

Shining with ADHD by The Childhood Collective

Episode #183: A Parent's Guide to Effective Consequences for Kids with ADHD

Mallory: Kids with ADHD are sometimes going to need to experience consequences many more times than their peers do to really learn the lesson. And this is just in how their ADHD brain is working. Again, it's not that they're like extra naughty or bad, it's because the ADHD brain lives in the moment and can struggle to at times draw on past experiences to inform the decision in the moment.

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

Lori: And I'm Lori.

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

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

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

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

Mallory: So today we're diving into a topic that might make you cringe a little at first, consequences in parenting. But spoiler alert, they're not just for your kids, they're also for you and for everyone.

Katie: That's right. Many parents shy away from the idea of consequences because they often first think about punishments that are overly harsh. But today we want to talk about how consequences can actually be great teachers when they're used properly. And consequences are actually a natural part of life.

Lori: Absolutely. I mean, consequences can help kids learn important life lessons. and at a higher level, it's important to understand that all of our behaviors as parents, as kids, they all

actually have consequences, whether it's positive or negative. So just to give you a couple examples, maybe you forget to put on sunscreen and you get a sunburn. Maybe you skip grocery shopping and you have no food at home to make dinner, that sounds like last night.

Katie: I know. Maybe that's a positive consequence because you're like, oh, doordash!

Lori: You buckle your seatbelt so that you don't hear that annoying ding thing that's going on in your car and non-stop. So those are all kind of examples of consequences that come naturally in our life.

Mallory: Absolutely. So, I think this reframe is a really great start. Consequences are not inherently bad; they're just a natural part of learning. And consequences, there are consequences for every behavior. Some consequences happen naturally, like that sunburn from the lack of sunscreen that Lori mentioned, but sometimes consequences in parenting are going to be parent imposed, like a parent has to intervene. And we're going to talk about that today.

Katie: Yeah, and I just want to point out, you know, consequences can be really confusing. So, we get questions all the time. Parents are saying, you know, when should I use a consequence? What is a good consequence for a very specific thing like my child lied or cussed or broke something like what should the consequence be? And so if consequences were really simple, we would not be getting this many DMs about it. So, if this is challenging for you or you're confused about it, just know that you're not alone. This is, this is complicated stuff.

Lori: Absolutely. And we are doing this episode today to kind of clear up some of the confusion and also give you some practical ideas for how to use consequences moving forward. Just, you know, a little note before we get into this for you to keep in mind that corrective consequences or things that kind of have a negative consequence are just kind of one piece of parenting. And I hope you've followed along with us long enough to know that our focus when we are trying to really support our kids challenging behavior, we really focus much more on positive consequences and teaching our kids what the skills that we want them to use and really focus on providing and imposing positive consequences more often with our kids. These things are what is going to teach our kids new skills and are much more effective. They bring us so much more joy in parenting. They bring our kids so much more joy in

parenting. But we also, we're doing this episode because corrective consequences are important. We do tell you to use them more sparingly and also, they need to be used in conjunction with really focusing on the positive. Like if you do not have that teaching reinforcement piece, it's just not going to be super effective. We do find sometimes parents really kind of try to focus a lot on how do I correct my child after these behaviors. Just know that this is one small piece to the puzzle. We again teach you how to do that if you're like, I don't know how to teach new skills or use positive consequences or things like that. We teach you step by step in our online course, *Creating Calm*. So, I'd really encourage you if you're confused around this topic to make sure you take a look at that course.

Mallory: So were talking about corrective consequences, but as Lori said, keep in mind, this is just kind of one piece of the ADHD parenting puzzle. But they are important and if you're parenting a child with ADHD, you're going to need these consequences, we get it. So, it's important to know but one small piece of the puzzle. So, let's start by talking about something called natural consequences and natural consequences are great because they don't require any extra effort on the parent part. They're not a parent imposed, they're natural. They happen all on their own. So, I think the most basic example is that if you don't wear a jacket outside, you're going to be cold. So, the parent doesn't like, make their child cold, that's just a natural consequence of not wearing a jacket when you step outside into cold weather.

Katie: Exactly. So, let's talk through just a couple other examples of where you might see natural consequences in real life. So, let's say your child is frustrated because they have to put their iPad away and they throw it down the stairs. So, a natural consequence in that situation is that the iPad will most likely break and then they don't get their iPad anymore. But again, it's not something that you've done, it's just what happened naturally.

Lori: And again, these are really hard lessons to learn for our kids. Another great example is maybe a child says something mean to a classmate, and they might find that the other kid doesn't want to sit next to them at lunch, or that child doesn't pick them to be on their team for a soccer game at recess. Again, no adult is imposing that consequence or punishment for saying something mean, it just sort of happens naturally.

Mallory: So, throughout our day we, we all experience natural consequences, positive and negative for the choices we make.

Katie: And we've talked about this before, but one really quick note is you don't have to save your child from every natural consequence. Like it's very hard when you see your child have a natural consequence to be like, okay, it's okay, I'll stop it, I'll help you. But, and it's up to you, obviously, in each kid and each situation being so unique, we can't really say across the board, but knowing that if your child drops their iPad, throws their iPad down the stairs and it breaks, you don't have to run and grab them a new iPad. You know, that's just not realistic and it, that's not teaching them. So those natural consequences, like Lori said, are so painful sometimes to watch, but practice letting them endure that natural consequence with your support of course, but realizing that that's okay, that's a life lesson and a teacher for them and we want them to learn from it. So that's what the consequence will do.

Lori: Yes.

Mallory: Yeah. And I think this is a good point, a good place to also point out that kids with ADHD are sometimes going to need to experience consequences many more times than their peers do to really learn the lesson. And this is just in how their ADHD brain is working. It's again, it's not that they're like extra naughty or bad. It's because the ADHD brain lives in the moment and can struggle to at times draw on past experiences to inform the decision in the moment. So instead of stopping and thinking, oh, the last time I threw my iPad down the stairs, it broke, so I'm not going to do that again. Hope that, we hope it would only take one learning opportunity for a child to learn that lesson, right. But sometimes for kids with ADHD, again because their brain is living in the moment, they're not drawing on those past experiences. Sometimes they do need that natural consequence several times before we truly see that behavior change. And that's really hard as a parent, but that's again, it's not your child like being vindictive or evil, it's just in how their brain is working.

Katie: Yeah, but it is hard.

Lori: I know, so hard.

Mallory: Okay. So, I feel like natural consequences are a little more straightforward since parents/grown-ups don't really have to actually intervene. Logical consequences, on the other hand, we're going to talk a little bit more about that, they're a little trickier. They don't happen naturally. They're parent imposed, so they're grown-up imposed. They require some kind of intervention on a grown-up's part.

Katie: Right. So again, logical consequences are something that doesn't automatically happen following a behavior, but it's really important that the logical consequence is related to the behavior. So, for example, let's say your child spills their milk. Okay, maybe you want to make them mow the lawn. Well, that could be a consequence, probably an overreaction, but it's not a great consequence because it's totally unrelated to the behavior of spilling the milk. So, a logical consequence is just having them help you clean it up.

Lori: Yeah. So, let's try another example. So, let's say your child tore apart their room while they were playing. Which again, my kids I think do this every single day, I walk in and it's like torn apart, it drives me nuts. But let's say you go in and you're like, oh, I'm so frustrated. Like I'm going to make them mop the downstairs. So that could be a consequence, but again, that's really not like related to the behavior. So, it might be better to just have them in this part if they tore apart the room, you tell them they need to clean it up before they get some of their other privileges. So, in our house it's like we're not going to, if the room is really messy at night, we read Harry Potter at night, they love it, we can't start Harry Potter until the room is picked up. So those are kind of more logical consequences.

Mallory: Absolutely. So, the logical consequence is something that the parent is imposing, but it's related to the challenging behavior, if you will. So, let's talk through some more examples because I know this is confusing and it helps to kind of think through some possibilities here. So, one type of logical consequence, I guess you could call it, is like a make it right consequence. So, like cleaning up a mess or apologizing. Like Katie said, you clean up the milk that you spill so you've made it right. Like Lori said, you clean up the room that you tore apart, so you're making it right. Maybe your child breaks a toy so they have to use their own money to replace it. So, in this case there's kind of the natural consequence going back to the natural consequence of like you play too rough with your toy and it breaks, that's a natural consequence. In some cases, however, a parent may choose to also rely on a logical consequence to help the child learn the lesson again, to teach. Again, we're not like punishing, but we're helping children learn lessons and grow. So, in this case, maybe the toy that they broke was their sibling's, so not only was the natural consequence of playing too rough, the toy breaking, but the parent is also using a logical consequence of now you have to use your own money to buy your sibling a new one. So that would be a logical consequence, using your own money to replace what you've broken. Another example of making it right

would be maybe you say something unkind so you apologize to the person you said something unkind to.

Lori: Yeah, in private practice, when I have kids, you know, sometimes kids will get really angry and upset when we are doing activities together. And I've had kids like tear apart my office sometimes like throw chairs or books or other objects. And obviously they have gotten very escalated in those moments. We, you know, it's really important to make sure that they have gotten back to a regulated, calm place, afterwards, but I always have a rule and I say we have to make it right before we move on for every single child. And I know sometimes it can be scary to do that because you're like, am I going to trigger them back into something? And I always find it like so interesting that kids are always so, a lot of times really sweet and want to help when they're in that calm space. You know, they're not always wanting to destroy things. It's like their big emotions just take over in those moments and they're almost always really good about making it right afterwards.

Mallory: And when this becomes a consistent part of your life and kids learn to expect this from you, they are more likely to stay calm because they're like, oh yeah, the five other times I did that, this is what my grown up did and it becomes a predictable response. They're able to stay calmer and they know you mean business, right. They know that every time this happens, you follow through in this way and so that helps them too.

Katie: I think another piece of this is that the make it right consequence is a great way for helping maintain or restore our kids sense of self. Because a lot of times kids with ADHD can be very impulsive, they don't have the executive function of like inhibition or impulse control and so they do something without thinking. And there's a lot of shame and guilt that goes along with that. And so, by allowing them and giving them the opportunity to make it right, you're helping them rewrite that narrative of themselves. Okay, I hurt my friend's feelings, but that's not the end of the story. I was able to apologize, I was able to make it right in some way. And we can go so deep on this to say, well, you know, it still hurt the kid's feelings, whatever. Yes, true, the papers crumpled up, you know, we've all done those object lessons with kids, but I think it is really important to give them their power in that case to say, oh look, you know how to make it right. What could we do? And it helps them have that sense of self. I'm not just defined by the one bad thing I did or the unkind thing I did, I can solve it in some way. And I just think that's very powerful for kids to know that about themselves.

Mallory: And I think then you're also able to leave these interactions on a more positive note. Like think about not just your child's emotions, but your own emotions after then your child has kind of made the situation right. Like you, you leave it more on a positive note and it's been a teaching moment. I think that can be really powerful for kids with ADHD. Especially like you said, Katie, with this impulsive behavior, they're gonna do things that they really don't want to do that two seconds later they wish they didn't. So, you're giving them the opportunity to make it right and move on. And no one's holding grudges, we've made it right, we're ready to move forward in a positive way.

Katie: So, another category of logical consequences would be pausing privileges. So, let's just talk through a couple of examples. So, let's say your child cusses while they're playing a video game and that's against the rule in your house. And so, one example of a logical consequence here would be to take away of that screen for the rest of the day. Again, this is parent imposed; you're pausing their privilege. Let's say your child is wasting art supplies, or in my case, using them on a white carpet. So, a logical pausing of privileges. Okay, first, it's my bad, I got the white carpet. It was supposed to be shell beige, guys, but it's very white.

Lori: That was not smart, Katie.

Katie: And so there is no liquid watercolors on the shell beige carpet, yeah, it's a thing. But an example there would be to pause that privilege to say, okay, these art supplies are off limits for the rest of the day. Again, this is one example because you might also just say, oh, no, take those, you know, downstairs where you can be on tile. But if you wanted to pause privileges, you would actually just remove them for the rest of that day. If your child doesn't have their homework done, you know, and they say, oh, I want to watch TV. An example of pausing privileges would be to say, no, we're not. We're not having TV until the homework is done. You might lose bike privileges if you don't wear your helmet. My son has one of those crazy go-karts that we had shared with our audience a few times, and he was on it. He had his helmet, but he also had rollerblades on while he was riding on the go-kart and so he lost his privilege of being on the go-kart until he took the rollerblades off, because I'm like, that's too many wheels.

Lori: Too many wheels, so many wheels.

Katie: Yes. There's just we need a rule about this. But it's really important to keep in mind as we talk through pausing privileges, we don't want them to be overly punitive. And by that, I mean we don't want, you know, the consequence here to be so strong and so powerful. When we say something like, oh, you can't have screens for a week, or you can't see your friends for a month, this can often be... It's an overreaction, first of all, I've been there and I understand. But it can also punish us because then our kids are going to be complaining. They're going to be whining. It's going to be so difficult to hold that boundary. So really thinking it through, what is the lesson I want my kid to learn and then figuring out kind of like the just right consequence so that it's not too powerful of a consequence. And this is easier to do when you're not mad.

Lori: Yeah. And it's really, this is really based in research too of like the harsher the consequence, it does not result in a better behavior change. And I think that's what's really important for parents to understand is that you could give them a week of no screens or a day and it's not really going to have a different change on their behavior. Especially for kids with ADHD that have a hard time, like they're just very in the moment. What's most important is that the consequence is immediate for them to really learn in the moment. It does not need to be harsher for them to learn better or for their behavior to change more.

Katie: Absolutely. And something that I think we do get questions about this and I know my kids will always ask like can I earn it back? So, this is something that you can kind of decide and each family is going to handle it a little bit differently. But you might want to give your child the option to earn back a privilege. So okay, once you finish your homework now screens are kind of unpaused and you can get the screen back. Or you know, after you play nicely with your toys, your other toys for 10 minutes, you can actually have the toy back that you threw previously. Now again, this is going to depend on the child. Honestly in my house this doesn't always work that well because my kids get really dysregulated at the idea of like I have to do this and this and this to earn it back. So again, this is something that each family has to decide. But in this case, you're really giving your child the opportunity to turn it around to flip their behavior and get their privilege back. And it really does place an emphasis on the thing you want them to do, the positive behavior, rather than just kind of what does sometimes feel like an arbitrary timeline, like no screens for the rest of the night.

Mallory: I would say that this actually is very effective in my house and probably what I lean on the most because I want to put kind of the onus on my child, the responsibility on my child to make it right. And yeah, in some cases I'm saying like no screens for the rest of the day or for a week or until the weekend. It does feel arbitrary for them and it often then lends itself to like when can I have it back? Is today the day I can use it? When am I going to be able to do that again? Whereas if I'm able to just set a really clear expectation like this privilege comes back as soon as you do xyz, the responsibility is in their hands to get that privilege back and kind of, it's off me and it's on you, you know exactly what to do. So I find that this is a very effective strategy in my home.

Lori: Another category of logical consequences could be taking a break, also. So, this is pretty straightforward, but it honestly a really helpful tool, especially when your child is just having really big emotions in the moment. So, you maybe make your child step away from a situation and they can come back when they have calmed down. So, let's say maybe your child and their brother are fighting over a toy. So, both kids have to take some space and they can come back once they have calmed down. Maybe your child pushed another kiddo off the swing at the playground and the child's upset. So maybe you say, we need to take a break and sit over here at the picnic table until you're ready to reengage more appropriately. So sometimes it can be helpful again to impose a break. Especially when you kind of see your child, their emotions starting to become bigger and bigger and you're seeing that they're getting dysregulated. It's important to, like, give them that time to calm down. And sometimes as we as parents need time to calm down and regulate ourselves, to know how to, like, handle the situation so that we're not just like, impulsively giving out consequences or reacting with our kind of big emotions too, to the situation.

Mallory: Yeah, because when we, like, impulsively, like, give out a consequence, it's tending to be harsher and then we're less likely to actually follow through on that consequence. So, then our kids learn like, oh, she says that, but she doesn't actually follow through with it. And I also just want to touch on an important point, when raising when you're re raising kids with ADHD, for many of them, kind of talking and processing through in the moment, like, let's say you've made your child take a break. Generally, in that moment is not the time to be talking with them and processing through what just happened. Like, why did you push that kid? What could you have done differently? What would you do next time? That tends to escalate kids, especially kids with ADHD. So, I don't want you to feel like have your child is

taking a break and this is your opportunity to teach. No, in some cases, that can actually increase the chance you're going to see that behavior in the future. If we're just kind of giving, we're just feeding into it too much. We're feeding into the big emotions when in that moment, generally what our kid needs is just space and honestly, not talking. That doesn't mean you're isolating them or leaving them alone. Like you can stay close and you're staying close to make sure they're staying safe. But it's not the time to talk and process, especially for kids with ADHD.

Katie: Yeah. And that is hard because I'm a total external processor and I'm like, let's talk this out and feel connected again and it's, it does not work. So, learn from my mistake, yeah. So, when it comes to these kinds of consequences it really does take practice because you are having to do some on the spot decision making. So, as you've probably figured out, in some cases there might be a natural consequence, but adding in a logical consequence might also feel right or helpful. You know, or there might be different types of logical consequences that you could apply. So, you kind of have to choose the one that makes sense in that situation for you and your family.

Mallory: Absolutely. So, this comes kind of back to your family values again. Something that one parent might feel they need to use a consequence for is fine in another person's home and that's okay. So, you have to kind of draw in your values, what are your family's expectations. And there's not one right or perfect consequence. Like you really have to take your unique family situation, what you know about your child to guide you in selecting consequences. And the more you practice it, the easier it will get. And again, in our online course *Creating Calm*, we really help you get into that problem solving mode to kind of decode and get to the root of those challenging behaviors that are happening again and again. So there's a lot more in kind of how to support you and problem solve your specific situation in *Creating Calm*. And another thing that I want to point out about consequences is that they're going to be most effective when they're delivered calmly and consistently. And we kind of touched on this, but when we are consistent in the consequences that we use, when we are predictable, we are fair to our kids. We want our kids to know what to expect from us and we want them to know that we are going to follow through each and every time. When we respond unpredictably to our kids, it makes them feel unsafe and it sets them into fight or flight. If we let them get away with a certain behavior 10 times, but then the 11th, we've had enough and that's when we implement a consequence, that's when we are going to see a huge reaction from our kids

because that was not a predictable response and they've gotten away with it 10 times, like, why on this 11th try are you mad about it? Like, why now? And that's when we're going to implement a consequence and we're going to have a hard time holding that boundary because our kid is going to have a big reaction to it. A helpful tool is to even talk through with your child in advance how you're going to respond to certain behaviors. So especially if there's challenging behaviors that are happening again and again and as a family, you've identified this as an issue and you're going to work on it. When you tell your child every time that I hear that word while you're playing a video game, you will be done with video games for the day. You are letting them know ahead of time that when they do that thing, this is exactly how you're going to respond. This is going to be the consequence. You are setting them up for more success because they know what to expect from you. It's going to be easier for you to hold that limit and implement that consequence because they knew. And again, kids with ADHD are going to need a lot of practice. Even when you talk through the consequences that are coming from certain behaviors, they're still going to do it probably, and they're probably going to do it again. But being consistent is how we are fair to our kids and ultimately how they're going to learn.

Lori: Yeah, it's just so, it's so, so important to like, set up those expectations and those rules and the consequences to our kids know in advance every time what is going to happen, and they're going to have less of a big emotion around it when we've been very clear what the consequences are for behaviors in the house. One thing I want to really briefly talk about is corporal punishment; punishment that is physical in nature. So that could be slapping, hitting, kicking kids. A lot of times, you know, we bring this up and I know many of you are not using these types of punishments, but we know that it does happen. And I do want to speak to if there are parents using those types of punishments, the research is really clear that these types of physical punishments have very negative outcomes for kids, including increased emotional challenges, behavioral challenges, mental health challenges later on in life. And we really, really advise you, if those things are happening, to speak with a therapist and kind of work with somebody to really work on changing those behaviors in your household. And I've worked with so many families over the years, they don't want to do those things, but maybe that's what was modeled to them. That's how their parents use corrective consequences in their home and it's not really what they want to do. But if you're responding out of anger, a lot of times it can be those kinds of negative, harsh punishments, and they just have really bad

outcomes for kids. So, we really want to encourage you to make a plan to change how you are interacting with your kids if you're using physical forms of punishment or verbal abuse.

Mallory: And I just, if any of our listeners are listening and say, like, gosh, that sounds like my home. I don't like the place we're in. I just want to encourage you that it's not too late to change the way that you have been implementing consequences and how you've been responding to those challenging behaviors. It's not too late to reach out for help and repair those relationships and move forward in a positive way.

Katie: Absolutely. So, our key takeaway for today is really trying your best to stay calm and consistent and focus on teaching rather than punishing. And by implementing natural and logical consequences consistently, we really can empower our kids to learn from their actions and make changes in our home.

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

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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!