

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

### **Episode #226: Back-to-School with ADHD: 3 Ways to Make the Transition Easier**

Mallory: Set up these executive function supports as early on as possible. Maybe it didn't happen on day one, but it's not too late. Don't wait for kind of the arguments to take over, for the papers to pile up before you create a system. I'm talking specifically at home right now, create a system that works for your family. So, something we talk a lot about is give everything a home, right. Give the backpacks a home. Give the shoes a home. Give the water bottles a home when they get unpacked. Give. Give the lunchboxes a home. Otherwise, those things are going to be strewn across your house. You're going to be overstimulated, or at least I would be overstimulated. We'd be scrambling the next morning to regather all the supplies. So, putting those systems into place as early on as possible before things have gotten too out of hand is really going to set your whole family up for success.

Katie: Hello, and welcome back to the Shining with ADHD podcast. I am excited to be chatting with Lori and Mallory today, and we're going to be chatting about three things that ADHD parents can do as we help our kids start the school year off on the right foot.

Lori: Yeah, and we actually already started back to school, all of us. Mallory was kind of the first one to start back, but I know a lot of you who are listening have not started back to school yet. I had so many plans to be organized and have all my stuff together, and we started yesterday and, you know, my youngest daughter didn't have shoes that fit. Like, we're getting ready for school, and she's like, can barely get them on and, like, squeezed into them all day. I don't know how I blanked on that. And we always go on vacation right before we go, you know, back to school and we were in California, and then it was like, meet the teacher the next day, and we were in it, and I dropped the ball on, like, numerous things. So, if you were not prepared, I am with you on that one.

Mallory: Well, that's kind of what I experienced this summer, too, Lori. We stayed home kind of for the first half of summer and did summer camps, but then we were traveling the second half of summer, and next summer, I would definitely reverse that. I would travel the first part when you're still, like, excited it's summer, and then save the second half of summer for some of the camps and then giving yourself kind of a buffer to ease back in and prepare for the school year and make sure the shoes fit.

Lori: Yeah, yeah.

Katie: And for context too, Lori's girls wear uniforms to school. So, it's not that they don't own any shoes that fit them, it's just the shoes that they need.

Lori: I ordered uniforms like two weeks ago or something and they still haven't come. My poor daughter, like, cannot fit into her skirt. I'm just like, you're just, don't button it. Like, I don't know what to tell you. Like, fold your shirt over just so it doesn't show. So, we're a hot mess over here. Yeah, uniforms are great, but they're a challenge.

Mallory: Okay, so we're here today to tell you what not to do.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely.

Lori: Don't follow me. I'm just here for like the ADHD parent, the relatable ADHD parent that is not starting the year off right. So don't listen to me.

Katie: My biggest challenge for back to school this year is that my daughter, she's 12 and she also has to wear black shoes as part of their uniform, but this year, for the first time, she decided she wanted fashionable black shoes, which I honestly don't know what that means.

Lori: Good luck with that.

Katie: Yeah. And so, she's telling me, you know, everybody has this brand or that brand, but it clearly states in the guidelines, which I'm the rule follower that says, you know, you can't have the brand on there. It can't say any brand names. So anyway, we spent several days going back and forth and she ended up wearing, her feet haven't grown as much cause I think she maybe has already stopped growing a little bit, but she ended up wearing her last year shoes and they did fit her. But she's still, even on the first day she came home and she's like, mom, everybody has really cool shoes. And I said, please ask them where they got them because we need help. So, yeah, we're all thriving.

Lori: I know I'm not the rule follower. And I'm like sending Katie these like cute black sneakers and she's like, there's gold on them. I was like, who cares?

Katie: Yeah, I think your exact words were, just use a sharpie.

Lori: You know, sharpies, duct tape. Like, those are my solutions to everything.

Katie: Yeah. So, this is actually going to be an episode about problem solving. No. Yeah. So, I think as we kind of jump in here, one really quick request if you are loving the podcast, if you could please consider leaving us a five-star review. We love to read your comments, we love feedback. If you have any concerns, any questions, just email us. We love to hear from you. And that's really the thing that I think helps us to grow and feel so motivated to keep going is just the relationships that we get to build with all of you. So today we're jumping into, you know, not a school shoe advice column, but that's later the support group starts after this, but we're going to be talking about three ways that you can start this school year on track. So, three things you can do whether you haven't started or you're about to start, and ways to just kind of get the ball rolling in the right direction. And the first tip is to start the relationship with your child's teacher early. I know that it can be a little bit, you know, intimidating. I know for me personally I've questioned like, am I going to bother the teacher or scare the teacher if I send them a really long email? And they're like, okay, I got that mom in my class. But it is really helpful for them to have information up front. And I can personally say that I've tried it different ways, different years. And in general, you just don't want to wait until there's an issue with your child. So, reaching out doesn't have to be a really formal process. You might email them or send a note, you know, with your child, but you're just reaching out to say, hey, here's some things that my child is really good at. Here's some of the things that we've been up to lately at home. And then maybe some ideas of like, here's where my child might struggle or ways that you could help them. And that can really help the teacher to feel one like they know your child better, but also you're opening the door to so that they can come to you and you can work together.

Mallory: I think that's a great way to let the teacher know that you're on their team. I think that a lot of teachers have in the past gotten pushback from parents. Maybe they reached out to the parent to say like, oh, your child is struggling with this in class or I need some help with this. And they've gotten a not so nice response from parents. So, I do think that sometimes teachers are hesitant to reach out. If there is a struggle, they want to solve it on their own. They're not sure how you're going to take it. But if you reach out early on to express kind of what works for your child, what doesn't work for your child, then they can go into the school year knowing like, okay, I have this parent on my side and I'm going to approach them sooner rather than later if something comes up. So, I think it's really important

to set the stage early that you want to collaborate with the teacher. And like Katie said, it doesn't have to be, you know, this eight paragraph summary of your child's entire educational experience, but just pointing out a couple things that were really key for your child last year. So, for example, last year my child used a wobble seat and so I reached out and said, hey, I'm going to send this with my child to school. They found it useful last year. You can figure out if this is something that you'd like to have in your classroom this year, like if he asks for it or you see a need for it. So, it doesn't have to be overwhelming. It can be like a simple actionable one or two strategies that you think are really going to help your child. But again, just to get that relationship started off on the right foot.

Lori: Yeah. And I think, I think a lot of parents when they ask this question are really concerned about is the teacher going to treat them differently or assume that they're like a bad kid right off the bat or they're a behavioral kid right off the bat. And I think that again from our experience, and I've worked in the schools with many teachers, we have lots of teachers in our community, they really do appreciate that information kind of up front because a lot of times they do like they're hesitant to approach a parent because they think maybe they're doing something wrong, that they're having difficulty. And again, part of it is the way that you frame it when you're talking about it. Like you can when you're giving them feedback, these are my child's strengths. You know, just saying they have ADHD doesn't really tell a teacher a whole lot. But saying they have ADHD and these are the things that have been hard in the past and these are the things that have worked. You know, you can write that in a way that feels very positive and focuses on their strengths and just ways to kind of collaborate and that you're open to collaborating. And I think that the way you talk about it makes a big difference.

Katie: And on that same note, I think being really intentional to say, like I am open and would love to collaborate, like be really clear almost to the point where you're like, it should be clear, you know, between the lines. But don't assume that, you know, teachers have a lot on their plate. They're very busy. They're coming into the school year with, you know, several kids, several parents, all the families. So being really clear and just saying, I'm so excited. I'm really grateful that my child is in your class, and I'm really looking forward to this. Like, please don't hesitate to reach out. Those things can just go a long way in helping them feel, like, okay, yeah, this mom or dad, you know, they get it. Like, they understand, and I can talk to them openly.

Lori: So, our second tip is to practice routines before the school year starts. I personally shouldn't be talking about this because I was, like, planning on really having a solid morning routine, like, scheduled out, like, the day school started. Like I said, we got back from vacation and my work was way backed up, and I have been basically drowning since then. But we have time. Again, like, if you're like me and you had all these plans, like, kind of manage the chaos and have a good routine in place, it's okay to wait a little bit. Thinking about, like, what is one area that you want to grow their independence this year? For us, like, making your own lunch is kind of one that we've been working on, and I've been having her do that, you know, throughout the summer. Just, like, thinking about, what is it that you want in your lunch? How do we, you know, build something healthy? How do you make that? So that's, like, one area that I want her to grow her independence. Maybe there's one skill that you can think about that you're doing that you think your child can take on and grow that a little bit. So that's kind of one thing to think about. Maybe your kids are, I mean, I think this is true for most of us, your kids are staying up later. They're sleeping in. We have a really early school time. So, starting to put your kids to bed a little bit earlier each night so that it's not like a big adjustment when they're having to wake up early. But again, the goal isn't, like, to fix everything all at once and change everything all at once. But thinking about, like, last year, where was there a lot of chaos? Was it morning? Was it after school? Was it bedtime? What was the hardest part for your family? Where do your, where does your child need to grow in their independence? And what's a good place to start? Those are kind of things to ask yourself right now to start maybe thinking about, how do we make a routine that works for our family?

Katie: Yeah, I think it's interesting how one small tweak can actually make a really big difference. So, Mallory and I were on a podcast, someone else's podcast, a few weeks ago, and we were talking about the same topic. You know, back to school, what can we do? And Mal said something that really was so interesting to me, and it's such a duh, moment. But she said her boys have, to finish all of their upstairs tasks before they can come downstairs and start the downstairs tasks. And we have two stories, that's new for us. We recently moved, and my kids really struggle with this. Going upstairs, downstairs. They go upstairs; they get their toys. They've totally lost the plot.

Mallory: So many shiny pennies along the way.

Katie: Yes. So many shiny pennies. I don't even know where they get all of those, but it's hard. And so, we tried this just the last few weeks of, okay, finish all of your upstairs tasks. And it took some coaching, like, we had to talk through what are the upstairs tasks? You know, your toothbrush is up there, you know, your deodorant, those kind of things. But for us, the motivating thing is breakfast, and that's downstairs. So, we got to get through those upstairs tasks really quickly. And so, I guess, obviously everyone has a different, you know, style of house, but if, in terms of just the small tweak can actually make a really big difference. So, I didn't rewrite our whole morning routine. I just said, hey, I had this idea. Mal's kids do it, and they love Mal's kids and so we decided to try it, and it's been really helpful. So, yeah, just anything you can do to reduce the friction. The other one I wanted to mention is if your school has, like, a, meet the teacher or back to school night, we just did ours, but that can be such a game changer. And I was volunteering at one of the tables, and I watched a lot of new families come in, and the kids looked so nervous, you know, but they have their parent with them, and they're walking around, they're going to the classroom, putting their supplies away, doing all these things. And it's interesting to me as a parent, when we've been in our school for a long time, but I could see those new kids come in looking terrified. And then kind of towards the end, as they're leaving, they looked so much more calm. Like, they saw the playground, they saw where the bathroom is, the water, you know, drinking fountain, these are things that we don't think about. And of course the school is there to help your child. But just walking through the school and seeing the different things, even, if it's a, you know, same school, new classroom, it can really relieve a lot of that stress. And I know that that might be tempting to skip, especially if you're at the same school. You're like, we've done it, we what to do. But maybe you have another kid that's younger or you have, you know, a new teacher obviously, and that those things can be really helpful for our kids just to kind of see. Especially ADHD, because if they've been out of school all summer, it's kind of out of sight, out of mind. So going back and having that visual can make a big difference.

Mallory: Absolutely. And something that I've done for one of my boys for the past few years is request a time for meet the teacher during the day, like not when everyone else is going to be at the school. Because I noticed that it was a lot harder for him to focus in and think about, you know, himself in this classroom and talk with the teacher when there was kind of chaos around him. Even I leave meet the teacher feeling overstimulated. So we worked with the teacher to set aside a specific time, just earlier in the day where we popped in for 10 minutes,

respecting the teacher's time as much as possible. Popped in for 10 minutes, saw the classroom when there weren't other people there. And that I felt like that really helped him create that visual, like Katie said, of like, what is my day going to look like once the school day starts. And so maybe that's something that your school's open to, if your child seems to get overwhelmed by meet the teacher so you tend to avoid it for that reason, that might be something to consider.

Katie: Yeah, we went and it was very hot and like I said, I was running a table, so I was there early and I had my son in like a nice little polo shirt. He looked really handsome. By the time we got up to the classroom, he had had an Italian ice. So, he's covered in blue, he's got dirt everywhere. He's been running around the playground like he was, he had the time of his life, but he looked like a hot mess. And I was just laughing. I'm like, hey, I know this teacher, thankfully, but I was like, I had him dressed for this event but he's been here for a few hours so this is what we're getting. So it was really funny. But I think even for him, he's been at school, like I said, for, you know, years, but it's, it's new. It's a new floor, it's, you know, a new classroom and just, yeah, it was, it really helped.

Lori: Katie and I also have kids in middle school and that experience is also like a huge transition that started last year. And I know I was, I was stressed, my daughter was really stressed about the transition. So going there and like having the opportunity to meet all the teachers and you know, I think that that's very important. And work, even working with the school on how to use a locker. When do I go to my locker? What do I get from my locker? How do I organize, like my agenda in a way that's like going to work with my brain? I think when we started sixth grade, I felt like it was just, they're being thrown to the wolves. Like it was just like, here, figure it out. So, if your child has ADHD, it's really important to like work with a counselor or somebody at the school in advance to like be putting something into place so that they're knowing how to use that properly. Your child is just not going to naturally know what to do. Like they need to have some sort of system and they probably need you to work collaboratively with them to have a system that works for their brain and that they will actually follow through on. Because if they didn't have input on it, they're probably not going to follow through on it.

Mallory: I think that leads nicely into our third tip, which is to set up these executive function supports as early on as possible. Maybe it didn't happen on day one, but it's not too late. Don't

wait for kind of the arguments to take over, for the papers to pile up before you create a system. I'm talking specifically at home right now, create a system that works for your family. So, something we talk a lot about is give everything a home, right. Give the backpacks a home. Give the shoes a home. Give the water bottles a home when they get unpacked. Give the lunchboxes a home. Otherwise, those things are going to be strewn across your house, you're going to be overstimulated, or at least I would be overstimulated. We'd be scrambling the next morning to regather all the supplies. So, putting those systems into place as early on as possible before things have gotten too out of hand is really going to set your whole family up for success. So, something I do simply when it comes to managing papers is the boys unpack their backpacks, and they put their folders on the counter, and then we look through the folders and anything that needs immediate attention, like, it needs to get done for homework or it needs a signature, we handle that. If it's something that doesn't need a decision right now, but you're not, like, ready necessarily to throw it away, it all gets put in a pile that then I look at maybe about monthly. It's those, like, you know, it's the artwork, the color by numbers, where, like, on the day of, your kid is really attached to it because they just did it. They just did this beautiful color by number. But in a month, they're going to look at their multiplication color by number, and they're like, I don't care about that. But you can't throw it away that day, right?

Lori: No, no.

Mallory: So that goes into the, like, wait and see pile. And of course, you know, I'm talking to Lori and Katie, they're looking at me like, all right, nope, let's talk what really works for the ADHD parents. So, you let me hear it. But that's what I do.

Lori: No, it's hard because we've talked about, I went through renovation, and, like, we still have not finished, like, closets even, and organizing. So, like, we had a holding place for those things in our laundry room, and we no longer have that. So, I'm still trying to figure out, like, where is our holding place for that? I'm really bad, and I just, like, throw things away, and I'm like, my kids are like, where did you put that, like, art thing yesterday? And I'm like, I have no idea. Where did it go?

Mallory: Are you sure you brought it home? Let's look for it.

Lori: I think you lost it. I think you lost. I just, my solution is to, like, throw everything away, which is not good. And Brant wants to, like, hold on to everything, so.

Katie: That's right, because he's sentimental.

Lori: He's very sentimental.

Katie: Both of our husbands are so sentimental. I am not. I'm ruthless. Yeah, no, I agree with you, Mal, actually. And I know that, like, you know, everyone's ADHD looks a little bit different, but for me, it is better to have a plan, like you said, to be like, these papers go here. And I do try to manage things in the moment. A lot of mine, is my kids will tell me something but not actually show it to me or have it in front of me. And then I think they think that that loop is closed. It is definitely not closed. I'm not going to remember. So, we do that too, where we, I have to be like, let's look at the folders. And they're getting better over time. But I also have a pile, we call it like our doom pile. But that I need to go through at least once a week. So, what I do is I put that in the corner on my counter and it bugs me, which is what makes me clean it. If I, I've tried putting it like up in a cabinet and it's all aesthetic. It does not work. It is there for eternity. Yeah. Like, the paper will decompose before I will get back to it. So that does not work. So for me, I have to make it a little bit, of a nuisance, genuinely, so that I'm annoyed enough to be like, fine, let's go through this pile. And it is, I know there's so many people out there who do like, self-help and I feel like I follow a lot of these accounts because I'm like, how do I keep myself organized? And a lot of people will say, you know, if it's, if you can make the decision in like less than five seconds or whatever, just make the decision in the moment. And that is something that takes practice. So I know that that's the best practice and the best thing to do, but it is hard for me. But I almost have to like, psych myself up and be like, we are going through this pile and it is all getting decided now. Because otherwise I will recycle it right back into the pile. So that doesn't work. So it is like using those strategies and, you know, supporting yourself. Everyone's, you know, brains are so unique, but that is what's helped me is having it be very obvious. Like, can't miss it.

Lori: Yeah, I do the same. I mean, our pile is like in a noticeable place on our desk and it bothers me too, so I will periodically go through that. But sometimes it doesn't bother me soon enough and I will miss stuff as a result.

Katie: That has happened too.

Lori: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, along those lines, and you know, as somebody, I have ADHD, so like, getting those things done is hard for me. Or even like following through on my kids afternoon routine is hard for me. Our goal with working with ADHD parents or kids in general, we want them to be as independent as possible. And the thing that we see parents getting so frustrated about is that I'm having to give them constant reminders. But then if, you have ADHD yourself, like, you can't remember those things to give them the constant reminders sometimes, right. So, what has helped us the most is having like a visual schedule. My kids are now 10 and 12. They still like having pictures up. I mean, they will write on there too. But it's so easy because me and my husband, like, they get home from school and they'll be wanting to like, launch into playing or doing something like that. And it's like, nope, look at your schedule. What comes next? And they never remember, like, to take their lunch out of their backpack. It is like the hardest thing in the world. We've been working on this skill for so long. It will come, I swear they will be independent, but they want to skip that step altogether. So that's like, usually the first thing that they are supposed to do when they get home. And it's, it's very easy to just kind of point and say, hey, what's next on your schedule? What's next on your schedule? And for me, that takes like a mental weight off of me because I don't remember. Like, I forget what they're supposed to be doing. I forget what the routine is. Like, I don't have to think about it each day. It's kind of there and we have that routine in place. And the more we do it the exact same way every single day, the better they get at doing that and doing it independently. If you're kind of like, I don't know how to have a schedule, and that's really hard, we will link our product printable visual schedules. We have afternoon ones, morning ones, evening ones. Whatever you're struggling with, you can get all of them or you can buy one individually for less than \$10. These can all be customized based on your family and your needs. They can draw their own pictures. It's just a way for you to kind of start and work with your child on that. But they make such a difference in helping to prevent challenges. Especially like in the after-school time where we see a lot of kids just maybe having too much screen time and not getting their homework done and melting down because we forgot to give them their snack and they're hangry, you know. So it helps again, for me having ADHD myself, it helps me to not forget those things.

Katie: Yeah, I think that makes a lot of sense. And especially for kids who take medication and also probably for kids who don't take medication, but kids who take stimulants throughout the day, they're not going to be eating a lot during the school day. So they're coming home, they're coming off of their meds, they might be very hungry. It can be really

dysregulating. So the after school is a really challenging time. So I think that the visual has helped my family a lot too, just with the after-school hours.

Mallory: Okay, so the three tips today were reach out to your teacher early, practice routines in advance, and make a plan to support executive functions, your own and your child's. And we just want you to hear this, if you're feeling really overwhelmed with the start of school or school has already started, and you're like, I did none of these things and chaos has already hit, don't feel like you have to do it all. Pick one of these things off the list. Like Lori said, choose that friction point. Put your energy there. You can get to the other things down the line, but focus in on one thing that you think is really going to make a difference in your mornings or your after school. Setting your whole family up for success. And start there.

Lori: So, our key takeaway today is that these small steps can help you feel more confident about heading into the new year. And as always, we are here to support you.