

Shining with ADHD by The Childhood Collective

Episode #144: Did Someone Say Dance Party? ADHD Parenting CAN Be Fun!

Mallory: When I bring some humor into, I actually can teach my kids lessons and they can learn, and we can improve behavior with, just a little bit of humor. It's more approachable for our kids.

Katie: Hi there. We are The Childhood Collective, and we have helped thousands of overwhelmed parents find joy and confidence in raising their child with ADHD. I'm Katie, a speech language pathologist.

Lori: And I'm Lori.

Mallory: And I'm Mallory. And we're both child psychologists.

Lori: As busy mamas ourselves, we are on a mission to support ADHD parents on this beautiful and chaotic parenting journey.

Mallory: If you are looking for honest ADHD parenting stories, a dose of empathy with a side of humor and practical tools, you are in the right place.

Katie: Let's help your family shine with ADHD.

Mallory: I once worked with a family who was frustrated over their ADHD child's Jekyll and Hyde personality. Most of the time, their child was a sweet, happy kid, but at the smallest request, he could flip to an hour-long meltdown. After walking on eggshells for years, the whole family was super stressed, and his parents found themselves arguing constantly about how to best discipline him.

Katie: If you can relate to this family's situation, you are not alone.

Lori: That's why we created our online course, *Creating Calm*, to give you practical strategies to address challenging behaviors that are incredibly common in ADHD.

Mallory: And as a bonus, these tools will help the whole family get on the same page so there's less arguing in your home.

Katie: Here's what Kate had to say after taking the course: "Creating calm has helped me really understand ADHD and given me so many practical tools to support my son and make our days not such a battle. I've read so many books, but they just didn't give real life examples and tools. This course has been so worth the investment and something I'll keep coming back to revisit."

Lori: A year from now, you're going to wish you had started today. Head to thechildhoodcollective.com/yes and enter the exclusive code **PODCAST** to get 10% off our course when you enroll today. You can also grab the link and code in the show notes.

Katie: Okay, let's be real. Do you guys ever have days when parenting just doesn't feel that fun? Like maybe you're just going through the motions, you're a little bit irritated or on edge, and you realize that you literally haven't laughed at all today?

Lori: Yeah, I mean, I came home the other night and was just not a fun person to be around. It was a stressful day, so I can totally agree with that.

Mallory: Some days feel just like Groundhog's Day. You wake up and you're like another day doing the things, going through the motions.

Katie: Seriously! And I like to think of myself as like, a pretty fun parent. Right? I mean, I have years of experience keeping little kids engaged in speech therapy, so I feel like I have a pretty deep toolbox for fun.

Lori: We know, Katie. But I think Mal and I sometimes, and most of us can relate to the ups and downs of parenting. And maybe you find yourself at a low point and you realize that you want to try something different.

Mallory: Yeah. And at the end of the day, as parents, we have a lot on our plates and it can feel overwhelming to think like, okay great I also have to be like the fun-est parent ever, too. So today we're going to give you some ideas, nothing too overwhelming though, that you can try to have more fun as a parent.

Katie: I love this. Okay, so our first strategy for making parenting more fun might seem kind of obvious, but it's to use humor and try turning things into games. So let me give you an example. So my son, he can be really inflexible around meals. He generally eats a lot, but

he'll just decide, like, I'm not going to eat that for whatever reason. And in our family, we generally just say, let's take a little bit on your plate, and then we don't really push him. I'm not going to tell him you have to take two bites or any of that, but I do want the exposure of just like, him putting it on his plate, having it sit there. And I'm honestly not complicated enough to be like, here's your rejected plate, or whatever. I know it can get you really complicated. I'm just not there. So it's just everyone gets a little of everything and you eat what you want. And so one night I had cut up a bunch of mangoes. Have you guys ever gotten the mangoes from Costco where you get like six or nine mangoes in a box? Do you know about that?

Lori: Oh, I love those.

Mallory: And then you're only eating mango.

Katie: Yes, I love them. But that's exactly how it goes, right? Like day one I'm like, yes. And then by day four, I'm like, why did I do this? So anyway, I cut up a bunch of mangoes and they were on the table. And, we've eaten mango before, and he generally will like it. He likes a lot of fruit, but for whatever reason, he's like, I'm not going to eat that. I'm not going to let that get on my plate. No. And so, of course, I'm gearing up in my immediate irritation to be like, no, we're putting this on your plate. And so I kind of stab the mango with my fork and, in a super loving way, but my husband reaches across and he knocks the mango off my fork with his fork. And he's like, mango war. And I look at him, I'm like, what? He's like, you can't have. It's a mango war. And thankfully, he was being so funny and cute, and so I'm like, oh, a mango war. And so all of a sudden, I'm like, stabbing at mangoes and my kids start stabbing at mangoes and we're trying to pile all these little slices of mango on our plates. And so it ended up with my son having a whole bunch of mango on his plate. And we didn't really say much else about it, but by the end of the meal, he had actually eaten quite a bit of mango. And it really reminded me, my husband, it's ironic, right? He doesn't have any training in child development or any of that stuff, but I was just so quick to gear up for a fight and he was so quick to be like, let's just take the pressure off. And I think that's such an important key, is like, we can tend to put a lot of pressure on ourselves and on our kids.

Lori: Yeah. And I think I sometimes will, like last night, for instance, showers. We've talked about showers. I don't know what it is like getting our kids to take a shower is so hard. They just resist it and then they'll get in and you can't get them out because they're having so much

fun. And then it becomes this ordeal to get them to even come out of the shower. So I have tried to build in fun activities at the end so that they're like, yes, we want to just get in, get it done, get out as quickly as possible. So like, last night, they love dance parties and they've been so into practicing their ice skating, like, jumps and spins and their routine. So I was like, we're going to do a dance party at the end. And they were so excited, so they got in the shower. So again, it's like, maybe even building in something fun, like a fun activity to get them motivated to get through the non-preferred things is really helpful sometimes.

Mallory: Katie, your mango story made me think of my younger son. He only does this with broccoli, but when we're serving broccoli, he insists that we say something like, you can't eat a piece that big. And then he proves us wrong, and he does it. And so for every time he's taking a piece of broccoli, he's like, hey mom, say, I couldn't eat this piece, or say, this piece is too big for me to eat. So then I say, like, there's no way you could eat a piece of broccoli that big. And then he does. And so he actually made that game up on his own, but he eats all of the broccoli, which is, of course amazing. And I notice that my boys are constantly looking to me for my reaction and my tone. When something maybe heavier comes up. They look to me like, how serious are we going to take this? And if I take it more the serious direction, they're like, shut down. They don't want to talk about it. They don't want me to problem solve with them. But if my first gut reaction is to kind of laugh about it a little or make a joke, I find that they're much more willing to work with me and talk through whatever that challenge was. So my kids are constantly reading me, like, where are you taking this? And I find that really, when I make light of it, when it's appropriate, when I bring some humor into it, actually can teach my kids lessons, and they can learn, and we can improve behavior with, just a little bit of humor. It's more approachable for our kids.

Katie: I totally agree. And whenever we talk about this, I always get someone who comments like, oh, you're just accommodating your child, and life doesn't accommodate them. Right? Or something to that effect. And I welcome that commentary because I think it is important to see the different perspectives, but in that same way, I want my perspective to be seen. And it really depends on how you look at this. If my goal is to raise kids who have the skill to laugh at themselves or make light of a situation, again when it's appropriate, and to turn things into games. I mean, I turn things into games. I'll tell you, I was telling you girls, I had to address about 150 Christmas cards. I decided I didn't want to pay, like, the \$40 to have the addresses written on such a mistake. This is a couple of months ago now, but literally, I got

the boxes of envelopes, and I could have cried. Okay, I'm looking at how many envelopes are sitting here, and I'm like, oh, my gosh. And so what I did is I divided them into sacks of ten, and I just lined them up on my counter, and I would be like, throughout the day, I'm just going to go do one stack of ten. Even if I want to do more, I'm just going to stop myself after ten, and then I'm going to go do something else. And I turned it into this little game for this adult woman in her late 30's. We'll call them mid 30's, mid to late 30's. And I'm, sitting here, like, gamifying my process of writing envelope addresses. So we want our kids to have that skill and not to break down when something is hard. And so when I think about this, I'm not thinking of it as like, oh, I'm accommodating and babying my child. I'm teaching them that it's okay. It's okay to laugh and see the humor in various things. And I think that's such a great way, like you said, Mal, to model this behavior that we want them to internalize and bring with them into all kinds of situations throughout their life.

Mallory: Yeah. And I think something to keep in mind, too, and we talk about this a lot when we're always offering you suggestions, is like, you know your child best, and I definitely have two different kids when it comes to how much humor I can use.

Katie: You do.

Mallory: I have one kid who you could not say something to offend him. He thinks it's all funny. He can take a joke very well. He takes no offense to any of this. Well, my other son is a little bit more sensitive, and you have to toe the line a little bit more gently when it comes to bringing humor to some situations. So you know your child best. Based on that, you decide when and how to use the humor. But I find that it really does help in my house.

Lori: Yeah. And one of the other things that can be super challenging for parents is when you're constantly reminding your kids what to do, right. And it immediately sucks the fun and the life out of your evenings. Like when bedtime takes a million instructions, right. And a lot of times ends in arguing or yelling. It's just a lot of negativity. So our second strategy that we really love is to use visual supports for our kids, so that they can see what's happening next and also to develop their independence more so we're not having to remind them through every single part of those routines. So this really can take the pressure off of you as a parent. If you feel like, oh, my gosh, I have to tell them every single step of the way, what they're supposed to be doing versus if there's a visual routine, let's say they get distracted, I can just

kind of point to that and give them kind of a minor prompt where I'm not having to get into this back and forth or this constant nagging. Right?

Mal: Yeah

Lori: And we have so many families that I think, think that they need to have this fancy, perfect, beautiful routine at home. And I can tell you nothing I have ever done in my house. I'm not a Pinterest parent. Anything I do is like, my kids making it. It's messy. Our reward systems are just like writing stars on a chart. It's nothing fancy at all. But basic routines can really help, with those problem times of the day. Again, you don't necessarily need them for every single thing. Like, for my kids, bedtime has never really been an issue. My kids do great at bedtime. Mornings are really hard for us. We get distracted. They are doing other things. It's hard to get through stuff. They're just not as independent in the morning. And so that's where we definitely need more routines and we need more structure around that time of the day. So, again, think about where do you find yourself redirecting your child or nagging or having to give so many reminders? And maybe it's developing a visual routine and making sure that you're hanging it in a spot where your kiddo is going to see it. So if you're not sure what this would look like, we have some amazing printables and examples that are on our website at www.thechildhoodcollective.com, so you can check those out. When we post on Instagram, we have lots of videos about routines because they're so important for kids. And whenever we post videos, people are always like, how can I get those? And we've tried to kind of tell people, yeah, you can use Canva, but we know so many of you just, you don't know how to use the program. You just want something that's already done. So we've made those as easy and simple as possible where you can print those off, cut them out, create the schedule how you want without having to use and know how to use Canva or technology in any way. So printables are just an amazing way to just keep things a little bit more fun, light in the moment, and kind of eliminate the times of the day when you're just nagging or getting irritated and going back and forth with your child.

Mallory: Yeah, for sure. And I mean, contrary to what I think my kids believe, when I'm nagging, I'm not having fun.

Katie: What? You don't live for nagging your kid and reminding them to brush their teeth?!

Mallory: I don't live for that. I don't live for that.

Katie: I'm shocked.

Mal: And I think in my house, I found myself nagging the most with just the simple after school routine. What you do when you walk in the door, you don't just kick off your shoes and throw your backpack and slouch on the couch.

Katie: Uh-huh.

Mallory: You hang your backpack here. You take your lunchbox out of your backpack and you set it by the sink so I can clean it. You wash your hands. You put your shoes in the drawer after you've dumped out the sand in the trash can.

Katie: I love your routine. Can you come to my house and implement that routine? Because the sand is a thing, man.

Mallory: Oh, man! If I saved all the sand over the past couple of years that my boys have been in school, we'd have a full sandbox in our backyard I'm confident.

Katie: Oh, my gosh. You could be a Pinterest mom with your new sandbox.

Mallory: No, but that was the routine that was really weighing on me the most. I found myself doing the most nagging. I was getting frustrated because it's really not that complicated of a routine. It's about four steps. So we used a visual, which we actually have this visual on our website, we used the simple visual reminding my boys of those four steps when they walk in the door after school. So now I can do a lot less nagging and the after school starts a lot better.

Katie: Yeah, I love that. And I think it's so funny. I feel like we all have different hard times of the day. For us, it is bedtime. My kids really struggle to just wind their bodies down. And of course, it doesn't help that dad is, like, wrestling with them and going and shooting hoops, and he's in his pajamas. You really need to go outside into the driveway. But it's okay. He just got home from work. So he's like, I want to bond. So what's really cool about the printables that we made is that they are customizable. So, for example, if your kids get hot lunch at school and you don't need a lunchbox icon, that's fine. You don't need it. And so that's pretty cool. And I love that because a lot of times when I've gone and searched for visuals, I end up trying to make my own anyway because they're already set. And like, maybe your kids take

vitamins in the morning or medication or whatever it is. So we've been able to include options for all of those things. So you really do feel like it's personalized to your family.

Lori: For my kids, the last thing they want to do when they get home from school is homework.

Katie: Totally and the last thing I want to do after a long day of work is deal with the stress of meal planning, grocery shopping, cooking, and cleaning up the kitchen.

Lori: Same here. We tried Hungryroot grocery service to help us eat balanced meals while saving time and money every week. It's been a game changer for our weekly meals and snacks, and I love that you can customize groceries based on your kids or your family's dietary restrictions.

Katie: Yes! My husband eats gluten free and I love that I can customize groceries based on our family's needs. And not only can I get complete meals delivered, but I can also order my weekly groceries through them. And I'm always amazed at how my kids will try new things just because they came out of our Hungryroot box.

Lori: Yes! It's easy to customize your box each week and you can skip weeks whenever you want. For a limited time, Hungryroot is offering our listeners 40% off your first box, which is amazing. Just be sure to use the code: CHILDHOODCOLLECTIVE40 so you can get the discount.

Katie: We also have the link and the code in the show notes, so you can try Hungryroot today.

Lori: Over the past year, my oldest has really struggled with anxiety, especially at night. As soon as it was time for sleep, she'd be crying for me to stay and worrying about all the things. I was talking to another therapist about our bedtime battles and she said the Zenimal, a screen free meditation device, had been a game changer for her daughter with ADHD and anxiety. I immediately purchased the Zenimal and can confidently say it was the best tool to help my daughter get better sleep. She was able to fall asleep an hour earlier using it.

Katie: Yes, it's actually really helped my kids to be able to calm their busy bodies at night.

Mallory: What we love about the Zenimal is that it combines two of our favorite bedtime recommendations, using a relaxation strategy and removing screens from the bedroom.

Katie: The Zenimal is an adorable screen free turtle with nine guided meditations your kids can choose from. And our absolute favorite part of the Zenimal is that every meditation ends with the most important message, 'you're a good kid.'

Lori: To grab your own Zenimal and get your child and yourself some better sleep, head to Zenimals.com and use our code: TCC for a discount. You can also find the link in the show notes.

Mallory: So our third and final tip for making parenting more fun, and this one, I love this one so much, is building mini or micro traditions into your week. Things that become part of your routine but are actually a lot of fun for your kids. Maybe make otherwise kind of boring or monotonous tasks a little more exciting for them, but also for you. Again, we're trying to make parenting more fun. So, for example, my son right now is doing weekly allergy shots, and we have to go to the allergist. He has to get the shot. You have to wait for 30 minutes to get checked and make sure that you don't have a bad reaction. And so we've taken something that's not super exciting for the kids or for me. He has to get a shot. We have to just sit around for 30 minutes in the doctor's office, and we've turned it into something a little bit more exciting. So our, mini or micro tradition around that is, after we do that, we always go somewhere for a special treat after or we go to a park. So they know first we got to do this. But part of our weekly routine, our tradition around this, is then we always go get or do something fun. And that's really helped make it more fun for all of us, but especially for me. I mean, it's not fun taking your kid to the doctor's office every week.

Lori: We did the same thing when my daughter was in therapy. There was this really cute ice cream shop that was right near there. So it was like every time we'd finish her therapy appointment, which those were hard. Sometimes going there is hard. That's hard to open up about your emotions, and it requires hard work. And so we made a little tradition of like, when we get done with therapy, we go and get an ice cream afterwards. And that always made it a little bit more exciting and something to look forward to each week. I know talking about things that are on our website, we have the printables, but we also have these lunch love notes and affirmations. And we had made them a couple of months ago, and, my husband printed some off, and he makes the lunches during the week. So he's been putting

little lunch love notes in their lunchboxes once a week. And again, it's just like a positive thing that really helps their relationship, and they love it. They come home from school, and they're like, do you know what Dad put in our lunches? And they tell me the little note that was in there. And again, it's a very small way to connect with our kids, but to make them feel good and have a little positive pick me up during the day, that makes them, it's fun, and they enjoy that.

Katie: Yeah. I think one of the biggest things, too, is just keeping in mind it doesn't have to cost a lot of money to do these traditions. So you're already cooking dinner, right? So maybe you say, okay, we always do taco Tuesdays. Or, we're in Arizona, it rarely rains, and so when it does, we go on a puddle walk. If there's any possibility. If they're not at school, we grab our umbrellas. My kids do have rainboots, even though they're, like, the least used item in their closet. And we have them because we want to go on a puddle walk every time it rains. Friday night, game night can be huge, but we don't realize, a lot of times, as parents is how much it does start to play into their sense of identity and just that connection. I know my family, we travel a lot. My husband loves to travel, and so we have a lot of maps in our house. The kids both have huge maps in their room, and we have a map in our living room. And I never really thought about it. I literally bought the map for my daughter, like, when I was pregnant with her. And I remember one time she was, during COVID, she was on Zoom. She was in kindergarten, so she was like five years old, and her class was on Zoom. It was the saddest thing. And they let the kids go around and give a tour of their house. And I'll never forget my daughter's little voice. And she's walking people through our house, and she goes, well, my family, we're all map people. And she showed them the maps, and I was like, oh, my gosh, we are map people. But it brings tears to my eyes, because I'm like, that's so cool. And I never told her that we're map people, or even really, the fact that we travel, we don't make a big deal about it. It's just this is what we do. That's how she's always been. But it was just so neat and so special, and she still thinks of herself as a map person, and that's just such a cool thing, for kids to have that part of their identity, so those little rituals and traditions that you don't realize you're really helping them build their sense of self.

Mallory: Yeah. I mean, something as simple as pancake Sunday or my son's love when we do sleepover Saturday. It's not really sleepover because we're at our house and everyone sleeps in their own beds anyway. But they like to make a checklist of the things that we're going to do that night. So like pillow fight, eat popcorn, watch a movie, and they'll write out what

movie we're going to watch, have a dance party, and we work down the list, we check the things off the list and that's just, they get so excited for it. It makes parenting more fun because it's so cute to see them working together to kind of make this list. And the pride they have is we're doing exactly what they want us to do for our sleepover Saturday. So I think the other benefit of doing these little mini traditions is that it's like a sneaky way to bring structure to your child's day. It's something that they come to anticipate. It's something that's always associated with Sunday morning or going to get your shot. And we know kids with ADHD thrive with structure and routine, so it's kind of a sneaky way to add in a little bit of structure and routine that we know they really need anyway.

Lori: Yeah. And we as parents also need to have fun. We need to enjoy parenting and we need to have time where we enjoy our kids and have a say too in making those fun traditions where it's something we look forward to. We're looking forward to spending time with our kids or doing something with them is so important just for our relationship and just life in general.

Katie: I love that. And you guys have given me some really good ideas. So I'm definitely going to bust out sleepover Saturday. That sounds fun!

Lori: I am too. I love it.

Katie: I love that. So hopefully this gives you some ideas. And again, it'll look different in each family. But our key takeaway for today is that ADHD parenting can be so many things, all the feelings. But if you're feeling like you're just kind of in a rut or you're going through the motions, these are just a couple things that you can do to make life a little more fun for you and your child. And we are here to support you. Thanks for listening to Shining with ADHD by your hosts, Lori, Katie, and Mallory of The Childhood Collective.

Mallory: If you enjoyed this episode, please leave us a review and hit subscribe so you can be the first to know when a new episode airs.

Lori: If you are looking for links and resources mentioned in this episode, you can always find those in the show notes. See you next time!