

Shining with ADHD by The Childhood Collective

Episode #201: Why Change can be Hard for Kids with ADHD (and What Helps)

Katie: We might be showing love to them and feel like, oh, I just want to give you compassion. You know what? You're right. Let's just get back in the car. We'll just go to the restaurant you wanted, or we'll just do the exact way that you wanted it to go. But that really, at the end of the day, it might eliminate the fight in the moment and it might feel good, like, oh, I just helped my baby so much. But in the long term, you haven't actually helped them. That just made that feeling bigger and harder to cope with. And we've kind of said, like, you know what, maybe you can't handle it. You're right. Let's just go to the other pizza place. Where when we show up and we're calm and confident and like, nope, we're gonna make it work. What, what do we need to do? Should we pull up the menu on my phone before we go in? Whatever that looks like that can really help our kids to know that, hey, mom or dad, they trust that we can figure this out. And that way we're not letting them avoid.

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: Ladies, we're back.

Lori: We're so excited for season three.

Katie: Yeah, it's hard to believe.

Mallory: Season three, what?!

Lori: I know.

Mallory: Oh, it's hard to believe and it's exciting. We had a nice summer break with our families, with our kids. But hallelujah, the kids are back to school.

Lori: Yeah, it was kind of a dramatic first week. Like, my daughter was sick her first day of middle school, so that like, threw everything off and then Katie, you got a puppy, which is so exciting.

Katie: I don't know. It's to be determined on how exciting it is, but so far so good.

Lori: You guys might hear her squeaking in the background.

Katie: Yes, literally. This is my new work buddy. So very excited about it.

Mallory: The new TCC mascot.

Katie: That's, right. She's pretty cute. She's a good mascot.

Mallory: Well, we are so excited to be back and back with you, creating more episodes to connect with you, get all of this amazing information to you. And today we're talking about something that is just very fitting with this change back to school and back to the podcast. And this is something that families experience all the time and that's handling change and handling new things.

Lori: Yep. I mean, change is so hard. And I have one daughter, my oldest daughter really has a lot of difficulty around change, so I can speak very, very much to this topic. So whether it's starting a new school, if you're having a move, a move to a new school, move to a new house or even smaller day to day changes like starting on a new sports team, it can bring up all the big feelings, especially for kids with ADHD. So just to kind of ask you guys, have you had times when your kids have really struggled around a big or even a small change?

Mallory: Yeah, just like you, Lori, my older son is definitely more the type to struggle with change. He's very much like, he doesn't want, he wants everything in life to remain very stable. Like one day I bought new bar stools for a counter. He came home from school very upset about new bar stools. He wished that I had consulted him and let him know that I was going to be making that change. The same thing happened when we had to put a new staircase banister in. Very hard change for him. Like things that make very little impact on his life, but he just, he holds on to the constant. It feels safe, it feels comfortable for him and changes hard.

Katie: Yeah, that's for me, that is definitely my younger one that has more challenges around changes. But for us, I would say my kids' lives were pretty consistent until about a year and a half ago. And then we decided to move to a new house and everything just kind of like fell apart. If you've been a long-time podcast listener, you've heard me talk about the stress of moving, but also just setting up a whole new home, new systems, new everything. And I think until that point I would have said my kids do relatively well with change, but that was a huge transition. And then, later in the year our lovely dog passed away and that's the dog that they've had their whole life. So, my husband and I were like, what did we do? Like we moved in the same year that the dog had cancer. It was really a lot and I will say, you know, for all of us it was, the change was a lot. But you know, we've kind of turned that corner. A year later, we do have a new puppy as Lori mentioned, but I think keeping holding space for those big changes like you said, like a new house or a pet passing away or a new pet, but also those little changes that we might not think of; bar stools. Oh, we're going to go to a different place for dinner and it's not the pizza place that you were thinking of. And so, I think we are all probably more prepared in some ways for like a big, huge change in recognizing how that's going to impact our kids. Where sometimes it's those smaller ones that will just jump out of nowhere and you're like, wait, what? This is upsetting to you? I didn't. I didn't even think.

Lori: Those can be a lot of times the most frustrating, I think, for us as parents. Cause we aren't expecting, and we think it's so silly, it doesn't make sense, you know, and it can be just frustrating when your kid is melting down because you're trying a new restaurant, right?

Katie: Exactly. And I will say I was excited about the new barstools that you got, Mal. So, I do think, I actually do think we got consulted. So don't tell him that.

Lori: I mean, to be fair, though, like, I, you know, an uncomfortable bar stool is kind of a problem. Like, my kids want to get a new bar stool because ours are hard and they want, like, a soft seat. So, you know, comfort is important to our kids.

Katie: So, we know that most kids with ADHD really thrive on predictability. And so anytime that something new comes around the corner, it can just throw them off so much. And today we want to share five tips to help you feel confident in supporting your child through these changes. And as we jump in, we just want to make a quick ask. Our goal for season three of the podcast is just to continue growing and reaching more ADHD parents. And so, one of the ways that that can happen is through all of you. So, if you're able to share this podcast episode, you can share it on your social media, send it to a friend, text it to a grandparent who you think might also be able to get on board with you and helping you through this, just anyone you can share it with is so helpful for growing our audience and just reaching more parents. So, we really appreciate it. And without any further ado, we're going to jump into tip number one. So, Lori, what is your very first tip for helping kids through transitions?

Lori: Yeah, so the first tip is going to be to prepare our kids as much as possible with those transitions. So, we know, and again, all of us, kind of the theme with our kids that struggle with them are those tend to be our more anxious kids, right. They struggle more with fear around change and fear in general. So, when kids don't know what to expect, they're gonna have a lot more worries and you're gonna, it's gonna look like for a lot of kids and a lot of ADHD kids, no. An immediate no. They might not even think about it. You bring up you know we're going to try this or this new sport and it's immediate no. Because their response is I'm just worried. I'm scared. And a lot of times that, what looks like defiance around something really is a lot of fear around it. And what we know about worries is, you know, the central part of why we worry, all of us, is because we don't know what to expect. It's that unpredictability. And so, we a lot of times will do things to create predictability for ourselves to eliminate some of those worries. And we can do that for our kids by eliminating some of those questions and fears that they might have about trying something new. So, my daughter actually just, I talked about this on social media, had just given up ice skating and she really wanted to try gymnastics and cheer and horseback riding. So, we're taking it one step at a time, but she did try a new gymnastics class the other night and she was so worried. And I love this, the place that we tried out because they gave you a tour like for 10 minutes before

you start the class. So, they showed her where she would enter, because she had all these questions like, what's it going to be? Like, what are we doing today? So, they told her, oh, today is, you know, vault and its bars and you're gonna enter here and you're gonna take your shoes off and mom's gonna sit here. And so, like all of that really helped make it a much more smooth transition because she knew exactly what to expect. And again, I could have maybe if she was more worried about it, I could have done that way ahead of time. So we could have done that a week in advance and gotten that to her before the class started. So she had a lot of those questions answered. So again, as much as you can prepare and talk through the things that you know are going to happen and explain those changes, you're going to kind of minimize the fear and worries, which is going to minimize the resistance around trying that new thing.

Mallory: And I kind of want to come back to the point that you made, Lori, about how a lot of times for especially for our kids who are resistant to change, fearful of change, their first reaction might be no. And like you said, Lori, to parents, if we're not recognizing like the underlying emotion here, that a lot of the time is the fear or anxiety, we might see that as defiance like you said, Lori, and then that changes how we respond to, right. A lot of us as parents, when our kid tells us, no, what's our first, like, what's our knee jerk reaction? It's to, like, put a consequence in and tell you, yes, you are going to do it, or this is what's going to happen without recognizing that, like, the underlying emotion, like, there's a lot more layers to that and like, maybe, at the root it really is anxiety. So I think it's important for us to understand that a lot of times the surface level behavior here might be defiance saying no, but really there's something deeper that's really important for us to tune into. And we can help them, like you said, Lori, by preparing them as much as possible. And I think the other huge piece when it comes to preparing our kids is practicing. Actually doing the new thing before they're expected to do it. So if your child is going to a new school the weekend before school starts, you might do a practice drop off. Like, this is the line that I'm going to get in. I'm going to stop right here. This is where you're going to get out. Practice them unzipping, you know, especially for kindergarteners, practicing opening their lunchbox, opening that internal canister where the soup is so that they know that when they get to school that day they get to lunch, they are confident that they can get their food open.

Lori: My daughter just started middle school and all the kids were really nervous about opening the locker and like four months beforehand, they gave them a practice lock, so that

the kids could practice in advance figuring out how to do that so the first day of school they wouldn't be so anxious about that. So I thought that was a good idea.

Mallory: That's so great because, like, the more that we can take off the mental load the first day of school, the better. We don't want, how do I unlock my locker to be part of that mental load. There's already enough with starting a new school and meeting new people, new classes, new teachers, so the more that we can kind of take off that mental load plate the day of, the more successful, the more confident they're going to go into it.

Lori: And I do think, like you said, Mallory, when you come at it as a parent from a place of this is defiance, your automatic reaction is to maybe escalate with them and get mad and lay down the law, right. Versus if I'm realizing this is fear, I'm gonna maybe come at it from being empathetic and validating their emotions, but also trying to reinforce the idea of you can cope with this. Yes, and you, I know you can do this, and I'm going to support you by helping to prepare you for it and giving you the tools that you need and helping you to really be successful in the activity versus kind of just saying, oh, they said, no, we're gonna quit, right. So, I do think again, we really encourage you that to think about that initial no as fear and really reinforcing the idea of yes, I really understand this, but you can do this, and we're going to try.

Katie: I love that. And as someone who myself, I have anxiety, and the more that I avoid something or talk myself out of it, the more I'm going to fear it, right. It gets bigger and scarier each time. And we do this with our to do lists within The Childhood Collective. I know you guys can tell when I'm anxious about doing something because I'm like, no, haven't started it yet, but I did these other eight random things that you didn't need, and it's totally avoidant. But in my mind, it gets bigger and bigger and bigger and harder and that's the same for our kids. And so again, we might be showing love to them and feel like, oh, I just want to give you compassion. You know what? You're right. Let's just get back in the car. We'll just go to the restaurant you wanted, or we'll just do the exact way that you wanted it to go. But that really, at the end of the day, it might eliminate the fight in the moment and it might feel good, like, oh, I just helped my baby so much. But in the long term, you haven't actually helped them. That just made that feeling bigger and harder to cope with. And we've kind of said, like, you know what? Maybe you can't handle it. You're right. Let's just go to the other pizza place. Where when we show up and we're calm and confident and like, nope, we're

gonna make it work. What do we need to do? Should we pull up the menu on my phone before we go in? Whatever that looks like that can really help our kids to know that, hey, mom or dad, they trust that we can figure this out. And that way, we're not letting them avoid. It's so hard. I say this behind my microphone while my kids are at school, but I do know because I've lived it, it's very hard to do in the moment, but it's something just to really keep in mind. So our next tip. Tip Number two, if you're keeping track, is to give our kids control wherever we can. So very often our kids feel like things are sort of happening to them. We make a lot of decisions throughout the day. We don't always consult them. Maybe it's not barstool level decisions, but our kids don't necessarily feel like their voice is being heard. And so, one thing that we can keep at the forefront of our minds is just giving them small choices whenever possible.

Lori: Yep. I know with going back to, like, our transition to middle school, there were so many things my daughter was really nervous about. Changing classes and all the materials and the different teachers. But for she was really excited about the locker. And when she found out, like, all the girls are decorating their lockers, she was, like, so excited about that one piece that she could pick out decorations and she could put up pictures that she liked, and she could now pick out the folders that were cute. So, all that almost overshadowed some of the things that were harder because she had so much excitement for that piece of it where she had that control.

Katie: A hundred percent. And to give it context, both Lori and I, our girls have been going to a school where it's very structured. Like, you have to have a red folder for science and an orange for math. And now that they're in middle school, they're getting a lot more autonomy and we had the same conversation. She's like, I can get this one that has stars on it. And I was like, the paper says yes. So we also experienced that. And it is amazing, you know, just that bit of freedom to see that, like, how much my daughter lit up to think, oh, I get to choose. And that is very powerful.

Lori: Yeah.

Mallory: Girls, I feel like I really missed out. My middle school and my high school were both completely locker free. Like, I never had a locker. So all this talk of decorating your locker, I would have been all over that.

Lori: I mean, I had a locker, and back in my day, your locker was basically to change out books, you know, like, no, I don't know. I don't remember anyone decorating a locker. Now, it's like, there's actual locker decoration. Like, my daughter bought a shag rug for her locker. Like, what in the world? Your books need a rug? Like, no, this is all new. I feel like I don't understand this generation.

Katie: That's hilarious. I'm gonna need to see some photo evidence of the shag rug, so yeah.

Mallory: You're gonna have to share with us, Lori.

Lori: It's hilarious. I mean it's so funny. But again, that made her excited enough to not be as afraid. So we're good with that.

Mallory: Yes, love it. Give them those little choices when everything else feels unpredictable and out of control. Give them control where you can to really ease that transition. I feel like that's so important. Another really important thing in our third tip here is to model our own emotions and our coping strategies for those emotions. So transitions are emotional for all of us. So many parents, you know, you see teary eyed at school drop off the first day of school, especially kindergarten. So it's so powerful when we can acknowledge those emotions, when we can show our kids that we experience those emotions too. They're not alone in this. I feel like there's so much power to kids to know like, oh, I'm not the only one who feels a little worried about this or a little scared about this. My mom said she feels scared about this too. But then also coupling that, expressing that emotion with an appropriate way to handle it, right. So then we're also kind of verbalizing how we're actually handling that emotion. Like I'm feeling worried about tomorrow, so I'm going to do as much as I can tonight to make tomorrow morning before school smoother. So we can really verbalize that process. We talk a lot about this. It's kind of making our internal thoughts external to benefit our kids. Kind of dialoguing out that internal monologue about what we were processing through because we go through, we're making so many decisions throughout the day that our kids aren't privy to because it's all internal to us. But when we can, when it's going to benefit our kids, especially if it's us coping with big emotions, making that internal process external so our kids can benefit from the skills that we're leveraging. It's just a huge modeling tool, a great learning tool for our kids.

Katie: And I will say that for me in my life, it hasn't always worked out that I do know the answer, right? So thinking about in the big picture, you know, getting a new house and the kids had a million questions, you know. What are we going? Where are we going to put our Christmas tree? What's going to happen? You know, these are big things when you're seven and ten. There were times that I would say, you know, I'm actually really curious about that too. I don't know, we could put it in this room because the ceiling is tall, but you know, it'll have to be a little bit tight by the couch and kind of talking through it with them out loud. The same thing happened for us starting middle school last week and not really understanding the drive through for like picking up kids. It's just so chaotic compared to elementary school. They had us trained in elementary school and then middle school, I'm like, why? Why is a kid crossing the street without an adult? It's just a lot for me. Okay. But my kids are like, what are we doing? What is the plan? Where will you be? When will you be there? And I love the idea of prepping them and talking through it. And I also was had to say, you know what, we're gonna figure this out. Like it's gonna take a couple weeks and I can tell that, you know, a lot of the moms and dads are new to this and so, you know, I'm kind of irritated in my own way, but we're gonna get through it. And so, but again, like teaching our kids that it's a process, I think they really think and I believed this about my own parents, like, oh, they know everything. Like when I'm an adult, I'm gonna know everything and my parents know everything. And letting our kids know, no, I don't. I actually am not sure. But I am sure that we can figure it out together. That is such an important mindset shift from mom knows what to do to like, oh, mom is really competent to figure it out most days and, and kind of by extension I am too then because you know, I'm with my mom and we're going to figure this out.

Lori: Yeah. And there's a problem-solving process to that that you're sharing with them that allows them to build and develop that skill which is such an important life skill that all of our kids and we need, right.

Katie: Absolutely.

Mallory: I think another thing that helps my kids a lot too is talking about experiencing the same thing they're going through when I was a kid myself. I feel like sometimes my kids forget that I was once a kid too. Like I'm just I've always been a grown up, right. They're like, oh yeah, you were in second grade at one point in your life.

Katie: A hundred years ago.

Mallory: Yeah, a hundred years ago. Yeah. But when I am able to say like, oh, I went through that when I was your age, like we moved and this is how I handled it. And this is the big thing I was feeling about that. Like I felt just like you. I was worried too. And it's kind of, my kids love to hear those kinds of stories. And again I love to remind them that I too was once a kid and I'm also not 100 years old. So I think that that also helps my kids process through things and again it normalizes what they're feeling.

Lori: Yeah, absolutely. So our fourth tip when these changes come up is to try and keep predictable routines the same that are around that change, right. So Katie, you can probably talk a little bit about this, like with the move, because I think that's kind of what saved you guys a little bit is keeping some of your routines in place. I know, like a really little example of the is, you know again, like with middle school changing, we're going to keep bedtime routine the same, right. So like we read a book before bed and we snuggle before bed and the time is the same and our morning routine is going to be generally the same. So all of these things kind of stay the same even though you might be going to a different school this time. Maybe the same person drops you off. And again, what are the things that we can keep the same? For my daughter, like she, with her starting gymnastics, my husband was going to take her the first night and she's like, no, I want mom to take me. Because I was always the person that took her to ice skating and I was the one that stayed and watched. So even those little things about me being there and me staying and watching don't seem like that big of a deal, but that feels familiar and comfortable for her.

Katie: Absolutely. For us in the move, it was definitely about the space. And as much as I could trying to set up spaces that were the same, you know, as our old house for the kids' rooms and bathroom. Because again, everything in our house has to function off of routines and some level of structure that we basically like create structure in the space and then we have taught our kids to keep it the same way. So they always have like their little Zenimal that we talk about, like that little meditation turtle that's real. We use that every single day. We have a charger in each room because if it dies it will get plugged in even if the other kids of sleeping in their room. So we the first thing we did, you know, we set up their beds with like their same bedding and you know, this is probably gross, but I didn't even wash their bedding. It was, it went in a garbage bag from our old house to our new house. It's only like a

two mile drive. And then we put the bedding right back on. And we set up the Zenimals and we set up there little nightlight things and they, you know, just keeping as much as we could consistent. That is also what kind of broke me down around the move was that it was really hard to do that because in my spaces like the kitchen was a completely different layout, everything was different. But for the kids we did, we tried to keep their spaces the same so that the first night we could do their same bedtime routine as usual. And we also bought a fixer upper. So like I, yeah, I'm definitely not the person to talk to about just like keeping things chill and calm. That's just not in my, in my inventory. But you know, that was, it was hard for me because I'm like, well we're gonna redo this bathroom but I'm literally putting your toothbrush in this drawer for now because we just want it to be in the same spot as it was in the old house. And so then over time we could redo things. But I wanted to be like, you know, just come in and paint and rip out all the things. But we could, we didn't and we couldn't do that. And so it was just, we kind of just set it up as it was. And that was very, I think that was very helpful for my kids to have something that they could kind of hold consistent.

Lori: Yeah.

Mallory: And on a psychological level, like holding as much constant as possible is just giving their brain a break from the things that are just by the nature of whatever the changes are going to be chaotic, are going to be different. So, in whatever ways we can give their brains a break and that stability and that predictability, you're just going to set them up for more success with that change or that transition.

Katie: Yeah, I love that. So our fifth tip that we want to talk about is for really big changes or if you are finding that your child, maybe they're smaller changes, but you're finding that your child is getting really upset about every small change or it's just a really consistent occurring issue in your family, we would recommend looking into therapy. And it can be such a game changer. Therapy is a great space where your child can be safe to work through their feelings. And in the ADHD space, you've probably heard, you know, that talk therapy isn't gonna directly address, effectively address those challenges, those core challenges of ADHD. But therapy can be a really powerful tool for kids who have anxiety and difficulty with these transitions and things like that. It's a great way for you to get tools to help support your child

and just that support and it gives a really safe space for our kids to work through their feelings and figure it out.

Lori: Yeah. And it's interesting Katie, you had brought up your dog passing away and I would say it's interesting because I've had a lot of kids who had like a lot of grief surrounding that that really did benefit from talking to a therapist around, you know, grief. And it can be grief related to again a divorce or an animal, a pet dying, losing a grandparent or losing a grandparent or a parent or any of those things, we really do recommend seeing a therapist. Not only to support your kids emotions through that, but to give you the support that you need for how to kind of keep things the same and do all these things and how to talk to them about those big changes. A lot of times there are books too that are topic specific and so sometimes like for, I think for ADHD kids if you're like tell me about your feelings, they're like yeah, they're often doing something else. Even if they do have big feelings around something, they're so distracted by what is going on during their day they're not gonna like sit down and talk about their feelings. But you know, at night when things are quieter and you can read a book together, maybe you're reading a book that is a, you know, about a topic that you guys are going through and that can sometimes bring up a conversation about what this character is feeling and then what you're feeling and how does that relate to you. So sometimes that can be a really helpful support for families. But I do again like we going back to kind of what we talked about, a lot of the no's that we hear around big changes or even little changes are you know, related to anxiety and fear. And sometimes those fears become so overwhelming that they take over every aspect of life where our kids are now avoiding trying new things. They're avoiding going to school, they're avoiding leaving the house, they're avoiding all these types of things and it's now having a negative impact on your family and you're not living the life that you want. That's really when we say you really need to see a therapist and look into maybe cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) for anxiety is a lot of times what we recommend. So that can be amazingly effective for a lot of kids.

Mallory: So our key takeaway for you today is that change can be tough, especially for kids with ADHD. However, by adding in a few key supports, we can teach our kids to build resilience and show them that they absolutely can handle what life throws their way. And just one more ask before we sign off, if you could please share this episode with another ADHD family or with someone who you think would benefit from this information, we'd be so grateful. And as always, we're here to support.

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!