

Homeschool Super Heroes

Speakers:

Ashley

JoJo

[audio start]

Ashley: Welcome to our Homeschool Super Heroes interview today. I'm so glad that you joined us. I'm really excited. I have JoJo Tabares here with me today. But before we get started, I want to make sure that everyone has the correct link. If you visit HomeschoolSuperHeroes.com you can listen to all of our different interviews, download resources and be able to see the schedule for the upcoming dates. So let's go ahead and get started.

JoJo holds a degree in Speech Communication. But it is her humorous approach to communication skills which has made her a highly sought-after Christian speaker and writer. Her articles appear in homeschool publications such as Homeschool Enrichment Magazine and the Old Schoolhouse Magazine, which she also endorses her Say What You Mean curricula. You can also find JoJo on websites such as Crosswalk.com and Dr.Laura.com. For more information on communication, FUNdamentals and Christian-based communication skills for the whole family you can visit her website, ArtofEloquence.com.

Thank you so much, JoJo for joining us today. I really appreciate it.

JoJo: Thank you. I'm so happy to be here.

Ashley: Great. Well, let's just get started. If you wouldn't mind telling our listeners a little bit about your family and how you guys homeschool.

JoJo: Well, we have two children, my husband and I. My daughter is currently on her way, she's in the air as we're recording this interview, on her way to her fourth year at Vanderbilt University. And my son is about to enter the 7th grade. And let's see, what else do you want to -- oh, how we got started?

Ashley: Sure, that'd be great.

JoJo: Basically we had moved into a new home about 12 years ago and the previous owners had homeschooled, which sort of intrigued my husband. My daughter was in a private Christian school at the time about to enter fifth grade and was doing figure skating on the side, which we were trying to fit into her schooling schedule. So we would go take her like 4 a.m., that kind of thing, to get her there before school. And my son was almost a year old and he said to me "Gee, this

homeschooling thing sounds like a really good idea. Why don't you look into that?"

So I spent about a month calling people and talking to different kinds of homeschoolers and finding out what it was all about it. And I came to him all excited and I said "We need to do this thing because this is great." And he said "Whoa! I only asked you to check it out."

So we kind of talked and I said "Well, let's try it out for a year and see how you think." And so we did that and we tried it out for another year and we just never looked back.

Ashley: Can you tell me if there is such a thing, but what a typical homeschool day would look like for your family?

JoJo: It really, yeah, most homeschoolers I think have a hard time with a typical day because we do so many different kinds of things, but I think a typical day for us mostly is we start very early in the morning at the moment because my son is an early riser. I have insomnia, so we get together real early in the morning. And we go through a few subjects. I get him started on some things and then I run up and I do some work, email, return people's calls, things like that and then run down and finish. And we kind of do that until the school runs out for the day. That includes doing things like extra-curricular activities and different other programs that we might have going on depending upon the day. But that's just basically it's, you know, me getting him started and then running back and forth to correct or whatever because I just have him left.

Ashley: Okay, great. Let's see here. I know that you help homeschoolers communicate better. So what are some different suggestions that you could give to moms to help them do with their children at different age levels, or when should we start the whole process of speech and that kind of thing?

JoJo: Well, I think first we need to understand that communication skills are probably one of the most important things that we need to train our children in because it affects every aspect of our life. People usually think when they hear speech communication or communication skills they usually think of making speeches, formal speeches, or debate, formal debate, sometimes manners, but there is so, so, so much more to communication skills.

If you look in the Bible there are actually thousands of references that God makes to our communication and it's not usually making a speech, it's usually talking about being gracious when we speak, being careful with our tongues and our mouths and our words, things like that. And so it affects all of our relationships, like as we parent, our friendships, our family relationships. It affects our college. It affects actually learning because learning has a lot to do with communication skills and as we speak and process information we learn better.

It also has to do with our working environment. If we're an employee in order to get ahead in leadership it plays a huge role. In order to be a leader in ministry, and then of course to share our faith, it's all about communication skills.

There is actually basically there's 7,000 references in the Bible to our communication and how we communicate with one another. I have found over 4,500 that deal with your mouth, your lips, your tongue, and your words alone. Just those things, 4,500.

So, really I think first what we need to do understand is that we need to teach these skills to our children and we need to start young because it is a skill that takes a while to learn. And if we start, and I advocate starting at preschool because then you don't run into what I had growing up I was incredibly painfully shy and I didn't want to talk to anyone because I really wasn't sure how to go about doing it effectively. And so I grew up so shy that I wouldn't really talk to anybody. You know if somebody met me somewhere I came upon them face-to-face they would say hi to me, I would look behind me hoping somebody was there so I wouldn't need to respond. I mean that's how why I was.

And so I think what I've done with my two kids is I started them at preschool understanding the, as they can, because at every different age level there's different things for them to learn. And then each kind of communication skill takes a little bit different, it's a little bit of a different skill when you're discussing your faith or politics or for when you're trying to make friends. I mean it's not the same thing.

So I think along the way we need to learn different parts of that, but we need to start at preschool. And I did that with both of my kids because when they came to the time later elementary school is usually where it starts where kids start to become aware of how other people see them and that can create shyness or the effect of shyness, meaning you don't want to really talk with anybody, you're afraid of how you're going to talk, those things can be completely avoided and they were in my children because I started at preschool. And then as they grew they learned more and more about how to communicate in various situations and the different skills that they needed.

So that at this point my daughter is now 21 and in college and she has had a lot of success in sharing her faith and talking about politics, the two most touchy subjects that we have today in polite social society. Those things have become almost second nature to her because of the training that she had as a young child. It started there.

Ashley: Right. That's really neat. I like that idea. Just that really being able to start young and then it seems to just flourish as you grow because you've began to see situations and stuff. Let me ask you the different, since you have both a son and a

daughter, was it different in those early stages the way that you taught them communication? Or did you keep it the same?

JoJo: Well, with both of them I had developed like mostly with my daughter, I had developed the Say What You Mean curricula that I now use and we sell at ArtofEloquence.com. But I started kind of, my daughter was my guinea pig, let's get it out there, and so I started with her and seen what works and what doesn't work. And so basically I've used the same curricula.

One thing that you do need to understand as most homeschoolers do, every child is different. There is a slight difference between boys and girls. Some skills that girls have early such as being very chatty, boys don't have as early. So while my son is very, very bright I was using the Say What You Mean for Preschoolers with him until he was much older because he was not yet ready for the elementary version let alone the junior high/high school version.

So with my daughter she was a little bit more vocal and conversational than my boy. Mostly that's true for boys and girls, not always, so you do need to kind of, you know, your mileage may vary, but there is a difference.

There's also a difference in some of the skills or the issues, learning issues that each child may have. My son has some focusing issues, which causes some differences in learning. He's very hands-on, which actually works very good for the Art of Eloquence curricula because there's a lot of standing up and doing things and activities rather than just rote memorization or learning a concept.

Ashley: Perfect. Well, I know you were talking a little bit about like activities and doing things. Would you mind giving us just some suggestions, especially towards our moms on other things that they can do to either themselves to be able to teach communication better? Are there certain tips and tricks that they can use throughout their children's lives to be able to teach this idea of communication to them better?

JoJo: I think a lot of people really have a hard time with this topic as they do with things like writing. They may know what's good writing, but they have a hard time teaching it because they haven't been taught themselves, so they don't really know how to teach it. And that's why I wrote the curriculum.

But there are some things that you can do that every mom and dad can do for their children. There's several articles on the website that will help you do this. We have a lot of free information on Artofeloquence.com and if you look at JoJo's Articles there's a bunch of things right there.

There is a couple of articles on how to teach communication skills and it gives a couple of different activities that you can do with your children, such as one of the things that I love to start with are things like description. And little kids tend to

describe things in a way that's not very clear to adults because they don't start with the big things and then go to the little things. They're in there describing the movie. They're kind of hyper focused on one of the characters and something he did, but you don't know what the movie is about or what the theme is about because he's on the little things before you get a concept of what he is talking about.

So one of the things that I do is I have some pictures that I suggest that you show children and then have them describe and then kind of coach them to start with the bigger things. You know, like when you're looking at, there's one picture of a very harried mom and she's obviously, not a work-from-home mom, but a mom. She has a briefcase, so obviously she's a working gal. And so she has a briefcase and a bunch of groceries and so the idea is to have the child describe what's in the picture and then also describe what you think happened just before this picture took place and what do you think is going to happen after the picture.

And so the things that they should start with is that this is a mom, and you know that because there's a little child kind of tugging at her, who's been working, but you know that because she has a briefcase. She just went to the store shopping. You know that because she has a grocery bag. And the big things are the things they need to start with and then they can notice the little details.

So as you encourage your child to do that more and more they will learn how to describe something so that it makes sense to other people. And then you can move on to things like directions.

And in our elementary and junior high study on basic communication there are some fun activities for that. And one of them is where the child needs to give you directions to some place fun. Let's say they want to go have ice cream. And these are obviously not for preschoolers, although my preschool daughter could tell me how to get everywhere. Not everybody can.

But if they're older and they know how to get, well, you can even start with going to the kitchen. Let's say you're upstairs in the bedroom. So you ask her how do you get to the kitchen and then you follow her directions exactly. But if she doesn't say something critical like go downstairs you won't get there. And so what you need to do is follow her directions exactly and then see where you end up and if you ended up in the kitchen you can celebrate by having some ice cream. But if you didn't end up in the kitchen or at the ice cream shop then you need to discuss what went wrong and why that was and then how you could have given those directions more clearly.

So there are things like that throughout the studies. There are things like that in the articles that are free on our website where you can go through those things with your children. A matter of fact we have free samples of pretty much all of

the curriculum so that you can sit there and do that, the lessons, with your children. So there's a whole lot of stuff.

There's also a fun little character on there called Foot in Mouth Man and he has monthly adventures, or as we like to say misadventures. So you can do those with your kids too and that way you can point out how FIMM is wrong for those kids that are really shy like I was or they're kind of a little, they get upset when you point out issues, things that they're not doing well. You can point them out in FIMM and then they will translate that to their own life. So when FIMM misunderstands something it's FIMM that's wrong, not them. And so Foot in Mouth Man is a great way to do that with your kids. And I know a lot of homeschoolers will do that as like a mini-communication lesson each month for their children.

Ashley: That's really neat. I like that idea because sometimes it does help us so they don't feel like they're always in the wrong or something like that. To be able to sort of put it off on someone else, but still get the point across that there's something that needs to be worked on or that kind of thing.

Turning the page a little bit, sort of moving from preschool up into junior high and high school years, can you tell us the benefits of speech and debate and how we should use those in our homeschooling?

JoJo: Well, speech and debate is a great course. Those are great courses to teach your children, sometimes even the lower grade levels. But mostly for junior and senior high because it gives them a background in how to present their ideas. And the fun thing about it is we are probably the only speech and debate course that uses fun examples, not your typical examples, topics that people have to research and that a lot of times the teens aren't really that interested in, a lot of the big heavy topics.

But we have fun things like one of the things that's in our speech course is to describe the uses of duct tape. These are things that everyone is familiar with. Everybody knows what duct tape is and everyone, you know, without having to research the topic if using creatively your mind and focusing on the ability to communicate the uses of duct tape rather than on the research you'd need to do on a particular topic that you don't know anything about.

Now we do have those later on in our second semester debate course that we have set up for you in Say What You Mean Beginning Debate, but in the Beginning Debate the first semester, it's all fun topics. And so there is a lot less research that needs to be done and preparation that needs to be done, and a whole lot more learning. And that's very essential because communication is a skill. It is not like math or science where you memorize facts and figures or dates for like history and things like that.

Communication is a skill that takes time to develop. So if you're constantly, if you only have a semester or a year in a speech course or a debate course, you don't want to spend most of that year researching the topic. You want to spend most of that year practicing these speech or debate skills that you'll need.

And the reason that those are so important is because while you may live your entire life without ever having to make a formal speech or get involved in a formal debate, those skills will serve you very well when you are trying to present your case because in everyday life we have what I like to call mini speeches. And mini debates. They're informal speeches or informal debates because you will discuss politics or religion with someone who is not of the same mindset as you. In a way that's either a speech or a debate. It's not a formal debate or speech with rules of time and what you need to say and point-counter-point, but they are definitely using the same skills. How you present yourself during that time is very, very important.

Same thing if you were going to go out into the workforce. You are going to have to do presentations if you are going to get ahead in the company. Usually as a lower level employee you don't do those things, but if you want a managerial role, if you want to get promoted in management, you will need to do presentations and things like that and those same skills are there.

And also when you're a parent you make little mini speeches to your children, which, you know, little informal mini speeches about how they should or shouldn't do x or y or z and those skills comes in handy for those types of things. So it really does translate into the rest of your life, but while you may never really need to do the formal speech or debate it's in there in our life, all throughout our life. So it's a great thing and it's a great time to do that toward the end of junior high or high school. That's a great time to begin speech and debate.

Ashley: Perfect. How do you suggest that homeschoolers participate in this? Is it something that you feel like they can do just as a family, or is it better to try to get a coop together, or how do you sort of manage all of that?

JoJo: It really does depend on your particular situation. A lot of homeschoolers may have a larger family and you can do that right within your family. The really great thing that we have at Art of Eloquence is if you purchase an e-book, and all of our products are digital or audio, you can purchase one for your entire family. If you have 10 children you only need to purchase one. So you can do a speech or debate course with all of your kids and just purchase one. And that's a great way to do it if you have a lot of family members, you have a lot of children, or even two or three would be fine.

If you are like I am and I have actually two only children. They're nine and a half years apart, so they really weren't in each other's curriculum at all. They were way too far apart in age for that. Or if you have one or two children and you

really don't feel like they would get as much out of it that way you can start a coop class and the curriculum actually translates very well to either an individual instruction or a coop type class.

And there is nothing you need to do other than read through the assignment and the activities would be done by more than one. If you have one in your, you know, if you're teaching your son you have one, but if you're teaching a coop class you just have a few from the class or if the class is small enough you'd have all of them do the activities instead of just the one student that would be your own.

So it really depends, but each way is very easy to do with the curriculum. And that's one of the reasons I did that because I'm a homeschool mom and one of the things I really have a problem with is paying for curriculum and then having to figure out how to use it. Here, read through the instructions. What was that again?

So the way that, and I know that a lot of people have never taken speech of communication skills, so they don't know. They don't have a background. And so this is just pick it up and use it. Pick it up and read it with your kids, or pick it up and read it to the class. So it's very easy.

And then we also have volume discounts for coop classes to make it easier on their budget. But it's just something you can do either way whichever works for you. You can get a class together that's small, or you can get a class together that's 25 students or more. And you teach it the same way, so it's just about as easy.

Ashley: That's really nice. It's nice that you can just go pick it up and start using it and not have to really do much research or preparation. I mean you should prepare, but you know, preparation beforehand and that kind of thing.

Switching topics a little, back just to homeschooling, one of the questions I'm asking all of our guests is if you could start all over again what would you do differently?

JoJo: The thing that I learned the most about homeschooling my daughter is that we started preparing for college way too late. We did not know all of the things that were different about a homeschooler applying to college. And we also did not realize that some of the things that you, there were things we thought we couldn't do because she'd never taken the AP courses, for example. We didn't realize that she could take the AP test. You can. There's nothing that says that you have to go through an AP course in order to take the AP test. It's just like any other homeschool course you have. You'd study for it and then you'd take the test. And that's what we did.

We started preparing for college in about the latter part of 10th grade and mostly in 11th grade, which is what they normally tell you to do. But I think for a homeschooler that is really way too late because there's a lot of information we as parents need to put together because we're also their teachers that I really had a hard time putting that all together last minute.

The other thing that we didn't realize about that is that there's a whole lot of communication skills that plays into college prep. We learned just before my daughter graduated that they changed the SAT test to include essays, which they didn't when I went. A lot of homeschoolers now -- when you went to college that was very different.

And the application process is different for a homeschooler than it is for a public schooler or a, you know, any other traditional school because there is now a homeschool application where you can list, because we have a lot of colleges love homeschoolers, but they like to know what it is that you did. And so they have a completely different process for you and you need to know what that's like.

And we did a lot of -- well, I didn't, actually it was my daughter and my husband, did a lot of research on that and she actually wrote a book, which we have up on the website, *The Homeschooler's Guide to Preparing for College*, because we spent so much money on just the college prep books alone because we thought oh, this one sounded good. And it's a brand name, it's a big name prep book, and we thought that would be great and she found that it wasn't.

So we wasted a lot of money purchasing these supplies and doing courses and things like that that were worth nothing. And we wanted to warn homeschoolers out there what they didn't need to spend their money on. We once took a picture, I think I lost it in my old computer, but we once took a picture of my daughter and behind her was a pile of books that we purchased for college SAT, SAT, PSAT, the ACT, all of those different tests. And we had books and they were piled up behind her and we probably wouldn't need to have spent nearly that much money if we had known what we know now.

So she talks a lot about what's worth it and what's not. And if I had only known that we would have started a lot earlier. As a matter of fact it helped us with my son because my son is now starting 7th grade and we've actually started college prep with him last year trying to plan out his studies, what courses he was going to take to put him on track for where we think maybe he'd like to go.

The other thing is making sure that your activities, because they do look at that, not just your grades and your SAT scores, but what activities that you've consistently done.

Well, my daughter had done karate for several years. She became a black belt and then was teaching for several years.

Ashley: Oh, wow.

JoJo: But that was really the only thing that she had that was consistent. Unfortunately, it wasn't anywhere in her area of interest for college. So we had to kind of bring in other things she did that was more short-term, but she was a very good writer. So she was able to make her essays for the application process sound good. She had other activities, it's just they like to see kind of a consistency in the area that you're interested in and had we known that we would have planned long before her 10th or 11th grade year. And we're starting to do that with my son.

So at this point, he's had a few years of chess. He's had a few years of other activities and as we get closer to the high school years we're going to map out exactly what he'll want to do based on where he tells us at that point he wants to go in life.

And I think planning ahead really would have given us with my daughter a lot easier time because as it was she was, poor thing, I felt so bad for her. She was, I mean basically writing 24/7 her last year of high school in order to get into college because she didn't have, because we didn't know. I mean now not to say she got into a bad school. She goes to one of the most elite schools in the country, but it was a lot of work because we just, you know, had we only known that could have taken the AP courses, she would have taken more than, I think she took four. She could have taken a lot more AP tests and that would have looked better on her transcript. We just didn't have time. We ran out of time.

Ashley: That makes sense. That's some really good information. I really like the idea of planning it out just because there are so many things that we as homeschoolers do that don't necessarily get the credit or the recognition that we should give them when we are preparing for future, whether it's college or --

JoJo: And then we have to mention that because we don't keep it in the forefront of our mind or we don't keep records maybe, so the other thing I'd say is start to keep those records like junior high so that you'll remember what you, because boy, having to search my brain, and I'm getting older, I had to search my brain. What else did we do? I know we did more things. And it took us a lot of time. We had like family meetings about this asking my young son at the time "What do you remember Sissy doing?" We got to remember this stuff.

Ashley: Yeah, we were laughing because my brother, my younger brother's portfolio I guess of all his activities was about two to three times the size of mine and it was just because we had learned after me just to be able to keep those records and keep it all organized and all that kind of stuff.

JoJo: Exactly.

Ashley: Do you have any other comments or questions or suggestions for any of our listeners at this time?

JoJo: I think the thing that I would like to impress the most on homeschoolers is how incredibly important it is to have your kids learn to be effective communicators. I have a degree from a secular college and I knew that communication was important. And every time I ask people, I do seminars and workshops and things, and I ask people, you know, raise your hand if you think communication is important and everybody will raise their hand. But when I ask are you teaching your kids, very few people raise their hand because most people still equate it with speech and debate, lawyers and politicians.

And the research is out on homeschoolers. The research is out and employers are looking for things that you would not believe. In certain, I mean in almost every job that they advertise for they are looking for applicants with communication skills. Things you'd never think require communication skills. They are looking for that because it's something they can't teach.

By the time you're an adult if you are just learning it it's going to take, there's a learning curve, so if you've graduated college or you've graduated high school and you're looking for a job without those skills it's going to take you longer. And now employers know this.

In fact, there was a book written and it has a lot of research in there and it's about thriving in the 21st century, so it talks about the economic aspect of it, what you're going to do for a living. And they actually mentioned us which is how I got a copy of this book. They mentioned Art of Eloquence as a resource. But the book is fascinating because it talks about a lot of research that's been done.

And I know that's true because I find the research myself that employers are looking for people with those skills because when they hire you as an entry level employee they are looking longer term. They're not looking for you just to exist in that one position. They're looking to see, there's a plethora of potential employees out there today and especially in this economy.

They are looking for someone they can promote, who is going to stick with them. And if you're going to be promoted to a managerial position you're going to need those communication skills. They can't teach that. They can teach you about their company, but they cannot teach that. That's what needs to be done and when you're young.

It's important for every aspect of your life, not just the economic aspect, not just what you're going to do for a living because you may have, you know, you may be mom, you may not like the working world. Moms need communication skills like nobody's business. Moms, they communicate with and, you know, you communicate not just with your children as a mom, but you communicate with

your children's doctor, with their extra-curricular activity teacher, with other moms, with the neighborhood, and you're an example. And so everywhere in our life, communication skills is probably one of the most important things that we as homeschoolers can teach our children to prepare them for the future.

Ashley: I really like that point. I mean no matter where you go in life that you're going to use communication and it doesn't matter if it's the small things or the big things you need to be able to communicate well and sort of back to what you were saying at the beginning, but to communicate well for our children, but also to be able to communicate well for our faith and be able to really proclaim that at the same time.

JoJo: Absolutely. Absolutely. And that's why I have studied in various aspects of life. Leadership, defending your faith, talking about politics, social communications, I mean it's everything. And as homeschoolers we're always at the top level. We are teaching the things that they are not teaching out there and I'm really hoping this takes hold because this is something employers are looking for actively and this is something that God warns us about many times.

Ashley: Very true. Well, thank you so much for your time today. I'd like to ask you if our listeners want to go hear more about your resources or look at your curriculum is there a website or contact information that you'd be able to give them for that?

JoJo: Sure. We have a ton of different things. We're kind of doing a lot of different things online. I have seminars and stuff, but everything you can find at Artofeloquence.com. www.artofeloquence.com. And you can find it there. I will say we are right now in the process of redoing the entire website so if you look at it today and you look at it tomorrow it may be different. But we have a newsletter for you with free information. A blog. There's everything is right on there. You can find it there.

Ashley: Perfect. Well, thank you so much for your time today, JoJo. I really appreciate it.

JoJo: Thank you.

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