Promising Practices

The WhyTry Program

by Mark Katz, Ph.D.

Parents, educators, health care providers and well-informed consumers are finding creative ways to address the needs of those who struggle with AD/HD. In each issue of *Attention!*® magazine, we highlight one innovative program, model or practice and pass on appropriate contacts so that you can implement similar efforts in your community.

FOR SOME, life's daily pressures and challenges feel insurmountable and no matter how hard they try, things never seem to get any better. Children and teenagers affected by attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), learning disabilities and related challenges may begin to ask, "Why even try?" For clinicians, school counselors, special education teachers and others working with kids who feel this way, the *WhyTry Program* may help.

The brainchild of Christian Moore, L.C.S.W., a successful clinician from Orem, Utah, who also struggled with life-long learning challenges, the program is composed of 10 visual analogies (pictures) that correspond to 10 problems or challenges often encountered by students who learn differently.

Reinforced by a series of learning activities and music, visual analogies show students how to reframe these 10 problems or challenges in a hopeful new light. They include the following: (1) how to turn life's challenges and frustrations into positive motivation, (2) how to handle ups and downs effectively, (3) how to change the negative ways others perceive or label you by letting your strengths emerge through your actions and behaviors, (4) how to use positive coping mechanisms and stop using unhealthy ones, (5) how to prevent your peers from holding you down, (6) how to overcome hurdles and start to treat mistakes as learning experiences, (7) how to use desire, time and effort to meet challenges, (8) how to self-discipline yourself to be stronger in the face of challenging situations, (9) how to connect with others to help you achieve your goals and overcome obstacles, and, (10) how to see life as something much more meaningful than your current problems and challenges.

All lessons and activities relate back to the central question, *why try in life?* And more specifically, why try in life when challenges and pressures feel overwhelming and insurmountable? Students learn to see that creative solutions to difficult problems really exist and that by choosing these solutions, new freedoms emerge, self respect grows, more opportunities appear and motivation to succeed increases.

Unlike many traditional therapeutic interventions that weigh heavily upon linguistic or sequential processing skills, the *WhyTry Program* draws heavily upon multisensory teaching strategies, emphasizing visual spatial and simultaneous processing skills, "modalities," says Christian Moore, "through which many children and teenagers learn best."

In use in over 500 school districts, mental health centers and correctional facilities in 46 states, Canada and Australia, the *WhyTry Program* is also gaining the attention of researchers interested in empirically validated practices that can increase motivation among reluctant learners, including those with AD/HD and learning disabilities. While studies are limited, program developers point to preliminary findings showing a variety of positive outcomes, such as reduced truancy, improved academic functioning and increased graduation rates.

Anecdotally, a number of clinicians, school counselors, special education teachers and school administrators have also attested to the program's success in motivating hard-to-reach children and teens. The program is adaptable to both one-on-one and group situations and appears most suitable to students 12 years of age and older.

Those looking for a way to help struggling children and teenagers see life's challenges in a new light may want to learn more about the *WhyTry Program.* You can do so by logging onto their Web site (**www.whytry.org**). Visitors to the Web site can also download illustrations of the program's 10 visual analogies. Those interested in learning more about existing research related to the program's effectiveness can call the *WhyTry* organization at (801) 724-9879 and speak with a program representative. ■

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