

**April 22, 2020 | Your Child's Brain: What's Going On in There? Virtual Parent Workshop
Questions & Answers – Provided by Chris Strater**

Brain Function

Are there certain types of movement that are more effective in reducing cortisol?

Aerobic exercise has been proven to lower cortisol levels in the body. It has been written that exercise is as good for your head as it is for your heart. Many activities can also assist in lowering cortisol: walking, relaxation, meditation, goal setting and good sleeping habits.

What does the frontal lobe control?

The frontal lobe is the part of the brain that controls important cognitive skills, such as emotional expression, problem solving, memory, language and judgment. It is, in essence, the "control panel" of our personality and our ability to communicate. It is also known as the prefrontal cortex.

How much frontal lobe activity can be expected from a teen since that part of the brain is not yet fully developed?

Great question – Although it may not be fully developed until around the age of 25, current research shows that many teens don't always show good judgement but rather often act out of the emotional part of their brain. This sometimes creates irrational thought, higher risk taking and vulnerability to drug usage. This is a wonderful time for parents to assist with good communication and healthy expectations. Dr. Daniel Siegel's book *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain* is a great read for those with teenage children.

Amygdala Hijack

Why would we encourage someone to sit still and focus during a stressful situation?

I personally would not, I am a believer that movement is a fundamental need for all brains. Focus can be enhanced when movement is done prior to a situation that needs mental clarity.

What would your advice be to help avoid the hijack before it happens? Are there words or phrases that help?

Mindfulness and mindset both assist the amygdala. Building a foundation of understanding the amygdala's function can promote deeper understanding. Maturation also plays into this level of understanding. Lastly, communication; what was the feeling and how can we adjust next time?

How do we help kids through the Amygdala Hijack while it's happening (anger, crying, yelling, etc.)?

First - Take a chill pill – it takes the chemicals spewing out from the amygdala about six seconds to dissipate. Take deep breaths with your child during this time. Try to find something positive to savor until the reaction subsides.

Engage your logic with writing – the logical brain wants to help sort through the situation. Help them to the logic piece by working with your child to write down the worst-case scenario, best-case scenario, and most likely outcome from the stressful situation. Can be done verbally also.

Identify the trigger – “Name it to Tame it” – after the situation calms down, identify with your child what caused the meltdown. Talk about it candidly. Awareness of triggers can help regulate the response in the future.

My first instinct is to give my kids a hug when they are overloaded, but sometimes I get pushed away. Should I wait until they calm down?

Just remember when the amygdala gets hijacked, your child is not always able to understand your kind, loving gesture. The thinking comes from the emotional center, not critical thinking.

What's a good amount of time to give a child to calm down? Should I be giving him time or just jumping into movement?

We all work a little differently, time and movement are both needed. Do some observation to determine what fits best.

What if Amygdala Hijack is happening often? Is there a way to help reduce this response? How do we stop repetitive behavior?

1. Name it to Tame it – what is the feeling and why? What’s driving the behavior?
2. Help with structure, order and predictability. What are other options?
3. Practice new thoughts and behaviors.
4. Explain the function of the amygdala in an age-related manner.

Does this hijacking happen to women going through menopause :) hahaha!!!

Happens to all of us!!

Is this also what happens to people who suffer from anxiety?

Anxiety is a different issue with the brain, but many of the practices and/or management skills are the same.

Neuroplasticity

Is neuroplasticity the same as unconscious mindset?

No, neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections throughout life.

Can those on drugs or in recovery be retrained?

I am not an expert in drug/recovery practices – neuroplasticity happens to all of us throughout our lives. Drug usage can change the structure of the brain.

Four M's (Movement, Mindset, Mistakes, Mindfulness)

What advice do you have for a child who isn't good at an activity and not improving, no matter the effort?

Remember they may not be there "yet", sometimes maturation is also needed to learn skills.

I say to my children, "we learn from mistakes." Is this a correct phrase to use with them?

Yes, we learn and sometimes grow new neural pathways.

Can significant adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) be overcome with the techniques discussed today?

Yes, they can assist those with ACEs.

My child is ashamed of his/her behavior during the meltdown and doesn't want to talk about it. He will just start to scream once we try to explain the situation. What do you do with that?

Best time to discuss is when calmness has returned, and they are in a comfortable space. Try to understand the trigger. Many of us are simply embarrassed by our actions, and this is hard to understand for a child.

I appreciate that this is for kiddos, but if someone is suffering with Neuropathy due to diabetes will these techniques still help?

I am not a doctor, but I would sure bet on it! Name it to tame it.

How can we encourage a child with anxiety to try new things?

Mindset – it's all about the effort, not the end result. Put a name to the anxiety and how you plan to go forward. Life will always have roadblocks—what is the goal?

Do you have tips to help get teenagers off their cell phones and encourage them to move more?

Model healthy choices for your child; include them in your journey. Remember their brains are going through change, helping to guide their choices and practices will help them understand their true needs and wants.

Resources

Any favorite resources (books, websites, YouTube channels) that you recommend to provide strategies for families to use at home?

I am a big fan of the following, which can be found on Google, websites and YouTube. Also google Mind, Brain, Education Science.

- Dr. Dan Siegel
- Brené Brown, PhD, LMSW
- Dr. Shimi Kang
- Dr. John Ratey

Guest comment: Dr. Dan Siegel has a great book about the teenage brain called *Brainstorm*. I highly recommend it if you have 12-25 year-olds or work with that population. I am a school counselor and

it's been SO helpful to me. **AFHK:** Chris, would you recommend this book? [*Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain*]

I've given it to many people, lost many copies of it and re-read it frequently. Wonderful book!!

Any tips for teachers to incorporate some of these approaches into distance learning?

The best book I know of right now is *Neuroteach: Brain Science and the Future of Education* by Glenn Whitman and Ian Kelleher. I, too, am on the learning curve for distance learning. This virus will change education in various manners, we will all be changing. Good luck!

How can parents work with their schools to incorporate these strategies?

Connect with your school in a manner you're comfortable with. Ask about mind, brain, educational science and/or social emotional learning. The book *Neuroteach* is a wonderful guide for teachers and parents.

Other

Are there nutrients other than omega-3 fatty acids that help with learning?

Very sorry, I don't know this, I'm not a doctor. Omega-3 oil helps in the myelination process of the neurons. This might be a great Google question.

What are the symptoms that identify a child with ADHD?

Check with your pediatrician. They have a matrix to help guide teachers in identifying a child who has ADHD.