

Meet Erin Carroll

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Alright — so today we've got the honor of introducing you to Erin Carroll. We think you'll enjoy our conversation, we've shared it below.

Hi Erin, appreciate you sitting with us today to share your wisdom with our readers. So, let's start with resilience — where do you get your resilience from?

I get my resilience from the same place my students get theirs: from learning how to fail and keep going anyway.

I grew up navigating school with ADHD before I had language for what that meant. I didn't know why things that seemed effortless for other kids required so much more from me. What I did know was that I had to find workarounds, build my own systems, and keep showing up even when the system wasn't built for how my brain worked. That is where resilience started for me. Not from some motivational moment, but from necessity.

It deepened when I moved to South America after college. I spent over a year there, including months helping to build a women's literacy project in Sucre, Bolivia. Living in a place where the language, culture, and infrastructure were all unfamiliar forced me to get comfortable with discomfort. I learned that not knowing what you're doing is not the same as not being capable.



Now, as an educational therapist and executive functioning coach, I see resilience differently than most people define it. It's not about pushing through. It's about understanding your own nervous system, knowing when to pause, and having the self-awareness to try a different approach. That is what I teach my students, and it's what I practice myself every day. My work is rooted in the belief that children's strengths and emotional safety must come first, before deep learning can happen. That belief didn't come from a textbook. It came from living it.

Resilience, for me, is not about being tough. It's about being honest about what's hard, and building the scaffolding to move through it with intention.

Let's take a small detour — maybe you can share a bit about yourself before we dive back into some of the other questions we had for you?

I am the founder of rit. Learning & Consulting and grit.ykids in South Minneapolis. I'm an educational therapist, clinical reading specialist, and executive functioning coach, speaker, podcast host, writer, and mom. I work with children and families navigating learning differences, ADHD, and executive functioning challenges.



My approach, which I call Responsive Integrated Teaching (rit.), is built on a simple but radical premise: children's strengths and emotional safety must be prioritized before deep skill learning can occur. Traditional tutoring and intervention tend to isolate skills and operate through a deficit lens. rit. does the opposite. It's holistic, integrating literacy, math, executive functioning, growth mindset, and social-emotional learning into a unified framework that treats the whole child, not just the skill gap. I also believe that educating the caregivers and teachers around a child is just as critical as working with the child themselves. Parents aren't bystanders in this process. They're partners.

What excites me most is the transformation I get to witness. Not just in grades or reading levels, but in how a child sees themselves. A kid who walks in believing they're broken and

walks out understanding that their brain just works differently, and that different is not less. That shift in self-concept is the thing that changes everything else.

Beyond my private practice, I run my nonprofit grrit.ykids, which is based on my radical, author-collaborated read-aloud podcast — made for every child but dedicated to children who may learn, think, feel, or look different. It's a space where kids can hear stories about characters who are strong and gritty and wonderful, just like them. I also lead rit. Rhymers, an early literacy playgroup for toddlers and preschoolers, because the research is clear that the foundation for reading begins long before kindergarten.

On the new and upcoming front, there's a lot in motion. I'm currently writing a series of children's books alongside a novelette for parents and caregivers called *That's Enough*. I'm also building out community programming through grrit.y kids and expanding my philanthropic consulting for businesses and organizations interested in meaningful literacy initiatives. My long-term vision is to establish rit. Academy, a school designed from the ground up for children who learn differently, one that reflects everything I believe about how learning should actually work.

I'm deeply proud that my practice is intentionally small. I take on only one to two comprehensive clients per year and limit my intensive caseload to four students per school year. That constraint is by design. This work requires depth, relationship, and trust. It doesn't scale the way most businesses do, and I'm okay with that. The impact shows up in the lives of the children and families I work with, and that has always been enough.



Looking back, what do you think were the three qualities, skills, or areas of knowledge that were most impactful in your journey? What advice do you have for folks who are early in their journey?

1. Learning to trust my own clinical observation over conventional wisdom.

Early in my career, I worked in specialized schools for children with language-based learning disabilities. I was surrounded by smart, well-meaning professionals who followed the established playbook: isolate the skill deficit, drill it, measure it, repeat. And I kept noticing that something was missing. Kids were making incremental gains on paper but still hating school, still shutting down, still believing they were the problem. The data said progress. The child's face said otherwise.



It took me years to trust what I was seeing more than what the field was telling me. But that trust is what led me to build rit., a framework that prioritizes emotional safety and self-concept before skill acquisition. The research backs this up now. Polyvagal theory, Mona Delahooke's work on bottom-up development, Russell Barkley's reframing of ADHD, Carol Dweck's research on mindset. But I didn't start with the research. I started with the kids in front of me.

My advice: pay attention to what you notice that others aren't naming. If something in your field feels off, it probably is. You don't need permission to question the dominant model. You need the courage to sit with the discomfort of seeing it differently and the discipline to build something better.

2. Understanding that struggle is data, not identity.

This one is personal. Growing up with ADHD and not having language for it meant I spent years interpreting my own struggles as character flaws. I thought I was lazy, careless, not trying hard enough. When I finally understood that my brain was wired differently, not deficiently, it changed my entire relationship with effort and failure.

That reframing is now the backbone of my work. When a child comes to me believing they're stupid because reading is hard, the first thing we do is separate the struggle from the self. Struggle tells us where the brain needs support. It doesn't tell us who you are. This is what executive functioning coaching is really about: helping kids (and their parents) understand the machinery of how they learn, so they can stop blaming themselves and start building systems that actually work.

For anyone early in their journey, especially in education, therapy, or any helping profession: do your own inner work first. Understand your own relationship with failure, perfectionism, and self-worth. You cannot help someone rewrite a story you're still living inside of. The most transformative thing I did for my students was heal my own relationship with learning.



3. Refusing to separate the child from their context.

Traditional intervention pulls a child out of class, works on a skill in isolation, and sends them back. It rarely considers what's happening at home, how the child's nervous system is responding to stress, what the sibling dynamics look like, or how the parents are coping. I learned early that you cannot address a child's learning in a vacuum. The child exists inside a family, a classroom, a community, and a body. All of it matters.



This is why rit. is built the way it is. I work with parents just as intensively as I work with students. I educate teachers. I pay attention to regulation, to sleep, to anxiety, to the moments a child's body checks out before their brain does. My training at Columbia gave me the clinical foundation, but my time in Bolivia, working on a women's literacy project, taught me that learning is never just about the individual. It's about the systems around them.

If you're early in your career and working with people in any capacity, learn to zoom out. Ask what's happening around the person, not just inside them. Understand that behavior is communication, not defiance. The professionals who make the biggest difference are the ones who refuse to treat a human being like a set of isolated symptoms.

How would you spend the next decade if you somehow knew that it was your last?

I actually think about this more than most people consider acceptable. Not in a morbid way, but in a desire to feel and lean into all of the things that I love about living. How short life is. How quickly it moves. Maybe it's the poet in me. I come back to the same question over and over: "How do I want to spend my days?" That's my mantra. Not what do I want to accomplish or what does my five-year plan look like. What do I want to spend my days doing?

The answer is always the same. I want to spend my minutes and days; weeks and months — connecting. Eyes open. Windows open. Screens off. Noticing the way children play, listening to their voices and stories and delighting in all of the deep, messy parts of learning. Connect with and help as many people as possible. And share as much as I can.



If I had one decade, I'd build my school. A school designed from the ground up for children who learn differently. Not a school that accommodates them. Not a school that tolerates them. A school that was built for them, where the pedagogy, the environment, the culture, and the expectations all reflect what we actually know about how diverse brains learn. If I had ten years, I would stop planning it and start pouring the foundation.

I'd want it on Lake Harriet, because I believe the environment children learn in matters as much as the curriculum. I'd want it to be a place where executive functioning, emotional regulation, and self-advocacy aren't add-ons. They're the architecture. A place where every child knows exactly how and why they belong.

So, that would keep me pretty busy! The rest of the moments I had, I would spend holding and letting go of my children — as that is the rhythm we are sentenced to when we love someone. And in between that — I would write everything else down. Every story, dream, hope, poem.



Contact & Links

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