



Communication is KEY

Learning Community

Children & Families

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Brain Development

Hand Exercise Dan Siegel

Brains are affected by stress!

Stress hormones exist in the body and brain at all times

However, they dramatically increase and flood the body and brain at times of distress.

4 Key Points to Remember

- ▶ All negative behavior rises from a state of Stress
 - ▶ Fear and love are the primary emotions
 - ▶ Children do not act out from a conscious place.
 - ▶ When we are stressed we regress
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STRESS

- ▶ WHEN WE ARE STRESSED WE REGRESS
 - ▶ Stress Causes thinking to be confused and distorted
 - ▶ Stress reduces short term memory
 - ▶ When a parent is stressed it increases the stress with the child.
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Lack of Peace & Calm

Hyper Aroused

- ▶ Yelling
- ▶ Movement
- ▶ Hitting
- ▶ Kicking
- ▶ Throwing

Hypo Aroused

- ▶ Isolation
- ▶ Refusal
- ▶ Avoidance
- ▶ Silence Retreat

Synonyms for Stress

- ▶ Fearful
- ▶ Anxious
- ▶ Hyper-vigilant
- ▶ Afraid

Is stress a can't or won't?

Is the stressed brain capable of responding appropriately?

- ▶ Waiting
 - ▶ Asking
 - ▶ Stopping
 - ▶ Sharing
 - ▶ Telling
 - ▶ Problem Solving
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Aggression

- ▶ Diminish stress– then the behaviors is diminished!
- ▶ Children do not consciously choose to act out.
- ▶ Their amygdala has been hijacked!
- ▶ We are aggressive out of fear . When amygdala is triggered all child things about is survival until the threat is gone.

Survival

When we are in survival mode we do not care how others feel.

Communication is KEY

When you help a child with big feelings pathways are formed that connect to the lower brain. Over time the child is able to naturally start to control primitive impulses such as rage, fear, or distress. This allows them to think about their feelings rather than primitive responses such as: biting, hitting, and kicking.

Communication is KEY

- ▶ Take the child's distress seriously, recognize how they experience events, even if it is different from you.
 - "You are so angry with me because I wouldn't let you have the toy in the shop."

Meet the child with the right voice and energy. If they are excited, you be excited!

Communication is KEY

Anything Unconscious dissolves when you shed light on it.

*Remember: Children do not act out from a conscious place.

How do you shed light?



Ways to talk to your child:

- ▶ “Last night I was feeling stressed and I bet you were too, How can we have a better night tonight?”
 - ▶ “I can tell you are really angry right now and I don’t know what you need. What do you need right now?”
 - ▶ “I know you are angry because I told you no”
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Ways to talk to your child:

- ▶ “I know when you are scared the first thing you want is food, it helps you calm down”
 - ▶ “Every time we go somewhere you get scared. Before we adopted you, you were taken away from your parents. How scary! How does this feel hearing me say this?”
 - ▶ Normalize their feelings! Help them make sense of it.
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Ways to talk to your child:

- ▶ If you are out in public and the child becomes stressed: Put your arm around him, “What’s going on? Talk to me about it.”
- ▶ “I can tell you are stressed, sit here beside me and help me figure this out. Should we stay or go home?”

Ways to talk to your child:

- ▶ When stressed we can not make eye contact, don't expect the child to when stressed
- ▶ Sit side by side, not toe to toe!
- ▶ Eye contact and touch stimulate the brain.

We need to be soothing and not stimulating at this time.



Ways to talk to your child:

- ▶ Physical soothing can calm the brain.
 - Rocking, holding, calm voice, gentle eyes

Don't meet violence with violence. Don't scream, shout, or smack your child. This models rage which does not help with higher brain development.

Play is Key

Child led play reduces the stress chemical in the brain

Oxytocin

First, it calms the brain's fear center. Then, it activates the brain's social center, making you feel good about interacting with someone. Calming the fear center is crucial. Fear is one of our strongest survival mechanisms, helping us survive physical danger. But it's usually not the best reaction to social situations. When you're anxious or afraid, you can't see things clearly. You may see someone as threatening when he has no intention of harming you. You're on guard and shut down, as fear chemicals race through your bloodstream.

Oxytocin (continued)

Oxytocin counteracts the fear chemicals, relaxing you and making you able to see other people as potentially friendly and trustworthy. At the same time, when it activates the brain's social center, it actually makes you desire social contact.

Understanding Oxytocin

- ▶ Oxytocin is known as the anti-stress hormone
- ▶ Swedish Scientist Kerstin Moberg, MD, author of *The Oxytocin Factor*, dubbed oxytocin the “calm and connection system”
- ▶ It is essential to the development of effective self-regulation
- ▶ Tremendous oxytocin release occurs during orgasm which presents its own challenges to sexual acting out.
- ▶ Science is just now beginning to discover all of the implications for this hormone as it relates to human relationships

Triggering Oxytocin:

- ▶ Offer a sweet kiss
- ▶ Share a warm hug
- ▶ Cuddle
- ▶ Make Love
- ▶ Sing in a choir
- ▶ Give someone a neck rub
- ▶ Hold a baby
- ▶ Stroke a dog or cat
- ▶ Perform a generous act
- ▶ Prayer
- ▶ Root for your team

Triggering Oxytocin:

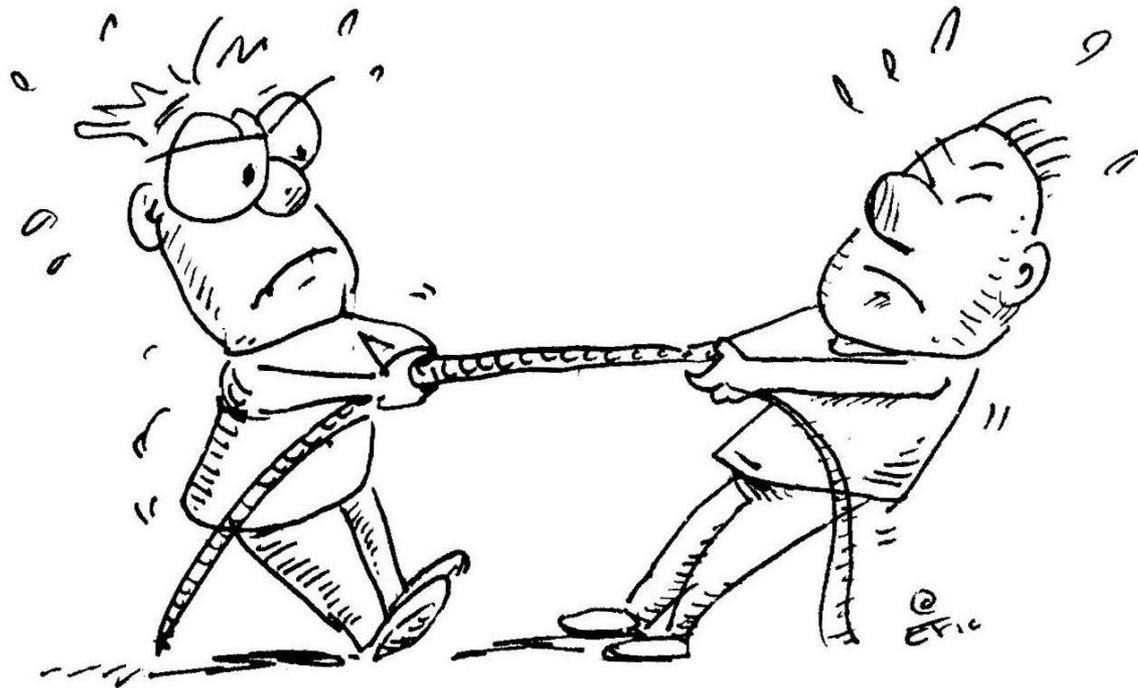
- ▶ Make eye contact
 - ▶ Breathe
 - ▶ Practice Mindfulness
 - ▶ Listen without judgment
 - ▶ Positive touch
 - ▶ Proximity
 - ▶ Play–Wrestle–Laugh–Dance
 - ▶ Think loving thoughts
 - ▶ Smile
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Chronic Stress

- ▶ Keeps you stuck in the primitive brain.
- ▶ The emotional brain is triggered
- ▶ You react
- ▶ You don't think things through

The child will challenge you to a tug of war of war

DON'T PICK UP THE ROPE!



Parents Can:

- ▶ Respond Calmly– recognize child is in brain stem. A child CAN'T reason in a stressed state.
 - ▶ Help the child come down from the agitation. Recognize the emotion.
 - ▶ Parents set the model! Stress is contagious but so is peace and calm.
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Parents Can Also...

- ▶ Acknowledge Child's Distress
 - ▶ Recognize the misbehavior, and the moment it is occurring in, as an opportunity to form an attachment with the child instead of an opportunity to discipline or consequence– in other words–
 - ▶ Meet the Child's unmet need!
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What skills do you need to keep your “thinking brain” on?

- ▶ Breathe, you need oxygen
 - ▶ Learn to take a break from the problem
 - ▶ Remember, the behaviors of older children express their needs just as the cries of the infant express the infants unmet needs.
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Don't let their wind get in your sails



Keep your thinking brain on

- ▶ It will model for the child how to react to stress
 - ▶ It will help the child to come down from the agitation
 - ▶ The coming down is the perfect chance for attachment to occur.
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Sources

The Whole Brain Child, by Daniel Siegel, MD.

The Great Behavior Breakdown, by Brian Post, LCSW.

Rhonda Evans



From a parent's perspective...

Our Family 101:

- ▶ John and K date for a few months = Travis
- ▶ John had 3 kids from his first marriage, they were 9, 10, and 14 when Travis was born.
- ▶ After K was pregnant, John learned that she had a very traumatic childhood and had been in and out of treatment since she was a teen.
- ▶ K drank, smoked pot and most likely took Rx meds she got from her friends during her pregnancy. Things were unstable and she was stressed.
- ▶ K's mother has been trying to get custody of Travis for many years.

Our Family 101:

- ▶ Travis spent the week with his bio mom, she made sure things looked stable when John picked him up.
- ▶ Travis spent weekends with John and kids; a stable, loving environment.
- ▶ By Kindergarten Travis had been identified, had a behavior plan and was part of the school's Family Support Team.
- ▶ When Travis was 7, K left for Australia and Travis came to live with us.
- ▶ I have an autoimmune disease so I don't always have the energy to keep up with a kid like Travis.

We thought that a loving, stable family would be enough.

He Comes Undone



Down the Rabbit Hole



Our Family Now