

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

### **Episode #228: Help Your Child with ADHD Finish What They Start**

Katie: Because every time they have to start that task, it can feel like almost like Groundhog Day. Like, this is gonna take forever. And you're like, no, but we've done this. We've emptied this dishwasher. We've filled out this math paper. I know you can do this because there's a lot of elements that are the exact same. So that's that visual working memory, when they aren't visualizing what they know and how they can connect it to what they've already done.

Mallory: Hello, and welcome back to Shining with ADHD. Today I'm here with Katie and Lori, and we are talking about one of our favorite executive function concepts. Because once you understand this concept, you really start to see it everywhere throughout your child's day. And before we tell you what that is, if you are loving the podcast, if you are finding it helpful, please leave us a five-star review. We love to see your reviews, read your notes. It's what keeps us going, keeps us motivated to putting out more episodes. So please leave us a five-star review.

Katie: Yes. And I'm especially excited about today's topic because this is something that I actually learned as a speech language pathologist many, many years ago, even before I had kids of my own. And I got to see two SLPs, Sarah Ward and Kristen Jacobsen. They are kind of specialists in executive function and I was definitely fangirling. But I got to go to two of their conferences, and it just really changed my perspective on the clients that I was working with and kids in my caseload and even in my own home at that time, just like, how could we use these strategies?

Lori: Yeah. So, if you have ever found yourself saying, I literally told them exactly what to do or how did they think they were finished? or why can't they just get started? This episode is for you.

Mallory: Yeah. So let's start with the story. Let's start with an example that might be a little relatable. So you ask your child to clean their room. Twenty minutes later you check in, and they proudly announce that they're done, they finished, their room is clean. You walk in and somehow there's Legos on the floor, the clothes are still on the bed, there's books everywhere,

the laundry basket is now upside down when it wasn't before, and you think to yourself, how did they think this was clean? It's definitely not what you were imagining.

Lori: Were you in my house yesterday?

Katie: No. I mean, I feel like we're all living paranoid parallel lives. The biggest reframe here is that when that happens, you walk in and you see, you know, are you kidding me? Your room is totally not clean. Our first reaction can be frustration, irritation, probably honestly, some basic confusion. Like what? But we want to reframe it a little bit because many times, especially for kids with ADHD, it's not that they're being lazy or oppositional or just, you know, so careless with their things that, you know, you've bought for them. It's actually that many times they have a completely different picture in their mind of what a clean room actually meant.

Lori: Yeah. And this always comes back to your child's executive functioning skills. We talk about this all the time. So the skill we're going to teach you today is called seeing the future picture. So we get lots of questions from parents all the time, how do I build and develop my child's executive functioning skills? That's what we're talking about today. This is a strategy that can really help with that. So let's kind of dive in. Katie is the one that, you know, really taught Mallory and I this. This is not something we were familiar with and I think that's what's so wonderful about our group at The Childhood Collective is that, like, we all come from different, like, backgrounds. And so Katie really helped us with this. So let's tell us a little bit about what the future picture is, Katie.

Katie: Okay. Thanks for coming to my TED Talk, guys. I'm glad to have you here. So future picture is looking at how a child is able to visualize what's going to happen in the future. And future picture can kind of take different forms. Like, maybe, you know, when we exercise, we have this future picture of, like, a really fit version of ourselves in, like, months, right. But also, a future picture can be more immediate. So why I don't really want to clean my kitchen, but I can picture in my mind what that clean kitchen is going to look like and what it's going to feel like. Like, I can actually picture, hey, I'm going to be, you know, the kitchen counters will be cleared off. Thank goodness, I do not like clutter on the counters. I'm going to light this little candle. I'm going to turn the lights down. It's going to feel awesome, right. And I can picture that. And so when I can see what my end goal is, I am much more motivated to get started. I'm motivated to kind of eliminate any obstacles in my way. I'm motivated to

prioritize it. And I don't always have a clean kitchen, but when I'm able to really focus on that future picture, it pulls me toward my goal. And for our kids, a lot of times they actually do not create a future picture. So especially for kids with executive functioning challenges and ADHD, they're not thinking in terms of that. So I might say, hey, it's we need to leave for soccer in five minutes. And I am picturing my kids standing there in their cleats. They have a water bottle. They have the correct jersey cause there's like a practice jersey and a game jersey. They have their bag. I'm thinking, oh, you know, there might be traffic. I think there was construction last week on Cave Creek Road. So okay, we need to leave a little early. I'm picturing the entire sequence. But I say, hey, we're leaving for soccer in five minutes and my kid is like, so not right now. Okay, we're good. I'm not going to be thinking about all those details, right. And so it's almost like watching a movie in your mind or visualizing kind of what is my end goal and what are those steps? And I can see what needs to happen to get me there. But a lot of times for our kids with ADHD, they don't because they're really living in the here and now.

Mallory: Yeah. I can tell you, if I wasn't able to create a future picture, I would never go to the gym. Because anytime it comes time to go to my favorite workout class, I have to imagine myself leaving that class in an hour feeling amazing and telling myself I'm glad I did that. I never regret it. I've never regretted going. If I wasn't able to create that future picture of myself leaving my workout class feeling good, feeling energized, I would never go to the gym. But that's what gets me there every day. And so again, it's like, it's not a lack of motivation for our kids, it's not a lack of effort. It's coming down to this executive functioning skill basically. It's coming down to can you imagine what the end goal is and can you imagine how you feel once you've reached that end goal? Which is another huge piece, right.

Lori: Yes, yes. And let's talk about another example that comes up a lot. Well, it did for me last year. Again, my daughter's was in middle starting middle school last year and I remember we had this huge science fair project and I feel like these big projects, especially when our kids get to like middle school, are things that come up frequently. But they a lot of times have a very hard time getting started on that even with a lot of instructions. Sometimes there's too many verbal instructions, like written down and they're not able to like, picture what that project is going to look like at the end or what they even want it to look like at the end. So it's hard to even know where to start, what they need to do, what the steps look like, what things

they need to gather before they even start the project. It's a lot, a lot of executive functioning goes into those projects.

Mallory: And this is where like having that future picture is going to help you what that whole sequence is going to be. And it's going to give your child a little bit more motivation to get started because they can see the clear picture of where this is going.

Katie: Yes.

Mallory: And that's why the future picture is so important. And like we said, like, once you learn about the future picture, you really start to see it everywhere. You start to see it throughout your kid's day. So the morning routine. So your child building this future picture of what it means to be ready for school. So my socks are on, my shoes are on, my teeth is brushed, my hair is combed, I'm wearing my backpack, I'm holding my water bottle, I'm holding my lunchbox. Like, having that future picture of what means to be ready for school helps your child get to that end destination. But when they don't have that end goal in mind of what it means to be ready for school, if you don't like, know the destination, you're not going to be able to get there, right. So the morning routine relies on the future picture. Homework relies a lot on the future picture. So finishing a worksheet and then checking your work, like, did you actually finish? Did you actually finish it? Did you write your name? Did you write your number on the paper? Did you fill out the answer to every single problem? So knowing what it looks like to have a finished homework assignment, and I feel like the other piece with homework here too is like to get started on homework, you need the future picture of what you're going to feel like when the homework is done. You're going to feel good, you're going to feel accomplished. Like that's a good feeling when you've checked that off your list because then you can imagine yourself, you have the future picture of yourself, homework's done and now I get to do what I want to do. Now I get to watch a show. Now I get to play with my Legos. So when you have that future picture of what happens when the homework is done, you're also more motivated to get started because you're like, oh, what happens next is good and I want that.

Lori: Yeah. I feel like one of the areas that we hear a lot from parents that is really challenging and we ourselves experience is showers. Where it's like, every time I tell my youngest, like, it's time to take a shower it is like a negotiation. And I'm just like, this is not, like, a thing we negotiate. Like, you stink and it's 120 degrees outside. You are taking a

shower. But a lot of times, again, they're not thinking about and they don't visualize that feeling. Feeling good in the shower, feeling clean, feeling when you get out of the shower, that feeling of, like, being relaxed and being in cozy pajamas and all that. They can't visualize that. And that it makes those transitions really, really difficult for kids.

Katie: Yeah. And a lot of this goes back to visual working memory. And that is part of the executive functions where our kids really struggle with, like you mentioned, like, picturing themselves even when they've done it before. And that's something about ADHD brains that can be really challenging because you're like, we used to use the phrase it's the same, but different, because, you know, you hand the kid a math worksheet and they just can melt, right. They're like, but it's going to take forever. And you're like, but, buddy, we do this pretty much every day, right. This is like the math, rocket math, where they have to fill out, you know, as many multiplication problems as they can in two minutes. And it's the same. We've done it over and over. But what I would explain to kids is like, hey, how is it the same? Okay. It still has numbers. It still has 80 problems on this page. Okay. It's a little overwhelming.

Lori: 80?!

Katie: Okay. I don't know.

Lori: I'm feeling overwhelmed and stressed. Geez.

Katie: Rocket Math is one of those, like, you either love it or you hate it. But. Yeah, I personally was like, yes, I was anyway.

Lori: I was the star of Rocket Math. I really was. So, I was a mathlete.

Katie: So you wanted 80 questions.

Lori: I wanted 80 questions. I loved it.

Katie: But we can look at, like, okay, how is it the same? It has, you know, we still write our name like Mal said. We still write the date at the top. My kids get a number assigned to them. That's what we were laughing about because my son is very excited. Our last name starts with an S and he's usually like number 26, but this year he gets to be number 30. And it's a big deal to be number 30. That's the last number that you can be. So, he, I think he might

write his name, his number now because of that. But we think about that's all the same. All of those things are the same on the worksheet. And then you have what's different? Well, last week we were doing the two's, and now we're at three's. So most everything's the same, but we just changed one number. And that is something we have to point out a lot of times to kids with ADHD because every time they have to start that task, it can feel like almost like Groundhog Day. Like, this is going to take forever. You're like, no, but we've done this. Like, we've emptied this dishwasher, we've filled out this math paper. I know you can do this because there's a lot of elements that are the exact same. So that's that visual working memory when they aren't visualizing what they know and how they can connect it to what they've already done.

Lori: Yeah. And I relate to that. Like, it is not a natural skill for me. And I feel that way every time I have to do laundry or dishes and I don't naturally think about like, what is the end product gonna look like? But sometimes I do. I mean, sometimes I can use that and it is motivating.

Mallory: Yeah. I feel like this is where I shine. Like, I feel like I'm constantly like, I'm gonna feel so good when that's done. I'm gonna feel so good when I get all the laundry done on Saturday and don't have to do any on Sunday. Like, I don't know, I'm constantly talking to myself like that.

Lori: Like, I mean, that's how my husband is.

Mallory: Like, future Mallory is gonna be so happy for right now, Mallory doing this.

Katie: Well you'll even do that in our team. Like, I'm just gonna get this done. Think of how awesome we're gonna feel. And I'm sort of like, will we? I don't know.

Lori: And I'm not listening. And that's how we work together. Mallory just does everything.

Katie: But yeah, it is interesting that I actually that you're saying that, because I do hear you using that a lot. And I use it a lot with my kids. You know, I'm like, oh, guys, think of how good this is going to be when this is all done. And I want to make a note really quickly because, you know, we talk a lot about, like, timers. And when you think about executive function, we might use, like, a visual timer or, you know, set a timer to see how long it's

going to take us to empty the dishwasher. And timers are great, so no shade to timers. But timers are really focused on the timing, like, when does it happen, how long should it take? Those types of things. But it's not really giving you a guide of, like, what to do. And the future picture is great because it's also a way to help our kids visualize the steps and the supplies that they're going to need. So I always think of it as, like, that's actually our true north, right. Like, that's our guide. So let me give you an example and we actually blogged about this, probably, I don't know, five years ago. So I want to post that in the show notes, a link to the blog, because there's some pictures that I think could really help make this clear. But my daughter was probably 6, 7 at the time. And same exact story that you told, like, hey, go clean your room. And she might disappear for a little bit. The next thing I know, you know, she's maybe like, put the books in rainbow order, and it looks awesome. But there's not a lot of other progress that's happened, right. And so I would say, hey, like, okay, what is it gonna look like when your closet, let's say, is clean? And in her mind, you know, everything's in there on the floor. It's fine. So what we did is we actually reverse engineered and we had to clean the closet, and then we took a picture to show what it's going to look like. And at, in this era, this was Disney Princess era, which I kind of miss Disney princess era.

Lori: Aw I do, too. I really miss it.

Katie: I do, too. So we had a lot of dresses. So we had a section in her closet just for her cute little dresses that she would hang up. And we had, I remember having a little bookshelf in there where she had some books. Her shoes would kind of be lined up in a certain spot. And now that I'm referencing the blog post, I'm like, I actually need to go look at that exact picture because I might be misquoting it slightly. But bear with me, because we took a picture of what it should look like and then when her closet would be messy, we would literally take that picture out and say, this is what it needs to look like. And that could feel overwhelming if I'm like, clean your closet. But what we can do is we use that as a guide, helping our visual working memory to say, okay, I see that all of your dresses in this picture are hanging up in the right hand corner. So what do we need to do to make that happen? What do we need? It's not the whole room. It's just the dresses and the hangers, right. Or I saw that you put your cute little pink cowboy boots over here on the floor. Okay, so let's go find all your shoes, right. And you're helping them break down the task. But again, the alternative to that is for me to stand in the doorway and tell her every individual step. It's a ton of language, which I don't mind, but she probably doesn't love, right. And it's a lot. And then it also puts all the

onus on me. I am, the frontal lobe, I am reminding, I am prompting, I'm guiding her through that sequence and she's capable to do each step. But what we're looking for here is the executive function, the underlying thought process where the picture allows her to look at that and say, okay, what's next? My hamper is full. So I in my future picture, my hamper looks empty. I need to get that laundry out to the laundry room. Or whatever it is. And she's building those inner skills and those inner kind of steps and strategies. And this takes a lot of time, but it makes a really big difference. And so we would say, okay, how does it look? Does it match the future picture? And at that point we could say, yes, we're good, or oh, something's missing. And it's not a verbal check, it's a visual check.

Mallory: So you've made kind of this invisible abstract thing that our brains do as grownups because we've had a lot of practice with it and making it totally visible for her. So just to like make it super clear. So one strategy to support your child in helping them build the future picture is to take a picture and print it out of what the finished product is going to look like. And obviously there are some situations where taking a picture of it, a finished product, is not going to work because let's say it's the science project. Well, you're not going to have a picture of the finished science project to take a picture of when it's done, right. So there's other strategies that we can use when it comes to that to help our kids build the future picture. So one thing you can do is to kind of see sketch out. This is not art, right? This is like whiteboard or and stick figures. Like, just draw out what the finished product might look like, because we're not gonna be able to take a picture of the, of the finished project. So let's take that example of the science project.

Lori: Yeah. And, like my daughter had a science project last year and she, you know, she had an idea of what she kind of wanted it to look like, but again, it wasn't like, clearly thought out. And so we would sit down and like, drew on a piece of paper, like, where does the hypothesis go? and where does the method section go? And do you want a picture here? And what does that picture look like? And, she could kind of plan out, like, all the things that she wanted to include and ways that she wants to make it, like, sparkly and cute and pretty, because that's very important to girls. And then we were able to kind of step back and say, okay, what do we need to make these things happen? Okay, so you need to have the hypothesis, so what do you need to do? Are you going to write that out in pencil? Are you going to type that out? Well, I want to type it. Okay, then what do we do after you type it? We got to print it. Like, so there's, again, once you have what this is supposed to look like,

then you can kind of say, okay, what do we start to work backwards from there and start to think about, okay, what do we need to do to make this happen now that we have it kind of the end result in mind. And it also just feels so much less overwhelming to kids, like, if you don't have that end result in their mind, it does feel like I'm never going to be able to do this.

There's too many things. I can't see it. It's overwhelming. And that's when you start to get, like, the meltdowns, the crying, the fits over it, because it just feels overwhelming and like, I can't do this. And there's just too much., right. This helps to take out that overwhelm and break it down for kids into a process that they feel like they can follow through on.

Mallory: There's so many different areas where you can use this strategy, whether it's taking a picture or drawing the finished result. Things like, what does a packed backpack look like? So have your child, like, with your child, pack the backpack, fold the front down so you can see what's in it. There's a folder, then there's the lunchbox. Then there's the water bottle. Oh, there's an agenda and a library book in there, too.

Katie: Glasses.

Mallory: Glasses. And take a picture of a packed backpack and then put that somewhere in your house where it makes sense. Wherever your child might be packing their backpack, so your child can see visually and do that check every morning, like, do all these things in the picture. Does that look like my backpack right now? Are all of those things in my backpack right now? That's a situation where you could draw it or you could take a picture. And taking a picture might be easier then. But let's think about, my boys are having their birthdays. And they have a vision in their mind of how my kitchen is going to be decorated, how the island is going to be decorated for their birthday party. Well, obviously that's not something we're going to take a picture of. That doesn't help, you know, that doesn't help us plan, but they can draw out what they want the decorations to look like, and then we know exactly what we need to buy. So there's so many different. I love Katie's example, too, of, baking. Her daughter loves to bake, and she loves to do cupcakes and decorate the cupcakes. So draw me a picture of what a decorated cupcake is going to look like so we can talk about what supplies we're going to need to get there. So future picture doesn't just help your child visualize, like, the final goal, but it also helps think through all of the steps and the sequence of those steps to get to that final goal. So using this strategy, taking a picture, drawing a picture of the end product, is one way that you can help your child kind of develop this skill.

Katie: Yeah. And I think, you know, it's a huge pet peeve of mine when people kind of will say, oh, well, visuals, you know, that's just you're kind of, like, overly helping your child. You're overly prompting them. And it's just like, I feel so frustrated by that feedback. And for parents who hear that feedback, because it is, you are helping them to be more independent, right. Like, yes, is the ideal situation that your child can just wake up in the morning, pack their backpack perfectly with no help and like skip to school. Sure, but we're not there, right. Like, raise your hand if you're there. You don't need to listen to this podcast. You've got it. You should probably come on and be a guest. So shoot us an email. But most of us are not in that place, right. Our kids forget their glasses, they forget their lunch, they forget to refill the water bottles so they go to school with an empty water bottle, right. So what is really frustrating about that to me is that then we're not really left with a lot of options, right. Because if you don't have a visual, then it puts all of the onus on us. We don't want our kids to go to school without their stuff. So then we're saying, oh, did you remember this? And this? And this and this? The visual is a bridge. It's helping to build that skill. It's probably not something they're gonna need forever. But I still...

Lori: But you know what? We still. I mean, let's be honest. Like, I can't function if I don't have a color coded schedule of like the different activities that I have going on during the day. And I can't function if I don't put things on a to do list cause they literally will not get done, right. If I can't look at my, you know, reminders in my notes, it's not gonna happen. It just won't. So we have visuals, like built into our day to make sure that we follow through on stuff. So it's ridiculous to kind of think a child wouldn't need that.

Katie: Yeah. Oh, they shouldn't need that much support because again, what you're really doing is you're taking away something that can help and then you have to add in more support somewhere, you know? So I think yes to your point, Lori that's where I was going too it's like we use this, these strategies in our own adult lives. To Mal's example of the gym, I use that example all the time to myself. Like, I'm like, okay, come on, you can do it. Like, you're gonna feel awesome. You love to be kind of sore from a workout. Like you feel like, you know, you're just crushing it in life when you're a little bit sore. Not too sore, by the way, but medium sore. But this is, you have to really, like, realize that we use this all the time.

Lori: Yeah. And honestly, like the visual schedules that my kids have for the afternoon, for instance, like I rely on those. Like I'm not just doing it for them, I'm doing it for me because I

can't remember the routine and it helps me to be able to follow through on it. So those things aren't just for our kids, those are for us too and that's not a bad thing. Like I am happy to have those things in my life. They help me to be more independent and a better parent.

Mallory: Yeah. And our kids, they might not always need the picture of a packed backpack, right. This is, this is a support that we're providing while our child needs it, but the idea is that our child is internalizing these skills over time, becoming more independent with this, internalizing these skills and doing them themselves over time. Seeing that it's an important skill to have. So that might not be, you know, you're not gonna have to go to college with them and take a picture of their clean dorm room for them, but as they get more practice when they're younger, they're going to become more independent with that skill. And that's why it's so important. And if you're anything like me, you're a visual learner. Like I appreciate seeing things visually. I do not do well processing things verbally. And so it kind of meets our kids where they are. It reduces that working memory demand that is hard for kids with ADHD. And that's why helping them develop the skill of the future picture is so helpful and so important.

Lori: Yeah. And this is actually one of the biggest ideas that we have throughout our online course, Creating Calm. There are so many parenting strategies out there that teach you what to do when a behavior happens, right. And if you have been following us for any period of time, you will know that we really focus on what do we do to prevent these challenges from happening in the first place. That is like the gonna be the most effective thing that you can do for your family. And so in Creating Calm, our focus is really in building our kids executive functioning skills, a lot of that is developing routines with them, creating systems at home. Everything has a place. Using visuals to help them so that we're reducing the language load on their brains, which they do not handle well. They learn better through visuals. Having clear expectations, having clear supports. When we have an environment in place that supports an ADHD brain, we're going to prevent a lot of those day-to-day behaviors and challenges in the first place. Because our kids really want to be successful and they want to be independent. They just don't know how and they get overwhelmed by all of it. And then we see the meltdowns and the behaviors and the difficulties. So again, the future picture is just one of dozens of practical strategies that we teach inside our course, Creating Calm. So if you feel like you're constantly reacting to behaviors, we really want you to think about, you know, taking the course. Think about how you can set your child up for success by making

some of these really, a lot of times small changes at home that can have a huge impact on your day-to-day relationship with your child.

Mallory: Absolutely. And so we don't usually do this, but I want to end with this. I want to end it with a little challenge. I want you to try one future picture with your child this week. Whether you're drawing it, whether you're taking a picture of it. Keep it simple. It doesn't have to be overwhelming. Choose maybe a point of your day that's kind of causing a lot of friction right now. They're constantly forgetting their lunchbox or whatever it may be. Try using the future picture to help things go a little bit more smoothly. Reduce the reminders you have to give and then let us know how it goes.

Katie: And, yeah, and we mean it. Like, please email us and let us know how it goes, because we read all of those emails and we love to hear from you. We've gotten a lot of really good feedback in the last few months from some of our other episodes about medications and things like that. And it's just, it's great to hear kind of how you guys are implementing these things. So it's a sincere ask. Please shoot us an email. So our key takeaway for today is that our kids aren't struggling because they don't want to do well. We need to assume that they are trying to do their very best. They may be struggling because they can't picture exactly where they're going. And one of the ways that we as parents can support them is by helping them to picture what they're supposed to be doing, where they're going, and helping them to get there.