

The Stress Mess! How Emotions & Pressure Affect Kids' Brains

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1

The BIG IDEAS

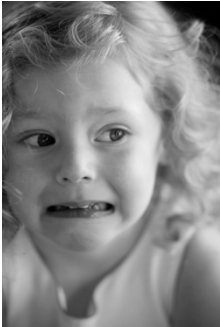


- Stress, Perceived Threat, and Emotional Upsets can **minimize** the brain's capabilities to think logically, problem-solve, learn and communicate.
- A child's Over-Scheduled life may contribute to Anxiety and Learned Helplessness.
- Technology Use and Information Overload may keep Digital Natives from developing the ability to think deeply about complex ideas, and develop Social Skills.
- Creating a safe and secure climate and environment that maintains consistent patterns, emotional support, **BALANCE**, healthy habits, and encouragement - can **maximize** capabilities.

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2

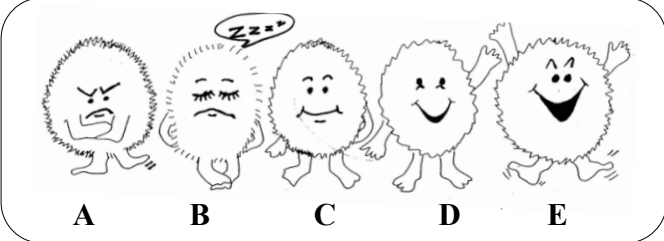

Perceived threats, stress, emotional upsets, isolation, and unpleasant physical environments trigger a "reflex response" and can minimize the brain's capabilities to learn.



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3

Which one represents how you are feeling right now?





Adapted from "TRIBES" by Jeanne Gibbs

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4

Stress Mess




- Stress is the body's general response to any intense physical, emotional or mental demand placed on it by oneself or others.
- Anything can be a stressor if it lasts long enough, happens often enough, is strong enough or is perceived as stress.
- Many gifted kids and adults have a heightened sensitivity to their surroundings, to events, to ideas, and to expectations, including a relentless pressure to excel.*

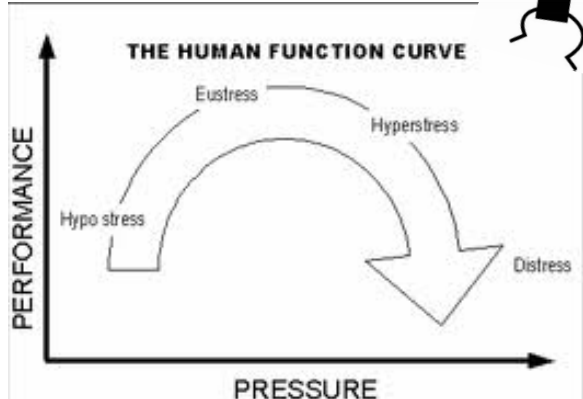
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Eustress – Good Distress – Bad



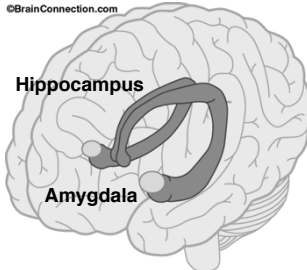
THE HUMAN FUNCTION CURVE



6


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REFLEX RESPONSE TO PERCEIVED THREAT



Reflex Triggers:

1. Survival, dangerous situations
2. Perceived threat
3. Old memories of danger
4. The unknown
5. **CHAOS & CONFUSION**




Physiological Responses:

- Stress hormones - reaction
- Startle Reflex
- Blood pressure, rapid breathing
- Upset stomach, dry mouth
- Large muscles stimulated
- Hackles tighten!
- Freezing

7

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Key Terms




- **FEAR** - an instinctive reaction to a clear and present danger or threat = ***FIGHT or FLIGHT***
- **FRIGHT** - a state of fear when danger or threat catches us by ***SURPRISE***.
- **ANXIETY** - a state of apprehension or worry about a danger or threat that ***MIGHT*** occur.
- **STRESS** - any situation (positive or negative) that involves “**unusual demands,**” is **persistent,** and **requires adjustment or change.**

8

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Possible Stressors for Gifted Students



- 1) Performing simple, monotonous, boring tasks.
- 2) Earning an "A" grade when expecting an "A+"
- 3) Constantly striving to live up to self-expectations - or those of others (parents/ teachers)
- 4) Striving to be FIRST or BEST or BOTH
- 5) Unclear procedures or unrealistic expectations are imposed.
- 6) Feeling different, lacking a peer group, not being included.
- 7) New situations.
- 8) Taking time off or vacations may make them feel nervous about missing school and keeping up with others.
- 9) Because they can 'see' both sides of issues, decision-making may be a very stressful process.
- 10) Watching or reading the news can cause kids to 'worry' about the world they will inherit.


9

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Learned Helplessness:

When people feel that they have no control over their situation, they may also begin to behave in a helpless manner. This inaction can lead people to overlook opportunities for relief or change.

- **Lack of affect and feeling...**
"I don't care." "So what?"
- **Believe any effort is futile...**
"I always fail." "It doesn't matter."
- **Have no control over what happens..."Whatever!"**



10

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"Learned Helplessness:" Patterns to Consider...

- Many children have been raised as "precious cargo."
- Many parents don't like to see kids struggle, so they pave the way or do things for them.
- Children are experiencing instant gratification every day...mostly through technology usage.
- In our efforts to raise children to "cooperate" we have created a generation who expect entitlement.
- Many affluent kids experience an "over-scheduled life"
- Many children in poverty never feel empowered.

11

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John Medina – Brain Rules

- **The brain is a sequential processor, unable to pay attention to two things at the same time. Businesses and schools praise multitasking, but research clearly shows that it reduces productivity and increases mistakes. Try creating an interruption-free zone during the day-- turn off your email, phone, IM program, or Facebook--and see whether you get more done.**

12

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What can teachers do?

- Avoid put-downs and sarcastic humor and remarks.
- Model and teach basic social skills: meet & greet, eye-contact, shaking hands, smiling, turn-taking, sharing, saying thank you.
- Include opportunities for Movement and encourage regular Exercise.
- Lighten-up, laugh, play, be silly once in a while.
- Orchestrate "Take Five" relaxation time(s).

13

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MAINTAIN A SAFE, SECURE & RELAXED CLIMATE

- Friendly and inviting 
- Clear beginning and ending times 
- Stated goals & expectations 
- Reflection Activity to start
- Inclusive seating arrangements
- Model JOYFULNESS, RESPECT, CARING & ENTHUSIASM 

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"Take 5" Areas

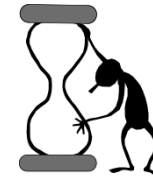
- Create a small space within the classroom that can be a place for reflecting.
- Set standards and time limits (5 minutes with no questions asked...)
- Include a comfortable chair, lava lamp, timer, fidget toys, stuffed animals...
- Headphones for music, pictures to look it...

15

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"TAKE FIVE" Relaxation Technique

- Find a quiet place - no disturbances
- Lie down - get comfortable
- Close your eyes - don't sleep!
- Breathe deeply - 5 counts in and 5 out
- Notice when you are feeling calmer
- Relax your muscles head to toe
- Tense your muscles then relax them
- When you reach you toes - take five (minutes)
- Slowly open your eyes
- Notice the feeling and enjoy it!




16

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“Humor is by far the most significant activity of the human brain.” Edward de Bono

HUMOR..


- Gets the brain’s attention
- Releases endorphins – feel good
- Bonds us with others – inclusion
- Enhances retention
- Relieves stress and tension



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BE A PANIC MECHANIC!
Some “Quick Fixes”...

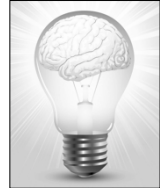
- Listen to music
- Relax and hang out with friends
- Go for a walk.. To the store? With the dog?
- Play music for fun or do something artistic
- Enjoy your hobby
- Watch a movie - not a scary one!
- Read a good book
- Practice the “TAKE FIVE” technique.
- Help someone else! Do some chores!!!
- Spend time with your pet... Hug your dog!



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☞ Take breaks:

- Do something different
- Move – Stretch – Exercise
- Look away from the screen
- Eat nutritious snacks & drink H2O

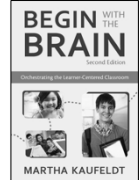


☞ Turn off technology

☞ Talk to others – face-to-face

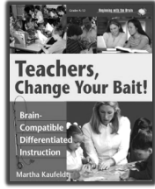
☞ “Tip-toe through the tulips”

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