

# Whole Brain Strategies

## Family Therapy Center of Bethesda

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This sheet summarizes parenting lessons and strategies from the wise parenting book "The Whole Brain Child" by neuropsychiatrist Dr. Dan Siegel and parenting expert Tina Payne Bryson. These tips and strategies aim to help parents guide children through tough emotions and foster strong connections within the family.

## First Things First...

What do we mean when we are talking about the "whole brain"? These strategies center around the idea of us all having four "parts" of our brain: left brain, right brain, downstairs brain, and upstairs brain.

Upstairs =  
sophisticated &  
analytical

Downstairs =  
Primitive & Reactive

Left =  
Logical

Right =  
emotional

## Basic themes

**Thrive rather than survive.** In hard moments when you are just trying to survive, think about how you can turn it into an opportunity for your child to thrive

**Integration = health & success.** When a child is able to use all the parts of their brain, they will be able to understand their emotions and succeed in relationships and other endeavours.

## Bringing together left brain and right brain

**Strategy #1 is CONNECT, then REDIRECT.** Before teaching logical lessons (left brain), connect with your child on an emotional level (right brain) by listening to them and validating their feelings.

**Strategy #2 is NAME IT TO TAME IT.** When your child is feeling strong emotions from the right brain, have them describe what they are feeling. In doing this, their left brain will naturally kick in.

## Connecting upstairs + downstairs brain

An important thing to remember with these strategies is that the upstairs brain is still developing or "under construction" until your child is in their 20s. Make sure to be **patient with them**.

**Strategy #3 is to ENGAGE, don't ENRAGE.** In stressful situations where you feel like your child is using their downstairs brain, try to engage the upstairs brain by asking questions and using logic. Don't enrage the downstairs brain by not providing good reason.

**Strategy #4 is USE IT OR LOSE IT.** Take every opportunity you get to allow your child to exercise their upstairs brain! Ask them thought provoking questions, and allow them to solve problems for themselves when they are able.

**Strategy #5 is MOVE IT OR LOSE IT.** If your child is stuck in their downstairs brain, it may be helpful to encourage them to let off some steam by moving their bodies. This will help them naturally find their way back to that analytical upstairs brain.

## Integrating all the parts of the self

Sometimes it is easy for kids to get caught up in one part of what is going on or what they are feeling. As a parent, it is helpful to encourage them to bring their awareness back to all parts of themselves.

**Strategy #6 is to LET THE CLOUDS OF EMOTION ROLL BY.** It is easy for kids to get caught up in big emotions and feel like it will last forever. Make sure to remind them that **this too shall pass**.

**Strategy #7 is to help you child SIFT.** SIFT stands for sensations, images, feelings, and thoughts. It is your job to help them understand all these things going on inside them before they can change their behavior.

**Strategy #8 is to EXERCISE MINDSIGHT.** Mindsight is how we focus our attention inwards to what is going on within ourselves. It allows us to see what is going on more clearly.

## Integrating the self with others

**Strategy #9 is to ENJOY EACH OTHER.** Acknowledge fun and happy moments! Allow your child to have fun and be themselves around you.

**Strategy #10 is to CONNECT THROUGH CONFLICT.** Conflict does not always have to be viewed as negative. It can also be a time to learn about each other and build communication skills within your family!

## Bringing In memory

**Strategy #11 is to USE THE REMOTE OF THE MIND.** Children may not always narrate events (especially painful ones) perfectly. Allow them to pause, rewind, and fast forward as they express their experiences.

**Strategy #12 is to REMEMBER TO REMEMBER.** Help your kids exercise their memory every chance you get. Whenever you can, give your kids the opportunity to practice talking about and remembering their experiences.