

Shining with ADHD by The Childhood Collective

Episode #212: ADHD and Self-Esteem: How to Help Your Child Feel Good About Who They Are

Penny Williams: When we're talking about neurodivergent kids, we need to be able to help them be themselves and be comfortable with being themselves, because they're getting so many messages that it's not okay to be themselves. They're not fitting in, right. And it's not about fitting in. We can't change the brains that our kids were born with. Yes, they can learn things. Yes, we have neuroplasticity. Like, we can, we can make improvements, but we can't change the brain. We can't take away the ADHD. And so, we have to help them figure out how they navigate a neurotypical world and feel good about themselves at the same time.

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: Today, Katie and I are thrilled to be chatting with Penny Williams. Penny is a parenting coach, author, podcaster, and an educator specializing in supporting families raising neurodivergent kids.

Katie: She is also the host of the Beautifully Complex Podcast with over 5 million downloads.

Mallory: Penny, thank you so much for joining us today.

Penny Williams: Thanks for having me. I'm really excited to chat with you all. It's always fun.

Katie: I know, it is so fun. We, we were just chatting that we actually came on your podcast about four years ago now. It's crazy how time flies, but it's such an honor then to turn around and have you on ours. So, thank you. And we're excited to talk with you today about helping kids be their most authentic selves and I know this is something you have a lot of experience with. But maybe before we dive into that, maybe just tell our listeners a little bit about your story and kind of how you got into this work.

Penny Williams: Yeah, I got into this work the same way that a lot of people do or a lot of people that I know doing this work do, which is I had this kid who didn't fit the mold, who was really struggling both at school, at home. Turned out to have ADHD, that diagnosis came when he was six. Then we layered on autism spectrum level one at 12, and now he's 23. But when he was first diagnosed, it was 2008 and there was no help. I literally was handed three one-page fact sheets and a prescription. And he said, I'll, see you in six months. I'm like, are you kidding? Like, the whole world is falling apart and you're going to see me in six months? Like, what do I do? You know? And so, unfortunately, I became really obsessed. I became really obsessed with ADHD, learning everything I could, networking with other parents like, this can't just be me. Other people have, have blazed the trail already, right? What did they do? How did they succeed? It's really hard to find them in 2008, but, going into 2009 and starting Facebook, then people, you know, we really started to build community, which is so necessary as a parent of a child who struggles. And so over the years, it just morphed from I started blogging, looking for people who could tell me what the heck was happening because I was so desperate. And then I figured out it was ADHD or that the clinician did, and then, you know, it morphed from there. The more I talked about more ADHD, the more people who came, but also the more they needed, the more information they wanted. And so, you know, books, courses, podcast, community, all these things just sort of were bred out of that. Out of being in the trenches and trying to figure it out.

Mallory: Yeah, I love when we get moms on here who have children who are now adults or young adults, because I think it's so important for those parents who are in the very early, early trenches, maybe even pre-diagnosis, to hear the perspectives of the parents who have,

like, been there, and they're, like, kind of on the other side, right. In a good way. Like, I've survived through that, and I think that's so important. Like you said, it's. It's oftentimes really hard to find those people, even who are at the same phase as you. It can feel really isolating and lonely, searching for other, like you said, you know, you can't be the only one going through this. But how do you find those people that are, you know, in the same boat? Anyways, so I just love when we get people on who have all this life experience raising neurodivergent kids sharing with our audience.

Katie: It's true.

Penny Williams: So much wisdom and gray hair and wrinkles and all the things.

Katie: And I feel like you have, like, a wise voice, too. Like, I would listen. It makes sense to me that you're a podcaster, because I'm like, yes, you do sound like you have wisdom. So, it's working. I like it.

Penny Williams: It's what I choose to call it.

Katie: I love it. So today we want to talk with you about something that you call the authenticity mirror. What a great concept. And can you explain to us what you mean by that term?

Penny Williams: Yeah. The authenticity mirror is really our role as a parent, or even a teacher, an adult in a kid's life, our role in helping them to be their authentic self. And when we think about it as a mirror, we can think about the fact that they're really looking at us and what we are doing and the message that we are sending. And that is coming into their heads, and it's being that voice, right. There's a quote that I'm going to butcher right now because I haven't thought about it in a long time. But, you know, what we say to our kids becomes their inner narrative, their inner story that they tell themselves. And so, we have to be really careful about that. But also, when we're talking about neurodivergent kids, we need to be able to help them be themselves and be comfortable with being themselves, because they're getting so many messages that it's not okay to be themselves. They are not fitting in, right. And it's not about fitting in. We can't change the brains that our kids were born with. Yes, they can learn things. Yes, we have neuroplasticity. Like, we can, we can make improvements, but we can't change the brain. We can't take away the ADHD. And so, we

have to help them figure out how they navigate a neurotypical world and feel good about themselves at the same time. Because if we're constantly telling them, you shouldn't do this, you shouldn't say that, you know, you shouldn't wear this, then that's sort of this real criticism that they adopt for themselves. And we don't want that. Like, if we sit back and think about it, that's not what we want for them. And so, we have to really get aware, get, like, so super aware of how our kids are interpreting even what we're saying and what we're doing, because so often it's not with the intention that we had in the first place. And so, for so long, I never thought about these messages. I probably came across really critical of my kids in a lot of ways, because I have social anxiety. And for me, as a teenager, I felt like everybody was judging me all the time and so I had to look exactly perfect. I had to have the clothes that the popular kids had. I had to go do the things the popular kids did, right. I just wanted acceptance to, you know, that nth degree, that isn't healthy, but that is the narrative inside of me, right. And so, a lot of times I found myself asking my kids, like, oh, well, what are the other kids wearing? Let's go shop there. What are the other kids? You know, and they were like, I don't care. And I had to really start to realize that I was putting my stuff on them. And I wasn't helping them to be their selves, their true selves, right. And to be who they want to be. And so, it's been a real journey for me to figure this out. And now that I have, it's a lot of what I talk about with parents. Like, we just really have to recognize what that reflection is going to look like when they look to us for what they should do, say, be, right. What part of themselves they should be open about, what part they should hide. My kid when he was young, like, the first thing he said to anyone he met was, I have ADHD. Like, it was he led with it, you know. And I was like, way to own it, but also, so you don't have to tell everybody all the time, right. When you first meet them, right. Like, he would say that before he told them his name. And so, there is like this push and pull and there is, you know, I think we get stuck in we want to protect our kids. We want to keep them, not just physically safe, but like emotionally safe. And if they do go to school and they get bullied, which is what I worried about from my own social anxiety perspective, we feel like we're protecting them.

Katie: Yeah.

Penny Williams: But we're also giving them the message that they shouldn't be themselves. And we're giving them the message that we can't handle anything that's hard.

Katie: Yeah.

Penny Williams: And life is full of things that are hard, right?

Mallory: Yeah.

Katie: Gosh, it's such a hard needle to thread because I totally, I hear you say this and I'm like, okay, let me apply this. How does this look in my own life? And I totally think you're right. It's coming from a place of absolute love for my kids and wanting to protect them. And yes, to your point, like, if I'm constantly like, wait, make sure you say this or make sure you don't do that, then that gives them a message of, I don't think you can figure this out. So, I love that and that is really, honestly so powerful. And I think it's actually kind of a good reframe because a lot of times I think as parents, we don't really feel like we have that many things that we can control on this parenting journey. It feels like a lot of things are not totally within our realm of control, but how we speak to our kids and how we speak about them and this authenticity mirror is something that's directly in our own control. And I love that. That's, that's very powerful.

Penny Williams: And it's about balance too, right. Like sometimes we do need to offer our ideas or guidance, but we also need to notice when there are things that are great, right. And I remember when my son was still pretty little, he was probably seven or eight years old, he was seeing a play therapist. And one session she had him lay down on this big sheet of paper, this big roll of paper, and they drew his outline and then they wrote down all the things about him so that he could see that ADHD was only one part, right. And there was all this goodness. And like when he came out of that room, I had never seen him feel himself so much before. Like feel good about, excuse me, feel really about who he is and that there are great things. Because he was getting so much correction, he was already seeing that he couldn't do what the other kids at school were doing. He was getting, you know, more redirection there as well. And that made such a difference. And we, we need to do that with, I think we need to do that with all other human beings around us all the time. Like, you know, that we notice that they're, they have value, they should take up space. They are a wonderful part of the world. And it often falls on us when our kids are neurodivergent to be that voice. Because it's harder to get that voice at school, right. Because they have 30 kids in the room and there's one of them and they're just trying to get through the curriculum, right. And so, there isn't as much, I think, space for it there as we can create for it at home. And we have to have that balance because without it, that narrative is just all of the negative stuff, it's all of

the hard stuff, it's all the stuff we want them to do differently. And you know, if you grow up that way, you're never going to be willing to be your fully true, authentic self out in the world. You're always going to be guarded.

Mallory: Yeah. And just thinking specifically about in the school, school setting too, like even, even the most gentlest and kindest teachers, if they're constantly redirecting, even if they're doing it in the nicest way, like pay attention or focus on your work, like, like you said, like that really does add up to a child's kind of self-perception over time. Again, the teacher's not being mean, isn't doling out punishments, but they learn like, I'm the one always who needs the redirection. I'm always the one that's not focusing. I'm the one that's always not done with my work. And that's why I think your authenticity mirror is just so important for kids with ADHD.

Penny Williams: Yeah. My son's first grade teacher, she was so great about differentiated instruction and really understanding that all kids learn differently and respond differently and interact differently. And she created visual cue cards, and she put them on a lanyard, and she had them everywhere in the school building, and she just used that. And she didn't just use it with him, she's used it with other kids, too. But, instead of saying, you know, Luke, do this, Luke, don't do that, it was just a visual cue. And so, it wasn't calling him out, and it wasn't him. Like, here it just, it lands differently with our body and our nervous system than it does to have your name and then some instruction that probably means you weren't on task. And I have always leaned into that. Like, that is something that I learned so early on because we were just getting the diagnosis. And at that point, like, I really had no clue what in the world to do. I learned a lot from her in that way, but that's the other thing. Like, can you do it nonverbal? Can you correct without speaking? Can you sometimes communicate without speaking? Like, you could put a note on your kid's door. I love how you were such an amazing friend when so and so was at our house yesterday. Or thanks for, you know, emptying the dishwasher for me without me having to remind you. I did that one for my own son a few years ago, and he left it on his door for years that little sticky. He left it there because he liked being, you know, praised for something. And it's about noticing. And, you know, if we could just notice more, but not just notice in our heads, we have to notice out loud, or we have to notice on a sticky or, you know, we text them or whatever it is, but, yeah, it's hard to find that balance. But there's so many tiny ways that we can do it and just start to weave it into our family rituals. You know, we can do it at bedtime. One thing I did with my

son when he was young enough for me to tuck him in, which has been a long time ago. But I always said to him, I like the way you blank today. And it could have been something we were working on. It could have been just something I noticed. But those days were, like, really, really hard, and it was really hard to even notice that anything good had happened. And so, it really helped for him to end on a positive note. But it also helped me to remember that there's good stuff here too and that's the kind of stuff that we just need to keep sharing with them.

Mallory: Yeah. I mean, think about how good that feels for your child at the end of the day when they do are having kind of these internal struggles, this internal thought of like at bedtime there's all these things my mom could bring up of what I didn't do right today, but she chose to focus on how I put my backpack on the hook. Like, she chose to focus on that good thing I did. And she's like, it's just what a gift to your child that at the end of the day it's like all that stuff happened, but this is what happened today that really matters and I'm so proud of you. Like, what a gift to your child to be able to do that and focus on that.

Penny Williams: That gave me full body goosebumps when you said that, that mom chooses that. That's so amazing.

Katie: Yeah, I love that. Yeah. My, with my own kids, I went through, I think it was last Valentine's Day because I got these little heart shaped post its and I'm sure I got this idea from social media, but I just wrote things about them that I love about them and stuck them to their door. And what was so fascinating to me is that the first day I had stuck a few on there and then the next day I did a few more and then they asked for the post its and then they wanted to leave notes on each other's doors on my door, you know. And then like my husband and I, we have, you know, like, I guess, French doors so two doors going into our master bedroom and they were like, this door is for you and this door is for dad so that they could do some for him too. And it's so fascinating to me because it's like we are not only are we building them up, but we're also teaching them how to find the good in other people. And I think that was really powerful message that I wasn't expecting to learn. I was like, I'm going to teach my kids how much I love them and all these things. And then it came right back and I was like, oh, wow, that is really incredible to see the influence that that has on our kids.

Penny Williams: It's modeling. Yeah, it's modeling for them. And that's a big part of the authenticity mirror too, is that we need to show up in our authentic selves and we need to

help them recognize that we're doing that. It's definitely something I've struggled with, with social anxiety. Like, I still, before I walk out of the house, feel like I have to be perfect and there's no such thing as perfect. So, it's like this constant hamster wheel sort of and I know that they've picked up a lot of that, but I. I try to say, okay, well, you know, my hair is really bothering me, but it's okay. People don't care as much as I think they care, or something like that, so that I can still try to model that authenticity. And then also just sort of pulling back on things that don't matter. You know, I don't need the name brand sneakers. We all know that in this world, you could be happy without, you know, \$150 sneakers or \$200, whatever they are now, I don't know, right. Like, and that's something that minor divergent kid actually taught me. Like, he could care less what he puts on his body and walks out the door. Drives me insane. Like, he wants to go everywhere in pajama pants and I'm like, nope, we're not doing that. I'm not good with that. Like, this, this reflects on me, I feel like. But again, it's that social anxiety of my own. It's my stuff. but, like, just being open, like, I, you know, he likes to go shopping for clothes and whatever he leads to. I'm like, okay, that's you. You know, and my kids have very different interests than I have. You know, they're very into anime and manga and all of these things, and gaming and, I don't know that world. And I used to cringe like, oh, you're going to shut out the people who don't like that if you show how much you like that, right. And I had to really, really be able to change my own thinking or at least stop myself and do something differently for them, right. It can be so incredibly hard to model authenticity because I think traditionally, in general, we are taught that we need to show up a certain way and that we do need to worry about whether other people think of us.

Katie: What does that look like for you then? Because I'm thinking again, like, how would I apply this in my own life? And I love the idea of modeling authenticity, but you mentioned that you might feel anxious about that. So, is that all inner work that you're doing then? Do you have a mantra? What's your strategy for getting through those moments where because it is very real to be like, oh, my gosh, I don't want you to be rejected by peers. I don't want myself to be rejected. And we hear from parents all the time that are so embarrassed by their kid leaving the birthday or at the park, you know, so what does that look like for you to be able to model that authenticity?

Penny Williams: Yeah, it's been a journey. And there is a lot of inner work, like a ton of inner work. And it still goes on, you know, I'm still working on it. I wrote about in, Boy Without Instructions, which is kind of a chronological story of four years maybe from diagnosis

through those four years when he was really little about how I had to build this suit of armor. And when I went in public, I would have to think about that I have the suit of armor, and what they're thinking can't get to me. And I just had to figure out what was going to be the narrative that was going to work for me. And a lot of it, like, public meltdowns, I would tell myself, he's not giving me a hard time, he's having a hard time. And that those people don't know our story. They don't know my kid, they don't know me. They don't know what's going on. They don't know what he needs. They may think they do, but that's their issue. It's not my issue. It's not my kid's issue. And in those moments, what really needs my focus is this hard time that my kid's having. And it took a long time and a lot of practice, but I was really able to get to a point where I could be pretty calm in a public meltdown and kind of get through it, right, without really spiraling into everybody thinks I'm the worst parent. I do remember one time in a parking lot, there, were a lot of people staring and I actually said to him, people are going to call the police if you don't, like, if we can't just get in this car right now, somebody is going to call the police. There are times where it's extreme, and you do have to be a little bit concerned about where that might lead. But in general, it's something that's more about our inner dialogue. Again, I know I keep talking about that, but, you know, it's the story that we're telling ourselves. Everything is neutral. Every circumstance is absolutely neutral. And this is a lot of the self-work that I had to do. And we, we choose what emotion to assign to it. It may feel like we're not choosing or it may feel like there's an obvious answer, right, but we still have that choice and we can still change that story that, that goes on inside of us. And then, you know, when we do that, being transparent about it helps our kids to do the same thing for themselves. But there, I mean, there's definitely times where I was just like, I'm going to melt in a puddle in the floor. Like, I'm just going to burrow. I can't, I can't deal with this. I know people are judging me, you know, but I had to really be able to focus on the fact that it was about my kid. It wasn't about them, it wasn't even about me. It was about what he needed in those moments, what was his struggle and what, what could I do to support him? What could I do to help him? But yeah, a lot of repetition. Like I can't even begin to imagine how many times I have repeated in my head over 20 years he's not giving me a hard time, he's having a hard time, he's not giving me a hard time, he's having a hard time, like, right. And that, that's some of that work. But I think having to do that work early on helped me now in this later phase of, you know, not trying to control how they look and what they do and what they say and where they go and all these things that I used to worry about affecting their life and really helping them to be more authentic.

Mallory: You know, I relate so much to just letting the struggle of just letting your child kind of be true to themselves and be who they are, as you've kind of mentioned of like, oh, what are the other kids gonna think? Like those kind of worries. And I have, you know, one of my boys, he just marches to the beat of his own drum. He wears what he likes and he loves. And I definitely have those moments where I'm like, you're gonna wear that to school? And he's like, well, yeah, they're both tie dye. Even though they're completely different tie dyes and patterns, but they're both tie dye, so they go together. And I just, I have to, you know, swallow, pause, say okay, and let it happen. But something that I've been noticing is I feel like I have to do that a lot. Again, he's, you know, he's making this choice. He loves this. I'm letting him be as his authentic self. I've been noticing as other kids are getting off the bus, I don't know why, but in my head, I have this vision that all the other kids are very polished with their collared shirts and their perfectly matching clothes and their perfect haircuts styled with gel. And then the other day, I'm watching all the kids get off the bus, and I'm like, everyone else is just like my son. Their outfits are mismatched. We don't have uniforms. Their outfits are mismatched. Their hair is not perfectly done. I'm like, why was I having this vision that my son was the only one showing up to school in like, the mismatched tie dye. Every kid getting off the bus is like that for the most part. So, I don't know why I had built it up so much in my mind that he was going to stick out. When I'm looking at the sea of children stepping off the bus, and I'm like, oh, okay, I understand why he liked that because that kid's wearing that, too. Or, anyway, so I feel like for some reason, I had built up in my head that my child was so different than the others and he was going to stick out. But then when I really slowed down, I was like, oh, no, he doesn't really stick out when you look at the sea of kids, and it's okay.

Penny Williams: And it's okay even if he did.

Mallory: Yeah.

Penny Williams: Right. Which is really hard for us to accept as parents. Yeah. And I think, too, culturally, we've shifted a lot toward being more openly authentic toward not caring as much about appearance. You know, I think culturally we're shifting in that way, which is good, but kids can get down a rabbit hole online really easily that's not that. That isn't supportive, right. And so, we have to be careful about that. But I think we are sort of, I think Covid really had a little bit of an impact on that, too. For nine months, they were at home,

they wore their pajamas and did class or whatever, and they were just like, I'm so happy to go back and see people it doesn't matter what I look like. That might have been a tiny little glim from that period. I don't know if you guys are familiar with Mel Robbins and her work and, her newish book, Let Them, but that's really what comes to mind for me in this conversation. Let them, the other people judge, but also let your kid do whatever is natural for your kid. If that's stimming, that's okay. If it's two crazy tie dyes at one time, that's okay, you know. If they have, like, a really maybe squeaky voice or something, you've been trying to coach it out of them. Like, there's a reason for that. Just let them be and what will be will be, right. Like, and that's such a, I feel like sometimes that's such a patronizing phrase, but I think there's some comfort in that. There's some relief in that, in really recognizing that it will be okay. Like, I can look back at my own childhood experience with social anxiety and say, why in the world were you so upset about this thing? Like, why did you put so much emphasis on this and think it was life or death? Because it wasn't. You know, but we get to have that perspective, and they don't have it when they're living it. So, it can be sort of hard. But I've loved that phrase ever since she revealed it before the book even came out. Like, oh, my gosh, if I could just adopt that, I could really push myself more with anxiety, right. And, I think that's what we have to lean into, too, with our kids. Let them. You know, and, like, parents will get so upset because their kid will not wear a coat, right? And it's like, is it worth the battle? Like, you know, if it's negative 20 and they're going to stand outside for two hours, yes, it's worth the battle. But if they're running from the car to the building and back again, yeah, like, they'll figure it out, but it's not worth getting all riled up about.

Katie: I always laugh about that one because we're in Phoenix and so for us, like, 65 degrees is cold. Like, we'll get out our furry boots and all the things, and the kids are just running around playing soccer, and they're fine in. You know, my kids do wear polos, Mal I don't know, you know, they're very fancy. They have a uniform at school. They would never choose to wear a polo, but they have their polo shoes, shirt, and their shorts, and I'm like, are you serious right now? It is freezing cold. But it is when you put it into the grand scheme of things, I'm like, oh, yeah, it's 63 outside, you'll be all right even if you don't have your hoodie. But again, exactly what you said, I'm thinking, oh, gosh, what if people think that I don't have a jacket for my kid, you know, or I wasn't on top of it? And so, it is letting go of that. And this is actually bringing up a question for me, that I wanted to make sure to ask you, Penny. So, I'm sure there's people listening who are like, yeah, I struggle with this. I have not done this well in the past. So, any thoughts for people that are hearing this and maybe feel a little

bit like they need to make some changes or any encouragement for them? You know, is it a situation where you would say, maybe they need to go back and repair? What would that look like for a parent who's like, no, I've really struggled, and it's been really hard for me to put these things into practice?

Penny Williams: Yeah. I think, like, if you're, if you're critical or if you're really trying to guide what they're doing and how they're doing it, being able to just take one small step back. Like, I am always about teeny, tiny steps, because teeny, tiny steps are doable for all of us, no matter the brain and the wiring that we have. And we can get success that way. And when we have success, we can continue on. So how can you step back in one little way? Like maybe letting your kid go out of the house in crazy clothes? I remember my kid had a phase where he wanted to wear snow boots in, you know, when it was 80 outside, right. He wanted to wear them to school with a tank top and shorts. And I was like, that's ridiculous. What are people gonna think? And then I finally had to say, you know what? It doesn't matter. It's okay. Like, just think about, is there one thing right now that feels really important, but maybe you could let it go. Maybe you could let them get on the bus in the crazy tie dye outfit and then really sit with how that feels, right. Because for, you know, for me, I would have a lot of anxiety. I would probably spend the whole day anxious about it. And then when they got off the bus, I would be like, what did kids say to you today? I would need to know if it was bad, right?

Mallory: And they would be like, why would anyone say anything to me? What do you mean?

Penny Williams: Oblivious. Brings up, like, another really good point, too, that sometimes our neurodivergent kids are more oblivious. They don't have as much awareness about these things, and that can be a real blessing. When my kid was in sixth grade we tried this new charter school, and we were, carpooling with other boys. And when it was my turn, I would often hear them, like, blowing him off and stuff. And he had no clue. He would just keep going, you know, oh, well, if your mom won't let you game right after school, we can do it after your homework. We can do it then we can do it, right. And they're just like, like, I just don't want to do this. And I could see it clearly, and all the other kids could probably see it clearly, but he had no idea. And I would come home and I would, like, cry, and then I would be so grateful, which didn't seem to go together. But, like, it was sad the kids were blowing

him off, but, oh, my gosh, like, he was just being himself and it was okay because his feelings weren't hurt. He didn't see it, right. And so, yeah, like, really just leaning into, where can I take this little step back that's gonna help my kid step forward more like themselves, right. And then I think the other thing is really being transparent. Really, like, can you make a ritual where every day at one point in the day, you say something about your kid that you love?

Katie: I love that.

Penny Williams: You know, and just make it routine because we get so caught up and we get so busy, it's so hard to remember. That's why the bedtime phrase worked for me, because it could be part of that bedtime every single day. And I needed that if I was like, oh, I have to remember to say something cool today.

Katie: Like, well, when am I going to do that?

Penny Williams: When am I going to do that? How am I going to remember it? And when am I going to be in the mood to do it, right? And, like, when you're just drowning in hard things. But I have found, like, family rituals like, that not necessarily routine feels so rigid, ritual feels more like flow.

Katie: Yeah. I love that.

Penny Williams: Find a time.

Katie: Yeah. And I do think that our, at least my ADHD brain is sort of wired to be, like, ugh routine. I don't love it. I do need it, and I thrive with routine. But just the fact that it's like, feels like it's just structured and I can't get out of it, makes me want to avoid it. So, I love ritual or rhythm or, you know, we love to talk about kind of habit stacking, putting something you already do and adding one little thing to it. And yeah, that's, I love that with the bedtime routine. And also, it's a great way to end the day. So, I would say for parents who are wondering, like, where do I start? Maybe something first thing in the morning or at night, because those are both great times where, you know, your child is probably a little more calm, hopefully and, you know, you might have a little more attention, but that, that can be part of either starting or ending the day. It's very beautiful. Gosh, Penny, I feel like everything you're saying, I've had chills. I've been choked up. The story about the video

games and in your son, not realizing that was beautiful. I know that so many people in our audience are going to want to connect with you, so tell us a little bit about that. How can they stay in touch? How can they continue to learn from you?

Penny Williams: Yeah, the easiest thing to do is just go ParentingADHDandAutism.com. Everything is linked up there. Social, the podcast, YouTube, all of that good stuff. You can find the podcast on any podcast app. It's *Beautifully Complex*, if you just search that. I just had you guys on as guests and it was episode 337, so there's a huge library of help there. That's a completely free resource. I had so many great guests on over the years and it's, been its own kind of journey for me, which is really cool too. But, yeah, all the things. There's so many things there and, it's pretty self-explanatory.

Katie: Okay, great. Yeah, I was gonna say your podcast is just a goal for all of us. So, we love to see all the work that you're doing and, and thank you so much for taking the time to come on today and chat with us and just share your heart for helping kids be their authentic selves. I think it's very powerful.

Penny Williams: Thank you so much for having me. It's been a good conversation. I've had all the feels.

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!

Penny Williams is a behavior and parenting coach, author, and educator who supports families raising neurodivergent kids, including those with ADHD, autism, and anxiety. Through her science-informed, compassion-centered SIGNAL Parenting™ framework, she

helps parents understand what behavior is communicating and respond with connection instead of punishment.

Penny is the award-winning author of *Boy Without Instructions*, host of the *Beautifully Complex Podcast* with over 5 million downloads, and founder of the *Regulated Kids Project*. Her work has been featured in leading parenting and neurodiversity publications.