

Help for Attention and Learning Difficulties

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The last article in this series outlined the availability of new computerized continuous performance testing which can assist in the objective identification of AD/HD (Attention Deficit Disorder with and without hyperactivity). The next logical question then is “What can one do after being diagnosed?” While traditional methods (i.e. psychotherapy, behaviour modification, and academic tutorial) can produce profound positive results, these techniques usually require a fair amount of time before significant change can be observed. One exception is when medication is required. Even then, often a number of trial periods are needed, which can take many weeks before the correct medication and optimal dosage are determined.

Rather than suggesting that there is one single alternative, it makes more sense to consider some combination of the previously mentioned interventions along with newer, more efficient methods. In order to accelerate the remediation process, once particular strengths and weaknesses have been identified, these traditional therapeutic methods can be supplemented with a computerized cognitive training and evaluation system. One such instrument is the Captain’s Log “Complete Computerized Mental Gym”.

Captain’s Log is comprised of 33 computerized cognitive skill exercises designed to facilitate academic progress and occupational success. By developing and/or strengthening individual cognitive performance and learning skills, significant improvement can be achieved by children, adolescents and adults. Research has repeatedly demonstrated the efficacy of cognitive training programs in improving memory, mental processing and reading speed, along with visual-spatial and auditory/visual discrimination skills. Other areas that can be included in the training program are: attention and concentration; eye-hand (visual-motor) coordination; impulse control; mental arithmetic; visual scanning and tracking; planning and organization; and problem-solving/reasoning skills.

A typical training regimen would consist of working with the therapist once or twice a week, but even at less frequent intervals, substantial improvement is usually seen in key areas in just a few sessions - with as much as 30-60% improvement in weaker areas after just one session! What makes this system especially effective is its ability to be customized for each user. Special features include the ability to: modify the level of difficulty (beginner to advanced) and length of task; complete an increased number of trials in a short period of time; add distractions (auditory or visual); along with the relative ease of responding, all of which help to enhance interest and cooperation in the therapeutic process. After each task is completed, immediate feedback is provided by the computer with a comprehensive analysis of success by listing point totals, number of correct responses (accuracy), and average reaction times. The inclusion of a point system makes this program more interesting and motivating for clients since one of the attractions of video games is the chance to improve one’s score. This point system also lends itself to easy charting of results and can simply be incorporated into a behaviour management program, resulting in a comprehensive system for enhancing cognitive skills. Therefore, as a supplement to more traditional methods of remediation, computerized cognitive skills training offers a fast, fun and easy way of developing critical attention and learning skills.

Editor’s note: Richard Glatt is a Provincially Certified Psychoeducational Consultant in private practice who has been providing comprehensive and confidential services for children, adolescents and adult in the Ottawa-Carleton Region since 1985, is an expert in his field, and is widely published. He can be contacted at (613)

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