

## **Shining with ADHD by The Childhood Collective**

### **Episode #213: Your Questions Answered: ADHD, Sports, and Big Feelings**

Lori: Again, they're, like, in their comfort zone. I get home from school, and maybe I just want to relax and do screens, and that feels like the easy thing. But I think, again, as parents, we know that it's really important for them to feel a part of something, to have that movement that they need during the day that we know when they do those things, they actually are really happy and really enjoy themselves at the end of it. We see, like, the positive impact that it has on them in so many ways and the skills that they're learning. So just knowing, like, yeah, they might be resistant at first, but we would really encourage you to push them to do that thing.

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

Lori: And I'm Lori.

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

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

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

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

Lori: Today I'm here with Katie and Mallory, and we have been getting so many questions lately, from parents on our Instagram page about ADHD and sports activities. So, we felt like we needed to just have a dedicated podcast episode on this topic.

Katie: Absolutely. So, we asked you all on Instagram to share your most burning questions about sports and ADHD, and we got a lot of really good ones.

Mallory: Yeah. And I feel like sports, it's such a mixed bag for ADHD families, because on one hand, as parents, we know that they're really great for our kids. They provide that movement that we know they need. They provide a sense of structure. They give social connection. It's a great way for kids to make friends. Gives the, you know, those dopamine boosts that come from those things. But on the other hand, sports can bring a lot of frustration, forgotten gear, emotional outbursts when your child loses or things don't go to plan, a fear of failure, your child may be wanting to quit in the middle of a season. So, on one hand we know it's great, and on the other hand, we can, like, kind of anticipate that we might be up for a handful.

Lori: Yes. And for so many parents, it can be really confusing to know, how much do I push my child? When do I back off? And we hear parents asking things like, you know, should I tell the coach that they have ADHD? Why is every game ending in tears? Or, I feel like they're feeling so embarrassed when their child is having these, like, behaviors in front of all the other kids. What do I do if they refuse to go? So, there's lots, lots and lots of good questions.

Katie: Yeah. And so much to unpack there. So today we are going to answer five of the most common questions that we received. We can't answer all of them, but we really want to give you some practical advice to hopefully keep sports fun and a positive experience for you and your child. Before we jump in today, of course we're going to make our usual request. Can you please make sure that if you are loving this content, go ahead and give us a five-star review and leave us a comment wherever you listen to podcasts. Or if you've already left us a review or reviews aren't your thing, please feel free to just send this over to a friend who might also love to hear this information. And anyone who has already left us a review, thank you! We read every single one and text them around on the group chat and they just make our day. So, thank you so much for the support.

Mallory: Absolutely. Okay, so let's dive into those five common questions, the first one of which, do I tell my child's coach up front that they have ADHD? And this is one of the most common questions we get. We get this question all the time. Parents, there's a fear, there's a worry that if I say something that my child's going to get labeled. Maybe the coach is going to treat them differently, but not in a good way. But if I don't tell the coach that my child has ADHD, how is the coach going to interpret my child's behavior or their struggles? Are they

going to be able to support them? So, we understand why parents ask this question all the time. Should I share that my child has ADHD with their coach?

Lori: Yeah. And there's not a one size fits all answer to this either. But a good rule of thumb is if you're seeing that their ADHD symptoms are impacting their ability to participate in that activity, how the coach perceives them, if they're getting in trouble for ADHD related behaviors. And actually, in this question that we got on Instagram, this parent was actually saying their ADHD symptoms, they're inattention, I'm seeing that it's affecting their performance. In that situation, we really would encourage you to share that information with a coach. And I also say that from a little bit of personal experience, my husband has been helping to coach for a few years. And I know there are certain kids where they're having a really hard time with like, coaching those kids just because they are getting off task or not focused. And I do think sometimes I will see him misinterpreting those behaviors and I think if he had a context of like, this child isn't doing this intentionally, it's because this is hard for them and also these are the things that helps, I think would make a huge difference in that child's success on a team and their kind of willingness to work with them and their understanding about it.

Katie: I agree. And, and I, my husband also coached and it's the same, you know, for them because they don't always, these coaches, especially for youth sports, they're not like, no, in our case a professional, they have, they don't have a master's degree in child development, you know, so as parents coming to the table to say, hey, here's some things that have helped, I think that's a really important key. And I, you know, I, I tend to over talk things and so I have to remind myself, you know, I'm not sharing my child's entire history. This person does not need all the details and all the things. It could be something as simple as hey, sometimes for my son, you know, transitions can be kind of tough. So anytime that you can make sure you have his attention or like touch his shoulder before you give instructions, that can make a huge difference. You know, something simple and you don't even have to share a true diagnosis if you don't feel comfortable. But really, it's just coming to the table to try to help bridge that gap and be helpful to the coach because they're there usually as a volunteer and you don't want them just to yell at your child or get really frustrated.

Mallory: Yeah. And I think that the big piece here, like you said Katie, is you don't even necessarily have to share that it's ADHD, but the goal here really is to help the coach

understand how to support your child better. So, if you're able to come to the table with strategies that, you know, really help them, that's the goal here, is giving the coach strategies to support your child based on whatever is tricky for them. And if you have an older child, you're going to want to include them in that conversation too. And ahead of time, talk with your tween, talk with your teen. What are they comfortable sharing with their coach? What would you like their coach to know? Get their input about what strategies might be helpful for them. And it's really honestly a great opportunity to teach your child self-advocacy because it's an opportunity where you might be able to kind of be there with them doing it. Whereas when it comes to school and things like that, a lot of times, especially once they get to high school, they're kind of on their own, certainly in college they're on their own, so it's a great, we can also look at this as, like, a great opportunity for our kids to learn how to advocate for themselves. How to talk with someone who feels in a position of power to let them know what you need to really be successful. And I think another great way to frame it, you know, you're on a team, this is teamwork. You know, let the coach know that you're on the same team. Like, we're all working, I want to help you because I know you want to help my child, so, let's all work together to see how this could go better. What could we do a little bit differently to really help my child shine and thrive in this sport that, hopefully they really love?

Lori: Yes. It's so important to kind of frame it as teamwork. And I think, the coaches really appreciate that, and sometimes they might be hesitant to talk with you about it because maybe they feel like this is coming out of nowhere. Maybe the parent doesn't see these things. So, I think it, again, opens up that conversation with the parent. So, our second question that we got was, what do I do when my ADHD child wants to quit their sport or loses interest?

Katie: And this one never happened to any of us, obviously.

Lori: This one comes up. This is probably the most common one we get. I would say this one hits home for so many parents. I know I personally went through this. I think all of us have at some point. ADHD brains crave novelty, and so sometimes your kids will be super excited about this. We see this with so many passions, with ADHD years, where they're, like, super into something for, like, three weeks, and then they're onto something else, right. So that new thing that was really excited that they were really into all of a sudden feels a little repetitive. Maybe it's more challenging than they were expecting it to be. Maybe their motivation starts

to tank, and then parents are kind of left, like, do we quit? Do we keep going? What do I do from here?

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. And I know for myself and my husband, you know, there is that kind of panicked feeling like, oh, my gosh, are we raising a quitter? Like, is our kid just not gonna, you know, ever be able to finish something that's hard for him? And so, you know, that's something to keep in mind, is that it's not necessarily a reflection of your child's character. It's most likely related to that executive functioning piece. Whether it's. It was really exciting at the beginning or maybe, like you mentioned, Lori, the middle is where you put in all the work, right. So that's when it gets hard, and it takes a lot of persistence. And I think of my daughter doing ballet, and the first several months of the year, they stand at the bar and they work, and it looks very boring to me. Granted, I can't hear the music through the window, so maybe it's much more exciting when you have classical music playing, but it's just work. It's building muscles and posture and, you know, tucking your belly button in and things that just don't seem that interesting. But when you get through that part, you get to learn dances and you get to get ready for the recital and the ballet, and that's the part that's really exciting. And the same goes for a lot of sports. You might start with, you know, a few weeks of practice before you even get to a game, and that part can be kind of boring.

Lori: Yeah.

Mallory: Yeah. I think a good rule of thumb is just to kind of pause before you pull the plug. Because also, when we're feeling really emotional about something, we can make hasty decisions that we regret later. So, pause before you pull the plug. Really give some time to think through it. Maybe you're asking your child questions like, what's feeling hard about this right now? What can make it more fun to really understand from their perspective, like, what's kind of leading up to wanting to quit. And I can say, my son recently, finished his first season of volleyball. He, you know, on a whim, kind of decided he wanted to do it. And we were headed into his final practice, and he was complaining he didn't want to go to this last practice, but, you know, we're at this point, we're not giving up. It's the last practice, we're doing it. And then the next day, he's like, can you sign me up for the next season of volleyball? And so, it's, it changes daily. And I was like, well, let's sleep on it. Luckily, we don't we have, like a month or so before we actually need to register for the next season to really think about it and reflect about what was fun about it or what didn't we like about it.

But again, like, kind of taking time to process through these decisions. But again, get to understand your child's perspective if they are feeling frustrated or not liking it. Why is that? Could we make, could we do some problem solving that is going to make it a little easier or a little more fun.

Lori: Yep. And I think sometimes it can help to have you know, like a finish line agreement. Like, we're going to do this, you know, if we're going to start this sport and kind of starting out with a very clear expectation about it, like if we're going to pay for the season and we're going to get some of the gear, then we have to kind of do the full season. And I do think sometimes kids, you know, they do start a sport or an activity and they realize, like, this isn't for me or I don't love it or whatever. And that does happen, but making sure our kids understand, hey, we've invested, we've agreed to do this and kind of finishing it out. Now, there are obviously situations where we hear about, like, maybe the kids are being bullied by a coach or other kids on a team, or there's like some harm going on within that team, then we would definitely say, like, if you feel like it's not a good situation, it's harmful for your child, then you do need to kind of reconsider that maybe this isn't the right fit. Maybe they like the sport, but maybe it's not a good fit with a coach or some of the teammates or whatever. And definitely keep that in mind. But I know my daughter recently, she had been ice skating for a long time and she really came to me and was like, I just really don't want to do this anymore and I want to try other sports. And because she had really put in a lot of time and effort and this was, she kind of been hinting at this for a while. Sometimes we do need to listen to our kids and say, okay, they've been doing this thing for a while, maybe their interest has changed. And we did take a couple of months to like, sit on it. We didn't want to do that immediately just because, like Mallory said, it can change and shift day to day with kids. So, I wouldn't again make a rash decision. But my daughter did switch and she loves her new activity and I'm glad we did it because she gets that varied experience and she's very motivated for it. So again, it's not a one size fits all, but those are kind of things to consider.

Katie: I love it. So question number three was, how can I help my child build resilience and keep a good attitude during games? I love this. And this is a tough one. Okay, so losing is hard for all kids and a lot of adults, but when you have ADHD, that emotional intensity, that, that quick reaction, it just feels 10 times stronger. And so, we know that ADHD brains are wired for this kind of quick reaction so that frustration comes out fast and loud. And so, what we want to think about here is how do we build resilience? Because resilience is a skill.

Okay. It's not something that we're naturally born with, it's something that we can grow. But again, this is something that all kids are going to be dealing with and you might see that it's harder than what you would expect for your child if they have ADHD.

Mallory: And I feel like we're a broken record here, but again, like the best way to grow any skill, so we're talking about resilience as a skill here, is to teach it, show it, practice it, do it. So, practicing resilience, practicing handling losing or challenging situations in a safe place, like at home, playing board games. Giving them small opportunities to manage that kind of similar frustration when you're not kind of in the public eye, you know, on the soccer field and you miss your shot. So, thinking about how you can give your child lots of opportunities to kind of build resilience towards being a good loser in a sense. And then of course, when your child does do that, well, we're praising, we're celebrating, we're giving that feedback. So again, we have to think of resilience as a skill. And the way we develop any skill is by doing it and by practicing. So finding those little baby steps that we can help our kids take, that hopefully then generalize to the higher stakes situations when you're on the soccer field or on the basketball court.

Lori: Yeah, and sometimes those, like if our kids start there and they haven't had a lot of that opportunity, it's just so it's the shame of doing that in front of other kids. Like they might react emotionally, then they realize that other people notice it and it's just an even bigger reaction because of that. So again, sometimes those like, bigger sports where other teammates might get frustrated or parents from the sidelines are getting frustrated, you know, that can be really hard. And sometimes, you know, a big team sport like that can be too much for some kids, especially when they're younger and just starting out developing those skills. They do need a lot of practice and opportunities where you can give them kind of those opportunities without them feeling embarrassed and feeling safe. Another thing is to kind of focus on the praise and feedback. I know, you know, a lot of parents on the soccer team are like, oh my gosh, you made a goal or I'm gonna give you money if you make a goal or whatever.

Katie: Oh my gosh, is that real?

Lori: That's for real.

Katie: Oh, no, I already, I just got anxious when you said that.

Lori: It's not like my husband has done that with our daughter. I mean, that has never happened. I think a lot of times focusing on effort instead of like those outcomes is really a good way to kind of teach that resilience and not focusing on whether or not you won or lost a game. Because if our kids focus on that and then they don't, they're going to be extra upset about that. So really focusing when they finish a game, oh my goodness, you put in so much effort. I saw you hustling out there. You worked really hard. That team was really good. Helps them to focus on the process of it and not being perfect and not the goal, not being to like win or lose, when you're giving that feedback is really helpful. And I think for a parent, like one of the biggest things that we hear from parents is, and I just, I remember a mom saying to me, my son's doing flag football, but he gets really upset and has these meltdowns or maybe he's not even paying attention and like, I just feel embarrassed the whole time, right. That there is a feeling of these big emotions within us that our kids are not following what all the other kids are doing, right. And it feels embarrassing. We want to validate that, that, that's like a real feeling that you feel and that can be really, really hard. But I think even having a mantra for yourself in those moments, like something that you can say to yourself that my child is growing in their own way and, and this is helping them. And reminding yourself that again, for them to get better at some of these things, they might not be at the same level of all the other kids out there, but they're still growing in their own way and it's still helping them and they're still having fun. And that's like the most important part.

Mallory: Gosh, these kids forcing us to grow our own skills, right. So, our fourth question is how do I deal with my child not wanting to do a new activity even when they had said they wanted to? And so, this is a tricky one. So, your child begs you to sign them up for something and the time comes and they've changed their mind. And I think a lot of times this is like kind of getting at the heart of emotion regulation and sometimes anxiety. And a lot of kids with ADHD experience rejection sensitivity. We've had episodes about this. But it's that fear, their fear of failing or being embarrassed how, as we've kind of touched upon. But sometimes what is coming off as stubbornness of like, I'm not doing that, no way you're going to get me in there today, is kind of this sense of self protection. Like there's some kind of anxiety about that and they're avoiding that situation. So, they'd rather just not even try, rather than risk the possibility of like losing the game or embarrassing themselves, especially if it's something new. It's a tricky one.

Lori: It is. And I think again, even for, for older kids, I hear lots of parents saying, like, they've just sort of lost interest in doing those activities. And as kids get older, sometimes it can feel like we'll do. I push them. But a lot of times they're again, they're like in their comfort zone. Like, I get home from school and maybe I just want to relax and do screens. And that feels like the easy thing. But I think again, as parents, we know that it's really important for them to feel a part of something, to have that movement that they need during the day. That we know when they do those things, they actually are really happy and really enjoy themselves at the end of it. We see like the positive impact that it has on them and so many ways and the skills that they're learning. So just knowing like, yeah, they might be resistant at first, but we would really encourage you to push them to do that thing. I was just, my daughter again, was like starting new activities and she was going into gymnastics class and this little girl was there and her, she refused to go in. And I actually had my girls like, try and like take her hand and encourage her to come in because I was like, because my kids went through the same thing. Like, I feel it's. I feel so empathetic to that because I have been there before with my kids not wanting to do stuff. And she still wouldn't come in. And her mom, I will give her props because she was like, honey, I know you really want to do this. You've been begging to do this for weeks, so we're not leaving. And she was like, if you need to stay out here and just watch for a little bit, but she let her kind of take small steps. And I think sometimes it is a matter of small steps and like, maybe your child does just watch from the window the first time. Or maybe they watch from the window for 15 minutes and maybe next time they go in for a little bit. So, thinking about even little steps to get in there if they are feeling really scared. You know, I, I love the movie what about Bob? But he's like baby steps. So, like, what are some baby steps that you can do to kind of gradually build up your child's like, tolerance and ability to try that? And I watched that little girl, she watched from the window for 15 minutes and her mom, like, kept asking her and she finally like went in and she had a blast and had such a fun time. And you think sometimes as parents we get like, really anxious, like, are they not going to do it? And we might even leave. But gosh, that girl would have missed out on an entire opportunity to try a sport that could have been life changing for her, you know. So just encouraging you if you find your child not wanting to do those things, giving them the little push and encouragement that they need, but also realizing sometimes that they might need to take kind of small steps to doing that activity.

Katie: Yeah, I've learned so much about anxiety working with the two of you. And this is what happens when you partner with two child psychologists, but, you know, the big

takeaway there just being that, you know, you don't want to sort of enforce that by letting your child leave and get out of it because then it just grows and it becomes more and more scary the next time. And that's such a hard thing for parents to do. But really, you know, it seems like you've solved it, you got back in the car and you left, but then next time it's going to be that much harder. And so that's, that's my takeaway as a parent working with two child psychologists, I always keep that in mind. Like, do not reinforce this by letting them avoid.

Lori: Yeah, avoidance just kind of grows that, fear, we know. So anytime you can kind of encourage them to still do the thing. You're communicating to your child, I know you can cope with this thing and I know it's going to go well and I'm here to support you. I understand that you're scared though, and really validating them, but I know you can do it. I know you're scared, but I know you can do it. And I'm here with you.

Katie: I love that. So, our last question, question five, is team sports or individual sports? Which one is best for kids with ADHD? And we get this question a lot. I actually got this question all the time when I was working in private practice because team sports were really hard. And parents would say, you know, I really want my child to be active, so what can I do? So obviously as parents, you know, we want our kids to be building social skills, but it's a balance. Is it going to just be too stressful or just too much for my child?

Lori: Yes. And honestly, I think both can work. And I know we're giving that answer for a lot of things.

Katie: Yeah, I thought you were going to be very clear and tell us only one sport.

Lori: There's no right or wrong answer. And it was interesting, we asked people within our audience, like, what is the best sport and wasn't it soccer? That was like the biggest one. Which is so funny to me because I actually feel like soccer is a really challenging sport for a kid with ADHD. Again, it requires so many executive functioning skills. If you miss a goal, like the emotion regulation, the listening, cooperating, paying attention during practices, all of it is, I feel like it's a lot, and I know we talked about that before. Like, team sports are amazing at building those social skills and executive functioning skills. So, if your child, part of it has to do with, like, if your child is passionate about it. Like, if they are not passionate about what they are doing, then it's going to be really hard. But maybe your child is just very talented at soccer and they love it and that's what you're going to do, but I do think for

younger kids, like 5, 6, 7, sometimes starting out with a team sport when you have ADHD can be a little bit too much for the reasons that we've talked about, where it can feel like making a mistake in front of everyone or being able to pay attention in big group. Maybe you try those out and your child does have a really hard time maybe backing up and starting to think about, maybe there's some individual sports we can try where my child's getting a little bit more one-on-one, where it's not such a big group. They might have a little bit more success with that. So that's something to think about.

Mallory: Yeah. And coming back, circling back to having polled our audience, soccer was the number one, like most, most common answer for kids with ADHD. But the following three or four were all individual sports. Swimming, martial arts and gymnastics were all kind of in the top four. So, soccer is up there, but the other ones were these more individual sports which are great for a lot of kids with ADHD. And my boys, really like golf. So, some kids need the structure of a sport, but they need less distractions or something that's not so focused on like who won the game kind of situation. Maybe you're just kind of competing against yourself, trying to, to beat your best time or do better. You know, fewer strokes, this next round of golf, things like that. So again, it's about really finding what ignites your child's passion, What they're excited about. And sometimes it takes trying quite a few things before you really find what the perfect fit is for your kid.

Lori: So, to kind of wrap up, I think it's just important to think about whether your child is doing a team sport or an individual sport. Any of these are really powerful learning opportunities for your child to learn about efforts, and resilience, and managing big emotions and working as a team. Developing these skills, sports are such an amazing way to do that and it also has the added benefit of being a way for your child to get that movement in that they need to self-regulate too.

Mallory: Absolutely. So, we hope that this gives you some reassurance and a few ideas to make sports feel less stressful and more enjoyable for the whole family. Again, please leave us a five-star review and a comment if you're finding this podcast helpful. It really is the best way for us to grow and reach more families like yours.

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!