

Shining with ADHD by The Childhood Collective

Episode #180: Your Questions Answered: ADHD + School

Mallory: If your child is being sent out of the classroom regularly for challenging behavior, it's time to call a meeting with the school. You kind of need to get to the root of what is going on inside the classroom. What is the root of this challenge? Why is this child being removed so frequently? And because we truly can't kind of address the issue and move forward if we don't have a better understanding of what is going on in the classroom that's leading to this.

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.

Lori: I'm here today with Katie and Mallory and we asked you on Instagram to share all your burning questions about school and ADHD. And we received a lot of them!

Katie: Yeah, we know that this time of year can be a real challenge for kids with ADHD and their families. So, it just makes sense for us to do a little deep dive into school and give more suggestions or tips about specific situations.

Mallory: Yeah. So, before we dive into your questions, we'll be using some school related terms today, like IEPs 504 plans, accommodations. If you have no idea what those are, which no judgment school is so confusing, you can check out some of our past podcast episodes like 165, which is about 504s and IEPs. episode 102 is all about school accommodations.

Lori: And episode, 137 is also important for families to understand some of the historical legal challenges that schools have faced in supporting kids with ADHD. So, make sure to check the show notes, will link a page that has our top school resources and podcasts for you to look at.

Katie: Perfect. So, we have a bunch of questions that we're going to get to in this episode. So let's get started. So our first question says my kid seeks connection, not necessarily movement at school. What's an appropriate accommodation?

Mallory: I love this question. I think this is really important for kids that seek movement or not all of our kids are seeking connection in some form, right. And it's so important to understand that for our kids with ADHD, they're getting a lot more negative feedback than their peers throughout the day. They're getting so many more corrections generally than they are getting positive comments. So, one way that we would kind of counter this tendency for ADHD kids to get a lot more negative feedback is to ask the teacher to very purposefully and thoughtfully build in more positive feedback to that student's day. In general, we like to say a ratio of five positive comments or five pieces of positive feedback to one piece of corrective feedback is like, what is a good balance for our kids with ADHD. Like we need them to be getting positive feedback at a much higher rate than they're getting corrective feedback. It's kind of like as adults at our job, if our boss is only giving us corrective feedback, never noticing when we're doing a good job, we're going to start to really hate that job. We're going to start looking for a new job. We all need that positive feedback. We want to know that we're on the right track. We want to know that we're doing a good job in order to feel positive about that experience.

Lori: Yeah. And our brains tend to dwell on those negative like or corrective feedback, or consequences. So that's why it's so much higher for the positive comment ratio, if that makes sense.

Katie: and I think we want to offer a lot of empathy to the teachers, right. Because you're leading a classroom with 20, 30 I don't know how many kids and it's really a lot to manage and it would be next to impossible to go through and complement each child five times for each one comment that you make, right. But if we think about it from more of the psychology perspective, when someone tells you that you're doing a bad job or gives you like negative corrections, you are not motivated to do it better a lot of the times. So, it really is those

positive things that can be that really pull you along and say ok yeah, I want that again, that was so exciting. But again, we understand where teachers are coming from and maybe five to one isn't necessarily that realistic. But by documenting it and by talking about it, it can be really helpful. I know I just had a parent teacher conference with my child's teacher and this was one of the things that we talked about because I said, oh, especially my younger one, he just needs connection. Like he needs his teachers to know about him and care about him and kind of have that personal piece. And I said something about, oh yeah, he was at lacrosse and she was like, oh, he plays lacrosse. And I was like, yes, this is a great segue, let me tell you two other things that he does because I want them to talk about those things. I want her to ask, you know, how is your game? Or how... you know he's auditioning for a musical, like how did that go? And I think that when teachers are more aware, it becomes a lot easier for them to have that little bit of connection too.

Mallory: Absolutely. And kind of from a more practical standpoint, your child doesn't necessarily need to have a formal plan, like a 504 plan or an IEP from you to ask the teacher about this or request that they do their best to kind of pick up on some of those positives throughout the day. However, including this in one of those plans, if your child does have one of those or you're considering one of those, would be a great accommodation.

Lori: Absolutely. And other ways that you can kind of look at building and connection with accommodation, a lot of the kids that we see maybe struggle with friendships, and that can be challenging for them. Maybe even asking that their close friend to be placed in a classroom with them is an accommodation. I know that can be tricky sometimes, but even making sure that they have at least one connection going into that classroom is really helpful. Other types of things are, you know, pairing them with an adult at school. They can act as a mentor or support them, if they're having a tough day. So, this could be a counselor, a social worker, any other staff member who's willing to do that is really helpful too.

Katie: Yeah. And I always like to frame it as, you know, my child has a really strong need for connection. So it's not like, hey, I don't know if you are praising my child enough or giving them enough affirmation. It's my kid. My kid has this need, and how can we meet it? And we also do have, whether it's for connection or movement or whatever, we have a list of accommodations that have been really effective for kids with ADHD and that's a free guide that we offer to our community. So, we will make sure to link that in the show notes, but

you're welcome to download that and get some ideas too. If these sound good or if you need other ideas, definitely check out that guide.

Mallory: Absolutely. Okay, so for our second question, the question said, how do we get more feedback from teachers on what students are learning? No homework, which I love in so many ways, but that means we have no eyes on what they do in school.

Lori: Yes. So, like we said, no homework is not necessarily a bad thing. Especially in elementary school we see so many battles around homework for kids with ADHD. Sometimes this can be like, sweet relief for parents. The downside of that is that you're not, I see that families are not getting that feedback on a regular basis of what their child's skill is. So, they're not working with their kids necessarily. Like, most are reading at night with their kids, but they might not be watching them write or seeing their handwriting challenges or, you know, sometimes when I'm doing homework with my daughter, I can see her not grasping math concepts. So, we don't have those opportunities necessarily. So, this is something that we a lot of times might ask to be put into a 504 plan or an IEP is giving some method of communication for you and the teacher and maybe that's just even on a weekly basis about your child's learning and behaviors. It's best to really talk with your child's teacher to find out how they like to communicate, whether that's email, text, their frequency, how they do it, that's very individual for each teacher and try and come up with a plan that works for them.

Katie: Yeah. This is such a broad question too because, you know, so many different schools and school districts have different means of communicating. I was talking to a mom this past weekend who told me that they use some sort of Google, like Google Classroom I think and she said it's so great because if her daughter forgets the homework, she just goes into Google Classroom and can download it. Which I was, my mind was blown, I was like, we're sitting over here with scraps of paper trying to write things down. And so, I felt like that was a really cool system. But again, each school, and I do think schools are trying to become more tech savvy and bring things online so that there is more of that constant monitoring, and communication. But another thought too is you might ask your child's teacher, hey, can you send home some work samples, you know, each week in my child's folder, like, let me know kind of how things are going so that you're not getting to a quarter and being told, oh yeah, they're actually really struggling in this subject. Which it does happen, where you don't

realize that there's a problem until it's been going on for several weeks. And so that's a good thing to try to get proactive. If your school doesn't have a system, let them know, like, hey, how can we keep this communication open?

Mallory: Absolutely. Opening that line of communication is just so fundamental to so many things in this relationship, especially when you're raising a kid with ADHD. So, our third question is how to deal with school refusal? Full body panic attacks and anxiety bathroom trips. So, school refusal or school avoidance, it is such a complicated and tricky and emotional issue. And we do have some resources for you that we will include in that link of our top school resources and podcast episodes. But again, it is so tricky and more often than not, there's underlying anxiety. In fact, there is one study that found that about 80% of kids that were experiencing the school avoidance, the school refusal, were experiencing separation anxiety. Social anxiety is also common. But there's a lot of other things that can kind of be at the root of this avoidance. And that could include depression. It could include the child is struggling to learn, so maybe they have dyslexia or they have some other specific learning disorder that's making it hard to learn and they're not getting the proper support, so know being thrown into the school environment every day where you're struggling and no one knows it can be really hard. Another thing that we see that's, contributing to school avoidance can be bullying. So, there's a lot of different potential explanations in this particular question. The parents specified that there's full body panic attacks, anxiety bathroom trips, so I think it's pretty safe to say that we have at least some anxiety going on at the root of this school avoidance, but to truly intervene and support kids and parents and teachers in this really tricky situation, we have to get more information. We have to get to the root of what's going on and contributing to the school avoidance.

Lori: Yeah. So, in thinking about what can you do to support your child, it's really important to again, validate their emotions. Sometimes for us as parents it can feel so ridiculous. Like how are they getting this anxious? Or sometimes it's really frustrating because remember when our kids go into fight or flight, a lot of times it's fight and they become really aggressive and extremely defiant and that can be really hard to be understanding about as a parent. And it can feel so, like such an overreaction. But remembering to really validate that experience for them, they are very scared and in this case that this person is talking about, their child is having very real anxiety and panic attacks, which is very scary for a child when a panic attack is very scary for anybody. For a child to have those strong feelings and alarms,

panic alarms going off in their body that they have no control over is very scary experience. The second thing to understand is to really try and have very firm boundaries. And I know this is so hard when your child has very real anxiety, but I want, I would say to this parent, like, and any parent going through this, our anxiety grows bigger and stronger through avoidance. And the more your child avoids those situations that they feel like they can't cope with, the harder it gets each day and the bigger that anxiety gets in their body, the bigger those emotions get in their body. So, really trying to have firm boundaries even when they're very scared to make sure that they are getting at school. Many, many times the anticipation of something anxiety provoking, those emotions are going to be the biggest. Once they are in that situation at school, you'll often hear teachers say they're generally okay. Sometimes kids are a little weepy or upset or whatever, but they're not having that extensive of an emotion the whole school day. So, a lot of times you'll see that get better. We would really encourage you, especially in this situation, to find a therapist that specializes in anxiety specifically. So you need to find an anxiety specialist that does cognitive behavioral therapy because we know that that can be very effective for kids with anxiety and for panic attack specifically. Many times just going to a general child psychologist or therapist that doesn't understand anxiety is going to be hard and they might not be able to help you with that, so you really want to find a specialist, and talk with your school about is there an evaluation that's needed? Like Mallory said, sometimes there's underlying learning issues that contributes to that anxiety. Many kids have extreme social anxiety if they're having to read or perform in front of other kids when they can't do that. So, we want to rule out that there aren't other things going on contributing to that.

Mallory: And I think it's really important to remember that like this, it has to be a team approach to like, everyone needs to be on the same page in terms of how are we supporting this student. What is the parent's job? What is the child's job? What is the school's job? Everyone has to be on the same page to make sure that you're approaching this as a team. Especially in those circumstances where that anxiety at school might be showing up as like really challenging behavior. Like Lori said, the fight or flight, like, if you're seeing the fight at school, it's so important for if you're working with a private therapist for parents and the therapist to be educating the school on like, the defiance is not because, like my child is super naughty. Like we've gotten to the root of it. There's this big worry, there's this significant anxiety and that's how like, this is how we're addressing it.

Lori: Yeah. And sometimes it's also, this is really hard for just a parent to take on. Like really, really hard and I want to emphasize that this is such a hard thing in the mornings and I've worked with single moms who are dealing with this. We really would encourage you to enlist another family member for help. So, if that's maybe dad staying home, you know, and not going to work on certain days for a week, or coming in late to work to kind of help support you in doing drop off, sometimes it's better if someone else does the drop off. Have asking grandparents, who are a more neutral person or an aunt or a family friend to kind of help you with those drop offs or even coming in the morning to kind of diffuse the emotions a little bit can be really helpful. And making sure that there's a staff member at school that can help with that transition is really important.

Katie: And I just wanted to mention too, because we're talking a lot about those kids who do go into that fight response and there's going to be a lot of maybe yelling or hitting or escaping. But there's also the type of school avoidance where kids are actually complaining about a lot of symptoms that don't really have a core. Like a really common way that this can present is, oh, my stomach really hurts, or I have a headache, I don't think I can go to school. Or even kind of vague things like, I'm just so dizzy, I don't think I can go to school today because I'm too dizzy. And so, we just want to encourage parents, you know, that if you are hearing that kind of like, I think, what do you guys call them somatic complaints or not the right term, yeah. So, if you're hearing those, get curious and start to figure out, okay, is this something that happens mostly on Mondays? I know I have a child who Monday mornings is always hard because we've been out of school for two days. And so, it's kind of like, oh, I kind of forgot, that I actually like this place and it's okay. And it's always a stomach ache on Monday morning. And I've gotten really good now at being like, that's all right, my stomach hurts too sometimes. Let's just see how it goes and kind of like gloss right over that. But again, the school avoidance can look like a lot of different things. And so getting curious if there are more of those like somatic or physiological complaints and they have no origin, you're like, there's, you're not sick, you don't have a fever, but this is a consistent pattern, that's a good sign that your child is, for whatever reason, avoiding school. And then again, we would get curious and start to look at what could it be? What are some of the most common variables and how can we help support them so that they're not feeling so much stress around school?

Lori: And that's such a good point because it is, it feels a lot of times like it's a medical issue and for our kids, they literally feel sick. Like they feel like they're getting sick, they feel like they're maybe have the flu. They feel like they're going to not be able to make it through the school day, they're going to pass out. I was a kid that had separation anxiety when I was younger and I remember a feeling like I literally was ill, like I felt sick. So that can be really tricky and challenging and knowing like, do I take my child to school when they're sick? And again, from my experience when I was a kid, it would pass, you know, it would pass when those anxious feelings went away.

Katie: Yeah, it's so hard for parents to know. And you're getting yourself ready for the day and you've already packed lunches and you're just trying to get out the door's really tough. So first things first, we have so much empathy and I know Mal started there. It's just, it's a really tricky situation, so we hear you on that. Our fourth question is what to do if your child doesn't show any urgency with schoolwork and turning work in on time. So, this is a great question and this is really common, you know, with kids with ADHD, especially if you have that inattentive presentation. You tend to have kids that, you know, are slower at their work, maybe they even finish it, but then they bring it to school and it comes right back home in their folder because they forgot to turn it in. And that's really tough for parents, but we want to start by explaining that that is really the result of executive functioning, right. The ability to self-monitor, to realize like, okay, I've actually done this exact thing yesterday and I just have to kind of do these different problems, but so much of the task is the same. And that's an executive functioning skill. To be able to see how things are the same but a little bit different and then to get started and that sense of time perception. And our kids often struggle with feeling the sense of the passage of time. So, this goes both ways. I always tell families, like, you could be at the park and they feel like they've been there for 10 minutes and you're sitting there going, we've been here for two and a half hours I need to cook dinner, we have to leave. And they'll say like straight to your face, we just got here. And they'll be really upset sometimes. And then the same thing can happen the other way where they, they don't really realize how quickly something is going to, how short something is going to be. Like, hey, we just have to quickly do these few problems and they're thinking like that is going to take two hours. Or my son always says it's going to take ages. And that's just his way of letting me know, like, I don't even know how long this is going to take, mom, but it's too long. So, this time perception is, is really, really tricky too. So, when we think about accommodations that can help support again, we have to start with what is the main skill or what is the main piece

that's missing here. And then based on that, we can start to develop some accommodations that will help target that specific area of need.

Lori: Yeah. So, if your child is, and we see this so often in kids with ADHD where it just takes them a long time to initiate a task, again, that's an executive functioning skill. They tend to get distracted more easily, so it tends to take a little bit more time. So, it's not necessarily, like they don't feel that sense of urgency. They, you know, again, they're very much in the moment. They're not think forward thinking into I need to get this done so I can go to recess. They don't think like that. So a lot of times having accommodations like giving them a reduced amount of, you know, problems in the classroom or reducing the amount of work that they have is a common accommodation that we use for kids with ADHD so they can still feel successful and we're kind of chunking their work into smaller steps for them again or reducing the amount of homework that they have to do. Many kids will not get their classwork done and then it gets sent home for homework and then they have homework and classwork and it's just, it's too much. So again, trying to look at if that it's taking them a long time to get started, it takes them a little bit longer to get it done, those are appropriate accommodations.

Mallory: Procrastination is such a tricky one for ADHD brains too, right. Because again, as we've said for ADHD brains, it's either now or not now. And so for especially bigger projects, multiple step projects that aren't due for a week, a month, those are not now tasks for your kid, right. It's not a problem until, it's not a now task until the night before and then all of a sudden, you're stuck with this huge project the night before. And then the tricky thing, too, with ADHD kids is that they procrastinate, it's all done the night before, they turn in the project and since these kids tend to be smart, they do well. So then that procrastination, in a way, is, like, reinforced. They're like, oh, yeah, I saved it till the last minute and that really sucked while I was doing it the night before, but then I still got an A, so it's all good.

Katie: And you have ADHD, so you already kind of forgot how terrible it was. So you're like, it's fine. That's me, I'm like, oh, no, that wasn't too bad and then I get back into the same situation, I'm like, how did I end up here again?! I need to write this down somewhere that I remember.

Mallory: Right. It's like that hamster wheel. So, if your child is struggling with procrastination, maybe you can really relate, help them learn the skill of how to break tasks

into smaller, manageable chunks so that they're not left with the whole project the night before. But then we're also kind of rewarding and celebrating the accomplishment of each step. As adults, maybe you like a to do list and just the reinforcement of crossing something off your to do list. Like, maybe you even put something on your to do list that you already did that morning because you just want the satisfaction of crossing it off your list (I'm looking at you, Katie).

Katie: Nodding! Wake up. Check. I did that. Make a list. Check. I did that.

Mallory: Check something of list. Check. But our kids are going to need help learning the skill of breaking those bigger tasks into smaller pieces, and they're going to need us to hold them accountable and then celebrate the wins towards those bigger things. And again, it's just, it's not because your child is lazy, it's just their brain is working differently and we need to actually teach this skill. Whereas for some kids, it might come a little bit more naturally.

Katie: Yeah. And when we think about homework, because some people obviously might not have homework, and some people do still have homework, you know, thinking about those kids that really struggle to complete their homework to get started. And this is going to be different for each family. So, every time we talk about this, we get someone that sends us a message and is like, well, my child needs a long break before they do homework. And then we say, okay, give your child a break. And someone says, well, my child needs to go straight into homework. So, we get that. Okay, we have six children amongst our group and they're all unique, right. Every kid has a slightly different need and we all have our own flavor to how we might do homework. And for me, honestly, it does depend a little bit on the day of the week because sometimes we have to get it done. We have an activity at four other times that can be more relaxed. But generally speaking, if your child is really struggling to get started on homework, a strategy that you can try is don't let your kid do something super reinforcing and super fun until after they've done their homework. And it's not really about being contingent and saying, oh, you only get to have joy in your life if you do your homework. It's more about really setting up the day in a way that makes sense, right. We're just going to get this kind of boring thing done and then we get to do this really fun, exciting thing. And so again, that's a strategy that you might try at home if you are struggling with the homework piece, because that is really difficult. But a lot of times we break it down with parents and they're like, well, yeah, they come home and they turn on the TV and then it's

time to turn off the TV and they don't want to do their homework. And I'm sort of like, same like I'm a blob when I'm sitting there watching tv, my brain is tired. I'm not going to stop that and then go start doing my math work. So, if I can talk myself through it, be like, I just need to quickly get through this, clean the dishes, whatever it is, then I get this really fun thing, you know. And a lot of life is sort of set up that way and so it's kind of a skill that we're teaching our kids to delay that gratification just a little bit and get the hard thing done and out of the way.

Mallory: So, for our fifth and final question, this listener asked, my son is in third grade and out of the classroom by the teacher most of the time. How should I handle this? So, we actually got a lot of questions similar to this where parents were saying their child was spending a lot of time outside of the classroom due to challenging behaviors or being distracting in the classroom. So, kids are being sent out of the classroom, they're missing instructional time because that is kind of the teacher's response to when those challenging behaviors happen. So, in some cases, the questions we got were saying their kids being sent out of the classroom because of meltdowns or really challenging behavior like throwing chairs or aggression to the teacher or peers. If your child is being sent out of the classroom regularly for challenging behavior, it's time to call a meeting with the school. You kind of need to get to the root of what is going on inside the classroom. What is the root of this challenge? Why is this child being removed so frequently? And because we truly can't kind of address the issue and move forward if we don't have a better understanding of what is going on in the classroom that's leading to this. So, in some cases, you may actually request what's called an FBA or a functional behavior assessment. And what a functional behavior assessment is, is it is a collection of data through observations of your child in the classroom to get a better idea of when is this challenging behavior happening? Is it during a specific time of day, a specific subject, when your child is close to a specific peer? So, kind of what's the environment like when this challenging behavior is happening? What actually is that challenging behavior? So, kind of getting a really good understanding of what that challenge actually is and then also getting a better understanding of what happens after that challenging behavior happens. How are the peers responding to your child? How is the teacher responding to your child? So, we have this really good understanding of what does this look like? And so this will involve, you know, as I mentioned, a collection of observations throughout your child's day to say, like, oh, your child is actually during this time of day, things are going great, but this is the challenging time of day. And the reason we want this

information is so that we can create what's called a positive behavior support plan. We want everyone on the same page in terms of is there a missing skill that we need to teach? How can we prevent this challenging behavior? But this can be really tricky. And obviously we don't want your child being constantly sent out of the classroom, missing important instructional time. It's often not the solution to kind of dealing with these challenging behaviors. And oh, gosh, I just feel like there's so much I want to say, but I will say that in our online course, *Shining at School*, we get into a lot of details about this, all about what an FBA is. Again, why we do that, what a positive behavior support plan could look like coming from that, the details about whether you need a 504 plan or an IEP to get that positive support plan. This is just a really complicated situation that can vary a lot depending on kind of what the challenge is, why your child is getting sent out of the class, what supports are available at your child's school.

Lori: Yeah. And typically, like, if we're seeing kind of frequent, really significant behaviors like that that are really disruptive to the environment, obviously, like, the teacher can't teach if there's chairs being thrown and really aggressive behaviors, like, that is so disruptive to everyone, right; Your child, the other kids, the teacher's ability to teach. We're really looking at even doing just like a full evaluation, and again, we talk about that how to go move forward with that in *Shining at School*, to look at really individualized supports, how do we teach those skills, what interventions does your child need, is really what we're going to kind of look at because, that's just, those are really tricky situations. So just things to think about.

Katie: Yeah. I think, you know, to boil it all down, and we did, we got hundreds of questions, and so we probably need to do another one of these pretty shortly here, but I think to boil it down is if your child is struggling, it doesn't have to be that way. Like, if school is giving you a pit in your stomach and you just dread Mondays and you look forward to those breaks, like, excessively, because you're like, I can't do another day of this, that is a sign that something's not right. And I think a lot of parents don't realize that you don't have to struggle. Your child does not have to struggle. You don't have to think, my child is in second grade. I have to do this for 10 more years, right. Like, if you feel that there are so many tools and resources to help you to get through it and also to come up with what really is at the root of the challenge and how can we help support. And I think that's just something we want to just give all of you a huge hug, because reading through your questions, it's heartbreaking. Like, these kids are struggling, and it doesn't have to be that way. And so, we wish we could get to every

single one of your questions, but we do have so many resources and we've linked a bunch of stuff in the show notes so please give that a little look. And again, that free guide to school accommodations is a great place to start if you're just like, what do you mean? Like, what could help my kid? I can't I can't think of anything. What do you got? So definitely start there. And then we do have our comprehensive online course *Shining at School*, and that is really there to help walk you step by step through what to do. We've had parents watch it before they go to a 504 meeting, like, three hours before their meeting in the morning, and they're like, I crushed it. So that is a very cool opportunity. But again, we just want you to know that you do not have to struggle. And I, I feel like we say it a lot, but maybe we don't say it clearly enough because there's so many people that are like, school is terrible and it's so hard. So, we are here to support you in that. And, our key takeaway for today is that even though you're not there with your child at school, you can be a great advocate for your child. You have the power to help them and get the right supports. And as always, we are here to support.

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!