

Brain Based Strategies

The Whole-Brain Child by Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson

A. Integrating the Left and Right Brain

Left + right = clarity and understanding: Help your kids use both the logical left brain and the emotional right brain so they can live balanced, meaningful, and creative lives full of connected relationships.

What You Can Do: Helping your child work from both sides of the brain

- *Connect and Redirect:* When your child is upset, connect first emotionally, right brain to right brain. Then, once your child is more in control and receptive, bring in the left-brain lessons and discipline.
- *Name it to Tame It:* When big, right-brain emotions are raging out of control, help your kids tell the story about what's upsetting them. In doing so, they'll use their left-brain to make sense of their experience and feel more in control.

B. Integrating the Upstairs Brain and the Downstairs Brain

Be patient with the upstairs brain: Unlike the primitive downstairs brain, which is intact at birth, the sophisticated upstairs brain is "under construction" during childhood and adolescence. Plus, it's especially vulnerable to being "hi-jacked" by the downstairs brain, especially in high-emotion situations. So, don't expect your children to make good decisions all the time, or to remain in control of their emotions and actions.

What You Can Do: Helping develop and integrate your child's upstairs brain

- *Engage, don't enrage:* In high-stress situations, engage your child's upstairs brain, rather than triggering the downstairs brain. Don't immediately play the "Because I said so!" card. Instead, appeal to your child's higher-order thinking skills. Ask questions, ask for alternatives, even negotiate.
- *Use it or lose it:* Provide lots of opportunities to exercise the upstairs brain so it can be strong and integrated with the downstairs brain and the body. Play

“What would you do?” games and present them with dilemmas. Avoid rescuing them from difficult decisions.

- *Move it or lose it:* When a child has lost touch with his upstairs brain, a powerful way to help him regain balance is to have him move his body.

C. Integrating Memory

Make the implicit explicit: Help your kids make their implicit memories explicit, so that past experiences don't affect them in debilitating ways. By narrating past events they can look at what's happened and make good, intentional decisions about how to handle those memories.

What You Can Do: Helping your child integrate implicit and explicit memories

- *Use the remote of the mind:* After a painful event, a child may be reluctant to narrate what happened. The internal remote lets her pause, rewind, and fast-forward a story as she tells it, so she can maintain control over how much of it she views.
- *Remember to remember:* Help your kids exercise their memory by giving them lots of practice at remembering. In the car, at the dinner table, wherever: help your kids talk about their experiences, so they can integrate their implicit and explicit memories.

D. Integrating the Many Parts of Myself

The Wheel of awareness: Sometimes our kids get stuck on one particular point on the rim of their wheel of awareness and lose sight of the many other parts of themselves. We need to give them mindsight, so they can be aware of what's happening in their own mind. Then they can choose where they focus their attention, integrating the different aspects of themselves and gaining more control over how they feel.

What You Can Do: Introducing your child to the wheel of awareness: *Let the clouds of emotion roll by:* Remind kids that feelings come and go. Fear and frustration and loneliness are temporary states, not enduring traits.

- *SIFT:* Help your children pay attention to the Sensations, Images, Feelings, and Thoughts within them. They can't understand and change their inner experiences until they are first aware of what's going on inside.
- *Exercise mindsight:* Mindsight practices teach children to calm themselves and focus their attention where they want.

E. Integrating Self and Other

Wired for “we”: Watch for ways to capitalize on the brain’s built-in capacity for social interaction, especially by being intentional about creating positive mental models of relationships. Parents and other important caregivers create children’s expectations about relationships that will affect and guide them throughout their lives. Help them develop mindsight, which offers them insight into themselves as individuals, and empathy for and connection with those around them.

What You Can Do: Helping your child integrate self and other

- *Enjoy each other:* Build fun into the family, so that your kids enjoy positive and satisfying experiences with the people they’re with the most.
- *Connect through conflict:* Try not to view conflict as merely an obstacle to avoid. Instead, use it as an opportunity to teach your kids essential relationship skills, like seeing other people’s perspectives, reading nonverbal cues, and making amends.