

Shining with ADHD by The Childhood Collective

Episode #222: ADHD and Screen Time: Are Screens Getting in the Way of Independence?

Mike McLeod: What I always tell parents is, you know, all behavior is communication and we only want to believe that when it's warm and fuzzy and oh, that's a connection, that's a connection seeking behavior. He just needs more hugs and kisses and me to validate his feelings and get on his emotions and get on his level. But in reality, your kid's telling you every single day, there's a reason why I don't do things when you ask me to do it, because the screens have now hardwired my brain towards instant gratification. So, parents would love to be able to keep the screens the way they are and just jump right into the skill building. But we're realistic from day one. There is like, executive functions are real world-based skills. If they live the majority of their day, the majority of their life in the virtual world, executive functions aren't going to develop. So that's the first hump to get over. Then we do the skill building.

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 we're going to be interviewing an expert who specializes in executive functioning coaching. We get so many questions from parents about what executive functioning coaching is, how it differs from therapy and if their kids need it.

Katie: Absolutely. So, we have a lot of parents who hear these buzzwords, but they're just not really sure what it actually looks like and what their child would actually do in an executive functioning coaching session. And they're not even sure if it would help. So today we are so excited to have Michael McLeod, the founder of GrowNow ADHD. He is back on the podcast for the second time today to talk with us about executive functioning coaching. And this is definitely a specialty for Mike. He's been doing this for over 20 years. So, Mike, thanks so much for coming back to chat with us.

Mike McLeod: Thanks so much for having me. I'm, I'm so excited. The last episode was a great time. I think I shared it about a million times with, with all, with all my people. And so it was a great, great conversation.

Lori: Yes. It was a very, very popular one. So, we're so happy to have you come back to talk a little bit more about this.

Katie: Yeah. And if you missed that episode, we will link it in the show notes. So definitely check that out. But that was a great overview of executive function and declarative language, all these kind of complicated concepts that Mike just broke down really, really well.

Lori: And if you're new here, and you didn't get to hear the podcast, Mike, can you start by telling us a little bit about yourself and what you do.

Mike McLeod: Sure. So my name is Michael McLeod. I'm the owner of GrowNow ADHD, an ADHD and executive functioning specialist, and the creator of the internal skills model. So back in you know, early in my career I was a speech and language pathologist. I was lucky enough to work with a great large nonprofit, that specialized in kids with speech and language disorders and chromosomal disorders that also had ADHD and executive functioning challenges. So, I learned very quickly from working with these students and these families that there was very little out there for these kids that was actually improving long term outcomes. They were being sent to therapy and talk therapy and counseling and social skills groups and all these different things that weren't helping them be successful in college or become more employable. It was a lot of things that, yeah, they were showing progress within the structured sessions with the coach or the therapist or whoever it was, but nothing that was transferring into the natural environment. So from there I dove very, very deep into the great work of Dr. Russell Barkley, Sarah Ward, who I'm sure you guys all know, Dr.

George McCloskey and developed this internal skills model. We did a yearlong research study on it back in 2016-2017, and everything's really expanded from there. Now we work with students and families all around the world and I travel the country training schools on the internal skills model of how to bring practical strategies into the classroom. And it's really all about, you know, spreading word about executive functions because this is the foundation of this youth mental health crisis right now is kids who can't self-regulate and self-motivate towards non preferred tasks and it's greatly affecting their quality of life and mental health. So along with this rise in depression, anxiety and everything, it's fueled by the lack of executive functioning development we're seeing basically in an entire generation.

Katie: Yeah, it is a lot. And I think we're just as a community and as a culture just becoming more and more aware of the problem. But I think the way you're framing it as these executive functioning challenges, that is new for a lot of people. I don't think most people have conceptualized it. I think ADHD parents probably have a little more of a leg up, right. But it is a problem just broadly and when you bring in phones and all these types of things, it can be really, really challenging. So, I know that you mentioned executive functioning coaching as kind of a big piece of what you do and you have a whole team, right, that works on this. So what does it mean? Can you break down for us what does a typical session actually look like? Like, let's say we have a child or a teen who needs this kind of coaching. What would they do?

Mike McLeod: Yeah. So the first thing that parents, all parents need to understand is that this whole concept of coaching is a totally unregulated field. Anyone listening to this podcast right now can press pause and go make a website and say, I'm an executive functioning coach it's 200 an hour for me to work with your kid for an hour. There's no training needed, there's no actual certification needed, nothing. There's no, no education background at all needed to say I'm an executive functioning coach. So you have to be very, very careful of, you know, where you're searching for it and those kinds of things. Like, do they even know who Dr. Russell Barkley and Sarah Ward and all these great people, do they, do they even know who these people are? They still think that executive functioning is time management and organization like we talked about in the last episode is, everyone keeps thinking about, you know, ADHD is going to affect you at school. Executive functions are skills needed for school and then it just ends up being color coded backpacks and cleaning, you know, color coded folders and, or you know, time management, organization when those are just the

external symptoms of the lack of the internal skills. So executive functions are the greatest predictor of success for human beings. It's not just school success. And with this youth mental health crisis we're in right now, you know, school is actually the place where we don't really even see the majority of the symptoms. The vast majority of ADHD and executive dysfunction symptoms are seen in the home behind closed doors around the unconditional love relationships of parents. So it's not just all this school prep, academic prep, its executive functioning for morning routine, homework, evening routine, sibling fighting, screen time, all these different things are executive functions. So you know, with, you know, the number one most evidence-based practice in all of ADHD executive dysfunction is parent training. And you know, so many parents need to really firmly understand that is, you know, we have to understand here in America, the therapy business is a trillion-dollar business and it only works, and there's so many therapists and counselors out there, it only works if you focus on client retention of keeping your clients over time. Most, most, not all. And you know, that means that, you know, positive outcomes means you end up losing a customer in many different ways. And you see it when you open Instagram and your entire algorithm are people selling their products and selling this and parenting, you know, selling parenting as this science kind of thing.

Lori: and well, I'll jump in because I will, I will challenge that a little bit. As someone who has done therapy before and who has a child who's been through therapy and she has OCD, a lot of good therapists is short term therapy, like many therapies for anxiety in particular is short term therapy with very particular goals and outcomes. I think the issue is with trying to treat ADHD in a talk therapy type of session. But when it comes to anxiety, depression, some of the thing, these things that can be co-occurring for a child with ADHD, it is very effective. I mean there are many things that can be effective for anxiety in particular.

Mike McLeod: Of course. And that's, and that's, and that's what I, I'm not an anxiety specialist, an OCD specialist, I'm an executive functioning specialist. So I'm never going to come on here and talk about things I don't, I'm not an expert in. But just, but just in general it's, you know, we know we have to treat these executive functions first. The foundation we need to bring the parents in 100%. And like I said earlier, some, not all. There are, I've know tons of therapists out there that are doing the right things and are focusing on the right things. But overall, you know, there has been documented research that in many, in many ways it is, you know, overused in different ways. And you know, here we have this entire generation of

youth that's getting the most therapy, getting the most counseling and they're the most depressed and having those different things. But in many ways it is very much needed in specific cases and nothing is one size fits all. I'm just saying overall, the number one thing that parents, the whole point of my spiel here is parents need to understand that getting your kid help can't be this service mindset like, hey, let me hire someone to clean my house, let me hire someone to mow my lawn. Parents need to be able to do those hard things.

Lori: Oh God. And it sounds like what you're saying is as a part of that executive functioning coaching, it sounds like you're always doing some sort of parent training alongside that, correct?

Mike McLeod: Always. We have to. Because if we weren't, we wouldn't be holding up our ethical responsibility of following evidence based practices when it's executive functioning and to your point, when there is that added anxiety, whereas when there, when there is that OCD, it's also our ethical responsibility to make those referrals to people like yourself that can treat those certain things. Because executive functioning, coaching, parent training is not going to treat those comorbidities.

Katie: Yeah, it really brings to mind for me as a speech language pathologist as well, the traditional model, exactly what you described. The parent drops off the kid. We work really hard, like on an R or a fluency strategy or maybe even an executive functioning skill. But in all of those cases, it's really hard to get carryover if you don't include the parents. And so one of the things I really liked about being in private practice where I was for about 12 years, is that I would bring parents in at the end of every session. And that was great for those kids that are working on articulation or fluency. It did not work for the kids who were working on executive functioning, because in that case, and I think this is where you're going, Mike, is we really need the parents almost in there more than the kid. Like, they are a very important part of this. I can sit there with a kid and be like, where could you hang up your backpack when you get home? This is not solving the underlying issue that you're talking about, which is where the parents are, you know, setting up the strategies. So maybe tell us a little bit more about that. What does that look like with the parent training in coaching with someone from your team?

Mike McLeod: Of course. Yeah. So just for an example, I was just doing a parent training this morning where, you know, the mom raised her hand and started by saying, my child has

little to no executive functioning skills. So I'm like, okay, you know, tell me more. Give me some more examples of where they're lagging in executive functioning. Oh, I've done everything to help them, you know, make their own breakfast and get out the door on time and all those different things. And then I, you know, find out more about what's happening. Because what we need parents to do is they need to flip their mindset. You, know, ADHD, executive dysfunction parents, every single day operate under the mindset of nothing gets done unless I step in. And every morning routine, every homework, every nighttime routine, nothing gets done unless I step in. So parents end up just hyper focusing, unintentionally becoming permissive, unintentionally becoming helicopter parents. And then that further promotes prompt dependence because the child learns, mom's always going to save me because of her own anxiety because of her own need for control. So, you know, she's this mom this morning started with, my kids have little to no executive functions. I ask further questions and I find out, you know, a little bit of complaining, she ends up making breakfast for them, a little bit of complaining, she ends up packing lunch for them instead of having them go to school, not having the lunch prepared for them and having to buy the lunch that's physically there and having to have that experience. So in so many ways we are, we are quicker to pathologize the child and say they're lacking in executive functions, but we have to look at what the parent is doing on a day-to-day basis that's further promoting prompt dependence and where the parents are overstepping in. So we really have to analyze what's happening. So part of our parent training is it's fully personalized, never one size fits all. We have to learn about the resources that are available. You know, is it a single parent, you know, two parents working together in tandem, two parents with different mindsets, you know, and where are the trigger points happening? Is it morning routine, evening routine, homework, screen time, sibling fighting, you know what's happening and what are the areas where, you know, the child is, is, is avoiding or creating some sense of control? So it's a lot of it is parent education and teaching them that, you know, the ADHD brain is the path of least resistance brain. If the question is going to be why won't my child just do the task? We have to ask ourselves, what are they doing instead of the task? And if screens are available to them, if, like, if you, if you haven't put limits on their phones, their video game, YouTube, whatever, they're going to choose that phone over literally anything you ask them to do. And that's not their fault. That's not that's not an executive functioning problem, that's an environment problem. If I was 14, 10 years old and my mom told me to do the dishes, but instead I can scroll Instagram, I'm doing that every single time.

Lori: Honestly, honestly at 44 years old, I'm having a problem, right? Like as adults, that is hard for us to do. Imagine like a 14-year-old.

Mike McLeod: Yeah, exactly and that's why, and when you approach parents with having to decrease screens, eliminate screens, their first thought is, oh, I can't do that. Why can't they just be taught the skills to manage it? And Lori just made a fantastic point. Adults can't even do that, you know, adults pick up their phone the second they wake up. It's the last thing to look at before they go to sleep. They're grabbing it at every single red light. And we're adults with fully developed brains. We think a 10, year old's going to be able to resist the greatest entertainment product ever created. It's not happening. So the whole concept of skills or a balance is a complete pipe dream. It's never going to happen, especially if your kids have ADHD. Nobody is a bigger victim of big tech's predatory marketing than ADHD youth.

Katie: Yeah. And I like that. As we kind of talked about at the very beginning, I do think people are becoming a lot more aware of this, you know, the anxious generation and other information like that that's coming out. Because I think phones came in so fast, and it was just like overnight everyone had an iPhone. I know I was late to the party because I was a poor grad student, and I just had a little awkward flip phone. I could text so fast on that flip phone, by the way it was a skill. But, you know, when I finally got an iPhone, I was 27, and I got an iPhone after my wedding because my husband and I went to go get our new phone line together, our new phone plan, and they kind of talked us into upgrading, and we both got our first iPhones ever.

Mike McLeod: What was your first ring tone?

Katie: Oh, my gosh. It was, Nelly 'you can stand under my umbrella'.

Mike McLeod: Okay, that's not. That's not. That's Rihanna. That's Rihanna.

Katie: Oh, Rihanna. Okay, My bad, my bad. No, it was Rihanna. I'm glad you know that, Mike.

Mike McLeod: But ask me any music trivia question right now, 90s, early 2000s, I'll answer it immediately.

Lori: Okay, but. But, Mike, what was your ringtone?

Katie: Easy question.

Mike McLeod: I definitely had, like, some of, like the. Oh, my gosh. I think I had, I can't even say it now because of recent events, but I definitely had some Puff Daddy back in the day.

Lori: Oh, man. We're gonna have to cancel you now.

Mike McLeod: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Some of that's, you guys remember Blind Melon? Oh, that was a big one. If you heard the song, you would know it.

Katie: See, I feel like I went through different iterations of my personality, and this would have been like, college, maybe just before or after college, and then. Cause that was my flip phone that had those ringtones. My iPhone was cool. It was just it would just buzz.

Mike McLeod: I would have it, like, on my belt and when it would ring if I was close to the computer, it would like make the computer buzz.

Katie: Oh my gosh.

Mike McLeod: Like, it was so strong. It set off so much radiation.

Katie: Yeah. Literally, somehow we all survived it. But I definitely had like a more, you know, I guess, introspective season where I had a Jason Mraz ringtone. So, yeah, I feel like there was multifaceted, you know, musical interests for Katie in the early 20s. But yeah, by the time I got to my iPhone I was 27. And if you think about that, my frontal lobe was pretty much developed at that point where now we're looking at my daughter, you know, is turning 12 and it's like all of her friends have iPhones and she does not. Which I still feel like that's the right choice for our family. But it's, it's hard. It is a daily conversation and we have set strict boundaries around it. It's not open ended, but it's really tough. And I just, I feel for parents because there are so many pieces to it, even logistically, like, oh, we're in dance and all the girls are sending a video of the dance to the group chat and I'm not on the group chat. And so it's I think that you're totally right that screens can overtake families and become hugely problematic. But at the same time, it's just something that we want to extend a lot of compassion because parents are in a hard situation and it's like, what do I do with limiting

tech and how do I navigate it? And I think again, everyone's going to choose their own path. But for me it has been no phones, no tablets, we're very strict.

Mike McLeod: And this is your daughter, you were saying?

Katie: Well, both of my kids, but my older one is 12 and she is, she's the more persuasive.

Lori: Katie and I both have middle schoolers without phones and it's been...

Katie: a neglect case actually.

Mike McLeod: You're giving them an enormous advantage. That's, that's all it is.

Lori: Again, I do feel like more and more families are, it's not just us. We, you know, a lot of my kids, friends also. So it doesn't feel like quite as much of a fight because we have friends that are doing things. But it's, but it is hard. It is definitely very hard. But going, yeah, going back to the executive functioning coaching, I love that you bring up that it's an unregulated field because that is a really good point because when we're talking generally about executive functioning coaching, one of the things we would like to emphasize, and I think you would too, is there are many professionals, like I'm a child psychologist, you and Katie are speech language pathologists. You have degrees, but we can't use our degrees and licenses across states and across countries. So sometimes the option is doing coaching. And again you're working with somebody who's a professional. So part of looking at if you are looking into executive functioning coaching, knowing it's very important to look at who is offering that. I think that's such a great point, Mike.

Thinking about the coaching that you do with families, I would love for you to talk about one of the biggest challenges that you see kind of over and over again. And we'd love to talk about like what is, you know, a strategy that you have used to kind of help families through that.

Katie: Can I ask that it is screens? Because we were kind of talking about screens and I do think a lot of families are like, okay, I hear you. Screens are a problem. My kid isn't doing the dishes, they're chilling on the couch with their phone or their tablet. What would that look like in a coaching situation? Like would your coaches or yourself be saying to them, okay,

like no screens at all? Are you negotiating? Like, tell us more about that and what that would look like?

Mike McLeod: Yeah, of course. Yeah. so, you know, overall the data is now unbelievably overwhelming of the negative impact on screens. The only screens are only still in kids lives, like you guys are saying, all the parents in your neighborhood are giving kids screens, screens are only in kids lives for two reasons. Number one, because of the social and they, and they think it's like this social thing that's going to help them socially and be the social output. And number two, the fear of your child and the fear of their withdrawal symptoms when you remove them. So the only reason kids have screens and phones is some sort of internal fear of the parent of my child's going to be ostracized socially. Or if I remove the screens they're now addicted to, they are going to hate me and they're going to freak out. I'm going to have to call 9-1-1 those kinds of things.

Lori: And to be honest, like there are definitely situations where that like is a. I mean I have a close friend who. That, that is like a legitimate fear. Like they're like, they become..

Mike McLeod: Oh, 100%.you're describing my daily life right now. That's exactly it. And that's, we've probably worked with over 500 families who, it's been a legitimate problem where they've had to maybe call 9-1-1 or you know, have someone come over. Because that's exactly what it is. It's a drug. And that's, you know, all the research is out there with digital dementia is real, brain rot is real. These are not trendy terms. These things are actually happening. And you know it's, it's marketed as this tool that's going to make your child safe, smart and social. But it makes them more antisocial, more dormant, more depressed, more dependent on someone else. It significantly delays executive functions. So we're here talking about executive functioning today. The only way to strengthen executive functions is through varied experiences and in person social relationships. That's it. Not worksheets, not monologues, not lectures, not one to one sessions or anything like that. It's doing as many different things as possible and meeting as many different people and having in person social relationships, boredom, play and those things. And you mentioned the Anxious Generation, how that was millions and millions of copies sold. How many parents read the Anxious Generation and then just was so emotionally moved by it but then just read the last page, closed it, put it back on the bookshelf and did nothing about it and had no proactive thing. Because the flip side of it is eliminating my kids screens and having them freak out for two to

three weeks while they detox. And that's too scary than actually doing something. So it's fear based. So it's working through the parents on the, through the fear, and it's holding their hand through it being that support system, having them sort of enlist supporters because the kid is much less likely to break things in the house or have self-harm or say shock value things if there's non-family members present, giving them all the tips and tools to keep, you know safety is the number one priority when you're removing screens. But what I always tell parents is you know, all behavior is communication and we only want to believe that when it's warm and fuzzy and oh, that's a connection, that's a connection seeking behavior. He just needs more hugs and kisses and me to validate his feelings and get on his emotions and get on his level. But in reality, your kid's telling you every single day there's a reason why I don't do things when you ask me to do it. Because the screens have now hardwired my brain towards instant gratification. So parents would love to be able to keep the screens the way they are and just jump right into the skill building. But we're realistic from day one. There is like, executive functions are real world-based skills. If they live the majority of their day, the majority of their life in the virtual world, executive functions aren't going to develop. So that's the first hump to get over. Then we do the skill building.

Katie: Okay. And something that I really appreciate about your Instagram, I follow a lot of the stories that you share and things like that and I think there's some really beautiful success stories where families are sharing in their own words, like, this is how this changed my kid. So maybe I know you've talked a lot about the problem and what that looks like and for parents who are like on the other side of it going, no, I can't, maybe you could share what does that look like? Like what, what is something, a positive outcome that you've seen, Maybe more of a trending positive outcome with a lot of kids where you're like, no, this is worth it. There's light at the end of the tunnel.

Mike McLeod: Yeah. So I think the number one thing parents need to hear is, I have never in my entire career doing this since 2015-2016, ever worked with a single family who eliminated tech and ended up regretting it. That's it. Like, nothing is 100% accuracy. But I can't think off the top of my head a single family that got rid of tech and said, no, we actually got to give it back to them. Every single one of them end up getting, getting their kids back. They become more social, more extroverted. It's easier for them to do basic tasks. It makes parenting so much easier. It improves the child's mental health, improves their sleep, improves their, you know, their grades, their attitude towards school, everything. They just

end up saying, why didn't I do this sooner? You know, this is what starts to make them connect the dots of yeah, it was the screens the whole time. I was upset. Why was it so hard to get out the door in the morning? Why was it so hard to get them to take a shower? Why was it so hard to get them to do their homework? Because their brain is hardwired towards a swipe of a finger, getting a rush of dopamine where five minutes on their phone doom scrolling or five minutes on Roblox, Fortnite, Minecraft, then you're asking them to do a boring, mundane task. It's impossible. And is that really an executive functioning problem or is it just so much exacerbated by the environment? You know, we were talking about, how I was just recently in Las Vegas and I was around all the all the slot machines and all the gambling and things like that. If I were to spend, you know, an hour gambling on the slot machines and doing all those things, and then five minutes later be asked to go sit in my hotel room and read a book or study or do something, I'm not going to be able to do it because my brain is hardwired towards pulling that and getting that rush of dopamine from the gambling. And that's what kids are doing. Kids have slot machines in their pocket.

Katie: Okay, but if you were in Vegas, would you be playing the Wheel of Fortune slot machine? Because that's the funnest one. That's the only one that I'll play. I don't gamble. But the Wheel of Fortune one, come on, you gotta do it.

Mike McLeod: I probably would. Yeah. Yeah. I didn't, I didn't gamble at all while I was there. But, yeah, I'm not a, I'm not a huge gambler, but I would, I would probably check that out.

Lori: That's pretty gambling, like, we have gambling addiction in our family. And, I am, like, I just won't even touch it. Like, I don't even want to have anything to do with it because I feel like I have that personality that would just become addicted to it.

Katie: So you would do a lot of Wheel of Fortune, like you'd be putting 20 bucks over and over.

Lori: Exactly.

Katie: Okay, I'm going to Vegas with you, Lori.

Lori: Risk, big win big, you know?

Katie: Oh, my gosh, if only that was true.

Lori: So I know we've been talking about kind of the more, significant situations where you have kids becoming violent, you know, when they're on screens. But then there are also other kids that again, I would totally, 100% agree with you. I've never had a parent, like, say, oh, this had a negative impact on our family when they either remove screens or cut back on screens. But are there situations in which, like, we don't play certain games, like, my child can do sports video games, and we have balance and we have limits around. They only have, you know, 30 minutes or an hour on the weekends. They don't do it during the week when they have school. Like, are there situations in which you see, hey, there can be balance with this, with certain kids, certain families?

Mike McLeod: Of course. So you know, we tend to use the term so this whole concept of screens really confuses parents because there's so many different kinds of screens when in reality the real victim here is the real perpetrator here is the Internet. The Internet. Giving kids open access to the Internet. We talked about how exactly how executive functioning coaching is an unregulated field where there's nothing more unregulated in the history of mankind than the Internet. It is the most wild, disgusting place in the world and we give kids full access to it. And we see on the news every day of kids making like deep fake images of their classmates and child trafficking and all these different, you know, all these different incredibly scary weird things that would never be possible if we didn't give kids open access to the Internet. It's like, like in, like Jonathan Haidt talks about how we're scared to send kids down the street to go to the store by themselves, but we'll let them be alone on the Internet in their room for eight hours a day. That doesn't make any sense. So it's, it's really the Internet that's the problem. So you know, there was no youth mental health crisis when TVs were the only screen in the house or it was the Nintendo 64 and the GameCube, systems that were not connected to the Internet. It all happened when it was those free to download Roblox, Fortnite, Minecraft, Brawl Stars and it basically became gambling specifically made by persuasive design. So if you're able to have the correct limits in your house, where it's not so much the screens but it's the Internet. I have no problem with kids watching cable television with commercials. It's only a problem when they're watching YouTube on the smart TV and they're watching videos of other people playing video games. And then they're getting so addicted to these online games that provide endless loops of dopamine. So you know you can bring in old school games and you know you just have, you have to look at what's happening

overall. Your kids are going to tell you with their behaviors, can they handle these screens? You never, never give them the screens before non-preferred tasks are completed. And part of those non preferred and it's not just brush your teeth, get dressed, do this. It's also go outside for a couple of hours, go get some outdoor exercise and then come back inside. So as long as they're taking care of their childhood-based responsibilities including play and social interaction and different things like that then sure, you can use it here and there, but you're going to see from your kids behaviors if it needs to be fully eliminated or there can be a balance.

Lori: Yeah. And I love that. I love that you are saying it's the Internet because it is, you know, that really is the issue is the safety. So many safety issues with the Internet and the games being so highly, highly reinforcing to kids, especially when they have ADHD and kind of seek that out.

Mike McLeod: It's a horrible place and it leads and they get stuck down these rabbit holes that really end up really negatively impacting them.

Lori: Right. And I think most parents can see, hey, when my kid plays animal crossing, like they're regulated and they can get off of it and they're regulated, right.

Mike McLeod: I'm a big animal crossing guy. Love, love it, love it.

Katie: Okay, well you can also download Wheel of Fortune on your phone and. No, I'm just kidding.

Mike McLeod: There you go.

Lori: Yeah. Katie, what is it with Wheel of Fourtune?

Katie: It's the best. I mean, it's the best game. I'm just kidding.

Mike McLeod: But that's a great point though. How many kids have trashed their house and cursed at their mom over animal crossing? Off of Mario 64? It didn't happen until recently. This wasn't an issue.

Lori: I think the issue, yeah, it's not just I want access to that all the time. The other issue is how dysregulated it makes kids while they're playing the game and after they stop playing the game. And I think every parent I have talked to can visibly see that in their kids. And Mike, every parent I've talked to, same thing, when they have removed that, they have seen nothing but positive, positive impact on the family.

Mike McLeod: But the mistake that 75% of them make, they see the progress, it pulls at their heartstrings and they give the screens back. That happens 75% of the time. Like they start to be like, oh my God, you're doing so well. I think you're ready for a phone now. And the kid goes right, right, right back to where he was.

Lori: So that's a warning to everyone when you see that progress. maintain it as much as you can. But we want to talk about just one other, what's another kind of common outside of screens and I know that's a big one, what's another common challenge that you see with a lot of ADHD families that you are talking about in your executive functioning coaching?

Mike McLeod: Yeah, so like I mentioned earlier, the ADHD brain is the path of least resistance brain, it's always going to choose the easiest thing in the moment. Because you know, as we all know, as the three of us know as these, we do a lot of ADHD executive functioning work, it's time blindness, stuck in the, stuck in the now. A disorder of nonverbal working memory, visual imagery where you can't visualize the past, you can't visualize the future, you're stuck in the now. So your brain wants the most dopamine producing thing now. So we talked about screens. You do the right thing as a parent, you get rid of those screens. Now your child's going to seek dopamine through conflict. So who better to get conflict from? Then you open a dictionary, you look up unconditional love. It's a picture of who?

Lori: Your mom, your dad.

Mike McLeod: Mom. No, it's mom. Let's be honest.

Lori: No, it is mom a lot of times and sometimes it's dad.

Mike McLeod: Yeah, yeah. Especially when dad has ADHD too. And dad gets dis and get, and dad gets dysregulated by the ADHD behaviors and they, and they feed, they feed into that negative feedback loop. So just like screens are a drug, your attention is a drug. So you

know, one of the things I describe in my parent coaching is, you know, let's say you have a 10-year-old child, every step they take closer to mom, you subtract one year from their age and by the time they're face to face with mom, they went from a 10-year-old to a 5-year-old. And that's exactly what it is. Executive functioning is very proximity based and all ADHD behaviors need an audience. So there's the old saying of if a tree falls in the woods, but no one's around to hear, it doesn't make a sound? If mom's not in the same room, is there an ADHD behavior? It's kind of like that, that exact same kind of concept of like they need the stage, they need the spotlight, they need the microphone, they want the responses to their behavior. And that's why, you know, when we first coach parents to walk away, ignore, don't get sucked into the argument vortex. Then the kid will start chasing them around the house, will turn it up a notch, start screaming, start breaking things, which is just further proof that your attention is a drug and they need it just like they need the swipe of a screen. So that's another thing you have to detox the child's brain from is getting negative attention from you. And then once they realize mom's not going to take the bait, they start attacking their younger siblings. They find different ways to make sure there's always an audience because their brain just gets so much dopamine from negative attention. So you have an ADHD child and you say, go put your shoes on. You're giving them a fork in the road. They could put their shoes on and hear a quick good job, or they can not put their shoes on and have you chase them around the house for three hours. Which one are they going, which one are they going to choose?

Katie: It's funny because even as you say that, I'm like, just put the shoes on, man. What do you mean?

Mike McLeod: But the flip side of that is just too and the mistake every parent makes with, homework now is I have to sit with my child to do the homework. But you physically being there is making it more dopamine, producing to get into a three-hour fight instead of doing five minutes of homework because I have an audience. I have, I have an unconditional relationship that I can be absolutely horrible to and say unspeakable things to. And she's still going to tuck me in at night and you know, and give me my favorite snacks and give me the Wifi password. It's not going to affect the relationship like it would at school.

Katie: Yeah, that's interesting. I do actually think that the homework thing is interesting because I was a really good student and my parents never, ever, ever looked at my homework

like I just did it. I don't think they knew if I had homework. But I feel like in our generation it is. And even the school expectation is like, make sure you're sitting down and checking your child's homework and looking through their folder. And now it's like a mutual, I don't know, I guess a group project to do homework. But I agree with you completely. Especially my younger one. He does a lot better when I'm maybe in the room but not paying any attention to him. Like I'm very, very busy putting this water in this pot to boil pasta and he's able to just get it done. But as soon as I sit down next to him, there's a lot of conversation and he's a joker, so he'll want to amuse me with his jokes and you know, tell them the same way three times to make sure he gets it perfect. And it's a lot. So I totally see that in my own family.

Mike McLeod: Yeah. And that obviously brings us back to, you know, ed tech and one to one laptops and you know, kids having open access to the Internet of are they doing homework or are they watching YouTube? I have to watch over his shoulder. So obviously, obviously, you know, obviously, you know me one-to-one, laptops are the worst thing to ever happen to education in the history of education. So that's completely ruined things. But besides that, you, you know, homework is called homework. Yeah, but it's a school-based problem. You know, it's very, very hard for parents to hold kids accountable for school-based things. Home and school have to be separate. You know, homework should be done at the school, after school, at a local library. Just like that whole proximity thing I just talked about. Homework success increases the further you get away from mom.

Katie: That's interesting too, because we actually do go to the library on Wednesdays. We have, my kids have a short day and we do the library. And it is, I think you're totally right. It's a lot easier just to get it done because that's the only task we can really do at the library.

Mike McLeod: Think about when you were in college. Did you get your work done in the dorms?

Katie: I was a big library person, actually.

Mike McLeod: There you have it. There you have it.

Katie: Between my umbrella ringtone and my library time, I was really crushing it.

Mike McLeod: There you go.

Lori: And I wasn't doing my homework and failing.

Katie: It doesn't matter if you went to the library.

Mike McLeod: Look at you now. Look at you.

Lori: I needed Mike's executive functioning coaching.

Mike McLeod: Homework is not a predictor of success.

Lori: It isn't. And I used to do homework through school. I, you know, I just, you know, I very much understand the ADHD kids resistance to that, because it does, it feels like, why am I doing this?

Katie: Yeah, absolutely.

Mike McLeod: There you go.

Lori: And going back to like, I know you're saying this, this is such an issue and we see the same thing with arguments for kids with ADHD. And, and it's hard for parents, I think, to understand like they feel like they're almost punishing their kids with these like verbal corrections and yelling at them or whatever and they don't realize that it is very reinforcing for those behaviors. How do you work with families through that? Like, if you could tell a family one thing today, hey, you can go home and work on this, what would you tell them?

Mike McLeod: The number one rule of all of ADHD parent coaching is use 90% less language. That's the biggest thing. So language makes dysregulation worse. And there's never been a harder time to be, to be a parent. You can't pick up your phone without some parenting guru yelling at you or whatever it may be and it's all the pressure of all these different things. So parents want to, you know, every time there's a tantrum, every time there's a complaint, every time there's whatever, parents think it's their responsibility to jump in and fix it. And if you do that, they're never going to develop those skills themselves. And the more you talk, the more you're providing an audience and the more you're feeding into those behaviors. So you have to get very good at saying things once and getting out of there. Like for all the parents that are having difficulty with morning routines, they're going to keep being rough until you sit in the driveway and wait in the car and stop prompting them constantly.

Homework is going to be a mess until you learn for it to be done somewhere else where you are not. So in so many ways it's talk less and do less. So the more you keep doing, the more you're over prompting. You know, I think we all watched too much Full House growing up and got so used to these heart-to-heart monologues that don't work in real life. You know, you're providing all of the stimulation by being the audience and talking, talking, talking. You know, kids don't learn through lectures, they learn through experiences. And remember, your attention is a drug. We have to unplug the power source. So say things once and get out of there. Remove the audience and they're stuck in a room where hopefully there's no screens, they're eventually going to do it themselves.

Lori: Yeah, and I think that's something as a parent like I have to work on daily is not, I get, I can get sucked into those arguments so quickly. And my husband fortunately is like the really like calm one and is like Lori, calm down. So I'm glad he is there to like suck me out of that. But it is, it's very hard in the moment to not get pulled into those emotions or those arguments and really just stay steady. I mean it just is hard. Especially if you have ADHD yourself and you get emotionally dysregulated also and get sucked into that. So it's, it's very challenging, but also I know like can really if I can stay calm and if I don't get sucked into that, it ends much more quickly.

Mike McLeod: Yeah. And we need, and we honestly need more dads to do exactly. What you just described is, you know, so many dads, you know, I don't want to overgeneralize here, but tend to take a little bit more of a passive approach and just, you know, think another argument. Whatever. Let me avoid. No, go in and do almost like a tag team and kind of tag, tag, tag mom out. Step in and you take care of it. You know, like, why does it, like, the majority of the time, I'm sure you guys see it in your practice, it's mom who does the morning routines. It's mom who does homework. It's mom who does the parent coaching, all of these different things. So we have to find ways to make it a true partnership where, you know, the mental load is real, it's a real thing, and it falls on the shoulders of the moment. And the mom ends up being the frontal lobe for the entire family. They lose their identity, they lose their hobbies, their interests, their likes, and all these different things. They end up living the lives of every other member of the family, and that's not sustainable.

Lori: Right. And my husband will come home from work, and he hasn't been kind of dealing with all of this stuff, right. Whereas I've had two hours of, you know, you know, meltdowns

and all these things and so I'm kind of out of spoons. Like, I'm done. You know, my threshold for being able to tolerate it is, like, done. Where my husband, you know, he hasn't been dealing with that he can stay calm in that moment. And then there are times when it's opposite. But, you know, again, if I'm the one picking the kids up and doing all those things, it tends to be harder for me just because of that.

Katie: Yeah, Mike, I think you nailed it. I think that's exactly how a lot of moms feel. And I know that that's something I experience, too. Sometimes I'm like, I'm lost in this because everything is about everybody else. And I actually gave a talk just a couple weeks ago, stop being the frontal lobe for your whole family. And it was all moms, and I loved it. So you literally nailed it. This has been amazing and I do think a lot of people probably there's going to be some moms showing this to their partners or husbands.

Mike McLeod: They should. They should. Yeah. Market it as that. Let's get this on board.

Katie: Yes. This is coming from a dad. I think you're a trusted source, so that's very helpful. And I know there's going to be people who want to continue to learn from you and kind of just soak up all of your knowledge. So what's the best way for people to stay in touch? I know you also released a new book recently. Maybe share a little bit about that and where people can get that. We'll make sure to link everything in the show notes, but tell us the high level.

Mike McLeod: Sure. Yeah. So I have my parenting playbooks, The Executive Function Playbook, which is the main book and all the practical information and then the accompanying sister workbook, The Executive Function Playbook In Action. Which is basically, it's not one of those workbooks where you have to force your kid to sit down and do the sheets with you. It's for you to do with your spouse or, you know, whatever, to create the structure and then utilize it. So it's not about the kids doing it, it's about the parents doing it, the teachers doing it. So it's a parent and teacher empowerment book to bring executive functioning principles into the classroom or the home. And that's available on Amazon, Barnes and Nobles, everywhere, links on my website as well. You can find me, you can get the books there, my website, grownowadhd.com and you can just find me on Instagram @grownowadhd.

Katie: Yeah. And I love the book. And I think if you were listening today, if you're a listener who's like, oh, I wanna know more about attention to the future or being able to visually image the past and those kind of things, we really skimmed over a lot of that because there's just so much to talk about. But there's a lot more in-depth information in the book about all these different kind of principles and things that parents really do need to know. So I think that's definitely...

Mike McLeod: Well, we can always do another episode sometime.

Katie: Absolutely. And then we need one on the mental load. We can expand on that too.

Mike McLeod: And one on ring and one on ringtones. All of these.

Katie: Questionable music choices.

Mike McLeod: People want to know about our childhood and what we were like. People need to know about us.

Katie: Absolutely they do.

Lori: Well, thank you so much. Yeah, we really appreciate having you on. And again, if you enjoyed this episode, we would greatly appreciate a five-star review. And as always, we are here to support you.

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!