

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

### **Episode #171: Connection: The Magical Tool to Make ADHD Parenting Easier**

Katie: And it can be hard, especially as parents who are so busy. It's like, oh, yeah, great. Let's just build in connection with my spouse, with my kids, with my mom. It's a lot of connection to be fostering all day long.

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.

Hey, ladies! Excited to be chatting with you this morning. How are we all doing?

Lori: I am, good. I feel like I had a real crunch the last two weeks to get all these reports written for my private practice, and no one thinks about in private practice, you know, I do mostly testing kids, but half of what I do is writing reports. And writing is just hard when you're a kid, it's hard when you're an adult, it's hard to, like, initiate that. It feels a little overwhelming because they're lengthy. So, I got, like, three reports done this week, and I'm feeling amazing.

Katie: I love that.

Lori: I know. I mean, there's more in the pipeline, but I got, like, a big push to get a lot done. I'm feeling free right now.

Katie: That's the best feeling. Mal, how's your week going?

Mallory: Oh, I think pretty good. Overall, things are going well. I had a little, one of my kids wanted to stay home from school this morning. A little bit of a cough, but telling me that after he was wrestling with his brother for, like, a full hour. I'm like, I think that, I think you'll be okay.

Katie: Yeah, I love that. I also had one trying to stay home from school today. I feel like it's we're hitting that point in the year where they're like, it actually sounds great to just stay in bed today.

Lori: Yeah. My kids always want to stay home on Monday. Like, the transition out of the weekend is so hard. They're just, like, missing me. They're missing having, like, fun or doing whatever they want. Mondays are always hard.

Mallory: Aren't they for all of us?!

Lori: Yes, they are for all of us!

Katie: I love it. Oh, man. It's just nice to hear how you girls are doing. I know we talk every day, but we don't always have time, or take the time, I guess, just to share, like, how things are going, all the ups and downs and all the things.

Mallory: Yeah. If we did that, we'd be on calls all day, every day.

Lori: Well, I mean, let's be honest. Like, the first 30 minutes of every call, we're just chatting.

Katie: Yes. Which is lovely.

Mallory: Yeah. But I agree, Katie, it's so important to have connection in your relationships, and especially for kids, right?

Lori: Absolutely. And you've probably heard that connection is important, but maybe you're wondering, why is it so important? And also, how can I possibly fit anything else into my day when I am stressed out and there's so much stuff going on. We're going to talk all about that today. I want to clarify before we kind of move on, when we talk about connection with our kids, we're not talking about this in terms of, like, a behavioral strategy that we're using like

when our child is having a challenging behavior that is absolutely not what we're talking about. We're talking about, just relationship building. And that's happening, like, throughout our day or at different times of our day, that it's completely independent of behavioral things that are going on with your child. So, I just want to clarify that because I do think sometimes when we talk about that, people are thinking, oh, you're talking about this and as a strategy we use, when my child's having a challenging behavior, that's not at all what we're talking about.

Katie: So, while you probably do know that connection is important, especially in ADHD parenting, today we're going to share five things about connection that you may not have thought about before. So, let's get started.

Mallory: Yeah, let's do it. So, a question that we want to start out with and answer is, why is connection important? You've probably seen this all-over social media. Your friends may be talking about it. Like, why are we talking so much about connection? Why do we care so much about it? And I really, I'm constantly brought back to this simple quote. I first heard it from Dr. Rebecca Branstetter, she's a school psychologist, but she says "connection is protection". And I think that really encapsulates the importance of connection. When we spend time connecting with our kids and we have a connected relationship, we're protecting them from kind of the stressors and the hardships of everyday life. Like, they have this solid connection with us to fall back on. When things feel stressful, when things feel hard, when they're having a challenging behavior, they kind of are rooted in this connected relationship with us, which can really be a buffer for our kids. And we also know that in order for our kids to really learn, grow, flourish, they need to feel safe, physically, emotionally. And when we're connected to them, we're kind of giving them that safety. Again, that connection is protection.

Lori: Yeah. And it's interesting because I know when my husband and I went through marriage therapy and are even in a marriage relationship, how essential building in five to ten minutes a day to connect in the morning is such an important piece to a relation, any relationship, whether that's a marriage relationship, a relationship with your child, a relationship with a friend. You need that buffer for all of the other challenging things that are going to be happening in life.

Katie: I totally agree. And it can be hard, especially as parents who are so busy. It's like, oh, yeah, great, let's just build in connection with my spouse, with my kids, with my mom. It's a lot of connection to be fostering all day long. I think another piece too, of this connection is protection. I love that quote. And it can just be so easy to get into kind of a negative cycle. You feel like you're constantly telling your child, you know, what to do or what not to do. And connection, when you're being really intentional about being connected, it helps to bring a lot more of the positives to the forefront of your attention and to really notice, like, oh, that was so fun, and that felt so good. Or I noticed how my child, you know, did this really great thing and it just gives us an opportunity to shine a light on the positives that are probably there all the time. We just don't always notice them because we might be so focused on getting things done, or we might even be negative about, you know, feeling like we're really in a really negative space with our child.

Mallory: Yeah, connection feels like the first thing to go when you're feeling really stressed, right. And you have this long to do list. You just got to check these things off the list. You're putting out fires with challenging behaviors constantly. Finding that time for connection is really easy to just be the first thing to be cut from the important list. But if you're kind of visual, Dr. Carolyn Webster-Stratton, who's the author of Incredible Years parent training program, she kind of has this positive parenting pyramid. So, if you imagine a pyramid, at the base of it really is connection and strategies we use to build connection with our kids. All those other parenting strategies that you're seeing on social media that you're hearing about, like those kind of are on the higher tiers of the pyramid, meaning we're using them more and more sparingly. But at the base of the pyramid, the foundation of the pyramid, that's connection, and that's what everything else is building upon. And so that's what we really need to invest our energy in because that's the most important.

Lori: Yeah. And I feel like we hear a lot from families that for kids with ADHD, that it's really challenging and it's really hard. And sometimes it's like I love my child but I don't like them right now. And it's because they're in this cycle of just kind of negativity, challenging behaviors. And our instinct as parents is to notice and think about all the negative stuff that is going on. And this strategy is one way to kind of keep ourselves where we're finding a little bit more joy and enjoyment with our kids and finding those little times during the day where we can be like, I really, I'm really enjoying myself and I'm really enjoying our relationship right now. Because I know sometimes it feels like that isn't there a lot of times.

Katie: So, the second thing we want you to think about with connection is how can I build connection into my everyday life? And one of the things that I, a term that I love is habit stacking. And if you're not familiar, habit stacking is the idea that every time I do this thing, I add one more little thing. So, a quick example might be every time I stop to get gas in my car, I just make sure to, you know, scan the backseat and throw away as much trash as I can. My dad would always tell me every time you get gas in your car you should wash your windshield. Which to be honest, sometimes I do not do that because it's too hot in Arizona. But that would be a great habit to stack if you would like an idea. Another one that I've been doing lately is if every time I blow dry my hair, I will make myself do squats or like toe raises so I feel like I'm getting a little leg workout. But the idea is you're already blow drying your hair, you're already standing there, or you're already waiting for the gas to fill up your car, so you're just adding in one tiny thing so it's not adding a bunch of mental load and work to your day.

Mallory: I love this. I think it's really important for ADHD parents to find ways to habit stack. Otherwise, it can feel really overwhelming if you feel like you have to add something big and huge to your already packed schedule. So maybe we could give a few examples of like how you can add connection with habit stacking. So, for example, something that my family does at dinner time, we're all sitting down, we're eating dinner. My boys love these little like question cards. We have a couple different sets of them and they have different themes. So, for example, one of the themes are seasons. So, the questions are kind of like, what's your favorite season? If you could add a new season, what would you, what would it be and what would you call it? Would you rather take a vacation in winter or summer? Would you rather take a vacation when it's going to snow or when it's going to be hot? So it's just these little, it's just three little questions that get us thinking and keep the conversation flowing that's a little bit more approachable than like sitting down at dinner and grilling your kids about how, how was your school day? You know what I mean? So it's just, it's fun, it's light hearted, and it's a really great way for us to connect and learn a little bit more about what our kids love. Another great way to habit stack, something that I like to do is just to invite my boys to join me in doing something I'm already having to do. And I'll admit there are some days where I'm just like, I just got to do this by myself and get it done. But on those days where I'm like, great, I have patience left in my patience bucket, I'm going to invite one of my kids to help me make dinner or I'm going to invite them to run this errand with me.

Katie: I love that. Something I always used to teach families in speech when they were talking about this because, you know, you think about it, if you say, oh, do you want to come help me make dinner? You might have one kid that's like, absolutely, I am there. But you probably might get a few kids that are like, no, I'm not interested in that. That sounds like work. Right? And so, a really fun way to help encourage our kids, and also it helps build executive functioning, because we can give them a title. So, you can just add 'er' to whatever it is that you are asking them to do. So, you might say, okay, I need you to be the chopper or the table setter. Or sometimes with my, in the car I'll be like, I need you to be the navigator. Right? And you're having them step into ownership of that role. So, you're not just helping me chop, you're the chopper, you're the one. And that can be really motivating for our kids and it helps them kind of internalize that model of, okay, what am I doing? And this is an important job that I'm, that I'm contributing.

Mallory: Yeah, I love that. I think, yeah, our kids want to be helpful and they want to have that responsibility so it's like an easy way to get their buy in. Another thing that we do in my family to habit stack, technically, is when I'm picking my boys up from school, I park in a farther lot where I have to add a little bit more walking. And it just gives us a little bit more opportunity after school to chat and connect. And again, I don't go into that with, like, an agenda about, you know, drilling them about what happened at school today. Did you get in trouble, anything like that. It's just, it's giving the opportunity for them to start a conversation and just have that little chat time that maybe we wouldn't have if we just, you know, picked them up, they jumped in the car, we zoomed straight home, and then everyone's off on doing their own thing.

Katie: Yeah, I get that. And I love that you're, you know, you're already there, you're picking up your kid. A similar example, if you're not someone that picks up your kids or that maybe you don't walk at school, we have more of a drive through pickup line. But, you know, if that's not an option for you, you could also do this at bedtime. So, most of us tuck our kids in. We say good night. We have a little ritual. But thinking about just adding in, you know, three to four minutes to just climb in your kids bed with them and chat and snuggle. Even as my kids get older, I'm still amazed that they love this time and again. I'm already putting them bed. I'm already in their room for ten or 15 minutes. Got to grab some water, all the things. So, I'm just adding in this one little piece. And it really does. My kids can really anticipate that and know, okay, we're going to get to talk tonight, which is helpful. One last one I'll

share is one that I got into because my kids tend to be pretty picky about food and they get really into their preferred foods, and it's hard. And so, we set up a thing a long time ago. Most of the time, I just go to the grocery store by myself, but when I bring them, I will try to remember to let them pick one thing that they haven't had before or that seems interesting and new. And sometimes it might be like strawberry lemonade, right? Of course, it's like a homemade strawberry lemonade and it costs like \$8 for this jar. But other times, you know, they picked out really interesting fruits or vegetables and we end up googling it. One time we bought a coconut, and we had to figure out, how do we get this thing open and what do we do? And so that's a habit that we can stack onto something like the grocery store. It's kind of mundane. My kids, again, don't always come, but they don't love the grocery store. But this is fun, and it's just a little tradition that helps build that connection. And again, our goal here is for you to know that it does not have to be complicated to build little moments of connection into your everyday life.

Mallory: I love it. So, a third point about connection and really building the strong relationship with our kids is that it's really important that we are consistent in our responses to our kids. And Lori kind of already touched upon this a little bit, talking about how this is not just in the parent child relationship, but in romantic relationships and friendships. And it makes me think of Dr. John Gottman and his work on relationships. But he talks about something called bids, where throughout the day, people in this relationship, they're making bids towards each other, and the partner either turns towards the bid or turns away from the bid. So, let's say someone says, this is one of the examples he gives, reading the newspaper. Someone's reading the newspaper, and they say, like, oh, I'm reading a story about what happened yesterday. The partner has the opportunity then to either turn towards that bid and say, oh, tell me more about that, what happened yesterday, or they have the opportunity to turn away from the bid and either ignore what the person just said, say, I don't have time to listen to that right now. But partners in relationships like this, and our kids are constantly making bids for connection to us, and we're presented with the opportunity to either turn towards or away from that bid. And again, it's not like some grandiose gesture of connection, but it's just these small little moments where we have the opportunity to turn toward our child's bid for connection and respond in a certain way. So, my kids are constantly making bids for my attention. And honestly, now that I sit and reflect on it, there are a lot of their bids that I turn away from, because, again, I'm busy. I'm in the middle of something else. So, they're like, mom, can I show you what I did on this game? Mom, can I show you what I

drew at school today? And a lot of times, I'm like, show me that in a couple minutes. And that's, that's kind of turning towards a bit in a way, because you're like, I really care about that, and I want to see that in two minutes when I'm done doing the dishes. Even if you can't, like, engage in that right that moment. But we want to think about how our kids throughout the day are constantly making these bids for our attention. And the way we respond to them is either growing, can really grow that connection with them. So even if we can't, like, do exactly what they're asking us to do, that right, right that second, like, come play magna tiles with me. We can respond in a way that's still turning towards that bid for connection, making a plan for when you are going to do that in a way that's just going to grow, strengthen that relationship.

Katie: Yeah. And I think no guilt here, too. I know that just this morning, it just started to cool off. My son was like, mom, can you, do you want to come out and eat breakfast with me on the patio? And at first, I was like, no, because I was cooking stuff for lunch. The kids are really into me packing them a hot lunch right now, so I was making mac-and-cheese on the stove, and I said, no buddy, I have to keep an eye on this mac-and-cheese. And then I look out there, and I see my little guy just, like, sitting at the table all alone. It's like, all right, all right. So, I ran outside. I had the timer going, and I sat with him, had some coffee, ran back in. But I did, I honestly had a little bit of guilt in that moment. But we've all been there where you're just, you're doing stuff, and you have to say, like, I'll come out in a little bit. I like that solution, too Mal. You're acknowledging it, but you're also saying, I have hot food boiling on the stove or whatever. But, yeah, that's an interesting. This is such good timing because it just happened. I saw his little body. He didn't have his shirt on. He's just, like, sitting out there eating his waffle. I'm like, so, yeah.

Lori: This is where I feel like my phone has been such a problem in my kids, in my relationship with my kids, where they have said, mom's on our phone too much. And it is because when I'm on my phone, I'm ignoring those bids for attention. Right. And that can happen too often where my kids are noticing it and feeling it. So, I do feel like that is such a struggle for me. I know it's a struggle for all of us, especially when we have work that's like, on our phone. And our kids don't always know that sometimes I might be working and they just think I'm on my phone, like browsing something, right. So that can be so hard. I know that's something I am working on and need to work on in my relationship with my kids and husband, too.



Katie: Yeah. And I think setting up times that you might just put your phone on the charger and walk away and turn your watch to do not disturb if your watch is dinging like mine. Because I do think it is hard, you know, especially with work and we, when we work on our phones. But setting aside a little bit of time and being really intentional can be really powerful. And it doesn't have to be 15 hours a day, you know, again, we can do things in small increments that can make a really big difference. I think another important part of being consistent in our responses is really thinking through what our response is going to be with various parts of parenting and trying to be consistent. So, for example, if your kids are always like, my kids always want to order a soda in a restaurant, and we've just basically said, no, we're just getting water right now. Because sometimes we would say yes, and sometimes we would say no. And what ended up happening is they would argue with us all the time about it. And so we realized, you know, at first I'm like, oh, my kids are the worst. They're arguing all the time. And then I thought more, I'm like, no, it's on me, because we're not consistent. We don't really have a plan. We, don't really haven't set that expectation. And so another part of connection that's not always really thought about is, am I consistent with my kids? Do they know what to expect? And they might not like it, but the fact that they know what is going to happen, what to expect from us, that helps them feel really safe.

Lori: Yep, I love that. And it's so hard to be consistent all the time, but it does make a huge difference, especially in those, like, challenging behaviors of negotiating and arguing. Not, to say that your kids are going to stop negotiating and arguing, but it can definitely help minimize it the more consistent we are. The fourth point that I want to talk about that is something that we a lot of times forget about with building connection is thinking about something that your child can teach you how to do. So, I'll give you a couple examples. You know, my daughter was at a camp where she was baking and she was learning, like, cupcake recipes. She'd come home and she, like, really wanted to show me how to make icing and make a cupcake. She was very proud of herself. Even last night, my oldest, she started cheer, and she's been doing practices, and they do, like, these intense workouts. It's like the first time she's ever done, like, ab workouts and, like, other stuff. And, you know, she's seen me work out. I work out, you know, almost every day, and it's a part of my routine, and they have seen that, and she knows that that's, like, a passion of mine. So, she was so excited to, like, show me her ab workout routine and what she could do and was so proud of herself. And I was like, oh, my goodness, look at how strong you're getting. And we had fun last night doing that. Although my abs are sore this morning from it.

Katie: I love it. Another one if we're thinking about letting our kids teach us something and keeping it really connected to a habit we already have, we recently moved to a new house, and my kids are getting used to the neighborhood. We honestly moved five minutes from our old house. It's a giant pain, but I really want them to know how to get to our house. And so we've been playing a game where I'll say, it's your turn to navigate me home. And they'll have to tell me, like, go straight, go right at the light and different things because I'm trying to get them to think through where they are and not just sit in the backseat. And so, I would say try that one at your own risk. You may end up making a few wrong turns, but it's been really fun and my kids love it because they'll take turns. And the farther we are away from our house, obviously, it gets more challenging. But, that's a really great one if you're just wanting to just incorporate into, like, your everyday life and having them, you know, feel really, really proud and it's very functional because, you know, they need to know where they are. Well, I really want my kids to know where they are. I don't know. Maybe with GPS nowadays, you don't need to know. But I'm like, no, you need to know where the sun is.

Mallory: I love it. Letting your kid teach you something is, like, my favorite way to connect. I just feel like it's the cutest moments. And it just makes them feel so good because so much of our kids day is spent learning from us, learning from their teachers, you know, being told they don't know how to do something yet. So, when they're put in the position of teaching us something, I just, it makes them so it feels. Makes them feel so good, so it makes me feel so good, too.

Katie: Yes, same. So, the last thing that we want to share about connection, this might actually be the most important, especially if you yourself or your partner have ADHD, because a lot of times we tend to think that things have to be really grandiose. So, it's like, oh, I really want to have connection. And all of a sudden, we start thinking of, like, a big, expensive vacation that we need to plan, like, three years from now and save up all this money. But really what we want you to hear is that connection does not actually have to be some big gesture or some big, grandiose thing. In fact, sometimes we can actually find the most connection in those day-to-day little moments and so really understanding you don't need to spend a lot of money to connect with your kids. You don't need to take a huge chunk of time, like three days off of work or something like that. It's really just building it into your everyday life. And we wanted to give you a couple examples. I know that every child's going to be different, and so you can obviously pick and choose and think of your own, but one that

we do a lot is, you know, a Saturday morning breakfast ritual. We often will make pancakes. I always push for french toast because that's actually my favorite. But my kids just love pancakes, so that's a fun thing that we can do. Reading books together, even as our kids get older. I always thought in my mind that I would stop reading to my kids once they hit maybe like seven or eight, but they still love to be read to. My daughter is ten. So, I think that's a huge one. Along the same lines of letting them teach you something, my kids are obsessed with those baking shows. That's like, we have exhausted almost every baking show on Netflix, but they want to show it to me and they're like, oh, this episode is really cool. They make a piano out of chocolate. And so that's been really fun and just a fun way to connect. Again, this isn't costing us money or taking a huge amount of time, but they feel so, their bucket feels so full after they get to show us something like that.

Lori: Yeah, I mean, they're like little things that we do together. My kids will go on a walk with the dog. I have to walk the dog anyway, so they come and we chat. They love dancing right now, so we'll do dance parties or they'll do gymnastics moves and I try.

Mallory: My boys love the dance parties, too. They'll like, have their favorite dance songs, so they're like telling me what songs to put on and they're dancing together.

Lori: Yeah. We also do fashion shows, so anytime anybody goes shopping, whether me, dad, them, we turn on music and everybody like, pretends like they're a model going down a runway.

Katie: Okay, I'm coming over! Ridiculous thing.

Lori: It's a ridiculous thing.

Mal: I love it!

Katie: Lori, we have not been invited to a fashion show.

Lori: I know, hopefully no one listens and knows my husband because he be, like, mortified, but his are the absolute best because he like, throws hats and I don't know.

Katie: I can see it.

Lori: The kids love it. Playing games. Reading together. My daughter loves to read to me, again, she feels very proud about her reading she's worked very hard on it. Playing catch, kicking a soccer ball around, you know, going to a jump park on the weekends. And, you know, you actually jumping with your child or doing something active with your child are awesome ways to kind of connect.

Mallory: My boys love to make checklists of things that we're going to do that day. So, like, if they've decided that tonight we're going to do like family movie and sleepover, there's going to be a checklist and it's going to be like, eat food, pillow fight, choose a movie, put on pajamas, and it's just like one way that they have, like, full control over what's happening and then they love to check off the list. And so we love, we love making, like, to do lists and then actually execute on those. That, just like, adds a level of fun when you have a list, I guess. I don't know. They love it.

Katie: I agree. I'm a list person myself, so I would like to come over for that, too.

Lori: I am not a list person, but my husband and my oldest are. Is that your oldest that's driving that, Mal?

Mallory: Yeah.

Lori: Okay. I was gonna say because, like, my oldest is, very much a checklist kid.

Katie: And as an oldest child, I can attest to this. Yes, we like to have a little bit of structure. It also gives us, honestly, a little control over everybody else when we're like, I'm holding the clipboard with the checklist and that. So, yeah, no, it's definitely a thing. I want to come over for list parties and fashion shows. Okay. So that's, that's happening.

Mallory: I love it. I think the point we're trying to make here is that it's not a trip to Disneyland. It's in these everyday interactions, these everyday things that you're already doing with your kids. These are the things that matter. And these things stacked upon each other over and over again is what building that really strong foundation of connection. And really the philosophy here with connection is that, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. When we have this really strong relationship and we're very connected with one another and we take the time to do that every day, we're preventing more challenging behaviors.

We're filling that connection bucket preventatively so that we have less to deal with when it comes to challenging behaviors. And parents, if you're in a position right now where you're feeling like you're constantly putting out fires. Like, you're just the bottom of your parenting period, mid right now is responding to challenging behaviors, we get it. It's really easy to fall into that pattern. But connection is like the first step in pulling yourself out of that. Like, finding those little ways to connect, we promise that it is going to make a big impact.

Lori: Yeah. And I don't know about you, Mal, but when I did therapy with kids and we had kids who were, you know, very defiant at home, kids with ADHD that were showing a lot of defiance, that's one of the first things we start with families. Is building in just little times for connection, especially when you are dealing with a lot of defiance at home is kind of that first preventative step. But again, I also want to say connection is one tool. And so, a lot of families are like, oh, I'm doing the connection, and we're still dealing with challenging behaviors. You are and it's not everything. There are many pieces to that puzzle. Again, if you're looking for more parenting tools and even just a little bit elaboration on what we talked about, today we have a free ADHD parenting guide, 6 keys to Raising a Happy and Independent Child with ADHD. So, if you have not grabbed a copy of that, make sure you do. Because we talk about not just connection, but a lot of other components to that are really important in understanding when you're parenting a child with ADHD. So, check that out.

Katie: And today's key takeaway is that connection is so important, especially for kids with ADHD. And keeping in mind it doesn't have to be some over the top gesture or expensive thing. Our kids love knowing that they can count on us just to show up for them in everyday life.

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!