

## Severe Allergies in Children Part 1

[INTRODUCTION]

**[0:00:06.7] ANNOUNCER:** Next is Dr. Charlene Wrighton to discuss everything early education about your children or students in our new show, Ed. Talks with Dr. Char.

[EPISODE]

**[0:00:21.4] CW:** Hi, this is Dr. Char Wrighton and we're going to have an awesome guest today, someone I've known for 14 years and she's going to be discussing the topic of allergies and children and we're talking serious allergies to moderate and mild.

There's so much information here that I know that we're going to take a full two weeks on this one as we have it planned, then were going to talk about the history of her daughter and her, the whole path that they've taken since they discovered that her daughter, Sabrina, had food allergies and we're going to go through what it was like dealing with them and going through school with them and all the different challenges and then the part two will be focused on her as an older child taking more governance of her own life, how hard it is for mom and at times, for all parents, letting go of children but the good news is that children need to be independent.

Also, Doreen is going to – I'm going to let her introduce herself but she is going to tell you — give you so much information that you'll be able to look online. She's got an amazing book that I can't wait to tell you about and she'll tell you about. Where I'm just going to turn that over to her right now and I'm going to be asking her questions and she has so much today like I said, this could probably be four weeks of radio shows.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy it, as always, you can email us with information, I'll give you that information at the end. Doreen, please tell us your story.

**[0:01:56.3] DG:** Good morning Char, thank you for having me. Well, my daughter was diagnosed with 15 life threatening food allergies at 16 months of age. So at that point, it was pretty overwhelming, I didn't want to take her out of my sight, it was very hard to manage going anywhere.

**[0:02:15.5] CW:** Now, at this time, did you know anything about food allergies?

**[0:02:18.7] DG:** I knew nothing about food allergies.

**[0:02:20.0] CW:** Okay, you were absolutely caught off-guard?

**[0:02:21.9] DG:** Totally. I hadn't even heard about any of my friends or family members ever having anything like that so it was a big learning experience for us and then we decided I was going to quit my job, I was going to stay home and help raise her, we were going to put her in this bubble and try and keep her safe and alive and then my spouse was diagnosed with cancer and we had to go to the hospital for chemotherapy and radiation and I didn't know what to do.

That's when I met you and said, please, take my baby and here, take care of her and make sure that she's going to be okay while we run to the hospital.

**[0:03:02.0] CW:** At this point, that's Safari Learning and we were a brand new school and that's when we met you and met your beautiful daughter and we were brand new at this whole preschool thing. I'm an educator who works with older children in the classrooms so obviously, allergies are always you know, in the news and more so now than ever. But this was brand new to us and so we went into action to figure out how in the world can we protect this child, safeguard her and make sure that absolutely no mistakes happen.

That has been our guiding force today in Safari Learning. We have so many different things in place so that we do not make a mistake even with children with mild allergies. If a child breaks out in a rash because they're eating a strawberry and we allow it, then that's our fault and that's not okay.

We do a lot of measures, we take a lot of measures to make sure that our children are protected. Let's talk about some of those measures that we did put in place at that point and that also meant, instructing all the teachers because the directors are not always in the room while the child is eating even though with Sabrina there, we absolutely just treated with kid gloves and make sure and we also had another child at that time that would go into anaphylactic shock over any kind of a nut — tree nut.

At that time, in a close proximity, we had to be so careful so we did watch vigorously. On the other hand, my point was, we had to train our teachers to be just as vigorous and our kitchen staff to be just as vigorous. Let's talk about some of the steps that we took to protect her.

**[0:04:41.1] DG:** Well, with Sabrina. We had talked about making sure that all the staff was epi pen trained, that they knew how to use the epi pen, that they had Benadryl on campus that we also had steroids on campus that if she did have a reaction that they could give her, her medication that the doctor had ordered.

One of the little twists with Sabrina at the time, she had a contact allergy to egg. I had asked that if your staff had breakfast that contain anything with egg, not to wipe their hands on their clothing, to make sure that they wash before they pick her up, was just a lot to make sure that you know, everybody's paying attention, watching her and then at the time, she's a toddler.

She sees other people, all of these kids at this table are eating this yummy little muffin but I can't have that. She's not going to understand why I can't have what everyone else is having so we keep her separate. We make sure that she doesn't see all the yummys that everyone else is having because as kids get older, you can teach them that okay, you can't have this because of X, Y, Z.

But when there's a toddler involved, it was really difficult because they don't understand what you mean by everyone gets this and I don't get to have this.

**[0:05:49.0] CW:** That made, was a challenge for the teachers, for one thing, just to make sure that they didn't miss anything. But also, to make sure that Sabrina did not feel left out, set apart, different from anybody else, we were still very cognizant of the fact that she's a whole child regardless of whether she has allergies or not. And then the whole contact thing. I think that's something that we need to go into a little more detail with because our audience that we speak to besides listeners who are interested are preschool teachers or kindergarten teachers as well.

Early education, parents and grandparents who have to deal with this. Just to educate teachers, I think, I mean our listeners is that we think that if you ingest something, it's an allergy or if you brush up against something like poison oak or poison ivy or you know, whatever the allergy might be. That you break out in a rash, you understand it. It's hard to understand that a child

could literally get a really serious reacting just by brushing up against somebody's apron or clothing. Could you go into little more detail on contact?

**[0:06:54.0] DG:** Well, first of all, there's several different layers of allergy, you can have like just a minor allergy to something, you can have a food sensitivity like some people have a food sensitivity to dairy where they get stomach ache if they have dairy. Other people can have life threatening allergies to her and then there's different levels of that life-threatening allergy.

It depends on when they take their blood test with the doctor, there's a blood test called Raz where they can test many things at a time. Based on how high the allergy is, it comes at a different level. Well, her allergy to egg was of the charts, it wasn't even listed on a number. Said it was too high for them to count.

They said that and makes it now a contact allergy and if she comes in contact with that allergy, not only could she have hives and a rash, she could have anaphylaxis.

**[0:07:40.7] CW:** Would that be in the air, will it be transmitted in the air or just contact?

**[0:07:44.6] DG:** It's possible it could be air, I was a little bit more consumed with contact than I was air.

**[0:07:50.1] CW:** Because I was picturing our common room at the time, of the old Safari Learning Academy and we had 35, 40 children in there at a time and we always had a special table for our allergy children. It made it easier, they could talk together, we always had a little sign up especially for parties because parents often help and we want to make sure that children were never served anything at that table that they'd be allergic to.

We bent over backwards to resolve that and because we had a child with not necessarily at the exact time as Sabrina but very soon following. Who had any kind of air with peanuts? I mean, thinking about the playground, there's so many things that you don't think about because again, I think our framework of what we think about allergies is well, I'm either going to ingest it and it's going to react or I'm going to brush against it to a known allergen and I'm going to react.

But you just don't, there's so many layers of this that we had to think of as a staff and so I remember, I mean, we still do is making sure that our children are separate but not feeling separate. That's always a concern to me. Also, making sure that there was a balance between protecting that child and also giving other children rights as well.

That's something you and I will talk about because it is a factor but to me, we protect children at all cost. I'm really thinking about how – you know, do we say and I know this is done in schools especially public schools. If there's one child that has peanut allergy, there's no peanuts in the room at any time.

We did not take that route, on the other hand, we were extremely protective when Sabrina was with us or other child. For example, just knowing that any kind of contact that take peanut butter which is the worst because it just sticks to everything. We always had our children wash their hands first and then after, before they ate, after they ate. Because we had to make sure that they weren't going down the playground and now, putting their peanut butter hands on balls or climbing equipment. So much to think about.

**[0:10:02.8] DG:** One of the schools that Sabrina used to go to, the yard duties there had put chalk all over their hands and touch the ball and threw the ball back and forth so that the chalk would get on the different people who caught the ball to try and explain what contact allergy means. So that kids of a young age could understand, now, that is on all of these different things.

**[0:10:22.8] CW:** Yeah, that's so good. We did the same thing at safari learning with red food coloring so that children can learn how germs traveled. Because germs are – you know, just get from one point to the other very quickly and all of a sudden, we had red everywhere. It's definitely an eye opener. That was such a sensitive thing for that person to do.

**[0:10:40.9] DG:** Right. And then, as far as the contact allergies go, we had a kind of an interesting thing happen at home where we had eliminated all of the foods from what she was consuming. We were really careful, we weren't bringing anything into the house, she was allergic to. But still of course, she's a toddler at that time. Her hands and her knees and her legs. She's still covered in eczema and hives. We couldn't figure out what the problem was and then the dogs of course have egg in their food and so we had to change the diet of our animals.

**[0:11:10.6] CW:** Such a good point.

**[0:11:11.7] DG:** In order to make sure that she wasn't being contaminated on our house which should be her safety zone.

**[0:11:17.1] CW:** Right. Boy, that had to be such a challenge. Did you get a lot of support from your pediatrician? Do you feel like that person was as well informed as he or she should be?

**[0:11:29.3] DG:** In the beginning, no. In the beginning I got the looks from people like are you a first time mom, kids get rashes, calm down. I kind of knew something was going on with her lungs that maybe she was asthmatic so I ended up taking her to the Bay Area Asthma Institute and that medical group, they have like six different locations and we saw a doctor there who originally gave her the allergy testing and then he did the prick test on her back and it was so bad they couldn't read anything.

**[0:11:56.1] CW:** That's amazing.

**[0:11:57.4] DG:** That's why they did then that blood test and then we started getting to the bottom of what the problem was and then I started getting support because they knew my gosh, this kid has 15 life-threatening food allergies, how are we going to feed her, what are we going to do, how are we going to keep her safe? It opened a lot of doors, a lot of questions because I was pretty confused myself.

**[0:12:16.0] CW:** Right. You know, thank God we had Internet at the time so that you could do the research, obviously. And then definitely try to find, I mean now, it's just everywhere and people are – it just seems like things are getting worse and worse and I know that researchers certainly wondering why because there are more children now that have allergies and never before and there's many three's out there.

Number one, why and number two, what to do about it? We might talk about that later. Some of the things that because you and Katie and I sat down and talked about this for a very long time, what we could do. So that we could train our teachers. But one of the things we did was to make

sure she had her own food and it was in a box and it was clearly marked and also that her epi pen was in there.

Safari Learning has always had all their teachers are trained, infant and toddlers, CPR, first aid, epi pen and the AED so that I mean, we basically covered everything and usually in any kind of a preschool setting on the directors and maybe one or two other teachers do this. We make sure that every teacher, because you cannot lose a second on this. If there's a toddler in the other room and we're somewhere else on the campus. We don't want to wait that extra second so we just made sure everybody was prepared.

So you brought in her food, it was in a box with her name on it, it had her Benadryl, it had her steroids, it had her epi pen and it had food. You really taught us how to read labels, you were really the first person who came in and went through all the labels because there's so many hidden things that we would not even think would be some of the bad guys in this. Tell us a little bit about that and how to read labels?

**[0:14:11.7] DG:** Well, originally, now, there's a law passed that the eight most common allergies have to be listed under the ingredient label. It didn't used to be that way.

**[0:14:21.1] CW:** That's right, that's true, yeah.

**[0:14:21.7] DG:** Multiple words that meant egg, multiple words that meant casein and for dairy, multiple words that meant different things and now, the eight most common, they have to be listed under. Now, it's much easier than it used to be but mainly just reading the label, making sure t hat you see the allergy warning, making sure that you know, you've read everything. Sometimes it's even in a different place, there was a time that Sabrina was at camp and it was under the fold was the allergy warning.

That's hard because I've done that with you know how many carbs, how many sugars are in something and you have to work, first of all, it's tiny print. Number two, you have to work really hard if it's on that fold to even see it and by that time, if it's bent, it's distorted. So that's a challenge.

**[0:15:01.3] DG:** Yes, eating out, anything like that. We went to an airport, I think it was San Francisco Airport or Sacramento Airport and we ordered French fries and it had a little tiny note on the bulletin board up at the top that said allergy warning about peanut oil and –

**[0:15:16.9] CW:** You know that is such a good point because really — menus of those do not give us as much information as they should and the cooks, the chefs are not thinking about what they are putting into it. I was at a smoothie bar and so ordering smoothies and I watched as the lady was making it and she was making it with almond milk and I thought oh my gosh, my granddaughter is severely allergic to any nut trees but nowhere – I looked carefully, nowhere was it mentioned that the use of –

That almond milk was common to making the smoothies it didn't list it and I told her. I said, "You have to list this people are allergic, deathly allergic. So it is interesting how people really don't understand and you would think the health department would be influencing that.

**[0:16:04.8] DG:** You would hope.

**[0:16:05.4] CW:** You would hope but that also shows how much responsibility the parents have to take constantly and be nonstop diligent.

**[0:16:13.1] DG:** You just can't assume, there was a time I ordered Sabrina spaghetti at a restaurant and it was actually in Vegas and I ordered the spaghetti and I said can you make it with wheat noodles instead of egg enriched noodles because she has an allergy and she goes, "Oh sure not a problem," and then the waitress asked me, "Well what are her allergies?" and I went through and listed all the allergies and she's like, "Okay well, let me be right back."

And it is a good thing that that woman took the upper hand and said list all of them because I guess the cook after he would cook the pasta would put peanut oil or some kind of nut oil in the water to keep the noodles from clumping together and I wouldn't have assumed that would happen. So you really have to check every single time.

**[0:16:56.6] CW:** You do and also from the time it is scribbled quickly onto her order book or his order book and sent there is a lot of I can't read it or I am moving too fast or I have forgotten. I mean this happens, how many times do we get our order wrong in a restaurant because the

communication isn't – everyone is moving too fast and isn't that great. So then you have to take extra, extra care to ask, I can't even imagine I even wanting to trust it.

**[0:17:24.7] DG:** Yeah it is very, very scary to eat out, ever.

**[0:17:28.2] CW:** Yeah, I bet that's got to make it so hard for you. So let's move on from the she was very young. I remember that it was so hard for you. We were so willing, we loved you so much, we love Sabrina. We already knew that you were going through enough just with the cancer issue that you just had double and triple jeopardy on your shoulders. So Katie and we felt that we just wanted to take and lift some of these off your shoulders by being so diligent and careful. Continue on with her schooling, tell other experiences that you had.

**[0:18:03.7] DG:** Well I was kind of blindfolded because when I was at Zoophonics with you guys I felt very safe. I felt like you guys really understood me, understood Sabrina and then it wasn't sunshine and biscuits anymore. I went to real school, real life public school and had to enroll my daughter and give her to people that maybe were not listening a 100% didn't understand.

**[0:18:28.0] CW:** Or too many of them, too many hands on.

**[0:18:30.8] DG:** Yeah and if they have 32 kids in a classroom and they can't even get them to sit at a table or pay attention for five minutes, how are they going to really pay attention in making sure that my daughter lives through the day. It was very scary.

**[0:18:44.3] CW:** It is terrifying to even think that that is a possibility. I mean boy, very difficult.

**[0:18:49.6] DG:** It was very scary but we had a lot of hiccups but in time, I got to the point where I was very close with the principal and I was very close with the teachers. I started volunteering all of the time. I started subbing for some of the clerical positions at the school. I was blessed not to have to work at that time. So I was trying to spend as much time at the school as I could. So that helped — being friends with the teachers, knowing the teachers, networking with the teachers, helping the teachers, they knew who Sabrina was and what to do.

**[0:19:21.3] CW:** Because you were giving, they were willing to give back and it is sad that you have to do that but I can see it because I think that people are incredibly busy and I think people

have a tendency to look at their own micro chasm and say this is my life, this is my circle, my sphere of influence and I am too tired and too busy and too whatever to step out of it and try to go the extra mile for people. It is hard to ask people to do that and yet that is what was needed for that child and for your child and for other children around the school. So did you meet other parents? Because it wasn't just you, did you start having a support group?

**[0:19:58.6] DG:** I did meet a couple of parents but one of the parents who I became close with, she worked fulltime. She actually had a day care of her own and she couldn't be at the school and so she knew that I was going to be at the school or I was going to be on the field trips or I was going to be wherever. So she would just make sure that her daughter was in my care whenever we went on these outings because she knew me and trusted me and knew that the teacher had her hands full. So it ended up working nice for those kinds of situations.

**[0:20:25.4] CW:** At what age did Sabrina start taking some responsibility for herself because I really feel like that is important. Children need to never know — number one know their issues, their own issues. They need to feel that they have the right to speak up and they should not be shy. This is their life and since it is so tenuous for some children, like I said there is a rash or there is breaking out or there is hives for one thing but when it's life threatening, there is no grey on that one. So what age can children start speaking up for themselves?

**[0:20:57.8] DG:** Well I think it really just depends on the child. For Sabrina we had a few bumps because she had a speech delay so it made it a little bit harder for her to get to the point where she could speak out and then when she did get to the point where she could speak out, she sometimes takes a while to take her words out and people interpret that as being shy or introverted and she doesn't have that I am going to tell you.

Now she's gotten to the point where we've had many, many conversations. You don't have the luxury of being a shy child. That just doesn't get to be of you.

**[0:21:27.6] CW:** Right and how old is she now?

**[0:21:28.5] DG:** She is 13 now. So now she has to stand up for herself and read the label and ask questions.

**[0:21:35.9] CW:** That is also that age where they don't want to be different from anybody else and also it is so hard. I am thinking of little children all the way through, doesn't end to adulthood. It is hard to say no to something you really want and you might even want to take a chance even though you know it is not good for you, you might want to take a chance just to try it or just to have that taste or just to be part of the group who is eating a cupcake like everybody else is.

So it's got to be very difficult and there has to be that inner strength that you go to still yourself to say, "I can't do this."

**[0:22:08.5] DG:** Yeah it's not too safe –

**[0:22:09.9] CW:** Was that hard for her?

**[0:22:10.7] DG:** I think it was easier for her than it was for me. I think she ended up getting her own voice maybe fourth grade, fifth grade, she started being a little bit more confident saying I need to read that label. I need to call and ask my mom, I need to do this or I need to do that but in the background, I was still panicking you know wanting to make sure there was no cross contamination, was there this – did somebody wash their hands before they put their hand on the bag. You know all the thoughts that go through my head on a daily basis.

**[0:22:38.9] CW:** Again that is another thing that we didn't even talk about is the fact as I said, we make sure that our teachers and our kitchen crew and teachers always wear gloves and if they are not cross contaminating they got to then take them off, put a new pair on but again that is one of those things that you got to remember because life is so subconscious. We move through a life with that or automatic, we move through a life without doing a lot of thinking and you have to think.

If I am going to serve this group of children peanut butter cookies I cannot do that with this group at this table. I mean I got to take off my gloves and wash my hands and again you are talking about contact on the clothes did and you think they don't. There is so much to think about but then I don't want their listeners to think that we are putting up too many negatives too. We are just wanting people to be careful and to be informed and educated and that is what is really so important here.

Is Sabrina an expert? Is this something she might go into when she is an adult because she does so much about it?

**[0:23:39.1] DG:** I don't know if this would be a field that she would choose but definitely, she is knowledgeable about it more so than most. She is very aware. Yesterday she came home and told me there was a plastic that I put over her drinking cup. I put a plastic over her drinking cup when she goes to school to make sure that no one drinks out of her little container, her little Contigo container and she told me the plastic was off and the rubber bands were gone.

So she was afraid to drink water yesterday. So she is aware and she is keeping herself safe even today in situations where somebody might say, "Well no big deal the plastic came off my container," well for her she knows I am not going to drink that today.

**[0:24:17.8] CW:** And that one sounds a little suspicious anyway doesn't it? It seems like you're too many things going wrong with that one yeah. Yeah so all right. It is so good to know that she has to take responsibility for herself, let us talk about your book because we only have a few minutes left and this book is beautifully done. Now I am a very picky person. As an educator, writer and curriculum developer, I am really fussy over artwork and how layout is and I feel like it is really, really well done.

I feel like you have just done a lot of planning here and right on the – it says where could your allergy be hiding and it is just such a cute book because it is about Ryan who is a boy who has allergies and that the reader has to actually help Ryan find out what there might be hidden allergens that might threaten his life or cause him distress and it is by Doreen Golsby. So where can you find this book?

**[0:25:15.0] DG:** It is available on Amazon and also on Barnes & Noble. So amazon.com and barnes&noble.com.

**[0:25:20.9] CW:** I love the colors, you chose such bright colors and it's got a lot of reality in it or real pictures not just cartoons. So as a combination of cartoon and photographs, who did your artwork?

**[0:25:32.8] DG:** Chris Bow who is a relative of mine did the art work for the book. He did a great job.

**[0:25:36.6] CW:** That is wonderful because like I said, it is beautifully done and I am real fussy and it is very, very clear and the thing is that this is so perfect for a child to read, a parent to read with a child that every pre-school should have this. Every kindergarten should have this. It definitely would do well for kindergarten even first grade. It is great for children, I mean it is a real good educator for children because it is graphic but it is super clean and what I mean about clean is there is not a ton of distractions.

It is beautifully laid out formatted as a special ed. teacher there is something that I definitely look forward I said it is not complex. It is not over stimulating to the eye. So it is really going to be a really good educator for teacher and child, parent and grandparent. So I would highly recommend this.

**[0:26:24.1] DG:** Thank you.

**[0:26:25.5] CW:** So we are going to certainly explore a lot more of this in our next radio show. I think it is so interesting that you are talking about baby products such as Lanolin. Tell the things that she couldn't have on her body also and does she still have those? I'd love to know if she out growing any of hers?

**[0:26:46.1] DG:** She's outgrown a lot of her allergies we are actually down to only four life threatening food allergies from 15. So we have made a lot of headway but in the beginning, Lanolin was a problem and I found that out the hard way that a lot of kids who have life threatening allergy to egg also have sensitivity to lanolin.

**[0:27:04.8] CW:** Now that does mean wool clothing, wool anything or is it just the oils from?

**[0:27:09.6] DG:** I was thinking like lotions and cream because she kept getting eczema and we couldn't get a read on what was happening why she was getting rashes and bumps and everything and then one of the physicians that we saw said try and take a Lanolin out of her skin products and we did and it made a huge difference so.

**[0:27:26.2] CW:** Interesting that it would be Lanolin and there is so many things, so many chemicals that they put into and during that time I mean we have done so much better than making things so much more pure far more simple in ingredients and trying to keep it as pure as possible. We are out of time. I want to tell the listener please if you would like to ask any questions if you are interested in knowing and learning more please email me at [char@zoo-phonics.com](mailto:char@zoo-phonics.com) or [char@safarilearning.com](mailto:char@safarilearning.com). Both work, I get both of them, both are my businesses.

We would love to hear from you and we can certainly especially in between this week and next week answer your questions next week when we start our next radio show. So hopefully, we will have some – we can have plenty of answers for you and we might even go into week three. So we thank you. Our number is 209-536-4926. Thank you so much Doreen for taking your time. I feel like this is invaluable and as everyone knows that we are vitally interested in the whole child, their education, their health — their physical health and mental health, their spiritual health, very important so thank you.

**[0:28:35.5] DG:** Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[0:28:40.2] ANNOUNCER:** That was Ed Talks with Dr. Char. You've been listening on KAAD-LP Radio live on 103.5 FM or streaming online at [kaad-lp.org](http://kaad-lp.org). If you would like to have Dr. Char answer any of your questions, please email your question to [dr\\_char@zoo-phonics.com](mailto:dr_char@zoo-phonics.com).

Thanks for listening and stay tuned for what's next on KAAD-LP Radio.

[END]