

childPSYCH News

A newsletter for professionals and parents

Inside this issue:

Emotions & Attention 1, 2

Helping Adolescents Make Career Decisions 2

We have moved to
2/606 Sherwood
Rd, Sherwood

Special points of interest:

- We have a NEW learning centre! Call us now for more information
- At *childpsych* only psychologists who are registered teachers and/or Educational Psychologists will write the report on learning difficulties
- To unsubscribe from this newsletter at any time, either email or call *childpsych*

Emotions and Attention

By Philip Gosschalk MAPS, Director of *childpsych*

It is an interesting thought – “do we pay attention to something and feel an emotion, or does our current mood influence what we pay attention to?” This chicken or the egg question is extremely important in helping us understand and treat such conditions as AD/HD, Autism, anxiety and depression.



Understanding the neuroscience

Various parts of the brain are involved in some way with how we feel and express emotion. The frontal lobes are involved in how we direct attention toward something. This means that for us to respond emotionally to something, we need to first notice it and pay attention to it. As you can imagine, if someone experiences a brain injury to their frontal lobe, or has something like AD/HD (where the frontal lobes are usually impaired), then they will have difficulty with managing their emotions and thinking logically. Such an individual may over estimate the level of anger someone is displaying or fail to observe when someone is becoming angry. Take note how problems with attention can affect how someone “judges” a situation. Research has also shown that how intense we express our emotions can be influenced by other parts of our brain and unrelated to attention – some individual’s seem to be “intense” in their emotional expression. Most scientists

How an individual responds to something, and what they respond to reflects differences between individuals

agree that when we hear/see/smell something we direct our attention towards it and then respond accordingly. Sounds pretty simple then? But why do some people respond differently to the same situation?

Individual differences

How an individual responds to something, and what they respond to reflects differences between individuals. What brings about these differences in how we react is a complex interplay between temperament, our experiences and beliefs. An example of how two individuals may respond to the trauma of a bank robbery may help illustrate this. Take a temperamentally anxious child, who has witnessed a violent robbery, they will likely develop a strong anxiety response and start paying attention to signs that a robbery may take place. Such a child may begin to avoid walking on the same side of the street as a bank. Soon this child may begin to look out for other signs a bank robbery may occur and

begin avoiding certain types of individuals who resemble the bank robbers. Alternatively, a child who is not temperamentally anxious may respond to the same bank robbery by becoming anxious but be able to walk past banks and have a less fearful response. So it seems that biological factors such as our temperament, our pre-wired personality if you like, may influence how we respond differently to the same situation.

So this should mean then that two temperamentally anxious individuals should respond in a similar manner to the same bank robbery? However, this is not always the case either as our life experiences have shaped our beliefs. So a temperamentally anxious child who has been raised to be independent may experience less anxiety than a temperamentally anxious child who perhaps has over protective parents. Our beliefs are very important factors in determining how we interpret things in our environment.

The importance of beliefs

Psychologists believe that while our brain is predisposed to pay attention to such things as possible threats (e.g. a sudden noise) in an almost automatic fashion, we also quickly decide if it is worth paying attention to. In determining if it is worth paying attention, depends on our frontal lobes and our current beliefs. So

Continue over...

CHILDPSYCH:PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICE

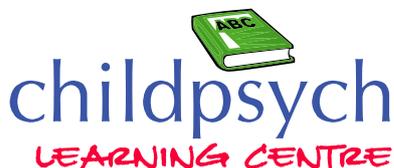
2 / 606 Sherwood Road
Sherwood Q 4075

DIRECTOR: PHILIP O. GOSSCHALK MAPS

Phone: 07 3716 0445
Fax: 07 3379 8965
Email: admin@childpsych.net.au

You maybe able to see
us under Medicare
See our website for more
information

"Take an interest in your adolescent's future and don't think you have to step back. Helping your adolescent to match various jobs to the sort of person they are is the best career decision anyone can make."




Emotions & Attention con't

anxious individuals tend to deliberately look for possible threats to confirm their beliefs that the world is unsafe. For example, a child who worries a lot may listen to the news for proof that the world may be ending. Likewise, a child with AD/HD and the associated problems with the frontal lobes, may begin to experience some anxiety and worry because they are having trouble with thinking logically about their problems (remember that the frontal lobes are involved in thinking logically).

Applying all of this to common childhood problems

Attention problems are a key symptom in certain types of AD/HD as well as a common

symptom in learning problems. In our practice, many children are referred because of behavioural problems and/or problems with attention. A common approach in our practice is to focus on emotions as part of the treatment plan. Helping the child to better understand their own emotions has been shown to reduce frustration in class and in turn improve concentration. However, when we work with children with autism, we assist the child to pay attention to various facial clues so that the child can improve their ability to "read" social situations. We also work with anxious children to encourage them to pay attention to clues that they are safe. Psychologists may also choose to work

on the beliefs of children by using what's called Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) in order to alter a child's beliefs and alter what they pay attention to.

As you can see, whether we work on a child's emotions or attention or both depends on why we are seeing the child. A thorough evaluation by a psychologist is important in developing an appropriate treatment plan. So to answer the original question posed at the start of this article, "do we pay attention to something and feel an emotion, or does our current mood influence what we pay attention to?", the answer is IT DEPENDS!

Helping Adolescents Make Career Decisions

2010 will be an important year for many adolescents who are contemplating entering the big wide world next year. Research shows that adolescents look to their parents for guidance about making future orientated decisions such as choosing a career. So how do parents help their adolescent make wise decisions about their career?

Good career choices are based on two simple things. First, it is important that the adolescent has a good understanding about who they are so that they consider careers that suit their personality. This means you adolescent should have a sense of what their strengths and weaknesses are, their personal qualities, the type of person they would like to be. Where do our adolescents develop such views of themselves? From influential people in their lives such as parents, friends and teachers. It is important that as adults we encourage our adolescents to try new experiences and try things they may think they cannot do. A mean-

ingful part time job, such as where the adolescent has some responsibility and works as part of a team, can be helpful. Make sure they do not do more than about 12 hours a week in this job however or it could impact upon their grades at school.



The second thing that helps with career selection is understanding how the real world works. Adolescents often have a limited understanding of the "world of work". For example, they may not realise all the possible occupations they would be well suited for. Access the website, www.jobguide.dest.gov.au with your adolescent to explore various careers, discuss the possible careers you think

they might be suitable for and *why*. Help them research an occupation they might be interested in by ringing up a person in that industry and conducting a brief interview. Be careful not to do it for them however, they need to take responsibility for themselves. You can encourage them by keeping them on track. For example, "well you write up some questions you can ask, and tomorrow we will find someone in the Yellow Pages and ring them".

Take an interest in your adolescent's future and don't think you have to step back. Helping your adolescent to match various jobs to the sort of person they are is the best career decision anyone can make. So long as you do not force them to pick a particular career path, but remain supportive and encouraging, you will be doing your job as a parent. Even if your adolescent researches a job or tries a job and decides they do not like it, then that is still worthwhile information.

We Now have a Learning Centre to
help children with learning difficulties
www.childpsychlearning.net.au