

Walcott, C. M., & Landau, S. (2004). The relationship between disinhibition and emotion regulation in boys with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology, 33*, 772-782.

Annotation

Many children with ADHD have seriously disturbed peer relations. One reason they are disliked is because they tend to be emotionally explosive when playing with other children. The purpose of this investigation was to determine if their problems with emotion regulation are due to the fact that they don't know they should keep emotions in check versus they know they should, but are unable to do so because of their disorder. The current study sought to determine if being told to "hide your feelings" in the face of a frustrating experience will be sufficient for boys with ADHD to control their emotions.

Forty-nine 6- to 11-year-old boys served as participants. Twenty-six met criteria for a diagnosis of ADHD, and 23 were same-age symptom-free control participants. Boys with ADHD were seen when they were off medication. Each boy came to the lab and completed the Stop Signal Task (SST), a computer-based measure of impulsivity. Following the SST task, each boy was taken individually to a private room that contained a Lego puzzle and was told that he would be competing against a boy in an adjacent room to see who could complete the Lego puzzle faster. However, there was no other boy in the adjacent room. Instead, a child actor was previously videotaped completing his puzzle, and his success was shown on a TV monitor to the participant. Because of missing pieces, none of the participants was unable to complete his Lego puzzle, but viewed his "competitor" completing his puzzle with ease and boasting about winning the competition. One-half of all participants was told to conceal his emotions, even if frustrated, while the other half was given no such instructions. Immediately following this competition,

boys were again administered the SST to determine if their frustrated feelings would cause them to have more problems with impulse control.

Findings indicated that, during the competition, boys with ADHD who were told to hide their feelings were not able to control their emotions. In contrast, symptom-free boys were significantly more successful at emotion regulation. This suggests that even when children with ADHD know how to “behave properly,” they may be unable to do so. In addition, SST findings indicated that the more upset the boy became during competition, the impulsive he became after it was over. Results suggest that the peer problems experienced by children with ADHD are not related to their inability of “not knowing what to do,” but more likely related to their inability to “do what they know.”