



The Missing Link for SLPs Podcast

The Speechless SLP Series

freshslp.com

Episode 109: The Speechless Mom: Unconditional Love and Unending Support

A pivotal role when a parent with young children suddenly becomes critically ill is who is going to look after the kids. In this episode of the Speechless SLP with Vanessa Abraham, we hear from her mom, Pam, on what it was like to have a daughter needing hospital care, and a young granddaughter needing to be looked after as well.

Discussion & Reflection Questions

1. Do you welcome caregivers and support people in your environment and help them understand your patient or client's particular needs and situations?
2. What are some of the medical and technological terms you use that could be broken down into simple language for your patient or client's non-medical support people to understand?
3. Are there ways you can help and encourage caregivers and support people to take a break and look after themselves too?
4. How much do you know about the different options for healthcare and different facilities people may have under their insurance?
5. If you were to find yourself in need of care would you want to be close to home?

Pam



Pam is a wife and mother to three adult children. Her life was flipped upside down when Vanessa, her daughter, became sick in the ICU and was unable to care for her child on any level.

Pam and her husband Allen rose to the challenge by not only helping Vanessa drive to medical appointments but provided a safe and loving home for her child to live during the most challenging and scary time of Vanessa's life.

Quote from the Conversation

At the local hospital, she was pointing at words. She would say to me at the very beginning to go home, take my baby, and go home.

When she was [later] at the local hospital for rehab, we were down there every day. We took her daughter with us, and that was a very positive thing for her daughter and, I think, Vanessa, to have us close. I think that was important.

- Pam

Vanessa Abraham, MS, CCC-SLP



Vanessa is a wife, mother and school based Speech-Language Pathologist.

She learned firsthand what it's like to be on the receiving end of speech services after experiencing a sudden-onset critical illness that left her with

limb and neck paralysis as well as a PEG tube and tracheostomy. She was thrown into the rehabilitation world after being an independent, healthy and vibrant young mother. Through many swallow studies, voice therapy, OT and PT, she had to learn to eat, talk and move again.

Her goal now is to help people critically ill patients cope with the grief they experience after a critical illness through speaking up about the topic of Post Intensive Care Syndrome (PICS), depression and anxiety post ICU in addition to educating families and patients about the various rehab modalities that have been successful for her.

Contact Vanessa Abraham
vabraham14@gmail.com

Quote from the Conversation

"It certainly takes a village, and not just one person in a village. That village it's got to be pretty strong, and pretty deep, because everybody needs breaks and it takes a lot of people to care for one person."

- Vanessa Abraham

Mattie Murrey Tegels, MA, CCC-SLP, L, CPC, CLSC

Medical Speech-Language Pathologist and
Founder of Fresh SLP & Badass SLP



Mattie Murrey-Tegels is the founder and SLP behind Fresh SLP, Badass SLP, and The Missing Link for SLPs Podcast. She's been "in-the-trenches" as a medical SLP around the world for over 25 years and now an Assistant Professor for 3 years. She is thrilled to be adding this dream of a podcast

because paying her experiences forward is something she is very passionate about. If you ask her patients and students, one thing they will remember is how much she loves her job! She may not look like it but she is a huge introvert and when she is not actively working as an SLP, she is almost always reading, writing (writing over 1,000,000 words a year), or listening to amazing Chicago Blues bands. She also loves being outdoors and definitely enjoys soaking up the sun at her home in Minnesota, where warm and sunny days can be limited. She's ridden motorcycles for many years, raced sled dogs, hiked huge mountains yet she cherishes the quiet moments of climbing into a hammock to nap or timeless conversations with friends and family. The Missing Link for SLPs podcast and Fresh SLP is her legacy, giving back to a career that has so richly rewarded her.

Quote from the Conversation

People use a lot of approaches when presented with overwhelming information – denying, minimizing, rationalizing, and hitting pause are very legitimate ways to handle emotions and the information. If we have a care support person who is maybe not active in technology and medical terminology, simplify things.

- Mattie Murrey-Tegels

Keep the Conversation Going

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Let's make those connections. You got this!

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Send a message to Mattie@FreshSLP.com!*

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The Missing Link for SLPs Podcast Show Notes

A pivotal role when a parent with young children suddenly becomes critically ill is who is going to look after the kids. In this episode of the Speechless SLP with Vanessa Abraham, we hear from her mom, Pam, on what it was like to have a daughter needing hospital care, and a young granddaughter needing to be looked after as well.

The Missing Link for SLPs Podcast Full Transcript

Mattie Murrey 00:03

Hi, everyone, and welcome to the Missing Link for SLPs podcast. I'm Mattie, your host, speaker, and very passionate speech language pathology advocate. You are listening to The Speechless SLP series with Vanessa Abraham, and you get a unique perspective in each one of these episodes on her journey being the speechless SLP in the ICU bed, unable to talk. So, welcome to this series of the Missing Link for SLPs podcast. Glad you are here. Sit back, take a listen.

Happy Mother's Day! I'm wishing our guests Happy Mother's Day today for a very good reason, we are here with Vanessa Abraham and her mom. So, welcome, ladies,

Pam 00:47

Thank you.

Vanessa Abraham 00:47

Thank you. Happy Mother's Day to you too.

Mattie Murrey 00:49

It's been a good day.

Vanessa Abraham 00:51

Mhm.

Mattie Murrey 00:52

We decided to record this episode on Mother's Day because your mother, Pam, had a very important supportive role, as well as your father, in your recovery because you have a family, and when you started going through your medical journey, and the crises, and the recovery, they were key in stepping in.

Vanessa Abraham 01:11

Absolutely. I don't know what I would have done without them.



Mattie Murrey 01:15

So, can you give us a little context? Pam, welcome. I have adult children. And so, you're going to be speaking to my heart a little bit, because it's easy when you have a younger child because you can go in and fix. But with older children, you sometimes have to have more of a stand back because they have spouses. What was it like for you being the mother of Vanessa and watching this unfold?

Pam 01:41

Well, it was pretty difficult waiting for information from him, but yet I didn't want to know. Like, if he sent something late at night after he came from the hospital, I didn't want to read it, if that makes sense, because I wouldn't be sleepy.

Mattie Murrey 02:05

Mhm.

Pam 02:06

So, I would wait until morning, and with my husband, Ken, I would read his text. Because I didn't – it just –

Mattie Murrey 02:14

You weren't ready.

Pam 02:14

– it was a lot.

Mattie Murrey 02:18

Yeah, yeah.

Pam 02:16

A lot to decipher.

Mattie Murrey 02:18

There's a lot of approaches we use when we're presented with overwhelming information – denying, minimizing, rationalizing, and hitting the pause button is a very legitimate reasonable way to handle some of the things, the emotions and the information in the scariness that you had.

Pam 02:38

Right.

Mattie Murrey 02:39



So, then when you did wake up in the morning, and you read some of those texts, and how did that go for you?

Pam 02:45

I had to have a dictionary, or go back onto my phone and figure out what he was talking about. That was difficult. And my husband's sitting there, and I'm trying to say, "Well, this is what he said. I don't know what that means", but –

Vanessa Abraham 03:02

A lot of the medical terminology was too complex.

Pam 03:05

Oh, yes. It was all –

Mattie Murrey 03:08

Okay. Good perspective. So, when we have a situation like this, and we have a care support person who is maybe not active in technology and medical terminology, simplify things.

Pam 03:20

Oh, definitely. Technology, to get information was difficult. He had only a certain amount of time that he could even talk to us.

Mattie Murrey 03:31

Mhm.

Pam 03:32

Not talk, but text us.

Mattie Murrey 03:35

Mhm. His focus was on Vanessa.

Pam 03:37

Mhm, yes.

Vanessa Abraham 03:37

Yeah, and he was in rounds, and he was busy consulting with doctors. And so, yeah, the time that he was able to finally get back to the family, and let everybody know what was going on, was usually late at night when he got home.



Pam 03:51

That's correct. And I didn't want to be reading stuff when my granddaughter was around either. I made sure I wasn't doing that when she was there.

Mattie Murrey 04:01

That was my very next question. When you were caring for Vanessa's family, and things shifted from their home to your home, what kind of words did you use to explain to her family what was happening?

Pam 04:16

We didn't talk about it too much. It was – at meals we would always pray for her mom to get better. And she accepted it very well at three years old.

Mattie Murrey 04:35

Okay.

Pam 04:36

So, that's all we did, and she went to school. She was an excellent child, and it didn't get talked about too much.

Mattie Murrey 04:48

Okay, and that worked.

Pam 04:48

[crosstalk] my mommy's better. She would say, "My Mommy's getting better" every day, and we would agree with her.

Mattie Murrey 04:55

Good. Excellent. Just simple, and at her level.

Pam 05:00

Mhm. Yes.

Mattie Murrey 05:01

And positive.

Pam 05:02

At school I don't think anybody talked about it either, and she was fine.



Mattie Murrey 05:07

Were you at all involved with Vanessa's inability to communicate because she was trached at a time? Or was that – did you ever make it? I know you made it to the ICU a couple of times.

Pam 05:19

No.

Mattie Murrey 05:23

No?

Pam 05:24

We were there when she was able to talk.

Mattie Murrey 05:27

Okay, good.

Pam 05:29

At the local hospital, I don't think she was, and she was pointing at words. She would say to me at the very beginning to go home, take my baby and go home.

Mattie Murrey 05:46

She was signing?

Pam 05:47

Yes. I knew what she said. I knew what she was feeling.

Vanessa Abraham 05:55

I think that's one of those things that a mom would know.

Mattie Murrey 05:58

Mhm.

Pam 05:59

Yeah.

Vanessa Abraham 05:59



Mom to mom. They know what the other one thinks, and what the other one needs.

Pam 06:04

Yeah. She didn't want me at the hospital. She wanted me with her daughter.

Mattie Murrey 06:11

At home, focusing on that.

Pam 06:14

Mhm.

Mattie Murrey 06:16

So, was there a positive memory through all of this? The whole trial from beginning to end. I know it was traumatizing, and hard, and difficult.

Pam 06:30

Yes.

Mattie Murrey 06:30

Positive memories?

Pam 06:29

They raised, with the illness and everything, a wonderful, wonderful child.

Mattie Murrey 06:41

Hmm.

Pam 06:42

And they kept it from her. I didn't see any negativity on her part through all this. She was never really worried, and I think that was a big part of Vanessa and Dale not wanting her alarmed about anything, and they were great parents through this.

Vanessa Abraham 07:12

We tried really hard to shelter her from the reality of what was unfolding in our family.

Pam 07:19

Yes. It was very difficult to be two and a half hours away, and not be in there. And when we were there, they had Vanessa looking like the queen. And she was the queen, and presented herself to her daughter unbelievably well.

Mattie Murrey 07:43

That's great.

Pam 07:46

The staff, everybody was so supportive of her daughter coming and her being there with her mom. I don't think she had any bad feelings afterwards seeing her mom or anything.

Mattie Murrey 08:05

Sure. Mom was in bed not feeling well.

Pam/Vannessa 08:08

Mhm. Yes.

Mattie Murrey 08:09

And she was going to get better and come home.

Pam 08:11

Yes.

Mattie Murrey 08:12

And until then, I'm staying with grandma and grandpa, having fun.

Pam 08:15

Yes. And there were some things that were like a miracle or coincidence, I don't know how to say it. But we knew at one time that she was being transported to a certain hospital, and my husband and I wanted to see where she was being transported. And I don't know how it happened, but we arrived at the hospital the moment she was in the ambulance coming in. It was quite an unbelievable experience. I go to my husband, I say, "Oh, there's the ambulance. They're bringing her in". And I don't know if that was the best thing for her daughter, but it just happened. We were there. Here's the ambulance and there's Vanessa coming, Dales right behind them. It was something like a miracle, and it wasn't even planned.

Mattie Murrey 09:20

So, you're reaching out. Your daughter's sick. You're reaching out to Dale, or Dale's reaching back to you for the information. You're watching their family. How did that interrupt your life and your husband's life – not from negative, like interrupted, but can you give us some depth of the sacrifice and the commitment?



Pam 09:43

I don't think it was any real challenge. It was just something that we did every day. We had our routine, and we corresponded with Dale about different things, and I think the time went really fast. She was a great child. My husband was great, supporting anything that I was doing or vice versa. He was there for her or I was there. I said, well, if I can't pick her up, he was there to pick her up, and we're always on time, and it worked.

Mattie Murrey 10:25

So, looking back, were there two things that you would have changed? Any way to make anything of what you went through better? What can we learn from what you went through?

Pam 10:45

Vanessa went through?

Mattie Murrey 10:39

You. You as their support person for Vanessa.

Pam 10:45

That I went through.

Mattie Murrey 10:47

Mhm, caring for her family. Is there anything, any perspective, any lessons learned that you wished you'd known looking back?

Pam 10:57

No, I really can't think of anything. I just –

Mattie Murrey 11:01

That's good. That's fine.

Pam 11:03

– did what we had to do. And she was at the local hospital for rehab, we were down there every day. We took her daughter with us, and that was a very positive thing for her daughter and, I think, Vanessa, to have us close. I think that was important. I'm glad she decided to go the route of being close to the family.

Mattie Murrey 11:37

Mhm.



Vanessa Abraham 11:37

I would say that that's probably one thing that you learned is that – and correct me if I'm wrong, I don't want to speak for you – but to those people going through this, that sometimes insurance wants to send you to different facilities. And I think one of the things that – being home with family helps heal your heart, and that's a piece of overall healing I learned. And I was there with you when we made that decision, mom.

Pam 12:10

Yes, I remember that.

Vanessa Abraham 12:11

I remember that moment that we decided that I need to be near home.

Mattie Murrey 12:16

Mhm.

Vanessa Abraham 12:17

I need to be in my home town to heal.

Pam 12:20

We had a doctor sitting – standing there telling us that. I remember that.

Vanessa Abraham 12:26

And the insurance wants to guide you where they want to guide you, and it's usually always based on money. And that was a huge moment there, that learning moment.

Mattie Murrey 12:40

That's good to know that. That's good to have that reflection, that the family have a pivotal role. So, if you have a choice between – hopefully, you don't have a choice, but if you have a choice between a higher range rehab facility versus family, you would choose family,

Vanessa Abraham 12:57

I would choose to go home near your family, where you can be around people that love you, that can continue to advocate for you. The people that love you, and you love. Your family is often going to be your source of motivation too.

Mattie Murrey 13:15

Mhm.



Vanessa Abraham 13:17

And, for me, seeing them every day, and having them come visit me was a constant reminder of all right, I've got to get up. I've got to keep fighting.

Mattie Murrey 13:28

I'm amazed at you, Pam, how – when I asked the question was there sacrifice, was there a hiccup in your daily schedule, and you're like, nope. We went and got her family, and we did this, and we did this, and this is just what we did. So, I can see where your daughter gets her drive forward.

Pam 13:55

Yeah.

Vanessa Abraham 13:55

Yeah. We are a very organized family. We like our schedules.

Pam 14:00

Mhm.

Vanessa Abraham 13:59

We like everything written down –

Pam 14:02

– and very on time.

Vanessa Abraham 14:03

Mhm.

Pam 14:06

And her fighting force was always for her family. That was her real motivation.

Mattie Murrey 14:15

Mhm.

Pam 14:16

And not only did she have her family here, but she had other – her people that she worked with that are also close, I think helped. She knew quite a bit since she was in that field, and I think they were a great support at the time. So –



Mattie Murrey 14:41

And I bet as a mom, you – because sometimes as moms, I don't know, I just feel like I want to lift the world and help a child, but we can't do that. We can't prepare the world for the child. We have to prepare the child for the world. And it's the same with your daughter. We can do as much as we can, but it's your daughter's battle. It was Vanessa's battle to get up out of that bed, get her voice back, get her walking back, and we are to support however, wherever we can.

Pam 15:15

Right. And trying not to interfere, or go above her wishes or her husband's wishes, that was important too.

Mattie Murrey 15:32

Mhm.

Pam 15:32

To realize it's their choice, his choice in what they wanted to do. If there was a problem with the family, he was always there to support us with them too.

Mattie Murrey 15:50

Mhm. So, final question, what words of advice do you have from your perspective being the mother of Vanessa? What words of advice do you have for parents who have a child that goes through a critical illness like this, who has a spouse?

Pam 16:06

Keep your thoughts to yourself. Let them decide. It's their life, their children, and just do what you would do with your own child, how you'd raise your own child, and I think that's what they wanted. Vanessa knew how she was raised, and she supported us and respected everything we did. They never questioned what we would do.

Vanessa Abraham 16:45

I had such immense comfort knowing she was here. I never worried. I knew she was adored and loved beyond belief, and she was going to be surrounded by the best people I could ever imagine caring for my child. It gave me such relief that that was the one area of my life that I could just not worry about.

Mattie Murrey 17:13

Mhm.

Vanessa Abraham 17:14



Everything else around me was falling apart. I didn't know what tomorrow would look like. But I did know that my child was safe, and that she was loved. And that's the only thing that let me sleep at night knowing that they were tucking her in at night, and reading her stories, and making her dinner and getting her to school because I couldn't do any of that, and it gave me such comfort.

Mattie Murrey 17:48

What words of advice then do you have for care support – family members, friends? Anybody who comes into the circle to help in this setting?

Vanessa Abraham 18:01

Oh, have patience with them? It's a ugly, ugly place that they're in right now. Have patience with them. Try to understand. My parents were wonderful. Anything we asked of them, they were there. Anything with my child, they were there. I'd say for any caregiver, patience is going to be a big one because there are very dark days. They're very hard days. It depends on the severity of the patient, but things can be hard. You may be bathing them. You may have to drive them places for months or years.

It's a big role to take on as caregiver. Make sure you're giving yourself breaks, because that caregiver gets beat up a lot. Not physically, but emotionally and mentally. I know Dale had some hard times with me. So, just being patient with them is going to be huge, and I think the way you just stay patient is make sure you as a caregiver, you're getting your enough breaks for yourself, that you're able to step away.

Mattie Murrey 19:16

Mhm. Words of wisdom.

Pam 19:20

And I had somebody else, that I wasn't always having to be with the child. If I had to do something, with her, she was taken care of by my husband. So, that worked. It would be more difficult if it was just myself.

Mattie Murrey 19:40

Mhm.

Vanessa Abraham 19:42

It certainly takes a village, and not just one person in a village. That village it's got to be pretty strong, and pretty deep, because everybody needs breaks and it takes a lot of people to care for one person.

Mattie Murrey 19:57

Mhm. Not everybody – go ahead, Pam.

Pam 20:00



She did too. She did a lot when she was in rehab, as in play time for her child. And it wasn't just for my benefit, it was for her daughter's benefit too, with somebody else. She was able to organize that that was huge. So, she was in bed organizing play time with somebody.

Vanessa Abraham 20:31

Yeah. I was trying to make sure my parents had breaks.

Mattie Murrey 20:36

Oh, wow! You were thinking of them while you were healing?

Vanessa Abraham 20:39

Oh, gosh, yes. I didn't want them to get burned out because it's hard. Raising kids is hard, and they're not in their 20s and 30s, and wanted to make sure that they were getting breaks along with my husband. So, I would make sure other people could come, fill in for two or three hours here or there. So, my parents could, I don't know, do whatever they wanted to do.

Mattie Murrey 21:00

Yeah. So, this is the episode of unconditional love, unending support, and it goes both ways.

Pam 21:05

Mhm. Yeah.

Mattie Murrey 21:07

Well, thank you for your time. What a wonderful way to spend some time on Mother's Day, talking about the wonderfulness of mothers and how we support one another.

Pam/Vanessa Abraham 21:16

Thank you. Thank you.

Mattie Murrey 21:20

So, hey, SLPs, that concludes this episode of the Missing Link for SLPs podcast. Please visit my website at freshslp.com. Follow me on [Instagram](#), or jump on [Facebook](#) to connect in our safe and friendly Fresh SLP community where we are empowering new and transitioning SLPs. If you found value in this episode, or in any way had an aha moment, or I gave you a fresh perspective, please show me some SLP love, and support me on [iTunes or the Apple podcast](#) app or subscribe to me on [YouTube](#). You got this!