

Shining with ADHD by The Childhood Collective

Episode #178: ADHD Holiday Survival: 3 Things We're Doing (and Avoiding) This Year

Katie: I just want to say, for families that are maybe a little nervous about the holidays or if it's feeling stressful or, you know, that your child might struggle through family events and late-night bedtimes and all the things, you know, you're not alone. The holidays can be hard on ADHD families.

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.

It's honestly hard to believe that we are recording another holiday episode. It seems like last year's episode wasn't that long ago.

Lori: I agree. Time is flying by, and our kids are at such a fun age for the holidays this year. And now that they're getting older, it's really exciting.

Mallory: Yeah, it really is. This year for the holidays, we're doing what we always do, and that's staying in Arizona. I feel like you don't suffer through the 115, 120 degree heat to, like, not enjoy the perfect Arizona weather. I mean, we can be outside in shorts riding bikes on Christmas Day, and so we got to do that. However, this is the first year that my boys are like, we need to see snow. And so some of you are probably like, oh, my gosh, your boys have

never seen snow. They maybe have once or twice. So we might need to. Maybe we'll take a day trip up to Flagstaff, Arizona, you know, do all the snow things. But then I'll be happy to come back to Arizona or, back to Phoenix.

Lori: I know growing up in Ohio, I can't, it's really hard for me to be. We've only been in Arizona at Christmas, like, one year during COVID because we just couldn't fly then. And being in shorts and being outside is just weird. And it doesn't feel like the holidays for us. We go back to Ohio every year for at least a week to see family and it's cold and we get that nice, feeling for the holiday that, like, I need and it's wonderful. It's not great having to travel, but last year we had a white Christmas, and it was so nice and the girls loved it.

Mallory: Yeah.

Katie: Yeah. My kids are definitely jealous of the white Christmas. But we're also staying here in Phoenix, and I'm excited. I feel like the white Christmas sounds really good until you're actually trying to fly and, like, a flight gets canceled because there's ice or whatever. I personally.

Lori: That's happened to us.

Katie: Yes, it's stressful to fly at the holidays. I know that you guys always do that, Lori, and I know your family really appreciates it, but we, my husband's family is in Iowa, and we've only been out there for the holidays a few times, and it was before kids, because I think we did one time when my daughter was maybe like 18 months old and our flight, we waited in the airport for 24 hours and our flight completely got canceled. And that was it for us! We were like, all right, you can come to Phoenix. It's great here, 82 degrees. But anyway, yeah, so for us this year, it's a kind of an interesting year because we just moved into a new house and so this year we're going to be here in Phoenix and hosting some family. And, you know, just a lot of change has happened in our family lately with the new home and our dog is getting really old and there's just a lot happening. So, I just want to say for families that are maybe a little nervous about the holidays, or if it's feeling stressful or, you know, that your child might struggle through family events and late-night bedtimes and all the things, you know, you're not alone. The holidays can be hard, on ADHD families. And I'm anticipating that my kids may have some issues as we go into the holiday season. Just all the newness and change, it's exciting, but it can also be, it can be a lot.

Mallory: Yeah, it really is a lot for ADHD families to manage. And our plan today is to share with you three things that we're not going to be doing this holiday season to make it go smoother, and three things that we are going to be doing.

Katie: I love it. Okay, so I will go first. Something that I am not going to do and you guys have to hold me accountable on this, okay. So, the text chat, you know, what to say, is I am, not going to schedule us for holiday events every single night. So, living in Phoenix, the weather is beautiful at this time of year. Not to brag, but a little bit because we do suffer, like, like Mal said in the heat. But, you know, it's hard because there's so many great things. We have zoo lights, we have a train park that does a train going through lights, and we have a lot of hotels in the area that host big Christmas festivities. And, you know, it's, it's a lot of fun. My kids really enjoy going out and doing ice skating and looking at all the lights and those kinds of things and it does always sound amazing when we're planning it, right? So, friends reach out and they're like, hey, do you guys want to do this thing? And what's hard for me is my brain will really process that in isolation. So that one task sounds fun and I'm like, yep, let's do it. And then another thing pops up and I'm like, oh, that sounds good. We haven't done that in a few years. Yep, we're in. And the next thing I know, my husband and I are looking at our calendar and we're like, oh, shoot, we have something scheduled for the next 11 nights in a row. And it's late at night and my kids, you know, they get disoriented and cranky. And so, my goal is to try to balance it out a little bit this year. And I think part of it is just figuring out like what is the most important thing for our family to do. So, there's lots of options. And again, ADHD brain, like I want to do all the options because they all sound really fun. And then in the moment it's like regret, regret. So, I'm not doing that. I'm going to plan it out more and be more intentional. And it's, that sometimes feels hard to create that space. But that's something I'm not going to do over scheduling my family because I definitely made that mistake in the past.

Lori: Yeah, that's, that's really good. And my thing that I am going to avoid this year is waiting until the last minute to do all of my Christmas shopping.

Katie: Okay, are we keeping you accountable too on the group chat?

Lori: Yes, please do!

Katie: Because this is a hard one.

Lori: Because this is a hard one. And I know if you have ADHD yourself, this is like probably something that you struggle with, leaving things to the last minute and then having like panic anxiety. Like I remember I used to work in the mall on Christmas Eve. I worked at Express and I remember there would be like lines of people like buying clothes at 5:30 on Christmas Eve, just because everyone leaves stuff until the last minute. So, I I have done this every single year my entire life. I don't plan, I don't think in advance. And like since having kids I've realized like, I just can't do this anymore. It literally ruins my holiday. And I'm just stressed out like the last week of Christmas and it's like not fun. Last year I was much better about like getting my shopping done at Black Friday. I saved a lot of money getting it done because there were all these sales. And then it was like it's done in that weekend and I can enjoy like the other stuff leading up to the holidays without like the stress of I need to get all these things. And it always seems like there's last minute stuff anyway that your kids are like, oh, this sounds really fun. I really want this instead of that. So, sometimes there's still last-minute things, but I got most of it done last year and it made the holidays so much more enjoyable. So, I do need to be held accountable to like do that. One of my kids is so great. She had her Christmas list like ready a month ago. And of course it changes like every day. She, every day she adds or subtracts from it, which is, you know, but she always has like a laundry list of things she wants and it's very easy. My oldest, it is like impossible to find out what she wants. So, I also need to like make my kids like, you know, sit down and think about what it is that they really want this year and what is exciting and even have some ideas for them so I can do that in advance otherwise it's really hard to do if your kids don't give you any ideas.

Katie: Yeah.

Mallory: Yeah. So, something that I'm going to work really hard to not do this year is to set my kids up with unrealistic expectations. For grownups, for kids, especially for kids with ADHD during the holidays, we can expect that we're going to see more challenging behavior. We're going to see bigger emotions just because were out of the routine. They might be staying up a little later than usual. They're eating foods that they're not used to, eating lots of candy. So, when we expect like that perfect behavior from our kids, you know, everyone's sitting around the campfire roasting s'mores, you know, there's everyone's happy all the time. It's the holidays, everyone's jolly. Like when we're expecting perfect behavior from our kids because it's the holidays, we're just setting everyone up for heartache. So, something I'm not

doing is setting my kids up with unrealistic expectations. I'm going to expect the unexpected. I'm going to expect that my kids are going to have some bigger emotions than usual that I might be dealing with a little bit more challenging behavior. And again, it's not because my kids are bad or naughty, it's just that time of year. So that is what I'm not doing.

Lori: Sometimes it's, it's almost good to like, expect a meltdown at like a family's house, like go into it like expecting that they're going to get dysregulated and out of control and have a meltdown because then you like plan in advance to like set up expectations, really work with them on going into that situation. Maybe you plan to leave early, and do kind of things to prevent that. And again, if it doesn't happen, then you're pleasantly surprised.

Mallory: Yeah, yeah, for sure, for sure. But if it does happen, then you can extend to everyone a little bit more grace.

Lori: Exactly.

Katie: And we've talked about this on other episodes but along those same lines, you know, if you are going into a family member's house or a friend's house for a party or something, it's totally appropriate to let them know, like, hey, my child might struggle a little bit with this aspect of it, just want to let you know this is our plan. And again, like it might not, you might not need that contingency plan, but don't be hesitant to put those needs out there. I think in my family, my husband and I spend a lot of time trying to make sure everybody else is comfortable. Like we don't want grandpa or grandma to be upset or we want to make sure and it's fine. Like you can express like hey, this, we might get tired and we may have to bow out and that's cool. And I think most people are going to be understanding of that and then you just don't feel awkward in the moment. So, I love all of these and I think we're just going to be so relaxed now that we've just committed not to do all these things. We're going to have our shopping done, we're not going to over schedule ourselves, we're not going to have too high of expectations. So, let's jump into what we are going to do this year. So again, for my family we did just move into a new house and so we are going to be bringing some of our old traditions with us to help my kids feel more at home in our new house. So, we have, you know, a tree that we've always, every time we go on a trip we put, we buy an ornament from that place and so we'll have our ornament tree and a lot of things like that that will stay the same. And then we're also going to be getting some new traditions, you know, with our, with my kids and I think hopefully leaning into that. And even if you didn't move this year, how

that might be relevant to you is that kids with ADHD are sort of an interesting conundrum in that they really like things to be the same and predictable, but they also really thrive on newness. And so, it's kind of a balance as parents of figuring out what are those traditions that really matter and that you want to, you know, try to infuse each year. But then also like, how can we make it novel and exciting and fun? So don't hesitate to do that. And then on the same note, you know, if my kids are having big feelings, like being in a new house at the holidays, which are just a really special time in our family, you know, holding space for that. And I'm again kind of like Mal said, I'm anticipating that that might be hard. And then I might be like, oh, that was a lot easier than we thought. But by kind of prepping myself, I'm giving myself grace to know like, I might be holding space for those feelings and that's okay and I'm not going to be shocked by it.

Mallory: Love that. Something that I'm going to do this holiday season and it seems simple, but I feel like it's going to be harder than just setting an intention on it, but disconnecting from tech, so disconnecting from our phones and taking every opportunity to get outside and to move our bodies as a family. So, getting away from the screens and moving our bodies more, you know, luckily, like we've said in Arizona, it's a great time to be outside, making sure that we're taking every opportunity to go on a hike, go for family walks, and really connect over that time together completely away from screens.

Lori: Yeah. That's so important, I love that. And for us, this is a little bit along the same lines of what Katie talked about earlier, but we're going to make sure to actually plan in holiday events this year because I have the opposite problem where I don't schedule anything and I don't plan in advance.

Katie: Okay, so we just need to work together on this.

Lori: We do. Like, if we could just be married, we'd have like a wonderful balance in our relationship.

Katie: Yep, and our husbands wouldn't be annoyed at us anymore. It would be great. Yeah.

Lori: I have a very hard time with planning and like my kids have been saying they wanted to go this pumpkin patch, like, but you know, before Halloween and it was a good reminder to me, like we never ended up doing it and I had told them, oh, we're going to do it. And then I

totally forgot about it. Didn't plan into like any activities. And then, you know, I find out the weekend before we have to go basically today, we can't do it. And I was way too exhausted. I'm like, I just can't do it. And we didn't end up doing it. I felt sad. Like, I felt sad for them because they really were excited about it. So, I'm like, this time around for the holidays, like, we're going to sit down and talk, not do everything like you said, Katie, not try and do everything, but actually have a conversation with the kids about, like, what are the most important things that you really want to do because again, like you said, in Arizona, there are so many amazing events. But I remember last year, my girls love ice skating and there's a resort in Scottsdale that does, like, ice skating and they have this big holiday thing and we didn't end up doing it. So that's probably one that they're really going to want to do this year. And making sure I like, plan that into December just because with work parties and like friend parties and family stuff and going to Ohio, it honestly will get pushed off and then we just won't end up doing anything. So, I think that's really what I'm going to try and do is plan in advance. Lots of things that I need to do in advance, so you guys can hold me accountable.

Katie: That's your theme. I like that. You know, it's nice when you can pull out, like, a theme and be like, okay, big picture, this is where we're headed. So, as we all think about the holiday season, our key takeaway for today is that you don't have to do all the things, you know, just find what works for you. You know, all of us are sharing our own ideas and our own situations, but as you can hear, you know, each of us is coming from different experiences and different goals, honestly. So really find what works for you and keep your own peace at the forefront, whatever you need to do to protect that. And we are here to support you.

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

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

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