

# REBOOTING THE BRAIN CAN ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER BE UNLEARNED WITH A VIDEO GAME? SOME EXPERTS ARE SEEING SUCCESS WITH A NEW PROGRAM.

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Think it and it happens.

Jordan Dube plays games on a computer without ever touching the keyboard or the mouse. The 16-year-old dons a helmet, and with hands and fingers motionless, he plunges divers beneath the sea or constructs a tower by moving blocks.

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

Rohn Kessler, educator and psychologist who likes to call himself Jordan's coach, explains the look-Ma-no-hands action is triggered by Jordan's brain waves, picked up by sensors in the helmet.

The intent of this educational program, called Play Attention, is to teach concentration. "What we're doing," says Kessler, "is rewiring or retraining the brain."

Nine years ago, Jordan was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder.

Articulate, funny and, in an awkward teenage way, charming, the Boca Raton youth is also excessively perceptive. And that's the problem.

"I get distracted," he says, eyes sweeping the room he's just entered. For no particular reason, he seems intent on absorbing every detail, every item on walls, desktop and floor. "I try to process my surroundings too quickly," he says.

Thanks to Play Attention, Jordan is controlling the impulse, curbing his fidgeting and focusing his attention better these days. "He's gained more ability to focus on tasks he didn't want to do," says his mother, Jeri. "He has skills he can call upon now. He learned coping mechanisms that work for him."

The program, developed by former teacher Peter Freer, founder of Unique Logic & Technology of Asheville, N.C., is based on technology used to train astronauts and Air Force pilots.

Kessler, who has used the program for four years now, says 90 percent of clients who complete the training show significant improvement in memory, attention span and the ability to listen and process information.

"It's a success-based program," says Kessler, who rewards his young clients with small toys.

Kids with ADD and ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) are usually intense, sensitive, easily frustrated and smart, says Kessler, president of Thinking Pays Inc., of Boca Raton. But they have problems that cause them to miss information.

As a result, they lose interest in school, fall behind and suffer frustration and poor self-esteem. "That's the downward cycle," says Kessler, whose company uses the latest discoveries in neuroscience and computer technology to help people learn better.

Jordan, who took the training four years ago, says, "I remember my mom screaming at me for doing badly in school. I was trying, but I couldn't concentrate."

"There were anomalies," says his mom. "He was very bright, but he wasn't performing. There were these disconnects."

These days, says Jordan, "I'm really confident about my capabilities. Back then [before the training] I thought, 'I'm never going to be able to do anything.'"

Attention is a learned skill. It's not something genetically fixed, says Kessler. "With 40 to 60 hours of training, you can change a kid's life."

Neytz haChochma School ESE, of Miami, has seen similar results. The Hebrew day school, whose students are "behaviorally and emotionally challenged," purchased the Play Attention program two years ago with a grant from The Children's Trust Foundation of Miami- Dade County. It is one of five therapies in the school's curriculum.

"Play Attention is the educational form of neuro feedback," says academic director Dolly Aizenman. "It's based on operant conditioning. That means it is pure training of behaviors encouraged by reward."

Twice a week, for up to 25 minutes at a time, kids sit at the computer to make frogs jump, eagles fly and blocks move -- simply with their mind.

At first, some kids become noticeably frustrated with the program, banging on the keys because characters aren't responding.

The therapist, who sits next to the child, taking notes, reminds the child that the frog plays only as long as they keep your eyes focused on him.

"A good therapist will make the child feel good, will tell the child, 'You did great,'" says Aizenman. And while progress may initially be slow, it is always rewarded.

The school credits Play Attention with helping to improve focus and concentration, short-term memory and, ultimately, grades.

Kids with short-term memory deficiency get lost when confronted with multi-step instructions, Aizenman says. "A teacher says, 'Open your math workbook to Page 24 and start doing the problems.' That's three steps. By the time the teacher gets to the word problems, the kid's forgotten which book to open."

Play Attention helps remedy this problem.

While Play Attention is just one of several therapies used at the school, Aizenman says it's a valuable tool for helping youngsters change behavior and achieve success

One mother who brought her son to the after-school program, where Play Attention also is used, told Aizenman the boy no longer was being kicked out of class for misbehavior. And most amazing, she noted: He could sit through and pass his fourth-grade FCAT. At the end of the year, he got a B for the first time in language arts.

"Once someone has gone through the entire Play Attention program," says Aizenman, "the results stay. It's like learning to ride a bike."

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**[Illustration]**

PHOTO; Caption: REWIRING: Rohn Kessler looks on while Jordan Dube, 16, demonstrates the Play Attention computer program and helmet. Staff photo/John L. White

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