



Episode #225

ADHD Essentials for Parents, with Brendan Mahan

September 8, 2020

Debbie: Hey, Brendan, welcome to the podcast.

Brendan: Hi, Debbie. Thanks for having me.

Debbie: Yeah, we have a lot to get into, to talk all things ADHD in this crazy time that we are recording this in. And I was so happy to learn about your work from Seth perler, who a lot of my listeners are very familiar with. He's a frequent podcast guest. And so you and I have talked, but I would love if you could take a few minutes to more casually introduce yourself to our listeners. I've already done your formal bio. But tell us a little bit about who you are as a person and why you're in this space.

Brendan: Sure. Yeah. And Seth is great. By the way, I'm really happy that I've connected with him and with you. So I'm in the ADHD parenting space, because I have ADHD, I guess. As a kid, I was like, I want to be a child psychologist. And I went to college for psychology and they were like, basically Early psychology classes are just the history of psychology, not psychology. There's no counseling stuff that you're learning. And so I left that and on a long and windy road ended up becoming a teacher. And I was a teacher when schools didn't have money. So I kind of bounced around a little bit I kept in schools, it's sort of the most recent person and is the first one that gets bounced when there's no money. So I got bounced a few times. And eventually I was like, I can't get better at this job because I'm not keeping a curriculum long enough. And when I left education, I had two ideas, either a guidance counselor, which is basically like a counselor for children, and connect kept me connected to education or an ADHD coach, because as a teacher, I was really good with the kids who had ADHD. I wasn't the guy who got mad and frustrated with them. In fact, I usually got annoyed with my fellow teachers who didn't seem to understand why these kids are struggling. And then I got diagnosed with ADHD and was like, Oh, that's why, but that's kind of how I ended up Getting here. I have a master's in education. And I also have one in guidance counseling. But there's not a lot of guidance counseling jobs available. So I ended up doing this ADHD stuff instead. And it's really better. Like I get to teach teachers, I train educational staff on how to more effectively manage ADHD and student productivity and social emotional stuff and all that, and anxiety. And that's kind of how I got here. In terms of more personal stuff than that, I guess, like I'm a father of identical twins, which is a lot like having ADHD, even if you don't have it, but I do. And we, we just do stuff, right like me and the boys and my wife too. I've managed to maintain a marriage for 16 years this Friday. 16 years this Saturday, sorry, we're celebrating it Friday, or it's actually on Saturday. And so I've kind of struggled and come up the other side stronger for it, and manage to navigate a lot of the difficulties. And that's that's why I feel like I'm good at what I do, I guess because I haven't. I've helped a lot of people and I haven't quit yet.

Debbie: Yeah, that's awesome. And congratulations on the upcoming anniversary of 16 years.

Brendan: Thank you.

Debbie: I'd love to hear a little bit about how you train teachers. I feel like this is kind of a mystery to so many of us who aren't teachers. And I mostly work with parents who were always looking to understand how to better communicate to teachers to understand who our kids are. And we recognize that there is a lot of negative stigma surrounding ADHD or there's still a belief among many people that it's not a real thing. And so a lot of us feel like we're constantly you know, climbing uphill in trying to advocate for our kids. So could you even give us a little inside look at the resistance, if any, you experience when you're working with teachers and what are some of the things you've found has really helped them change the way that they teach their ADHD kids.

Brendan: Some of it is. I was a teacher. So I've talked to teachers, I speak teacher, my sister is a teacher, my brother in law is the head of the math department at a high school. So, I know that culture, and rolling in and being able to say, Hi, I've been a teaching assistant, I've been a teacher, I've been a principal, I earned a lot of credit from the jump, because it doesn't seem like I'm a talking head. And then I own a lot of what they already have going on from the jump. So I say to them, like, I am not here to tell you that you're bad at what you do. What my expectation is, the assumption that I'm working from, is that you are 90% amazing and 10% not there yet. And my job is to help you fill that 10 percent. I'm not here to add work, I'm not here to put more stuff on your plate. A lot of what we're going to talk about today, you're going to find is stuff that's already on your plate. And I'm just asking you to look at it from another perspective, to make your life easier in the long run, it might be a little bit harder in the first six months to a year, but after that, it's going to be easier for the rest of your career. So it's that kind of stuff, like it's recognizing the challenges that they already have, and what's already frustrating for them. And trying to alleviate those challenges, while providing them with professional development around anxiety or task initiation or ADHD or executive function or whatever the case may be.

Debbie: Just such important work and, and that's something I realized, you know, when my son was quite young, just how his teachers were awesome and didn't have the tools or information like they were and I was turning to them like, wait, I need you to tell me what to do but they just weren't aware of strategies that work or where to even begin on so many levels.

Brendan: Yeah, one of the things that I do when I talk to teachers is I make sure to talk about time awareness and the struggles that folks with ADHD have around time awareness. And specifically, I talked about the time horizon, which is the point at which things become imaginary as you sort of think into the future. For neurotypical folks, they can go out like three months, and it's developmental. So younger kids, they're not going to go as far. But folks with ADHD, it's like a day to a week, a month, if you're really lucky. And I haven't met too many people with ADHD who go out that far. And oftentimes, the time horizon is a day away. And I mentioned this to teachers specifically, because so many teachers do projects and they break it down into small tasks, so that it's more manageable. But almost none of them are thinking that another benefit to that process is that you're

making it so that some piece of that book report, I don't know diorama on ancient Mesopotamia. You want some piece of that project to land inside the kid's time horizon. So if there's something due every day, there's always something in their time horizon. And they're always working toward that goal, as opposed to if it's not due till the end of the week, and now they're not doing it until Thursday because it's due tomorrow.

Debbie: That's so interesting. You just kind of summed up procrastination. A time horizon. I like that because it also sounds a bit like a sci fi concept.

Brendan: But it's real.

Debbie: Yes. So actually, that kind of ties in a little bit with your concept on the "wall of awful," which I really think is such a powerful concept. I have shared the video with certain members of my household, but I do not know that they've been viewed yet. But can you kind of walk us through what the wall of awful is because I think it's really going to resonate with a lot of parents.

Brendan: Yeah, so it started because I was trying to explain to parents why their kids didn't do homework, or why they had trouble doing homework, I should say. And then, as it progressed, I realized it was bigger than what I was talking about. And that it was really a trauma model, because in a lot of ways it is. And so here's how it works. Every time we fail, we get a brick in our wall, right? So let's stick with homework because that's the origin. My kid didn't do their math homework. So because my kid didn't do their math homework, they get this brick in their wall, right, this little failure brick of doing math along with the failure brick, they also get a disappointment brick because they disappointed themselves. But they also get a disappointment brick for everyone whose opinion of them matters as it relates to that assignment or that failure. So in the case of a math assignment, mom, dad, their teacher, You're right. Those are probably the other bricks and maybe a classmate depending on what's going on with this homework assignment. When we get a disappointment brick, we also get a rejection brick because we feel like the person we disappointed is going to reject us socially. And it doesn't matter if they do where they don't. It only matters how we view it. It's only our perspective that matters and all this unless that person gets in really quick and explains it, it's not a big deal, right? Like if I don't do my math homework, and I am worrying all night because I didn't do it. That brick is going to settle, those bricks are going to land. But if I sort of open up my backpack and realize I don't have it, or my teachers like and take out your math homework, and I'm going What do you mean math homework? I don't what huh? We had math homework. Then the teacher can get in quick enough and say, Brendan, it's cool. Don't worry about it. You haven't missed an assignment all year. This is no big deal. And then I don't get that break. People with ADHD fail a lot more than people who don't have ADHD, because of the nature of the executive function challenges that they have and the dopamine challenges that they have. I know because I have ADHD, and I've done all that failing, and I'll do some more later. But as a result, we get more walls and they tend to be bigger. And other bricks that can land in your wall of awful or things like worry, and guilt and shame. The difference being that guilt is I feel like I made a mistake. And shame is I feel like I

am the mistake. And if the reason I made the mistake is because I have ADHD, it's really hard to keep the guilt from becoming shame. And in fact, shame plays such a prominent role in this that a lot of people mislabel it as the wall of shame, which is not what it is, is the wall of awful. But one of the ways that I kind of tease guilt and shame apart is I just think sometimes the ADHD wins and that helps me stop, new battle, I can pick up the fight again and try to not try to not mess up whatever I just messed up a second time around.

Debbie: As you were explaining that a question popped into my mind that, is this something that our kids, even kids who pretend as if they don't care, like, I don't care about this, I'm not interested, this doesn't bother me. Is this going on kind of beneath the surface? In your experience?

Brendan: Yeah, yeah, eventually it becomes surface level. And when it's going on below the surface, maybe you don't have a wall of awful for that because you haven't noticed that it's a deal yet. It's not bothering you yet. So that might be a thing that you failed that infrequently enough, or with such low stakes, that you just don't have a wall for it. Or you might just not have the self awareness, which is totally an ADHD thing. completely fair. Once you're noticing it, that wall matters and it's pretty significant. And it's not like we have a wall of awful for doing anything. Ever, right? You get walls of awful for specific tasks. So I might have a wall of awful for math, I might think that I'm bad at math, right? I might have a wall of awful for homework. If I have to do math homework, I'm tangling with two walls of awful in order to get that done, or in order to get that started, I should say, because what's happening is when we'd go to start this task, there's this huge wall of emotions. That's what the wall of awful is. It's an emotional barrier that prevents us from initiating tasks and taking risks. And we have to navigate that emotional barrier before we can begin whatever it is that we want to do. And in order to do that, we have to know that it's there. We have to have some language, to think about it and to talk about it. And that's the other thing that the wall of awful is, is it's a language model and a thinking model for how to navigate that barrier of negative emotions and negative associations. That keeps us from initiating a task.

Debbie: Yeah, it's such a great idea. For. So that's why I love the visual of it. And you did two great videos with Jessica McCabe from How to ADHD about this. And I really recommend people listening to share this with your kids if they're willing to check it out. It's really powerful. It totally resonates. So can you talk a little bit about then how, you know, you said you have to be aware that it's there and tap into the emotions behind it? What are some of the ways that our kids can overcome this wall or at least learn how to navigate it?

Brendan: Yeah, so there's five ways that people try to get past the wall of awful. Two of them don't work. And one of the ways that works is not healthy. And the other two are pretty, pretty good. The first way that people try to get past the wall of awful is they just stare at it, which is not in any way interacting with anything. So you're not getting past the wall because you're just staring at it. The second way that people try to get past it is they try to go around it but it's a metaphor, and it's infinitely wide and you're never going around it, you're just going to wind up

doing something else and get distracted. Right? The first way that people try to get past the wall of awful that works, but is unhealthy is they have smashed through the wall of awful, right? They just get angry. Fine! I'll do my math!

Debbie: Right. Sounds familiar. Yes.

Brendan: Yeah, that's kind of Hulk smashing outwardly at the person who's asking you to do this task. The other thing that can happen is they can Hulk smash inwardly, which we might not always notice. And that's when like the hoodie goes up, right? And they're like, why do I suck? Why can't I just do this? They're kind of beating themselves up, and we may or may not know that that's happening. And both of those Hulk smashes are damaging relationships. And when I turned them off, and I'm like, fine, I'll do my math. God. Shut up. I'm damaging that relationship with my mom, because I'm not treating her with kindness. And sometimes mom Hulk smashes right back at me because she's got a wall off of her arguing with me, but that math homework has to get done. And now we're in a battle. And when I kind of flip the hooded sweatshirt up and get all forlorn and emotional and anxious or angry or whatever, then I'm damaging my self esteem I'm damaging my relationship with myself because I'm just like, why do I suck? What's wrong with me? Why can I do this, and that's not healthy either. So those three Hulk smash, go around and stare at it, our fight flight and freeze. It's the body's stress response. It's how we typically respond to anxiety and inducing events. It's the amygdala hijack stuff. The two that work to get us past the wall of awful that are healthier are climbing it and putting a door in it. And climbing It looks a lot like staring at it. And that's what makes this tricky from the outside for mom and dad to be observing their kid for example, or for mom to be observing dad or dad to be observing mom. I might look like I'm staring at the wall because I'm sitting there with all of my papers out and my binder whatever, my iPad on, but I'm not doing anything. So it looks like I'm staring at it, when really what I'm doing is all of this internal emotional work to get started on the task. And it's hard to tell, are they getting started? Or are they staring and one way that we can tell that they're getting started is when your kid takes forever to get their binders out of their backpack. I don't know if you've experienced this before. And it's like, they have to do homework, it takes them 20 minutes to get the binders out. They're making this slow, gradual forward momentum towards the homework, but it's really slow, much slower than it needs to be. That's because there's emotional work happening that we can't see. And getting the binder out of the backpack for 20 minutes, is the physical manifestation of that emotional work. And we can speed that up by talking to them about it. If our kids know what the wall of awful is, because they've watched those videos or heard this podcast. You can just say, Hey, are you climbing the wall of awful and hopefully the kids like yeah, I think I am. Yeah, okay, cool. How can I help? Do you need to get your snack? Do you need a hug? Do you just need me to put the binders on the table for you? What's helpful? But often what parents do is they grab those binders, drop them on the table and sometimes slam them on the table, flip them open and say, Get to work, get going. And now you've asked the kid to get to the other side of the wall of awful right now. And the only option they have available to them is to Hulk Smash. So they beat themselves up or yell at you, in order to get to the other side of this emotional barrier that they

probably don't even know is there. So climbing it is just a lot of internal emotional work. And there's ways you can make that easier with ADHD friendly strategies and mindfulness practices and that kind of stuff. But it's internal work. The other option is to put a door in it. And that's just changing your emotional state, typically with external stuff. So if I change my location of where I'm working, I might be able to get stuff done more effectively, which in COVID is hard. I used to go to coffee shops or local supermarket snack bars and stuff in order to be somewhere that had Wi Fi so I could do the things that were hard for me to do. That's not really a choice anymore for me. So I've had to find other options, and I have cleared my sunroom out so I can go into the sunroom. I go outside into my yard to do things. winter's going to be hard when I don't really have those options anymore. But one option is to go somewhere else. Another choice is to listen to music that you find motivating, right? We've all had that conversation where we're like, I need to go to the gym, I need to go to the gym, I need to go to the gym, and you're not going to the gym. But then like Eye of the Tiger comes on, or Metallica or your motivational music of choice, and you can't do push ups fast enough. Music is great for making us feel motivated. And so I advise using that. Podcasts too. If you're struggling to get started or you're having a challenge with your kid, there's podcasts to listen to that can help you get going, listen to a podcast that is people being successful at what they want to do. And that might help you feel motivated to start your task. listen to a podcast like this one, it might help you approach your challenge with your kid from a new angle and also just approach it in general, because you're being motivated by the ideas and thoughts being shared.

Debbie: So I love both of those strategies. And that was so interesting when you describe climbing the wall. And that what they're doing when they're staring at the backpack or they're just moving like molasses to kind of get going with something that we think should go much quicker is that they're transitioning, they're processing, and that we really rob them of that process if we don't recognize what's going on. So I just thought that was really fascinating. And a reminder that so much of this always comes back to our expectations of what we think things should look like and how productive our kids should be or how quickly They should be able to do something. So it's a good reminder to just slow down. And I'm wondering between the door and the climbing, you know, is the idea that we want our kids to know that both of these options are available to them and help them understand what works best for them. Like, do you personally use a blend of these?

Brendan: I do. Yeah, I use a blend. Because if you rely entirely on the door, you're not doing the hard work of getting past. The challenges that are internal, right? Like you can make the wall easier to climb by doing internal work, and you can almost eliminate them. But you have to do that internal work in order to make that happen. And if all you ever do is put a door in it, you're gonna burn yourself out because you're just shifting your emotional state too quickly, and there's still this dread and this anxiety around doing your math homework, mowing the lawn, making that phone call That you haven't really processed. So you don't want to always put a door in it. And you also don't always have the option of climbing it. Because climbing it takes a while. And sometimes you just need to start. And you

don't really have the luxury of doing a whole lot of internal work. So you kind of have to use a blend, and you have to be aware of when you're climbing versus when you're staring, which can be hard to tell sometimes. And even when you're putting a door on it versus when you're going around it because I don't think I do that parallel yet. But I want to really quickly. Your kid might say, I have work to do, but can I watch an episode of *Bob's Burgers* first. And they're trying to put a door in it, right? They're trying to like, visit their friends Bob and Tina and laugh a little bit and then be ready to do their homework. But it turns into going around it and getting distracted because one episode of *Bob's Burgers* turns into two which turns into three and now you haven't done your homework and you're doing something else entirely. And that's executive functioning challenges. Right. That's a lack of an obvious choice point for when the *Bob's Burger* episode is done because Netflix just starts the next one. That's a roll of dopamine that you're not aware you're caught up in. And you're not utilizing that dopamine that *Bob's Burgers* episode one got you. You're just applying it to episode 234. And you're not disconnecting and working on that ancient Mesopotamia diorama that you need to do. And so, we need to externalize that part of the dopamine motivational role of the door by setting timers, putting sticky notes, giving mom and dad permission to interrupt this episode after the first episode, turning off the autoplay of the next show, whatever the case may be.

Debbie: Awesome, and I just have to ask, has there been a diorama about Mesopotamia that's happened in your household?

Brendan: No, there hasn't.

Debbie: Okay, I'm just checking. Okay. So you mentioned COVID in that last bit And I do want to talk about what I mentioned before I hit record that Seth and I had done a very lengthy back to school prep and prioritizing workshop last night and the night before we recorded this. And obviously, just parents are at wit's end, specifically around the remote learning with their ADHD kids, kids who really struggle to attend to zoom classes, or you know, to just manage their relationship with tech, when they're schooling at home and parents are trying to work at home. And so, as you've described you, you've got all the bases covered: your former teacher, Principal, your parent, you have ADHD, you've got kids at home, you've got the whole thing. So please give us some wisdom. What are some of the best practices or advice you have for parents to set not just their kids up for success, but really maintain the integrity of their relationship with their kids throughout this process.

Brendan: Yeah. And I'm glad that's where you started. Because our relationships with our kids matter more than anything else. Yes, education matters. But my relationship with my kid matters more than their education, because I can't help them with their education if I don't have a good relationship with them. So we want to prioritize relationships over all of the other things. But that doesn't mean that the other stuff always takes a backseat. We don't want to be like a pushover parent who's just just like me, and you don't have to do school. That's not a plan either. But we don't want to fight so hard that we're doing long term damage to our relationships with our kids. We want to pay attention to where that line is.

And that's going to vary family to family. So I can't really provide too many clear examples of what that looks like. But just if you're getting a really hard pushback, respect that really hard push back and use the wall of awful. Maybe as a model to talk about it, when they need to take a break, let them take a break. But make sure that before that break happens, you're getting a commitment from them that they're going to do whatever it is that they're not doing, at some later point in the day, or maybe the next day or over the weekend, or whatever the case may be. We don't want it to be a break and you don't ever have to do that thing that was bothering you, you still have to do the thing. You just get to take a break from it now. So that prioritizing a relationship is critical. After that, the virtual stuff, it's kind of broad, so we're going to poke around and play around in various areas. I want to start with the emotional side of it because I think that this is something that's not getting looked at enough. And a lot of the anxiety that kids are experiencing when they have to do virtual school is getting chalked up to school resistance. And I don't think that's what it is. I think that when a kid sits down to do their virtual school what happens is, they get reminded that things are not normal anymore. They get reminded that we're living in the pandemic. And things are scary and uncertain, and unclear and inconsistent. And I think that brings about a very real existential dread that the kid can't even name or identify if they wanted to half the time. And that's the anxiety that they're dealing with. It's not anxiety that's pointed at like English or teacher or math or something like that. Everything is weird, and I'm sitting at my kitchen table, going to school, and that's not how this is supposed to be. And it's, I don't like it. I think that's a huge amount of the anxiety that's coming up. And as parents, we have to be mindful of that and do our best to put the right language to it. Because if we say to our kids, Hey, I know you just don't like school, but you have to do it. Then, assuming things return to normal at some point and kids are going physically to school again. That day. It is going to stay. And it's going to turn into more school resistance. But if we look at it in terms of, I know that things are weird right now, and I know you don't love doing virtual school because it reminds you that things are weird. But we still have to do this. It's still it's still part of your job as a kid or whatever, however you want to put it, advocating for them, and validating those emotions will help them initiate that task that has otherwise been so hard for them to initiate. Mm hmm. That's really,

Debbie: I haven't heard it put quite that way in terms of a cause of the anxiety. I mean, I hear from a lot of parents that their kids are just shutting down, especially even younger kids that they are just refusing to do the same classes and, and I really love your explanation for why that might be going on.

Brendan: Yeah, I don't think it's any different than when I go to BJ's and I have a little tiny anxiety attack and I have to talk myself into going into the supermarket. And I don't know why it's only BJ's. I can go to every other supermarket. It doesn't happen from Yon, which is how I know it's all in my head. But I mean BJ's was the supermarket that I went to the most when this stuff started to hit. And I think it's just a carryover. I have a wall of awful for going to BJ's now, but I'm not afraid to go to BJ's. It's, it's a reminder that things are different. And that's the part that causes the anxiety. When is this going to end? Am I going to be safe? Am I going to bring COVID home to my family, that kind of stuff? I think our kids are going

through something similar. It's not the same, but it's that same kind of initial anxiety response is not connected to what you're doing. It's connected to things being different. Mm hmm. Um, another thing to do is schedule a time for your kids to use their iPad screen, whatever, video game stuff as video games every single day, because if they know and only like an hour like not like All day, I set clear boundaries around it have it be scheduled because if they know that they're going to get to use their iPad at four o'clock, for video games, they're going to be less inclined to try to use it for video games at 1130 when they should be learning about ancient Mesopotamia right, because they already know they're going to get to do it. So having a slot scheduled where they can do the video game stuff will facilitate them attending school virtually a little more easily.

Debbie: How involved do you recommend parents are? At what point do we just raise the white flag and say I can't monitor your every move on this tech for school, what is that balance?

Brendan: I don't think you ever raise the white flag. I don't think that's a plan. I think what you do is you change your strategy. And that's by framing what tech is and what the job of tech is. Because tech has more than one job. And that's part of the problem. When I have my phone out, right, because a phone is just a mini iPad, I might be checking the weather, I might be looking at Facebook stuff for my business, I might be looking at Facebook stuff Personally, I might be texting a friend, I might be looking up the definition of a word or whether or not this person was in a movie that I think they were in. I might be watching YouTube videos that have nothing to do with anything. I might be watching YouTube videos that are teaching me how to fix the grill. I can be using this for all kinds of different reasons. And the same is true for our kids, iPads and computers in general. So we needed find the purpose behind the screens. And the way I look at it is are you using this screen as a tool or for entertainment. And let's start by splitting that hair. If my kid is on their computer, on their iPad on their phone, using it as a tool, I don't have any issue with that. If they're using it for entertainment, and depending on when and how long they've been using it, I might have some concerns. If they'd been playing video games for five hours, that's not healthy, go outside. If they're supposed to be doing schoolwork, and instead they're watching YouTube videos, that's not good either. I'm concerned about how you're making decisions or prioritizing things or avoiding distractions. But if we don't find terms and you don't have to pick tools versus entertainment, you can do something else if it's better for you. But if we don't find tools and terms that allow us to differentiate between the different ways we're using our screens, If we don't share those with our kids, they're not going to be able to provide the judgment to their lives that we need them to be able to bring. So giving them some ideas around how to partition out the ways they use their screens, will help them make their own judgment and put their own priorities on it, and hopefully, use it more as a tool and less for entertainment. When that's what needs to be happening.

Debbie: Yeah, I like what you said. I mean, that someone I've had on the show and who's a friend Devorah Heitner. She wrote the book *Screenwise* and she is a big advocate of that idea of mentorship over monitoring. And I do think it's

important, and we're getting a lot of opportunities right now to have these conversations and help our kids better understand, so that they can eventually know how to manage their own screen time. And again, as you said, not all screen time is created equal. Not all the same.

Brendan: And we also have to recognize that our kids are using their screens for social interaction pretty heavily. And that is using it as a tool. It might feel like entertainment to us because they're talking about nonsense and we don't understand and it can't matter, surely. But it totally matters. It's completely important.

Debbie: Yeah, for sure. Now more than ever. So I have one more question for you. I'm just wondering we have a lot of differently wired parents who listen to this show a lot of parents with ADHD who are trying to juggle this and so just wondering for you, personally, you know, you've got twins in the house, you work you're you know, you're doing this juggle like everybody else. So what hacks Have you had as a parent with ADHD that have helped you navigate this time?

Brendan: Um, before I go into the hacks, I want to say that it's really hard. I just want to start there and validate that one for everybody who's listening and to further Me, I guess, because it's really easy to listen to a podcast and get the impression that like, well, this expert knows what they're doing and I should do what I'm doing. And now I feel bad because I'm not doing it, right? Everybody is doing a bad job at just about everything right now. It's just the way it is. We're living through a global traumatic event. It's a pandemic. It's scary and hard and overwhelming. And you're right, you're not a good enough friend and you're not a good enough parent and you're not a good enough business owner, employee, whatever. And you're not a good enough son, husband, brother, sister, daughter, wife. Your house is not clean enough. your yard is not clean enough. You're not eating right. All of that is true. And all of that is okay. Because half of that was true before COVID hit. And so you're like, it's not that much worse. It's just trying to judge yourself based on the past standards, and those don't apply anymore. And me too, I don't feel like I'm a good enough friend, I don't feel like I'm a good enough family member. I don't feel like I'm good enough in so many ways. And that is why I've had to come up with hacks and figure things out. And some of my hacks are exactly this just being like, Hey, I'm not good enough. And I need to accept that I can't beat myself up with it. If you're hearing the tone of my voice, I'm not saying I'm not good enough. It's not like this dramatic thing. It's this very Matter of fact, I'm just not good enough. Because I can't be, it's not realistic. So that's one of my hacks -- accepting that I'm just not going to do a good enough job. And that's a way to keep the bricks from landing in my wall of awful is by accepting where I'm at, and letting myself be there. So what I've had to do is look at my values. And what matters to me more than the other stuff like prioritizing my value. And honestly I use Maslow's hierarchy of needs to do this. That's kind of how my values fall a lot of the time. So Maslow goes like, sort of biological needs. So like food, sleep, that kind of stuff. After that comes safety. That's where we all are right now, by the way is those biological needs and safety. That's where we are as low as cousin, global pandemic. Mm hmm. One tear up from that is connection and relationships and love and belongingness and that kind of stuff.

After that comes accomplishment, which is where school lives and we're like, I don't know being the most amazing ADHD coach in the world lives or something. And then comes self-fulfillment like personal being an amazing guy. So the way I've prioritized stuff is my family first. So my kids are home like I'm it's summer camp dad this year, and I do a lot of stuff with my kids. I'm going to be homeschooling them this year because I can, really because my wife makes enough money that my business can take a hit. And we can still stay in our house and have enough food to eat and that kind of stuff. So I've had to look at things in terms of how to prioritize stuff in that way, and figure out where can I loosen up? And where do I need to focus my attention, my kids when my business has taken a backseat to that, which means I'm just not making as much money and I'm not taking advantage of opportunities that are coming up right now, which means my business is not going to grow as much for the foreseeable future. And that's okay. It's more important to me, that my kids get the time they need with me because like, they're 11 they're in that like, they're not quite independent yet. And with the regression of covid that all kids are experiencing, like they need me a little more than they used to even although that's starting to go away now.

And that those are my hacks is they're kind of really big picture hacks. In terms of what can I loosen up on, and everyone's got different things they can loosen up on, some parents have to work and they've had to loosen up on the way that they parent their kids, there's some parents who are just getting stricter with what they're doing, because they don't have time to negotiate anymore, or the bandwidth or energy to negotiate. So there's a lot more like, sit down, eat your dinner, go read and go to bed. And that's okay, if that's where you are. Just, again, as much as you can make sure that relationship is, is staying healthy, even if it's a little more of a short, short tempered mom or dad. I don't want to come across like I'm being critical of anyone, not everybody is in the position that I'm in, I'm really lucky to be able to do things the way I am. So that those are some hacks. I also, in general, the way I approach the world is I do a lot of pre mortem stuff where you sort of like, what am I doing? Why is it going to go horribly wrong? And you figure that out before you do the thing and then you work backwards and solve those problems in advance. So I typically approach the world that way. And I also spend a lot of time paying attention to my resources in terms of people and time and items and that kind of stuff. And how can I use those resources to more effectively do whatever it is that I have to do. An example of that is I've got friends in schools, and I'm going to homeschool for hopefully only a year and they'll go back to school in seventh grade. I just emailed some teachers I know and was like, Hey, can I steal some of your curriculum? And most of them said, Yes. So I have more curriculum than some random parent off the street, because I know teachers who are willing to share, in some cases, their entire year long curriculum with me. So like, I don't have to redesign social studies because I've got that. And I was an English teacher. So, I taught sixth grade, which is the grade my kids are going into. So I have that. Those sorts of strategies and those sorts of tactics are also hacks, like what are your resources and how can you take advantage of them.

Debbie: That's great. Thank you for that, that answer and just keeping it real about where we all are. Because everything you said I think resonates whether you're

parenting with ADHD or not like this is this challenging what we're experiencing. And my very wise, brilliant friend Michele Borba reminds me that this is the time to lower the bar. And that's something I'm trying to just remind every parent to do right now. So thank you for that.

Brendan: And also, people with ADHD like this is maybe a strength that we have in this situation, depending on how we look at stuff. But as a person with ADHD, like I live life on hardmode all the time, and I'm not really sure what's going on most of the time. There's all kinds of surprises that happen because I forgot about things or something like that. So the uncertainty of COVID-19 and the not being good enough of COVID-19. That's a world I lived in before COVID-19. And depending on how I navigate that, there's days when I feel that Go off even more. And I feel like I'm that much more not good enough. That makes it harder. But there's other times that I'm like, Yeah, but I'm used to not being good enough. So this is like and whatever, it's no big deal. So sometimes the neurodiversity of ADHD can be an advantage in times of hardship.

Debbie: Great point. Well, on that note, I would love it if we could just wrap up by hearing where people can connect with you. You have a podcast and I know that you have a parent group and just give us a little more insight on where people can connect.

Brendan: Yeah, so they can find me at adhdessentials.com or thewallofawful.com will get you there too. And the podcast is ADHD Essentials. And I run online parent coaching groups for parents affected by ADHD either because they have it, their kids have it, or both. They run for eight weeks. There's a lot of curriculum planning that happens in it because I was a teacher, so that every week has a theme and you can find those on my podcast. The next round will be starting September 21. So if this is before September 21, there's probably openings hopefully, and I'd love to hear from people. They can also email me at Brendan at ADHD_essentials.com.

Debbie: Awesome. And listeners as always, I will have links to all of those resources as well as the videos from Jessica McCabe's YouTube channel on the Wall of Awful for you guys to check out and Brendan, thank you first of all for just going all over the place with me today. We touched on so many topics but such a timely conversation for so many parents right now and I really appreciate it.

Brendan: Yeah, thank you for having me and I have ADHD so going all over the place is kind of my jam.

RESOURCES MENTIONED:

- [Brendan Mahan's ADHD Essentials Website](#)
- [ADHD Essentials Podcast](#)
- Email Brendan: brendan@ADHDessentials.com
- [Jessica McCabe's How to ADHD YouTube Channel](#)
- [Wall of Awful videos with Jessica McCabe \(How to ADHD\)](#)
- [Seth Perler](#)
- [What Should We Be Doing, Anyway?](#) (workshop with Debbie and Seth Perler)
- [Screenwise: Helping Kids Thrive \(and Survive\) in Their Digital World](#) by Dr. Devorah Heitner
- [Devorah Heitner on Helping Kids Thrive in Their Digital World](#) (Tilt Podcast episode)

