

## **Shining with ADHD by The Childhood Collective**

### **Episode #150: What Should I Say at My Child's First ADHD Appointment?**

Mallory: And I think an evaluator too, might be asking you and just trying to get a general idea of how much are all of these things impacting you as a family.

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.

You don't want your child to struggle for years and dread going to school. But without an understanding of the school system, you are overwhelmed and confused about how to really help them.

Mallory: Luckily, you don't have to be an expert in school law to get your child the support they need. But you do need to know your child's rights and school terminology so you can be a competent advocate for your child.

Lori: In our online course, *Shining at School*, we walk you through navigating the school system and identifying the right supports for your child with ADHD. From getting an evaluation, to creating an IEP or 504 plan, to knowing your legal rights and next steps when you disagree with the school.

Katie: We have taken the most important information we would give you in a one-on-one consultation and broken it down into simple, easy to understand lessons.

Mallory: Wherever you are in the school process, we created Shining at School for you and your family.

Lori: You want to feel confident and know that your child is happy and thriving at school. Head to [thechildhoodcollective.com](https://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: You get up the nerve to call a psychologist or your child's pediatrician to have your child evaluated. You've suspected that your child might have ADHD and you're finally ready to get some answers. But now that appointment is just about a week away and you're probably starting to feel a little nervous.

Katie: Yes. And it's totally normal to have a little anxiety before the evaluation or even a lot of anxiety. You might be wondering what questions the doctor is going to ask? What exactly will they want to know? Which behaviors are the most important to share? Do you need to write down the approximate number of times that you had to ask your kid to brush their teeth last night?

Lori: Okay, now I'm totally overwhelmed by Katie's questions.

Katie: Sorry, guys.

Lori: Whether you're just going in for your child's first ADHD evaluation or maybe you're even headed back to do a reevaluation, you're definitely going to want to listen today. We're going to share the five most common questions we ask in an ADHD interview to help us better understand your child's strengths and their challenges.

Mallory: Absolutely. So one of the most important questions that you're probably going to get asked, and I feel like it's a question that not a lot of parents anticipate is, is there a family history of ADHD? So ADHD is strongly genetic, it's highly heritable. And so knowing if there is a family history of ADHD is really important to your evaluator and making an accurate diagnosis. And we're not just talking about does mom or dad have an ADHD diagnosis. We're talking about other family members, siblings, aunts, uncles, and oftentimes

we also want to know not just about a family history of ADHD, but other diagnoses, like anxiety, depression, learning challenges, speech delays, autism, bipolar disorder. The evaluator is probably going to be asking you for an extensive history of any family diagnoses to kind of better understand, given that a lot of these things are strongly genetic.

Lori: Yeah. And I would say, too, when I'm talking with parents, I'm 42 years old, and I know that back in the day, ADHD was not as widely recognized. And my brother grew up with really severe symptoms and wasn't diagnosed until late in high school just because no one really knew what it was. And so many of the families that I'm coming in and talking to maybe never had a diagnosis, but there were things that maybe indicate that there was possible ADHD in a parent, right. Where they were maybe on an IEP through school, maybe they had speech therapy, maybe they had behavioral challenges. I had one dad who was like, yeah, I literally lived in my middle school principal's office. So that tells me something about how that parent was when they were a child and a lot of the challenges that they were going through. So even if there wasn't a diagnosis, necessarily, if there was, like, a history of things that could indicate that, those are things that we might want to know. And I know there are also a lot of parents, who have adopted kids. And so some of those families, after we did the intake, went back and they were able to ask those biological parents, do you know of any diagnoses within your family too? If you have the ability to kind of ask those questions or even go through your child's paperwork to kind of get them before that interview.

Katie: Absolutely. Yeah, I think that's a huge one because there are so many families where the parents do not have a diagnosis, but as you go through these intake questions, they're going, oh, yeah, I did that. Oh, yeah, I did that all the time. Oh, wait, hang on. And then they do go on oftentimes to get their own evaluation, which is hard sometimes for adults, but that's a common trend. So even if you don't officially have that diagnosis, but thinking about within the family and yourself, what are some of those kinds of characteristics that maybe your child shares? So another thing that a lot of times will be asked in an ADHD interview is when did you first notice some of these differences? What were the concerns that you had when your child was younger? So thinking back to maybe age three to five, those preschool years, were there differences in how your child communicated? Did they seem like they had a hard time following directions? Did you ever hear the teachers at preschool share concerns about behaviors, social skills? Sometimes those predictive behaviors look like more aggressive behavior, and that can be so hard to define, but things like biting or pushing other kids on the

slide. And again, when it comes to these early behaviors, and we've shared about this before, but a lot of kids, pretty much all kids, exhibit a lot of these characteristics in their younger years. And when we expect kids to start to outgrow a lot of this, the hyperactivity, maybe changing activities really quickly, big emotions, we start to see kids develop some coping skills, and we start to see this really improve. That is typically when kids with ADHD will be identified because they're not acquiring those new skills as quickly as their peers. And so it can be hard to look back on that and see, like, well, what was going on there? And was that typical? I know I question that myself as a parent all the time, and especially when my kids were younger. We have a very strong history of ADHD, but I was always, like, looking at the other kids at the birthday to see, well, how are they acting? And are my kids in line with that? And so, thinking through, what are some of those differences that you might have noticed early on? The things that kind of got you here to this evaluation and that can be really helpful.

Lori: Yeah. And that's why I think a preschool teacher is helpful in the sense that they're not going to come to you if it's kind of run of the mill things that happen at preschool, right. Like occasionally a kid's going to bite or push or whatever, but they're coming to you and having a conversation if it's like a pattern of things or it's more than what other kids are doing, right. So it's kind of thinking about were there patterns, were there behaviors that kind of were happening over and over again. Were there just challenges with really long, extended tantrums every time you left somebody's house for a playdate? That was really not normal in comparison to the other kids at the playdate, right.

Katie: Right.

Mallory: I think another early concern that we hear from a lot of parents, even when their child was a baby, was challenges with sleep.

Katie: Yes.

Mallory: So that can also be helpful information when you're thinking back to when did you first have concerns. A lot of parents are reporting to us that their child didn't sleep or they couldn't fall asleep on their own, or they weren't staying asleep through the night.

Lori: Yeah. And along the same lines of sleep, I always try to ask a little bit more about that, like, how much sleep is your child getting at night? Does it feel like an adequate amount of

sleep? Are they napping during the day if they're young, or did they nap when they were a child? Even things like when you hear them sleep, are they constantly gasping or are they snoring or are they rolling around in the bed and constantly moving at night? Those are other indications that there could be, like, an underlying sleep issue that we maybe want to have evaluated a little bit more, before we did more ADHD testing for instance.

Mallory: I think it's really helpful for parents to anticipate that as a possible question just because it's not always something you're paying attention to if your child is asleep in the other room. So it might be helpful to check on your child a couple hours into sleep, start to pay a little bit more attention to, oh, how much total sleep are they really getting? Because you might be asked questions about that in an ADHD intake interview.

Lori: Yeah. So another area that you're going to get a lot of questions about is how your child is functioning at school. So again, most kids who are coming in for their first evaluation or if they're coming in for a reevaluation, they're going to be school age and we're going to want to know about what is happening in that setting. I think for me, when parents come in with report cards or work samples or even I think a lot of times what's really helpful are emails from teachers about behaviors that have been happening at school. A lot of times I can glance over like ten emails and be like, yes, symptom of ADHD, symptom of ADHD, symptom of ADHD, right. Where it's like they weren't focusing in class, they were hitting kids or biting, they were not sitting in their seat, right. Like all of these things that maybe you don't necessarily think about those things, but you put them all together and it's like many symptoms related to ADHD. I think another thing I like to look at on the report cards is there's always like a section related to behaviors. So it's listening attentively or staying organized or their social skills with peers and they'll get kind of a grade in those areas and sometimes even teacher feedback in those areas. And I can look through the years. So if you're bringing in your child in fifth grade, you could bring in report cards from several grades that have, again, a pattern of behaviors over multiple years showing challenges in those specific areas. The other thing to keep in mind is we're also looking at, other often co-occurring diagnoses with ADHD, right. And the other big one is learning challenges. So are we seeing within those grades or teacher feedback that there's also been a history of your child's struggling with reading or they need to practice math and it's like four years of that or we're putting them in intervention and they've been in intervention for four years might be

indicative of we need to do more testing to rule out things like dyslexia or dyscalculia, which Katie hates it when I say that!

Katie; It's so hard to say!

Lori: You know just challenges with reading or math that could explain or also be going along with that ADHD diagnosis we'd want to know about.

Katie: Yeah. And I think it's important to talk about here, too, the kids who aren't going to be as disruptive in a classroom setting, more that inattentive presentation, because it can be really hard and we get messages every single day from parents that are like, the teacher is denying that there's any challenges. And that can happen. And I know we've all sat through school meetings where a teacher has said, oh, no, it's not ADHD, they're just losing all their things and forgetting their assignments and they have a hard time checking their work. And we're like, yes, that is a lot of executive functioning that you're listing off there. And so, that can be really hard. A lot of times that presentation can be girls, but it can also be boys. It's the inattentive type of ADHD. And a lot of times those kids will fly under the radar because they're not disrupting class.

Lori: And they're also just very likable, right. Like, I've had a couple of girls come in recently that the teachers love. They're just awesome kids who are like, the teachers have great relationships with. But then you dig a little deeper with a parent, they're like, yeah, over the years, they're always getting in trouble for talking way too much. Just talking, getting distracted. And again, the teachers don't see it as a problem because they're like such sweet kids who want to do well. But when you look at a pattern of behaviors over many years and things that parents have seen at home in a family history, it's starting to look like that. And I will say again, I've had the ability to follow a lot of my girls with ADHD from early on to middle school years. And it's amazing to see these kinds of people pleasing girls. They struggled much more with inattention and focus and organization, and then they've sort of learned the skills with some intervention and other things that they can kind of hide that pretty well or even are taking medication, and it's not really as noticeable anymore. So it's important to talk about that.

Katie: Absolutely. So what would you say to a parent who might be listening and they've talked with the teacher, they've asked the teacher for their concerns, and the teacher is saying

like, no, there's no concerns, I don't see ADHD. What would a parent need to do or prepare before an intake?

Lori: Well, I think what I would say is, again, you have a class as a teacher of, like 30 kids, right. And you're busy teaching and you're doing a million things during your day. The things that you notice are the kids getting out of the seat or yelling out or the problem issues, right. So if your child you know is more of an inattentive kid that gets distracted or isn't working, maybe just point out the things that you're seeing at home that you're struggling with and saying, hey, can you give this a little extra observation this week and just tell me are you seeing any issues in these particular areas? Can you just give this a little bit more attention? And sometimes they'll be able to kind of look at that and see, oh, yeah, I've started to notice and she's just like staring at the wall for 15 minutes while the other kids are working or she's talking constantly to other kids, and I just never noticed. So sometimes maybe asking the teacher to keep an eye out for some things that you want more information about is a good thing to prep beforehand.

Mallory: Another kind of rule out diagnosis when you're considering the possibility of your child having ADHD is anxiety. And this can be a tricky one, too, because anxiety and ADHD can look similar at school, until you really dig deeper and really observe and talk to the child in some cases. But, for example, we talked about popcorn reading on a recent episode as well you know.

Lori: My daughter loves popcorn reading, which is so weird to me. She's like, mom, I wish they would call on me more often when we do popcorn reading.

Katie: That's a unicorn child because nobody else in the whole world likes popcorn reading.

Mallory: But this is an example where both a child with ADHD and a child with anxiety might struggle with popcorn reading, but for kind of different reasons beneath the surface. For a child with ADHD, they're distracted, they're not paying attention, they're not following along on their page. So when it's their turn to read, they have no idea if they're even on the right page. While a child, perhaps, who actually has anxiety, is scared to read out loud, doesn't want to be judged, doesn't want to read a word incorrectly, so they don't want to do the popcorn reading, or they're spending the whole time leading up to their turn, like, practicing their lines. That's just one example of how both of these kids might struggle with

popcorn reading, but for different reasons. But on the surface, they might look pretty similar. Same goes for interacting with peers. A child with ADHD might struggle with that because they're talking too much, they're not kind of reading the social cues, paying attention to when the person they're speaking with is getting bored versus the child with kind of anxiety at the core. Maybe it's social anxiety and they're scared to talk to someone. They don't want to be judged socially; they don't know what to talk about. They're putting a lot of thought into when it's their turn to talk next. So that's going to be another thing that an evaluator might ask about is anxiety. And again, because these two things can look similar on the surface, but kind of have a different route and they can co-occur, of course.

Lori: Yeah, for sure. And I think the last kind of point about school too, I would say, let's say you're going in for a reevaluation. So maybe your child has already been diagnosed with ADHD, but now you're questioning maybe there's something else going on or you don't know if it's the right supports. It's really important to bring and talk about your child's current IEP, their current 504 plan, and share what is working, what isn't working, what do we need to maybe troubleshoot? What information do we need from this evaluation to make the plan a little bit better? Are all things that you'd want to kind of talk about too.

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.

Mallory: So the next and maybe most important part of an intake evaluation that you're going to be asked about is how are things going at home? What is home like currently? What are your concerns? What are you struggling with? What is your child struggling with? And it's really going to help the evaluator get a better understanding of what home looks like. If you're able to come with kind of specific examples of what is challenging in the moment. They're going to want to know, is your child having tantrums or meltdowns? And not just yes

or no, is that something that's happening at home? How often is your child having a meltdown? How long does that last? How are you responding to it when that happens? What time of day is that most likely to occur? So thinking about kind of the context of some of these challenging behaviors too. They're going to want to know how schoolwork is going at home and how they do with organization, keeping track of their assignments, their school books. Are they constantly forgetting to bring their lunch with them to school, leaving things behind, losing things? They're going to want to know, how does your child do with routines, do you have to have really strict, rigid routines in order for your child to get stuff done? Or is it a little more flexible? They can follow routines. They don't really need a lot of help from you. What do routines look like?

Katie: All three of those are really good examples, though, where for me, as a parent, if someone said to me, how does your child do with organization or routines? My immediate reaction would be to say, oh, really well. And once they start questioning more about it, it's like, oh, well, actually, yeah, it does take a five-minute warning and a timer and a plan. I have to explain what. And all of a sudden I'm realizing like, oh, okay, yeah, it's going well because I have a lot of training in this and I am working my booty off to make it go well, right. So I think that's something that a lot of parents might struggle with is like, you don't want to overly state these problems, but thinking about it really, like, not necessarily how does routines go when you are doing all the things, but how do routines go without a lot of help from you? And maybe reframing it in that way can be really helpful because again, if you've come up with systems that are helping, that is wonderful, and that's not how things would go without your help.

Mallory: I think that's a really good point. And if you're a podcast listener but your child doesn't have an ADHD diagnosis yet, you probably have started to implement some of the things that we're talking about that help kids with ADHD. So maybe routines are going better now, as Katie said, because you've put a lot of effort into routines going well. That's important for the evaluator to know. Routines used to be challenging until I put some of these supports in place, and I find that a lot of parents get themselves into a very tricky place where their home is full of accommodations and supports because they've learned that's what their child needs. So when they go in for the evaluation and maybe even they're filling out those checklists, at this point, things are actually going pretty well, but they're not giving themselves credit for all of the things that they are doing to make sure that they are going

well. So that's a really important thing to keep in mind when you're speaking with the evaluator. Maybe something is going well, but it's because I've put these supports in place that's important for them to know.

Lori: Yeah, it's funny because I've had a couple of people from our community come see me for an evaluation, after they had taken Creating Calm, and they're like, yeah, our routines are going great, they're so much smoother. But before, it was a nightmare, right. So it is really important to think about that. I remember I had a supervisor once that was like, the question I always ask ADHD parents in an intake is if you ask your child to go upstairs, get dressed, brush their teeth and be back downstairs in ten minutes to leave, what happens? And he'd always say, if they start laughing, that's a great indication they have ADHD.

Katie: As I sit here and laugh.

Lori: And it's so true, if you ask that question, I can't even tell you how many families just start laughing because there's no way that that would ever happen. They would immediately be distracted, right. So I feel like that's always a good indication.

Mallory: I think another thing that evaluators might be asking you about when it comes to how your child is at home is what is their activity level like? Are they just constantly running, climbing, jumping? Are they going full speed? Are they an energizer bunny from dawn till dusk? Can they stay seated at a meal time? So putting some thought into really, what does your child's activity level look like? Do they have kind of boundless energy? Are they seeking a lot of opportunities to move their bodies, get some kind of sensory input? You might be asked questions about that.

Lori: Yeah. And I do think one of the other things is, I know we talk about school a lot, but we do want to look at other settings. And one of the questions I always want to know is if your child's in an extracurricular activity too. If they're in soccer, are they getting distracted or goofing around? So how are they functioning in different settings too? It's helpful information too.

Katie: And I think that's going to be so situation dependent because I can think of activities that my kids do that they absolutely love, and they look awesome, right. Because they flourish in that situation. My daughter's really into ballet and it's incredible to see her. It truly

takes my breath away. And so it's like, we're not saying you have to see all of these different signs and symptoms across all environments, but it really does help because exactly like Lori said on the basketball team, how's this going with memorizing plays and looking around and seeing what everyone else is doing and all of that? And I know whenever I would talk with parents, I would ask a lot about social relationships. How are things going with family members, how do they do at the birthday party? How is it going between the siblings? And that can be really important indicators of what's going on as well. And asking about different habits, like screen time, we talked a lot about sleep. and another one that parents would always tell me in a speech therapy evaluation is about emotions. And just that emotion regulation piece can be so difficult for kids with ADHD. Whether it's anger or just even pure joy that just fuels them and they're yelling and whooping and running around, and it's like, wow, these are just really big, huge emotions. And the ups and downs of that can have such an impact on families, and they'll bring that up too. And I'll try to understand more, like, what situations make it worse, what situations might make it better. How much does this impact your ability to go out and travel or spend the day at the train park? What does that really look like for you? And so thinking through, like the girls already said, just those examples can be so helpful to help an evaluator really get a better sense of the severity of what you're talking about.

Mallory: Yeah. And I think an evaluator, too, might be asking you and just trying to get a general idea of how much are all of these things impacting you as a family. How challenging is this for your family to deal with all of these things? A little bit challenging. A lot challenging. And that's helpful information for your evaluator to kind of get an idea of the intensity of some of these things you're dealing with and how much of an impact it's having on your family's day to day life.

Katie: For sure, I think that's such a huge piece. And then the last thing that we would really hope that any person that you're talking with, any evaluator would ask you about are your child's strengths. And really, in the last few years, we've moved to such a model of strength-based evaluations, really focusing on what is your child good at? What skills do they have? And I know that if you're in a really hard place in parenting, you might be like, they don't have anything they're good at. But really thinking about it and digging a little deeper, like, what are their passions? What are they interested in? What makes them really unique, and what do they contribute to your family? And this could be so many things, like, do they love

to give hugs? Do they tell you or write imaginative stories? Are they really good at drawing? Are they really good at jumping, right? Is your super energetic kid just amazing at the obstacle course at the park? And thinking through some of those things so that you can call those out to the person doing the evaluation. My child is very kind. He's the first one to help a kid up on the basketball court. My child notices a lot of things, even the details that I totally missed, right, because my child is looking around and noticing the really cool cloud in the sky that's shaped like a train or the bird's nest in our tree that I would have walked by a million times, but my child is like, mom, look, there's a nest and then they check that every day to see if there's eggs in the nest. And this is beautiful. I think we want to make sure to, we're going in and we're focusing on these problem areas, but it can be really therapeutic for us as parents and for our kids to know that there are a lot of things that they do well as well. And that's just really huge to focus on that.

Mallory: I think that's so important, too. These evaluations and interviews can feel really heavy, and it's just the medical model that we're in and we have to follow to kind of make these official medical diagnoses. We do need to gather some of this information, and we need information about what's challenging for your child and what's not going well and how many of these symptoms do they have. And it kind of stinks in a lot of ways and it's hard as a parent to go in and talk about all the things that are really challenging for your kids. So I think it's really important and love when evaluators ask questions about what really lights up your child and what do you love about them and what do they do well, because we know that your kids do so many things well, and we know that there are so many strengths that come with ADHD. Out of the box thinking, creativity, energy, excitement. And I think it's really important to talk about those things as parents, especially on those hard days, reminding ourselves that our kids do a lot of things well.

Lori: Yes. So our key takeaway today is that ADHD evaluations can feel really daunting to so many parents. And we want you to just take a little time to prepare by writing down examples of challenges your child experienced, maybe in the past or is experiencing today. And again, don't forget to talk about their strengths. Just again, think about what are the questions that you want answered with this evaluation, and be really clear about that with the person doing the evaluation. If you suspect that something's going on, let them know that you want that question answered with the evaluation that's so important. And then we hope that you head

into your child's ADHD evaluation feeling really confident that you have all of those details covered so the doctor can fully understand your child's unique strengths and needs.

Katie: 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!