

Shining with ADHD by The Childhood Collective

Episode #148: After School SOS: Preventing Meltdowns

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.

One of the hardest parts of parenting a child with ADHD is wondering, “how can I help my child succeed at school when I'm not even there?”

Mallory: We love hearing from families about the amazing outcomes they have experienced after taking our course, Shining at School.

Lori: Yes, like Allison, who said, “I want to thank you for taking the time and resources you poured into the Shining at School course. I've been an educator for ten years and my fourth-grade son has had an IEP since kindergarten. Your course is helping me feel more empowered and has made me feel like I can advocate so much better for my son. Truly the best money I've spent on any school related item.”

Mallory: And Aaron, who told us, “My son's 504 was approved today. It was a fantastic meeting and I'm so happy with the level of support the team agreed on. The principal said, ‘my son shines’, which made me think of your course. Thanks for all you do.”

Katie: We seriously love hearing stories like this. It actually gives me chills.

Lori: If you want your child to shine at school, our course is here to help you do just that. Head to thechildhoodcollective.com to check out Shining at School and use the exclusive code PODCAST for 10% off. You can also find the link and code in the show notes.

Mallory: I've had so many conversations with my friends lately about how their kids are coming home from school just completely dysregulated. Just they come home and they basically collapse. And they're really thankful that generally their kid has had a pretty good day at school, but they feel like once their kid gets home, they're left to deal with the fallout.

Katie: Absolutely. And especially for kids with ADHD. I mean, they're working really hard all day at school to stay regulated and pay attention and navigate social situations. And by the time they come home, a lot of times they really don't have much left to give when it comes to controlling those emotions.

Lori: Yeah. And this is something I talk a lot about with my patients. Some kids come home and are just tired and maybe even weepy. Some kids come home whiny and argumentative when it comes to getting stuff done. And in other cases, more severe cases, we have really significant behaviors. Throwing things, yelling, just complete meltdowns.

Mallory: It can be really hard as a parent to know how to deal with this, especially if you feel like every day when your kid walks through the door after school, you're just walking on eggshells. You're trying to just keep the peace, make it to those after school activities, make it to dinner time, to bedtime. It's really stressful.

Katie: It is. And so today we want to give you some tools and strategies that you can consider for your family if you're constantly dealing with that after school slump. Or maybe another word is the collapse.

Lori: Yes. So the first one is to really take some time and kind of reframe the behavior that you're seeing. Because sometimes when our kids are just having these huge behaviors, we can take it super personally and it can really dysregulate us if we feel like our kids are out to get us and doing it intentionally, right? So I think take a minute to kind of think about, like, imagine yourself. You've had this long day of work, your boss is kind of on you about everything, you feel like you just maybe haven't done a great job. You've lost out on fun activities, and then you walk into a bunch of questions from your partner and it can feel super

stressful if you think about it that way. So your kids have been at school working hard and probably working a lot harder than their peers to focus, to sit in a chair, to pay attention to the teacher. Many of you guys will say, my kiddo does pretty well at school and then we come home and it's just a complete disaster. And part of that, again, is because there's structure and clear expectations at school and they have to kind of behave in a certain way. But it's a long day. It's a really long day. And so it can feel like, very stressful for your kids. So when they're in a safe space with their safe person who they know loves them unconditionally, a lot of times they're letting loose and all of those emotions are going to come out. Just as moms, I think we can say, I know my kids are much more weepy and emotional and tell me about all of this stuff. Whereas even with their dad, they don't necessarily feel that way. I'm just kind of a safer person that I'm the one that they always talk to about things that are happening, things that are going on during their day. So really think about the fact that it's hard when your kids are really having a hard time to think about, yes it's because they love me so much. In some ways, it really is. I always tell my patients, I'm not going to come here, I'm going to give my best to the kids that come in, and I'm going to stay calm, but when I go home, I'm going to get mad at my husband, and I'm going to get irritated and snappy, and I'm going to yell at my kids or whatever that I would never do at office because I know that they love me unconditionally. We all behave differently at home than we behave in other settings.

Katie: And I think that's really important for parents to get because it does help us recognize that we're not alone in that situation, right? Like, if you're picking up your kids from school or you're coming home from work a couple of hours after that, and your child is having these meltdowns, it's not something that you're doing wrong. You're not a bad parent. Your child still loves you. And I think that that's something that we all can question ourselves in that moment of like, oh, my gosh, why is this happening? So want to make everyone understand, like, hey, you're not alone in that.

Lori: Yes, absolutely. And, I think another really important thing to think about is that it's important to still have expectations. Okay, so when we can understand what our kids are going through, but not all behaviors are allowed and acceptable. And so again, we talk about this in our online course, *Creating Calm* about setting routines and having very clear behavioral expectations and consequences and things like that. We cannot just allow our kids to be throwing and yelling and saying horrible things to us. Like, there have to be clear expectations for behaviors. But we want you to really, we always talk about this, is that our

goal is really to prevent those things from getting to that point. And so having clear routines and structures and we'll talk more about that in a second is so important so that we're kind of bringing down those stress levels so that we don't get to a point of absolute significant behaviors. But I do want to emphasize the fact that it's not okay to just say, yeah, it's all right for my kid to cuss me out and throw things and be aggressive to everyone. You have to have clear consequences too.

Katie: Absolutely.

Mallory: Absolutely. So I think, as Lori was talking about, we can reframe the behavior while still having expectations for our kids that we're not going to accept all behaviors that come through the door. and one thing that can really help, as Lori was saying, is we want to prevent these challenges as much as possible. So some of the other ideas we're going to offer you can kind of all be part of an after school routine that's going to give your child some predictability, and they know that they can come home and have that time to decompress and kind of reset after a long day. So, our second tip or trick here is to really consider your presence and how you're greeting your child. So we've already kind of mentioned this. We don't generally advise you to bombard your child with questions the second they walk in the door. What did you do today? How was your day? Who did you sit with at lunch? Although I know if you're like me, you really want the answers to those questions.

Katie: Yes.

Mallory: But limit the questions when they walk in the door and just be really mindful of the presence that you're bringing to the home. I know that especially if you've been working a long day, you come home a little bit wound up too, maybe. And our kids can kind of read the room and read the emotions, and it's not always going to be possible for you to come home and be a zen parent, but to the extent possible that you're greeting them calmly and consistently, you're going to help just set them on a good trajectory for the afternoon. So just consider the presence and how you're greeting your child.

Katie: I will say, I have one child who comes home and will just download everything from her day, right. She'll tell me, oh, my gosh, we missed three minutes of recess, and she'll tell me the whole sequence of what happened. And it's great because I'm able to get a pretty fast read on Okay, where are we at? Right? It's like a quick check in, you know, where you stand.

And I like to think that I'm the same way in a lot of my relationships. I'm pretty like, here's where I'm at. And if I didn't tell you, you could see it on my face, right. But we have another kid who gets in the car and is like, we're good, everything's fine. And later I'll start to see, like, okay, there's actually some stress there, or, wow, they had a fire drill. And for my son, fire drills can be really overwhelming. It's very loud. I was there one time during a fire drill and I was overwhelmed. So it's really loud. But he won't get in the car and start there, right? He'll start to kind of be more ornery about things or just, like, inflexible. And then I realize later throughout the day, he'll tell me like, oh, we had a fire drill. And I'm like, oh, there it is. So I think that's something again as parents, I'm the same parent to both of my kids, I'm pretty consistent, but I just happen to have two kids that are incredibly different in that way. And so you might be in a situation where you can pretty quickly figure out where your child is at, and you also might be like, no, I'm walking on eggshells here. And so just want to normalize that. That's part of this experience. And a lot of us go through that.

Lori: I find my kids are not like Katie's at all. Well, one of them, where they just don't. I'm not going to get any information out of them right after school. I just am not. And I pick them up from school and we actually have a long car ride. Not long, but a decent amount of time. And a lot of times we are sitting in silence. I'm not going to get information out of them. They can't even half the time remember stuff. When I get information from them, it's at night in bed, when their bodies are calm. But they're usually just so kind of done from their day that they both just need to decompress. And if I try and ask questions, I won't get anything.

Katie: That's really funny. My kids, number one thing when they get in the car is, do you have food?

Lori: Yes.

Katie: I know that I sent you to a school with a lunch and two snacks, but yes, here's a string cheese because I just carried this around with me in a cooler. All right, so that brings us to our third point, which is sort of along those same lines. It's important to give our kids a little time to adjust and have a little bit of downtime. So this can work different ways for different families. On one hand, I think there are kids who want to come home and just jump right into their homework, they're ready to get it done because they kind of just want to clear the docket for the rest of the day. On the other hand, I think there's a lot of kids who need a minute or 30 minutes to just relax a little bit. It's great if they can move their bodies, which we'll talk about

in a second here, but giving them a little bit of a built-in sense of, okay, we're going to do 30 minutes of this and then we're going to do homework. And I think it's really important in that situation to set the expectation, hey, we're going to come back at 04:00 and do this so that it's not just open ended. But when we give our kids a little bit more freedom and let them choose, it just gives them, again, that time to regulate and that downtime so they're not just like walking into a big list of chores or homework. And again, there's going to be someone that says, well, my kid loves to do homework right after school, and that's great. We love that. But there's always that kid who needs the time. And again, we're sort of saying, like, try this out and see what works the best for your family.

Lori: I would say the vast majority of kids with ADHD, if you tried to just say, let's get done with school and jump right into homework, you're going to have some meltdowns. And the vast majority need time to decompress and to regulate and move their bodies. I know my kids have been very clear with me, I can't do homework right after school. I have to play so we definitely have playtime set aside. I don't allow that playtime to be too long just because, again, we need to get it done. And if we move it too far towards the night, then I have meltdowns because they're tired or hungry or whatever.

Katie: Absolutely. And a lot of kids will be off their medication by that point, too. Their stimulant has totally worn off by 06:00. And so that can be another thing to consider. So again, it's just going to be so personal for each family.

Lori: Yeah, and that's a great point, Katie, is to really think about, we know many of you guys are going to have kids who are on medications, really thinking about when that does wear off and planning kind of your afternoon and the homework time around that also.

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.

Mallory: One thing I hear from my friends is that their kids often think boring tasks like chores or homework are going to take forever, and in the same breath, their kids can play 2 hours of Minecraft and then complain that they just got started.

Katie: Okay, I think that friend you're referring to might actually be me.

Mallory: I'm not naming names. One tool we all love and have in our own homes is Time Timer.

Lori: At this point, I think we all have multiple Time Timers. For kids with ADHD, time can be a very abstract concept and Time Timer helps by making time more concrete. It helps kids visually see the passage of time.

Katie: And it can prevent those inevitable meltdowns when 2 hours of Minecraft just wasn't justification enough to ask your child to complete five minutes of chores.

Mallory: From homework, to chores, to screen time, to daily hygiene, to our own work, we love Time Timer because it is so versatile and their designs are cute too. A staple in our homes.

Lori: If you have a child with ADHD, we know you need a Time Timer and we have a discount code for you to use. So head to [timetimer.com](https://www.timetimer.com) and use the code: TCC to get the discount. You can also find the link and code in the show notes.

The fourth point is to kind of think about how can we, and I talked about this before, prevent those behaviors by anticipating our kids needs and what they might need, and developing kind of a routine after school routine that fits those things in. Again, I have a seven-year-old who just never communicates that she's hungry, but she will have meltdowns when she's hungry. She cannot say and does not feel hunger necessarily, but she is hungry, or won't necessarily go to the bathroom until it's like an urgent situation, right. So I think, again, that's where having a real clear routine of like, this is what we do every day. We walk in the door, we go to the bathroom, we eat a snack, and then we play is better than just kind of like winging it day to day. And we just know our kids with ADHD do so much better with routines and with structure. But I think hunger, thirst, needing to go to the bathroom are all things to really think about because those can definitely trigger behaviors. And I found, again with my youngest, she doesn't usually eat an afternoon snack and I can't make her do that, but she wants to play and she's not that hungry after she's had her lunch and then she's starving by the time she gets in the car. So honestly, I come prepared and I just leave a box of goldfish and some other snacks in the car, like, ready to go because we've had so many hangry meltdowns as a result.

Katie: Love it.

Lori: So those are, again, things to really consider when you're creating that after school routine to prevent those challenging behaviors from happening.

Mallory: And our fifth point that we've already kind of alluded to, if you can build this into your routine as well, is getting your child to move their body and be active in some way, really helps a lot of kids kind of reset. It doesn't have to be an hour long walk outside, it doesn't have to be going to jujitsu class, but jumping out on the trampoline at home, running around outside, getting outside when you're moving your body, like, bonus points. That really helps our kids kind of reset too. But thinking about ways that you can help your child get in a little bit of movement after school, especially before starting homework, can really help kind of push that reset button and help them regulate after a long day.

Katie: And just a little encouragement there too. I know for me, there's days when my kids are so excited to run outside and they'll immediately get into a game or they have their soccer net and they'll just start playing. But there's other times where they'll push back and they're like, no, it's boring. I want to go play with the neighbor, or, I want to do this, or can I watch

tv? And so it's up to you. Obviously, this is going to be each family's individual values, but have confidence to say, no, go outside. It's going to be okay, you got this. And kind of push your kid out there a little bit because, more often than not, they'll get outside and then they immediately, or within a few minutes will start to figure out like, oh, okay, this is actually really fun. And so if your child is more of an indoors kid, it's okay. And we all have those preferences, but encourage them to go outside and try it. And you might go out there with them sometimes, but you don't always have to be out there. You don't have to be the cruise director. You can just say, go outside, go find something to do, go take magna tiles outside. And that can even be enough of an activity just for them to have something to get started. But I know I'm thinking there's days when I have one kid who will be like, no, I want to stay in and bake cookies and I'm like, no, we are not baking cookies, go outside.

Lori: And we know from the research, for us as adults and kids, getting outside, being outside for any portion of the day is so important for our mental health, for our physical health, and for our sleep even. Our body runs on circadian rhythms. And when we are outside during the day and being exposed to light, it's going to help our sleep better at night. So it's just so critical and important. And I think, like Katie said, sometimes we have to kind of have clear boundaries of like, no, we're going to do this and we're not doing screens after school. And I know some kids, it can feel like the screens can be regulating because they're calm during those times, but it's when they get off, that it is often worse behaviors because it isn't providing their body with that self-regulation and movement and things we know are just important for an ADHD kiddo. So I think really, it is really important to kind of think about what are those activities that they're doing after school and is it really going to help them in the long run that evening.

Mallory: The more that you're consistent with that and the more that you stick to a routine, the easier it's going to become. When we start to become inconsistent, some days we let them watch screens, some days we make them go outside, kids don't know that day what they're going to get from us and whether if they just push hard enough, they can get what they really want. So I'm not saying 100% of the time you have to be consistent. Never give your kids screens, never deviate from the plan. But the more that you are consistent and your kids know what to expect and that you're going to hold the limit, the easier it's going to get.

Katie: Absolutely, but not at first. Right? And that's the hardest part, is getting over that big hump, because as you start to set more firm boundaries and say, this is what we're doing, you are going to see most likely the pushback. But over time, with consistency, it's going to go way down. I wish we could show, like a chart. I'm picturing a graph in my mind, so I hope you all are picturing the same graph that I am. But you're going to see that get worse before it gets better. And I think that's when most of us are like, I'm only human. I can't do this. So hold to it if you know that this is a healthy boundary and it can be really tough. So along that same line, when we're thinking about ways to relax and regulate our bodies, another suggestion is to use a relaxation strategy. And as we were prepping for today, we talked about different ones that we might offer to you. And I think, being realistic, there are some kids that are going to love this, and there's some kids that are going to avoid it, but you can be sneaky. So, for example, you might put on an audiobook in the car, and your kids can sit and listen. A lot of times, audiobooks are very soothing. There's sometimes, like, little sound effects, and they're just sitting in the car for a minute on the way home. And that is kind of like meditation or relaxation. To let them just sit, they're just absorbing. They don't have to talk, they don't have to fight over the goldfish, right. So using those kind of things, if your kid is one that loves sensory activities, like, okay, we're going to squeeze lemons and tighten up all of our muscles, or what are five things that you can see? Great. Love that. But there's probably a lot of kids that are going to be like, no. So you can build it in. Let's try some yoga, or let's do some stretches. My daughter's really into dance, and she is showing us all of her stretches and her arm workouts. So we do those as a family. And I think it's very regulating to all of us. As you know, we love the Zenimal, and that is easy because it's a little turtle that you can actually bring with you in the car. So sometimes on road trips and stuff, I'll just bring the Zenimal and I just put it there and my kids will turn it on. I don't push them to turn it on because that will immediately result in them saying no. But when you're thinking about relaxation strategies, just be creative. It doesn't have to be sitting with your eyes closed doing 15 minutes of meditation. But thinking, like, what are some other ways I can help my child to relax?

Lori: Yeah, absolutely. Those are great tips. And the last thing we're going to talk about is really involving your child in problem solving. If this is a thing that you're seeing every single day and your child is coming home and you do all the things, but you're still having significant behaviors, challenges, we really want you to kind of talk with your child. Not when they're escalated. Don't ever try to talk to your child when they're escalated. So if

they're in the midst of a meltdown, not the time to do that, right. But afterwards, when your child's calm. And like I said, my kids, and I find this is true for many families and especially for families of kids with ADHD that are kind of all over the place and distracted easily, it's better at night when their bodies are calm and they can kind of focus just on talking to you, to maybe talk about what are things that happen during the day? Are you feeling really stressed at school? Is something going on there? I've had so many families that didn't know their child was being bullied for like a whole year because their kiddo just didn't communicate that. And so I think there's a lot of times there are things going on during the day that we might not even know about and trying to ask those questions and maybe get at what could be going on during the day. Are they having learning difficulties? Are they not getting any accommodations at school and are really putting forth so much effort, because they don't have any interventions or accommodations that they're super stressed out.

Mallory: And I think you make a really great point, Lori, about talking to your kid about what's happening at school and the way you greet your child when they come home from school and the routine that you build to help make that successful and help them regulate is kind of just one piece of this jigsaw puzzle. If our kids are really struggling at school, if they're continually confronted with tasks that are just outside their skill level at that point, if our kids aren't being accommodated properly at school, we're kind of fighting an uphill battle where our kids, the school day is just far too taxing for them. More taxing than your typical child because their needs as an ADHD student, are not being met. Even the best calming routine when they get home might not be enough.

Katie: Absolutely.

Mallory: So we need to make sure that we need to understand why school is so challenging for them. Because there are kids who come home and do fine, right. That don't have the meltdown that is possible, that exists. So we also need to be considering what's happening at school and what extra supports can we be providing our kids at school so that the school day is just a little less taxing and we don't need to undo so much challenge from the school day. And without going into a ton of detail about actually how to do that, we do of course have resources for you. We have our free guide that you can download all about getting your child accommodations at school, common accommodations that support ADHD learners. We also have a podcast episode, episode 137. We'll link that for you in the show notes. That is about

something that all ADHD parents need to know about getting their child help at school. Those two things are a great place to start if you're like, yeah, school is really challenging for my child. I don't think that they're being accommodated enough. I feel like I need to make that easier for them.

Katie: Absolutely. I think that's such an important piece and we don't want to overlook that. Exactly as you said, all the calm greetings in the world aren't going to solve the problem if their needs aren't being met. So our key takeaway for today is that the after school hours can be really challenging for kids with ADHD and their parents. So if you are experiencing that, you are not alone and with lots of compassion and setting those expectations, we know that the afterschool hours can become a better experience for everyone.

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!