



## Counseling, Technology Tackle ADHD

By Michael Wade - 10/1/2007  
Little Rock Family Staff

It's like something out of "Star Wars." Can someone use The Force to combat ADHD?

Andy plays games on a computer without ever touching the keyboard or the mouse. He dons a helmet, and with hands and fingers motionless, he flies a jet over mountain tops or constructs a tower by moving blocks.

Should he fidget or lapse in concentration, he loses control over the characters on the screen.

Licensed professional therapist and marriage and family counselor Robert Gerst began working with Andy using NASA-inspired technology called [Play Attention](#). He explains that the no-hands-required action is triggered by Andy's brain waves, picked up by sensors in the helmet. The program's intent is to teach the skill of attention – and much more.

Gerst runs [The Care Center Inc.](#), a nonprofit Christian counseling and therapy facility in Little Rock that provides a full range of counseling services. The Care Center uses cutting-edge technology such as Play Attention to better serve children with ADHD.

"The Care Center started in 1990 in southwest Little Rock and has grown slowly until three years ago when we started to experience dramatic growth," Gerst says. "We grew 256 percent in 2005 and 187 percent in 2006. Not only do we provide cutting-edge services such as Play Attention, but children and adults will find a safe place for counseling; testing; play therapy; and individual, family and group therapy."

In the midst of his parents' divorce, 14-year-old Andy found himself socially insecure and struggling in school. He'd been put on a large dose of Adderall to help him focus in class, but he was still struggling to make C's and he didn't have many friends. Concerned for Andy's well-being, his mom took him to The Care Center.

Gerst discovered that Andy felt "put in the middle" by his parents' divorce but lacked the self-confidence to make his feelings known. Much of this insecurity had been built by continually poor academic performance, which was frustrating for Andy since he considered himself a "bright" individual. No matter how hard he tried, he just couldn't keep his mind from wandering.

"Andy and I did Play Attention twice a week for more than 40 sessions, and his Adderall use went down by half. Before, he had a lot of internal self-distractions, would get lost in video games and had poor social skills. Now his whole social set has improved! Andy is not the isolated loner anymore; he has friends he spends time with, and he made the A/B honor roll last year for the first time."

Though already boasting a successful practice, Gerst was inspired by what he saw and tried this new approach in more challenging venues, such as his charity work in children's homes.

"These kids come out of homes that are massive deficits emotionally," Gerst says. "Nobody has ever told them they were good kids; no one has ever given much in the way of praise at all."

Gerst dealt with kids who had experienced all kinds of complicating factors like drug use, family death, physical abuse and alcoholism, resulting in a variety of behavioral issues. Many of these children were extremely impulsive and oppositional and manifested distracting habits that were detrimental to their ability to focus and concentrate, which also affected fellow classmates.

As before, however, Gerst's hard work paid off:

“We’ve seen kids who were struggling to get grades end up on honor roll, and we’ve seen kids who had serious behavior problems actually learn the mental self-discipline to help control their behavior.”

On changes his students see with Play Attention, Gerst says:

“That’s one of the big reinforcements with it, because they can actually see their own progress. And when we’re talking about kids who come from a social deficit, they’ve never seen themselves progress at anything.”

Having given away over half a million dollars in services last year, Gerst and his staff have garnered the attention of state government officials.

“Our senator here is trying to get some funding for The Care Center, and one of the things that impressed his staff when they came to see us was that we’re using the latest technology in treating people, and that was Play Attention.”

And what of Andy, the first participant in Gerst’s skill-building approach?

“Andy got his learner’s permit to drive over the summer,” Gerst says. “He did not want to drive before simply because he was afraid; the responsibility was overwhelming to him. Getting those A’s and B’s really changed his confidence and self-image!”

*The Care Center is located at 820 W. Sixth St., Suite 200, in Little Rock. For more information on The Care Center, please contact Robert Gerst at 244-9950 or visit [The-care-center.org](http://The-care-center.org). For more information on Play Attention, call (800) 788-6786 or visit [Playattention.com](http://Playattention.com).*