

# Neuro Developmental Conditions (NDC)

## Impulse Control – All Things ADHD Series

By  
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# Outline

- What is 'impulse control'?
- What happens when impulse control fails?
- How much of a problem is 'impulse control' for children with ADHD?
- Why do people with ADHD have problems with impulse control?
- What can we do to help children and young people with ADHD who have impulse control problems?

# Acknowledgement

- The vast majority of ideas in this presentation come from Professor Russell Barkley's work.
- Professor Barkley is a world-leading researcher on ADHD
- See:
  - Barkley (2020) 'Taking Charge of ADHD' (4<sup>th</sup> edition)
  - ADHD lectures (<http://adhdlectures.com>), particularly lectures on 'Executive Functioning'

# What is impulse control?

- Impulse control involves being able to:
  - Stop and think before acting/not reacting too quickly
  - Resist distractions
  - Interrupt and stop yourself when you are doing something that isn't effective
  - Wait to get a reward
- Impulse control is sometimes referred to as 'behavioural inhibition' or 'response inhibition'

# What happens when an individual lacks impulse control?

For children and young people, there are impacts on:

- **Social interaction and relationships**, as a result of e.g. talking over others, butting in during conversation; dominating play; other's frustrations with their learning and behavioural problems (see below)
- **Learning**, as a result of e.g. being frequently distracted (by immediately rewarding activities), not being able to start or stay on task
- **The individual's safety and physical wellbeing**, as a result of e.g. engaging in risky or dangerous behaviours
- **The individual's sense of self/identity**, as a result of repeated failures and sanctions e.g. leading to poor self-esteem

## How much of a problem is 'impulse control' for children with ADHD?

- Hyperactivity-Impulsivity is a core feature of ADHD
- Impulse control problems are part of the picture for most kids with ADHD
- Impulsive actions range from relatively harmless (e.g. butting in when someone is talking; getting up out of one's seat) through to very dangerous/risky (e.g. running across a road without looking)
- Impulsivity, like hyperactivity, sometimes reduces over time

# Why do people with ADHD have problems with impulse control?

- Because the ADHD brain is different
- Specifically, the parts of the brain that allows most people to manage or resist impulses don't function in the same way as they do in people without impulse control problems.
- Indeed, the regions of the brain involved in 'Executive Functioning' don't function in the same way.

# What is Executive Functioning?

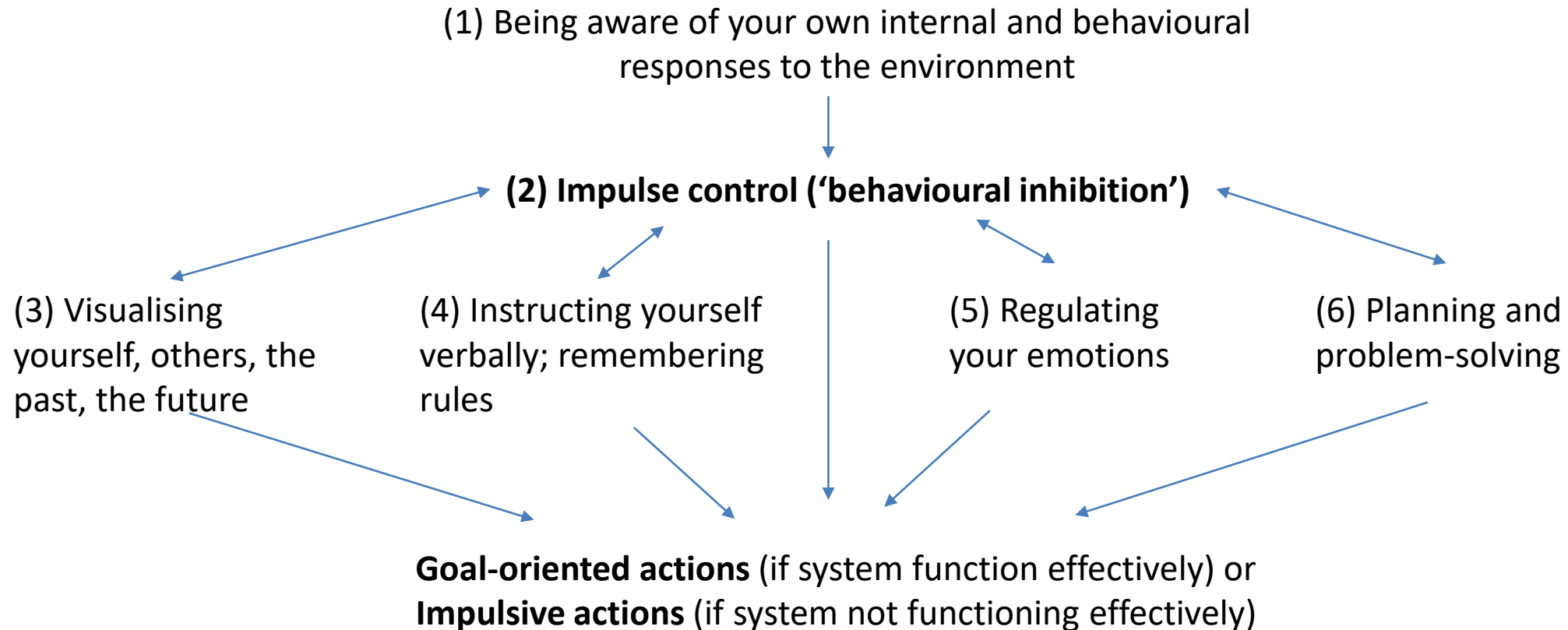
- Executive Functioning can be defined as the use of self-directed actions (**self-regulation**) to identify goals, and to choose, enact and sustain actions over time that enable an individual to achieve these goals (Barkley, 2011).
- The Executive Functioning system develops over a period of approximately 30 years. 6 Executive Functions play a key role in ADHD:
  - (1) Having awareness of your own internal and behavioural responses to the environment (**self-awareness**)
  - (2) Inhibiting a dominant initial (1<sup>st</sup>) response (thoughts, feelings, verbalisations, actions/behaviours), interrupting your behaviour if feedback is showing that it is ineffective, and managing distractions (**behavioural inhibition or impulse control**)
  - (3) Visualising oneself, other people, the past, and the future (**non-verbal working memory**)



# What is Executive Functioning?

- (4) Engaging in self-talk to instruct oneself, remember what others have said, follow rules, organise oneself (**verbal working memory**)
  - (5) Modifying, distracting, and/or replacing initial strong emotions (**emotional regulation**)
  - (6) **Problem-solving and planning** (which involves analysing/deconstructing problems and synthesising/constructing solutions)
- ADHD disrupts the developmental of these self-directed executive functions.

# What is Executive Functioning?



# Why do people with ADHD have problems with impulse control?

- ADHD should be understood as a 'performance' problem not a 'knowledge' problem.
- At the point of performance (i.e. when something needs to be done), people with ADHD cannot put the things they know (such as rules about how to behave) into action without significant external support. This is why you will often hear parents of children with ADHD say "I've told him a thousand times. He knows he's not allowed to do that".

# What can we do to help children and young people with ADHD who have impulse control problems

- Always try to remember that there are underlying neurological (brain) reasons why your child is struggling with impulsivity. Impulsivity is not a choice!
- Teaching skills to children with ADHD is never enough. Help your child “show what they know”.
- Help your child understand that they have a problem with impulse control. See: <https://www.kidsinthehouse.com/special-needs/add-and-adhd/parenting-tips/explaining-adhd-child>

# What can we do to help children and young people with ADHD who have impulse control problems?

- Always provide clear expectations. Then, wherever possible, back this up with support/guidance at the point of performance.
- Manage the environment at the point of performance:
  - Reduce distraction
  - Break up lengthy tasks into smaller tasks
  - Externalise memory (e.g. with signs, lists, cue-cards, charts, posters)
  - Externalise time (e.g. with timers, clocks, counters, phone reminders)
  - Externalise mental problem-solving (e.g. rather than doing arithmetic in head, encourage it to be done physically)

# What can we do to help children and young people with ADHD who have impulse control problems?

- Provide significant **incentives/external motivation to increase desired behaviours** (as people with ADHD often cannot internally motivate themselves to do the things that need to be done when they need to be done):
  - Social and tangible (e.g. tokens, points, marbles) incentives for engaging in desired behaviour
  - Need to provide clear (verbal and written/visual) expectations of what you want to happen
  - Incentives/rewards need to be provided immediately after the desired behaviour
  - Need to provide 2-3 times more incentives than sanctions/'consequences'
- Provide **sanctions/consequences** immediately after behavior you want to change (e.g. Marble jar strategy).

What can we do to help children and young people with ADHD who have impulse control problems?

**Replenish your child's fuel tank so that they are more able to self-regulate!**

What can we do to help children and young people with ADHD who have impulse control problems?

- Ways to replenish your child's fuel tank:
  - Increase rewards
  - Increase experiences of positive emotion
  - Talk about the future and goals much more frequently
  - Provide breaks more frequently
  - Encourage positive self-statements about competence
  - PHYSICAL EXERCISE
  - Provide small amounts of extra glucose (e.g. sips of a sugary drink) during mentally demanding tasks



# Questions

Please prepare questions about Impulse Control ready for the Q & A session 😊

Many thanks