

Shining with ADHD by The Childhood Collective

Episode #186: Helping Your Child with Inattentive ADHD Thrive

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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: Before we dive into our podcast today, we want to make a small request. If you are loving the Shining with ADHD podcast, would you please just take a second to give us a quick review? Reviews are really the best way for us to grow the podcast and keep releasing new episodes and we just want to give a quick thank you to all of you who've left reviews. Just know that we read all of them and they mean the absolute world to us.

Katie: Yes, they do. Okay, so switching gears, there has been a lot of discussion around the name ADHD. So many people really don't actually like that name. So, I was just curious, what are your thoughts?

Lori: I think the reason why a lot of people don't like it is because it says attention deficit. And I feel like so many parents, it's just very confusing for parents because they will come in for an evaluation and they'll be like, what are you talking about, my child can, like, sit down

and focus on video games for hours on end to the exclusion of doing anything else or going to the bathroom. So, again, kids with ADHD actually can focus amazingly well, better than their peers. In many situations, it's just dependent on the environment and the activity. So, to say that it's an attention deficit, I feel like is not the greatest name for it and it's confusing.

Katie: Yeah. One way I've heard it described is that it's a difficulty regulating that attention. So again, not that it's not there, it's just that it's really hard to regulate and find the just right amount of attention. So, I don't know, I'm just gonna vote, you know, since they're asking my opinion, obviously, I'm gonna vote that we keep the name ADHD so that we don't have to rebrand this podcast and a lot of other things on our website that have the word ADHD in it.

Lori: That would really ruin things for us.

Mallory: I think there's also a lot of confusion because of the word hyperactivity in the title. And parents, again, will be like, well, my kid is not hyperactive at all. And some parents would say, in most cases, I would describe my kid actually as like, physically under activate. So, my kid isn't hyperactive, it can't be ADHD.

Lori: Yeah. And we see for that very reason, so many kids are under identified who have ADHD. We see this, you know, particularly in girls, but, you know, a great example, I had a family with two boys, and the oldest one had gotten diagnosed very early. He was just a hyperactive kiddo, they saw those symptoms, like, very early. Soon as he got into school, there were all kinds of behavioral challenges, difficulty sitting still, you know, impulsive with friends. He got his diagnosis very early. Many years later, their youngest is coming in for an evaluation, and they're just like, you know, the teachers are always saying he's shy and quiet and he's really sweet, but he's not getting his work finished, he's not turning stuff in, he's forgetting to bring his stuff home. And they were just like, we know that he needs support at school, we have no idea what this could be. And they truly had no idea, that it could possibly be ADHD because it looked so vastly different in each of their kids.

Katie: Yeah, I get that. I mean, I know it can be really confusing for parents. And I can just say I grew up in a family where a lot of us went on to get a diagnosis of ADHD, even in my family now, each of us just looks very different. So, parents can be confused and think, oh, it's definitely not that with this kid, but actually they're just showing a different side or a different type of ADHD, so that's really challenging.

Mallory: Yeah. And a whole other layer to all of this confusion is that the diagnosis has changed a lot over the years, just contributes to the level of confusion that parents are, you know, reporting back to us. So today we're going to do a deep dive into ADHD, the predominantly inattentive presentation, and hopefully clear up some of these misconceptions and misunderstandings. So, we're going to talk about how the diagnosis has changed over the years, the unique challenges that kids with this predominantly inattentive presentation face, and then also what you as parents can do to support your child.

Katie: I love it. So maybe you guys could just quickly go over what are the different presentations or types of ADHD.

Lori: Yep. So, the first one, which we are going to be talking and going into depth about today, is that predominantly inattentive presentation. So, we have specifiers on ADHD, so all kids will be termed like ADHD for short, but they are different presentations. So, kids with the predominantly inattentive presentation now used to be called ADD, or Attention Deficit Disorder, and that's why there's confusion. And that was around, you know, the 80s, and it changed eventually in the 90s, so a lot of us, me included, like, we knew people who were diagnosed with ADD or ADHD. And so that's where some of that confusion comes in.

Mallory: That's where you have people saying, like, I have ADHD without the H.

Lori: Exactly. And, and interestingly, prior to the 1980s, the diagnosis was really one of, we thought that hyperactivity was just a part of it, and so the diagnosis really was, included symptoms of hyperactivity. So, it wasn't until the 1980s that we really started to see, no, there's something kind of within this that there are kids who don't have those hyperactive, impulsive symptoms, they only have the inattention. And we started to parse those out a little bit more. So, when we look at the criteria, kids with the inattentive presentation have to meet six of nine symptoms. I'm not going to go into all those, but a lot of times it's not paying close attention to details, making careless mistakes again, difficulty sustaining attention to tasks that are not preferred or not interesting to them, losing things, forgetting things, difficulty listening and following directions. So, those are all kind of, you know, symptoms that we might see in inattentive presentation.

Mallory: Yeah, so that's the main type that we're going to be talking about today, but as Lori was explaining, there's two other presentations. So, one of those is predominantly hyperactive

impulsive presentation. Those are the kids like Lori was describing with that family, the older son, when it comes to having a hard time sitting still, maybe blurting out in class, doing things that are impulsive, struggling with friendships because they have a hard time keeping their bodies to themselves. So, some kids are classified as predominantly hyperactive, impulsive. And then there's also the combined presentation and this is when a child or an adult meets enough criteria in both the inattentive category and the hyperactive impulsive category.

Katie: That makes sense. Yeah. So, let's talk about some of the challenges specific to kids with this ADHD inattentive type presentation. And probably one of the biggest challenges is that people with this type of ADHD often go undiagnosed longer and they tend to fly under the radar. So as Lori has mentioned, they're not as disruptive in class or at work, but they might just feel like, it might seem to other people like they're just daydreaming or they're kind of slower to respond. But it's not that they are creating a problem in the classroom that then the teacher immediately flags them as, know, a behaviorally challenged kid. At home, a lot of times, parents aren't as concerned because, like we mentioned, they can see their child focusing for really long periods of time. And so, what the research tells us is that especially girls and women who are more likely to have this type of ADHD, they tend to go undiagnosed much longer. In the meta-analysis, globally looking at children and adolescents shows that boys are actually diagnosed twice as often with ADHD as girls. So, if you have a daughter with ADHD or suspected ADHD, we have an amazing episode. We were able to interview Dr. Stephen Hinshaw, who is just an amazing researcher who has researched ADHD for, I don't know, I think over 30 years or something like that. But we interviewed him and his episode is number 153. So, if you have a daughter with ADHD, I highly recommend that episode. Both inattentive or hyperactive presentations, he was just excellent. That's episode 153.

Mallory: Yeah. So, let's talk about some of the unique differences that we see in kids with ADHD that have the inattentive presentation versus kids that have the more hyperactive, impulsive presentation. So, one area that you might see kids with the inattentive presentation struggle with a little bit more is the slow processing speed. And research actually shows that these kids work slower on visual motor tasks. They may be slower to respond to questions that you ask. They may work through their schoolwork at a slower pace. It may take them longer to get ready in the morning. So, they are experiencing this slower processing speed.

So, let's talk through some ways that you can help your child if you notice that this is maybe an executive function that they're struggling with. So, one of the most important things you can do is give them just a little bit more time to process. Pause and wait. And a lot of parents raising kids with ADHD and I can really relate to this, we fall into this trap of rapid firing directions and commands at our kids before we've even given them the opportunity to process what we've just asked of them. And then we're getting upset because we don't think they're doing what we've asked them to do quickly enough. When really, if we paused and gave them about 10 seconds to kind of process what we just asked of them, they might follow through. And then, you know, it turns into this whole negative cycle between parents and kids where parents are telling their kids to do something, the kids don't do it, parents escalate, anyways... So one way that you can support your child if they need a little bit more time to process is to pause and wait. Give them that opportunity to respond to your direction before you repeat it again.

Katie: I will say too, with that strategy, I love that strategy because I'm totally the parent that wants to tell them like four things in a row. And another piece of that strategy, though, to make it really successful is make sure you have your child's attention before you start giving an instruction. Especially for inattentive kids, when there's in, you know, the iPad, the TV, music, just even just their own thoughts, you got to kind of get their attention and make sure they're listening like that you have their attention before you start giving them a command. Again, it's just going to make it that much more successful, because that is something that can be really challenging if they're not listening to you in the first place.

Mallory: Yeah, absolutely. And you know, just being mindful of some of these things might take your child a little bit longer if they're processing things more slowly, so give yourself extra time whenever possible. If you expect that something should only take five minutes maybe you add, maybe you plan that it's going to take your child 10 minutes just to avoid that frustration that I know is really quick to creep in when you want things done, when you want things done now and you want them done quick, right.

Katie: And I just want to say one more thing. I have like so many little things to add, I feel like today, but I think that if you yourself or your partner have ADHD or you suspect ADHD, something that we've really noticed in our house lately is that both my husband and I struggle to realize how long transitions actually take. So just at baseline, like Mal said, if you know

it's going to take five minutes, I'm probably estimating it's going to take two minutes. So, when my kids take 10 minutes, that just feels like an absolute eternity. So, it's really helpful to be aware and that self-awareness of like, yeah, I actually don't build in enough time for transitions anyway and then my kids are struggling too, and it kind of makes it more of a teamwork thing. Like, okay, I struggle with this in my own ways and you struggle with this, so we need to work together on this and figure it out. And so, but just being aware, again, I think we don't necessarily see that as like a symptom of ADHD, but if you have ADHD, you may have noticed or you may not have noticed that it might be hard for you to estimate how long things are going to take. So just something to think about.

Mallory: Absolutely. I think that's important and kind of leads into the next point of just understanding the passage of time, feeling the passage of time. One way that you can support your child is using visual timers. And this helps them, you can set up little situations where they have to beat the timer, beat the clock, or you can use visual timers where they can actually see time elapsing to kind of help them stay motivated, keep on task. If you are having your child sit down and do something that is more challenging or less preferred, like homework, give them smaller intervals to work in and give them, you know, frequent breaks. So, work for a short period of time, get a break, and you can use timers to do that, so that's one extra strategy. Using those visual timers can help in a lot of ways.

Lori: Yeah, I feel like if we didn't have visual timers in the morning, it would take so long for my kids to get ready. It just, it helps so much because they can be on the ground putting socks on for like 10 minutes and have no idea that it's taken 10 minutes otherwise. So that, that's been a huge help for my family, I know. So, one of the other big differences they'll often see in kids with inattentive ADHD versus more hyperactive impulsive symptoms are differences in their emotional reactions. So, kids with inattentive presentation are less likely to have some of those, like, really huge outbursts that we'll see in more hyperactive, impulsive kids. The difference, I think, you know, many kids with inattentive presentation still have those emotional reactions, they just sometimes show them differently. So, they're often still very sensitive to criticism and rejection equally as other kids with ADHD, but many times what I see is those kids internalize those emotions. So, what you see is a kid who withdraws, who sometimes shuts down, they put their head down, they will hide sometimes under a desk or run away if they're younger in situations or if they're older or adolescent sometimes they just altogether avoid situations that make them emotional or anxious or whatever. Sometimes

we'll even see kind of that internalizing aggression to themselves. So, you know, recently I had a kid who was hitting himself or just saying really negative things about himself. So again, still having emotional reactions, but those emotional reactions look differently. And because we tend to see more of that internalizing of emotions, what we also see from the research is kids with inattentive presentation tend to show more symptoms related to anxiety and depression as opposed to kids with hyperactive impulsive symptoms show more of those oppositional defiant, more externalizing challenges. So, we're going to see more challenges with anxiety and depression that often is helped more with kind of individual therapy or cognitive behavioral therapy or things like that.

Katie: And I think that that's just a really hard part of parenting a child with this presentation. And so, we just want to hold space for parents because it's really difficult to see your child feel anxious or say terrible things about themselves. And that giving yourself, you know, a lot of compassion because that's really challenging. And when we get our kids the right support, we often see those types of challenges go down and get less and less, but it's really tough. So, you know, we're talking about this kind of clinically, but it's so important to acknowledge like that's really hard and it can be just like really heartbreaking. I, again, I know from personal experience and it's just something that you have to give yourself a lot of compassion about.

Lori: Yeah. And it's also just again, another layer of things to kind of support your child in and it requires kind of different ways of addressing it. You know, we treat anxiety and depression differently than we treat ADHD symptoms. So sometimes it's looking at like, how do we address both at the same time? Can we? Which is most important? So, making those decisions and things like that is very hard. So, as far as like how to help your child, again, understanding that your kids with ADHD are just very, very sensitive to things in their environment, to rejection, to any little types of criticism, even things that you might not see as a criticism, that they might feel in view as a criticism. So, validating and starting with validating those feelings that they're having and really listening and understanding them, reflecting some of those experiences that they're talking about is really just an easy way to kind of support them. Giving time and space for them to calm, so when they are starting to have those emotions, giving them time and space to calm down before you kind of press. So, a lot of times this might happen during homework time when they're feeling defeated and it's hard and they're not successful at it. Giving them time and space to calm down before you push on and move on into doing more things is really important. Once they're calm and in,

you know, a space where they aren't super emotional, those are times that are better to talk about what is, what maybe happened that was frustrating them. What were they feeling, what thoughts were they having about themselves? So, we can kind of address that in a calm state and troubleshoot how can we better support them to kind of prevent those things from happening in the future. I was talking with a family recently and they had really worked with their child on developing mantras like because homework was so frustrating and they were so perfectionistic and didn't want to make mistakes. And one of the things they, I think it was a saying like, everyone makes mistakes, that's why pencils have erasers. So again, having and having your child kind of think of what is a mantra that we can have that really kind of positively speaks against those common negative thoughts that I have about myself or my identity to really challenge those negative identity feelings and to challenge those like negative thoughts and realize, oh wait, everyone has this problem. This is, this is why a pencil has an eraser on it, because everyone out there makes a mistake.

Mallory: Yeah, we really love those positive mantras for kids, we think all kids with ADHD are going to need those at some point in life. We actually have a printable that you can purchase that has this whole collection of these positive mantras that you can have your child choose their favorite and keep close to them. Or you can use them, as like little lunchbox love notes, slip them in their lunchbox. So, you can check those out, we'll link those in the show notes. And I also just want to point out, while individual therapy isn't an evidence-based treatment for specifically targeting like signs of ADHD, ADHD symptoms, a lot of kids with ADHD who are experiencing anxiety, depression, a lot of that negative self-talk, will benefit from therapy. Finding a therapist who specializes in working with kids with anxiety and depression to help address some of those worries, help address some of that negative self-talk, so that's also something to keep in mind that if your child is struggling with that, that that is an avenue you can consider and pursue. Another area where we see differences between kids with this inattentive presentation and then the hyperactive impulsive presentation is that kids with inattentive presentation tend to struggle less as Lori was mentioning with like the behavioral outburst or the aggression. But their behavior struggles tend to be a lot more related to executive functioning and how that impacts kind of their day-to-day life. So at home homework might be taking five hours because they have a hard time getting started. They have a hard time staying on tasks. They have a hard time following multiple step directions. Maybe they weren't listening in class, so they also don't understand the content that's in their homework. So, homework might take a long time. They might

struggle with routines, things that you expect them to do every day, but they're still struggling. Like it's taking a long time to actually get them in the shower. Once they're in the shower, it's hard time getting out of the shower and they're also not sure whether they actually washed their body and their hair.

Katie: It's like you were at my house last night. Okay, time to get out. Like I haven't shampooed yet, mom, what are you talking about? Oh my goodness.

Mallory: They might be struggling following multiple step instructions. They might have a hard time keeping their room tidy and organized. They might be losing things often. So, you know, behaviorally they tend to not be the kids who are really acting out and aggressing upon other friends and things like that, but they're struggling more with these kind of day to day executive functioning tasks. And so, some ways that you can help your child if this is something they're struggling with is very clear expectations and very consistent and clear routines. So yes, the ADHD brain does love novelty and newness, but it really, really needs very clear and consistent expectations and very clear and consistent routines.

Katie: Yeah, it's like the worst dichotomy. They need the routine, well, okay, I'll say we need the routine. We fight the routine. We need the routine. We fight the routine. It's just you know, it's a constant push and pull, I think.

Mallory: Yes, yes. But the ADHD brain with all of these executive functioning tasks is very taxed and the more we can rely on the consistency and the routines, the more we're kind of offloading the work that the frontal lobe is having to do, the smoother these things are going to go. Also, kids with ADHD really benefit from making things visual. So rather than having to keep all of this information in their head, making it visual by making some kind of visual schedule or as we've already mentioned, some kind of visual timer. So, the more that we can kind of externalize these things for our kids, we're going to support them with remembering what they need to do and helping them stay on-task.

Lori: Yeah. And we also, just to mention, we also have, you know, sample morning, afternoon, bedtime routine, so we'll link those in the show notes. Again, those are really helpful for creating like those visual routines and schedules to help support your child's challenges with working memory.

Katie: Yeah. Another thing that's been really helpful for my family and I think it can go a little bit underrated because it sounds annoying a little bit on the surface is to make sure that everything in your house, or at least everything that your child needs for those routines is in the same spot. Like that it has a clear spot that it goes. And I will just share a personal story that we moved last year into a new house after living in the same house for 12 years and I really did not handle it well, I'm just going to be honest. But I couldn't figure it out. Like people would kind of ask me like, are you not excited about the new house and everything? And I'm like, I am excited about the new house, I don't know. But the level of stress that I experienced during that right after that move was just unprecedented. And I think it's because as I've had time to reflect on it, nothing had a spot. Like we went from a vanity that had a specific number of drawers and in my kids' bathroom everything had a spot and then we went to a bathroom that didn't have any drawers. And all of a sudden everything's just, you know, thrown on the floor of this cabinet and it's kind of like I don't know where anything goes and my kids don't know. And so, it wasn't just me having to figure out where to put all of my stuff, which is a project in and of itself, but all of a sudden nobody can find a charger, no one can find socks. They don't know where their tights are, their helmet, their mouth guard, they don't know where anything is. And so each and in every single individual routine in our house took four times as long, if not longer and there was always a panic of finding stuff. And so, what we've spent a lot of time doing over the past year is creating these little systems that I didn't even really think about it. I think we had already kind of set that up in our old house inadvertently just kind of one at a time. And then when we moved and they all got overhauled, I was just, it truly in a state of shock.

Lori: Yeah. And you realize, you also realize the mental load that that takes on your everyday life. We just went through like cleaning, I cleaned out my kids' playroom with them, their bedroom, and we did the same thing. Like we found everything needs to have a place. Where did these things belong? How do we, how do we decide on that? And it does, it's at the end of the night, it's not like this huge battle of meltdowns. Like, they know where things go or even I know where things go to kind of help them. It just reduces so much mental load during the day to know that those things go here and I can find them. I'm not losing and forgetting things as much.

Katie: Yeah. And if you're trying to start this, don't lose hope, right. Like, if you over the first time are saying, this is where your toothbrush goes every single day and your child isn't

putting it there right away, keep going, don't stop. You know, continue reminding them, showing them, praising them when they get it right. You might even need to set up some little rewards. That is fine, but it's going to take time for them to learn that and learn the value of that. But it's just, I would say my one piece of advice is just start small. Start with everything you need to get ready for school or everything you need to get ready for bed, which is probably pretty similar and just start there with putting those things in the right spot each time. It's just, I don't know, it can be a real, real game changer. Anyway, moving on, let's talk about differences at school for kids with the inattentive presentation. So, again, we kind of touched on this, but a lot of times those kids are going to fly under the radar. It can take longer for teachers to recognize the needs because again, they're just not creating any sort of issues in the classroom. The other thing that we see is that sometimes they can be really inconsistent. So maybe there's a topic that they're really interested in. I remember my kids going through a phase of measuring things in math class. That is very interesting to my kids. They get to get a ruler and then carry it around the house and measure things and you can bet that those math assignments were just pristine. But then we get to something kind of boring like multiplying decimals and that is not interesting to one of my kids in particular and that math looks like a chicken walked all over the paper. I literally am like, I can't read this, I don't know what you're doing. So, you know, a teacher who sees that might say, wow, you know, that child is just being really lazy or so defiant to not do their math homework. Well, I've seen them do it great, right? And this inconsistency makes it look and feel more like a behavior challenge, but it's not. It's executive functioning and their level of interest really impacts their performance in this case. So, we might hear things like, they struggle getting started in class, they are distracted by their peers around them, they might lose things, forget to turn in the homework. That's always just a personal nightmare when you finish the homework, but it comes home in the folder and you're like, why did you not turn this in? But again, it's that, that anticipating that routine each time and being really consistent. Another piece that is important to think about is a lot of times kids with ADHD do have learning challenges and so most likely, if your child is struggling in the school setting, you'd want to request an evaluation through the school to look at that and to start to figure out what's going on. So, first step, you'd want to talk to the teacher, let them know some of the things you're seeing. Can you keep an eye on this? Do you notice these same things? And then you can initiate an evaluation, which is to request it in writing and say, these are the areas I'm concerned about. If you've already had an evaluation outside of school, you can bring that to the school as well, and they can use that to make a plan. And I feel like we are literally

skimming, like, the teeniest little surface of this. I just went through that in two seconds, so if you are listening and you're like, actually, school is a huge challenge and you really did not do it justice, there's, we're doing that by design because we have so much to talk about about inattentive ADHD. But we do have other resources, and in particular, we have an online course *Shining at School* that goes deep into all of these things, but we also have a lot of blogs and other podcast episodes that can be really helpful in working with the school and getting that evaluation. But those are just some of the very specific things you might see if your child has this type of ADHD, in the school setting.

Mallory: So, one final area that we just want to highlight when it comes to differences between these, these different presentations of ADHD is how they look socially. And so, kids with the inattentive presentation we see tend to be more shy, more withdrawn, a little more passive in their social interactions and in their social relationships compared to those hyperactive kids who might be, you know, impulsive, shoving friends, struggling to take turns, things like that. Kids with inattentive presentation might struggle more with kind of the social knowledge of how these relationships and interactions should go. So how do I ask a friend to play? How do I join a group? How do I make small talk? Do I want to make small talk?

Katie: And can I listen while I'm making that small talk so I can, you know, comment back on what they just said? It's a lot of skills getting worked on.

Mallory: It is, it is, it is. And so, they tend to just generally be a little less assertive rather than really struggling with the self-control that we see the hyperactive, impulsive kids tend to struggle with more. And because of this they tend to be more socially neglected than their counterparts just because they are shy and have a harder time kind of joining the group and playing and noticing some of these social nuances. So, ways that you can support your child if they're struggling socially is to teach and practice how to be a little bit more assertive, how to advocate for their own needs in these relationships. One great way is to just give them a lot more social opportunities with kids that they really like, kids that share interests with them, so like-minded peers. So really finding those kids who your child just seems to mesh with and give them as many opportunities for social interaction as possible.

Lori: And I think it's important too that, again, thinking about in person because I hear from so many families that they're like their only social interactions outside of school are over a

video game. And you are missing out on so many things, in a social interaction. #ven though it's good, it's good that they can connect with other kids. You know, reading facial expressions, having conversations, there's so many things that they're missing out on practice on if they're just doing that online versus in person.

Mallory: Absolutely. And if your child is younger, a great thing to do is to ask your child's preschool teacher, daycare provider, which child or children your kid tends to gravitate towards to give you some guidance about who you might want to set up a playdate with if you're just not sure. And there's so much more that goes into supporting kids socially. We have a whole podcast episode, episode 107, we'll link that in the show notes for you. It's just about supporting friendships and kids with ADHD.

Lori: So, our key takeaway today is that kids with inattentive ADHD can look very different, than children who have those hyperactive impulsive symptoms. They show less overt behavioral challenges and as a result they can go undiagnosed or they can even go misdiagnosed with anxiety or learning issues and that attention issue is not addressed at all. So, our hope is that children are able to be identified sooner and receive the supports that they need sooner to thrive, but they do need interventions that are tailored to their unique needs.

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!