

The Whole-Brain Child



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 as a team.

What you can do:

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, so their left brain can help make sense of their experience and they can feel more in control.



INTEGRATING THE UPSTAIRS BRAIN AND THE DOWNSTAIRS BRAIN

Develop the upstairs brain: Watch for ways to help build the sophisticated upstairs brain, which is “under construction” during childhood and adolescence and can be “hijacked” by the downstairs brain, especially in high-emotion situations.

What you can do:

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, ask questions, request alternatives, even negotiate.

Use it or lose it: Provide lots of opportunities to exercise the up-stairs brain. Play “What would you do?” games, and avoid rescuing kids from difficult decisions.

Move it or lose it: When a child has lost touch with his up-stairs brain, help him regain balance by having him move his body.



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.

What you can do:

Use the remote of the mind: When a child is reluctant to narrate a painful event, 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 recalling important events: in the car, at the dinner table, wherever.



INTEGRATING THE MANY PARTS OF MYSELF

The wheel of awareness: When your kids get stuck on one particular point on the rim of their wheel of awareness, help them choose where they focus their attention so they can gain more control over how they feel.

What you can do:

Let the clouds of emotion roll by: Remind kids that feelings come and go; they are temporary states, not enduring traits.

SIFT: Help your children pay attention to the Sensations, Images, Feelings, and Thoughts within them.

Exercise mindfulness: Mindfulness practices teach children to calm themselves and focus their attention where they want.



INTEGRATING SELF AND OTHER

Wired for "we": Watch for ways to capitalize on the brain's built-in capacity for social interaction. Create positive mental models of relationships.

What you can do:

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: Instead of an obstacle to avoid, view conflict as an opportunity to teach your kids essential relationship skills, like seeing other people's perspectives, reading non-verbal cues, and making amends.

