



A Heart For All Students

Podcast Episode Transcription

AHEART #25 ADHD Homeschool Teaching Tips

Hey, friend, in today's episode, I am going to talk to you mamas about how we navigate the ADHD brain in our home schools. It's been a few weeks for many of us. Some of us may have not started, but a lot of us have. And so it's always a good thing to get a refresher when you are navigating how to work around that mindset that our kids have to be sitting for hours and hours at a time in order to effectively provide them an education.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The typical classroom setup is just one modality for teaching children. And the reality is, it's meant to teach the masses. True learning is our goal here. Home schooling is not school at home. We're always going to think about what's the goal? Learning, learning, learning.

So be encouraged. I'm going to offer you some amazing tips to how to equip and harness the power of your child's ADHD brain. I hope you're encouraged.

Hi and welcome to A Heart For All Students podcast. I'm your host Lindsay Livingston. Each week, we're going to discover how to parent and educate our uniquely designed outside-the-box, kids to thrive as the people God has designed them to be.

If you are a mom raising a child who simply doesn't fit into the box of the world's expectations, this is a place for you. Whether your child has ADHD, ASD, SPD, GAD, or no acronym at all, your child has been intentionally designed with gifts, passions and purpose by the God who loves them deeply. It's my honor to work alongside you by providing actionable strategies, tips, encouragement and support as you homeschool and raise your uniquely designed child to thrive.

Hey, friend, are you home schooling or teaching a child with ADHD, whether you're a new or veteran homeschooling mom, harnessing the attention of the ADHD brain can be a challenge.

You know, the signs trouble paying attention to non-preferred tasks. Think math, reading, chores, whatever they don't want to do. The child that struggles to sit still, difficulty taking turns, difficulty making transitions, a bedroom that's always messy no matter how many times it's been organized and cleaned.

You get the idea.

I know it's not easy when we're trying to get our kids to do things they don't really want to do. But the reality is this: ADHD is actually hereditary.

And it took me years to realize that I wasn't ADHD or myself.

I mean, the reality is, I killed it in school. I'm one of those people that likes to geek out on English grammar and diagramming sentences. I spend my nights reading all about neuroscience and whatever it is that I'm really interested in. And that's the thing. Not all ADHD brains are alike. But when we work with the wiring of the unique child's ADHD brain, when we harness their interests, it is amazing what these kids can do. Some of the most successful entrepreneurs in our world have ADHD. These inventors that have changed the world historically most likely had ADHD. Why? Because of something called hyper focus. You know, when your boy is really, really zeroed in on his Legos and you ask him to stop so he can go brush his teeth. All of a sudden there's a huge meltdown and a tantrum because he's so overwhelmed with the idea of having to stop. Well, even though that looks like this willfully disobedient, bratty kid, it's not that is part of your child's gifting. And that is amazing because that gives us power to come alongside our kids and equip them with what they need to use those gifts for good. So, friend, be encouraged. I am going to offer you some amazing tips about how to harness the power of your child's ADHD brain so they can thrive in your homeschool.

So let's get started. Let's talk about traditional teaching and the reality that it is setting us up to fail.

I'm sure you can relate. Our frustration as moms begins when we try to teach our kids using the traditional school teaching approach. The whole thing where the teacher lectures on and on and the

kid has to sit still and listen. Insisting on this teaching approach in our homeschools only sets up our kids and us to fail. Because here's the deal. When our children are wired to move, when they have been designed to use their physical bodies in order to maintain calm and to learn, insisting on teaching our kids while they are sitting requires our kids to use their cognitive energy to focus on sitting still. And by doing that, they don't have any capacity to hear what we're saying. Or think about your daydreamer. These are the kids that all of a sudden they are completely checked out because we are droning on and on and on expecting them to just listen while sitting there. Mom becomes frustrated with her inability to teach her child and then our academic growth stalls while our frustrations and tensions between child and Mom grow.

Friend, this is not good. It's so stressful and it's not worth it. So what do we do?

What is the homeschool mom do to more effectively teach her child? And even more importantly, what do we do to teach our children but at the same time maintain and grow a loving, healthy relationship?

I have some suggestions.

So in order to gather some cool and useful tips, I've asked the advice of a dear friend of mine. She's an amazing occupational therapist and her name is Alisha Matthews. She has walk alongside my family for years and I absolutely love her. She honestly has been a key player in our family's journey to support my outside-the-box son and the rest of us, quite frankly.

So of course, I went to her to get some of her best tips for harnessing the attention of a child with ADHD, utilizing occupational therapy strategies. All right. You may be wondering. Occupational therapy for learning? Yes, friends, yes. OK, occupational therapy is not a new area of intervention. Really a good occupational therapist, a good one, should have a deep understanding of the brain, the body and how to optimize them both for effective learning. Think of this optimization as the key to unlock the door to effective learning. OK, I'm just going to say it. Seat work stinks. Any learning that requires a child to sit and pay attention can be extremely tough. Not for all kids, but for a ton of kids. Many kids with ADHD, they are wired to thrive through movement. So when this is the case, we need to get our kids moving strategically. When I talk to Alicia, she recommends the right sensory input before we have our kids sit. So when your kid starts to wiggle, you want to make them wiggle well, and even more. So movement is a must for sensory needs.

Now, as an OT, Alicia recommends starting with sensory strategies to improve all learning challenges. So before we get started, let me just get us all on the same page. Many of us grew up hearing about the five senses. Taste, touch, sight, smell, hearing. Right. Five senses. But the reality is that our bodies are full of dozens and dozens of sensory systems. And there's two other sensory systems that we're going to talk about today. These include the vestibular system and the proprioceptive system. These are crucial to understanding the brain body connection. This should be super, super helpful for you if you haven't really thought about sensory input and sensory needs. So while you've probably heard that getting up and moving can wake up the body, you've probably never been told why. So when we move our bodies, our brain releases feel good chemicals that stimulate the brain and ultimately relax the body.

So teaching tip number one: the stimulus input. Now, vestibular input refers to the sensory system that allows us to know where our body is in space. It's like that tickle that we feel when we're on a swing or riding a roller coaster. That tickle is the brain's way of communicating that it knows that we're not on solid ground anymore or that we're inverted or that our head is tilted. That movement releases histamine, which increases attention. So how to use vestibular input to increase attention? There's a several activities that you can use. Some of them that you can use outside include going down a slide, swinging high in the air or riding a scooter. Indoor vestibular activities include log rolls spinning in an office chair or performing inverted yoga poses. Now, I will say that with my daughter, at one point when we were working very closely with Alicia, we did that spinning in an office chair as part of our sensory diet. I just went to the local goodwill and picked up a six dollar desk chair that happens to spin.

And I'm telling you, it's been one of the greatest investments ever. So spinning in an office chair can definitely stimulate that vestibular sensory system.

Another thing that you can do to increase that vestibular system is to perform inverted yoga poses cartwheels. In my home we loved these yoga pretzel cards. They were fabulous. And you could just pull out a yoga card and it would put them in a position that was kind of it was kind of like used as a brain break. But a lot of them have the head inverted. And by doing so, again, you're stimulating that vestibular system, which again releases chemicals that tend to relax us. Grab these yoga pretzels and just have your kid grab one or two and you can easily incorporate these movement breaks into your homeschool routine. Now, I do want to make one note.

Every human being on the planet is unique and different.

Every child has different sensory needs. So while the stibular input might be something that your child needs to calm down, the stibular input could also be a trigger for your child.

Start to notice the behaviors of your child and you'll start to pick up on the things that they enjoy. If you have a child that enjoys swinging on the swings, if you have a child that's always doing cartwheels or falling off their chair or doing things and flipping, then they're most likely a vestibular seeker. So you can just play with some of these different techniques and see which ones work.

All right, let's move on to tip number two: proprioceptive input. Proprioceptive input refers to movement and changes in joint position. So this movement releases serotonin, which decreases hyperactivity levels and calms the body and mind. So proprioception, I always say, like, think of a deep tissue massage. I mean, how heavenly would that be? There's a reason that women love to get massages because that deep pressure in the body releases those calming chemicals. Now, I love to lift weights. So lifting weights is another way for me to get proprioceptive input.

I stole my oldest daughter's weighted blanket about two years ago. Thank you to my mother-in-law for buying that for her. She wasn't really into it, but I love it. I know I am a proprioceptive seeker and it is so helpful for me and it calms me down. This is very often the case with our kids. So activities that you can use that are proprioceptive outside are like climbing a rock wall, maneuvering through monkey bars that hanging your joints are being pulled or jumping on a trampoline. And interestingly, a trampoline is going to use the stibular and proprioceptive sensory systems. It's going to provide both. We actually have this awesome trampoline in our playroom. We moved into a neighborhood that doesn't allow us to have a trampoline in our backyard. So when we moved here, we purchased like a seven foot. It is a pretty large trampoline that we can put in our game room.

And to us it was worth it. We needed to utilize that. My middle daughter is definitely a vestibular and prop girl and she uses that thing all the time. If you go to the show notes or the website, you'll see a link to the one that we really like.

Now, inside activities for proprioceptive input would be something like pushing or pulling a heavy bin of toys. So if you have a younger child, you may just get a cardboard box and stuff it. If you have a kindergarten, stuff it with a ton of different items, or have your baby or toddler get into the box and have bigger brother, your first grader or second grader or whomever, push that little one around on the floor for a few minutes. That creates that same sensory input. You could do deep pressure with a sofa cushion. I just a couple of days ago took a sofa cushion placed on my son and I just laid on top of them because he sometimes he needs that proprioceptive input to calm down. Or you can climb up

the stairs on your hands and knees, have your child climb up and down the stairs with their hands and knees.

You can do these little activities, for like two minutes right before you want your child to sit and focus. These movement breaks are incredibly helpful, incredibly helpful, to help the brain be optimized for learning.

Now, tip number three: when teaching a child with ADHD, you really want to consider time.

So when working on a difficult activity, always start with small increments of time. Even five minutes can seem like forever to a child. So set this short time expectation ahead of the lesson. And this will allow your child the confidence that they can do it, that they can get through it. And whatever you do, stick to your word, Mama. If you say five minutes of learning this new multiplication concept, stop at five minutes, especially if your child really is giving you their best in those five minutes. So many of us fall into this trap when our kids actually do what we want them to do and they don't resist and they're doing so well and then we push them when the timer is over. This is not good. It breaks trust and it increases anxiety the next time we tell them five minutes because they know the last time Mom didn't honor her word. I make this mistake. I've made it so many billions of times. So just learn from me and stick to the five minutes.

I usually preface it this way. I will say something like, OK, as long as you give me your best effort, we're only going to work on this new math concept for five minutes. I know you can do it. When they know you believe in them and when they know you keep your word. Those five minutes of concentrated time will yield so much more fruit than pushing through a twenty, thirty minute lesson on this new concept where you're having tears and meltdowns. It's just not worth it.

Trust me, small chunks of intentional teaching over time will yield fruit. I promise. I know. I know. It's totally unconventional, but it's the truth. It works.

Tip number four: an obstacle course. Alisha recommends getting creative sometimes when movement can be incorporated within a lesson. Try using an obstacle course. This could be something really simple like you're getting ready to work on multiplication facts. I'm on a multiplication facts kick right now. Or maybe it's sight words for your younger child. Go ahead, take him out into the backyard and just utilize the playset that you could tell your son or your daughter. You could say, I want you to run up to the top of the slide and you could have flashcards at the top of the slide. And I

want you to do those 10 flashcards. Or, and then I want you to go down to the swings and I want you to do the swings 10 times, or you're going to do the swings for five minutes. And Mommy's going to flash those words in front of you while you're on the swing.

You just start thinking outside-the-box. It doesn't have to be like this full blown obstacle course. But the idea or the principle of incorporating movement, little chunks, through some fun activities can be super, super helpful.

Tip number five: check your child's seating. If you have a child that struggles to sit at the table, check their seating. Grab a sensory cushion, a therapy ball or maybe even a chair band. These tiny tools can help a child who really needs to sit for a few minutes of time. Like, for example, if you're working on penmanship or something that requires him or her to actually sit at the table. These little tools will allow our more fidgety kids to make small movements without being completely distracting. On the other hand, these tools can be really helpful for the kids that actually need to increase attention. So for the child, that appears to daydream and this is actually an incredible gift as well, offering them these small ways to stay alert can help.

Our daydreamers, just a side note, like think about our daydreamers, other ones that are deep, deep thinkers. They're the ones there are creative types. They're the ones that I truly believe God has designed to change the world with their ideas and their stories. Don't ever doubt your daydreamer. So when you have your daydreamers, these kids actually need some sort of tool to help them sometimes stay alert and stay awake in those sensory cushions, therapy balls or a chair band could actually help them. When you're requiring them to sit, don't fight it, friend. Use your child's wiring to their advantage. If something doesn't work, just go ahead and try another option.

Now, when we teach a child with ADHD, another option, another thing we need to really zero in on at times is warming up the eyes. Now, why is it important to warm up the eyes? Well, when reading and writing, the eyes perform a variety of tiny movements. And if these skills are not present or automatic between the brain and the eyes and their muscles, the brain has to work extra hard to compensate.

So understandably, this will negatively affect your child's ability to focus and sit still for a number of reasons, because the brain actually has to expend extra cognitive energy. Think of it as like, the calories in our bodies. It has to burn more calories and use more energy just to control small eye movements. So that means that a child has less cognitive fuel to focus on controlling behavior and attention. So here are some easy eye warm ups that you can do at home to prime the eyes, the brain and your child. Of course, for effective learning.

Tip number six: you can toss a balloon or a ball. Grab a ball or blow up a little balloon and just hit that balloon or toss a large ball back and forth just like ten times. You can change it up by varying the type, the height and the speed of the object. You could use a stuffed animal. It doesn't really matter.

Tip number seven: tick tock. You want a complete tick tocks by having your child follow an object with their eyes. So you might just take a pencil and put like a big fuzzy eraser or a pencil top on it. And you can just have your child follow that pencil top or the fuzzy eraser or whatever you choose. And you just try up and down movements ten times in a slow pattern, having your child follow with their eyes. Then they can follow looking right and left. You can get silly and fun. You can add music to try to have your child like focus in with rhythm and you can increase efficiency by utilizing rhythm. You know, some of us have heard more recently of a lot of people doing like vision therapy with their children. And while I am not an optometrist, I'm not an ophthalmologist and I'm not an occupational therapist, know enough. And I've learned enough from a ton of different experts and my research myself to know that there are a lot of these therapeutic activities that when we understand what's going on, we can employ different activities to support our children's vision or eye muscles at home. Lots of people are doing vision therapy and there's a reason for it because it's much more common than we think for children to have a struggle with controlling those eye muscles.

All right, number eight: play eye movement Simon Says. You can mirror eye movements made in the four corners of your visual field. So you might have your child sit in front of you and you're going to say to them, OK, I want you to follow my eyes. And you move your eyes up and down and side to side. And it's just like Simon Says. It might be fun and you can take turns with your child, especially if they're younger.

Tip number nine: natural lighting is best. So fluorescent lights can quickly cause fatigue, especially with intensive reading activities. So you really want to use natural light when possible. And you also may need to consider limiting visual distractions around your child. So it may be a great idea to sit beside a window. But some of our kids may have a difficult time tuning out distractions from the outside. Now, interestingly enough, I love to take my kids outside. However, I tend to take them in the backyard where we have much more privacy and more just natural surroundings instead of having cars driving by. So, when natural light is not possible, you can remove the amount of light bulbs in an overhead light, or you can position your child with their back facing the light source. So there is a little bit softer.

Tip number 10: a slanted desk. Speaking to eyes and vision and how much that can impact learning, many children struggle with a particular type of eye movement called eye convergence. And that means when the left and the right eye have to work together to focus on text both near and far. So this often explains when a child complains of headaches or has a real obvious lack of desire to read.

So when you're teaching your child with ADHD, autism, any executive functioning issue, or quite frankly, I don't care if they have a diagnosis or not, if you have a child that resists writing and reading and all the things, nine times out of ten, there's something going on behind the behavior. Often times with our kids that struggle with reading, it can be something having to do again with eye convergence so you can try offering a slanted desk area. You can use a slanted board or like a large binder under your child's paper or book. My kids, a lot of times, they just sit on the floor and have them, I usually give them like a whiteboard or a clipboard and they just lean it on their knees. But it just helps soften the effect on the eyes and helps them read and write better.

Tip number 11: Hey girlfriend, this is the one, this is the one friend. We all hate clutter for a reason. So full pages of text can be so overwhelming for children and adults. Me right here. So we mammas become overwhelmed when we walk into a messy and cluttered house, right? Too much visual input at once, increases stress and shuts down our ability to function.

I mean, how many times have you come home from a long day out or you've just had a day. You walk into the house and the house is a mess. That's it. It's like you are done. Are you kidding me? You're stressed out. It just causes anxiety. It's too much. Well, that's because the brain only has so much capacity. So when we're constantly flooding ourselves with all the to do's and all of this visual mess, our brain has to tease through everything that it's taking in in order to zero in on what's most important. This is a huge issue for our children.

When we have too many problems, math problems, too much reading, text on a page, the likelihood that your child, for example, when reading skips words or full lines of text, it will increase. This often explains reading comprehension issues. So let me just point out that skipping words or full lines of text is not a willful choice or a sign of laziness in your child.

This is an indication that something else is going on behind the behavior, and I'm super passionate about it because I have messed up so much with my kids. And once I learn this, you know, we can only do the best we can with the information we have at any given time. But once I realized what was going on behind the behavior, it has helped so much in me, offering them compassion and grace, but

also understanding myself better and equipping them better to receive from me whatever it is, whether it's academic information or it's just instruction on chores or anything in this world.

So, here are some quick tips to reduce visual clutter. Use a piece of paper to cover up half of a page, ok. Or you can use that sheet of paper as a line marker when reading or referencing something. You can purchase on Amazon, there's little page windows. So when. Your child is learning to read or if they are supposed to read a larger chunk of text, you can use like these little page windows that helps them focus on line by line. You can use a whiteboard and write one math problem on it at a time. And I recommend this all the time.

In fact, I have a video. I know it's floating around on Pinterest. I have a video where I demonstrate how when we hit multi digit multiplication, I needed to really bring down the anxiety level. And also because there's so many steps with multi digit multiplication, there's so many steps involved. So I literally teach with one problem at a time on a small whiteboard. That can be a game changer. So don't give your kids tons and tons of math problems on a page. Start with one, especially if they are feeling overwhelmed. If you have a child that is struggling with keeping their eyes focused, I also I use a Kindle a lot. I use a Paperwhite that's more sensitive to the eyes and I increase the font really, really large. And that has been super helpful in increasing reading comprehension and just increasing my children's desire to read.

So here's my last thing, friends. I know this is long. When in doubt, get an OT evaluation. I cannot more highly recommend getting an eval. If you think your child may have ADHD or is just struggling with schoolwork, I cannot more highly, highly recommend it.

Now, an occupational therapist can provide you with so much insight and clues to how to best support your child. So even if you're concerned about the financial and time commitment involved in going and getting an eval and having weekly occupational therapy, don't panic. I just recommend at least get the eval, get the occupational therapy eval, because you'll be shocked at how much you can learn about your child and how they're wired. You can learn about what is going on behind behaviors by getting that evaluation. Now, know these terms aren't going to be super familiar to you at first, but once you have that document in front of you, it will guide your research and a good occupational therapists will understand and want to at least explain to you what this eval means. So definitely get an occupational therapy eval. It's so, so helpful.

So I want to say thank you to my sweet Alicia Mathews. She is a pediatric occupational therapist with about ten years experience. She is a master of science degree and occupational therapy from the

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. If you'd like to get in touch with Alicia, you can check out my website or check the show notes www.aheartforallstudents.com.

Have a great day. Thank you for listening.

Hey sweet friend. Do you desperately want to be a good Christian Mama? But daily just feel like a failure? You love your child deeply and you want her to thrive but there's just one problem. Your kid has meltdowns over everything, every single day.

Friend, I have been there and I get it and I'm on the other side. That's why I've created the Free 5 Day Devotional for you. Find hope and a new way to approach your child's toughest behaviors. Be encouraged and grab your free copy at www.Bit.ly/exhaustedmomhope

Hey friend, guess what? You just finished an entire episode. Give yourself a pat on the back. In this season of parenting, where we are barely surviving, every accomplishment is a victory. So take it. And while you're at it, if you found this episode to be helpful, please consider leaving a review on iTunes or wherever you listen to your podcast episode and don't forget to subscribe, so you never miss a thing...

And if you're looking for more practical tools and encouragement as you homeschool and parent your outside-the-box child to thrive, go to www.aheartforallstudents.com. There are tons of resources, freebies and lots of extra support over there. Don't miss anything. I don't do this thing alone. Friends were in it together and together we can change the narrative for our neurodiverse outside-the-box kids.