



HOT • ISSUES

This edition of *Hot Issues* focuses on the implications of special needs youths for fire-setter intervention. If you've worked with young people for any length of time, you'll recognize the kids described in this issue. They're the ones who can't sit still for an interview or educational session. They're the ones who just don't "get it," even though you're using the same methods and materials that have usually worked with kids before. They're the ones who act before (or without) thinking. They're the ones who represent the biggest challenge you face when dealing with juvenile firesetters.

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Portrait of a special needs youth

by Robert Gitelson, LCSW
Marion County Mental Health

Johnny is a seven-year-old boy who, even as a small infant could never sit still. As he grew, he showed an extreme hardheaded



streak and could throw wild temper tantrums. When the toddler years arrived, he demonstrated the knack for getting in everything and into trouble. On one occasion, he was caught trying to light matches in his bedroom closet. When asked why he was doing it, he replied, "I don't know." There were several other times that he needed a reminder not to touch matches.

Through all of this, his parents were thrilled that Johnny seemed to be such a happy, highly intelligent child. His kindergarten teacher thought he was simply charming and tended to look past his moments of distractibility and forgetfulness. She noted there were many times he ended up playing on his own because other kids thought he was too rough.

First grade was not as easy; Johnny's new teacher immediately labeled him a behavior problem and criticized his every move. She even went so far as to tell his parents that Johnny was immature and irresponsible and that they were not helping things.

The parents began working with the school vice principal to help Johnny with his behavior problems. Things went from bad to worse as the fall went on and Johnny began to hate school more and more. He cried daily and begged his parents not to send him back. He began to fail and had no friends. He often complained that he was missing recess and breaks, which he was often late returning from because he had gotten into trouble. On one occasion, Johnny's parents received a phone call from the school counselor that Johnny had been caught with matches and a pocketknife in his jeans pocket.

Putting learning styles to work in intervention

Effective interventionists recognize that kids learn best when material is presented in ways that accommodate the youth's learning style. Some youths are visual learners who learn through seeing; others are auditory learners who learn through hearing; still others are tactile/kinesthetic learners who learn through moving, doing and touching.

If you have a small fire safety group, it's safe to assume that the kids in it don't all learn in the same way. Therefore, it's ALWAYS a good idea to present a lesson using as many learning channels as possible: show them, tell them and have them do something. Develop a bag of educational tricks which includes different ways to present the same material. If a lesson isn't working, change your style of approach.

For visual learners, include activities such as reading; watching demonstrations or videos; handouts such as pictures, charts and graphs; drawing and painting; using color to highlight and organize; multimedia, including the computer and videos; written directions and post-it notes with instructions.

For auditory learners, include activities such as making presentations and participating in discussions; having them restate what was just taught in the lesson; and include word games. Auditory learners may be distracted

by noise, will respond well to spoken directions, and may need to "talk it out" in order to understand a lesson.

For tactile/kinesthetic learners include activities such as experiments and hands-on project-oriented lessons—murals, diagrams and models. Other ideas are group activities such as role play, dramatization and cooperative games. These "wiggly" kids will benefit from frequent study breaks and will suffer through seat work.

Special needs youths, such as the ones discussed in this edition of *Hot Issues*, will arrive in your class with a preferred learning style AND a processing deficit. If you know that the youth is in special education, you can contact his teacher for help with tailoring your lessons to accommodate these special needs. On pages four and five you will find a helpful chart by Irene Pinsonneault listing common processing deficits and teaching strategies to compensate for them.

On pages six and seven, you will find an article by Susan Zenor, a school counselor. Using a curriculum developed in Oregon for curiosity firesetters, she taught fire safety skills to one of her special education classes. It's a great demonstration of how to adjust existing materials to accommodate special needs kids.



Portrait of a special needs youth

Continued from page 1

His attitude was poor and he began seeing only the negatives in any given situation. He seemed to lose his smile and was often irritable, sad or frustrated. After one particularly difficult day, he cried for hours and finally said, "If you make me go back, I'll kill myself. Everyone hates me there."

What are Johnny's presenting symptoms?

- Doesn't sit still
- Poor short term memory
- Poor respect for boundaries
- Poor adaptability skills
- Rough with others
- Poor peer skills, difficulty in making friends or maintaining friendships
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Behaviors out of parental control
- Poor school performance
- Poor concept of time
- Oppositional behaviors
- Firesetting

Robert Gitelson is a member of Oregon's Treatment Strategies Task Force and the Marion County (Oregon) Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Network. He has worked with juvenile firesetters and youths with ADHD for many years.

Overview of ADHD

Characteristics

Poor ability to sustain attention

(organization and focus skills)

- Often fail to give focused attention to tasks, causing careless mistakes on work
- Often has difficulty sustaining attention to tasks
- Often does not seem to listen when spoken to
- Often does not follow through on instruction (finish projects, school work, chores—not due to noncompliance or lack of understanding)
- Often has difficulty organizing tasks
- Often avoids, dislikes, or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental focus
- Often loses (misplaces) things
- Often forgetful in daily activities

Impulsivity

(control and gratification skills, overstimulation)

- Acting before thinking
- Often blurts out answers before questions are completed
- Often struggles to wait for their turn
- Often interrupts or intrudes on others

Hyperactivity

(motor skills)

- Often “on the go” or acts as if “motor always running”
- Often fidgets with hands, feet, or squirms
- Often leaves seat during times remaining in seat is expected
- Often runs about or climbs excessively (in inappropriate situations)
- Often has difficulty in playing quietly
- Often talks excessively—“motor mouth”

Social functioning

(significant impairment relating with others)

- Poor awareness of social cues

Neurochemical issue occurring within the brain

(prefrontal lobe region, executive brain functions)

- 1999 study found increased levels of the dopamine transporter in the brains of ADHD adults compared to non-ADHD adults
- A number of imaging studies have indicated that the prefrontal cortex of the brain may be underactive in those with ADHD when compared to those without ADHD

From Fidgety Phil to ADHD*

1863 - Fidgety Phil

1902 - Defective moral control

1920s (early) - Restlessness syndrome

1920s-'30s - Postencephalic behavior disorder

1940s - Brain-injured child

1950s - Minimal brain damage

1960s-'70s - Minimal brain dysfunction

1960s - Hyperactive child syndrome or hyperkinetic reaction of childhood

1980 - Attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity

1987 - Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and undifferentiated attention deficit disorder

1994 - Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, three subtypes: 1) inattentive type, 2) hyperactive-impulsive type, 3) combined type

*Previous diagnostic terms used for modern ADHD

Associated issues or issues which mimic ADHD

- Oppositional/defiant behavior
- Aggression/antisocial behavior or conduct disorder
- Learning disabilities
- Academic underachievement
- Poor peer relationships
- Fine motor or handwriting delays
- Speech language delays
- Sleep disturbances
- Enuresis or bed-wetting
- Depression and anxiety (PTSD and other types)
- Bipolar disorder
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Tourette's syndrome
- Pervasive developmental disorder
- Central auditory processing disorder and hearing problems
- Fetal alcohol syndrome, FAE, and drug affected children
- Schizophrenia
- Personality disorder

Our thanks to Robert Gitelson, LCSW, for the information on this page. It is derived, in part, from a presentation on ADHD he gave at *A Community Response to Firesetting Youth*, a conference held in Brooks, Oregon, in October of 2001.



Web resources on ADHD

www.aboutourkids.org

www.chadd.org

www.ADDitudemag.com

Helping children think and learn

by Irene Pinsonneault

So, you've read the IEP and it's all there before you—a laundry list of incomprehensible phrases and deficits that have been identified as problems for the child in any educational setting. What now? Well, first you have to understand what these deficits mean in a most practical sense—what is it that the child will not be able to do? Then you have to revisit your lesson plan to make sure you are not going to make demands in areas where he or she is most deficient. For each major deficit in thinking and processing mechanics, there are a number of strategies you can employ to adjust your lesson plan and make it possible for the child to learn the critical fire safety knowledge and skills they are obviously lacking.

Processing deficit & how it will challenge the child	How you can adjust your approach
<p>Auditory sequencing... Confusion with number sequences, lists or lists of directions. Hearing 199 instead of 911.</p>	<p>Provide written instructions to reinforce oral instruction. Use visuals with lectures, encouraging child to refer to the visual reference before completing any list-related task.</p>
<p>Auditory memory... Difficulty remembering what was heard, difficulty remembering important items from a lecture. Spells poorly.</p>	<p>Don't penalize spelling, just correct. Provide written instruction to look back on and encourage the child to check with the written directions first. Provide basic outlines of what is being presented and make frequent stops to realign the student's attention and memory.</p>
<p>Visual sequencing... Problems in using a separate answer sheet. Loses place easily. Problems with reading. Reverses or misreads numbers or letters. Reads words incorrectly. Difficulty with equations.</p>	<p>Keep everything to one page—it's too much to expect the child to track information when part of it is on a separate page. Read directions aloud and talk about what they mean. Write on an overhead, so the words and symbols appear as you are teaching. Color code things written down to help the child categorize and recognize the information. When writing questions on the board, change color every other question to create a clear visual break.</p>
<p>Visual memory... Difficulty remembering what was seen. Reading comprehension. Difficulty with math equations. Poor recall of information that is presented visually.</p>	<p>Avoid having videotapes as your primary teaching tool. Provide handouts that are clearly written and take time to talk through each item. Associate information with action or sound so the child can rely on other avenues for learning and retaining.</p>
<p>Dysgraphia... Inability to form letters correctly. Students cannot read their own writing.</p>	<p>Oral tests. Audio/video projects. Art projects. Use the computer to generate the type or writing.</p>
<p>Visual motor integration... Mechanical problems in test taking. Difficulty copying from board or book. Spaces poorly. Poor written work. Unorganized.</p>	<p>Allow the use of a computer and a tape recorder for lectures. Substitute oral reports. Provide individual written outlines so there are fewer steps to process. Incorporate the development of an outline or plan for every lesson so they can navigate and follow the teacher. Use graph paper. Have a "note check" before the student moves to a new phase of the lesson.</p>
<p>Auditory discrimination... Often seems to misunderstand. Trouble telling differences between similar sounds or words: 17 for 70. Seems to hear but not to listen.</p>	<p>Talk at a slower pace and use a written outline that you refer to and they follow along with. Give one task at a time.</p>
<p>Auditory figure-ground... Trouble hearing sounds over background noises</p>	<p>Sit student near you, shut off the phones and alarms. Use frequent attention cuing ("look over here," "eyes forward, please,")</p>

Visual figure-ground... Trouble seeing an image within competing background. Picking one line of print from another.	Use an index card or marker when reading to blot out distraction of other words. Use cut and paste, image assembly projects that begin with clean, uncluttered visual fields.
Visual discrimination... Seeing the difference between two similar items.	Clearly space words/problems on a page. Use blocking (“cold items on right,” “hot items on left”) to make the distinctions both more apparent and more instructive.
Spatial orientation... Loses materials. Late to class. Difficulty with oral reading. Unorganized homework. Difficulty judging time.	Provide more time for assignments or shorten them. Include time to sit and plan how the child will tackle the assignment or project. Check back on progress frequently. Provide less reading material and more reading time.
Expressive language... Difficulty expressing themselves. May sound “cynical.”	Provide opportunities for written reports. Allow adequate time to respond to questions, or better yet, break out the art supplies and let the child express meaning visually.
Receptive language... Appears to be “not listening.” Incomplete work.	Have students repeat directions back to you for understanding. Have them write down important elements, especially those relating to criteria for success.
Organization... Incomplete assignments. Unorganized notebook/notes.	Provide calendar with weekly plan, include homework. Provide written detailed explanation for projects. For long-term projects have periodic checks (graded or non-graded). Show by example (ready-made notebook). Use a visual tracking system to monitor performance (coloring in a thermometer chart, filling a “job well done” bucket with tokens, etc). Talk through plans and help the child process different outcomes (“but what if...”).

This is one broken record you *should* sound like!

by Irene Pinsonneault

Over the years, I have developed a list of stock phrases that I apply liberally during the course of every lesson. They come in particularly handy when working with children who have learning disabilities. If you consider as you read this list that most learning disabilities involve challenges in perception—hearing, seeing, visualizing, you will discern that most of these comments are designed to help construct a new frame of reference for the student.

- Are we ready now?
- Let’s get started by having everyone listen carefully while I outline the lesson today.
- If we need to get through all this before we finish today, what would be a good place for a break?
- Think it through...what do you need to have with you before we can start?
- Let’s review the checklist and make sure everyone is ready to start...
- Okay, eyes forward, everyone look at me for a minute.
- I’m going to say something important so I want you to listen and then say back to me what I said.
- Poor vision is no excuse for poor manners.
- Calm down, it’s not a race...
- It’s okay if you need to check the outline.
- You’re making real progress on this, look how much you have finished already!
- You’ll have time to correct any mistakes we spot when we review it later.

- I know you don’t know the answer...I haven’t told you the answer...I want you to figure it out for yourself.
- Stay focused, it’s not time for a break yet.
- One step at a time.
- Let’s check that before we move on.
- We have time. Rushing won’t help.
- You can do this, we’ll find a way to make it work.
- I’ll help if you need it. You try it first. I’m right here.
- Stop. Think. What should we do first?
- Well, what is your idea for what we should work on for a project?
- Let’s review what we’ve done so far...
- I want to be sure you understand what the project is, so you explain it to me in your own words.
- Let’s try this another way...
- Are you satisfied with the way it looks now or do you want to work on it a little more before you turn it in?
- We can adjust the project, we can try something different, but simply saying you can’t do it this way won’t change the fact that you will have to do it some way.
- I know you can do it.
- You can choose which of these three activities you want to complete, but take your time and think it through because once you choose you have to finish it and do it right.
- I can see that you are working hard and really trying and I am impressed by that.
- You’re doing great, keep it up!

Irene Pinsonneault is the director of the Massachusetts State-Wide Coalition for Juvenile Firesetter Intervention programs. Thanks, Irene, for sharing these very useful tips from your experience!

Curiosity firesetters and attention deficit disorder— a school counselor's perspective

By Susan Zenor, M.S.

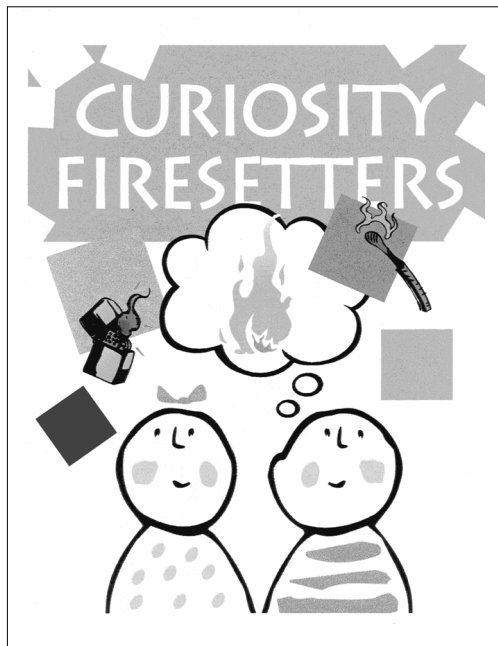
Ed. note: Susan Zenor, a Behavioral Specialist with Willamette ESD in Salem, Oregon, field tested *Curiosity Firesetters* (a three-lesson fire safety curriculum) with some of her students with ADHD. In this article, Susan shares tips on how she tailored the curriculum for these special needs students.

The entire curriculum is published and can be downloaded from the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal Web site at www.sfm.state.or.us. The lessons are: 1) *Tools and Toys and Good and Bad Fires*; 2) *play safe! be safe!* (kit by BIC) and home escape plan; 3) *Clifford the Firehouse Dog*.

Curiosity Firesetters can be a great resource for school counselors and interventionists who are working with students with impulsive behaviors such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Studies have shown that these children are at a much higher risk for fire play.

The three-lesson curriculum allows children to learn through a variety of teaching modes to develop better understanding of fire safety. The first lesson, *Tools and Toys*, gives the instructor the opportunity to interact with the students and gain a better understanding of their level of fire knowledge. This lesson is well set up for students with attention issues, but will take longer than fifteen to twenty minutes if taught in a group setting.

The second lesson can be broken down into smaller lessons and used several times. I found the cards (from



the *play safe! be safe!* kit) for this lesson visually small, making it hard for me to hold their attention. I did not emphasize the cards as much as relying on the video provided to enhance learning. The video was excellent and exciting for my students. They enjoyed sitting on the floor rather than in their desks while watching each section.

The final lesson, *Clifford the Firehouse Dog*, was great, but I added an art lesson. This gave them an opportunity to have some hands-on learning through art, and also provided a better idea of what learning had taken place. For best results, have a variety of drawing or painting materials available to better meet different developmental levels.

If this curriculum is taught to a small group, it is important for the instructor to be aware of the students' unique thinking patterns and listening skills. Many students

with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder are socially immature for their age (sometimes by several years) and will use noises/body gestures when they are excited or feeling anxious. Their short attention span inhibits their ability to listen for long periods of time, and younger children need to be reminded what it means to have good listening skills such as eyes on the teacher, mouths quiet, hands/feet to self, etc. Take time to teach and reteach these skills to set the tone for your lessons.

It is very important to give feedback and positive reinforcement often when teaching students with attention issues. Set expectations that are clear and simple. Pace each lesson so it does not move too quickly, but allows children to take part in conversations that "tell their story" regarding fire and fire tools. I tried to use a puppet and stuffed dog of "Clifford" during my presentation. Unfortunately, my young students became so intrigued with these items that I was not able to keep their attention. I quickly decided to keep Clifford at home the next time. My clever idea did nothing for my students except to distract them.

Students with attention issues will need opportunities to move often. The instructor can have each child come and help with parts of the lesson whenever possible. I involved my students by having them help me do such things as hand out activities and collect homework in order to gain their cooperation and keep them

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Lighters that look like toys...

...how are children supposed to know the difference?

For years, fire safety interventionists have been teaching the difference between tools—including tools for starting fires such as matches and lighters—and toys. Lighters such as the ones pictured here are appearing for sale. They send a confusing message and bring with them a great potential for fires, deaths, and burn injuries involving children.

Be on the lookout for lighters such as these in your area. For more information, visit the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal Web site— www.sfm.state.or.us.

and the Kansas State Fire Marshal's Web site — www.accesskansas.org/firemarshal/



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focused. I reinforced them often with compliments for their behavior and ideas. When one of my students began to become distracted, I complimented the students who were listening by stating what they were doing correctly and this encouraged the other to get back on task. Children want to have positive reinforcement from adults and often do not hear when they are doing well, but always what they are doing wrong. Positive reinforcement builds self-esteem for students and encourages them to follow the rules.

The lessons in *Curiosity Firesetters* are nicely written and well suited for students with different learning needs. Each lesson includes a homework activity that can be done either in the classroom or as homework. The homework lessons are reviewed and shared in class. The curriculum also includes sample parent letters, flyers, and a list of unique characteristics of children in middle childhood. I would definitely recommend that school counselors review this wonderful

curriculum and teach it whenever possible to their at-risk primary students.

Susan Zenor presented on adapting fire education materials for special needs youths at *A Community Response to Firesetting Youth*, a conference held in Brooks, Oregon, in October of 2001.

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Resources

The Bear Facts about home fire safety

The Bear Facts is a twenty-page booklet of home fire safety tips on kitchen fires, burns and scalds, careless smoking, campfires, fireworks, candles, fire survival and insurance issues.

The booklet is the latest addition to a coordinated fire safety campaign developed by the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Unit. The campaign now consists of a poster, refrigerator magnets, a tri-fold brochure, and *The Bear Facts*. Each piece features the original poster bear.

Insurance Information Service of Oregon and Idaho (IISOI) has partnered with the Office of State Fire Marshal to make *Bear Facts* widely available. Ordering information will be up soon on IISOI's Web site www.insuranceoregon.org or contact the printer: beckyw@selectimpressions.com, or phone 1(503)304-3525. The booklet can be viewed in its entirety on the IISOI Web site.

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Hot Issues in electronic format

The most recent four issues of *Hot Issues* are always available on the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal Web site (www.sfm.state.or.us). They are in PDF format and can be downloaded and printed just as they would appear in your mailbox. If you would prefer to receive the newsletter electronically by downloading it from our Web site, drop us a line or give us a call, and ask us to remove your name from the mailing list.

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