



ME AND MY BRAIN

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1. WHY A BOOK ON THE BRAIN?

Children's brains are at a stage of rapid growth. By about six years of age, their brains are already about 90–95% of adult size. However, your child's brain continues to change and develop. It is important to understand this. Rapid and unequal changes take place in different parts of the brain, especially in nerve connections. This is the basis for the emotional fragility, identity crisis and risk-taking propensity that children have as they grow into their preteens and teens. During this time, what goes into the brain will affect brain wiring and, thereby, their attitudes, values and behaviour. This is part of what is called neuroplasticity.

The Bible is clear. Parents and carers have a significant role to play in facilitating a child's brain development (Deuteronomy 6:6–9; Proverbs 22:6; Proverbs 12:26).

This is supported by secular research. For more information, see 'Your teenager's developing brain', Raising Children website, http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/brain_development_teenagers.html

This is why we wrote this book.

2. WHAT WILL THIS BOOK DO?

This book will help you to discuss:

- the importance of the brain in decision-making and memory (pp. 4–7)
- the significance of the 'thinking brain' and 'feeling brain', and how they develop at different rates (pp. 3–11)
- how to help your child make wise choices and decisions to help the 'feeling brain' and 'thinking brain' work together (pp. 12–17)
- the effects that playing violent video games or watching pornography can have on the brain (pp. 18–21)
- how to develop self-control (pp. 22–23; 30–31)
- the redeeming and renewing impact that Jesus can have on our brains (24–29).



3. TEACHING MOMENTS IN THIS BOOK

PAGES 4–7 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BRAIN IN DECISION-MAKING AND MEMORY

Discuss how in biblical times the ‘heart’ was considered to be the place where we think and feel and plan and control our actions. Now we think of our emotions as being felt in our brain.

Read Matthew 22:36–38, and discuss with your child what it means to ‘love something with all your heart’.

Activity: Make a list of activities, feelings and body functions, and figure out what part of the brain does each, referring to the labels where needed.

Refer to the PDF diagram of the [brain](#).

Some examples are getting out of bed, feeling ticklish, reaching into the fridge for a sweet, your heart beating, breathing, feeling happy, feeling sad, talking.

Unless you are a biologist or doctor, you may need to familiarise yourself with the brain!

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Some simple child-friendly sites:

- ‘Your brain & nervous system’, *KidsHealth*, <http://kidshealth.org/en/kids/brain.html>

Some fun videos on the brain to share with your kids:

- ‘The human body for kids/Learn about body for children/Brain song for kids’, *Kids Learning Tube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qw8E9WnZTQk>
- ‘How your brain works’, *KidsHealth.org*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nH4MRvO-10>

On brain connections:

‘How the brain works’, Sentis, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSzsI5aGcK4>

And, on emotions and rewards (feeling and thinking brains):

‘Emotions and the brain’, Sentis, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNY0AAUtH3g>

Phrases you may need to explain:

Page 3: ‘Your brain is important because it tells your body what to do.’

The brain sends and receives messages through nerves. Nerves are like motorways with messages rushing up and down. Sensations rush to the brain along these nerves. Actions (like moving your arms and legs, and speaking) are instructions, rushing away from the brain along these nerves.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Development of the young brain:

- ‘Development of the young brain’, National Institute of Mental Health, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XeIvtx6HHLg>
- ‘Your teenager’s developing brain’, *raisingchildren.net.au*, http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/brain_development_teenagers.html
- ‘Development of the young brain’ (includes transcript), 2011, National Institute of Mental Health, May 2, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/news/media/2011/gieedd.shtml>
- ‘Adolescent brain’, https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=GPMP68QP698#
- *The Teen Brain: 6 Things to Know*, National Institute of Mental Health, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/imaging-listing.shtml>

PAGES 8–17 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ‘THINKING BRAIN’ AND ‘FEELING BRAIN’, AND HOW THEY NEED TO WORK TOGETHER

You can use a Bible reading that you and your child are familiar with to discuss good and bad emotions/feelings and self-control. One suggestion is Galatians 5:16–26.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

- Kristen Jenson, 2012, ‘You have two brains!’ *Protect Young Minds*, April 16, <https://protectyoungminds.org/2012/04/16/you-have-two-brains/>

Another useful concept: the ‘Brain house: Upstairs and Downstairs’:

- Hazel Harrison, 2016, ‘How to teach your kids about the brain’, *Mindful*, March 17, <https://www.mindful.org/how-to-teach-your-kids-about-the-brain/>



Share: As you are comfortable, share how as a child you may have followed your ‘feeling brain’ and done something that had a bad outcome. Maybe, you ate too much of your favourite ice-cream and were sick afterwards? Or, you went out to play in the rain (when your mum had asked you not to!) and ended up sick and missed something else enjoyable.

Activity: Make a list of activities that would classify as ‘feeling brain’ and ‘thinking brain’.

Take a couple of ‘feeling brain’ entries (for example anger, sadness) and discuss what the ‘thinking brain’ might suggest as a response.

There are activities at the link below that you and your child could use:

- Hazel Harrison, 2016, ‘How to teach our kids about the brain’, *Mindful*, March 17, <https://www.mindful.org/how-to-teach-your-kids-about-the-brain/>

Activity: Ask your child to make a list of people he/she trusts who can help him/her develop the thinking brain capacity. You might like to refer to Proverbs 1:8, which is referred to in the book.

Read: Proverbs 1:8–9 and discuss what a garland and a chain may symbolise today. Note ‘garland’ and ‘chain’ are used in the New International Version. If you are using a different Bible version these terms may be slightly different.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

- ‘About good decision-making’, *Kids Matter*, <https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/families/about-behaviour/making-decisions/learning-make-good-decisions-and-solve-problems>

PAGES 18–21 THE EFFECTS THAT PLAYING VIOLENT VIDEO GAMES OR WATCHING PORNOGRAPHY CAN HAVE ON THE BRAIN

Read: Philippians 4:8, ‘Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.’

Ask your child: What does it mean to ‘think’ good things?

Share with your child about the temptations you experienced to think about things that weren’t ‘good’ when you were young. Perhaps these could be through TV programs, music videos, games or songs.

Make a list of foods that are good for the body and bad for the body.

Discuss how some foods that are tasty may actually not be good for the body if eaten in excess.

Now use this list to discuss what things form good and bad ‘brain food’, and how, similar to real food, some things that seem like fun can be bad for you.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

- Office of the Children’s eSafety Commissioner, ‘Discover the 24/7 world of movies and games’, *iParent*, <https://www.esafety.gov.au/education-resources/iparent/multimedia-reviews/movies-and-games>
- Kristen Jensen, 2016, ‘Sex mods??? Is minecraft safe for my kids?’ *Protect Young Minds*, November 3, <https://protectyoungminds.org/2016/11/03/sex-mods-minecraft-safe-kids/>

PAGES 22–31 DEVELOPING SELF-CONTROL

Read Proverbs 25:28, ‘Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control.’

Read Titus 2:11–14, ‘For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.’

Discuss these with your child as appropriate. The proverb’s verse of a ‘city with broken walls’ is a good example for discussion. You could perhaps even draw a picture of this simile to help your child to understand it better.

Share stories of your own lack of self-control and what resulted. Be brave!

Remember, the thinking brain, the seat of self-control, is not fully mature in your child.



Activity: Develop some exercises to help your child to work on self-control.

Example: (using delayed gratification) set a 'rule' in discussion with the child, and decide that if they do this, then they get certain rewards. They have to train their thinking brain to do something they don't particularly want to do (make their bed, take out the garbage, or sweep the kitchen floor), such that they get to do the fun (feeling brain) thing they want to do as a reward (go out and play, watch TV, play a video game).

You want them to understand:

- They can learn to control their choices, but often they can't control the consequences of these choices.
 - Keeping my thinking brain in control of my choices = reward. (Fun)
 - Allowing my feeling brain to drive my choices = less rewards. (No fun! In fact you may end up in trouble.)
1. Teach the difference between choices and consequences.

What would happen if you chose to jump in the pool? (You would get wet.)

How do you choose to keep from getting wet? (Don't jump in the pool.)
 2. Discuss how they can choose their actions, but consequences of those actions may be out of their control.

Can you jump in the pool and stay dry? (No.)
 3. Discuss how it is the thinking brain that helps them to choose which consequences (or results) they want.
 4. Discuss how sometimes the feeling brain may make you say or do something that hurts someone. Your thinking brain will help you to work out a way to say sorry. Assure the child that you as a parent or carer will always be there to help them.

Phrases you may need to explain:

Page 20: 'internet or TV that shows people taking off their clothes and having sex': this is an opportunity for you to say 'this kind of unhealthy brain food is also called pornography'.

Page 21: 'You might do something that hurts you or someone else.' You may want to use this opportunity to discuss appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.

- Ask if anyone in his/her class has ever behaved in a way that has made him/her uncomfortable?
- Ask about social media use among his/her friends. Has anyone put pictures or videos of themselves on Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, Musical.ly?
- Discuss why this is unwise.

Pages 24–25: You might want to read the story of Zacchaeus the tax collector from Luke 19. You could also read Romans 12:2 as you explain how God can help us to change the way we think.

Page 29: 'Ask someone you trust to help you.' This is an opportunity to discuss and maybe list people your child could go to for help.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Below are some references to help you in dealing with these issues:

- Kristen A Jenson, 2015, 'Ultimate parent hack: Teach kids to use their "thinking brain"', *Protect Young Minds*, April 2, <https://protectyoungminds.org/2015/04/02/ultimate-parent-hack-teach-kids-to-use-their-thinking-brain/>
- Justin Coulson, 2017, '7 ways to teach your child self-control', Dr Justin Coulson website, April 25, <https://www.happyfamilies.com.au/blog/7-ways-teach-child-self-control/>

