

Shining with ADHD by The Childhood Collective

Episode #162: Parents Who Have ADHD: Systems that Work with Amy Marie Hann

Amy: It's because we don't think it should be hard, but it's okay that it is hard. You know, I think there's so many of the things, it's like just recognizing it. It's like, yes, transitions are hard for people with ADHD and, like, beating yourself up or feeling like this shouldn't be as hard doesn't make it any easier.

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: Today, we are so thrilled to welcome Amy Marie Hann back on the Shining with ADHD podcast. Amy is the creator of Master the Mundane, a unique online course and community that empowers moms with ADHD to manage their home and families in a way that works for their brain. ADHD has touched every area of her life. Amy herself was diagnosed at the age of five and her three kids, husband, dad and sister, are also ADHD.

Lori: Amy has also fostered, adopted and homeschooled kids with ADHD and brings a wealth of personal experience, authenticity and relatability to everything she creates. She believes that the ADHD brain is uniquely created to bring good to the world. And the best thing we can do as moms of ADHD kids is to model what it looks like to thrive with ADHD. She's a loud laughter, avid reader and workout enthusiast with a mild obsession with HGTV.

And today Amy's going to talk with us about setting up realistic systems that work for families with ADHD.

Katie: Amy, welcome. We are so excited to have you back on the podcast today. We were just reminiscing about how you were our very first guest on season one, so this is pretty full circle.

Amy: Yes. Oh, my gosh. I was so honored then, and I'm thrilled to be back. I can't believe it's been almost a year.

Lori: I know, and I love your intro. I'm like, I feel like we could be best friends because I definitely have an obsession with working out and HGTV.

Katie: Yes. I love when you post, like, the boards where you find a bunch of furniture and rugs and lamps and stuff and you're like, I don't even have to buy this. I get dopamine just from making this image. And I'm like, hey, I get dopamine from looking at these images. So it's pretty cool when you do that.

Amy: Absolutely. That I tell people all the time. I'm like seriously, you got to try it. It is like, it feels so satisfying. And you didn't even have to, like, buy any DIY stuff.

Lori: Yeah, that's amazing.

Katie: And you're not like, sanding anything in your garage.

Amy: Exactly.

Lori: Well, before we dive into the back-to-school transition and setting up systems that work in real life, we want you to tell our listeners a little bit about you and your family.

Amy: Yes. Okay. So, we live in Florida. I am a mom of three kids. My oldest is Bowman. He is 13 going into 8th grade. Frank is my middle guy. He is going into fourth grade, is nine. And Libby is my youngest. She is five and going into kindergarten this year. So that will be a big thing for us.

Katie: Yes.

Amy: So we're excited. So, all three of my kids, like you mentioned, are diagnosed with ADHD. I was diagnosed as a child, and, then my husband was diagnosed in his late forties after my oldest was diagnosed. And he went through that process of learning about ADHD and was like, man, I have it, too. And then, both my husband and my oldest are also diagnosed on the spectrum. So, for me that transition to having three kids, I was diagnosed with ADHD as a child, which I'm so thankful for. In the mid-eighties, it was very rare that girls, I didn't know anyone else that was a girl that was diagnosed besides my sister and on medicine. But for me, the transition to motherhood was hard, especially after that third child. Just the added mental load of all the things and all the additional executive functioning, I, was just so much harder than I anticipated. And so that is why I do what I do, which is really try to help moms create systems that work with their ADHD brain, because it was really hard for me and I tried everything out there, and everything was really created for neurotypical moms raising neurotypical kids. And so, that's why I do what I do. And it has been such a joy to get to meet people like you in the process.

Lori: Yeah, it's so needed. I mean, that's one of the main things we hear from the families that we work with is, how do we do this when we have ADHD ourselves? and I love your account, because you really empower families to feel like, no, I can do this. It's hard, but I can do it, and I can have systems to be successful.

Katie: And I think about, you know, in your bio, too, you said this, but thinking about, for our own kids, modeling that, and I know that that's a huge part of my family is modeling. Okay, I'm really struggling with this thing. Meal planning is really hard for your mom. So, what can we do? And bringing my kids along for that, and having them help and teaching them like, hey, that's okay. This is hard for me, and we can do it together. And that's teaching them, like, they can do this for themselves in their adult life and teen years and everything else. So it's so huge. I love how you're just modeling this and it's really cool. So we know that we're all going through this big transition right now, it's back to school. But transitions can just be really especially challenging for ADHD families, whether that's the beginning of a school year, a holiday break, both getting into the holiday break, getting out of the holiday break, vacations, again, like leaving on vacation, coming back from vacation. So, in your own experience, why do you think this is the case?

Amy: Well, I think just off the bat, you know, it's funny even preparing for this I hadn't thought about that. But just hearing you rephrase that question, I just think it's because we don't think it should be hard, but it's okay that it is hard. You know, I think there's so many things, it's like just recognizing it. It's like, yes, transitions are hard for people with ADHD and, like, beating yourself up or feeling like this shouldn't be as hard doesn't make it any easier. So, I think just giving ourselves permission and space to realize that transitions are hard and then giving ourselves the space to transition and not expecting ourselves and our kids to just change, you know, everything in their life right off the bat. The other piece of this is that I see so much, and I think I did this for such a long time, is we try and change everything at once. So, we're going back to school and we're like, okay, not only are we just going back to school, but let's also implement this brand new screen time strategy. And now you guys are going to do chores. And by the way, we're going paleo all of a sudden. We're like, we're going to use this thing, this one change to change everything and it's just too much. And we try to take on too much because our, you know, ADHD brains love dopamine and challenge and so it's a lot more interesting. Instead of just being like, okay, now this is hard. Now I have to, like, make lunches and get the kids up. And instead just focusing on the basics of, like, there are things about back to school that are, you know, we're all gonna have to do. It's like lunches, getting dressed, getting out the door on time. Like giving yourself permission to just focus on those things and then giving yourself time to, you know, create what systems you need to, whether you need to, like, set an alarm or, you know, whatever small things you can do to just get those few basic things figured out before you're trying to add to it, and then add to your kids, too, because then you're going to feel frustrated, you're going to feel bad about yourself, and then they're also going to just feel overwhelmed. And just even the basic thing for kids with ADHD, just being back in a classroom all day is a big transition. They are going to be, dysregulated when they come home. They're going to be tired. They're going to be cranky. So, we not only need to give ourselves grace and space, but we need to create space for that. Realizing, you know, having the foresight to realize, like, this, is this in itself just the basics of being a classroom all day is going to be hard, so we need to leave space for that.

Katie: I totally agree with you, and I think, you know, a lot of it, too, is the expectations. Like you said, like, we don't think it should be hard. And I am so guilty of this. My husband and I both were like, let's go on a road trip, and we'll drive all up and down the east coast, and it'll be so fun. And we'll just, like, stop at little cute strawberry stands and have snacks, and it will

be so fun. And then when you actually get in it, it is fun. But you didn't anticipate, like, someone has to go to the bathroom, and the million times, are we almost there? And we're like, no, this, this is the destination. This car is where we're going. And the kids are like, but what are we going to see when we get there? So, it's really like, you, if you don't picture what it's going to be like, realistically, you kind of have this, like, different perspective in your mind of what you're expecting, and then it does, it can feel disappointing. And I love when you said it shouldn't be this hard and that should be such a trigger, at least for me. Like, I spend a lot of time in what it should and shouldn't be like. And I've had to really reset myself, especially over the past year or two, learning more about my own brain and realizing, like, no, I am living in all the time trying to live up to these expectations, and I'm creating them most of the time, what it should or shouldn't be. But I love how you said that. It's just, we don't think it should be hard, but it can be really challenging for all the reasons that you just said. And so that's huge. Just like kind of, it sounds negative, but it's not. It's just knowing what's realistic and being realistic in your expectations.

Lori: Yeah. And that for kids with ADHD, like you said, going from summer to sitting in a classroom all day is really, it is challenging. And having that, shifting those expectations of we're not going to try a million different things all of a sudden and trying to keep things as consistent as possible. And just knowing this is going to be hard is helpful.

Amy: And I think more and more with ADHD, the thing that I, the word, the phrase that keeps coming to mind for me is just self-awareness. How important, I think we think, we need to, become completely, like, self-controlled. But I think in the easier thing, the more important thing for us to work on is our self-awareness and knowing what are the things that are going to be hard. Instead of trying to, like, change who we are, it's like being able to be self-aware of what is going to be hard so that we can prepare for it and leave space. Because it's just part of life and then we're not beating ourselves up. It becomes, it's not as hard. It's funny because I feel like that mindset, it sounds maybe defeated, but it's not because it ends up not being as hard because you're giving yourself permission to let it be hard. And then it's weird how that happens.

Katie: It is. I love it.

Lori: You share a lot about setting up systems that work within your family. What does that look like during a transition time? Like going back to school.

Amy: Yes. So, I am a big fan of tweaking systems. Because I think one of the things, like I mentioned earlier, one of the things that we tend to want to do is like, you know, reinvent the wheel and start from scratch, especially if we're like, okay, something's not working. And so, I, my system doesn't change dramatically with each new season, but I do take time with each new season and I think of that as, like, going back to school, start of the new year, and then going into summer. So, like, three times a year, I kind of tweak my system.

Lori: Okay.

Amy: If you've seen, so I have, you know, a bunch of different templates and I'm always kind of tweaking those and expanding them. But, my basic system in managing my home and life is, you know, there's kind of three daily things that I try to do each day. There's two weekly things that I try to do. I try to do six to seven boring things a day.

Katie: I love that you call them the boring things.

Amy: Yes.

Katie: Like, I see you, like, washing dishes on your stories, and I'm like, oh, Amy's doing a boring thing. And I'm like, it's so boring. It's the worst.

Amy: Yeah, we being able to admit that and then own it, mean, like, hey, identifying things are boring things. So, it's like, so I have three daily things, then try to do two weekly things, and then one monthly thing. And so then that extra, like I say six to seven, that extra would be like, something that's gonna pop up or like a phone call or, I think about it as the extras. Like kids, you know, doctor's appointments, you know, sport practices, all those extra, you know, PTA meetings, like all those extra things. And so what I do is I tweak and revamp and sit down with my kind of systems. And then you, know, tweak things based on, you know, each kind of season. And it doesn't really change a lot, but it might change some. And then, I also do have a time blocking system. And so now you, know, I teach people how to do this from the beginning, you know, step by step and, break it down into really bite sized chunks. But at this point, you know, I've been doing this for so long that I just kind of tweak my life and kind of move the boxes around to kind of where things fit in. But then from, you know, kind of seasonal planning, you know, kind of update my time blocking and then, but the biggest thing that I encourage people to do is thinking about those extras. And, so what I do is

I sit down with my calendar, and I personally, I actually don't use a planner. I use kind of a hybrid of, you know, templates, paper templates, and then with my electronic system, so, like my online calendar. But then I actually sit down with a paper calendar. I like to do it on Canva because I like to be able to, like, make the fonts different colors so things like, stick out because I have a really hard time, I have really bad handwriting. I'm sure I have dysgraphia that's never diagnosed, but handwriting. So I like making it on a calendar. And so one of the, like, the biggest things that I do is when I kind of give a chunk of time and I don't try to do this, like, right before school starts. It's usually, I think, most helpful to give myself, like, a couple weeks of that kind of crazy transition time and then to kind of, like, go to Starbucks on a Saturday, or, you know, my husband, get the kids out. But I give myself, like, focused attention. I actually, for my community, actually host a session where we do seasonal planning together. It's like 2 hours just being on the body doubling for it, where I can kind of update these things and then really get the next few months out on the calendar so I can see it, because the extras, I think is where we tend to go overboard with our energy. So just in terms of, like, appointments, PTA, kids activities, birthdays, like, anything like that, getting all of that on the calendar and really trying to not have more than one thing a day. Because I think when we're, and then when I get that big picture, it makes it a lot easier to make decisions about, you know, like, okay, are we gonna do soccer? Are we gonna, you know, do this thing that's at church or sign up for Girl Scouts or whatever? Because that's what the thing at the beginning of school is like, we have all these things coming at us, and it can be really hard to think clearly. Everything feels like it's in the future. It's like, oh, okay, yeah, I can volunteer for that thing in October, or, yeah, I can, you know, host that, you know, Thanksgiving kids party or whatever. And so once I get that kind of on the calendar, it gives me a much better vision of my capacity and it makes it so much easier to say no to things.

Lori: I love that. I mean, that is, that is so helpful, because I feel like that is my problem. I just get into things too much and over schedule and don't see, you know, the big picture, and it's like, oh, I'm gonna do all these things. And my husband's like, what are you doing? We are way over scheduled. This is a problem. We don't have enough time. And the other thing that I think for myself, and I'm sure other people feel this way, I'm an introvert, and, like, I need a lot more decompressing time at home also because of my job. Like I, you know, if I'm talking to people all day, like, I just need more downtime away from people. And I like, I think admitting that to yourself and saying, like, what works for you and your life is really

huge. But sometimes I'm not very good about being honest about that. Like, I feel like I should be able to spend more time with people or do more things.

Amy: Absolutely. And then I, think the, you know, part of that is that self-awareness piece is critical because we have to know. Like, you know, I kind of know for myself, like, more than one evening out a week is too much for me. Especially if it's, like, a me thing. You know, if it's like, where I'm gonna be talking to adults and just even being out of the house in the evening. You know, if it's, like, me taking the kids to us, to sports, and I'm like, can read a book or something like that might be different. But so, also getting to know your kids and then being able to kind of make those decisions, like, have for me that visual of seeing the few months, like, just helps me so much. And then also the other piece of that is being able to communicate big picture, like, with a spouse or with, you know, to getting support. Like, if I'm like, okay, well, I know every Wednesday that, you know, Frank has therapy and Libby has ballet, and that's not gonna work. Like, okay, Mark's gonna need to, every single Wednesday, take Frank to therapy. So, like, anything that you can communicate in advance, that's all executive functioning. So anything on a weekly basis, you know, from big a picture that we can assign to someone else to be thinking about; we have fewer decisions on a, you know, daily and weekly basis, the more mental capacity we're going to have to just do life to help our kids manage their emotions, to manage our own emotions. So, just for me, thinking big picture and then making those things. So I really try, not that we're not robots, but I know part of that self-awareness piece is I know that one off things are always really hard for me. So, you know, a random haircut on a Tuesday afternoon at 04:00 p.m. is I'm gonna forget. Because I like, but if I'm like, okay, you know, every six weeks, on Wednesday at 3:00, we always go Wednesday at 3:00 because Wednesday's an early day, and I pick up the kids and it's the same routine every time, then I know. And every, I always know, okay, Wednesday's our appointment day. So I try to, like, alternate the med checks and the haircuts and, you know, the things that we need to do are kind of on Wednesdays and that's like my, one of my weekly things on Wednesdays. Anyways, anything like that, that I can make so it's regular, is going to be so much easier for my brain. Less things to think about. because I know I always struggle with like those random dates. So those are kind of some of the things that I do. And as I've done this over time, like now, I'm like, I do, like at the beginning of the year, I text our hairdresser a bunch of dates and I get like the whole years for the kids just because it's easier for me. Cause I'm like, I wanna have Wednesdays at 3:00 cause it's easier for me, so I get it all on the calendar. So, I've learned little tweaks along the way, but because I've done this and

then I just, I don't try to perfect everything, you know, with each new season or change everything. I'm just always kind of tweaking and getting better at managing the mental load of my home and my family. So then over time, it's just given me so much more capacity. So, it doesn't happen overnight, but.

Lori: Yeah, I have a question for you. When you say three boring tasks a day, does that include work or are you just talking about like your home family life?

Amy: I'm kind of talking home family.

Lori: Okay. I was like, because I would never get anything done.

Katie: You're like, I have to do a lot of boring tasks actually, it's called my job.

Amy: And honestly, a lot of the women that I work with, I mean, we talk a lot about managing their, you know, how much we call them, you know, yellow tasks, but managing those tasks that there are a lot of people that if you have a job, I mean, if you're at a job for 8 hours a day, that is super boring for you, it's going to be really hard for you to do more boring things. So you have to give yourself a pass, you know? And so for me, I've tried, like, in my business, you know, I am self-employed, so I manage my hours and I am, I have kind of a separate system of like tracking things for my business hours. But I think more than anything, having this system that doesn't change a ton has just freed up a lot of energy. More than anything, it's the reducing the procrastivity where we're doing the random things that, you know, make us feel productive, but they aren't really the urgent. So I really just focus on doing, like, the urgent, necessary things, and then it, and so I have a lot more time and energy because I don't as much try to do the, like, random project that I'm doing just so that I don't have to unload the dishwasher.

Katie: I'm the queen of the random project so that I don't have to unload the dishwasher. So I'm curious, too, with these systems that you put in place, and it sounds like this is something that you've been doing for many years. So as you do that, are you sharing that calendar with your family, or is this something that you just personally utilize? Like, how does it work with your kids? I know you mentioned one is, like, going into 8th grade. So does he have a calendar? Do you all share? What do you do there?

Amy: So, one of the things that I gave myself permission at first was to focus on me. And because I think that was the struggle. I'm all about family contribution, but I think, especially initially, managing the other people was too hard. Was too much. That itself was boring. So I needed to just focus on simplifying my expectations of me. And I think the result has been simplifying the expectations for everyone. And so for me, what I have found to be more helpful is to just, like, include them. Like, okay, on Wednesdays, I'm cleaning the bathrooms, I'm like, okay, hey, Bowman, can you go get the towels from that bathroom? You know, stick them in the washing machine. You know, or like, okay, hey, here are the towels, put them up. Or like, hey, put the, take the trash out. And I think because part of it is also, as I was my oldest, is on the spectrum so, like, as I was really learning about, like, reducing kind of demands, it kind of came out of that. Also, I found that for me, it's a lot easier if I have autonomy and flexibility, because I'm not, like, I have to do this. Like, I give myself permission to, like, not have to do the thing on the exact same day. I'm like, okay, do I want to wash the dog or do I want to wash the car? Okay, I'm gonna wash the dogs. Like, I giving them a little bit, I think any kind of rigid system around, like, okay, you have to take this out on Wednesday, it becomes a lot for me to manage and it comes a lot more for them to manage. So I have kind of, I'm transitioning just now to really trying to give them more jobs. But I, think for me, for the most part, it's been helpful for me to focus initially with them on attitude. Like, I want you to have an attitude of helpfulness. If I'm like, hey, can you take this out? And we have found for our family that to be more helpful, than like, okay, I only do these three jobs, and then you can't ask anything of me. So I found that to be the easier place to start, than like, a super prescriptive, thing.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. We've gotten a lot of good feedback on those kind of routines where the kids are managing it. Like, it's not me going, did you brush your teeth? Did you put your socks on? Did you put your shoes on? But when they can see it there, it can be really helpful for them. That makes them more independent. So, thinking ahead, as school is kind of starting for a lot of us here, and I know there's a lot of parents who maybe the summer didn't go exactly as planned, or they might just be feeling pretty burnt out. I know I worked from home with my kids all summer, and it's really exhausting. Do you have any advice for parents who are maybe just not in the best mental space going into this new school year?

Amy: Yes. Oh, my gosh, it is a lot. And I know, you know, there's a lot of people are gonna be taking their kids to school, and they're still having to, you know, they've been working full

time in an office setting the whole summer, and it doesn't feel like a lot's changing. But, you know, to be kind to yourself, to go simple. And like I said before, your kids, they're going to be very emotionally dysregulated. So if you are already dysregulated, that's going to be a recipe for disaster. And so doing things that are going to help you, let go of making the perfect Pinterest style lunch box, giving yourself kindness at that. One of the things that I really helped women with, in my program is really starting small. Starting with three daily things. I think for most people to start off with the, you know, six to seven things, that is way too much. And so most people, I encourage them to really start small with kind of three daily things that they're going to define as, like, if these three things happen. Which is, like, for school, it's like, okay, the kids, you know, get out the door. They have had a good breakfast. They have clothes, and they have their lunch packed. Keep it simple and then really focus on building those self-care habits if you don't have them. Getting good sleep, getting some kind of movement and probably connection. Just connecting and it doesn't have to be super complicated, but just even connecting with another mom, or a friend, or just having a phone call with a friend, or even just texting a friend every day so that, like, you're having some point of connection, I think is super important. So depending on where you're coming from and how burnout you're feeling, it's like that burnout is, it's super important to address that. It's the most important to address that because you're not going to be able to create these complicated routines. Not that the systems are complicated, but if you're coming from a place of burnout, the most important thing is to get out of burnout, because your brain's not going to function well. You're not going to be able to manage, regulate your emotions. You're not going to be able to help your kids regulate their emotions. So it's super, super important to give yourself permission to focus on that self-care piece. And sometimes it takes a little while to get out of burnout. So be kind to yourself because it can be hard when you are in burnout to think clearly because everything feels, you know, it feels like you're like drowning in the weight of the clutter and the stuff. And so I have a blog all about dysregulation that would be helpful too, if that's something, if you are really at a place where you're overstimulated and you're burned out. So I highly recommend that.

Lori: Yeah, we'll try and link that in the show notes for sure because I think that would be very helpful for families. Well, Amy, this has been amazing and so helpful yet again. And I'm sure our listeners would love to get in touch with you, learn from you. I'm sure they're very curious about that. So can you share with them about your free webinar and any other resources that you offer?

Amy: Yes, of course. So the best place to find me is Instagram. My account is @activatedadhd mama, my website is www.amymariehann.com, and I have a free webinar that, is all about how to manage your home without feeling like a failure, because feeling like a failure is the thing I hear from so many moms with ADHD. And then I also have a resource, an ebook that has, if you're just like, just give me the templates, and you just are, you know, kind of want to learn as you go and figure it out. I have, it's a brief ebook with just a ton of templates where you can take my system and really apply the words and the phrases and the jobs that mean the most to your boring tasks. So you can take all my stuff and personalize it to you and to your family. So all the links to that will be, I'm sure, included here in the link to podcast.

Katie: Yes. Well, again, Amy, thank you so much for being here. We just really appreciate you, and thanks for sharing your expertise.

Amy: You are so welcome. Thanks 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!