BRYSON EXPLAINS WHY THE “WHOLE BRAIN” IS GREATER (AND BETTER TO USE) THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS

Tina Payne Bryson Ph. D., coauthor of The Whole-Brain Child (with Dan Siegel MD), wants parents to better understand how our brains work. Once we do we can optimize our cognitive abilities when dealing with our adolescents and “discipline” them with the true meaning of the word in mind.

In her presentation March 11th at the College of DuPage McAninch Arts Center for the Glenbard Parent Series Bryson used several humorous antidotes to illustrate how the left hemisphere of the brain, that which governs logic, lineal thinking, linguistics and literal interpretation, operates (or should operate) in conjunction with the right hemisphere of the brain, that which governs emotional interpretation, non-verbal cues, whole-picture-context thinking, body language and random assortment of information.

When adolescents are having an “emotional tsunami,” parents often respond trying to use logic. Bryson explains why this doesn’t work. When emotions “run high” there is “hyper-arousal.” Kids become defensive and can’t think clearly and can’t even hear what you’re saying.

When responding to an upset adolescent, Bryson recommends using “connect and redirect.” This technique promotes the integration of the left and the right brain. To “connect” with the child, a parent should use a relaxed posture and calm voice. This will not only calm down the child, but the parent as well. Use non-verbal touch to comfort and then empathy to acknowledge the child’s feelings. This is right brain thinking.

To “redirect” a parent should ask open-ended questions and guide the child to solutions, planning, logical explanations and boundary setting. This is left brain thinking.

Bryson reminds us that the true definition of the word discipline is “to teach” not “to punish.” When your adolescent is “acting out” ask yourself questions? Why did my teen act this way? Be curious and look behind the behavior.

Remember: “Struggles equal opportunities.” All behavior is a form of communication. Adolescence is not just about raging hormones. The experiences teens go through cultivate new great abilities.

In adolescence the brain is becoming specialized. As Bryson puts it, “Where attention goes neurons fire. Where neurons fire, the brain rewires.” Parents can play a role in how their teen’s brain develops. Teaching them to integrate both sides of the brain will give them life skills larger than the sum of their parts.

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