

Upstairs and Downstairs Brain

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UPSTAIRS BRAIN (For kids: Your Wizard Brain or Green Light Brain) You teach the Upstairs Brain	Calm even with emotional responses
In Control Brain Frontal Cortex Think Learn Rationalize Respond	Hears and remember things Participates in conversation rationally Puts things in sequential order (past, present, future) Categorizes thing (same verses different) Uses words to communicate thoughts and feelings
DOWNSTAIRS BRAIN (For kids: Your Lizard Brain or Bear Brain or Red Light Brain) You train the Downstairs Brain	LOTS of Emotion No rational words If asked “why?”, will respond with “I don’t know”
Out of Control, Reflex, Impulsive, Reactive Brain Limbic System The Survival Brain Reacting (no thinking) No real learning takes place Impulse (no rationalizing) Can train a response through procedural memory Responds in four possible “survival behavior” ways: ➤ <u>Fight</u> → physical fight → verbal fight → passive aggressive/manipulative Fights = lying and stealing behaviors ➤ <u>Flight</u> → physically leave the room; or hide → mentally leave/disassociate Flights = running away or “checking out” behaviors (<i>This is where all the addiction behaviors live</i>) ➤ <u>Freeze</u> → no response at all physically or verbally (most common with sexual assaults) → “Camouflage mode.” People blend into their environment so well no one knows they’re in survival mode until a change exposes them. Then people generally see an instant switch back to fight mode and see a huge anger response that is highly exaggerated for the situation, or they will see a panic attack/melt down. (<i>This is where all of the anxiety disorders live</i>) ➤ <u>Faint</u> → Physically pass out, loses consciousness or falls asleep	Only hears and remembers information needed for present survival moment Generally does not hear or remember details or requests People in downstairs brain will generally show signs of: ADD/ADHD Auditory and/or sensory processing problems Memory loss Loss of time No awareness of intensity of emotion or action Little to no memory of events. Five minutes after returning to Upstairs Brain may act like nothing ever happened and has little or no memory of reactive episode. When the Downstairs Brain is in control of a person’s body, it heightens all sensory processing issues. Normal sensory “preferences” become “requirements” for functioning. Example: A preference may be for a quiet environment to do homework. When the downstairs brain is in control all environmental noise becomes intolerable and the person can’t function at all until <i>all</i> the noise goes away. Fight & Flight is used as a stress/trauma response Freeze & Faint is used when the brain thinks you’re going to die

Amygdala

The Amygdala is the Triage Command Center (for kids: The Emergency Room Intake Desk) and resides in—and is part of—the Downstairs Brain.

The seven senses* relay all information to the Brain Stem which then to the Amygdala in the Downstairs Brain. If the Amygdala perceives the environment to be “Safe” (physically, verbally, mentally, sexually and spiritually) it allows the information to move on up to the Upstairs Brain. If the environment is perceived as “Not-Safe” the Downstairs Brain goes into active survival/defense mode.

When the Downstairs Brain is activated it may discard 50% - 75% of the information originally received from the seven senses because it’s deemed “not necessary for present survival.” This means when the Upstairs Brain finally receives the information it only gets 25% - 50% of the original information with which to make a decision.

The Amygdala is developed during the first three years of life by the attachment cycle. If the attachment cycle led to a secure attachment style the Amygdala knows the difference between “Safe” and “Non-Safe”. If the attachment cycle was broken or disrupted during this time the Amygdala cannot comprehend what is actually “Safe.” Therefore, any and all information coming into the brain gets over-analyzed by the Downstairs Brain before being passed along (maybe) to the Upstairs Brain. Note: if a person had secure attachment then suffers a trauma after the age of three—although the Amygdala is intact—it will wall off the option of “Safe” and the Downstairs Brain will perceive every situation as “Not-Safe” until the trauma has been healed.

Repairing the Amygdala is foundational in order to help people stay in the Upstairs Brain and communicate well in their relationships with other people. The way to heal the Amygdala is through the original needs-based attachment cycle.

Needs-Based Attachment Cycle:

- 1) Recognize the want/need
- 2) Verbalize want/need to self then others
- 3) Allow want/need to be met *enough* to feel safe and satisfied
- 4) Feel safe and satisfied
- 5) Trust will be built so the next time you have a need your willing to express it and get it met successfully

It generally takes one month of living out the needs-based attachment cycle daily per year a person is old for the Amygdala to heal (provided there are no other medical, mental, or developmental disabilities that prevent healing).

*The seven senses are: touch, taste, sound, sight, smell, balance and pressure. People will always have a preference of sensory seeking or sensory avoidant in each. It’s important to recognize what a person’s preferences are in order to train the downstairs brain when the preferences become requirements for survival.

Recommended Resources:

Whole Brain Child by Daniel J. Siegel, M.D., and Tana Payne Bryson, Ph.D.

The Connected Child by Karyn B. Purvis, Ph.D., David R. Cross, Ph.D., and Wendy Lyons Sunshine

INSIDE: Understanding How Reactive Attachment Disorder Thinks and Feels by Timothy L. Sanford, MA