Our Amazing Brain
Brain Stem: Reflex/Instinct

- From ages 0 to 15 ½ months – it is the only state available.
- Survival state – You see everything as a teeth bearing wolf. Feels threatened. When we have high adrenaline our alarm is over activated – we view all events as life threatening.
- All you can do in this state is hide, hurt or defend – these are your only skills here.
- In this state one acts out physically and cannot hear or negotiate.
- This state lasts can last 20 minutes so every question you ask (can’t answer questions here) adds another 5 minutes to this state.

The Need is Safety

- Only question they are asking themselves is: Am I safe? No matter what you are asking them or saying to them. This is all they can focus on. **You must help them feel safe before you can do anything else.**
- You can’t help them feel safe until they connect with you. So, imitate their body actions/positions, say – “I see your arms like this…” get close and try to get eye contact.
- As soon as they make eye contact – send positive feelings from your eyes to theirs. • • • Way to move out of brain stem is to get them into organized movement.
- In this state they hate choices – asking them to make a choice when here will make things worse.

The brain stem is the rhythm keeper of the body.
- It’s first experience is the maternal heartbeat.
- This helps to create order.
**Limbic System: Hindsight**

- The Limbic system comes online between 15½ months to 4 years.
- In this state the feel aggravated not threatened.
- Emotional/Verbal state – can be negative – name calling, whining. It is where me, mine, poopy, I hate you – comes in as emotional name calling – wants attention.
- This is where they develop their CD rom of baggage language – are you helping them to make it positive and affirming or threatening? This is the voice that is or will be playing in the mind.
- What is playing on your CD?
  - Depends on your family, culture, religion, rules of being that you learned.
  - We tell our children what we learned.

**The Need is Connection**

- Only questions they are asking themselves – “Am I loved? Can you see me? Am I important to you?
- We can’t erase our CD but we can overlay it. It can’t be erased but can be re-written.
- Limbic system LOVES choices
- Women have 8x more blood flow to emotional centers than men.
Prefrontal Lobes: Problem Solving

- Comes online between the ages of 4 ½ to 8 yrs, but it is not fully developed until age 25.
- So we do not have full access to Executive Skills until after age 25 or so. It shows up as difficulty with goal setting, making plans, sticking to it, achievements
- **Inability to do all of executive skills causes all discipline problems.**
  - So can’t expect them to do what they aren’t able to do. Do it another way.
  - We must help them develop the skills rather than punish them for not having them.
- Knowing what the skills are and being about to do them are two different things.
- We disconnect ourselves from prefrontal lobes with negative self talk, which puts us into the Limbic System.
- We can’t teach people unless they are in the prefrontal lobes.
- When we are stressed we have no prefrontal lobe access.
  - We have no empathy
  - Everything is overwhelmed – can’t prioritize
  - Can’t organize
  - No impulse control
  - Inflexible
  - Memory lapses
- When prefrontal lobes are under stimulated people seek conflict to stimulate it.
  - To simulate pre-k - need problem solving in a public situation.
- When looking for food and have a lot of food in fridge but nothing satisfies, we are looking for a brain state change not food.
  - Our early childhood training teaches us how we will respond to our adult challenges.
  - (Sad – cheer up, have a cookie…)
  - (When excited told to calm down so now fearfully of being really excited about things and we learn to turn our expressions down when this is triggered.)
• Awareness that this is occurring is needed to fix it.
  ◊ Do activities to move up the brain.
  ◊ Our right prefrontal stores the negative information.
  ◊ The left prefrontal can take control because it holds positive emotions and sees solutions
  ◊ They work together to solve your problems.
  ◊ When we notice ourselves being negative we can use Conscious Discipline to integrate the
two halves of the brain.

The Need is Problem Solving
• If children do not feel connected they won’t have access to prefrontal so will learn the life skills
  from the brain stem or limbic – will learn to be violent or emotionally controlling.
• Structure helps us access these skills until they are fully developed. Structure also helps these
  skills to develop.
• When you are operating in prefrontal lobe – you can hold your intention despite external
  influences – this is a great gift to children and adults.
• Organized movement stimulates the prefrontal lobe, such as:
  ◊ Babies – Finger Play
  ◊ Older Children – Dance or movements
  ◊ Rubbing our ears brings blood to the brain
• When skills are fully developed:
  ◊ We can ask ourselves – what can I learn from this experience?
  ◊ Can answer questions
  ◊ Has full access to our own inner wisdom.
  ◊ Has any choice he/she wants to make
  ◊ Can choose OOPS

Optimal Learning
 Takes place when a child/teen feels safe.

Our job is to create a safe environment: Must be safe and be perceived as safe.

We create a safe environment on Sunday mornings by:
• Providing ritual and routine
• Providing opportunities for mastery

Routines
• The brain is pattern seeking.
• Predictability puts the brain at ease.
  ◊ Routines help the child know he/she is safe and they are in a familiar situation.
  ◊ Also is good for those with the Logical/Mathematical Intelligence

Rituals
• The brain seeks to give meaning to events and people.
• Am I connected? Do I belong?
• Yes, you are valued here. Your life matters.
The Teenage Brain

Source: David Dobbs & Jane Harden

Teenager’s prefrontal lobes short out and reset frequently. That is why they can be brilliant and stupid within seconds of each other.

While the brain is almost full size by age 6, there is a re-organization that occurs between the ages of 12-25. It is a networking and wiring upgrade. It develops from front to back.

The Results of This Brain Development & Growth

- Better at balancing impulse, desire, goals, self-interest, rules, ethics and altruism creating more complex and sensible behavior.
- It is also hard to get all the new cogs to mesh together so it can result in impulsiveness, idiocy, selfishness and reckless bumbling.

Unity View of the Teenage Brain Works

Trait: Love of the thrill, sensation seeking, hunt for neural buzz
- Advantage
  ◊ Leads to urge to meet new people and a wider circle of friends
  ◊ Leads to a willingness to experience new things about the world

Trait: Risk taking.
Teens court risk more avidly than any other age. They do not fail to perceive the risk - they actually overestimate the risk compared to adults. Teens weigh risk v. rewards differently. They are more willing to take the risk to get what they want or value.
- Advantage
  ◊ The willingness to take risks to get what you want works like the desire for a new sensation - it gets them out of the house.

What Do Teens Want?

- Social Connections
- The Company of Those Their Own Age
  ◊ Fees their attraction to novelty
  ◊ Peers seen as more interesting than their familiar family
- To Learn Primarily From Their Friends
  ◊ Allows them to invest in the future rather than the past.
  ◊ We enter a world created by our parents but we live our lives and prosper in a world made by our peers.
- Peer Relations
  ◊ Peer relationships are not a side show but the main show
  ◊ Our success in life does depend on our ability to develop social relationships
  ◊ Reacting to social rejection as a threat to existence is not just melodrama
- Teens in all cultures prefer novelty; excitement and peers