

ADDRESSING IMPULSIVENESS IN ADHD

Many individuals diagnosed with ADHD have substantial difficulties with impulsiveness. These individuals often have predictable cognitive and characterological features. Cognitively, these individuals are drawn to exciting and stimulating interests and pursuits. Activities that involve a great deal of stimulation and immediate feedback are viewed attractively. Activities involving sustained attention and sustained effort are typically viewed negatively.

Characterologically, individuals with a primarily impulsive style tend to experience emotions rather more intensely than do other individuals. Their emotional status is often quite variable. Combined with their impulsiveness, emotional intensity will often lead to episodic behavioral difficulties.

Regarding effort, these individuals are typically quite good at putting forth a great deal of energy for a short period of time, particularly for tasks that they enjoy. Metaphorically, they are sprinters rather than long-distance runners. When they view activities as fun, they sustain effort well. Once these activities are viewed as work, it is difficult for these individuals to maintain attention and effort.

One difficulty that these individuals have is they tend to have a harder time developing a work ethic than do other individuals. There are probably numerous reasons for this, but one of the most powerful is that these individuals tend to quit or give up on tasks and pursuits as soon as their initial interest decreases. Therefore, they typically do not have as many experiences as do others in which they sustain effort, and this sustaining of effort leads to success.

Some activities that can be helpful for individuals with primarily impulsive inattention include physical/athletic pursuits such as martial arts, swimming, running and dance; and nonathletic activities such as playing a musical instrument. The common and essential element in these activities is repetitive practice beyond the point of comfort.

These individuals are prone to rushing through homework or other demand tasks. Their goal is often to complete the work as quickly as possible so that they may engage in more attractive activities. Creating a study-time approach can be quite helpful with these individuals. Emphasizing effort rather than ultimate product can also be quite helpful.

Children with primarily impulsive inattention are often prone to telling lies. Because they are so focused in the moment, these individuals often do not appreciate the long-term consequences of being untruthful. Ensuring that these children are provided with immediate and consistent consequences for lying is often quite helpful.

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