

Shining with ADHD by The Childhood Collective

Episode #156: I Didn't Mean to Do That! Impulsivity and ADHD

Mallory: It just takes a lot more practice and a lot more trials for kids with ADHD and again, it's not because they're bad. It's not because they're not smart.

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.

Katie: 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 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.

Katie: We get a lot of questions about impulsive behavior, and the biggest questions that parents ask us all the time are: how can I stop my child from acting impulsively? And what do I do after they do something impulsive?

Mallory: Yeah, we hear this all the time. And personally, we've been there, too. And it makes sense that people are asking about this because as parents, we obviously want our kids to learn the skill of, like, pause and think things through and then act. But unfortunately, it's a lot easier said than done.

Katie: It's so true, and it's really hard when our kids do something impulsive. And the hardest part is that we see how it affects them. They do something without thinking and then they have to deal with the consequences and this is especially true in social situations. So today we're just going to dive into this concept of impulsivity and we want to talk about why it's so common in kids with ADHD. And then we really want to share with you a few of our favorite strategies to help get our kids through these situations. So let's start with why does this happen? And this is probably not where you want to start, right? Give me the strategies! But this is really important to start here because a lot of kids are impulsive. I would go so far as to say most kids can be impulsive, but we see it more in our kids with ADHD. And we talk a lot about executive functioning, but kids with ADHD live in the here and now. They are very much present in the moment and it can be really hard for them to see the future. And a lot of impulsivity is that we didn't think through what's going to happen next.

Mallory: Yep. What if I do this? If I do x, y happens? There's not really the stop to pause to think about that. And I really want to take a moment to just reframe this impulsivity. And I know if you're parenting a kid with ADHD, you might be getting feedback from other people

that your kid is naughty and your kid is bad. And a lot of it can come back to the struggles with impulsivity because they are acting without thinking, and then you're attributing these bad traits to a child when really they didn't want to do that. Like the, you know, the shame washes over them right after they do something impulsive. And so it's not that our kids are bad, it's not that they're naughty, it's how their brain is growing and how their brain is functioning. And it's, you know, like you said, Katie, coming back to those differences in executive function, and a lot of it comes back to the executive function of inhibition. The ability to inhibit the first thing that comes to mind or the thing that you really want to do. So Doctor Hallowell talks about this. He calls this the fire, aim, ready. It's doing the first thing that pops into your head without thinking through the consequences. Again, it's not because you're bad, it's because your brain is struggling with the executive function of inhibition. Doctor Barkley also talks about impulsivity. He talks about how kids and adults with ADHD, they have this. Their brain has the engine of a Ferrari. It's going fast and it's strong, but it has the brakes of a bicycle. And so once it's speeding down the road and it's decided it's doing something, those bicycle brakes are not going to stop your kid from doing that thing that they really want to do. So we have to step back, and we have to reframe this impulsivity and remind ourselves our kids want to do well. They don't want to be naughty, but they're missing this key skill. And when you're able to kind of reframe the impulsivity and look at it as a missing skill, we can approach our kids with a lot more empathy and understanding, and it changes the way we then respond to the impulsivity. Rather than being angry and wanting to dole out punishments, we can come back to it and say, okay, this is a missing skill. How am I going to help my child?

Katie: I love that. And I think as parents, we do really want to hold space that it is hard when our kids are impulsive. We're at the birthday party and they do something impulsive, or you ask them to help you with something around the house, and instead you just see this kind of impulsive behavior, and we get it. It's really hard, and it can be really, it can feel like you're doing something wrong as a parent, and that is not our goal. We want you to feel really empowered to understand, okay, this is what's going on in my child's brain, so how can I help? So now we get to jump into those strategies for you to try, and we're going to talk through three different options. And as we were kind of preparing for this episode, we talked about how it really does take judgment to know what to do in a different situation. So your reaction to whatever is happening with your child is going to be different depending on the situation. So these are three different ideas that you can try, and you might think, okay, one of

these is better for my kid. It also might be very situation dependent. So we just want to say that. That you, you can try these out in different situations, and we just want to expand your toolbox of ways to manage impulsivity.

Mallory: Absolutely. So our first strategy is to use something that we call a do over, rather than jumping right to some kind of punishment, which we know is confusing, too. But the do over, our kids are going to learn through repeated practice and different situations with different people. And a do over is giving your child the opportunity to basically rehearse and practice a more appropriate reaction to a situation. So it gives them the chance to kind of think through, this is what I want to do, these are the potential consequences of the that choice, and then practice it. So what, again, and this is like helping them understand that they aren't bad. It's kind of like, WHOOP, that was a quick choice. Let's rewind and let's do that again. Let's do a do over. And I also love the strategy of a do over because it kind of reminds your child that you're on their team. Again, it's not you doling out punishment, it's we're going to work together and we're going to practice a better way to handle that.

Katie: I feel like we need a different word than rewind because does our generation know what rewind means?

Mallory: Well, our generation does, but do our kids generation, is that what you mean?

Katie: It's that little circle and it goes like back 30 seconds, right? I guess we could identify that that's rewind. That used to look like two little arrow buttons. Yeah. And I love the do over too, because we all need a do over from time to time, right? There's times as a parent that I'll say something and I'll say it in a tone that I didn't like and I'm like, oh, my goodness, that was not kind. Let me try it again. So pointing out when we need a do over can really help our kids teach to not feel like they're the only one that needs this.

Mallory: Absolutely. I think it's great anytime we can model the skills that we're trying to grow on our kids. I love it. So you're probably like, okay, do over sounds nice, but you need some examples. So let's talk through some examples. So none of these, one of these are from personal experience, okay?

Katie: Obviously, yes. Our children are never impulsive.

Mallory: Okay, so let's say you are on your phone, you're scrolling, you're doing whatever, and your kid decides they want to see what you're doing or they want to use your phone to do something. So they grab your phone right out of your hand as you're using it. Oh, that can feel really frustrating as a parent. It might make you really mad right at first, but this is a really great opportunity for a do over. Again, your child decides they want to see something on your phone, so they're just, they're going to take your phone even though you're in the middle of something. So I would say, hold on, do not take my phone out of my hand, hand it back to me, and then you could ask to use it. So after that happens, you have the option of then, okay, yes, you may use my phone, or you also have the option of saying, no, I'm using my phone right now, in five minutes, you could do that, or we're not going to use my phone right now. But you're giving your child the opportunity to pause, use the appropriate words to then ask for a turn with your phone.

Katie: Yeah, with my niece, her, she has all these, like, funny phrases that she uses. And the thing that she really bothers her more than anything is when my kids snatch, that's what she calls it 'no snatching'. So if somebody's looking at a phone or holding a toy or the remote control is a big one, they'll just run over and take it, right? And then she'll say, no snatching. And so it's allowed us to do a lot of do overs because we have to give back and then ask nicely.

Mallory: I'd say whenever possible, we want to kind of honor the request or the thing that they really wanted if they're doing the do over well, but that's, I mean, that's just not always going to be a possibility. So, you know, you might have to say thank you for asking kindly, but now is not the time for that. Or we're not, you can have it in five minutes. Another example where you might use a do over, again, not from personal experience at all. You're at a carnival and there's a lot of bounce houses. Just saying. And your child runs straight up to the front of the line to get in the bounce house when there's already like five, six, seven kids in line. No, look, there's other kids that are waiting. Let's walk back. Walk to the line. And you get at the back of the line. So again, it's that do over rather than we're leaving the carnival, why don't you know how to wait in line? It's just, oh, look, there's a line. Let's try that again. Come back here, let's walk, and let's go to the back of the line, and we'll wait our turn. Again, a lot of this can be easier said than done. And as Katie said, it's going to require your judgment and it's going to depend a lot on the situation. You're at home, you're at grandma and grandpa's house, you're at the carnival, and you know your child best. So you in

the moment are going to have to make the judgment call. Is right now an appropriate time for a do over?

Katie: I love it. And I think that one of the best parts about that too, is that there's not shame involved. We're not shaming our kids. Exactly like you said with the carnival, it's not why don't you know where to stand? It's, hey, I see that you went to the front. there's actually a line. See, all these kids are waiting. What's in their thought bubble, right? Like, they're going to be frustrated that we just cut them in line. So we need to go to the back. And there's no shame. You're just observing it. And the tone of voice that you use and the way you say it is really important. So keeping that in mind too, we're not angry when we do a do over. We're just sort of matter of fact, like, oh, we can't, we can't stand here, let's figure this out.

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.

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.

Katie: Another tool that we really love is when we're thinking about building up that skill of being able to see what is going to happen. The way we do this is we like to help our kids see the future picture. So there's a lot of things that kind of specific language around this. Like for example, I will say to my kids, what is it going to look like when . . . , right? And we're going to kind of fast forward five to ten minutes and see what could happen. So I do this in real life with my kids. I used to do this all the time in private practice as a speech therapist because this is really hard for a lot of kids with executive functioning challenges. And it was really helpful for parents to understand. So I might say something like, let's pretend you run in the house and you throw your backpack down in the middle of the doorway. And I'm kind of like being playful about it, right? Again, I'm not angry. We're just talking and I'm like, what would happen? And my kids will be like, oh, I would see it. I would just step right over it.

And that's where a lot of times kids with ADHD will stop. They're like, this is what would happen, I'm sure. And the reality is we, most situations, we don't have one clear outcome. So I will push them and say, okay, that could happen. You might see and step right over it and it's fine, but what if grandma comes? Now what could happen? And then they're like, oh yeah, we could trip. Grandma could trip. Or I could trip on it. And then I might say something like, what if you had something really valuable, like your rock collection inside of your backpack and you left it on the floor? And I'm getting them to say eventually, like, oh, well, I could step on it. I could break the rock collection. And the idea is that we want our kids to be able to think of an action and then fast forward five minutes or even 30 seconds and figure out what the possible outcomes could be from that action. So if I throw my backpack down, it could be totally fine. There could be some sort of negative consequence, like falling or tripping or breaking something. On the flip side, I might do it for positive things, too. So what will happen if you practice your spelling words? What will that look like when you take the test on Friday? And, oh, yeah, I'll be really good at it. I'll know all my words. Yeah, you're right. And how's that going to feel? It's going to feel awesome. So we're helping our kids to put themselves into a future moment, and it can be really tricky to do this, but over time, again, you're building up a skill, you're building a muscle, and our kids do get better at this. And another piece is to really use our language to help our kids connect things to the positive outcome. So, oh, you put all your clothes that were dirty, hopefully just the dirty ones in the hamper. I don't know, we've had a lot of clean clothes in the hamper lately. It's kind of driving me nuts. I'm like, no, that is not where you're supposed to put that. Like, it's just on recycle from the washing machine to the dryer back to the hamper.

Mallory: It's just the easiest place to put it. Easier than the drawer.

Katie: Seriously! I know. It really is. Can you imagine having to open the whole drawer and put that in there? But the idea being like, oh, if you put all your clean clothes in the hamper, what's that going to look like? Oh, we're not going to have any clothes. And I'll be silly with my kids. I'll be like, then you're going to be naked. And they just think that that's absolutely hysterical. But then on the flip side, like, what will it look like if I put all my dirty clothes in the hamper? Well, then it's going to be so easy to grab the laundry, and then you'll have clean clothes. So again, we're trying to teach our kids how to connect their actions to a positive or negative outcome, just to even consider what the outcomes might be. And I know we talked a little bit about social situations, but this is a really great place to use that skill. And so when

you're walking into a party or a playdate or a carnival at school, you can talk about that with your kids. And I think a lot of us are afraid to call it out or point out, like, what our kids should be doing. We don't want to offend them or make them feel weird, but I do it all the time, and it's really helpful because we actually plan it out and we say, what's it going to look like when we have to wait in line? And rehearsing it helps them to be really prepared for those moments, and especially the ones that, you know, can be challenging. I would talk about those and make a plan with your kids, and it can be really helpful.

Mallory: Absolutely. And I love that helping your kids see the future picture and using kind of this prep strategy, talking things through in advance. That and the do over are not mutually exclusive. Like, ideally, you use both of these strategies. You're preparing your kids for situations that are reliably more challenging for them. And again, you're not, you're not lecturing them about every single possibility about what's going to happen at the carnival, but you know your child best, and you know what things they might struggle with at the carnival. And maybe they're not going to struggle with the waiting in line piece, but are going to struggle with not buying 20 pieces of candy or only having four tickets.

Katie: Oh my gosh! Every time. Can we get cotton candy? I'm like, you're actually eating ice cream as you ask me about it. We're talking about this, like, in the moment, right? You need to live in the moment. As I'm trying to get them to, like, not live in the moment, I want them to see the future. But when it comes to, like the next treat, my kids are all about the future.

Mallory: Totally. But, you know, helping, talking through the future picture prepping your child and do over. These things are not mutually exclusive. Ideally, you're using both of these things. You're setting your child up for success, and then you're giving them lots of opportunities to practice the stop, think, act sequence. And for our final tip, for our third tip for helping with the impulsivity, we want to talk a little bit about consequences, because we know that, this is the biggest question we get asked. Like, when my child is impulsive, like, do I punish them? What do I use as a consequence? And this is a tricky one, and again, it comes back to, you know your child best, and it's going to depend on the situation. But let's talk through a couple possibilities. So, as we've kind of already alluded to, we don't recommend, you know, super punitive responses. A lot of times those are hard to follow through on. It's putting a lot of shame on the child for something that oftentimes they don't intend to do, they didn't want to do. But with impulsive actions, a lot of times there just

happens to be a natural consequence for that impulsive behavior. Or sometimes there is a very logical consequence that requires a little bit of parent intervention, but will provide your child with a good learning opportunity. Again, this is not to shame or be harsh with your child. It's to help them learn that there are consequences for the impulsive behavior, because our kids need lots of practice, repeated practice, in different kinds of situations to really develop the skill of inhibition. So let's talk through what is a natural consequence. So a natural consequence is something that happens as the result of your child's behavior, as the result of something impulsive that doesn't require any kind of parent intervention to actually implement this consequence. So, for example, you go to school without your jacket, you are cold. That is a natural consequence. Let's say you got a balloon animal at that carnival that you were at, you know, on Friday. Saturday morning, you have your balloon animal, you're rubbing it along your wall at home, and maybe it's like a texture while it's kind of rough and your balloon pops. That's a really hard lesson to learn. That doesn't feel good as a kid, but that is a natural consequence. So you rub your balloon along the rough wall, your balloon pops. It didn't require any kind of parent intervention, but you've learned a lesson that when you rub your balloon along a rough wall, it might pop and then you're going to feel sad. And for our kids with ADHD, they might need to pop ten balloons over the course of their childhood before they really make the connection or are able to really pause and think through that I don't want to do that. I think that's the other frustrating piece for parents that are raising kids with ADHD is that it just takes a lot more practice and a lot more trials for kids with ADHD. And again, it's not because they're bad, it's not because they're not smart.

Katie: Yeah, that's a huge one. They are very smart. Very often they are.

Mallory: Yeah. It's not that your child isn't smart. It's, it's that impulsive piece that they're not stopping to think through those potential consequences, where if they did stop, they could think through those potential consequences.

Katie: But I think the balloon example, too, it's like, you know, a lot of I know from one of my kids in particular, if his balloon popped, he would immediately be like, I need a new balloon. Go get me a new balloon. We need a balloon right now. Like, we have to replace it, right? And, it's really hard, to be honest with you. Like, as a professional, I can tell parents all day long what to do. And when it's your own kid, it does feel different. And I'm like, honey, drive to the store, get balloons, get a whole pack, because we don't want him to be without a

balloon. And the reality is, I mean everyone is going to do whatever they want to do, and there is no judgment whatsoever if you've replaced your child's balloon. I have also replaced my child's balloon. But it's okay for them to experience these natural consequences. And it can be helpful, as Mallory was saying, for them to learn. And so, as painful as it can be for them to experience the natural consequence, like, they didn't wear a jacket and now they are cold. And we don't want to see our kids be cold. We don't want them to be sad. But we also have to realize that that's okay. That's important. They're learning from that, and that is okay. We do not always have to rescue them from that consequence.

Mallory: That's really, that's a really great point. We don't always have to rescue them from that. And actually, that can be a great teacher for them. And there are going to be some impulsive things that your child does that don't have a natural consequence to them. And there are going to be some impulsive things that your child does where a do over just doesn't feel quite right for you. And in that case, a logical consequence might feel appropriate. So a logical consequence is parent imposed. So it does require some kind of parent intervention, and it's a consequence that is related to that impulsive behavior. So here's an example. Here's an example of a natural consequence. Your child is playing on their iPad, and they throw it down the stairs because you told them it's time to get off, and they're angry. So they throw it down the stairs, and the iPad breaks. That's a natural consequence. That really, really, really stinks for everyone involved. But that, didn't require any parent intervention. The iPad broke. That's a natural consequence. Let's take the same impulsive behavior. You tell your child it's time to get off the iPad. They're very upset about it. They throw the iPad down the stairs, and it doesn't break. What would be a logical consequence to that impulsive behavior? Maybe it's no more iPad for the rest of the day, or you've lost iPad tomorrow, or you have to earn the iPad back. That is a logical consequence. So it's related to throwing the iPad down the stairs, but it required parent intervention. It wasn't something that just happened naturally. And there will be times that your child is impulsive, does something impulsive, and you do have to do some kind of, you have to provide some kind of logical consequence, because a do over just wasn't appropriate. Whether it involves severe property destruction, it involves harm to another child.

Katie: I was thinking about that, too, because we were doing an example where we were talking through, giving some examples about, you know, what about if your child pushes another kid to get them off the swing. And I feel like, in that situation, what would you do

Mal? A logical consequence, right? It would be, you pushed this kid and what would be a logical consequence in that case?

Mallory: So, a logical consequence in that case would be, I would require my child to take a break. Like, your body is not calm. We need to take a break until you're ready to try again. And I would also be making my child make it right.

Katie: Yeah.

Mallory: So go back to the kid, make an apology, ask if they're okay. So in that case, again, there's no natural consequence for your child. Sometimes there's a natural consequence for your child pushing another child off a swing because the other kids might get mad at your kid, or they're going to say, like, I don't want to play, or, yeah, the kids might step up and provide a natural consequence for you, but taking a break from playing on the playground would be a logical consequence for that because it's parent imposed. It's not something that just happened naturally. And then I would be making my child go back and make it right, or get it right by apologizing to the child, asking to use the swing appropriately. And again, this is one of those situations where it's going to really depend on where you are, who you're with, what you're doing, whether there's, whether you offer a do over or whether you feel like having a natural or a logical consequence is going to be the best teacher. I think the common theme across all of these is that we're doing our best as parents to do this in a calm way. We're calm when we're doing the do over. We're calm when we're talking to our child about that natural consequence that just happened. We're calm when we're using a logical consequence. Our kids are going to be better able to learn from the experience if we are reacting to these situations in a calmer way. So you're doing your best to stay calm. Your child may not be staying calm. That also, I want to say in that moment of the, of the using a logical consequence, if your child is really upset about it, that's not the time to kind of problem solve or reason through with them. Well, this is what happens when you push your friend off the swing. You know, save those kind of conversations, the problem solving for later, once everyone's calmed down, is ready to actually, like, receive some kind of lesson from the impulsive behavior.

Katie: I love it. So our key takeaway for today is if your child is struggling with impulsivity, you are not alone. This is very common, and when we reframe the way we view it, we can really get curious about the best way to help our kids, whether that's giving a do over, helping

them see the future picture, leaning into some of those natural and logical consequences. We can really help our kids learn through a lot of repetition and a lot of practice to think things through. And as always, we are here to support you.

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!