

# “Building Self-Confidence with ADHD,” with Dr. Cate Brandon

Thank you everyone for coming out tonight. I was really excited when I got approached to do this topic. I think it's so important. There's a lot of research that shows that kids with ADHD rate themselves lower on measures of self-esteem than other kids, and the same is true even into adulthood. This is something that kids with ADHD struggle with quite a bit. And as a psychologist, I almost always incorporate this into my work with kids with ADHD.

So as far as what I'm going to cover tonight, I'm going to spend some time going over “why do kids with ADHD struggle with confidence?” Because I'm going through that part - those of you who are taking care of kids that have ADHD are not going to be surprised by what causes these struggles and self-confidence. We'll talk about what to look for, how to know if your kid might be struggling with self-confidence, as well as how this can impact their lives in other ways. And then we'll move into what I want to spend the most time on, which is what can you guys, as parents, do to help your kids improve their self-confidence?

So as a psychologist, there's two different ways that I can work on things. One is our thinking, how we talk to ourselves about a situation, how we view a situation, how we interpret things. And then the other thing that I can work on is behaviors. So, there are strategies that you can do externally to kind of help improve some of these things that might be causing low self-confidence. And as I'm talking about these things, I'm talking about things you can do with your kids to help them, but also things that you as parents can maybe do differently to help enhance their self-confidence.

So let's talk briefly about the causes of low self-confidence in kids with ADHD, because I think none of these things are going to come as a surprise. The first and biggest thing is school. School really is not tailored to kids with ADHD. It's kind of “one size fits all.” And a lot of the things that school expects of kids are the things that are hardest for kids with ADHD.

So they're expecting you to keep track of your things, plan ahead, sit and listen -- which is really hard for kids with ADHD. Sit and do boring paperwork, manage their time... So all these things that kids with ADHD naturally struggle with are just kind of part of their day. And school is the biggest part of their day. And then a lot of times they come home and have to do homework, which is also sitting, doing paperwork -- things that are the hardest for them.

So when they're kind of faced with this throughout the day, it can start to impact how they view themselves. Kids with the ADHD also obviously get a lot more negative feedback than other kids. And

sometimes this is them getting in trouble or sent to the principal's office or getting consequences, but they're also getting a lot more of just corrective feedback: "don't forget to raise your hand. Don't talk when I'm talking. You need to remember to pay attention." So all these corrective things that -- even if they're delivered with kindness and patience -- the kid with ADHD is still getting the message that "I'm not doing this right," or "oh, I messed up again."

Another thing that can lead to low self-confidence in kids with ADHD is how they do socially. Now, some kids with ADHD do great socially. Sometimes they can be very charismatic and lots of fun. They have lots of energy. And so, some of them have really positive social experiences, but for some of them, their symptoms get in the way. So, they may be interrupting a lot. They may not be picking up on cues that other people are getting tired of what they're doing or that they're getting irritated. They may have too much energy or be impulsive. So, these things can impact them socially, which of course can then have an impact on your self-esteem -- if you're feeling like other kids are excluding you or not wanting to be around you.

And then lastly, kids with ADHD have self-awareness, so they may notice that they're getting in trouble more, or that other kids aren't wanting to play with them, or that they're getting corrected more in class. They can't do the things that seem easy for everybody else. "I'm always forgetting to turn in my assignments, but everyone else can do it just fine." And so as they start to compare themselves to others and they feel like they're always kind of coming up short, or they're not able to do the things that they know that they're capable of, then they can start to feel more negative about themselves.

So what should you be looking for to see if your kid is maybe struggling with their confidence? A big obvious one is if you're hearing a lot of negative self-talk, like, "I'm always messing everything up. I never do anything right, I'm always in trouble, nobody likes me, I'm stupid." If you're hearing a lot of these negative comments, that can be an indicator that your child is feeling negatively about themselves.

If they're overly sensitive to criticism. And like I said before, this can even be corrective feedback. Like if you're just saying, "oh, I asked you to go get your shoes, you don't have your shoes on" and they're falling into a puddle on the floor and sobbing, "I'm always in trouble, you're always mad at me." If they're overreacting when you're trying to help or correct or when they're in trouble, that can be a sign that they're feeling really bad about themselves.

I have some kids with ADHD that are saying things like, "well, if anybody, if anything bad happens, it's always blamed on me," or "I'm always the one that's in trouble" because that's how they feel. And so, if they feel like every move they make is wrong and they're in trouble, then they may overreact, even when you're trying to be helpful or correct them.

A lot of times if kids are struggling with their self-esteem, even when they are successful, they don't give themselves credit. So, they'll say, "anybody could have done that, It was just luck, I got a good grade on that test because it was easy." They don't give themselves any praise, or even if you praise them, they just kind of blow it off.

If they're comparing themselves negatively to others, "everyone else can do this easily, I'm always the last one done with my test." If you're hearing a lot of those negative comparisons, that can also be an indicator.

This is a big one: avoiding responsibility. So I mean, it's almost inevitable at some point when I'm working with kids with ADHD that there's going to be comments like, "the teacher never gives us time to write down our assignments," or "everybody did that on that test," or "the teacher didn't explain the directions," or "you didn't remind me. You were supposed to remind me that I was supposed to do that assignment." So, there's a lot of this shifting blame, which that's a self-protective thing. They don't want to feel bad. They're always in trouble or they always feel like they're falling short. "If it's somebody else's fault, then I don't have to feel as bad."

Apathy or disinterest in activities is also kind of a self-protective thing. So if they feel like they're going to mess up a lot or that they can't do things well, they just don't really feel like trying. "Why bother trying? I'm not going to be good at it anyway."

And then acting out is an obvious sign of low confidence. If they're getting in trouble a lot, if you're trying to correct a behavior but they keep doing it anyway -- maybe they're always in trouble for talking in class. And so instead of trying to change the behavior or work on it, they may decide, "well, I'm going to get in trouble for it anyway, so I'm going to crack jokes" or "I'm going to make everybody laugh." So if they're just acting out in ways that their behavior is worsening, that can also be an indicator of low self-confidence.

So if your kid is having low self-confidence, this can impact other things as well. So if everyone around them is expecting them to make mistakes or mess up or not follow through on things, not finish things, then they start to expect the same thing as well. They may feel like this is something that's just who they are, they have no control over it, and they may feel defeated if they try to do what other people expect of them and then still slip up.

Procrastination, as you probably already know, is a symptom of ADHD but it can worsen if the kid is struggling with their self-esteem. So, for example, if they're not good at school anyway, they're struggling in math and they have to come home and do math homework, why would they want to do that? They're just going to end up feeling worse about themselves. And so their natural tendency to put things off

becomes exacerbated because it also makes them feel bad. So why are they going to want to invest time in doing it?

These kids may also avoid trying new things and when they do try new things they're very hesitant or again expect themselves to fail. They don't want to try something new because every time they do it doesn't seem to go well. And putting poor effort into things because they don't have an expectation or a belief that if I work hard at this, then I can do well or be successful.

The last thing is fixed mindset, which I'm going to go into in a little more detail. But basically a fixed mindset is just the belief that “no matter what I do, I can't improve, I can't change. This is who I am. If I make a mistake it says something bad about me. It doesn't mean that it's something I can work on or something I can get better on, better at. This is just something bad about me.”

So, talking a little bit more about a fixed mindset versus a growth mindset. So, people with a fixed mindset tend to have lower self-esteem and less self-confidence and they feel like if I make a mistake that says something about me. A mistake is not something that I can learn from or grow from. It's just a failure. That means I'm a failure or I'm bad at something.

People with a fixed mindset will avoid challenges because if something is hard, then it means something bad about me. “I'm not good at this, I'm unsuccessful, I'm not smart.” Whereas someone with a growth mindset looks at a challenge as, “this is an opportunity for me to push through something, get better at it, learn a new skill, try something new.”

And of course if you're looking at a mistake as meaning “I'm not smart, I'm not good at this,” if you make a mistake you're going to give up quickly. So, there's no sustaining effort, there's no putting time into something to get better at it. Whereas someone with a growth mindset, if something is challenging, they'll work at it harder. This is an opportunity for me to get better. So, people with fixed mindset tend to shut down if they get negative feedback as opposed to saying “hey, what can I learn from this? I can take something out of this.”

So now we're going to move a little bit more into “how can we start to help kids with these things.” The most important thing about changing from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset is that you also have to adopt and believe that change is possible. So, if you're trying to help your kid look at mistakes as an opportunity to learn -- trying to help them grow and improve and work hard at something that's difficult, but you're also saying to them, “you never turn in your homework, you're always making us late.” If you're saying these kinds of things to them in the moment, then you're not giving them a growth mindset message. And you're also not having a growth mindset. You're not looking at it as, “hey, this is something

that they can work on and get better at. This is difficult for them, but they can work and improve.” You are giving them the message that “this is just who you are and it's never going to change.”

So, one really simple way to change -- to help plant the seed for a growth mindset -- is to add the word “yet.” Obviously this is not going to fix all your problems or make a drastic change right away, but it does start to help give the message that this is not a permanent state. Like, “just because I'm not good at this doesn't mean that I'm never going to be good at it.” And just adding that word can start to make them think like, “this is not permanent. I can maybe do something to change.”

In addition, you want to be looking at the effort, not the outcome. So, if your kid gets an A on something, that's great. But that's not what you should focus on. You should talk about, “you worked so hard to get this, you put so much time into this. Remember how hard it was when you first started and look at where you are now.” You want them to really be thinking about the time and effort and the work that they put into something, rather than just “what did you accomplish?” As you focus on that, you help them see that their hard work is what paid off. It's not that “you're smart.” It's not that, “oh, you're really talented” or “you're really successful.” It's that “you worked really hard at this.” And giving them that message is what sustains them and wants them to put more effort in in the future.

So there are some phrases where adding the word yet won't work very well. Like, “I can't do anything right yet” that's not going to help anybody. But all of these phrases that you may have heard your kids say are things that you can modify and adjust just a little bit to make them look at it in a different way. It is important if you're trying to shift to their thinking in a little bit that you're not saying something that's not true. So if your kid says, “I can't do anything right,” you don't want to respond with, “no, say I do everything right” because that's obviously not true and it's not going to be something that's going to work for them because they know it's not true, they're not going to believe it.

But instead of saying, “I can't do anything right,” saying “everyone makes mistakes,” that is true, that is accurate. That's not a lie that you're telling yourself. When they say something like, “I'm a bad kid,” that's a label they're giving themselves. And that's a fixed quality. That's who I am. When you say, “I made a poor choice,” a choice is something that you can do differently in the future. And so it helps them look at it as, this is not defining who I am. This is one choice that I made at this moment in time. I can make a different choice next time.

“I'm stupid,” is one that I hear a lot. A lot of kids with ADHD feel that way. They genuinely feel that way because the things that seem easy for everyone else are not as easy for them. But saying “I'm still learning how to do this” is true, and it makes you not feel bad about yourself.

“I’ll never get this. This is too hard.” The other ones that I hear constantly, “it’s too hard.” And it’s okay to say, “it’s hard.” That’s fact, that’s actual, that is legitimate description of how you’re feeling. But that doesn’t mean it’s too hard. It doesn’t mean it’s impossible.

So if you start to kind of nudge their thoughts in a different direction and, like I said, your own as well, like, listen to how you’re talking to your kid and the things that you’re saying to them -- are there ways that you can maybe adjust them a little bit to help them think about “what can I do differently next time?” or “how can I work on this?” or “how can I improve?”

This is something I love, and this is something that I truly, almost always talk to my kids with ADHD about. And the parents as well, because it is really easy to get focused on the problems that ADHD causes. And those problems are legitimate. I don’t want to brush them off. And a little bit later I’ll talk about maybe some ways to address some of those problems that may reoccur, but all of the symptoms of ADHD have their assets -- they have their positive sides. And this is something that a lot of times, not only the kids, but the parents forget.

And so I just listed a few of them here. The problem or how we describe them clinically, but then the flip side of how they can be beneficial to the kids. So, all of these qualities in a certain context cause the kids problems, but in another situation, they can actually be an asset or a benefit.

When I’m talking to parents who are concerned about, “is my kid ever going to be a functioning adult? Are they going to be able to survive in the real world?” I always tell parents that a lot of times once kids get through school, they pick a job or a field or a career or path that plays to their strengths, because all these kids with ADHD do have a lot of strengths. They just kind of get overrun in the school setting, which doesn’t play to their strengths.

So daydreaming and distractible. Obviously, a lot of kids with ADHD are not listening to the teacher and looking around the classroom and kind of getting lost in their thoughts. But a lot of times they have a rich imagination. They’re very creative.

A lot of times a teacher may be going over something from history, for example, and the kid kind of goes off in their own thoughts. And they may not be able to recite any of the details of what the teacher was talking about. But they may have thought about how that particular moment in history applies to something they’re going through today. Or they may be connecting it in different ways that nobody else in the classroom is thinking about when they’re memorizing dates and names.

A lot of kids with ADHD have nonlinear thinking. So, one of the questions I’m always asking people when I’m doing a diagnosis is tell me how conversations go for you. And they often will say things like,

“oh, I'll be having a conversation with my friends and I'll say something and my friends are like, what are you talking about? That doesn't even have anything to do with what we're talking about.” Because their thoughts are not always in a straight line. They kind of go all over the place. But that a lot of times lets them see the big picture or they're able to pay attention to lots of different things at once.

I had a kid once who had always come to me from school and he hated school. He was always in a miserable mood when he would come to therapy sessions. And one day he came in and was like so excited because his class had done a group project and they had to use pretzels and marshmallows to build something. And everybody was just sticking the pretzels and the marshmallows. Everybody was doing the same thing. And in his group he suggested, why don't we split the marshmallows in half? The inside is all sticky and we can use that to build something different. And his group had done the best in the class and he had never felt so proud because he'd never had a real successful experience at school. But in this case, he had thought of a completely different approach to the task from what everyone else had thought of. And he was able to feel like he contributed something to his team. And I'm sure that it was his ADHD that allowed him to think about a different use for an everyday object.

Obviously, kids with ADHD have a lot of energy so that hyperactivity can cause a lot of problems that they're in and out of their seats jumping around the room. But this also means they have a lot of energy. So kids with ADHD tend to -- a lot of times they like active pursuits, sports or activities where they can be really hands on and physical. And they also tend to be really -- if you can channel it correctly -- they can be really helpful.

So a lot of times for kids in the classroom, when I'm making suggestions to the teachers, if I have a kid with a lot of energy, I encourage the teacher to find a way that they can use that energy in a productive way so that the kids can feel successful getting out of the chair and helping pass out directions or helping the teacher move something -- so that their energy is not seen in such a negative way.

Kids with ADHD a lot of times are impatient, but their brains work very quickly. And so a lot of my ADHD adults tend to go into jobs where they have to think very quickly or solve something really quickly. So like EMTs or ER nurses and they're very successful at taking in all this information all at once and immediately solving a problem. It's not something you would want me to do. Like if you had a problem and you came to me, I could give you a lot of pro-con list and a lot of options. But if you need an emergent decision, I'm not the one to come to. So that's a really good skill that a lot of them channel into success later in life.

And then the last one impulsive. Obviously, kids with ADHD are impulsive, but this also allows them to be intuitive. So a lot of times they can take a whole lot of information, process it very quickly and come up with a solution. Which is why a lot of kids with ADHD do gravitate towards video games because

there's all this stimulation coming in all at once and they can respond very quickly and that's a place where they can feel successful. So, they tend to do really well in brainstorming activities. Like they can come up with a lot of fresh ideas. Situations where they have to follow their gut and kind of respond on instincts -- kids with ADHD can do really well in this.

So, all of these are examples of the symptoms of ADHD, but they can also have positive impacts on the kid, which leads us into our next thing. Part of your job as a parent of a kid with ADHD, or any kid really, is to recognize your kid's strengths and how can you channel those in a positive direction. So kids with ADHD can focus really well. So, a lot of times people, I mean, it's part of the name, so people think ADHD means kids can't focus, like they can't pay attention. But really ADHD is a difficulty in regulating attention, so they're kind of at one extreme or the other.

So sometimes they're paying attention to everything, which is what we see a lot. Like in the classroom, for example, when they're supposed to be listening to the teacher, but they're watching people walk by in the hallway, or they're getting distracted by the ticking clock or people shuffling papers. It's not so much that they're not paying attention, it's that they're paying attention too much, so they can't regulate that attention.

But on the other end, kids with ADHD can hyper focus, so they can get really focused on something that they're very interested in -- to the point where they can't focus on anything else, whereas most of us are in the middle. But if you can find a way to capture their interest, then a lot of times you can help them learn better.

So I had a parent once who took math problems that their kid was really struggling in math. Just nothing made any sense to him, but he was really into sports. So, this very determined dad turned every math problem into a sports story problem, and the kid then, after doing several of these, the numbers made sense to them. Not all of us, myself included, would have time to do that. But that's one way to help engage a kid.

Anything that they can do to engage their senses or make learning more tactile or hands on or visual is really helpful for kids with ADHD. So again, in the classroom, most of the learning is passive. You're just sitting there listening to the teacher talk. You're reading. You're taking in information that way. And that's really not conducive to how kids with ADHD learn.

So it can relate to the activities. So, like, if you're learning, I don't know, states and capitals, rather than trying to memorize a list of them -- you're looking at a map, you're connecting it to something visual. If they're trying to learn a story, a plot, something from history -- using action figures to act it out, or dolls or their own bodies, anything that's engaging them a little bit more in the activity.

But it can also be doing the activity in a way that's more tactile, like writing spelling words in shaving cream, or practicing math facts by tossing a ball back and forth. I know one parent who goes around the house and writes math problems on the window with an erasable marker. So the kid is moving between each problem, and when they're doing the problem, there's other visual stimulation besides just numbers on a page. So it takes some creativity. But if you can engage your kid a little bit more, that can help them be more successful with their learning.

Another thing that's important is teaching your kid how to ask for help. So, I said earlier, the weaknesses or the struggles that they have are real. It's not something that just by positive thinking, we can pretend that they don't exist. It's like if I took my glasses off and you had me read the exit sign. I can't read it. You can tell me to look harder or try harder, but I can't. So, telling your kid to focus harder or just remember, it's not that easy for them.

And so, they may sometimes need to ask the teacher for help, and they need to know that it's okay to go up and advocate for themselves. "I didn't understand the directions. Could you go over that with me?" It's okay to ask you for help. "You asked me to clean my room. I have no idea where to start. It's too chaotic. Can you give me a list of steps?" But it is important for your kids to learn that it's okay to ask for help. That's not something to be embarrassed about or ashamed of. That's not a weakness. That's a way for them to help overcome some of the struggles that they have.

So the next kind of approach I want to talk about is shifting from a problem focused to a solution focused approach to helping them deal with their struggles. So, acknowledging that there are things that are difficult for them, but we want to focus on "how can we improve it, what can we work towards? What goals can we set? Or what's the next step we can make?" Rather than saying, "why are you always doing this?" or "this is a problem or "you messed up again,"

The first part of this is allowing failures and allowing them to make mistakes. So, you don't want to overprotect them. And this is really hard, especially if your kid is struggling with self-esteem. Your natural inclination as a parent is, "well, I don't want them to make mistakes because that's just going to make them feel worse about themselves." And that's a very normal feeling but the problem with that is that if you're always protecting them from the mistakes, then they are getting that message that mistakes are bad and they're to be avoided. They need the opportunity to be able to face their mistakes, be okay with them, figure out on their own what can they do differently.

The other problem with trying to protect your kid from mistakes is that unintentionally and indirectly it gives them the message that you don't think they're capable of handling it. So, if you're always checking over their homework, if you're swooping in to pack their bags for them or giving them reminders all the

time -- what they take away from that is a feeling that “mom and dad don't think I can handle this. Mom and dad don't think I can do it. I probably can't.” And so it feeds into that lower self-esteem even when you're trying to help them.

They also need the opportunity to be able to correct their problem on their own. I have a ton of kids that come in saying, “hey, if my mom and dad would just back off and stop reminding me to do things, I would get it done.” And parents never believe it, but a lot of times that is the case - especially for kids if they have ADHD and they're struggling with self-esteem and you say, hey, “you have this missing assignment” or “hey, did you know this is due tomorrow?” it instantly triggers that feeling in them that “they expect me to fail. They don't think I can do it.” And so, letting them do it on their own and try to do things their own way might be helpful.

So, a lot of times, for example, I have kids come in and say, “dad always make me do my homework right after school. I can't do it. My brain is fried, I can't focus.” And the parents are like, “well you have to do it after school because if you wait till later, you're not going to want to do it. You're going to be too tired.” And the kids like, no, “I really can't do it after school. I would do so much better if we waited until after dinner.”

So usually what I say is like, “let's try it their way. We have an appointment again in two weeks. For that next two weeks, homework is done after dinner and we'll see how it goes.” And then I also put the responsibility on the kid. So “you're saying this is what works for you. What that means is you need to do it without prompting, without reminding, without whining, without complaining, without arguing if this is how you want to do it.” And a lot of times it works. Sometimes it doesn't, but then the kid has learned that for themselves rather than hearing from their parent, “it's not going to work. Your way is not going to work. My way is better.” And the kid is much more likely then to try something different. Or maybe you can compromise and get the math homework out of the way before dinner and the easier stuff after.

So, like I said, shifting to a solution focused approach -- we're moving away from correcting a problem to working towards a goal. This kind of helps kids feel more confident. It improves their belief that they can do something about a problem because it's starting with the assumption that they can do something about whatever problem they're experiencing. So, for example, rather than saying “you need to stop failing your tests,” saying, “what kind of things do you think you might be able to do to prepare better?” Or rather than saying “you need to stop procrastinating,” say, “what ideas do you have for how to plan your day out better?”

It is important to make sure that the kid is identifying why they want to change, because their reasons for wanting to change are not always going to be the same as yours. They may not care about getting an A, or they may not care about getting positive feedback on an assignment. They might care about not having

you nag them that might be their goal, or maybe they're really into sports, and if their grades are starting to slip, they might be motivated by wanting to stay in their sports. But the idea is that if you're trying to get them to change, to find the things that you find important, you're going to have a lot less success than if you can help them, identify why it's important to them.

So again, rather than criticizing or punishing, you want to work on solutions. So, one way to do this is to look at other situations where they're successful and see what's different about that situation. So, for example, if they're always doing really well in social studies, but not so well in science, what's the difference between those two classes? Sometimes that's not something you can change. Maybe the kid really likes social studies and hates science, or maybe the social studies teacher is really engaging and exciting, in which case there may not be much you can do about it.

But sometimes there's a reason why one is better than the other. So maybe in social studies, they're sitting in the front of the classroom, and so that's an easy change that you can make. Or maybe the social studies teacher makes them take notes, and that helps the kid because it's more active rather than just sitting and listening. And so you can suggest, "even though your science teacher is not having you take notes, why don't you try taking notes?" So if you could find a situation where they are being successful and identify what it is that's making them be more successful there, then that can help them, that they can maybe transition that to generalize that skill.

Acknowledging what's working well. So, they're always excited to go to basketball. "Your bag is always packed for basketball. I notice that. Hey, do you think that that might help you be ready for the morning in school if you've got your bag ready the night before?"

And then we talked about how they do have strength that we often overlook. A lot of times as parents, we think we know the right way or the right path or the right strategy. We've got it all figured out. But sometimes you want to encourage them to think about what might their solution be.

So, for example, I have a young adult with ADHD, and we were trying to try and get her to stop procrastinating and organize her day and structure her day. And one session she came to me and said, I came up with a plan. Every day of the week I have a different theme. So, she had like a mental health day, and she would schedule her therapy appointment and do meditation or go get her nails done or something that would be positive. And then she had like a cleaning day. And on that day, she was just focused on cleaning. So that would have been something that never would have occurred to me, but for her that idea worked really well. So a lot of times if you encourage your kids to come up with a solution, they may come up with something that to you sounds maybe not like something you would pick, but for them it might work really well.

And then you want to identify one small change that they can make. Rather than starting from here and trying to get them all the way to maybe where other kids in their class are performing, you want to figure out what's one thing you can do. So maybe if they're disorganized this is causing them to miss a bunch of homework, they lose their homework, they have a messy backpack. Maybe you start with just going through their backpack every night and then you can work on "how do we make sure that the assignments get turned in? How do we make sure that when you get the assignment at school it makes it home?" But starting off with just one step that they can do so that they can feel some success with that first step.

This is another important one. You may have an idea what you think the problem is, but letting your child talk to you about "what do they see as the problem, what's holding them back, what's causing them difficulty," can help you understand the problem from their perspective. So, if you're trying to fix something that's not the actual problem, you're not going to be very successful with that.

Helping your child identify their goals. So, your goals may be different than their goals, but if you can engage them into setting their goals, then they're going to be a lot more engaged and cooperative and wanting to do that.

It is important that you're aware of what triggers you. So, a lot of times there are things about their behavior that you tend to maybe react to very quickly, things that escalate you very quickly. And you need to be conscious of like what is making your emotions bigger than what maybe they need to be. Because that's going to be a clue to ways that you're probably over focusing on some of their difficulties. And that's probably a place where you can change.

So for example, if your kid is always interrupting you whenever you're trying to say something, if you look at that as like, "that's disrespectful, that's inconsiderate, they don't care about what I have to say or they're not listening to me." You may stop, take a step back and think about that and reframe it in different ways.

So maybe your kid is excited to share something with you. Like they really want to tell you about something and that's why they're interrupting. They're not doing it to be rude or disrespectful. They're doing it because they want to share something with you. And maybe because they have ADHD, they think, if "I don't say it now, I'm not going to remember what it is," and so they're blurting it out and interrupting you. So that's a reframe. Like if you think about it that way, it might still irritate you, but you're not taking it as personally or you're not as angry about it, or you're not viewing it in such a negative light.

A lot of times I hear about kids with ADHD, they're labeled as lazy. They don't care about school, they don't care about their grades. But a lot of times this is not their choice. They're not trying to be lazy. But

when you label it that way, you look at that behavior in a certain light. But if you start to think about “why didn't they turn their homework in?” or “why did they not practice their instrument?” Rather than immediately assuming that it's because they're lazy, then you might find a different reason or a different explanation for the problem.

And the other piece of that is if you're always saying, “you're so lazy,” then the kid starts to think that they are lazy and then they become lazy or they start avoiding doing work.

Using scaffolding is what we use to try to get a child from point A to point Z. You're not going to get there that quickly. So, you want to start off by making sure your expectations are realistic. So, if your kid is assigned a project and always does the project at the last minute and is scrambling for whatever they need, you're not going to immediately turn them into somebody who plans and organizes everything. So, you have to kind of walk them through that.

So, I compare it to like running a marathon. If you haven't exercised in three years and you've sat on the couch, you're not going to be able to run a five K the next day. You have to set a step that's the next step that you can do. You're going to start by jogging a block or whatever, and you're going to gradually work your way up to it.

And you have to have those same realistic expectations for your kid. You may think “because you're this age, you should be able to be doing all of this,” or “your peers are doing this, your brother's doing this, your sister is doing this,” but that may not be realistic for them. Another analogy I use is if your kid may be 13 and you put them in an algebra class, but if they've literally never learned any math facts, they don't know addition, subtraction, multiplication, they can be 13, but they're not going to be able to do algebra. Just doesn't -- it's not possible. So, it is important that you're teaching them, starting where they actually are, not where you think they should be -- and what is the next step that you think that they can do.

It is important that you're noticing and pointing out the positive, and this includes the absence of the negative. So, a lot of times for kids with ADHD when they're behaving well, things are just going smoothly. We don't always notice that they're doing a good job or that they're working hard at it. We're just kind of grateful that we got off the door on time or that for today, we don't have any missing assignments.

So a lot of times it takes effort to praise them, because if you're really just praising that, “hey, you didn't get overly upset about that,” or, “hey, you didn't disrupt us tonight when we were trying to have a conversation at the dinner table,” it's hard to catch yourself or remember to do that.

And sometimes, actually a lot of times, I have parents say that it doesn't feel right to praise them for something that they should be doing anyway, or they should already know how to do, or their siblings are doing. But again, you have to think about where they're at. You have to praise them. You're not praising them for just doing something basic for them. This is difficult. This was a challenge.

My oldest kid didn't walk until he was, like 16 months old. Everyone else that I knew that had kids, their kids were walking a half a year before that. But I didn't sit there and look at my one-and-a-half-year-old and say, you've been walking six months ago. This is not that exciting. I was excited about it. So not to compare your kids to a toddler, but it is that idea of, like, it's still an accomplishment for them, even if it may not be an accomplishment for a peer -- for them, this is something that they've had to work hard to get to.

The other thing about noticing the positives is that it can help them notice, "hey, I did do that well. What was I doing when I did that? How was I successful with that?" so that they can remember to do that in the future. And it also helps you because again, with ADHD, a lot of their behaviors are really frustrating and disruptive and irritating. So, if you're not noticing the positives, you can start to have a more negative view of your kid than is actual in reality. So when you shift your focus to notice, "hey, these things are going well," or "they are making better choices," you're also helping to change your mindset of your kid.

You want to be really specific when you're giving them praise. So you don't want to just say, "hey, good job at practice today." You want to say, "I noticed you were really listening to the coach and following directions" so that they're aware that this is what they're doing well and that they're conscious of what it is that they're being successful at. If you're just saying, "hey, good job," they don't pay attention to what they're doing. It doesn't help them learn. And it also kind of feels kind of weak or not genuine.

Setting aside time to do the things with your kid that they're successful at -- the things that they're interested in -- that helps your kid, obviously, to feel like, "hey, I'm good at this." A lot of the kids with ADHD I know have a very specific interest that they know everything about and can tell you more than you would want to know about it. And a lot of kids I have with ADHD have a skill or something that they're really good at. I have a kid that has this Rubik's Cube, and it's mind blowing how quickly he can solve it. But when you take time to sit with them and do these things that are their interest, that helps them feel better about themselves, but it, again, also helps you recognize, "okay, yeah, my kid is struggling with this particular thing, or is not the best in school," but it helps you recognize that they really do have these strengths or these qualities, and it shifts your view of them as well.

So just to end a quote that probably most of us have seen, "everyone's a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it's stupid." So, we have to remember that our kids with ADHD do have a lot of struggles that other kids don't have, and a lot of times they're

reminded of these on a very frequent basis, which can cause them to feel like, "I'm not capable, I'm not competent." Thank you so much.