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The Importance of Whole–Brain Thinking

By Susan Dunn

The Importance of Whole–Brain Thinking by Susan Dunn, MA Psychology, Emotional

Intelligence Coach

Understanding the parts of our brains, knowing them all, and getting them together for effective functioning is Emotional Intelligence. It means being able to engage in whole–brain thinking, and the whole is definitely greater than the sum of its parts.

Our brain consists of three brains, the reptilian, or primitive brain; the limbic brain; and the neocortex. Furthermore, the neocortex, the thinking brain, is divided into two parts - a left and right hemisphere.

The reptilian and limbic brains deal with emotions. The reptilian deals with the lower ones needed for survival, such as territorial aggression and defense, sex, and disgust. These feelings are automatic, and beyond our control. The limbic brain deals with higher order emotions, such as parenting and social responsibility. They are also automatic, as you know, if a child has assaulted your preschooler on the playground and you are overtaken with rage.

The neocortex , the thinking brain, consists of two parts - the left and right hemispheres. We each have both, but generally one is dominant. It is always dominant unless you have worked to develop the other side of the brain. It will always be the one you revert to under stress.

The left brain is analytical, logical, linear and factual. It deals with words as words, and tends to see the trees, not the forest.

The right brain is holistic, sees patterns, creative, metaphorical, and intuitive. It tends to see the forest and not the trees. Right–brained people tend to pay attention to the tone of the voice, the nuances and the nonverbal expressions rather than the actual words being spoken.

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You can see difficulties in communication here. If you have one person who is very right-brained trying to communicate with someone who is very left-brained, the discomfort on the other person's part can be physiological and real.

In the best-case scenario, if you've worked on your emotional intelligence, you have developed both hemispheres of the brain. The advantages to this are numerous. In relationships at home, in your social life and at work, you can simply communicate better. Not everyone can switch their style of communication, but if you can, you will have a crucial advantage in communication.

If you've ever listened to someone try and present a case when they're using the wrong "language," you know what I mean. For one person, saying, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks" can clinch the deal. To another, they will

become upset and ask you to "stick to the topic please." Metaphor works with some people and not with others.

Alternatively, giving a list of data, with facts in a linear progression may convince someone else, but leave you cold.

Research at Harvard Business School has demonstrated that the higher up you go in an organization, the more important it is to combine right-brain intuition with left-brain rationality.

In actuality, both hemispheres AND the other brains are necessary to make good decisions. Emotions give us information. Rational thinking can help us make a strategy and carry it out.

Effective people, for instance, use all their skills in all phases of problem-solving. Intuition - call it gut feeling if you prefer - can direct your initial thinking processes, and also provide clues along the way. Gathering quantified data is also necessary and must be systematically organized and analyzed. Gut feeling can again guide your final decision, as data always runs out at some point.

Gut feeling is particularly effective in dealing with people. It's not uncommon to receive resumes from several people who are similar in skills, education and training, or to be interviewing several who are similar. The final decision will rest on the interviewer's skilled intuition as to which one would make the best fit with the organization. It's not always possible to quantify how such a decision is made, though it may rest on years of experience.

You can see how it's crucial to know and understand your emotions in problem-solving. You may want a certain candidate, for instance, because you like them a lot, but they may not be the best qualified for the job, or the best one to choose. Or you may dislike a candidate for personal reasons, and need to over-ride that, because they would be the best candidate. At another time, it may be prudent to

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select the candidate you like the best - particularly if they're going to be working closely with you. There are all sorts of variables to take into consideration, and it takes a whole brain to do that.

Anxiety is also an emotion that can interfere. If you're experiencing anxiety, it's cramping down on your ability to think and reason, and you will make poor decisions, or none at all, which can be worse.

Emotional Intelligence is whole–brained thinking. It means understanding your emotions, managing them, and using them, and being able to do this about others. It means understanding how to think and integrate emotion with analysis for problem–solving, strategizing and implementation.

Such skills as resilience, creativity, flexibility, intuition, and intentionality can greatly increase your effectiveness in relationships and on the job. Developing your Emotional Intelligence pays great dividends in all areas of your life, and lets you make use of your whole brain.

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Ten Easy Ways To Help Kids Learn: A Brain–based Learning Strategy That Really Works

By MaryJo Wagner, Ph.D.

Susan's a math whiz and Caleb's an artist extraordinaire. That's, great but wouldn't it be better if Caleb could improve in math and Susan could develop some artistic skills? They can and it's easy.

Researchers have recently discovered that whole–brain learning or brain–based learning is an efficient and effective learning strategy that helps kids (parents and teachers, too) learn anything easily without struggling.

One feature of brain–based learning involves using both the right side and the left side of the brain. Although nobody is just left brain or just right brain, most of us have a dominance.

Susan's math aptitude means she is probably left–brain dominant, and Caleb, the artist, has a right–brain dominance.

Learning to read and write requires using both sides of the brain. So does learning math and even doing art. In fact, doing just about anything well, including thinking clearly, and even problem solving, involves using the right and left hemispheres of the front part of the brain.

How do you accomplish this? Easy. Just move across the center mid–line of your body. Every time you

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move your right arm to your left side or your left arm to your right side, you're crossing the mid–line and improving learning, thinking, and problem solving. Now you're using brain–based learning.

Works for kids. Works for you. Try these parenting tips and teacher resources today.

1. Give yourself a big hug.
2. Tell kids the only rule is to cross the mid–line of the body, right hand to left side, left hand to right side. Now let them invent ways of doing this.
3. Dance the hula. Or twirl a hula hoop.
4. Take a Brain Boosters TeleClass. Sign up at

Or a Brain Gym

class. Sign up at

5. Do the twist. (So you weren't dancing in the 50s and 60s? Ask somebody to show you how to twist or get a dance video.) Twist with the kids while you listen to some old Chubby Checker songs.
6. Rake some leaves with your kids, making sure you're raking off to the side instead of straight in front of you.
7. Play a board game. (Use your right hand to move your piece when it's in the left corner and vice versa.)
8. Practice using your non–dominant hand to reach for things on the opposite side of your body. Even writing and drawing with your non–dominant hand helps. (You'll get better with practice.)
9. Do Yoga and Tai Chi. Lots of moves cross the mid–line.
10. Cross your ankles and arms in front or in back when you're doing jumping jacks. Kids can usually do this. If you can't, try it in a swimming pool.

This brain–based learning strategy really isn't all that complicated. Lots of everyday kinds of activities get the whole brain active. Sitting around watching TV, however, isn't one of them! You and your kids have to move around and cross your mid– line. It's fun.

MaryJo Wagner, Ph.D. The Learning Doctor "Helping You Help Your Kids Learn"

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Get the complimentary

newsletter, "Brain Boosters for Your Kids," Help your kids learn faster and easier.



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