

ATTENTION & MEMORY IN KIDS



It's easy to label kids as being either good or bad with memory and attention, but that's harmful to the child and disrespects their unique strengths. "ADD is not a syndrome," said Philippe Ernewein. The label ADD "doesn't consider the complexity of each kid, but instead lumps them into one big category." A more truthful assessment of a child's abilities takes into consideration the different components of memory and attention and recognizes that, where there are weaknesses, there are strengths as well.

At PIN's December presentation, Mark Twarogowski and Phillippe Ernewein of Denver Academy spoke about recent breakthroughs in understanding attention and memory. By looking at the underlying parts of attention and memory, parents can better understand why their children struggle and which strategies will help.

"Attention and memory are different today than when we grew up," said Twarogowski. "We believe they're evolving, and that they've changed significantly in the last few decades." Short term memory holds onto an idea for about 20 seconds, and also consists of *active working memory*, which enables us to remember ideas while we're actively using them in a task. Long term memory is divided into episodic memory (memory of personal events), semantic/declarative memory (remembering facts), and procedural memory (knowing second-nature skills like driving). "Parents need to be specific with their kids," said Twarogowski. "You may be good with episodic memory, but weaker with procedural memory." By gaining a clearer understanding, parents can encourage their kids about their strengths while seeking targeted strategies for areas of weakness.

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Strategies That Help Ernewein cautioned parents not to make attention a moral issue by blaming kids for things they might not be able to control. He then described tips that can help with memory. Citing

ideas from the book *Make It Stick* by Peter C. Brown, Ernewein explained, "Attention must be intentional. It has to hurt a little. Learning that's easy is like writing in the sand: quickly gone," he said. Ernewein recommended the Cornell Note-taking System as a great help for studying, as well as mnemonic devices, i.e., memorizing by creating a sentence from the first letter of a string of words. He also spoke about "cover and remember" techniques as a far better approach than simply reading through textbooks or notes. For example, "Flash cards work," he said, emphasizing that studying from hard copy (paper) as opposed to screens makes information stick better in our brains.

The Effect of Screen-Time "Parents today wonder whether being on the internet, TV, iPads, etc. is having an impact on attention and memory," offered Twarogowski. "I think it does. This generation of kids think they're multitasking, but there's really no such thing as that; they're just rapidly shifting back and forth from one thing to another," he said. "I believe there's evolution happening in people's brains—that our brains are being rewired," he said, adding that "[Screen time] damages our ability to stay focused on a single thing."

For more information and helpful tools in dealing with learning and attention issues, visit www.understood.org/en. The speakers also recommend the books *The Road to Character* by David Brooks, and *The Seven Sins of Memory* by Daniel Schacter, as well as the PBS Frontline documentary, *Digital Nation: Life on the Virtual Frontier*, which is available online. Download the podcast at www.PINccsd.org.

Next at PIN: Join us on **1/5** to hear Superintendent Dr. Harry Bull moderate a panel of former CCSD students about alternatives to the traditional 4-year college track in **Thinking Outside the College Box**. Ron Peterson from Career and Technical Education (CTE) will also give an overview of programming and opportunities in: automotive, aviation, business, culinary, consumer & family, engineering & robotics. Representatives will be available from community organizations and the military. *By Bobbie Turner, PIN Publicity.*