

Game-Based Learning

An Update on LearningWorks for Kids

LIKE MANY OTHER EXPERTS, clinical psychologist Randy Kulman long observed children with ADHD who, despite struggling mightily to pay attention at school, paid attention just fine when playing computer games. He began to consider an idea: What if he could design a program that uses popular computer games and apps to help these children identify and further improve their executive functioning skills, then learn to generalize these skills to their day-to-day school lives?

Kulman's vision became a reality several years back. His program, LearningWorks for Kids (LW4K), uses high-interest computer games and apps to help children strengthen attentional, executive, and thinking skills, then learn to generalize these skills to real-life situations at home and at school.

When first conceived, LW4K began with all parents

first completing an executive functioning questionnaire about their children in order to identify areas of executive weakness. Parents would then receive ongoing "prescriptions" to play selected popular games and activities in an effort to apply the same executive skills that were practiced in the games.

Kulman found, however, that parents were rarely engaged in playing the games with their kids or using the suggested talking points designed to help kids understand how and where to apply executive functioning skills. As he stated at many CHADD conferences, "Games are not enough. While research suggests that video game play may result in small improvements in executive and problem solving skills, the approach at LW4K recognizes that games are best used as a teaching tool to practice executive functioning skills and that more is needed."



A new program: LW4K Live

That is the reason for LW4K's new program—LW4K Live—an ongoing, small-group executive function training program that uses popular video games and apps as teaching tools. The program is intended for children ages 8-15.

LW4K Live instructors teach participants to identify executive function skills in game play and the real world, help them to recognize how and where to use these skills in daily life, and provide fun “homework” for kids and parents to practice these skills. According to Kulman, kids really enjoy playing the games with LW4K instructors and are engaged in learning how to use and apply executive function skills.

All classes are held in virtual classrooms or in private servers and are led by trained instructors knowledgeable in areas of attention and executive function. Instructors begin by introducing fun and popular video games like Minecraft, then apply them to day-to-day executive function, learning, and social-emotional skills. Instructors also introduce children to practical apps that can help with common attentional and executive function trouble spots, such as planning, organization, and managing time. Instructors place particular emphasis on learning ways to apply attentional and executive skills to both home and school.

Says Kulman, “We know how important it is for children with ADHD and executive function challenges to use and practice attentional and executive function strategies, along with helpful tools, at school and at home, where attentional and executive function challenges are most likely to occur, what Drs. Russ Barkley and Sam Goldstein often refer to as *the point of performance*.”

Recent examples of online classes include:

- Building Time Management with Minecraft
- Building Planning with Minecraft – Creative Mode
- Practicing Working Memory: Remembering Information to Solve Problems, Part 1
- Practicing Working Memory: Remembering Information to Solve Problems, Part 2
- Practicing Working Memory Skills by Creating Mnemonic Clues
- Working Memory: Using Working Memory Under Pressure
- Time Management: Building Awareness and Making Lists
- Practicing Time Management: Putting Tasks in Order
- Time Management Skills: Staying Calm Under Time Pressure

Readers may visit <https://learningworksforkids.com/learningworks-live-unlimited> to learn more. (Fees for individual sessions do apply.)

First highlighted in 2013, LW4K has grown substantially. Kulman's creative vision, however, remains unchanged. New

staff and colleagues include James Daley (Educational and Creative Director), Ryan Smith (Gaming Specialist and Live Instructor), Erin Churchill (Live Instructor), Kate Foster (Live Instructor), and Dallas Funk (Game Reviewer and Writer).


LW4K play diet and learning resources

Similar to a well-balanced nutritional food diet, LW4K stresses a healthy play diet. Parents are provided guidelines for establishing a healthy balance of play activities, including when and how to apply appropriate limits on computer games and activities. Parents are also provided guidelines for promoting different forms of play, including active play, creative play, and free play.

LW4K also provides updated articles of interest to both parents and teens. Ongoing articles for parents include “The Science of Play,” “Thinking Skills,” “Academic Skills,” “The Alternative Learner” and “ADHD.” Articles for teens include “Teenager's Guide to Apps and to Improve Slow Processing Speed,” “How Teenagers Can Improve Working Memory and Processing Speed” and “Apps and Tools to Help Teens with Depression.”

Resources for educators and clinicians

The LW4K website also provides articles for teachers and clinicians that cover topics related to our current understanding of attention, learning and executive function challenges among school-age children, and our current understanding of research-based practices for improving and managing these challenges. Ongoing articles also address computer games and activities that draw upon attentional, learning, and executive skills. Educators will find many relevant resources and articles at <https://learningworksforkids.com/welcome-educators>.

Clinicians will find many resources at <https://learningworksforkids.com/clinicians>, including updates on the use of educational technologies designed to enhance the learning process and articles on generalizing attentional and executive skills to both home and school. There are also materials that address ways to help parents understand when computer time becomes excessive and ways to manage its healthy use. 

FOR MORE INFO

To learn more about LW4K, go to <https://learningworksforkids.com/about>. Email Dr. Kulman directly at randy@learningworksforkids.com.

A clinical and consulting psychologist, **Mark Katz, PhD**, is the director of Learning Development Services, an educational, psychological, and neuropsychological center in San Diego, California. As a contributing editor to Attention magazine, he writes the Promising Practices column and serves on the editorial advisory board. He is also a former member of CHADD's professional advisory board and a recipient of the CHADD Hall of Fame Award.