ADHD CONNECT — EPISODE 33 GUIDE

Why They Argue — And What to Do About It

Building self-awareness around argumentative patterns, skills of acceptance, and the ability to collaborate rather than explode

Dr. Tish TAYLOR, Ph.D

Emotional Regulation | **Perception and Perspective**

WHAT THIS EPISODE COVERS

Excessive arguing in children with ADHD rarely happens for one reason. Dr. Tish walks through how to help children become more self-aware about when they argue, what's triggering it, and what they're actually hoping to get — and how that self-awareness becomes the foundation for learning to accept, collaborate, and regulate rather than escalate. She also introduces the problem-size scale and the "helpful coach" tool for managing the moment when emotions start climbing.

FOUR COMMON TRIGGERS — WHAT'S USUALLY UNDERNEATH IT

It feels unfair	They want something they can't have right now	They don't like how someone reacted to them	Something is hard
Something was given to a sibling or peer that they didn't get. The comparison feels like an injustice — and arguing is how they protest it.	Not a fairness issue — a timing or logistics issue. But it feels the same from the inside, so the response is the same.	A tone, a dismissal, a correction that landed wrong. The arguing is a response to the interaction, not the underlying content.	The task, the transition, the expectation feels too difficult. Arguing becomes a way to avoid or delay engaging with the hard thing.

THE SELF-AWARENESS CONVERSATION — DRILLING DOWN

This work happens during a calm time — not in the middle of an argument. The goal is to help the child see their own pattern: when does it happen, what sets it off, and what do they actually gain? Once they can name it, they have something to work with.

Questions to explore together

- ☐ When does arguing tend to happen — at home, at school, with certain people?
- ☐ What's usually going on right before it starts?
- ☐ Which category fits most often — unfair, can't have it, didn't like the reaction, something's hard?
- ☐ What are you hoping will happen when you argue?
- ☐ What actually happens — does it work?

Building perspective

- ☐ How do you think your parent/teacher experienced that moment?
- ☐ Did they think they were being unfair — or was there a reason?
- ☐ If you have an older sibling, what's the difference in what they're allowed? Why might that be?
- ☐ If it's a "can't have it right now" situation — is there a reason, even if it's frustrating?

☐ How does the other person tend to feel afterward?	☐ What's one thing you could say instead of arguing that might actually work better?

THE PROBLEM-SIZE SCALE

Dr. Tish uses a simple but powerful check: is this a small, medium, or big problem? And — importantly — is your reaction matching the actual size of the problem? A popsicle at a baseball game is a small problem. It doesn't warrant a medium or large reaction. Helping children calibrate their response to the actual size of the issue is a core acceptance skill.

The scale

- ☐ Small problem — something I can handle myself, deal with, or let go
- ☐ Medium problem — worth talking about, but not an eruption
- ☐ Big problem — genuinely serious, worth a strong response

The key question:

Is my reaction matching the size of the problem — or is it bigger than what actually happened?

What to ask in the moment

- ☐ How big is this problem, really?
- ☐ Is not getting a popsicle worth leaving the game?
- ☐ Will this matter tomorrow? Next week?
- ☐ Is there a way to handle this myself?
- ☐ What's the smallest response that would actually work here?

SKILLS OF ACCEPTANCE

Accepting "not right now." When something can't happen in the moment, the skill is learning to tolerate that — and to use communication rather than arguing. "If we can't do this now, could we do it tomorrow?" is a collaborative move. Then accept the answer honestly given.

Accepting "no." How do I accept no for an answer? This is one of the most important acceptance skills Dr. Tish names. It's not about agreeing that the no is fair — it's about learning to cope with it without erupting. That coping is a learnable skill.

Accepting that reasons exist — even when they're frustrating. Almost every "no" or limit comes back to health, wellbeing, safety, or values. Parents are in the middle of something. There's a logistical reason. The older sibling gets that privilege because of age. Helping children understand the reasoning — without requiring them to like it — builds tolerance.

WHEN THE EMOTION IS ALREADY BIG — THE HELPFUL COACH

When emotion is already escalating, the strategies above can't land yet. Dr. Tish introduces the "helpful coach" character — the internal voice that says: step away, take some breaths, calm down before you react. The goal is to stop and think before acting, not to suppress the feeling. Once they're regulated, the communication tools become available.

BY AUDIENCE — YOUR NEXT STEP

EDUCATORS	PARENTS	PROFESSIONALS
→ When a student argues, try to identify the trigger category — unfair, can't have it, reaction, or hard → Use the problem-size scale as a classroom reference — not just for arguing, but for any outsized reaction → Build the calm-time conversation into regular check-ins, not just after incidents	→ Do the self-awareness conversation on a calm day — identify your child's most common trigger category → Practice "if we can't do this now, could we do it tomorrow?" as a scripted alternative to arguing → When an eruption happens over a small problem, name the size: "This feels like a small problem to me — what size does it feel to you?"	→ Use the trigger category framework to help clients map their own arguing pattern → The problem-size scale is an accessible self-monitoring tool for older children and teens → Help clients develop their own "helpful coach" script — what does their internal pause voice sound like?

REFLECT

Think of a child who argues frequently. Which trigger category do you see most often — unfair, can't have it, didn't like the reaction, or something's hard? Does knowing the category change how you respond?

When you're in the middle of an argument with this child, what do you currently do? Is it working — or are you matching their escalation?

What would it look like to build the self-awareness conversation into your regular routine — before the next argument, not after?

WHERE THIS LIVES IN THE CURRICULUM

*This episode connects to two core elements of **ADHD: The Social and Emotional Self***

Emotional Regulation — argumentativeness, frustration tolerance, stopping and thinking before reacting

Perception and Perspective — understanding others' reasoning, situational awareness, building perspective around limits and rules