

Book Review

The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind, by Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson. New York, NY: Bantam Books Trade Paperbacks, 2011, ISBN: 978-0-553-38669-1, 176 pp. \$15.00, paperback.

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In the book *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*, Siegel and Payne Bryson share tools they have created derived from scientific knowledge. These tools are written for a layperson's understanding to help parents more effectively work with their children ages birth through 12, when challenges arise in the parent-child interactions. These tools also help children learn how to manage their emotions, thoughts, and interactions with others.

Siegel and Payne Bryson have developed these strategies through their research work with children on links between the brain, behavior, thoughts, and emotions. Specifically, they share how these strategies and tools can help children in using their whole brains in relating to themselves and to others. A whole, integrated brain results in improved decision making, better control of body and emotions, fuller self-understanding, stronger relationships, and success in school.

The book has six chapters: Chapter 1, "Parenting With the Brain in Mind"; Chapter 2, "Two Brains Are Better Than One: Integrating the Left and the Right"; Chapter 3, "Building the Staircase of the Mind: Integrating the Upstairs and Downstairs Brain"; Chapter 4, "Kill the Butterflies! Integrating Memory for Growth and Healing"; Chapter 5, "The United States of Me: Integrating the Many Parts of the Self"; Chapter 6, "The Me-We Connection: Integrating Self and Other." Half of every chapter is devoted to "What You Can Do" sections, where the authors provide practical suggestions and examples of how readers can apply scientific concepts from that chapter. These chapters are followed by the conclusion, "Bringing It All Together," the Refrigerator Sheet, and Whole-Brain Ages and Stages. The Refrigerator Sheet briefly highlights the book's most important points. The Whole-Brain Ages and Stages chart offers a simple summary of how the book's ideas can be implemented according to the age of the child.

Chapter 1 explains some fundamental concepts about the brain and the reasons integrating all parts of children's brains are important. Chapter 2 explains how parents can help their children integrate the left and right brain through two strategies: combining the left and right and using the "name it to tame it" technique. Chapter 3 explains how parents can help their children integrate the upstairs and downstairs brain. Sometimes, kids can use their upstairs brain and sometimes they can't. Just by parents knowing this, they can adjust their expectations and can see that their children are often doing the best they can with the brain they have. Tantrums are also discussed: the upstairs tantrum and the downstairs tantrum. Three specific strategies are shared: "Engage, Don't Enrage: Appealing to the Upstairs Brain"; "Use It or Lose It: Exercising the Upstairs Brain"; and "Move It or Lose It: Moving the Body to Avoid Losing the Mind." Chapter 4 addresses integrating the memory for growth and healing. Memory is all about associations, so a memory is the way an event from the past influences us in the present. Whenever we retrieve a memory, we alter it. Two types of memory are described: implicit memory and explicit memory. It is important to help children integrate the implicit and explicit memories to help them make sense of their experiences. Two specific strategies are shared to help this integration: "Use the Remote of the Mind: Replaying Memories" and

“Remember to Remember: Making Recollection a Part of Your Family’s Daily Life.” Chapter 5 addresses integrating the many parts of self. Just like adults, children can become stuck on certain aspects of their being, which can lead to rigidity or chaos. A temporary state of mind can be perceived as a permanent part of self. Kids can be taught that they have choices about what they focus on and where they place their attention. Three specific strategies are shared: “Let the Clouds of Emotions Roll By: Teaching That Feelings Come and Go”; “SIFT: Paying Attention to What’s Going on Inside” and “Exercise Mindsight: Getting Back to the Hub.” Chapter 6 is focused on integrating self and other. This addressed the importance of children being able to effectively relate to others. Based on attachment relationships with their caregivers, children develop models about how they fit into the world around them and how relationships work. Children can be helped to learn mindset skills like sharing, forgiving, sacrifice, and listening. Two specific strategies are shared to help children integrate self and other: “Increase the Family Fun Factor: Making a Point to Enjoy Each Other” and “Connection Through Conflict: Teach Kids to Argue With a ‘We’ in Mind.”

A notable strength is being able to use a strong scientific foundational knowledge of the brain to help parents understand the connection between brain development and children’s thoughts, behaviors, and emotions. It is a different approach to dealing with childhood behavioral and emotional behaviors. The suggested strategies are compliments to other known effective approaches to parenting.

A limitation is the book is written for children only through the age of 12. Because the adolescent and young adult brains are still actively changing, parents need strategies for these ages, too. In many families, adolescence and young adulthood are the ages for which parents are seeking help with parenting approaches. Having more specific parenting strategies for this age group could especially be helpful in decision making and balancing emotions.

Siegel and Payne Bryson have combined their extensive scientific knowledge and parenting expertise into a practical, understandable guide for parents of children from birth through age 12. They provide myriad ways to apply all the concepts presented.

This book is written for caregivers and teachers of children. It can also be helpful for professional counselors and licensed clinical social workers who work with children, as the concepts can be used as part of the counseling process and/or in teaching the concepts to children’s caregivers. I recommend this book to anyone interested in effectively helping children learn how to manage their emotions, thoughts, and interactions with others.

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