

**From the research of Dr. Bruce Perry**

**"Resilient children are made, not born!"**

**Those 49 techniques that promise to get you into college are meaningless and short lived if we are not emotionally connected to one another meeting the student where the brain development has landed!**

**The below research and strategies are not just for some youth...although critically important for those children and adolescence walking in with pain and adversity... but for all students and educators!**

**As this summer season of presentations, teaching, and researching comes to a close... I have and am learning more about negative behaviors than I could have imagined. As I have delved into the pain and perceived stress beneath the oppositional, defiant, shut off, and apathetic brain states, I am beginning to understand that behavior management is about me! It is not about our students and when I lead, mentor and sit beside students that carry in their worlds- their social maps; I am responsible for placing myself in a brain state that is co-regulated and coherent ready to explore the complexity of those maps. If I find... inside a tenuous encounter with another... that my resting heart rate is elevated, my fight flight freeze response can become activated and I can become and have become a clear unscathed mirror of the antagonistic and angry behavior in front of me. I can also unintentionally begin to personalize that which can only escalate the conflict that is budding! I lead the way when disruptive behavior is present. Fear literally arises from the core of the brain affecting all brain areas and their functions with neurochemical activity. Two significant brain regions involved with the fear response are locus coeruleus- this is**

**where the majority of noradrenaline neurons are located (brain stem area) and the popular amygdala located in the limbic area, the emotional center of the brain.**

**More than desiring compliance and obedience, I want to stay emotionally connected with my students through the discipline process. This is why understanding a child's brain is critical to the teaching and learning process!**

**Early childhood experiences (positive or negative) have a far greater impact than later ones and in the first years of life. If we have not developed the healthy neural circuitry that allows us to reach out and connect with others or to self-soothe inside acute negative experiences, we can easily become hard-wired and habitually reactive in those older and lower parts of the brain where the stress response system is chronically activated. One of the most important characteristics of memory, neural tissue, and development, is that they all change with patterned repetitive activity! So the systems that are used the most will change and those that are not activated will not! What does this mean for many of our most troubled youth who are consistently being met with an array of discipline and punishment sanctions? Because our brains create unconscious implicit memories and make associations of our earliest experiences, we then subconsciously begin to predict what the world is like based on our personal schema and social maps. If those early experiences are negative and toxic to forming the healthy neuronal networks that breed connection and safety and the ability to self-regulate, our predictions can then guide us to very dysfunctional ways of relating to others, and being in the world in healthy purposeful ways.**

**If you lack a deep memory of feeling safe and loved, the receptors in the brain that respond to human kindness fail to develop!**

**If we feel safe and loved, our brain specializes in collaboration, play and cooperation.**

**If we are constantly feeling unloved and unsafe, then our brain specializes in managing feelings of fear and abandonment**

### **Brain Development - we have to know as teachers and administrators!**

Early neglect and other environmental and relational adversities cause a dysregulation of body rhythms and a stress system that is overly sensitized to even minor stressors. Just the thought or memory of an aberrant childhood experience can trigger a hyper-aroused alarm in the emotional centers of our brains and this trigger can come out of nowhere because it is an internal perception of the past! In many instances, this stress system can actually interfere with the other systems compromising the brain's ability to regulate mood cognitively process and relate to others. What does this look like? In a classroom both disassociation and hyper-aroused responses can look like ADHD, ODD and anxiety. We can also see depressive symptomology.

What I am learning today is that at birth, human touch is not innate to the brain... it feels novel and can be perceived as a stressful stimulus! Only when consistent human touch or contact is provided does the brain respond in positive ways, but if this physical and emotional contact is not experienced, the brain stem sets off a stress response. If children especially in the first year of life are not given that human tactile connection consistently, they learn to numb and are unresponsive, creating associations in the brain that embrace toxic memory templates stagnating the later developing skills such as empathy and the ability to create options, be creative and employ cognitive flexibility. For when one lives in a survival brain state... one is very centered on the "Me!" The survival brain state can look selfish, aggressive, violent and shut down! And in the classroom what we forget as educators, is that harsh discipline, sudden movements, and yelling feels familiar to the student, and although it could escalate the conflict... there is

certainty in misery because we have begun to associate these negative feelings with safety and the known! The survival brain has three components.

- When we are living in survival mode, with our stress response turned on all the time, we can really focus on only three things!
- Body- Am I ok?
- Environment-Where is it safe?
- Time- How long will this threat be hanging over me?

Think how often, with especially younger children we have unintentionally (during bouts of bad behavior) have escalated the encounter asking for eye contact, or brusquely and physically turned a child toward us or an adolescent desiring respect? In our discipline systems, we have to remember that the language of the amygdala is feelings. The amygdala can only be regulated through movement, breath, and space. When both teacher and student have upshifted to the prefrontal cortex where thinking is clear, we feel emotionally calmer, and we can listen to one another to learn...

Within the Discipline Process...all children need

1. Slow approaches
2. Gentle movements
3. Very little to no eye contact
4. Teach a child or adolescent how to calm the amygdala... modeling techniques that use movement or breathing. These strategies from Psych Central could be incorporated into an

Amygdala First Aid Station. We could also use a metronome to help to mimic a heartbeat that has become sporadic!

## **Hand Massage**

I learned this one in both the MBSR program and in Brukner's book. What's great about it is that you can do it while attending a lecture, listening to your kids fight, or sitting at your desk working. No one will notice. Simply use the thumb of one hand and press around the palm of the other hand. It's very soothing.

## **2. Palm Push**

By pushing your palms together and holding for five to ten seconds, you give your body "proprioceptive input," according to Brukner, which "lets your body know where it is in space." I like this one because it reminds me of tree position in yoga, which is the last of the standing series postures in Bikram yoga. By then, I am quite happy to hold the tree position. The palm push is like a mini, portable tree position I can pull out any time to calm down.

## **3. Close Your Eyes**

Aron says that 80 percent of sensory stimulation comes in through the eyes, so shutting them every now and then gives your brain a much-needed break. She also says that she has found that [highly sensitive persons](#) do better if they can stay in bed with their eyes closed for nine hours. They don't have to be sleeping. Just [lying](#) in bed with our eyes closed allows for some chill time that we need before being bombarded with stimulation.

## **4. Mindful Sighing**

During the MBSR class, we would take a few mindful sighs when transitioning from one person speaking to another. Basically you breathe in to a count of five through your mouth, and then you let out a very loud sigh, the sound you hear your teenager make. I was always amazed at how powerful those small sighs were to adjust my energy level and focus.



## 5. Mindful Monkey Stretch

A couple of times during the MBSR class, we would stand in back of our chairs, move at least an arm's length from each other in a circle, and do these exercises that I call mindful monkey stretches. We brought our hands, arms extended, in front of us, then brought the arms down. Next we brought our arms (still extended) to our sides, and then down. Next we brought our arms all the way past our heads and then swooped down, our head dangling between our knees, and hung there for a second. This exercise is extremely effective at releasing the tension we hold in different parts of our body. Our teacher said she does it before her lectures and it works to release the jitters.

## 6. Hug Yourself

Did you know that a ten-second hug a day can [change biochemical and physiological forces in your body](#) that can [lower risk of heart disease](#), combat stress, fight fatigue, boost your immune system, and ease [depression](#)? You can begin by giving yourself a hug. By squeezing your belly and back at the same time, you are again giving yourself proprioceptive input (letting your body know where you are in space), which can help stabilize you.

## 7. Wall Push

Another great exercise to ground kids (and I add adults) with sensory integration issues, according to Brukner, is the wall push, where you simply push against the wall with flat palms and feet planted on the floor for five to ten seconds. If you've ever experienced an earthquake, you can appreciate why this gesture is calming ... placing the weight of our body against a solid, immobile surface and feeling the pull of gravity is stabilizing, even on a subconscious level.

## **8. Superman Pose**

If you do Bikram yoga, the superman pose is basically the full locust position (airplane position), except the arms and the hands are stretched out in front of you, not to the sides. “Lie on your belly on the floor,” explains Brukner. “Extend your arms in front of you, and hold them straight out. Extend your legs behind you and hold them straight out.” Hold that pose for ten seconds. It’s a great exercise if you are groggy, overexcited, distracted, or antsy.

## **9. Shake**

Did you know that animals relieve their stress by shaking? Lots of animals like antelopes shake off their fear after being frozen in [panic](#) to escape a predator. In the MBSR program, we practiced shaking, for like 15 minutes at a time. I can’t say it looked all that pretty, but neurologically, I do believe it was beneficial.

## **10. Bubble Breath**

My favorite exercise in Brukner’s book is the Bubble Breath, because it is so simple and calming. Brukner explains:

*Breathe in for five seconds, out for five seconds.*

*Imagine you have a wand of bubbles. When you breathe out, be careful not to pop it.*

*Place one flat palm on your heart, one flat palm on your belly.*

*Breathe in through your nose and hold your breath for five seconds.*

*Breathe out a large “bubble” through pursed lips, blow out for five seconds.*

4. Routines and procedures that are created for the specific negative behavior and are put into place each time to calm the stress response system.

5. A rocking chair in the amygdala first aid station with an option of gentle movements and

breathing as these experiences will regulate the brain stem and limbic brain for positive emotions and the ability to respond.

6. Teach children and adolescents about their neuro-anatomy as this will bring relief to misunderstood behaviors and responses while also empowering students that they have the neuroplasticity to change old worn out ways of reacting and relating!

<http://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/2012/04/05/what-kids-should-know-about-their-own-brains/>

7. Trauma is carried through for three generations and because of our growing understanding of epigenetics...we know that trauma can be inherited like eye color but we also know that our genetics is not our destiny!

As educators when we ask these questions setting up a proactive discipline/ brain system... we begin to help students to discover their well-being!

Purpose + Connection = Well-Being

1. Am I important to someone here?
2. Am I good at something in here?
3. Can I affect the world here?
4. Can I share my gifts here?