

SHAME, It's Impact on ADHD and How to Help

Mon, 3/1 7:50PM 17:31

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

kids, executive function, struggle, adhd, teachers, safe, feel, problem, people, parents, shame, called, students, hear, counselor, execute, falling, most important thing, unsafe, system

SPEAKERS

Seth Perler

S Seth Perler 00:01
Parents and teachers, shame can be so impactful on these students who struggle with ADHD and executive function. What I'm going to do in this video is I'm going to really break that down for you in a really practical and meaningful way. And I'll wrap it up, just sort of giving you my most important thoughts about this so that you can better support your child or the students that you work with. So let's go ahead and get started here.

S Seth Perler 00:27
The first thing that I wanted to mention, as I said, we're going to talk about the impact of shame on ADHD. Who are you? You are parents and teachers, and some of you may be psychotherapists, counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, yada, yada, yada. You guys are your tutors, mentors, you're people who care about kids you're concerned about, and you want more answers. And this, this shame thing is such a pervasive problem, but it's something we don't often see because of messaging that we grew up with. So you people that are concerned, you want some answers, and I want to start by talking about something called the A to B. I talk a lot about the A to B. The number one thing I ever hear from parents ever is, "I just want my kid to be happy," or "I just want my kid to be successful," or "I just want my kid to be happy and healthy, or happy and successful." However, parents, that is the number one thing I've heard in more than 20 years of

working with families. So if that's the goal, that's really what we all want. It's your own definition of happiness and success. But that's really what we all want for our kids. Every single one of you listening, we all want the same thing. So we're trying to get from this A to this B here. What does that mean? That means that we have a kid who struggles with ADHD or executive function, and we want to get them from point A, we're really concerned to them, they're really struggling with this stuff, to point B where they've turned a corner. It's not perfect, but they've turned a corner and we can breathe a sigh of relief and go, "Okay, this kid has decent executive function skills, they're going to be okay, they're going to be able to live the life that we want them to be able to live." Well what life do we want them to be able to live? We want them to be able to launch a good future, however they define it. And this is an old Banksy piece if you are familiar with Banksy, a famous artists that nobody knows who he is, interesting character. But, educare, E D U C A R E, educare. The word educare a means, 'to lift or to raise or to bring up or to bring forth.' So education, educare, education is literally about lifting people, raising people. I'm raising my child, bringing up my child. Listen to that metaphor, education is about bringing someone up, up. But there's a problem, when you don't fit into the system, this education thing may not be working for you. If you struggle, the concern that you have, or that I have, or parents have, what we're concerned about here is that if this kid is struggling to raise, to lift, to be brought up in this world, so that they can launch that good future. That's a problem.

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Seth Perler 03:03

Executive function has to do with the prefrontal cortex, the front part of the brain. The front part of the brain is where executive function takes place. And it helps us to execute. So people with ADHD struggle in this front part of the brain, the brain is still developing, they got plenty of time. And how do you know if the kids struggling with executive function? Well, they have trouble getting important things done, they're lacking the skills to get the things done. So these things are usually school things and life responsibilities. They have homework and schoolwork problems, grades are falling, they have this DIP pattern every semester, things fall apart, they have an unrealistic perception of their ability to independently execute their tasks and have the time and energy that is needed to do these things. They often lack future thinking, which is like being able to really put two and two together as far as the consequences are concerned. You know, "Things would be a lot easier if I just finished this. Oh, things will be a lot harder if I make this choice." There may or may not be a diagnosis of anything. So you can struggle with executive function and not have any diagnosis. If your child struggles with executive function, ADHD, they're resistant, they avoid their non-preferred activities, things that they don't feel like doing and they have excuses and they procrastinate on doing the things that need to get done.

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Seth Perler 04:19

We've got this big problem because the system, so this cartoon says, you've probably seen this before, 'Our education system,' 'For a fair selection, everybody has to take the same exam, please climb that tree.' Clearly the monkey and the bird are gonna look like they are successful according to this test. The fish is going to look the least successful according to this test. So our system often does not recognize executive functioning struggles and other things like neurodiversity, asynchrony, unique brains, differently wired kids, complicated human beings, outside-the-box thinkers, atypical learners, 2e kids, and the fact that there are many spectrums of many things. We are not standardized human beings. We should not be standardized human beings, we're very complex beings that have different needs, and strengths, and gifts, and talents, and interests, and things like that. So we can't use the same tests. These kids can often look like a failure in this sort of a system. Now, I want to get to this beautiful quote, 'I've learned that people will forget where you said and forget what you did, but will never forget how you made them feel.' And as I'm getting into the topic of shame here, how we all want to feel, is we want to feel safe. This is a rock climber, he's falling, actually if you look closely, you can see that he's smiling, but he is safe. Because he knows that he's what's called on-belay, he's safe. There's a person below with the rope who has a special harness, falling is not uncommon in rock climbing. So for him to take that fall, he has a person who's belaying him, who's got him is safe. Now for our kids, when we say you know, 'people will never forget how you make them feel they,' often feel unsafe. I want to make this very, very, very, very, very, very clear in this video, this is important. They often feel unsafe. What does that mean? Kids who struggle with executive function and ADHD often feel unsafe. Meaning that when they're trying to execute, when they're trying to do the things they're being asked to do, it ends up after months and years of hearing messaging from adults, it starts to feel unsafe to them. We have to understand that, because if we don't address that there's a sense in their nervous system that they're unsafe, we're not going to be able to help them. Shame feels unsafe. Shame feels like, "I can never do any right. People don't see how much I try. They don't notice it everything I try to do. It's never working out for me, I keep failing, or getting in trouble, or I can't do anything, right." And they start to really feel unsafe. What we really want to do is, this is from Polyvagal theory, this thing called safe and social if you're interested in looking at Polyvagal theory, but we want them to feel safe. We cannot help them if they're not there. We want them to feel on-belay. If they take a risk, like using a planner, or doing homework, or whatever the thing is, that can be a risk for them. We have to really understand that this can be scary for them. So imagine this climber, like this can be scary, you know. So we need to really support them.

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Now, what we're trying to get to, when they feel safe, and we are trying to help them. So

you the parent, or you're the counselor, or teacher, or mentor, or tutor, you're trying to be helpful. Well, if they feel safe with you, then we can really start to help them and then we can start getting some results. So this is from one of my students who was a high school junior at the time when she texted me this, she said "Yay, the first time ever, I think I can actually get all A's this quarter. I hope I can do it, just wanted to say thanks for all the help you have given me and pushing me to do the things I need to do in order to succeed," from Abby. This was a long journey, and I could not have pushed her to do the things she needed to do if she didn't know she was safe. I just cannot emphasize this enough. That's what we're trying to get to. What we're trying to also do with the safety is to help them with the resistance.

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Seth Perler 08:22

The number one problem with ADHD and executive function, as far as I'm concerned is the resistance. What do we resist? We resist doing our homework, or responsibilities, being honest about things, using planners, organizing our stuff, checking our portals, dealing with email and inboxes, reading our assignments, whatever. We resist all these things, and if we don't feel safe, we are not going to get here where somebody allows us to move through our resistance so that we can overcome these things. Rather than doing that, what ends up often happening is students are having an experience that causes them to say the following. What they'll often do is they'll do the bare minimum, stay off the radar, keep the parents off their back, keep the teachers off their back, and then they'll use strategies to not execute when they are on the radar. They say things like, "School sucks. This is so boring. This is stupid. I don't want to. I don't want to do my homework. I don't want to do this. I hate school. My teacher hates me. I'm bad at math. I'm bad at science. I'm bad at writing. I'm bad at reading. When will I ever use this? I don't feel like it. Why do I have to do this? This is so stupid. Why should I care about this? For once just trust me, I'll do it later. Leave me alone. Get off my back. Stop nagging me. Stop bugging me. I've got this, I promise I swear I'm on top of it. Stopping so annoying, the teacher lost it or it's the teachers fault." So what ends up happening is that the students are saying all of these things to help deal with the fact that when they start doing these things that often is an unsafe experience for them, so they have these methods, these strategies to not do this thing that feels unsafe to them. Okay, we can put that together. When we adults can put two and two together and really understand this, then we can really start being of more service to them.

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Seth Perler 10:00

Let's finally get into shame. So what does shame look like around this stuff? The messages that these kids get, these messages that these kids get, they are rooted in a

misunderstanding of executive function, or a lack of understanding, or complete ignorance of understanding. Most parents and teachers have never even heard of executive function. They've heard of ADHD, but they don't know what executive function is, and the ones that do often don't know a lot about it. Basically, because of this misunderstanding, people, adults, think that the kid is being willful, that they're just not trying, that they're making a decision. What does that look like? Here's what the kids hear, "You're just lazy. You're not motivated, you don't try hard enough. You just need to put forth more effort, you've got so much potential. You just need to be more disciplined. You just must not care about school. If you just do this, this, and this, everything would be okay." What happens, sadly, is that these kids, whether, you know, parents, or teachers say those messages directly or indirectly, they've heard those types of messages for years. They can internalize it. Whrn they internalize it, that means that it starts to become a belief about who they are. They start to believe, "I'm bad, I'm bad person. I'm not good enough. I'm not worthy. There's something wrong with me, I'm broken. I'm not smart, I'm stupid, I'm dumb." And then they really live in this story. "It's too hard. I just can't, I give up. Why should I even try?" And oftentimes, they'll try from pressuring them enough, or whatever. But is that healthy for them? What do we do here? Well, I love this quote, 'Once in a while it hits people that they don't have to experience the world in the way that they've been told to.' And the reason I love that so much is that we don't have to respond when our kid, let's say, has an F because of a million missings. We don't have to respond in the same way that we used to and worry so much about the grades, and getting everything done, and doing all that. We can really start to say, "Wow, this kid is in a position where they have to climb a mountain doing something that's super hard for them, that feels overwhelming to them, that may not be valuable to them. Even if they did all of their homework, and had no life for the next month and got all caught up, that would be horrible for them because their mental health would suffer. They wouldn't have time for the fun, or for their friends, or for themselves. And they don't have the skills to do it, what we're asking them to do is unreasonable, but we're gonna push, push, push, push, push them. We don't have to push, push, push, push, push them necessarily. We can relook at, maybe the kid isn't conforming that system, maybe this system should be conforming to the kids learning styles, learning needs, neurodiversity. Their uniquely wired attributes, how awesome they are, build on their strengths, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Really, it hits us that we don't have to respond to the system in the same way. That gives us a choice to not go into messaging that they can internalize, that creates a story that really holds them back from seeing how awesome they are.

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Seth Perler 13:13

Well, how do we do this stuff? One of the best ways we do it is our own, our own deep inner work, our own. You know, as adults, our own therapists, our own psychologists, our

own counselor, our own friends and support groups, and men's groups and women's groups, and self-development books or self-help books. I know some of you are like, "Seth, that's woowoo this stuff isn't...", Look, our own deep inner work, it doesn't matter what you call it, doesn't matter if it's journaling, or meditation, or prayer, or programs that help you do it. But it's the work that helps us become self-aware and look at our own attachment systems, our own dysfunction, we all have this stuff. If we work on that stuff, we become safer not only for ourselves, but our kids notice that our nervous systems are more regulated, they notice that we're responding differently. When we respond differently, they can feel safe, they can feel on-belay, they can not feel shamed.

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Seth Perler 14:17

Now, finally, now, we can support them to move forward. Okay. So when we do our own deep inner work, this isn't the only thing, but when we really start doing that, we can start to change the dynamic. And I say this because a lot of you watching, maybe already do your own deep inner work, but a lot of people haven't been told how to start, or where to start, or how to do your own deep inner work, or that it's even important, or maybe you grew up in a family system that says, you know, "If you work on yourself and get a counselor that means that you're bad and there's something wrong with you. Our family doesn't do stuff like that," all sorts of ways. I really want to encourage those of you who may not have gone there yet to make that the most important thing in your life, to start doing your own deep inner work. You will be better for yourself and for your child, or the kids that you work with, if you're a tutor, or a teacher, or a counselor yourself, or whatever.

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Seth Perler 15:12

Finally, last thing I want to say is about the most important thing. Okay? The most important thing, if we circle back to the beginning, all we want is for our kids is to be happy, healthy, successful, whatever that means. It's the most important thing, forgetting grades, forgetting school, forgetting all of the craziness, forgetting everything else I said. The most important thing is our relationship with our kids. Whether you're a parent or somebody else who's working with kids, the most important thing is what I call a 'securely attached relationship'. It's attachment theory, I didn't think of it or anything, it's out there all over. The most important thing is that our kids feel safe with us, that they have a relationship with us where they feel connected, safe, like we've got their back, like we hear them, they really feel like, "Oh, they really hear me, they really get me, they really understand me. They've got my back, they see me." And I know that everybody watching this video, "But I do see them, I do hear them." That's not what I'm saying. Listen closely. Do they feel heard? Seen? Understood? Like you've got their back? Do they feel that? You know you got their back, you know you're well intended, you know, you're doing the best

you can. But do they feel that? That's what we really want to work towards is that relationship is the most important thing. So anything that's going to help build that is going to help then empower you to empower them to take the actions that are going to help them turn that corner, that A to that B, where they're taking our guidance, and they're actually implementing these things so that they can create a great future and they're not limited, and they're not struggling, and they have choices, and opportunities, and possibilities in this world that it's very, very, very, very challenging to live in.



Seth Perler 17:01

My name is Seth Perler. I'm an executive function coach out of Maui. I help struggling students navigate this thing called education. I have a website called SethPerler.com. Go ahead and click on it. You can get freebies, I put out new content every week. If this helped you, share it with somebody, share my work with people. Feel free to leave a comment below. What do you think? What did I leave out, what how's this resonated with you? Thank you so much for caring about kids and for taking the time to watch this. I hope you have an amazing day. Take care.