The Psychology Department is pleased to announce:

Interrelations between Executive Functions and Emotional, Social, Physical Well-Being: How can we Help More Children Thrive?

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ABSTRACT: “Executive functions” include skills like being able to exercise self-control, inhibit distraction to stay focused, mentally play with ideas, flexibly adjust to change or the unexpected, and creatively see anything from different perspectives. These make it possible for us to think before we act, resist temptations, reason and creatively problem-solve, and succeed when faced with difficult challenges. Indeed, they are often more predictive of achievement, health, wealth, and quality of life than IQ and they can override the effects of economic disadvantage.

This talk will invite you to think outside the box and to question some of the things you thought you knew about how to improve thinking, reasoning, or self-control. It will invite you to see the whole person (mind and body, intellect and emotions) as fundamentally interrelated.

You may have noticed that when you’re sad or stressed, you can’t think as clearly or exercise as good self-control. There’s good reason for that. Executive functions depend in large part on a brain region called “prefrontal cortex,” and that brain region is affected first and most severely if you’re sad or stressed. Even extremely mild stress impairs the executive functions of most people. On the other hand though, prefrontal cortex can be key in helping you feel less anxious or stressed.

The single greatest mitigating factor to early adversity or disadvantage, such as childhood stress, is terrific mothering – responsive parenting by a caring, warm adult. The most powerful predictor of success of any early childhood program or adult psychotherapy is that the child or patient feel that his/her teacher or therapist truly cares about him or her.

The most effective activity for improving executive functions is mindfulness practices that involve movement (such as tai chi and taekwondo). The best computerized cognitive training approaches are only third most effective. Across intervention studies, aerobic exercise and resistance training have thus far been found to be the very least effective at improving executive functions, yet the correlational evidence is clear that at all ages those who are most physically active and aerobically fit show the best executive functions.

Thursday, January 13th, 2022 | 4:00 P.M. MST.
Harvill 150 or Zoom: https://arizona.zoom.us/j/82871800093

If you would like to meet with Dr. Diamond after her talk, please contact Lynn Nadel, nadel@arizona.edu to arrange a meeting.

If you have questions about access or to request any disability-related accommodations, please contact Vanessa Noonkester, vnoonkester@arizona.edu