

Metacognition

Why is it never their fault?

I didn't do it. It wasn't me. It was because so and so did such and such to me. One parent said their kid tripped going up the stairs and yelled down at the parent blaming the parent for it. Why can't they admit to their errors?

Sometimes it's not just denial. Some people have poorly developed metacognition, or the ability to think about what you are thinking about. Such a person will have difficulty noticing when they are daydreaming, and difficulty reading a context and behaving in a way that fits. Everyday problem solving will also be affected- trouble noticing your strategy is not working and trying a new one. Noticing errors in your work or whether a job is truly finished or not is also part of metacognition- without it there is no insight. If this was your spouse it would be like being married to someone for whom it was never their fault, always yours, and apologies never get issued- only blame.

An article in the Sept/Oct 2014 edition of Scientific American Mind says that metacognition, or insight into your own thoughts, is the ability to make judgements about your own thoughts, such as is this memory accurate or is my decision appropriate. When a person with a disorder is unaware of his or her impairments, they are said to have anosognosia, and may be unaware of their dementia or disability, their lack of ability to remember or drive a car or need to take medication. Traditionally these people have been viewed as being in denial.

So what can we do? Some medications like Ritalin appear to help. Electrical brain stimulation of the frontal lobe looks promising, but I wouldn't try this at home. Some studies of meditation appear promising in terms of enhancing subjects awareness of their accuracy on a memory test. In the classroom asking students to reflect on how well they had done after a break improved self-awareness, and greater accuracy in insight was triggered by having the subjects identify their own keywords- a few words generated to summarize a topic learned.

Searching for more ways to help a kid improve metacognition? I went to the text Smart but Scattered, (Dawson & Guare 2009) and here's what I found.

1. Give specific praise for important elements done as part of a task.
2. Have them evaluate how they did- How do you think you did? I like the way you got the dirty clothes off your floor. Did you look under the bed?
3. Have them identify what finished looks like.
4. Teach questions they can ask themselves. How am I going to do this? Am I following my plan? How did I do?

To help them evaluate their behavior in social settings and adapt in appropriate ways:

1. Play guessing games to guess facial expressions and body language. Let the kid make faces for you too.
2. Do the same with voice tones.
3. Teach clues to how a person is feeling even when they are hiding their feelings. I like to teach poker in social skills groups and teach how to bluff and read a bluff. Empty your loose change bucket and use some real money to make it interesting.
4. Ask them to guess how their actions will impact others.



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