

Shining with ADHD by The Childhood Collective

Episode #158: Balancing Structure & Flexibility: Summer Strategies for Kids with ADHD

Lori: Our kids with ADHD do really well with consistency and predictability. And so when we try and maintain some structure and some routine, they tend to do much better.

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 Erin, 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: So, I'll be honest, it was around spring break time that I was thinking that maybe the summer I would take it really slow with my kids, maybe a week or two of camp, but I was kind of just thinking it might be nice to have a chiller summer. Just recharging, being at home, swimming a bit, getting lots of time in the backyard. But after I had my kids home for all of spring break, with very few activities and very little structure, I changed my mind.

Katie: I get that. And you guys had an extra-long spring break. So, it was like, every Monday we're like, are you still on spring break? So, yeah.

Mallory: Still on spring break.

Katie: Yeah, love that for us. Yeah, I totally understand. And I think it is good. I know my kids definitely need time to relax and recharge, but they also crave structure. And quite honestly, I do a lot better in structure. And one of the other things that I have to figure out this summer is my kids just need a ton of opportunity to move their bodies.

Mallory: Yeah.

Lori: Yes. And my kids love their summer camp. We do, like, the same summer camp every year we have for multiple years. And it's nice because it's a great way to give them that structure that they kind of get with school. And my husband and I both work over the summer, so it can be, you know, obviously kind of stressful with trying to figure that out, but it's a great way to give them a little bit of structure and also have, like, the childcare we need to work.

Mallory: Absolutely. So, whether your kids are going to be home this summer, at summer school, at sleepaway camp (I wonder if I'll ever get there) or a mix of all the things, a little planning and preparation can really help make your summer a success.

Katie: Absolutely. So today we have five tips to help ease us all into summer and to make it a summer to really remember for our kids. So that's what we're going to be talking about today. And I want to start with our first tip, which isn't really a tip at all. It's more of just an acknowledgement that summer can actually be pretty stressful for us as parents. And it's expensive if you need to put your kids into childcare or camp, like, if you're working all day and you have to figure out, okay, now my kids aren't in school, what are we going to do? And if your kids are home, that can also feel really costly because there's, you know, you're trying to think of activities. And we love the library cause it's like, I don't have to spend any money at the library, but it can be just a lot. And we're out of our routine. And again, like, as working parents, we're trying to juggle a lot of things and just giving ourselves a lot of grace and realizing that whether you're home with your kids and that can be a whole lot of things or you're working and balancing, it's just a lot for all of us. And so we want to just acknowledge that and we're in that boat, and it's a lot. And really giving ourselves all the extra compassion and grace to realize it's just a season.

Lori: Yep. And if you're like me and you still don't have childcare for the summer and you have to work, you're not alone. I have a few of my weeks scheduled, and I still need to figure stuff out, so I'm procrastinating on my summer plans. One of our first tips for you for kind of creating a smoother summer with your kids is really to try and maintain as much routine as possible. So I think it's really, again, when you've had like the structure of the school year, and I know at this point, I'm just like, so over waking up at 06:00 a.m. every single day making lunches, and it's like, I just want to be done with it. So it can be really tempting to just like throw away any type of routine because you're just like, I just want to sleep in and do whatever. But our kids with ADHD do really well with consistency and predictability, and so when we try and maintain some structure and some routine, they tend to do much better with that. Again, that doesn't mean that you are going to structure every minute of every single day. Like, that just doesn't work. But it does help to kind of let your kids know what kind of plans you have for that day, let them know what the summer kind of looks like ahead of time, and to kind of have some predictability in their schedule each day. Again, for our family, sleep is so important, and I am a little bit of a very particular person about my kids sleep. And

I will say Katie and I have always been that way. Katie and I met when we were nanny sharing when our kids were little and we were sharing sleep training tips. And we just really value quality sleep because we know how important it is for kids' brains and kids' development. And again, we know when you have a child with ADHD, sleep can really be hard and disruptive and we have other podcasts kind of to help you through that. But one of the things I try and do is really keep my kids sleep schedule generally consistent. And so they might go to bed a little bit later in the summer, but we generally have consistent bedtimes and wake up times each day and try and make sure that we're getting, like, an adequate amount of sleep at night, which really, again, helps the behaviors at home. I know for one of mine in particular if she doesn't get enough sleep, we are having like meltdowns every single night and I can't handle that. My sanity can't handle it. So the sleep is important, is really important for me. If your child again has summer camp, like my kids are going to be in camp just because we're working, it's nice cause we still have that structure that's kind of like school. And we still have to go to bed and we still have to get up, but we have maybe a little bit of flexibility for a later bedtime and waking up a little bit later and it's a little slower, but we still have to get out the door, we still have to pack lunches.

Katie: You know, the other thing that you mentioned, I think it's really important is that when it comes to sleep routines, you can move your sleep routine in the summer. So if you want your kids to go to bed 30 minutes, 45 minutes, an hour later, but it's more the consistency day to day. So my kids typically go to bed at 7:30. And honestly I rarely deviate from that because my kids are the, just the awesome little ones that will wake up at six no matter what time they go to bed. So even if we stay out late, they're up at six and I know that. But some people might have more flexibility to say, okay, we're going to move our summer bedtime to 8:30 because my kid will sleep in until 7:00-7:30, whatever that looks like for your child and it's going to vary based on age. So you don't have to necessarily keep your school your bedtime, but once you set your kind of quote unquote summer bedtime, figuring that out and then trying as much as possible to be consistent. And of course there's going to be, summer is a lot of fun, you know, depending on where you live in Arizona, we're kind of like melting. But it's really fun. Depending on where you are, you might be outdoors a lot more and spending that time and then, yeah, it's hard. One of the things we always struggle with when we're in the Midwest, my husband is from the Midwest and it's literally light outside until like 9:45 p.m. So we don't have that here, we don't have daylight savings and it's dark by, I don't know, what like 8:00, 7:30? So we're, we're pretty lucky for that specifically because it's just

too hot, but that can be really confusing for our kids. So once you set that summer bedtime, it doesn't necessarily have to be the same as the school year, but just keeping in mind that once you set it, you can kind of shoot for that as a target.

Lori: Yeah and we just know with the science of sleep that kids, we're helping our kids internal clock when we set a consistent bedtime and a consistent wake up time. And it just really helps them be able to fall asleep at the same time each night when we're staying kind of consistent with that.

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: CHILDHOOD40 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 our third tip for transitioning to summer setting yourself up for success is to make expectations really clear upfront about what our responsibilities this summer, what is the summer going to look like? So we want you to work together as a family to talk through this, you're a team. So think through is your child going to have daily responsibilities? What are they going to be doing chores? Are they going to be allowed to use screens this summer? And what is the screen time plan going to look like? How does that look different if it looks different from during the school year? So up front at the beginning of summer, really talk through with your child as a team what is the summer going to look like? What are your expectations? What privileges is your child going to have so everyone knows what to expect? Because again our kids with ADHD do much better when expectations are very clear and then we're consistent with those expectations. Another thing to think about, because I know a lot of parents worry about this, is the summer slide. Is my child going to kind of lose their academic gains from this last school year over the summer? And where are they going to be when the school year starts? So I know that there's some parents have the fear about their child losing that progress and so they want to make sure that their child is kind of continuing

to practice and keep up with their academics. And I think we take a very balanced approach on this. There are some kids where we don't want you to stress about that. If they're doing okay academically, if they're reading daily, that's great and we would say focus your energy and invest your time and other experiences for your child. Getting outside, playing with friends, learning a new skill, because there's a lot of value in these things as well. And we also know that when it comes to doing schoolwork at home, for a lot of kids with ADHD, that's a big struggle for parents. It impacts the parent child relationship. So if your child is doing okay academically, we don't want you to stress too much about that summer slide, right. However, the caveat here is if your child has a learning disability like dyslexia or the school has advised you that your child really needs to work on a specific skill because they're behind grade level, the summer sometimes really is a great time to catch up on those skills because they don't have the stress and the pressure that comes along with school, and we can really hone in and target those weak areas. So I think this depends a lot on, you know your child best. This depends on where your child is academically, kind of how you approach the amount of, you know, academic work that your child is doing over the summer.

Lori: Yeah. And I know last summer, one of my kids was struggling with math facts and the teacher had, like, commented at the end of the year that she was having difficulty understanding, like, addition/subtraction. So we tried to make it fun and just got, like, a little rocket math app on my phone, and we just practiced some of those fluency things for like, five minutes a day and she liked doing it cause it was an app. And the other thing that is usually free to everyone, and many places have this, is your public library. So every year, to kind of keep my kids excited about reading cause my kids don't really like to read, they're not struggling readers, but they, you know, it's good to kind of keep practicing, and reading is really important over the summer. At the library, they have some great programs that get kids excited. My kids earn prizes and things like that, and they can keep track of it, and they make it kind of a fun thing. So the library is a great option for that, too.

Katie: Do you remember when we were kids, and you would do some sort of summer reading challenge, and you would win a personal pan pizza from..

Mallory: From Pizza Hut!

Katie: From Pizza Hut, yes!

Mallory: It was the best. Yes.

Katie: Yeah. Was that at the library, or was that through the school?

Lori: I think so. And my kids last year earned, oh, what is that, Raising Canes? They got, like, a giant drink. It was like, a 32 ounce drink. I'm m like, I don't want you getting a 32 ounce. How? Like, it's like, the size of my child. Like, why are they giving away a 32 ounce drink? Like, they were so excited about it, though.

Katie: Oh, my gosh. I would have done anything for that personal pan pizza. I mean, that was like, my sister and I still talk about that. Like, do you remember when we would get our pizzas and it was a really big deal. I don't know if pizza is still on the prize list, I'll have to check it out.

Mallory: But, yeah, there are. I mean, my boys love doing the summer reading challenge through our library every year. And there are some really exciting prizes and things along the way. Always get a free book or sometimes multiple free books. We get coupons to get books from the library that they were kind of phasing out of the library whether they're old or whatever, you can get those for free. So there's a lot of fun stuff that comes along with these public library summer reading programs. We look forward to that every year. So that's a great point, Lori. It's a good way to kind of keep them engaged in a low key way.

Lori: Yeah. And I think with some of those, like, creating expectations, we'll link this in the show notes, but we have routines for morning, afternoon, evening that you can get from our website and many people who have already bought them and we use them in our homes. It's great because you can just print it off again and change it for the summer. So it's not like you have to, like, buy a whole other routine, it's customizable. So we're going to redo that when summer comes, just so we have some of that consistency still, but the routine is definitely going to change and be a little bit different than it is during the school year. So we'll put those in the show notes.

Mallory: Absolutely. And just one more thing I want to say about this, this tip for summer success. I also love setting a goal or two with my child for a new skill that they're going to learn over the summer. So again, this is a conversation that kind of happens up front. Like, what do you want to learn to do this summer? And sometimes it's more like practical like, I

really need you to learn how to tie your shoes this summer we're going to work on that. Or maybe one of my boys really is a reader, setting a goal for how many chapter books he's going to read that summer? Honestly, like, 30 chapter books would probably be a realistic goal for him. Like, he's constantly reading, he devours those. But it's just a fun way to add a little bit of structure to their summer, something to work towards. And again, you just, you set that expectation upfront and you work that into your daily routine and then it just becomes the habit for them.

Katie: I love it. And another tip that we have, I think this is our fourth tip, is to help your kids be prepared for new activities as much as possible. So one of the things that we talk a lot about is helping our kids be prepared and seeing the future picture kind of anticipation of what's coming. And so your child might be trying a new camp. Obviously, that can be really challenging for a lot of our kids. We get a lot of messages from families every year, like, how do I choose a camp that will work with my child and kind of help support them with various needs, you know, and we, it's can be really difficult. And one of the things that we tell families is as you're starting a new thing, whether that's a new activity or a new camp or maybe some kids are in summer school working on those academic skills, it's unfamiliar, we want you to talk through it with your child and say, okay, what's it going to look like when we go to camp? What's it going to look like when you maybe lose the game? Like, what are you going to do? And talk through it with them and plan and problem solve those different situations. And this is going to be very specific for each child, but the idea is, you know your kids the best and one of the things that we can do for them is to help sort of forecast, okay, this is the plan. Not only what's coming, but also what might be some of those roadblocks for them can be really helpful to just problem solve and make a plan and say, okay, what can we do? And that's a, again, a skill that we want our kids to internalize and to do for themselves as they get older, but we're going to start by modeling that for them.

Mallory: Absolutely. And to your point, Katie, we don't have to like prep them for every aspect of everything or problem solve everything that could potentially happen. But as Katie said, you know your child best. You know, what is, you know, pretty consistently challenging for your child, problem solve those things. Because again, we don't also want to, you know, we're on our way to camp and we're like lecturing them about the million things that they need to remember. Really, you know, target those things that are reliably challenging for your child. Make a plan for those things, practice those things at home if you can, depending on

what it is, and then you're just going to set your child up for success. When summer really is for a lot of kids, a lot of new experiences. They're at camp with kids they've never been at camp with before. There's a lot of new experiences. So setting yourself up for success by talking as much about those things ahead of time is going to just help everyone out. And our final point here, and we've alluded to this a bit is that get your child involved in these summer plans, get their input, and this is, summer is really a great opportunity to lean into your child's strengths. And we know that a lot of kids with ADHD struggle at school. They struggle during the school year. The school day is hard for them. They come home, they have nothing left to give, but they've got to do homework, and that's taxing on your parent/child relationship. And we know that there can be times where you feel like there's not a lot of space left in between all of those things to really lean into what they love and the things that they do well. But summer really gives that great opportunity to lean into those strengths, lean into those interests as much as possible. And so I know we've already mentioned going to the library, but, you know, checking out books that really are tailored to your child's interest, rather than, you know, reading the book that the whole class has to read over the summer, they can really lean into those interests, reading the books that they want. Maybe your child really loves arts and crafts. Finding cheap ways to do, provide more opportunities for your child to do that at home. Maybe your child is a really active kid, and they love moving their body. So how can we get them more opportunities to practice the baseball in the backyard, at the park.

Katie: You could set up a whole obstacle course right at your house and pull those pillows off the couch. It always gives me anxiety, but I'm like, all right, we're doing this. We need to move our bodies, and it's 114 degrees outside. But I think that's such a cool way to describe it, like, leaning into our kids' strengths. And I think about one of my kids is really entrepreneurial, and so I can always count on her to be like, mom, I'm going to make a business. It's a lemonade stand. Like, I'm going to need some lemons and a pitcher and a stand. And so thinking that through, like, what is your child interested in? What do they love? And even whether you're at home or at camp or with a babysitter throughout the day, or maybe you're sharing, like, one family sends their kids to your house one day, and then you have to work, so you send your kids over there. But thinking about, yeah, how can we lean into their strengths and what they naturally gravitate towards? And we also have a really good podcast episode that we can share about, it was with Lizzie Asa, who is a mastermind at getting her kids to play independently. And a lot of what we talked about today really

reminds me of that and giving our kids that space to get creative and like figure something out, but it takes time. And she talks about this kind of hump that our kids will go over where they're like, I'm bored, I need an activity, but if you allow the space, and really especially she talks about this, she's an ADHD parent herself and ADHD brains just need a little extra time to know that I have the time to really dive into this. And so when we give our kids that, that freedom, that space a little bit too, and she has tons of really good ideas in her episode, but that can be a really magical thing for them to become more independent. And for those of us, like myself, I work from home, I need my kids to play independently throughout parts of the day so that I can get stuff done and it's really tricky when they're home, honestly.

Lori: So, yeah, we just, if you're like us, and you're in a very hot climate. So we are in the desert of Arizona and it is like 120 outside and unfortunately, like the only thing a lot of times for us to do with our kids is like swim, but not everyone can swim every day. But we just put together a lot of people's recommendations for like indoor climbing activities and things like that. So we'll link that in the show notes too. So that, you know, again, if, if it's hot and you're looking for activities for your ADHDer to like get their energy out. And again, those kids who love to climb, we took lots of recommendations from other ADHD families of the things that their kids really did well with. So we'll link that too.

Katie: I love that list. And there's things on there that I would have never thought of.

Lori: I know.

Katie: There's like this Swedish ladder. I'm now thinking I need to figure out where to put that. You can get one first and then we can come to your house and try it out, Mal and then. So, yeah, no, it's a cool little list. That's a good idea, we should put that in there. And I think it was really helpful to me to see other people's ideas because I'm like, how do you all do this? And depending on where you live, half the year it might be snowing. So we all have to have time that's indoors, and so that's, that's a huge one. So our key takeaway for today is that with a little bit of planning, all of us parents and kids really can enjoy our summer and find that balance between building skills and rest and relaxation. And as always, we are here to support you.

Thanks for listening to Shining with ADHD by your hosts, Lori, Katie, and Mallory of The Childhood Collective.

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

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