

## Episode #5: ADHD Parenting Strategies with Tanya Stevenson

This is Episode Five. Let's get started.

Smarter Parenting welcomes you to our podcast series, The Parenting Coach for ADHD. Here to heal and elevate lives is your parenting coach, Siope Kinikini.

**Siope Kinikini:** I had a great opportunity to talk to Tanya, who works as a supervisor over group homes, she's also been a professional parents. And by that I mean she's worked with foster kids and also with kids placed in group homes, so really difficult behaviors. We talked about ADHD and how she implements skills from the Teaching-Family Model in helping them adapt. She also talks about establishing a new structure in the home, working with children who are on medication and are off medication, and things about feeling judged. You know, a lot of times, there's a lot of judgment behind the behaviors that children exhibit. She provides some really great insight into what it is that you can do, as a parent, to improve your life with your child who's struggling with ADHD. So take a listen.

What are some of the things that you implemented with children with ADHD, that you found to be helpful? What are some techniques or skills that you felt were super helpful for children with ADHD?

**Tanya Stevenson:** I think what was really helpful would be recognizing that they may not be able to complete a full task, right. They get really distracted. You know, you go in, and you walk in to their room, and you had asked them to clean their room, and for some reason they're not cleaning the room, they're sitting down playing with toys. You're like, "What were you doing these last 20 minutes?"

First thing is to break down the instruction. They may not have the ability, when you say, "Clean up your room," they don't understand where to start, so give them a starting point. You may say, "Hey, you know what? How about you clean these clothes in this pile? How about you just put them in a pile and start there?" Or, you know, "I want you to pick up all your toys and put them in your toy box." Start with one instruction at a time because it's going to help them focus on one thing at a time. If you give them a very broad instruction, it might be harder for them to pick out where to start. It becomes overwhelming sometimes, those things.

And then, you can make it fun. Oftentimes, we see with ADHD they get distracted, right, so set a timer. "All right, we're going to do a race right now. So I'm going to set the timer for five minutes. I want to see how fast you can get these toys in that toy box." You're going to start associating

things like that as positive experiences. And then, for me, caffeine. A copious amount of caffeine.

**Siope Kinikini:** Right.

**Tanya Stevenson:** No, but, and then you just ...being able to laugh through it right, and not-

**Siope Kinikini:** In looking at parents, I can see questions actually popping up, where they're like, "Well, that actually takes a lot of my time to break it down into their time, and after a while, I'm spending an hour in there, where I could just clean it up myself and it's faster."

**Tanya Stevenson:** Yeah, but they don't learn. By investing, you have to look at it as an investment to your kid. It's going to take a lot of work upfront, a lot of patience upfront, but with that, you're going to be able to pull back, and they're going to start to be able to naturally do those things on their own because the expectation's greater, and you've created that expectation for them.

**Tanya Stevenson:** You're still going to have to monitor them. It doesn't mean that you, as a parent, get to step back. It's a consistent thing you have to go back to. The kid might struggle sometimes, and you're going to have to go back, and as they get older, I mean, we're talking about a little kid, right, so I mean, there's toddlers, there's a kid, there's a pre-teen, there's a teen-

**Siope Kinikini:** Teen, yeah.

**Tanya Stevenson:** Right, and so they're all these different phases of their life, and you're going to have to re-approach these things because society starts coming in there, culture starts coming in there, peers start coming in there, friends. It's a continuous process but if you maintain it, that's the important piece, is consistency and maintaining it.

**Siope Kinikini:** Right. So in a way it is, you initially lay the groundwork and then you just maintain. That kind of, I mean, the earlier you can intervene and you can teach these skills, the easier it is to maintain, rather than trying to rebuild it or start over, right?

**Tanya Stevenson:** Oh, yeah. Yeah, if you can create those expectations from the beginning, it's clear to the kid. Instead of, you know, if you let all this time pass, your kid gets kind of confused. They're like, "Why is Mom laying down the law now?" When you introduce them sooner, you're going to be able to shape that and mold that sooner, and then society's not going to teach them, right?

**Siope Kinikini:** Right.

**Tanya Stevenson:** You, as a parent, is going to be able to teach them.

**Siope Kinikini:** Right. What advice would you give to parents who are starting this later, with older children, who, because I've heard it before, and the parents who've laid down the law to teenagers, and the teenagers freak out, and they're like, "You are such a hypocrite because you never did this before, and now we're doing this, and how dare you?" It's like, "Who are you? I don't even know you," you know, and it's hard.

**Tanya Stevenson:** Right, yeah. Like, they think that you're suddenly the enemy-

**Siope Kinikini:** Exactly.

**Tanya Stevenson:** They think, like, "Why are you suddenly changing? This was cool before. Why are you suddenly the uptight parent?"

**Siope Kinikini:** Exactly.

**Tanya Stevenson:** "Why can't you be the cool Mom?"

**Siope Kinikini:** Exactly.

**Tanya Stevenson:** Right? "You were once before." It can start with any age group, right, because I worked with a teen, teen kids, and they were teenagers, and at that point they had a long life of society teaching them other ways, and so when they understand the reason why you're doing it-

**Siope Kinikini:** Yeah, this is for older kids, right?

**Tanya Stevenson:** Yeah, for older kids, yeah. If they understand the reason why you're doing what you're doing, they're going to start to become more accepting. They may not accept it upfront, but create those firm boundaries and continue with it, keep it going. They're going to have a lot of pushback at first. That's normal. That's normal, and it's going to get hard, but it gets better.

**Siope Kinikini:** You've been able to work in families, that have children on ADHD, that use medication and families that don't want to use medication, and so I'm curious as to the implications of using these techniques on the children, both who are on medication and not on medication. Is there a difference? Is there, you know, do the skills work the same?

**Tanya Stevenson:** They work the same.

**Siope Kinikini:** Okay.

**Tanya Stevenson:** I think, I mean, in my experience, I've always felt that they worked the same. How you implement them might be a little bit different. Understanding your kid and what's going to meet their needs, I think, is really important. The way that you give your instructions, so I still believe that starting off with one simple thing at a time, I still think that's effective with or without medication. I still believe and I still have seen that it's effective both ways, and you know, that is the parent's choice, and I think it's still effective.

**Siope Kinikini:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, fantastic, and I guess that drives home the point that the skill itself is something that children just need to learn anyway. I mean, these are skills that are lifelong skills, that will be helpful for them regardless of where they are in life. As they get older, they need to know some basic behavioral skills to manage their behavior, and whether or not your child's on medication or not, it doesn't matter. Like, because medication really doesn't ... it addresses symptoms but it doesn't fix behaviors.

**Tanya Stevenson:** Oh, yeah, no. We have a lot of kids who come in, who are extremely over-medicated, and they kind of were like, "Well, if we just sedate the behavior, then it's fixed." No, it doesn't, because when they do get upset, we've never really addressed the behavior.

**Siope Kinikini:** Right.

**Tanya Stevenson:** Right, and so there is that magic mix of whether or not you choose to use medication, but it doesn't affect behavior itself, it doesn't teach the behavior, they aren't learning anything with medication.

**Siope Kinikini:** Right, okay.

**Tanya Stevenson:** It's something important to remember, they don't learn with medication. It might help kids get to a point where they can learn, but it doesn't help them with the behavior, itself.

**Siope Kinikini:** Right, perfect. I'm curious, in your perception in working with some of these parents, I know a lot of parents feel judged, and probably the parents who have their kids taken away feel extremely judged by the system, by case workers, by judges. What are some things that you do to help them build their confidence in their parenting style so they can take over the reins, because you can't keep the child forever, and your goal is actually to help integrate them back into a healthy environment? Are there any things that you try and help parents with, to help boost their self-confidence in what they're doing?

**Tanya Stevenson:** Yeah, I had one parent in particular who would come to our home every Tuesday night. He would watch us do the structure, he would watch us do the teaching, and saw how it was effective with his daughter. Over time, we said, "Okay, now I want you to try it." So he was really supported. He had his team behind him, and he was able to do the teaching, and be able to do all these things, implement the model with his daughter, with the support, and

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when he started to see that he could do it, he started to feel empowered. He felt more comfortable doing it, and able to do it by himself, and that took a little bit of time.

Something to understand, working with parents, is that a lot of these parents, they themselves were probably traumatized at some point, or victims at some point, or part of the cycle, and so their upbringing, you know, you model what you know, and so being empathetic to other parents. I know a lot of moms feel judged, and a lot of parents feel judged, but you only model what you know. Being able to help teach the parent, too, that this is effective, and that they can do it, and supporting them in their decisions when they do issue a consequence, and saying, "Hey, you did a really great job, that's awesome," and then praising them, too, for their little successes.

And then also understanding that my expectations might be different than their expectations, and that's okay. I have to be realistic that not all my kids are going home to a beautiful home in the suburbs. Some of my kids are still going home to a single parent who works all day, who might not have all the same resources and things like that, and so understanding the scope of their reality, and knowing that at the end of the day, that kid is happiest because they're back home, not because they had all these other things, but they're back home with their family, and so supporting them in the scope of their reality.

**Siope Kinikini:** No, that's great. That supporting in the scope of their reality, would you say that the model is something that every, regardless of where you are, it would be helpful?

**Tanya Stevenson:** Yeah.

**Siope Kinikini:** Yeah?

**Tanya Stevenson:** Oh, yeah.

**Siope Kinikini:** Yeah. I've seen the model actually work with families that were homeless, actually living with other people because and they had to move around, had nowhere to go, up to millionaires who, you know, and implementing the model with families across that economic gamut has been fascinating to watch because it does work, regardless of where you are, and then the cultural thing.

So I'm curious about the culture thing, because you obviously work with children from multiple cultures, with multiple parenting styles, some a little more aggressive than others, and some are very different, discipline is very different in other countries, and so can you talk a little bit about your experience in working with families or different parenting styles like that and implementing the model?

**Tanya Stevenson:** Yeah, and I just think it can go across every culture, because I think where we're trying to get away from is the yelling, or the screaming, or maybe the spanking, but the

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steps are in there, and it gives you a lot of control. It gives you a lot of ways to find your footing of where to start, to ease that frustration, and I feel like the model makes you feel, as a parent, you have your handbook, right. You don't get a handbook when your kid's born, right?

**Siope Kinikini:** Right, nobody-

**Tanya Stevenson:** No one tells you how to be a parent.

**Siope Kinikini:** No.

**Tanya Stevenson:** But that's what the model does. It helps you feel like you have a direction where to start, and no matter where you come from, I think it's universal, because then the artistry piece can kind of slip in there later, right?

**Siope Kinikini:** Right, which includes respecting cultures, but at the same time, teaching effectively how to raise healthy and happy children.

**Tanya Stevenson:** Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Siope Kinikini:** Okay. No, that makes sense. That's great. I know, in working with different families, sometimes the cultural thing would move in. You know, it was like, "This is the way I was raised. I'm normal, so I'm going to ... I want to do it this way," and of course, then we discuss why I'm even there in the first place, because I'm there because the style that you chose didn't work.

**Tanya Stevenson:** And that's the conversation I have had to have with parents, is like, "I understand this is how you were raised but is it effective? Has it been effective? Are you still frustrated with their behavior? If you are, then maybe it's not as effective as you think." Helping them understand that the model itself is going to give them the tools to where it is going to be an effective parenting style, and that they are going to be able to be in control, and are still going to be able to parent in a way that's going to be structured, and it's going to be good for not only them, but for the kid.

**Siope Kinikini:** We here at Smarter Parenting want to thank you for listening to this podcast, and we are passionate about helping families who have children with behavioral issues, specifically with ADHD. We need your help, and the way that you can help us is to subscribe, to like, to share, and to comment on this podcast. Help us grow, help us move forward and accomplish what we want to do in helping families around the world.

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