

Some Final Thoughts:

Part of the brain develops by watching the people closest to us.

If we are stressed, our child can feel stress. If we are anxious, our child can feel anxious. If we are excited and playful, our child will be excited and playful.

Model the relationships and skills we want our kids to have.

If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.

If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive.

If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.

If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves.

Children Learn What They Live by Dorothy Law Nolte

Some resources you may find helpful

Family Support
http://www.familysupportni.gov.uk

The Parenting NI Parents Helpline
0808 8010 722

Parentline NI (CiNI and RELATE NI)
0808 8020400 or chat online
http://www.ci-ni.org.uk/parentline-ni

24 hour Domestic Violence Helpline
08009 171414 (this number will not appear on your phone bill or be disclosed via 1471)
24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org

For Adverse Childhood Experiences
Fact sheets on Stress, Trauma and the Brain and Ideas for Healing can be found at https://stepstocope.co.uk/practitioners-area/

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Building our Children's Developing Brain

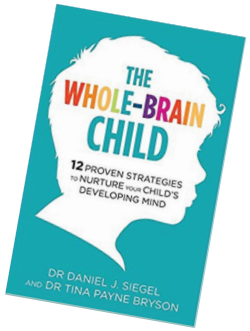
A summary of the key ideas for parents and carers



Introduction

In this leaflet are the key ideas taken from the full booklet **Developing our Children's Brain**.

Both have been developed from **The Whole Brain Child** by Dr. Daniel Siegel and Dr. Tina Payne Bryson.



It gives you ideas on how to strengthen the different parts of your child's brain to work together and can be used with children of any age.

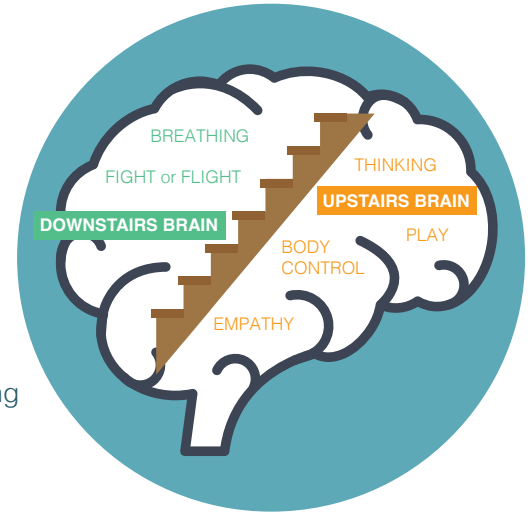
The brain has an upstairs and a downstairs part:

Downstairs brain

- Is well developed at birth
- Reacts to danger and impulses (fight, flight and freeze) and strong emotions (ie., fear and anger)

Upstairs brain

- The thinking part of the brain which is not fully mature until a person reaches their mid-20's
- The upstairs brain deals with making sense of things, decision making, control over body and emotions, self-understanding and empathy.



Because the upstairs brain is a work in progress for children, it can be hijacked by the downstairs brain especially when big emotions hit.

When strong emotions take over, it is like a stair gate blocks the upstairs brain from working.



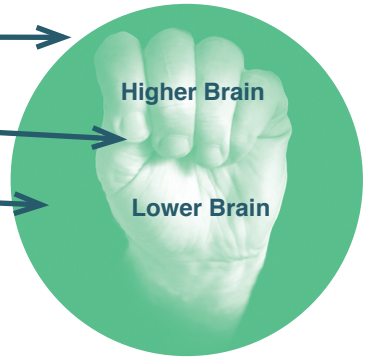
Dr Siegel's Hand Model of the Brain

To help understand how the brain works

Fingers
Front Cortex of the Human Brain

Thumb
Limbic System Mammal Brain

Wrist
Brain Stem Mammal Lizard Brain



Use your hand to make a model of the brain.

Your thumb and below your thumb is **downstairs brain** that regulates arousal, emotions and the way humans have a "fight or flight "response in times of danger.



Your fingers are the **upstairs part of the brain** that helps you think and make sense of things.

When you have big feelings they are coming from the downstairs part of your brain.



When you flip your lid the downstairs part of the brain takes over. Your upstairs part of the brain is not touching where the feelings are coming from and you are not thinking straight.

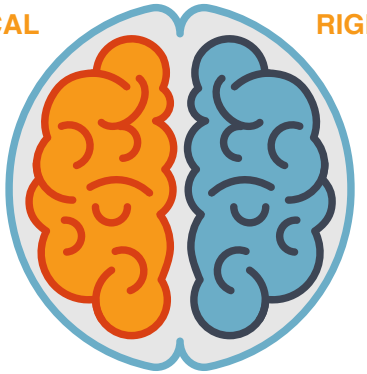
By connecting to the upstairs part of your brain you can calm those big feelings and make better decisions that will work for you.



How the brain works

The upstairs brain has two sides: LEFT and RIGHT

LEFT BRAIN = LOGICAL **RIGHT BRAIN = EMOTIONAL**



Very young children under three are right-side dominant.

At two years of age the left hand side of the upstairs brain is only beginning to develop. It does not fully mature until adulthood.

Both sides of the brain have to work together so that your child uses both sides: logic and emotions.

Evidence suggests that children who have experienced a lot of stress in their young lives (Adverse Childhood Experiences) are more prone to get “stuck” in the right side.

As a result, these children have a greater tendency to look to unhealthy ways to sooth strong emotions.

This can lead to a range of problems later in life. (See resources at the end of this booklet)

An ounce of prevention

Standing back and being curious as to what could be contributing to tantrums or meltdown is helpful.

Make sure your child is not too **h**ungry, **a**ngry, **l**onely or **t**ired. (**H.A.L.T.**)





Getting parts of the brain working together

Connect and Redirect

First connect to the right brain - a soothing touch, name what you think they are feeling, listen.

Then, redirect with the left brain - when they feel that connection with you, it is time to talk about it.

Engage, Don’t Enrage

Engage the upstairs brain and not “enrage” the downstairs brain. Lower your tone, choose your words carefully.

Name It to Tame It

Helping a child **name** their emotions helps increase **control** of these feelings. Help them tell you what is going on.

Let the Clouds of Emotions Roll by: Teaching that Feelings Come and Go

Help children learn **feelings are temporary** and **will pass**.

Help our Children Calm Themselves

Taking **calm breaths**, visualising calm place and develop mindfulness skills.





Getting parts of the brain working together

S.I.F.T: Paying Attention to What's Going On Inside

Help your child recognise and understand what they are experiencing inside: **S.I.F.T.**

1. **Sensations** in their bodies
2. **Images** in their minds
3. **Feelings**: Help them say how they feel
4. **Thoughts**: What are they saying to themselves?

Move it or Lose It: Being Physically Active

Encourage children to be **physically active** that can shift an emotional state and connect with their upstairs brain.

Rewind and Remember

Helping a child **name** their emotions helps increase **control** of these feelings. Help them tell you what is going on.

Use It or Lose It

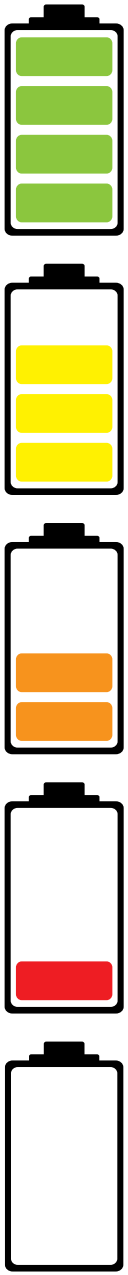
Help children learn **feelings are temporary** and **will pass**.

Help our Children Calm Themselves

Taking **calm breaths**, visualising calm place and develop mindfulness skills.

Self-care: Keeping your batteries charged





Any parent can get worn down by the constant pressure that comes with parenting.

To keep our mobile phone working, don't we make sure we keep the battery well charged?

We need to do the same with ourselves to make sure we are responding not just reacting to everyday pressures.

Looking after your emotional well-being is a way to keep your own battery well charged. People tend to have more resources within themselves when they look after themselves. It is within your choice and control.

What can you do to look after yourself?

Take 5: Take 5 is a set of practical, evidence-based ways to improve everyone's' mental health and wellbeing.

Take5 steps to wellbeing

It includes:

Connect

Keep learning

Give

Take Notice

Be Active

The Power of Positive Emotions

When you experience positive emotions your brain produces Dopamine (the chemical associated with pleasure). When you do this regularly, your dopamine pathways are strengthened and memory, learning and cognitive flexibility is strengthened.