

childPSYCH News

A newsletter for professionals and parents

We have helped over 5000 children!

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See us in...
Springfield,
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Special points of interest:

- At *childpsych* psychologists who are registered teachers and/or Educational Psychologists are involved in the child's assessment
- To unsubscribe from this newsletter at any time, either email or call *childpsych*

Does martial arts training teach self control?

A common question we are asked by parents, is "will martial arts teach my child self control and self discipline?"

The answer, like most things to do with human behaviour, is not simple. The short answer would be, "yes it can, but it can also do more harm".

Researchers from the University of Bergen in Norway looked at boys participation in "power sports". Power sports was defined as wrestling, martial arts, and boxing. The researchers were interested in whether involvement in these sports led to increases in aggression. Looking at 477 boys between the ages of 11-13, and following them over two years, the researchers found that participating in such sports does increase aggression. Now it could be argued that children higher in aggression tend to select such sports, but this particular research design took that into account. It seems that exposing children to aggressive role models may enhance aggressive impulses.

Of concern is that even if children were to quit the sport, they had already been exposed to an aggressive way of behaving. The effects were most noticeable for sports such as boxing.

However, does this mean sports such as boxing and martial arts are not good for children?

The answer is no. There are a lot of studies that suggest "power sports" can be effective in teaching self control but certain conditions must exist. In particular, the importance of managing self control must be



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emphasised. There is a significant body of research on the effectiveness of martial arts in decreasing violence in youth. In fact the Gentle Warrior Program is a traditional martial arts program taught to students in schools. Research on this program has shown that bullying in schools can be reduced. The program emphasised the psychological, spiritual and non-aggressive aspects of the martial art. Not the aggression and competition that could be emphasised.

The Gentle Warrior Program taught students physical skills, assertiveness and mental skills (e.g. how to relax one's body). Measures were taken of attitudes towards aggression as well the degree to which the students would help another student in need of help (i.e., being bullied). The results suggested that students were now more likely to intervene and help a peer being harassed, were more likely to use means other than physical force to manage a disagreement and were more empathetic.

This last point is important. Empathy means the extent one person can appreciate the thoughts and feelings of another person. The Gentle Warrior program seemed to

be able to develop empathy in students which in turn resulted in less aggression. But what about individual's who are low in empathy?

Well even the use of martial arts with "anti social" adolescents has been shown to reduce aggression. A study who took sixty violent adolescent boys found that after ten weeks, the students were less impulsive, more socially appropriate but not necessarily less violent. This is important to consider as these results suggest that how martial arts is taught to students is paramount. Student's low in empathy can benefit from marital arts training to improve self control BUT how the training is delivered is important.

The importance of the instructor cannot be over emphasised. Research has suggested that an instructor that emphasises self control as well as the defensive nature of the martial art tend to have students who have better self control. More importantly, *traditional* martial arts instruction is better. Traditional is defined as those martial arts that have ancient Taoist/Buddhist origins and philosophies. The word *do* in the name of the martial art is a clue that it may be a traditional form of martial art (though absence of the word does not mean it isn't). *do* refers to a calm and centered mind.

Interestingly, the positive impact of martial arts is less well documented for girls. It may be that martial arts reduces obvious signs of aggression seen in boys (e.g. physical fighting) and not the subtle forms of aggression seen in girls (e.g. alienating a peer from a friendship group).

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Working Memory Training



Working memory is **critical** for **focusing**, appropriately **shutting out distractions**, and for **complex thinking**. Problems with working memory lead to difficulty with attention, expressing ideas on paper by writing, being organised and coping with a lot of information at once. It should come as no surprise then that children with learning disorders, ADHD and autism tend to have problems with working memory.

Working memory is different from "short term memory" which is the ability to remember simple information for brief periods of time (e.g. a phone number or someone's name when you meet them).

Until recently it was not considered to be able to **improve** working memory. Rather individuals with this problem were told to learn skills to

get around it (e.g. use a Pocket Organiser, use computers to write, extra time on exams).

In the last few years neuroscience advances has seen software programs developed to improve working memory. These programs have claimed to actually "repair" working memory. To date the only program that has collected enough research, and published this research in reputable journals, has been **cogmed™**. This has earned cogmed the status of an "**evidence-based intervention**".

cogmed research has suggested that working memory training can improve the frontal lobe (where working memory is located) as well as other brain structures. In addition, use of cogmed with children with ADHD was able to show improved attention and organization and reading comprehension.

For more information on cogmed go to <http://www.cogmed.com/research>

The Effects of Music on Studying

Adolescents often state they learn better with music on. Research has examined whether music is either a hindrance or an aide for studying with mixed results.

Some researchers have argued that requiring the brain to listen to music AND read and comprehend will overload it. Certainly if working memory problems are present this is likely. Yet other researchers have shown that when students listen to music only (no accompanying pictures as seen in music clips) they are able to stay on task. In fact TV seems to be more distracting because of the images. Therefore, many researchers have argued that music is less distracting than TV.

Another study found that playing classical instrumental music helped improve reading comprehension. These researchers found that music improved mood and general alertness.

So does this mean we should let our adolescents listen to their choice of music while they study? The answer seems to be NO.

A recent study allowed adolescents to select their choice of music, while studying. The researchers found that reading comprehension decreased



significantly. However, there were a small number of students who did not suffer a decrease in reading comprehension with music. It appears these students may actually have the cognitive skills to screen out distractions. Obviously if the child has an attention disorder or learning difficulty then they need to study in a quiet environment. The same study also found that girls were more likely than boys to prefer to study while listening to music and were more distractible when music was being played.

These studies suggest adolescents should study without music. In addition, parents need to be aware that girls seem to prefer to study with music but are at greater risk of being distracted. It will be important for parents to monitor their adolescents study habits.



childpsych is offering this evidence-based working memory training program.

The complete program includes:

- Initial interview
- Start-up session
- Five weeks of training with weekly Coach calls
- Wrap-up meeting
- Six month follow-up interview
- Access to the Cogmed Training Web
- Optional Cogmed Extension Training (12 months)

How long does it take?

The cogmed program consists of 25 training sessions of 30-40 minutes each, done over 5 weeks. It is the intensity of this training schedule that is critical to the program's success. The user/family sets the training schedule with the Cogmed Coach, with plenty of flexibility.

Autism Services

childpsych provides a specialist autism clinic focused on assessment and diagnosis and intervention services. Our autism interventions are delivered by psychologists accredited to work with children with autism spectrum disorders.

- ✓ Assessment and diagnosis of autism
- ✓ Management of children with autism to age 18 years
- ✓ Behavioural interventions, social skills, transition to school, treatment of other conditions such as anxiety, depression
- ✓ Special education development classes and remedial teaching classes

childpsych.net.au/autism-services.php