THRIVE EMERGE

Five Minutes Before Opening Night

Last night I had a dream.

I was in a play.
And I was cast as a teenager.

Opening night.
Five minutes before the curtain was going up.

And suddenly I realized… I didn't know my lines.

I hadn't studied.
I hadn't prepared.
I had no idea what I was supposed to say.

I could see the director slowly realizing it too.
That look -- the quiet horror.
The dawning awareness: *This is going to fall apart.*

And I felt that rising panic.

Five minutes.
No script.
No rehearsal.
No backup plan.

And when I woke up, I thought:

That's parenting a neurodivergent teen.

Because here we are.

The curtain is rising on adulthood.

And many of us feel like we don't know the lines.

We don't know:

- How to prepare them enough.
- How to protect them enough.
- How to push without breaking connection.
- How to let go without abandoning them.

And beneath all the strategy conversations -- the grades, the job applications, the executive functioning systems, the therapy appointments -- there's something much more vulnerable happening.

There's fear.

Real fear.

- Will they be safe?
- Will they ever be ready?
- Will they find meaningful work?
- Will someone love them well?
- Are they emotionally steady enough?
- Did I miss something when they were 8… or 12… or 15?
- Is it too late?

And often what we talk about is:
"What do we do about our kids?"

How do we get them to:

- Make the bed
- Turn in the homework
- Follow through
- Apply for the job
- Choose better friends
- Meet the deadline

But underneath that is a quieter plea:

"Please make this better… because I'm scared."

Sometimes when parents ask me,
"Why won't he just do it?"
"What consequence should I use?"
"How do I make her care?"

What I sometimes hear underneath is:

"I am hurting.
I am scared.
I don't know the right line to say.
And I need this to feel more predictable."

Tonight, I want to gently shift something.

Tonight isn't primarily about what to do about them.

Tonight is about what we do about us.

Because here's the truth:

We don't get to pick the script.

We don't get a clean, rehearsed path into adulthood.

Parenting neurodivergent teens often means living in:

- Uncertainty
- Risk
- Loss of the imagined future
- A slower timeline than we expected

And also:

- Unexpected strengths
- Fierce loyalty
- Deep emotional insight
- Creativity
- Moments of breathtaking growth

The real question becomes:

How do we stay on stage
when we feel unprepared?

How do we steady our own nervous systems
when everything in us wants control and certainty?

How do we hold compassion in our hearts
when another part of us is screaming for predictability?

How do we stop running from fear
and learn to live with it -- without letting it run the show?

Because there is no perfect script.

There is no single right parenting line.

There is no moment where the director says,
“Relax. You’ve mastered it.”

There is only growth.

There is learning to stay present.

There is learning to tolerate not knowing.

There is learning to say, “I don’t know my lines yet… but I’m still here.”

Tonight is about our hearts.

It’s about how we grow.

It’s about how we regulate ourselves
so we don’t parent from panic.

It’s about how we soften
when fear hardens us.

It’s about how we learn patience
without giving up hope.

Because when we grow --
when we become steadier --
the entire relational field shifts.

Not because we forced our kids to change.

But because we stopped acting from fear.

This isn’t opening night.

This is rehearsal.

And we’re learning together.

And none of us have to know all the lines yet. Because in the end, the most important thing our children need is not a perfect performance -- it’s a parent who can stay steady when the script falls apart.