

Ep #153 Tips for creating routines that work

This is episode 153.

We welcome you to the ADHD Smarter Parenting Podcast. Here to heal and elevate lives is your Parenting Coach, Kimber Petersen.

Hello. This is Kimber, I am your host here with the ADHD Smarter Parenting Podcast. And today we're going to be talking about school. As we dive into this new school year, I've been coaching families across the country and even internationally, and so it's been really clear that everyone's school starts a little bit different and at different times, but we felt like mid-September was a good time to dive into this topic of kind of getting your school routine and your schedule going, and some of those things that can make your days and weeks a little bumpier along this transition.

So, today we're going to talk about just a few things. One is that we're going to go over tips, just some suggestions, and tools that you can use in implementing and planning out your schedule.

Another is how to use self-government and accountability to teach your children to have some buy-in and some accountability in the schedule.

And then the last thing that we'll go over is some after-school questions. Some things that you can do to communicate and cultivate your relationship with your child.

In my early days of being a treatment parent, I found myself, I was a professional treatment parent, and so kind of a little bit more intense version of a foster parent. And we had six kids, all between the ages of about, that group was probably between about six and 12.

And so we ended up having a lot of different school schedules, and our local school district worked some schools on a year-round routine and some schools in a traditional setting. And we found ourselves with six kids and five different school schedules. And so we quickly learned that we needed to have some very clear routines and expectations and different things going on in our schedule.

So a couple of the things that we learned along the way were to schedule in some downtime. I found that with this age group, especially for my kids with ADHD and other attention deficits, they really needed to have some pockets of time where there was a little bit more downtime. And so we would arrange our schedule and our routine to fit in with that, and plan for no more than about 30 minutes of productive time.

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So if kids are getting up, getting dressed, brushing their teeth, eating breakfast, all of these different things that are productive and helpful for our schedule, we also needed to throw in there a five minute wiggle time, or a dance party, or some Legos, or something that helped break up that schedule and make it a little bit more motivating.

Now in doing this and setting up our schedule that way, it actually gave us a little bit of wiggle room because it can be very easy, especially in the mornings, to try to plan for such minimal amounts of time that you're pretty go, go, go, and you've just got to get things done. But planning in these pockets gave us some wiggle room for days where things didn't go smoothly, or somebody didn't get up on time, or somebody had a tantrum, or something like that came up.

It also gave us a tool to use to help reward and create opportunities for rewards and consequences within our morning routine. So our kids that got up on time were able to have some of that Lego time, or whatever was scheduled or pocketed in there. But our kids that got up a little bit late, part of that consequence was that they lost out on some of that time, if not all of it, depending on kind of how that morning routine went. That made it motivating for the kids to adhere to the schedule that we had set up. So if they were waking up at 7:20, then they were up and out of bed at 7:20 because they were excited to get to that point that they earned Lego time, or wiggle time, or running around outside and playing with a football, whatever that looked like.

Now scheduling some downtime in and having some breaks in there is a really great tip to have in your morning routine, but another tip that I have for you is to schedule in some things that happen regardless of behavior. So those wiggle times, those little pockets of rewarding opportunities, those could come and go. And if we were running late, those were the first thing to get dropped, and it kind of gave us some of that wiggle room that we needed, as I said.

However, we also scheduled some things to happen regardless of behavior. And even if we needed to sit in the school parking lot for a few minutes and have them be a little bit late to class, whatever it took, we made sure that our kids were leaving on a positive note, and that they were prepared and emotionally ready for their day before running into the school. Especially on those stressful mornings where things were really busy, things were really late, and I was just kind of dying to get them to the point where, "Okay, into the classroom," so I can mark this task as done.

A lot of times, those mornings were the ones where we actually needed to take more time and just sit and wait in the parking lot and just have some time together. So we would do things like take deep breaths or use other coping skills that helped regulate their emotions. We would talk about their day, or we would talk about their worries, the different things that were coming up for them emotionally so that as they headed into those doors for school, they were ready.

Now another tip that you could try out is using some visual aids. So that might be a timer or a clock. They make some really great ones where you can visually see the time moving on. And

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some families have even taken just a generic clock and colored in the different sections of it, so that their kids know what times they do what task.

I really like in my family, using a visual timer. We use something that's called a time timer. And so it has up to 60 minutes on it, but the shaded part is very clear for my kids. So if I set it to 15 minutes, they can see that 15 minutes of that time is set to blue, and then it gradually gets smaller and smaller as the time dwindles on.

Another visual aid that I use for my kids is kind of what their routine looks like. So if we've got a schedule where they get up, they make their bed, they change their clothes, they eat breakfast, they brush their teeth, and that's our routine in the order we want it to go in, we'll have some visual aids, whether that's pictures, or words, whatever's appropriate for them, that are printed out and ready to go, so that they can see and follow exactly along what they need to be doing.

These are great tools for teaching your kids accountability. I've had a lot of families ask me about accountability and how to teach their child to be more self-accountable and motivated and those kinds of things. And at this age, this six to, well, 18, I don't know, no, but those kind of six to 12-year-old range, it's pretty normal for them to not naturally or inherently take on a lot of accountability. And so some of the tools that you can use are things like these visual aids, whether that's timers, clocks, or schedules, routines, charts, whatever that needs to look like, and to help redirect your child back to that.

So instead of saying, "You are supposed to have your teeth brushed right now," I would say, "What's on your checklist? You need to complete what's on your checklist." Or direct them back over to the time timer and say, "How much time do you have left to finish this task?" So that they can look at it, and even my four-year-old can look at that and tell me, "A little bit of time. A lot of time." He's doing really well with learning numbers, so he'll start to tell me how much time he has left. But it's just a really good tool to help teach them to be responsible for themselves instead of waiting for me to direct and dictate every tiny task in the morning.

[So as you think through and prepare for what you want your mornings to include and to incorporate, one of the tools that you can help strengthen this accountability is bringing your kids into the conversation to help set up and arrange exactly what the expectations are. Now when you as the adult plan through and put out expectations, a lot of times those things are really well thought through. But you're not always teaching and including your child in that thought process and in why you're making the decisions you're making. So one of the tools that we like to use is a family meeting. Family meetings are great for teaching kids to govern themselves and to manage their time, their schedules, their wants, their needs, and to think through critical thinking skills.](#)

Some tips for having a family meeting. One is that you want to schedule it for a time that everyone in your family can attend, or at least most of the family can attend. You want to have some sort of consistency and regularity with how often your family meetings are. Now it might not be perfect, but if you plan for Monday nights after dinner, or every night after dinner, or

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whatever your expectations are in your family, then you want to have some consistency with that, so that the kids have kind of a clear expectation of when they can bring their thoughts, and that it's a reliable source of communication. If your kids don't feel like they can rely on that family meeting regularly, then they won't use it as a communication tool, and it can be very powerful as a communication tool.

You want to have a consistent outline with your family meeting. So think about things that you'd like to include in it. Do I want to go over the week's schedule? Do I want to let anybody make an announcement? Do we want to go over the menu for the next couple of days, or even just the day? Whatever that needs to look like? So what kinds of things do you want to have as your housekeeping items?

Now you should plan to keep your family meeting fairly brief. Now we don't want to go too long, and a lot of times, especially with your younger kids with ADHD, you want to make sure it's under 15 minutes, but keeping it brief, to the point, and something that's regularly scheduled is going to be really important. And the bulk of your time is going to be spent on giving your kids an opportunity to contribute and give their choices and thoughts.

So my family meeting topic might be something like, "What time are we going to wake up?" And what I would do is I would go through and I would start off with our announcements, or our schedule for the week, or whatever our housekeeping items were. And then I would lead them into the topic, "Okay, so today we're going to talk about what time we want to wake up in our school routine. Now a couple of things to keep in mind are that we need to leave by 7:50 every single morning. And to do that, we need to have shoes on, we need to eat breakfast, we need to brush our teeth, and yadda, yadda, yadda."

Once I've laid out the context for my kids to understand the things that they need to consider while making this decision, I'll ask them for their input. And I want them to give thoughtful or detailed input because this is my opportunity to teach critical thinking. My child might say, "I think we should wake up at 7:00." But I'm going to push and prompt for that to include more of a rationale so that I understand their thinking behind their decision. "I think it would be helpful to wake up at 7:00 because then we would be able to complete all of those tasks we went over, and then get in the car before 7:50."

So once my child has given their input or their thought, I'm going to praise that. I'm going to reinforce it. I want them to give their input, even if they tell me something ridiculous like, "I think we should wake up at 7:40 because then we can go super fast and get everything done, and then be at the car by 7:50."

I can still find things to praise and to reinforce in that comment, and I can also help teach them and redirected some of that. So I might say something like, "It sounds like you really value your sleep. I love that. Maybe we should have another meeting on what time to go to bed so that we can plan for more time to sleep. For the morning time, we're going to need at least 45 minutes to get all the way ready for school. So with that in mind, what time do you think that we should get

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up?" And then they can reconsider that and then give a new statement. "Well, I think we should wake up at 7:05 because you said 45 minutes, and that's how much time it takes." And that's fine.

So once I get their contribution, then we can kind of take note of that, gather everybody's input, and make a decision together as a family because in going through this, we've now solicited input from every member of the family, they've given their reasons why, and we've likely seen some sort of pattern. So everybody's saying about 7:00, 7:05.

For the ease of setting it up, let's have a vote. Or the majority of our family chose 7:00, and so let's try that out. And if there really is more time in the morning and you can sleep until 7:05, then maybe instead of having 10 minutes of playing with Legos, you could choose 7:05 the next morning instead of 7:00.

So now that my family has had their 15, 20-minute conversation about this topic, we've all contributed and helped made the decision. My children are much more likely to adhere to that 7:00 time now that they've had a chance to work it through, help problem solve, and contribute their opinion.

Now, remember, we want to have regularity to using this tool. And so in the problem-solving or the example that I gave before, I said, "We can have another meeting about it." And in order for that to be an effective resource and tool for my kids, we need to make sure we're having these meetings with some sort of regularity. So choose how frequently you would like to do these meetings with your family. And make sure your topics are bite-sized, so that they fit into these small little areas.

Now our conversation today is around our school routine, and it could be much longer than just what time are we getting up for school, but I chose that bite-sized topic because that was something that we could reasonably accomplish in this timeframe.

Other topics I might've chosen for my school routine are, "What kinds of breakfast options do we want to have available for the family?" And, "How do we keep our mudroom tidy so that we are not tripping on everything as we're going in and out the door?" And, "Why do we have to wear what we wear to school? Why do we have to wear a jacket?" I hope that's a family meeting topic in many homes, just like it is in ours. And kind of breaking these down and going over the different details with your kids.

Now, remember, as I introduce any one of these topics, I have an opportunity to explain why we're talking about it, and layout on the table the different things that my kids should consider. And then I really want to hear their thoughts and input because it might be surprising or enlightening what your kids think about different topics. And instead of battling the jacket every single day for the next six months as most homes do, you can have these meaningful conversations to understand what's holding your child back from having their jacket and what you expect from them. I expect my kids to take a jacket to school as an option. So if they want

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to put it in their backpack, that's okay with me. And that's something that we were able to decide in a family meeting because I laid out what I expected, they laid out what they wanted, and we found that meaningful compromise in the middle.

Now in your home, you might expect them to wear their jacket onto the bus and all the way to school. Once they get in their classroom, they can take it off. And so you can go through those different kinds of scenarios and examples, and your expectations, and their expectations, and work out what works well for your family.

That's going to reduce these daily battles that you might have otherwise. Now the other benefit to having these meetings on a regular basis is that you can use it as a tool to redirect your child's complaints. There might be complaints like the jacket situation, or like, "I hate this chore," or those kinds of things. And as your kid is complaining, or whining, or even moping in what's going on, or even if they're wanting to disagree or argue about a situation or something that they are expected to do, you can propose that they add it as a family meeting topic.

"We're meeting for a family meeting on Monday night, so why don't you bring that as our topic, and we can all talk about it? And you can propose a different solution for the chores, or you can ask what the family thinks about the chore scenario. Then you can all contribute your rationales." Right? So you might bring to the table that chores have to get done, or the family has a messy home and that it's important that we don't have that. Your kids might bring to the table that they get sick of doing the same chore every single day, and so they want to have some sort of routine where they mix it up and change up their chores, and that might be okay. That might work well for your family. You'd be surprised about the creative solutions that kids can come to.

Another thing that surprised me about family meetings was that as I did them with my kids and we went over things like consequences. Like, "What's the consequence for being late to school?" My kids would often choose something that was much more significant than I would choose. So I might have a small consequence in play like they can't have media time a little bit later that day. And my kids might come to the table and say, "I think that person shouldn't eat dinner. They should have no Xbox, and they need to go to bed early." And they would bring things that were much more intense and heavy to the table. And so it was good for us to have this conversation where we found the right balance and it was funny because as they brought some of these intense consequences to the table, and we ended up choosing something that was a little bit lighter and more reasonable, then they were much more accepting of it when it came time for that consequence to be administered.

The last few tips that we have for our family meetings are things like having a binder, or a notebook, or something where you can record your notes. Sometimes it's good to reflect back, or even to set up a meeting where you're going to review it. Maybe I have one of those meetings where my kids are all really frustrated about the distribution of chores, and they want to choose a setup in the chores that I don't think is really realistic, and I don't think we're going to be able to maintain. But because they all brought it to the table, they all agreed on it, I want to give them

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that opportunity to see it through, and so we'll go with it. But I'm going to use my notes as a resource to help set up another time that we're going to meet. "Okay, let's try these chores for two days. And then in two days, let's meet again and see how it's going."

Then we've got that meeting again in two days. They can reflect back on the decisions that we made and the rationales that they brought up, and how it's been going for the last two days, and give them an opportunity to readdress the system that they coordinated, or set up, or help contribute to.

Now in doing that, my kids again feel that sense of reliability in the communication. They know that this is a resource and an outlet for them to do some Decision Making. And it helps drive their motivation to be involved and engaged in the meeting, and that's a really important part of the family meeting.

Family meetings cannot just be about me talking to them, or talking and making decisions for them, and announcing things. It really needs to be something that they are contributing to more than I am. I hope to hear about some of your family meetings that you have coming up.

In this last portion of the podcast, I wanted to go over another thing that comes up for us in school routines and adjusting to the new schedule. So my son started preschool a couple of weeks again. And in doing that, I was blown away by how quickly I got the "School's good," kind of response to me asking about his day. So from day one, I asked him about his school day, and he said, "It was good. I don't remember." Right? These were his short little one to three-word answers. And I was like, "We cannot get started on this."

[So a couple of the questions that with use in our family to help drive conversation around how their school day went and to build our relationship are things that are important to them.](#) A lot of our kids care about recess and friends and activities. And social components are a really important part of school. So I might ask questions like, "Who did you play with at recess? Or what was your favorite game?" You can also ask questions that help give them a little bit more power in the conversation. I love to use the question of, "Can you teach me something new? And that will have them kind of driving and thinking about different things that they can teach me." My son might come home from preschool and teach me about songs, or about colors, or numbers, or whatever he feels the need to teach me about.

But it's nice to see him be excited to tell me about something that he learned, and that question can drive that a little bit more than, "What did you learn today?" You can also ask them, "Was there anything that made you sad today? Was there something that made you excited? Is there something that you missed out on? Were you looking forward to anything for tomorrow or later this week?"

Asking those kinds of questions ties into their emotions, and that's oftentimes a little bit easier to reflect on than the individual tasks that came up in the day. Or what did they color? Or what did they do? Or what assignment did they have? You can ask them some questions like, "Is there

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someone at school that is important to you?" And they might tell you about a teacher, or a peer, or a class pet, whatever it might be, but asking about kind of what's important to them and what their priorities are, helps reframe that in a way that's easier for them to reflect on.

And then the last question that you could ask them about is, "Was there something that made you laugh today?" And oftentimes, laughter can really bring back good memories and positive feelings about school, and that can help drive the rest of your afternoon.

If they had a hard day at school, giving them some time, or even asking questions like, "Do you want to talk about your school day right now? Or do you want to talk about it when we get home?" Giving them some time and some choice in how they direct the conversation, rather than getting frustrated in the car because you're asking about their day, trying to build a relationship, and they are stonewalling you. You can try to take some empathy and some understanding to what's going on for them.

I had a foster son, he was about 12-years-old and he really loved school and he thrived in his school setting, and he really struggled with the transition home. And that transition period, no matter how positive I tried to make it, he was angry and frustrated and cranky and defiant, and we really struggled with it. And so in talking with him and asking him some of these questions, we came to the decision that he really just needed to have a nice break. Something where there were no demands. There were no questions. There were no people. He needed to have some quiet time right after school. So every day after school, we scheduled for 20 minutes. And we made this decision actually, him and I, around bedtime. And when it came time to use it the next day, he was really frustrated about it, that I was having him go and take some quiet time in the living room or in his bedroom.

And we did it anyway because it was a decision we made together, kind of like that family meeting, but it was just him and I. And so he went into his room and he did his 20 minutes. And then he came out and he was so much happier. And it was really good that we made that decision together instead of me making just the executive decision because otherwise, that battle of getting started on it probably would've been much longer, but because he knew that he had some conversation in it and that we could readdress it and we would talk about it again in a couple of days after trying it out, then he was more willing to give it a shot and see how it went.

It ended up being a critical part of our day, so I would not ask him questions on the drive home from school. We would listen to some music. We would get home, he would go to his room, or he would go to the living room, or somewhere where it was quiet. There wasn't anything going on. And he would read, or he would color, or he would dance. And he loved music. And he could do whatever he wanted for those 20 minutes, but it didn't involve people, or demands, or requests, or anything. And then after he came out of his room, we got to dive into the rest of the afternoon, all the busyness that came with that. But that piece of our schedule was pretty critical.

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So between these scheduling tips, these family meeting suggestions, and even this list of questions that you can ask your child, I hope that there's a couple of things that you took away from this that you can apply into your school routine and regimen that you have coming up into this school year.

Hopefully, there's a little bit of peace that comes from that, but we would love to hear about how it goes, so please reach out to us on social media. We are on Instagram at Smarter Parenting. And you can let us know how things are going.

I will also post some of these because if you're anything like me, you're listening to a podcast while you're doing the dishes or in the car. And we'll post some of these online so that you can use these suggestions, or have these tools available to you. And hopefully, that helps bring a little bit of peace into your school routine this year.

Have a great day, and I will see you next time.

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