just encourage you to straight up cross things off your list, delay things that can get delayed, and give yourself grace and compassion as you do less.

Megan:

I absolutely love this because setting boundaries about what you can do and what you want to do is so important and I feel like it's something I am continually working on and refining as well.

Sarah:

Yeah, I think especially for those of us who are highly sensitive people, HSPs or introverts, it can be pretty draining to work in a helping profession and come home and just feel completely exhausted. So it's

really important to have regular time where we're taking care of what we need so that we can help ourselves. It's also really important to think about what is relaxing for you. And even if, like me, you judge those things and you're like, those are nerdier, those aren't real Hobbies. Still do them. So for me, it's reading fiction, going for walks, sitting outside, drinking tea, things like that. And I have spent a lot of time thinking that my hobbies aren't cool enough or artistic enough. And finally, I just accepted that I'm going to make time to prioritize things that I care about that are going to give me energy. And I also wanted to talk about the amount of sensory stimulation we get as SLPs. We often get a lot during the day, so it can be really helpful to just come home and and lay in a dark and quiet room or lay on the floor and get less sensory stimulation just for a short amount of time. That gives me some energy when I get home from work.

Megan:

As I also am a fellow introvert, taking time to recoup and rest after busy events and times in our lives is so important. With that being said, though, I have to constantly remind myself that not everyone is an introvert and they may not need time to recoup like I do, or they might just need to do it in a different way. So I continually remind myself that I need to add advocate for myself and my needs and that that doesn't make me a bad person. It makes me me and taking care of me is so important.

Sarah:

And that's it for this episode of the SLP Happy Hour podcast, where we discussed Megan and her job and then she asked me some fun questions and then we talked about editing our to do lists and saying no. I hope this was a helpful listen for you and that you enjoyed the conversation and learned something new. If you enjoyed this episode, please take a moment to rate and review us on Apple podcasts that will help other SLPs, SLPAs and SLP students find the podcast and learn as well. Thank you for being here and we hope this episode was a little slice of an SLP Happy Hour for you. Until next time.