

Attention Problems and Motivation

Excerpted from *An Introductory Packet on Attention Problems: Interventions and Resources*, The Center for Mental Health in Schools.

Many individuals with learning problems are described not only as learning disabled, but also as hyperactive, distractable, impulsive, behavior disordered, and so forth. Their behavior patterns are seen as interfering with efforts to remedy their learning problems, and the conclusion often is that such interfering behaviors have to be eliminated or minimized in order to pursue instruction. The focus has been on any actions of an individual that compete with instruction.

Besides trying to reduce the frequency of disruptive actions directly, programs have been designed to alter such behavior by improving

- impulse control
- selective attention
- sustained attention and follow-through
- perseverance
- frustration tolerance
- social awareness and skills

Variations in focus derive from the ways in which interfering behaviors are viewed. Some professionals see the problems as a skill deficiency and have tried to improve the situation through instruction. Others see the problem as a matter of control and have addressed it through the use of control techniques. For those children diagnosed as hyperactive or as having attention deficit disorders with hyperactivity, a number of controversial nonpsychoeducational interventions also have been advocated (such as the use of stimulant drugs or special diets to avoid chemical additives in food).

Current work in psychology has brought renewed attention to motivation as a central concept in understanding learning and attention problems. This work is just beginning to find its way into applied fields and programs.

Although motivation has always been a concern to those who work with learning problems, the stress is usually on how to use extrinsic to mobilize the learner and maintain participation. There is a recent emphasis on the relationship of learning problems to deficiencies in intrinsic motivation. The general content focus has been on

- increasing feelings of self-determination
- increasing feelings of competence and expectations of success
- increasing feelings of interpersonal relatedness
- increasing the range of interests and satisfactions related to learning

In response to concerns about deficiencies in intrinsic motivation, remedial activities have been directed at improving

- awareness of personal motives and true capabilities
- learning to set valued and appropriate goals
- learning to value and to make appropriate and satisfying choices
- learning to value and accept responsibility for choice