

Raising a Whole-Brain Child



While bringing up an all-rounded child is no easy feat, it isn't impossible as well. Read on to find out how you can nurture your little kiddo into becoming a whole-brain child.

BY SHAISTAH MUNAWAR

Do you at times wish you could understand exactly how your child's brain works? If you do, perhaps it's time for you to make a move to the whole-brain parenting approach.

According to Dr Tina Payne Bryson, co-author of *The Whole-Brain Child*; Psychotherapist at Paediatric and Adolescent Psychology Associates and at the Centre for Psychological Services in California, the whole-brain parenting approach gives parents strategies to help their child move from either chaotic or rigid states into adaptive, flexible and stable states. She adds, "These strategies also enable parents to survive the meltdown moments while

guiding your child as they develop."

Before going into the hows and whys, it is first important that you as the parent understand and grasp the concept of what a whole-brain child is.

Children are usually right-brain dominant from birth up to 18 months old. After which, the child will become more left-brain dominant due to the exposure he gets in the environment.

The Whole-Brain Child

Simply put, a whole-brain child is one who is able to use both the left and right hemispheres of his or her brain, describes Lim Wee Ming, Founder of My Little Genius and Public Relations Director of Whole Brain Activation Academy.

Concurring, Dr Bryson shares that when children have experiences that nurture all the parts of their brain including honouring an emotional intelligence, as well as a logical, intellectual intelligence, the whole brain is developed, which leads to the ability of making good decisions to live a balance and meaningful life.

While there is no exact age of when you should start moulding your child into a whole-brain child, Dr Bryson shares, "Parents can begin to influence how their children's brains develop from the earliest moments with them. When we are intentional about providing experiences that are emotionally attuned and nurturing, we begin laying the groundwork for a whole-brain child."

Wee Ming, on the other hand, believes

that education begins when the foetus is in the mother's womb. "When a child is born, he is always observing the environment and learning by the second. There are age-appropriate activities for the child even if he is just a few days old, and exposure to such activities will develop his love of learning if he thinks that the activities are fun."

Left versus Right

We know that there are two sides to the brain, but just how different are they from one another? Let's find out.

Left Hemisphere

"The left side of the brain is logical, linear, linguistic, literal, verbal, and it's like an emotional desert," explains Dr Bryson.

Some of the other characteristics of the left side of the brain shared by Wee Ming include analytical, objective, 'detail'-oriented and having critical thinking.

Right Hemisphere

"The right hemisphere senses emotion and information from the body. Both send and receive non-verbal information, and look at the overall meaning or context, and it's like an emotional tsunami," adds Dr Bryson. Characteristics include being random, holistic, intuitive, subjective, and having creative thinking.

Additionally, both our experts express that children are usually right-brain dominant from birth up to 18 months old. After which, the child will become more left-brain dominant due to the exposure he gets in the environment and as he uses more of his logical thought processes. Wee Ming further explains that by the age of six, a child would be left-brain dominant.

Developing Both Sides

Why is it important to nurture both sides of the brain then? It all comes down to the brain working together as a coordinated whole to achieve better results.

"Clearly, we function best when the two hemispheres of our brain work together, so that our logic and emotions are both valued as important parts of ourselves and we are emotionally balanced. Then we can give words to our emotional experiences, and make sense of them logically," shares Dr Bryson.

However, there are also times when your child will make use of the left and right sides independently, hence it is best for parents to develop both sides equally.

“Different circumstances call for different aspects of the left and right hemispheres of the brain to be used. When a child needs to tap into his creative juices, the right hemisphere of the brain will be more active. When a child needs to analyse a Math question and formulate equations to solve it, the child is actually using the left hemisphere of the brain when he undergoes such logical thinking,” states Wee Ming.

What Can Parents Do?

Dr Bryson suggests that the key to nurturing a whole-brain child is to help your child notice their emotions and the emotions of others.

“This is a great way to help connect the left and right hemispheres of the brain. When kids become aware of their emotions – and that’s no easy task, even for adults – they are better able to know themselves and to understand what’s going on inside them, as well as have empathy for other people. Just as important, they’ll also be ready to engage their left brain and verbalise these different experiences and emotions. Keep in mind that ‘emotions’ – the feelings we experience – are really in both sides of the brain.”

One way is to engage your child in discussions, as it gets them thinking and paves the way for emotional intelligence and empathy. Here’s how.

① Look for moments to highlight feelings and emotions

While reading together, ask your child about his thoughts on why and how the character is feeling in the story. Ask questions like, “If you were in this story and they were chasing you, what would you do? How would you feel?”

② Use real-life scenarios

Pose questions such as “How do you think it makes your brother feel when you say that to him?” or “What do you think is going on in that waitress’s life that made her so rude to us?”

Activities to Activate Whole-Brain

There are many other activities to stimulate a child’s left and right hemispheres of the brain. These include:

Left-Brain Activities

IQ sheets and activities, mazes, Math and language worksheets that require a child’s analysis to solve such questions

Right-Brain Activities

Pretend play, visualisation, memory games, songs and brain kinesiology

Activities for Both Sides

Chess, where visualisation, planning and analysis are required, as well as dual-hand abacus and mental arithmetic, in which the child utilises both the left and right hemispheres of the brain while visualising the abacus in his brain and performing the calculations

Nurturing a Whole-Brain Child: Dos & Don’ts

✓ **Do** always use positive comments such as ‘Well Done’ and ‘Great Job’ to encourage your child, as children thrive on positive affirmation.

✓ **Do** try to remember that your child’s brain is still under construction. They can’t be perfect all the time.

✓ **Do** bear in mind that your child is always doing the best he can at that particular moment, especially when you’re frustrated.

✗ **Don’t** use negative comments such as “We don’t love you anymore”, “This is so easy, so why are you so slow?” Such comments will negatively affect children’s self-esteem and self-confidence and they may have a fear of learning new things or picking up new skills.

The Benefits

As a child’s abilities are enhanced through this approach, your child will be more loving, appreciative and sensitive towards others.

“In terms of physical enhancement, I have seen children who initially feared water, but they jump straight into the swimming pool (with floats around the arms) during their swimming lessons. They also master new skills such as cycling on two wheels faster,” Wee Ming points out. ☆

