

Welcome to *Hidden Sparks Without Walls*. We will be starting shortly...

To alleviate background noise and ensure a quiet session, your phones have been automatically muted.

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- Select “**All Participants**” if you would like everyone to see your message. Select “**All Panelists**” if you would like only the presenter and facilitator to see your message.
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ABOUT HIDDEN SPARKS

Hidden Sparks is a non-profit whose purpose is to help children with learning differences reach their full potential in school and life. Hidden Sparks develops and supports professional development programs for Jewish day schools to help increase understanding and support for teaching to diverse learners.

Guided by a philosophy that helping schools meet the needs of children with learning and behavioral differences will ultimately benefit all students, Hidden Sparks' programs combine professional development in learning and positive behavioral support, guided classroom observation and one on one coaching.

*Since inception, Hidden Sparks has trained **190 coaches** in **65 Jewish day schools** in the New York Metro area, Baltimore, MD, Boca Raton, FL, and Chicago, IL, and 3 Israeli cities (Jerusalem, Ramle, Ra'anana).*



Our Guest: Claire Wurtzel

Claire Wurtzel, Co-Educational Director of Hidden Sparks, recently retired from the faculty of the American Museum of Natural History. In her previous position she was the Director of Faculty Development for the Churchill School and Center in New York. Prior to that, Ms. Wurtzel was the Director of Faculty Development for the New York City Schools Attuned initiative for All Kinds of Minds, where she oversaw Schools Attuned courses, mentor training and facilitator training for over 400 New York City schools, and has worked to adapt the Schools Attuned professional development program for Jewish day schools in the US and Israel. Ms. Wurtzel was also on the faculty of Bank St. College for 18 years. Most recently, she and her husband, Bill Wurtzel, co-authored the book, *Funny Food: 365 Fun, Healthy, Silly, Creative Breakfasts*, and have been running workshops in New York City schools to improve children's eating habits.

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Overview of the Session

Tonight's webinar will address the role of attention on a child's learning, relating to others and managing daily life.

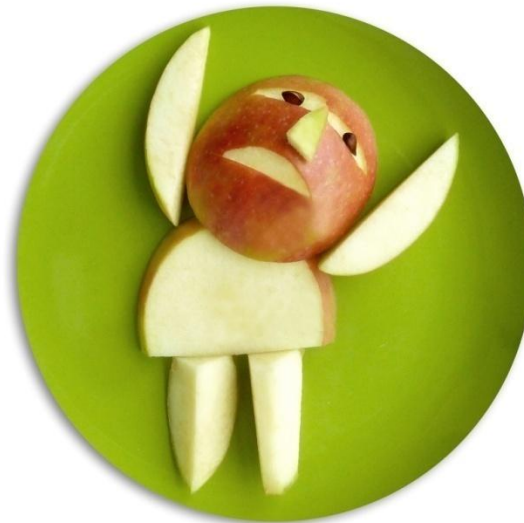
It will speak to the emotional toll of attention challenges and strategies to support the child.

Session Goals

- To encourage the use of descriptive words to describe behaviors instead of judgmental words or labels.**
- To refine your knowledge of the different functions of attention and provide appropriate strategies**
- To build awareness of ways to reach win-win situations at home and school that empower children to find success**
- To help children understand their strengths and challenges so that they can actively participate in creating their plan for success**

Our Role is to support children who struggles with attention

Teachers and parents are often confused and frustrated by children who seem very capable, are intelligent and yet, have difficulty getting started, concentrating, or following through on tasks.



These children need to hear you say that you know they are intelligent, have challenges with their attention and you are there to help.

- Nightly arguments about chores and homework can lead to chaos for the family.
- We tell them to “get to work” -they want to, but they can’t always look, listen or do the right thing at the right time.
- You are not alone. 11% of US children have been diagnosed with attention issues.

What are your attention challenges?

Are you good at managing your time?

Are you able to concentrate well on most tasks, even if there is a lot going on in your environment?

Do you ever say things without thinking through the possible consequences of your words?

What kinds of tasks are hard for you to stay focused?

Intelligence and Attention Issues

You can see from our own attention challenges that these problems have nothing to do with intelligence.

It has to do with how our brains are wired. And, it's not anyone's fault!

The Attention Control Systems

Attention Controls

Attention is not a single phenomenon. It is made up of three main functions:

- 1. Mental energy**
- 2. Processing**
- 3. Production**

Each control system has different functions. A person may have difficulty in just one function or all three. It is important to match the strategy to the function in need of support.

Mental Energy

Mental energy includes:

- Maintaining a steady flow of energy to complete tasks, to learn and control behavior
- Having the ability to regulate alertness and not tire easily.
- Anxiety or weak ability to multitask empty the energy tank too quickly

What helps?

- Switch activities, or work with a partner to keep up the energy level
- Take breaks and exercise.

Processing includes:

- Absorbing and filtering incoming information including relevant details
- Using incoming information to connect to prior knowledge and to trigger new ideas. Some children can't stop and get lost in the ideas- called cognitive activation.
- Some children lose focus and are easily distracted. They hear sounds that others filter out automatically.

What helps?

- Color-coding key ideas on the board and in written material is helpful.

Production:

- Previewing possible outcomes before acting
- Not jumping to do the first thing that comes to mind- but to inhibit that impulse and think first.
- One needs to prioritize and know how to select the most important things to do first.
- Self-monitoring work and not rushing through.

The emotional toll of attention challenges

- Many children with attention struggles feel that they are bad. Many have a lot of anxiety about themselves. On the one hand they know they're intelligent, but they also feel stupid.
- They need to learn to understand themselves.
- They need help. It's like offering a person in a wheel chair a ramp. The support allows them to function normally.

“ Why is everyone angry at me?”

“Why can't I get my work done?”

- Some kids can't fall asleep because they can't shut down their minds. Then, they can't wake up in the morning. Not a helpful cycle.
- They may need help to recognize and acknowledge their fears. It is the first step in developing the capacity to cope with them.
- Many children who were hyperactive as youngsters calm down physically when they get older, but report that they feel a business of ideas. It feels like there are multiple TV channels going on at once internally. The problem has gone undercover- but is still there.

Small immediate rewards

- MRI's on students with attention challenges show that some are not wired to be sensitive to distant rewards as opposed to immediate rewards.
- They need small rewards along the way to stay focused.
- You might look at an assignment with them “How about reading four pages and then you can play.”
- They may have trouble staying motivated if they have to do too much at one time. They also lose their mental energy.
- Video games provide continuous motivation. When you finish a math problem all you get is another math problem.

Emotional aspects of attention

- Until 1976 emotions were considered a part of attention and then it was separated in the psychiatric manuals (DSM).
- However, emotional and attention problems have an impact on one another. They may not be two separate issues.
- If you can't get your work done you will be frustrated and may have a hard time regulating your emotions.
- Mental imaging can help. Help the child create a new image- something happy. When the child is frustrated or angry teach them to count to 10 and go to their "happy place".

Relationships

- Many children with attention issues act like younger children.
- They are delayed in maturity. We need to understand and treat them in a way that is appropriate for their emotional age.
- Kids who are impulsive have trouble making and keeping friends. They are quick to get angry and annoyed at kids reject them.
- Imagine how that feels.

Parent and teacher support

- How do you respond when your child gets distracted and doesn't finish a task?
- We may get frustrated and offer unhelpful opinions or use judgmental labels.
- Sometimes kids who need help are too ashamed to ask, or don't know how to ask.
- Hold on to the power of possibility and optimism; an important way to move toward a win-win situation is be careful what you say.
- Do not humiliate or blame the child; learn not to misinterpret their responses or behavior.

- Remember that your child was born a certain way.
- It's not your fault.
- You didn't cause their problems, **but you can help handle it.**
- The goal is for the child and the parent to be in a win/win situation.

Ways to help your child engage in work toward reaching a goal.

- Allow the child to take breaks and move around.
- Do a few minutes of exercise before going back to the task.
- Exercise helps if they don't have sufficient energy or if they have too much energy.



- Many kids with attention issues have time blindness. Time is too abstract they can't see it or feel it.
- Use a timer or analog clock-the moving hand makes abstract time visible. Children with time management issues struggle because their internal clocks are broken. For long-term work use day planners or make charts of work to be done.
- Build in time for exercise or rest. Use post-its as reminders. They extend memory.

- Regular checking is a good support- if it is done with care.
- Have the child evaluate his/her attention after a work period.
- Stage the work so the child does not become overwhelmed.
 - An ex.: Don't give 3 instructions at once. "Take out the trash, give the dog water and start your homework". Break down the homework as well. "What about doing two problems and after dinner and doing two more?"
 - Giving advance warning- such as: "Please listen carefully because there are two things you need to remember to do after school".

- Changing the environment, a healthy mix of pressure, structure and consistency are also valuable strategies.
- Sometimes children do better if someone is in the room when they are doing homework. It helps them start and sustain their work. A gentle touch may help them refocus.



- Children who are impulsive may need to form mental images of how things played out in the past. Remind them to visualize what happened last time they did the same thing. Developing hindsight will help them develop foresight.
- They need to hear their own voice in their head helping them to think before they act.
- Model how you do self-talk:
 - “ I don’t think I’ll tell Sara that her haircut is ugly.”*
 - “If she asks I’ll tell her I liked her last haircut better.”*

- Remember that being optimistic in the face of your child's learning challenges helps the most.
- Be on their side.
- Let the child know that the two of you will be doing a scientific experiment to see what helps.
- The first thing you try might not work.
- There is no magic- keep trying until you get it right.
- Sometimes just sitting next to a child while they're working is an effective strategy. It helps them start and sustain their work.

- Treasure their strengths. Whenever possible use their strengths and interests to support their challenges.
- For children who are impulsive - involve them in making predictions, and analyzing problems that arise at home.
- If prioritizing is a weak area have them plan a family day with you. Think aloud about the list of things you could do and have them decide with your support, which activities must be done immediately.

Keep in Mind:

- Many children with attention issues grow up and marry organized people.
- Many choose jobs that allow movement and flexible hours that match their learning profiles.

Takeaways

- Share something you've learned about yourself.
- One thing you can add or change to support your child.

References

Publications:

Russell Barkley - You Tube videos on attention and medication

Thomas Brown - “Smart But Stuck: Emotions in Teens and Adults with ADHD” Jossey-Bass 2014

Mel Levine - “A Mind at A Time” Simon & Schuster 2002

Organizations:

CHADD-Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder. chadd.org

Understood: <https://www.understood.org>

Upcoming Hidden Sparks Without Walls Sessions

4/5/16	<i>For Parents and Teachers</i> Dyslexia 101: Clarifying the facts and Dispelling the Myths - Karen Kruger
5/18/16	<i>For Teachers</i> Being a Sensory Smart Teacher: Helping Students with Sensory Challenge – Chaye Lamm Warburg

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Hidden Sparks
to your school or city, please contact us:
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