

Shining with ADHD by The Childhood Collective

Episode #159: ADHD Parenting: Perspective Is Everything with Rachel Nielson

Rachel: Have to remember that ADHD is a legitimate disability, and this has been a really important mindset shift for me.

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

Lori: And I'm Lori.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mallory: Lori and I are so excited to have someone we admire a lot on the podcast today, Rachel Nielson.

Lori: Rachel's the host of the top-rated parenting podcast '3 in 30 Takeaways for Moms'. Each 30-minute episode offers 3 takeaways to help overwhelm moms become more self-assured and find more magic in motherhood.

Mallory: Rachel and her husband, Ryan, are parents to two miracles. Her son came into their family through adoption, and her daughter came through IVF. They live in the mountains of Idaho, I'm a little jealous, with their dog, Petra.

Lori: She's also the creator of the Flecks of Gold Journal that all three of us love and have in our own homes. So welcome, Rachel.

Rachel: Oh, thank you so much for having me. I have loved your work for a long time. It's helped me a lot with my own child. I've done both of your online courses, Shining at School and your course on behavior modification, remind me the name of that.

Lori: Creating Calm, yep.

Rachel: Creating Calm, yes! I've done both of them and they've been super helpful, so it's just a joy for me to be here today.

Lori: Oh, that's awesome. And I was just saying, before we got on, I got the kids Flecks of Gold Journal this year at Christmas, you sent us a copy and my daughter has used it so many days and she tends to be kind of like, she tends to focus on the negative things that happened

during the day and just sitting down and, like, thinking about what were fun things that happened today or writing some of those memories down. She's just very sentimental and loves having those memories and looking back. So she's really loved it.

Rachel: Oh, I love hearing that. It's been fun for me, too. My daughter started doing it and there's a space for them to draw, too and I love seeing her little illustrations of her best moments from her week. So your family's loving it, too.

Lori: Yep.

Mallory: We've been followers of yours, Rachel, for a long time. I mean, since we started The Childhood Collective, since 2019. You know, you've been sharing your story and hosting your podcast for so long, it's really exciting to actually get a chance to talk to you. I remember, how long ago was it now that you got your, Petra is a vizsla, right?

Rachel: Yes, she is, yeah. We got her in 2021? She's two years old. We got her in 2022, I guess, just almost exactly two years ago.

Mallory: Oh, wow. I remember when you were going to pick her up and then you posted. I don't know, I love vizslas, I've never owned one, but when you were sharing that on Instagram, I was instantly jealous. They're such beautiful dogs.

Rachel: Yes.

Lori: I was like, I don't even know what you guys are talking about. Yeah, explain what that is, because I don't know.

Rachel: Yeah, she's our puppy we just love. And she is like, they're such a fun breed because they're super athletic and so my husband loves that he can run with her and hike with her, but they're super snuggly and that's what I need. So, she's like my little cuddle bug, and then she goes out for a run with my husband. So, she's been perfect for our family.

Lori: Oh fun. Yeah, we have a golden doodle, and he is just like the snuggliest. Like, I mean, if a dog could hug a person, he like hugs us all throughout the day. Like, he just wants to, like, live on top of us, it's great.

Rachel: Sounds like Petra.

Mallory: My boys are begging for a dog. We don't currently have any pets, and I have to admit that pet free life is really easy, but my boys are starting to wear on me.

Rachel: Well, I totally recommend a vizsla, so you'd love having one.

Mallory: Yeah. Yeah, I bet. So, in addition to being a dog mom, hosting your amazing podcast, being the creator of the Flecks of Gold Journal now for moms or parents and for kids, you're also mom to a child with ADHD. And since you're the queen of 3 in 30, we were hoping that today you can share with us your top three takeaways for parenting kids with ADHD.

Rachel: Yes, absolutely. And these have come to me after a lot of years of trying to figure this out. And I, as I was prepping for this conversation, I was thinking, what direction do I want to go? Do I want to give takeaways for like, the diagnosis process that I wish I would have known beforehand? Or in the end, I sort of came down to how to be a calmer parent to a child with ADHD. How to be a connected, calm mom when you have a child that has these extra needs that can be really frustrating to parent. And I'm sure anybody who's listening to this can relate. And, I've definitely lost my temper with my son when he's impulsive, when he gets in fights at school or at summer camp, or he forgets things, he doesn't listen to me when I ask him five times to do things. And so these three strategies have really helped me to come a long way in parenting with him with more love and connection. So I'm excited to share them with your community today.

Mallory: Yeah, let's jump right in. What's your first takeaway?

Rachel: So, my first takeaway is to remember that ADHD is a legitimate disability. And this has been a really important mindset shift for me because if my child had another type of disability that was more visible, I would be more patient. And so sometimes my husband will say to me, or I will say to him, whoever needs it at the moment, remember, he has a legitimate disability. And so we shouldn't be holding him to the same standard as a child who's neurotypical. And that just sort of helps us to take down the frustration a little bit. If our son had down syndrome, we wouldn't be angry at our son for not being able to do the same types of developmental or academic tasks as his peers because we would have a lot of

understanding around his disability. If our son had a physical disability and was in a wheelchair, we would not be angry at him for not being able to walk. So, similarly, when my son is impulsive or forgets things or some of these things, when I remind myself his brain works differently than other children's, it helps me have a lot more compassion for him and parent from a place of love and connection. And that's just been really helpful for me to remember that.

Lori: Yeah. And it's hard because there is, you know, when you're looking at resources for ADHD or even sharing the diagnosis with friends or family, you get a lot of potential feedback that it isn't a legitimate diagnosis. and, you know, all of us I think have situations that we've been in where people have really denied that as an actual diagnosis. So sometimes it can be really hard to wrap your head around that because it isn't something that you can actually physically see. It's these behavioral kind of manifestations of these internal executive functioning challenges. It's so much harder to understand.

Rachel: Yeah, totally. And I feel like there's even a hesitation with calling it a disability. It feels like, does that really, like count? And what can I, you know, I was recently advocating for my son in a space where the environment was not conducive and they were frustrated with him, but he was really doing the best that he could. And I said to the adult, the other adult, I said, he has a disability and you need to accommodate for it. And it almost felt like, am I allowed to say that? Like, but it's different. If you had a child there that had a visible disability, everybody would be understanding, and my son does too and so let's all figure out a way to support him and advocate and help him. And so that's been just really, and I'm the one that needs the reminder most of all times, like, remind myself to take a step back and treat him with the love and compassion he deserves because his brain does work differently. One thing that's been really helpful for me is I read the '12 Principles for Raising a Child with ADHD' by Doctor Russell Barkley, and he talked about how developmentally kids with ADHD are typically about 30% younger than their actual age as far as, like social/emotionally. And that was like a huge light bulb for me to realize that my son is twelve, but social/emotionally, he's more like he's eight. And so if I'm expecting him to be able to handle situations that other neurotypical twelve-year-olds could handle, I need to remember, well, actually, he's more like an eight-year-old and would an eight-year-old be able to handle this? And this can be tricky too, because he's super smart.

Lori: Yes.

Rachel: And so it's not like intellectually he's behind, but it's more of the, it's the social emotional piece that I have to remind myself, would an eight-year-old be able to handle this? If not, then it makes sense that my son can't either.

Mallory: Yeah, that's the other piece I was going to mention, especially for other adults who, you know, don't live with your kid, is that asynchronous development piece where, like you said, intellectually, he's really smart and he probably can carry on a great conversation and talk in-depth about certain topics that would kind of, you know, show up adults, right? So then it's hard for adults to kind of reconcile like, wow, this kid is really smart and he can talk about really complicated topics, but then he can't manage his emotions when he's not first in line. And that's hard for adults who don't understand ADHD to kind of reconcile this asynchronous development, such, you know, great skills in some areas, but really struggling in other areas. And I feel like that's just another complicating factor for our kids with ADHD.

Rachel: Yeah, absolutely.

Lori: Well, let's talk about your second takeaway.

Rachel: Yes. So, my second takeaway is that as a parent, you can talk through your own compensatory strategies for your child so they hear executive functions modeled. And as you do that, as you do that more and more often, your child will start to gain some skills and then you'll be a calmer parent because you'll see that they're actually making progress. So, I think for me, it's just helped me to feel like a calmer parent when I feel like, okay, I'm being a little bit proactive here with this child. I'm teaching him, it makes me feel like a good mom, and that makes me feel calmer. And so it's just such a simple thing to sort of narrate out loud what executive functioning looks like, what decisions I'm making that are kind of just innate to me, but I need to narrate out loud to him. And so I sort of become a narrator of my life. And I have executive function struggles, too. Like, I am a scattered mess, and so it's like. And my husband and my son relates to me in that way like, we kind of laugh about how we're both a mess. And so then I can say to him, like, okay, I'm like, Noah, I just set a timer for 28 minutes because that's when this load of laundry will be done. And so that will help me remember to forward it to the dryer, because if I don't set that timer, I'm going to forget, and

then these clothes are going to get stinky and I'm going to have to wash them again. And so I'm just sort of telling him what I do every day to manage adult life.

Lori: Okay, well, I just learned a skill for doing my laundry. Thank you very much for sharing that, because my clothes are always stinky and never in the dryer.

Rachel: Yes. And I have to add, I mean, I know, like, there is a big, and you, too can speak to this, but I know there's a big hereditary component or genetic component with ADHD, so there probably are a lot of people listening who have ADHD.

Lori: A lot of people. Yep.

Rachel: And so, like, narrating for them for your kid, how you have learned to manage ADHD. My son's adopted, so that genetic link isn't there for us. But, I definitely have some struggles of my own. And so, like, I literally got a lanyard for my keys and tied them to my purse so that I would stop losing them, so that they were always connected to my purse. And so I narrated to my son, hey, the reason why I did this is because I always lose my keys. I'll say things to him like, this paperwork is super important, and I know I'm likely to forget it in the morning and so I'm putting it in my car right now so that I don't forget it in the morning. So I'm just kind of just trying to always tell him out loud what it is that I'm doing. And it makes us feel like more of a team, like, in our scatteredness, instead of being at odds with each other, it's like we're supporting each other and figuring out strategies, and hopefully that's helping him long term to start thinking that way for himself.

Mallory: The other thing that I love about this strategy is parents that are raising kids with ADHD feel a lot of pressure to be doing all the things, right. To be helping their child develop skills, to be taking them to the therapies, to feel like any downtime, you're wasting downtime, valuable time that you could be playing a board game with your kid to grow executive function or whatnot. By just narrating simply what you're doing, you're growing your child's skills without really adding any extra time or anything else to your plate other than you're just going to start speaking your internal monologue out loud, right?

Rachel: Yes.

Mallory: So, another reason that I love this strategy, it really doesn't take up any extra time or space, just start speaking some of the things you're already doing out loud. And it really does help kids with ADHD to kind of like, oh, you actually do put a lot of thought into why you do that, something that way or why you're making me do that. So I, you know, our listeners always love strategies that are not taking them too much extra time, too much extra effort and so that's what makes, I think, this takeaway really great.

Rachel: Oh, yeah. And I think starting to, my son's twelve now, so I can sort of start to turn some of it over to him and start asking him questions and saying things like, how are you going to remember that your screen time is over in 30 minutes? And he'll say, oh, I could set a timer like you do, you know, I mean, he doesn't say that last part, but I think essentially that's, he's seen me set a lot of timers, so he's like, I could set a timer. I'm like, great, will you do that? And there's just so many technologies now. Like, he'll just say, Alexa, set a timer for 30 minutes, and I'll say to him, when the timer goes off, you need to turn it off. And if you don't, then you lose your screen time tomorrow. And so we're setting those expectations, but I'm kind of trying to hand it over to him so it's not always me managing him. But I'll narrate for him. Like, I don't love folding laundry, and so I'm going to pair it with watching screen time. And that's fine to pair, like, something enjoyable with something you don't like. But, like, how are you going to remember to stop? How are you going... because he won't. Like, he'll just keep playing video games or watching tv for hours. So I'm trying to teach him how to integrate some of those enjoyable things into his life, but also figure out ways and skills to stop and move on to the next thing when it's time.

Lori: Which is so important because you think about, I mean, I work with so many families that are in their kids teen years, and they're like, wow, you know, in a couple of years, they're going to be going off to college and being on their own, and I'm not going to be there to shut off the screen. I'm not going to be there to say, you know, it's time. I've been on here 3 hours and I need to go to bed because I have a class in the morning. You have to start working on those skills now, early. So that's really helpful.

Mallory: If Katie were on this episode with us, our speech language pathologist, she would be saying, this is a great opportunity to use declarative language. I wonder how you're going to remember it's time to get off the computer. I wonder if there's something you could do tonight to help you remember your paper in the morning. I just had to chime in and, you know, since

Katie's not here to speak for herself, I have a feeling she'd jump in and say, this is a great opportunity to use declarative language, which we have a whole other podcast episode on if our listeners are interested. But, yeah, that is a strategy that helps kind of transfer the responsibility to our kids as they're getting older and they're becoming more independent and they want that independence. And you want them to have that independence, too.

Rachel: Yeah. And I do feel like tweens and teens, they're sort of resistant to anything that they can sense is like a strategy.

Lori: Yep.

Rachel: But because I have, I've spoken out loud that I do these things too, it feels, I think it feels like less of a strategy to him, then me being like what could you do, Noah, because your brain is broken? Like, that's I think sometimes that's what he feels like unless he's also seen me do it. He's like, oh, people do this, it's not just me. He does it too. And so now I can do it as well, because this is just part of being an adult with an overloaded brain in a frantic world. Like, we do things to help ourselves remember things, and we can transfer those skills to our kids if we're narrating out loud.

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 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 is gluten free and I love that I can customize groceries based my needs. 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 when they come in our Hungryroot box.

Lori: 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. Head to the show notes to grab our exclusive link and discount code.

Katie: 40% off and you feel great about feeding your family. Try Hungryroot today!

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

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

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

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

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

Well, let's talk about your third takeaway.

Rachel: So my third takeaway for parenting a child with ADHD with love and connection is to look for good in your child, especially in super hard seasons. And this is why I created my Flecks of Gold Journal, which you mentioned at the beginning of the episode. The concept behind this journal is it's just a place for moms to write down a golden moment that they experience with their kids each day and or even by themselves. But like a golden moment, something good, that happened. And it sort of starts to retrain your brain to be looking for the good in your child or in your life. And that's especially important if there's not a lot, if it feels like there's not a lot of good to identify or look for. And this concept came to me when I was

a new mom and Noah was colicky. And I had just looked forward to motherhood so much and idealized it so much and it was not living up to what I had hoped for. And I heard a religious sermon that talked about a young miner in the California gold rush who went looking to strike it rich and he thought that he was going to just find these big nuggets of gold everywhere. And day after day, he's dipping his pan in the river, and all he's fighting is rocks. He's getting discouraged. He's ready to go home. And an elderly prospector walks by, and he notices, the young man notices that this elderly prospector has a big belt, a big, pouch that seems to be weighed down with gold. So he stops him and says, I want to know your secret. Like, how did you find those big golden nuggets? Because all I'm finding is rocks. And the elderly prospector says, you're just not, you just don't know where to look. These aren't big nuggets. He opens up his pouch and shows him, these are just flecks of gold that I've collected over time. And he showed him, start looking for the flecks and accumulating the flecks, and that will become a treasure to you. And when I heard that, I thought, okay, I thought motherhood was going to be all huge, golden moments, like beautiful, romanticized, you know, pictures of frolicking outside with my kids and snuggling and all the things. And that's not what it is. But there are little flecks of gold, and if I start collecting those, then I'm going to feel, anchored in my motherhood because of those little flecks. So I started looking for him and writing them down. And that has become even more important as my son's gotten older. And I just have to look for all the good in him and there is so much good in him. And when I start looking for it, it becomes all you can see because you're looking for it rewires the story that you're telling yourself about that child. And so it's become a really tangible practice for me to sort of, see my son in a new light and in a more encouraging light. And I think it's honestly transformed the trajectory of our relationship over the years, because I'd say now, I see more of the good in my son than the hard in my son. And that's, like, been a shift over the last few years as I've started actively looking for it using this journaling practice.

Lori: That's amazing. Yeah. And it is so easy, I mean, I think all of us have a tendency in research shows, to think about, most of our thoughts are negative. The vast majority of our thoughts are negative. And when you're parenting a child that has so many needs, it's so easy to only focus on the challenges. Even if you aren't, it's so easy because parenting is just hard to focus on that one horrible tantrum where they said, I hate you, and that's all you take away from the day. That's all you remember. When there might have been lots of other moments that were completely forgotten, because that was just such an emotional experience for you. And it is like, it is a practice that you have to get into. And I have to say, like, I'm not good

about it personally. It's very easy for me to feel overwhelmed by the challenging things during the day, but it is a really helpful practice.

Rachel: Yeah. And I, when I started doing this, I just used a spiral notebook, you know? And you can start this practice without any special journal. Just start writing down the golden moments that you see. Years later, I decided to actually create a journal, which was a place that's dedicated to collecting your flecks of gold. And it's a three-year journal, so that you see the moment that you wrote the year before on that day. It's sort of, you circle all, you go all the way through the journal, and then you start over again, and there's a space for the next year. So you can read the golden moment from the year before as you add your golden moment from this day on, this year. And it's really, like, just reinforcing, oh, we had so many. We had this great moment last year, and I remember it, and I love these kids, and I love being a mom. And so no matter how hard the current season is, it reminds you that it's worth it. And so if listeners are interested in the Flecks of Gold Journal, depending on when this episode airs, hopefully they'll be back in stock because they totally sold out and we're waiting for more to come, but, more are on the way. So you can go to flecksofgold.com, and 3in30podcast.com/flecksofgold either of those URL's will work. And you can use the affiliate code TCC to get 10% off, The Childhood Collective, TCC, because I think this could be especially powerful for moms that have the extra stuff that makes motherhood feel a little bit harder sometimes.

Mallory: Absolutely. I know this could help a lot of families, and we all have our own Flecks of Gold Journal and we use them. And I personally, I mean, I'm kind of getting the chills as you're describing the reason for it. I'm kind of in a, I feel like I'm in a hard season of parenting, sorry. But, my husband and I have gotten into a practice of when we notice those little flecks, we just make eye contact. We just know that we both need to notice those little things.

Lori: Yeah, I think that's a good point, Mal, that it isn't necessarily. I don't like to write. it's hard for me to write. So my husband is always the one that uses the journal, and he loves it. But I think it is really, you don't have to even write it down. Sometimes it is just a look with a spouse, or sometimes it's talking to your child at night before they go to bed, where some of the cool things that happened today or over dinner or talking out loud, just like you would

talk through a strategy, talking out loud about the things that you noticed today about your child that were awesome, and sharing that at dinner.

Rachel: Just I feel like this phrase, flecks of gold, like, now that my kids know it, I will say to them, like, this is my fleck of gold for today. And so we will, like, all have a moment where we're like, yeah, this is a great moment. Or they know, like, I'm my mom's fleck of gold today. Like, you know, I'm, like, driving in the car with my son and we're listening to Harry Potter and the sun is going down and I'll say to him, like, this is my fleck of gold for today. And he just smiles, knowing, like, my mom loves me.

Lori: Aw, yeah.

Rachel: I think these kids get so much correction and they start to believe, like, I'm a screw up. My parents think I'm a screw up. You know, I think Noah believes, like, he's adored by his mother, and I also have to, like, do the correction and stuff like that. But he knows because of flecks of gold, that mentality that I try to weave in, that he truly is adored and delighted in, and I'll try to share that with him when we're having those really good moments. One of my motherhood mentors said to me once "sometimes in motherhood, the hard moments outnumber the beautiful moments, but the beautiful moments outweigh the hard moments". And that is so true. Like, if you can give weight to those beautiful moments, it can get you through all the hard ones.

Lori: Absolutely.

Mallory: I love that.

Lori: Yeah. Thank you so much for coming on and sharing these important messages. And I think all of us are going through challenging seasons and things like that, so it's just encouraging to hear. But can you let our listeners know where they can find more about you?

Rachel: Yes, absolutely. So my podcast is '3 in 30 Takeaways for Moms' and my show is not solely dedicated to ADHD, but having a child with ADHD, I have episodes sort of sprinkled throughout about ADHD and also just kids with big emotions. And so I've put together a playlist because I have over 350 episodes, so I don't want you to have to dig through that. So I've put together a special playlist that would be particularly helpful for moms of kids with

ADHD, with, like, my best of, and you can get that by going to 3in30podcast.com/ADHD and sign up there to get sort of a highlight reel of the episodes that might help you the most.

Mallory: That's so helpful. Thank you for doing that for our listeners.

Rachel: Absolutely.

Mallory: Well, thank you much, Rachel. We really appreciate you coming on today, sharing your three takeaways on our podcast. Love it so much. It was such a delight talking with you.

Rachel: Thank you so much for having me.

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!