Parenting with the Brain in Mind: Understanding Teen’s Emotions, Relationships, and Decisions

HINSDALE SPEAKER SERIES
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Experience Shapes the Brain

- Brain is shaped by: genes & experience
- Neurons that fire together, wire together

- Where attention goes . . .
## 2 sides of the brain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Left Hemisphere</th>
<th>Right Hemisphere</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Logic</td>
<td>• Senses Emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Linear</td>
<td>• Whole picture-context</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Linguistic</td>
<td>• Random</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Literal</td>
<td>• Non-verbal</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Senses body info.</td>
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LEFT MODE

Right Mode

Can you prove that?
Integration

• Separate things → working together as a functional whole.
  o DIFFERENTIATED (Separate—distinct properties)
  o LINKED (Whole—working together as a coordinated team—HARMONY)
Integration & MENTAL HEALTH

Flexible
Adaptive
Coherent
Energized
Stable

The Whole-Brain Child
Promoting Left/Right Integration:

CONNECT AND REDIRECT
Connect and Redirect

Connect with emotions before redirecting behavior

**CONNECT** with the right:
- nonverbal comfort
  - touch
  - tone of voice
  - facial expressions
  - Empathy
  - pausing

Then **REDIRECT** with the left:
- solutions
- words
- planning
- logical explanations
- boundaries
Building the Staircase of the Mind: Integrating the Upstairs and Downstairs Brain
Middle Prefrontal Cortex

- Regulates body (autonomic nervous system)
- Regulates emotions
- Sound decision making
- Impulse control
- Empathy
- Flexibility
- Personal Insight
- Overcoming fear
- Executive function
- Intuition
- Morality

So what does this have to do with behavior?
Where attention goes, neurons fire. Where neurons fire, they wire.

What can we do to develop the upstairs brain—to integrate it?

- **USE IT**
  - MINDSIGHT TOOLS
  - Discipline!
  - Relationships
Building the upstairs brain

MINDSIGHT
TOOLS
The Marshmallow “Sentence”

Marshmallow Video

- 1972—preschoolers asked to wait 15 minutes
- 1988—(teenagers) the delayers=greater academic, emotional, & social competence, higher SAT scores
- 2011—four decades later—still differences in resisting temptation, mental health, competence, success
- 2011—significant brain differences found (mPFC)
They might need a better strategy
Building the upstairs brain
Two Most Studied Dimensions

- **High limits/boundaries**
  - **Authoritarian**
  - **Authoritative**
- **Low limits/boundaries**
  - **Neglect**
  - **Permissive**

Baumrind, 1965-1991
THE TYPICAL APPROACH=

“extinction thinking”
How do I stop this?

So we ask:
WHAT CONSEQUENCE DO I GIVE?
WHAT PUNISHMENT WILL BE MOST EFFECTIVE?
What is Discipline?

Discipline = Teaching (skill-building)
Replace OUR assumptions with curiosity

- The purpose behind behavior?
- Reinterpret problem behavior as an adaptation
- → What is the meaning of the behavior?
STRUGGLES ➔ OPPORTUNITIES

TOTALLY SHIFT OUR LENS:

Behavior is COMMUNICATION. And, it leads to “discipline”.
The brain is either receptive or reactive.

Inspired by Porges, Ogden, Siegel, Kuypers, Williams & Shellenberger, and Lillas & Turnbull.
discipline approaches

Is the response counter-productive?

Is the response building skills?

*can’t vs. won’t
Common Discipline Practices through a new lens

- Punishment
- Threatening
- Shaming
- Yelling
- Lecturing/Arguing
- Fear-based control
- What else?
The overall approach:

CONNECT AND REDIRECT

WITH KIDS

WITH PARENTS
Why Connect and Redirect?

- It moves people from reactive → receptive
- It works in the moment—
  - Gets them back into **green zone**
- It works in the long run – building the upstairs brain
  - Widens their **green zone**
Try getting below eye-level.

Really.

One of our most important discipline/behavior/brain-changing tools is connection/relationship.

SOOTHE
How do we build skills?

- The role of guilt in reflective dialogues
  - Insight and empathy
- Redirecting/SKILL-BUILDING
  - Reflective dialogues
  - “How can I help?”
  - “I know you know. . . “
Ideas for reflection:

- **DOES YOUR CHILD NEED HELP?**
  - **HOW DO YOU KNOW?**
    - Is your child in the red or blue too much?
    - DURATION
    - INTENSITY
    - FREQUENCY

- Do they feel like you’re on their side?

- Your relationship with them is your most powerful tool.
Building the upstairs brain

RELATIONSHIPS
What is Attachment?

- Organizational system activated by fear/threat.
  - Child → *seeks proximity* (*safe haven*)

- SAFE
- SECURE
- SEEN
- SOOTHE'D

- CONNECTED AND PROTECTED.
- Secure base to explore the world.
Research of HOPE

- IT’S NEVER TOO LATE TO CREATE POSITIVE CHANGE IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CHILD.

- Attachment is not fixed: we know brain is influenced by experience—these parts are still open to change by experience.

- IT ONLY TAKES ONE!!!!
What you do matters.

One last point to remember:

Neuroplasticity

Experience changes the brain

(Hope for kids, and for ourselves.)
Resources

- No-Drama Discipline and The Whole-Brain Child by Siegel and Bryson
- Brainstorm and Parenting from the Inside Out by Siegel
- Why do They Act That Way by Walsh
- The Primal Teen by Strauch
- The Brain that Changes Itself by Doidge
- http://www.pbs.org/frontline “teen brain”
- Lost at School or The Explosive Child by Greene
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