Whole Brain Parenting

STAR Health
Objectives

- Understand basic brain functioning
- Explore the links between brain functioning and attachment
- Explore the role of reflective parenting to repair attachment
- Understand and improve left brain-right brain integration
- Learn strategies to help youth integrate thoughts, actions and feelings and thereby operate from a whole brain perspective
Brain

Organ of thought and feeling; the controlling center of the nervous system in vertebrates, connected to the spinal cord and enclosed in the cranium (Webster)

Mind

A process that regulates the flow of energy and information (Daniel Segal, M.D.)
Brain Functioning 101

- Parietal Lobe
- Frontal Lobe
- Temporal Lobe
- Occipital Lobe
- Cerebellum
- Pons
- Medulla Oblongata
- Spinal Cord
Brain Functioning 101
Brain Functioning 101

Four Lobes
- Parietal Lobe
- Occipital Lobe
- Frontal Lobe
- Temporal Lobe

Brainstem
- Basic functions such as Flight or Fear, carries out basic process
Brain Functioning 101, cont’d

Cortex

• Six layer thick folds made up of grey and white matter allows us to make sense of the outside world, for example relating sights and sounds
• On the exterior of the brain, looks like folds or wrinkles

Corpus Callosum

• The two hemispheres are connected by bundled fibers, allows hemispheres to process information
# Hemispheres of the Brain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Left</th>
<th>Right</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loves and desires order</td>
<td>Cares about the big picture, meaning and emotions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Logical</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear</td>
<td>Non verbal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literal</td>
<td>Experiential</td>
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<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
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Amygdala and Hippocampus

**Amygdala**
- Gateway to our fears
- Controls Flight, fight or freeze responses
- Buried near the tip of the temporal lobe
- Name comes from its shape, Latin for Almond

**Hippocampus**
- Responsible for encoding and organizing memories
- Classifies and categorizes them so they may be used at a later time
Attachment and the Brain

Attachment patterns the personality and effects the lifelong ability to have relationships
Attachment and the Brain

Securely Attached

Attuned brain

Operates in a state of harmony and balance
achieving coherence of motor activities, physical, self, emotional regulation
Attachment and the Brain

Insecurely Attached

Avoidant
Disconnected from others
Ambivalent/ anxious ..... Sense of confusion regarding relationships
Disorganized
Fearful of attachment figure
Mirror Neuron's
Reflective parenting

A process of reflecting a child's internal world; interpreting their actions with an understanding of the underlying thoughts, intentions, feeling in children's behavior

- Helps children provide a voice to a subjective experience, understand where things come from
- Helps to repair attachment issues
Trauma And the Brain

In *early childhood*, trauma can be associated with reduced size of the cortex which may impair complex functions like memory, thinking and language.

Trauma may affect “cross-talk” between the brain’s hemispheres, including parts of the brain governing emotions.
Trauma And the Brain, cont’d

In *school-age children*, trauma undermines the development of brain regions that would normally help children:

- control fears, anxieties and aggression
- keep up attention for learning and problem solving
- control impulses
- manage stress
Trauma and the Brain, cont’d

In **adolescents**, trauma can interfere with development of the prefrontal cortex, the region responsible for:

- consideration of the consequences of behavior
- realistic appraisal of danger and safety
- ability to govern behavior
- meeting longer-term goals
Calming the Mind and Brain

Meditation is one way to calm the mind and brain

Helps to quiet the animal brain and step out of a fear response

With practice, one can call up memories of a meditative state and instantly calm oneself
Mediation

“When we are no longer able to change a situation - we are challenged to change ourselves.”

— Viktor E. Frankl
Strategies for Integrating Left Brain and Right Brain

Right to Left brain
Achieving a balance between the two
Join the emotional storm in a calm and nurturing manner
(Right Side) Use Touch Language eye contact to connect

Tell your story… child /young adult tell there story
Put words to emotions help your child describe and label internal experiences
Redirect to the Left Logically explain issues and plan solutions or redefine the situation
Claire, a 12yr girl, comes home from school after having a fight with her best friend and coolly tells her Foster Mother this story:

“We had a fight at lunch. I don’t care if I see her again. She bugs me. It’s OK if I never talk to her again.”
Teach your child about their Brain
Activities to increase integration

Learn Something New

• Learning a new language, painting, or adopting a new craft requires the coordination of multiple regions of the brain.
• Help your brain to make new connections, ensuring it stays on the ball
• Take up a new hobby in the evenings or play a board game with your family.
Activities to increase integration

Let's Get Physical

• "Physical exercise can reduce stress levels, promote brain plasticity, help grow new synaptic connections and help it resist toxic insults,"

• Your mind needs to stay in shape too, so that it can fight off serious mental diseases.

• Activities such as dancing and basketball will challenge your brain to hone its short-range spatial skills, flexing another part of its ability.
Activities to increase integration

Talking/Listening Exercise
having a conversation is one way to exercise your brain. "Social interaction stimulates brain growth

Confuse Your Brain
Eat and brush your teeth with a different hand. Switching things up presents your brain with a completely new set of stimuli
Upper and Lower Brain

Upper brain
- Has the ability to process logic and cause and effect
- Uses right and left side to develop personal insight
- The brain center for empathy and morality

Lower brain
- Instinctual
- Fight, flight or freeze reactions
- Operates more primal responses
- Driven by strong emotions like fear and anger
Case Example... What part of the brain is being used?

Sarah, 6 yrs., is walking with her foster mother in Kmart. She sees the object of her hearts desire, a Furby toy she has wanted for a year. Sarah grabs the toy off the shelf and places it her foster mother’s cart. When the foster mother removes it Sarah screams I WANT THAT FURBY NOW!

Johnny is an athletic active 9 year old boy but is refusing to learn how to skate with his siblings. When asked Johnny just states he “doesn’t want too learn”. He becomes noticeable anxious and nervous over the even the idea skating.
Cognitive Mindfulness

Non-reactivity
Observation
Acting with insight
Described feeling
Nonjudgmental

*(Bear et al. 2006)*
Memory Integration

The Hippocampus, located in the medial temporal lobe, helps us process memories and place and organize information. Memories are first stored like puzzle pieces of sensations, feelings, and impulses. Then organized and stored by the brain to be used at a time goes from implicit to explicit memory.
Integrating the Parts

Maria is a 12 yr. girl who was placed in care three months ago. Her Social worker states that she has recently become obsessed with death. She believes this may be due to the recent death of her mother from a drug overdose. She is now convinced she will die from some natural disaster and is thinking about it all the time. How can we help her?
References

- [http://reflectiveparenting.org/](http://reflectiveparenting.org/)
- *Zen Brain Reflections: Reviewing Recent Developments in Meditation and States of Consciousness* by James H Austin M.D. The MIT press 2006
- *The Mindful Brain; Reflection's and Attunement in the Cultivation of Wellbeing.* by Daniel Siegel (Norton Press)
Questions or Discussion?
Thank You!

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