

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

### **Episode #214: ADHD in Middle School: Why Everything Feels Harder (and What Helps)**

Jessi Dall: For me, the most important thing is for us to help you help your child feel understood. They feel out, they feel like an outsider. They feel like they don't belong. You know, they're going through all of that as a middle schooler in general, and then you throw in the ADHD. And so, I try to give parents some script that they can use at home because if we don't have it already in our mind, of course we're going to say, have you started your homework yet? Why can't you do your homework when I asked you the first time? You know, it escalates quickly and of course, then the power struggle starts and then shuts down the potential for any executive function skills to develop.

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, Katie and I are interviewing an expert in a topic that comes up often for our community, the transition to middle school. For a lot of ADHD families, this stage feels like stepping into a new universe. More teachers, different expectations, new routines, more homework, and way more independence.

Katie: Yes! And when your child has ADHD, those growing expectations can bring on a whole new level of executive function challenges, from organization, time management to big emotions and difficulty with follow through.

Lori: That's why we're excited to have Jessi Dall joining us today. Jessi is the founder of Sophos Speech and Academics in Phoenix, Arizona, a thriving practice that helps families navigate speech, learning, and executive functioning challenges with a compassionate, family centered approach. Welcome, Jessi.

Jessi Dall: Thank you. I'm so glad to be here.

Lori: We're so happy to have you.

Katie: And you're right in our backyard, just down the street.

Jessi Dall: Yes, all here in Phoenix together.

Katie: So, we're really excited to be chatting with you today. And just to start out, can you tell our listeners a little bit more about your background, kind of how you got started and then how you came to start Sophos?

Jessi Dall: Sure. I started as a classroom teacher in public school, transitioned to private school. and then I got this harebrained idea that I was gonna go to dental school because I just really wanted to do more. So, while I was getting my prereqs, I was teaching by day getting my prereqs, I started collecting tutoring students and then I left the classroom and just had tutoring as basically a side hustle and that was in 2008. And then I was faced with the financial advisor and thought, I don't think dentistry is my thing. But coming from an educational background, I'm like, am I entrepreneurial? I don't really know. And so, I hustled. And then I learned a lot along the way. I ran the company, for about six years before I started having my own kids and that completely changed my perspective on the services that we offer. And you know, you just get a different viewpoint when you're going through it with your own kids. My oldest has ADHD, my youngest has ADHD, we've got dyslexia, dysgraphia in there. And so really experiencing that on a personal level while growing the business to serve on campuses, in homes, virtually at our center, has all contributed our really keeping students at the heart of everything that we do and families, because it all started with,

the homework battle and wanting to bring that to an end so that families could have their quality time back. Cause there's just so little time that families get to spend together with all the extracurriculars. But then as it's grown to become much more than that, including occupational therapy, speech therapy, executive function coaching, dyslexia programs. And so, we've really tried to become a cohesive social service. We call ourselves a major educational support hub so that we have all these practitioners who are working closely together to really get those results that the kids are needing.

Katie: Yeah, in a way it's kind of like a dream for families because I know as a speech therapist on the private practice side, a lot of times, you know, you'd have this kind of idea of a one stop shop. Like families can come and get all their services, but that's really, really, really hard to implement in real life. Because like OT, for example, you need a lot of space. They need a whole gym for occupational therapy, you know, and then with SLPs and getting their therapies ready and tightened up with like the reading schedules and the occupational therapy schedules and families that have two or three kids coming, it was just almost impossible. And so, what ends up happening is families go around to all these different places, right. And after school on Mondays we do handwriting, and on Tuesdays we have speech. And so, the idea of putting everything integrated, it's a really big idea and I have so much respect for the fact that you've been able to make that work. And I think it is a real blessing for families because it's just like your parents are already so stressed out and have so much going on and coordinating the therapy schedules is just such a headache. So.

Lori: Yeah, especially when you have ADHD too, as a parent and you're trying to manage like going here for occupational therapy on Monday and here for dyslexia tutoring on Tuesday and it becomes so much for families.

Katie: And it looks more manageable to me when it's in my phone on my calendar. But then when I'm actually stuck in traffic, I'm like who made this schedule? What are we doing? So, yeah, that's a lot of things. So that's great. And I love to hear about that. And I think we'll continue to kind of touch on that throughout today and some of the strategies that you use in that business. And so, when we're talking today about middle school. Okay, so Lori and I both have daughters that started middle school recently, and it really is a whole new world. You have more classes, more homework, a lot of responsibilities. And obviously, as we think about, you know, as kids get older, the executive functioning demands just continue to

increase. So, what would you say are some of the biggest struggles with executive functioning that you tend to see in this middle school transition?

Jessi Dall: Yeah, I think, one of the things as parents, or when I'm consulting with parents, I always try to affirm them because they come to me and think, why doesn't, why don't my kids have these skills? I mean, I have been teaching them. They've been in school for 12 years they should have these skills by now. They don't and that's very normal. ADHD or not ADHD. And then this fear comes up of, if it's this bad in middle school, how's my kid ever going to make it in high school? So, it's just so normal and especially for our ADHD kids. And then you put, you, incorporate the pushback from the student and the refusal, the power struggles, all of it. And at times they just appear lazy and having a bad attitude. And of course that's a, that is a trigger for parents where they're just instantly frustrated with their child. So, it's a bad combination that they're bringing to the table. However, it's a very normal combination. And I also try to tell parents all those external behaviors that you're seeing of the power struggles, perceived laziness, it's a mask. The child is feeling no confidence, feeling overwhelmed, not knowing where to start, having anxiety. So of course it's easier to just act like I don't care. I'm not even going to try to do this or to just fight with the parent or whatever that plays out to be. And so just kind of giving a realistic picture to parents is something I try to do on the front end. Because what we typically see as the top struggles, are procrastination, time management and task initiation.

And I think those are all normal. But when you're dealing with a middle schooler as a parent, it's hard to know is this just the normal middle school chaos of all the things you've already listed, more teachers, more responsibility, or is this something that might need some extra support? And I break it down into two things, pattern and impact. And by pattern, I mean it's normal to occasionally have a student forget to turn in an assignment or forget they have a quiz. That's totally normal. That's not a pattern, that's a one off. It's totally normal for them to need some reminders. But if the pattern begins to establish as they're consistently not turning in assignments, they are consistently starting to see their grades drop and drop and drop and it's becoming that negative pattern. That's when it's not just the normal chaos and they probably need some specific executive function support. And so, with the pattern it links directly to the impact. And the impact can be simple or can be a bit more complicated. But the impact, the subtle impact is the rising stress level in the child. And I think as parents we feel that when we know our child is oftentimes, they're really trying but their stress just keeps

rising, their anxiety keeps rising, and even their avoidance is increasing. That impact of the negative patterns is a red flag for we, need to do something. We're not just going to hope that this gets better.

Lori: Right. Yeah. And I would say that speaks to everything that I see when I work with middle schoolers or high schoolers. And so many times they start, maybe start off the year, they get their planner, they're excited, they really do want to do well. And then as the year progresses they get more behind in assignments. They now they have 20 missing assignments. Now they're so anxious that they're in fight flight freeze. They've gone to freeze and they can't initiate because of the executive functioning impact and the anxiety and the avoidance that goes with that. And it just becomes this kind of negative spiral, a downward spiral into like poor grades, overwhelm and then they're just kind of, it's so hard to get back on track and they feel like they can't even do it at that point. And yeah, and so many of them are saying I want to do well. Like want good grades, they want to be successful, just like you said. But sometimes it doesn't look like it. They don't know how.

Jessi Dall: Yeah, yeah. Which the good news is executive function skills can be taught. There is, there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. I like to think of it as like the momentum. So, you can have momentum in a really negative way. You miss one assignment and that turns into two, and then you're going to do poorly on the test because you didn't, you know, do the work that prepared you for the test. And you can also get that momentum going in a positive way. Like I turned it in and that felt really good and that gave me a lot of dopamine, so let's do that again. And I really feel that, I think I'm, as a parent, I'm overly sensitive to momentum. And I love what you said about the pattern and the impact. And I'm going to keep that in mind because I think one missed assignment or one late assignment and I immediately jump, right. My own ADHD jumps to, oh, my gosh, we're dropping out. This is a tragedy. Let me just call my mom and tell her about the problem. And she also has emotion dysregulation. So, I think it's really, that is really great for parents and a really tangible thing that they can take away is, is this really a pattern versus a one time, a one-time thing? That's a great barometer for parents to keep in mind.

Lori: And I think it's good to think about in the sense that we do want to prevent it. If we know your child has ADHD, they're going to struggle with those things. Getting ahead of that

and understanding like these are going to be hard. So, we really want to kind of front end some of those like, supports and strategies like before the school year starts so that they can kind of have that positive experience I think is important.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely.

Lori: So many parents tell us their kids just can't get started or they lose focus halfway through their homework. Let's talk about some realistic strategies that families can use at home to support focus, organization, time management without constant reminders and power struggles.

Jessi Dall: Yes. I wish that I could say I have this magical formula and if you just know it, all your problems will be solved, but not the case. But I do have some super practical things that you as parents, parents, can take away from today and implement today and see immediate change today. And the first thing is a, dedicated space in your home for your child to do their work. And I want to clarify that because a lot of parents hear that and they think, okay, great, I'm going to get a desk, I'm going to get pencils, I'm going to get paper. They won't need to get up from their desk because they'll have all the supplies they need. And what they're missing is the student buy in. The child has to feel like this is a space that speaks to me and that supports my focus struggles. And so, I always encourage parents to be curious. It's so hard because we have different ways as parents that work for us. But to ask the child, do you like to, do you feel yourself being more focused when it's really bright or when the lighting is dim? And letting that being okay as a parent, I mean, this totally comes back to us as parents that it's like we have in our mind. I focus better when the lighting is good, that may not be true. A lot of ADHD kids get super overstimulated and exhausted more easily with too much light. Asking the music question. I don't have ADHD, so listening to music while I'm trying to do a super focused task is way distracting for me. But we found with a lot of our ADHD kids, specific music is really helpful for their study space. And so, asking some of those questions and helping the child feel like, oh, I get to have a say because I'm already feeling totally lost, which is why I'm needing executive function skills. And I would of course be remiss if we didn't talk about the phone. In our sessions, in our executive function sessions that we do with students, we have a couple must haves. There's two settings on the iPhone. I'm not going to talk about the Android, because I'm not as familiar with it, but I'm sure there's similar settings. And the first setting is downtime. And so, if you put the phone or the

student puts their phone in the downtime setting, it allows the phone to block all apps except for specific ones. And I think they don't have the self-control. Like some of them are doing their homework on their phone. They need to be able to access their homework portal or their Google Classroom or whatever it is and so we're actually doing them a disservice by saying you can't have your phone. So how do we help them eliminate the distraction? So, downtime in conjunction with focus, which a lot of adults I know use focus, especially when they're driving. But that setting allows for a specific amount of time, which I like because I think that time management piece is so important. Kids with ADHD go into their designated workspace and they immediately think they've been there for an hour and they've only been there for five minutes.

Lori: Yes.

Jessi Dall: Helping them navigate that. And we use the model of cue routine reward. And so, in this situation the cue is the designated space. The student is going to go there. They're having that mental shift of, okay, I'm going to get something done. The cue is putting their phone in the settings. If they don't need it for homework, I would highly recommend not having that at their designated place. But if they do need it, there's ways to make it work and help them still be productive. The routine is every time I sit down to do my work at this space, I am going to first, get out my planner, second, make sure I have a glass of water, whatever it is, that's part of their routine. But routines are really valuable for the ADHD student because it kind of calms the chaos in their mind. We at Sophos use the Pomodoro technique, which is a 25-minute study model. And so, for students that gives them a beginning and an end time because they get very overwhelmed by, I don't know when I'm going to be able to get out of this chair and I don't like that. That creates that anxiety and lack of motivation. And so, with the Pomodoro model, they only have to be there for 25 minutes and this can go up to a second cycle. So, let's say they do 25 minutes, then they earn their reward, whatever that reward is. It could be laying on the floor and just relaxing. It could be going outside and going for a bike ride. It could be getting to scroll on their phone, which is where that focus setting on the iPhone comes in. So, whatever they decide it is or you as a parent and the student decide, but I always get asked this question, okay, we're going to do the Pomodoro method, 25 minutes. But you just said don't have the phone at the study station. So how does my student know when 25 minutes is up? I love the Time Timer. You can get it on Amazon. The visual timer.

Lori: I'm holding mine up in my office. I use it for my testing sessions.

Katie: We have them all throughout our houses too. And these, can you quickly explain to people what that is though? Because they're not going to be seeing this. What is the Time Timer. Like, how does it work?

Jessi Dall: Yes, definitely. And first of all, it gives that instant reward because the student gets to control the knob to turn it to the, we're going to use the Pomodoro 25 minutes. As they're working, they get that visual encouragement seeing the colored part of the timer go less and less and less and then ping and they get that little hit of dopamine. The feel-good signal in their brain of just accomplished something. And we want to give these kids some wins because a lot of them are not getting a lot of wins in their days at school. And so definitely a visual timer that's part of their designated space, if you have multiple but not moving around the house but with them. And then another tool that we really like, and if you're not familiar with body doubling, it basically means the power of having another physical person present increases the motivation and the productivity of a person with or without ADHD, but it's significant, it's very prevalent in ADHD.

Katie: Yeah, I do, we use the term body doubling all the time in my house. Like even if I'm laying in bed watching TV and I'll tell my husband like I need a body double to brush my teeth because I just can't get up and he's like so amused by me all the time, obviously. But it really does help. And then it's like, oh, that was actually not that big of a deal. But sometimes it's just like you said, the getting started.

Lori: Do you find that, using your friends, do they just have friends where they can schedule to do kind of body doubling with or does that become a distraction? What have you found with that?

Jessi Dall: Yes, we have lots of students that that's how they do it. Which from a parent and a tutor perspective, it seems a little odd to me that they're on FaceTime with their friend and they're not talking, they just have the phone there.

Lori: I see it all the time though. I see people all the time.

Jessi Dall: Yeah, yeah, it's exactly. That's what it's creating is that body doubling sensation of I have someone here with me so I can keep moving.

Lori: Right. Yeah, that's so helpful.

Katie: As parents, it is really tricky to know when to step in and when to step back. So how can families support our kids when it comes to building that independence and helping them be confident with their executive functioning skills, but at the same time still giving them the structure that they need?

Lori: Yeah. And one thing I guess I noticed this year with middle school and our school is maybe a little bit different than other people's. We don't have a lot of stuff that's online, so they have to have like books and paper and pencils and they go to their locker a couple times a day. But I was really overwhelmed when we went to a presentation on the locker situation and like the, they're just expecting you to know how to organize the locker. And that's another issue that we see of kids forgetting books. Kids, that's where they get the assignments lost. They did the assignments, but they get lost in the mess of this locker or their backpack and don't turn them in. So, I don't know if you have any tips about like the organization component at school where parents like don't have control.

Jessi Dall: Yes. And that is so common with our executive function students, middle school students especially, they cannot keep track of things that are in a locker. And so usually what ends up happening is one, they just don't turn in the things because they can't keep track of them. Or they keep everything in their backpack and then they've got a 40-pound backpack that they're carrying around. And that's not a great strategy either. And so, I think, our approach is to work with the school as much as possible on that. Some of the schools are real hung up on every class needs to have its own binder. Why? And so, if we can have that conversation with, can we do an accordion where each class has its own section, that cuts down five pounds right there. And then they've always got all their assignments at least in there. Are they going to keep track of all the books? Not likely. But I think, I mean, it is creating that routine though. And that's where a lot of time our coaching comes in with, okay, every morning you're going to go and you're going to get these three things and you're going to put them in your backpack. At lunch, you're going to go and get these three things and swap out these three things. And it usually takes till the end of first quarter before we really get in a groove. And then you throw in the component of, oh, well, this teacher decided they

don't want us to bring that to class anymore. Or this teacher decided they want us to bring extra things. And so, it's definitely a revolving routine that takes, it takes a long time for the kids to adapt to that, but we really try to come up with systems that align with the specific teachers. Like, for example, one of our students, the teacher has them take Cornell notes and the student for some reason thought that that should be on loose leaf paper. Well, you can imagine we lost all the notes all the time. And so, we asked the teacher, is it okay if this student only takes notes in a notebook so we can at least just keep track of the notebook? Sure. Because that's not the directions that were given to the rest of the class. But having some kind of, because, you know, they're so self-conscious, they don't want to be different, they don't want to ask their teachers. So, helping to be an advocate or give them some words to talk to their teachers about we found has been really helpful. And I think when it comes to you as parents, how do you support that? A lot of it comes back to the script or the words that you use. Because for me, the most important thing is for us to help you help your child feel understood. They feel, like an outsider. They feel like they don't belong. You know, they're going through all of that as a middle schooler in general, and then you throw in the ADHD. And so, I try to give parents some script that they can use at home. Because if we don't have it already in our mind, of course we're going to say, have you started your homework yet? Why can't you do your homework when I asked you the first time? You know, it escalates quickly. And of course, then the power struggle starts and then shuts down the potential for any executive function skills to develop. And so, working with the student to say, how about which subject would you like to start with tonight or would you like to do your homework before dinner or after dinner? If a student's like, I don't know how to do the math homework. I don't remember. And you as a parent are like, neither do I. I haven't done that math in forever. Having a word, a script to say, can you check your notes and see if you have a sample problem that looks like the one you're stuck on?

Katie: It's really interesting. That's the exact fight that my daughter and I have been getting into because they changed the way that you do math now. And so, I'm like, well, this is how you do it, she's like, you're doing it wrong. And I'm sort of stuck because I'm like, where's your notebook? Let's look it up, let's see and then that becomes such a power struggle. You know, either she doesn't have the notebook or we can't really understand what she wrote, she doesn't really remember. She's very good at copying things, but maybe not internalizing them in the moment. She'll just be like, oh, I'll figure it out. But then I'm not really able to help her. And that, that's funny. You're, you're nailing it. When you were talking about the scripts too.

One that came up a while back. I don't remember who taught me this, but the question would be what is your plan? And asking your kids what's your plan for getting your homework done? And that one has been really effective in my family because it really does give them back some power. I think that's really important for my kids especially like they want to kind of run their own schedule. But if I am saying okay, first we need to do this and then eat, and then this, you know, it's like, hey, we need to leave for dance at 6. What is your plan for studying for your test? And then that allows them that. So parents, you know, you can try that out. And every, every kid is going to respond differently to different words, but that's been one that's been really helpful in our family.

Jessi Dall: Well, and it sends that message to your kids. I trust you. I know you can do this. And also, yet you, you mentioned it, but it's highly unlikely your child's going to respond to a question like what do you feel like starting with? And they're gonna be like, oh, I feel like starting with my English today.

Katie: I've been waiting all day for you to ask me that.

Jessi Dall: Like they're gonna roll their eyes and they're not going to act like they're, it's gonna seem like they're not listening. But what parents need to remember, first of all, it's not personal. They're not really taking it out on you, but, but it is igniting those executive functions by asking those questions that send a message to them to say, I trust you, I believe in you, you can do this versus I'm gonna have the whole plan and you better abide by it.

Lori: Yep.

Jessi Dall: Yeah. I also encourage parents to just check their assumptions. Sometimes I think it's just, it's really easy to assume, well, my kid's struggling because he's just so disorganized. When in reality maybe they don't understand the concept. And this specifically relates to those cumulative subjects like math and Spanish. Which good or bad at Sophos, this is when we are telling parents your child needs a subject specific tutor who specializes in ADHD students with math. It doesn't have to be forever, but those cumulative subjects, if they are shutting down with those, it's highly likely they didn't learn whatever skill this new skill is building on, and therefore, they literally can't do it and they're going to need somebody to come in and help them with that. So, I also think, a lot of parents say, well, my child just isn't studying enough. And then when I asked the parent, well, how does your child study? And

they're like, well, they reread the notes, or you ask the student, how did you study? I reread the notes Monday, I reread them Tuesday, I reread them Wednesday, and then I bombed the test.

Katie: Yeah. Like, did that work? What was your plan?

Jessi Dall: Uh-huh. So maybe that wasn't the best way to study. So, we say metacognition is the superpower of motivation when it comes to study. And metacognition basically means the ability to understand how you think. So, you don't have to use the word metacognition with your student, but helping them understand how they learn is so important. Two strategies we always give parents with the assumption my child's just not studying enough is to help the child quiz themselves. Nobody teaches them how to do that. That's a super powerful way to help them check their own comprehension. Another one that we like for schools that do utilize an online platform for Google Classroom or Canvas or something like that, usually the teachers post the study guide online. So, to print multiple copies of the study guide, and each night have the student try to fill out as much as they can. And the next night they're going to do more the next night. And it's this natural, I feel good because I got something done. I completed the study guide, and it's helping them study in a way that that's measurable versus I just reread and reread and reread.

Lori: Yeah. And I think, I think that's such a great point because, you don't realize the variability and how people learn information. And, like, I will test a child and I will give them a list of 10 words, and we'll do different learning practices on a list of 10 words. And it's interesting because some kids will naturally chunk those words into categories, which is going to help them retrieve that better. Some kids, there's no organization to how they do that and then they can't remember the information. So, some of us might naturally do some of those things, but most of us need to be taught how to study and we don't get taught how to study. And I think that's, you know, not everybody has access to you, but that's why we kind of look at, does a child need an IEP or even a 504 plan to get some of those supports of how do I learn different strategies to study more effectively, to learn information more effectively and retrieve it later?

Jessi Dall: Totally, totally. There's lots of ways to get there to the point where you can help the child start to succeed.

Lori: Absolutely. And more effective ways than others. And kids don't just naturally know how to do that. You have to be taught how to do that. So, one thing I wanted to ask you was thinking about for our families who have kids who are at the end of elementary, they're thinking about, oh my goodness, my child with ADHD is going to be transitioning to middle school. What can I do to make this a smooth, successful transition? Like, what would you recommend? When do they talk to the teachers? When do they start making a plan to talk about lockers and organization? To get an idea, like, do we do that when the school year starts? Do we do that even sooner? At the end of their fifth grade or sixth grade year? Like, when would you recommend that?

Jessi Dall: Yeah, and I think, it could potentially be a complicated question because we work with students who are at K-8 schools, so it makes sense at the end of fifth grade to have that conversation with sixth grade teachers because they're naturally transitioning. If they're changing schools, it's highly unlikely the sixth-grade team or seventh grade team, whatever grade they change in, is going to meet with you the year prior. But I, I always encourage parents to reach out the first week of school and say, I'd like to get a meeting on the calendar. I really want to understand how the systems work at your school so I can better support my student and we can come up with a game plan because I already know there's going to be some challenges just by the sheer fact that this is a major transition. And schools, I mean, it's hit and miss. Some of them are more willing to work with us as parents, and some of them are like, stop babying your child, let them figure it out. And we know that that essentially means they're uninformed. They don't realize this isn't a choice. This is, you know, a genuine struggle. But I think as parents too, practically we like to encourage families to do Sunday sessions. And those Sunday sessions include the parent has their calendar out and the child has their whatever calendar, their phone, their planner. We're not talking about homework specifically, we're just modeling and having an open conversation with kids to say, okay, the parent says, Tuesday night I have a late-night meeting so I won't be home. Do you want to write that on your calendar? No, I don't care, Mom or yeah, actually that helps me. And so just kind of helping walk through the week. On Thursday, this person's picking you up from school. Why don't you write that down so you don't forget. Any family things that are coming up and just kind of creating a plan for the week. We always encourage families to ask students, hey, do you know of any assignments coming up? Do you, you know, ask it? I don't, we don't encourage them to make that the time when they're really focusing on homework because it, it often becomes a battle or it becomes an argumentative conversation.

So that's not the goal. Sunday sessions are very positive. If there's a birthday to celebrate, you know, things like that. And that just not then that naturally tag teams into calendaring, which is a skill that as executive function coaches, we work with on our students, with our students on how to use a calendar, whether it's virtual or whether it's paper- pencil. And that really depends on the student, what works for them. We have some students who have a little notebook on a ring attached to the outside of their backpack. That's their planner because they can't keep track of their planner. And so, they, there's, they never have to look through their binder. And it's not an actual planner, it's just a little notebook on a ring, like a keychain. So anytime they need to write, just write it down and then you can always find it. So, I think some of those routines that are not, surrounded by high emotions are also really helpful. But I also tell parents, they don't tell us in the parenting handbook how much of parenting is advocating for your child, but when it comes to getting the school to support them with those skills they truly need in order to flourish in the classroom, oftentimes it requires a lot of follow up emails, a lot of follow up requests. Yeah. And so, I mean always I encourage families like they're your team so the last thing you want to do is irritate them or make them feel like you want to fight them. They're your secret to helping your child so you really need to show them you want to partner, not work against.

Lori: When I worked in the schools, again, for kids who are on an individualized education plan, we would have a transition meeting in the spring, but you don't always get that with a 504 plan. So sometimes if your child is on a 504 plan, they're getting accommodations we would say, like schedule maybe that meeting in the spring. But like you said, you might not know who the teachers are and the teacher's expectations change, right. What they want for that specific student. So there, it's not like you can do all the planning in the spring. You still have to do follow up and kind of working with individual teachers on what they want and accommodating, like you said, for some of their needs based on what's working and what isn't.

Katie: Yeah, but in the past we've also talked on here about, you know, if you're a parent and you're listening, let's say you have a fourth grader and you're just trying to get ahead on this whole middle school concept, you know, if your child does not have a 504 plan or a written down plan at school, it's definitely, this is one of the benefits of that when they're younger is to get a plan in place. You know, so many parents will say, oh, the teacher is amazing, she already does these things and that's awesome. But, going from classroom to classroom or

moving into like middle school or going into high school, this is when having a written down plan can be really helpful. So, you know, if you're listening to this and middle school starts in a month, then that's probably not the time to be telling you this. But if you're a few years back, definitely advocating for a written down plan. And like Lori mentioned, that could be an IEP.

Lori: And you can start working on those study skills much sooner.

Katie: 100%. Yeah. And so it is that if you're, if you're prepared with that, that does make it easier. But again, if you don't have that, that's okay because as we're talking about here, the expectations are changing, your child's brain is maturing, they are developing new skills. So that's not even to say that the exact plan needs to follow them if they did have a plan, but something just to keep in mind that can be a really helpful starting point with, with those transitions.

Jessi Dall: Well, for sure. And I think parents need to realize that the stigma that was potentially associated with an IEP or a 504, it's not there. I mean, you could find it if you really dug deep. But I know for a lot of parents, they're like, I don't want to get my child tested because then they're going to be labeled or they're going to have, it really isn't like that. Especially because so many kids have IEPs and 504s now, but I think reframing the thought of this is supporting my child to be successful. And as parents, of course, all we want is for our kids to be happy and successful and healthy. And if this piece of paper or this testing process gets that, it is well worth it. Yeah. So, we we're big proponents here of early testing, early pushing for IEPs if that's needed, because it not only does it give you, as a parent, information, but it does set the child up. Because in high school, if they have one and they do truly need one, it makes a huge difference to already have it in place by high school or prior to high school.

Katie: Yes, absolutely. So, Jessi, this has been such an encouraging and insightful conversation. I know I'm going to start having Sunday meetings, in my family. My husband and I have been trying to do that, but we never really thought about including the kids. I think that's a game changer. So that starts this Sunday, I'll let you know how that goes.

Jessi Dall: Love it.

Katie: Yeah. And I know that so many parents are just going to walk away with a better understanding of what's really happening with their kid's kind of behind the scenes here, so thank you so much.

Jessi Dall: You're welcome.

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

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