

INTRODUCTION - SECTION 4
HOW CAN HUMANIST PARENTS AND TEACHERS
EDUCATE CHILDREN TO LOVE THEIR BRAINS?

January 28, 2021

This section of the website is designed to help parents and teachers (any adult who cares about children) develop a balanced approach to making sure that they and the children they influence can learn healthy brain habits. It also teaches the creative thinking skills and emotional control skills necessary to understand the new brain knowledge.

Understanding the new evidence from cognitive neuroscience is essential for creating a modern secular humanistic philosophy of life for individuals and families. The new brain knowledge can be used to deal with any personal or family relationship issues.

The new knowledge includes brain information that applies to science-based best-practices parenting principles and leadership skills. This is because it helps people control their own emotions in social situations by using their informed willpower to challenge or change traditional social customs. This is the essence of free will: to be able to choose between cultural alternatives within the social fabric.

The bonus for using the new brain information is that what is good for the brains of children is also good for the hearts of children. Children need to exercise regularly, eat nutritious foods, challenge their brains on a daily basis to solve difficult problems themselves or with the help of others in a collaborative or participatory way, and get enough sleep (8-10 hours consistently).

If parents and teachers used the following advice from the leading sleep expert in our country, they would be able to influence their children to live longer, healthier, happier lives. Without knowing anything else about the

human brain or learning anything new about your brain, you can train children to have good sleep habits and that would guarantee a healthy basis for all other educational efforts.

In his book, *Why We Sleep*, sleep researcher Matthew Walker has reported that "after two decades of my own research efforts, combined with thousands of studies from other laboratories around the world, we have many of the answers... These sleep revelations, together with many similar discoveries from my fellow sleep scientists... offer all the proof you need about the vital importance of sleep:"

TWELVE TIPS FOR HEALTHY SLEEP

[1] "Stick to a sleep schedule. Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day. As creatures of habit, people have a hard time adjusting to changes in sleep patterns. Sleeping later on weekends will not fully make up for a lack of sleep during the week and will make it harder to wake up early on Monday morning. Set an alarm for bedtime. Often we set an alarm for when it is time to wake up but fail to do so for when it is time to go to sleep. If there is only one piece of advice you remember and take from these twelve tips, this should be it."

[2] "Exercise is great, but not too late in the day. Try to exercise at least thirty minutes on most days but not later than two to three hours before your bedtime."

[3] "Avoid caffeine and nicotine. Coffee, colas, certain teas, and chocolate contain the stimulant caffeine, and its effects can take as long as eight hours to wear off fully. Therefore, a cup of coffee in the late afternoon can make it hard for you to fall asleep at night. Nicotine is also a stimulant, often causing smokers to sleep only very lightly. In addition, smokers often wake up too early in the morning because of nicotine withdrawal."

[4] "Avoid alcoholic drinks before bed. Having a nightcap or alcoholic beverage before sleep may help you relax, but heavy use robs you of REM sleep, keeping you in the lighter stages of sleep. Heavy alcohol ingestion also may contribute to impairment in breathing at night. You also tend to wake up in the middle of the night when the effects of the alcohol have worn off."

[5] "Avoid large meals and beverages late at night. A light snack is okay, but a large meal can cause indigestion, which interferes with sleep. Drinking too many fluids at night can cause frequent awakenings to urinate."

[6] "If possible, avoid medicines that delay or disrupt your sleep. Some commonly prescribed heart, blood pressure, or asthma medications, as well as some over-the-counter and herbal remedies for coughs, colds, or allergies, can disrupt sleep patterns. If you have trouble sleeping, talk to your health care provider or pharmacist to see whether any drugs you are taking might be contributing to your insomnia and ask whether they can be taken at other times during the day or early in the evening."

[7] "Don't take naps after 3 p.m. Naps can help make up for lost sleep, but late afternoon naps can make it harder to fall asleep at night."

[8] "Relax before bed. Do not overschedule your day so that no time is left for unwinding. A relaxing activity, such as reading or listening to music, should be part of your bedtime ritual."

[9] "Take a hot bath before bed. The drop in body temperature after getting out of the bath may help you feel sleepy, and the bath can help you relax and slow down so you are more ready to sleep."

[10] "Dark bedroom, cool bedroom, gadget-free bedroom. Get rid of anything in your bedroom that might distract you from sleep, such as noises, bright lights, an uncomfortable bed, or warm temperatures. You sleep better if the temperature in the room is kept on the cool side. A TV, cell phone, or computer in the bedroom can be a distraction and deprive you of needed sleep. Having a comfortable mattress and pillow can help promote a good night's sleep. Individuals who have insomnia often watch the clock. Turn the clocks face out of view so you don't worry about the time while trying to fall asleep."

[11] "Have the right sunlight exposure. Daylight is key to regulating daily sleep patterns. Try to get outside in natural sunlight for at least thirty minutes each day. If possible, wake up with the sun or use very bright lights in the morning. Sleep experts recommend that, if you have problems falling asleep, you should get an hour of exposure to morning sunlight and turn down the lights before bedtime."

[12] "Do not lie in bed awake. if you find yourself still awake after staying in bed for more than twenty minutes or if you are starting to feel anxious or worried, get up and do some relaxing activity until you feel sleepy. The anxiety of not being able to sleep can make it harder to fall asleep." (pages 341-342 of book **WHY WE SLEEP**)

+ Reprinted from NIH Medline Plus (Internet). Bethesda, MD: National Library of Medicine (US); summer 2012. Tips for Getting a Good Night's Sleep. Available at <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/magazine/issues/summer12/articles/summer12pg20.html>
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WHY WE SLEEP:

Unlocking the Power of Sleep and Dreams

by Matthew P. Walker.

Scribner, 2017 (i-viii, 360 pages)

Teaching children healthy habits by using the "brain mindfulness" approach can be done easily by considering the importance of learning good sleep habits. Training your children to love to go to sleep on a regular basis can create healthy lifelong skill-sets if done within the social context of unconditional loving kindness.

You are the master and there are no other authorities who have as profoundly an important opportunity to establish essential healthy sleep habits for your children. By teaching your children how to avoid sleep disorders early you will be giving them a solid gift that will keep on giving forever.

The alternative is knowing that if sleep skills are not taught well, then almost nothing else will matter as much. The same teaching method can be used to teach the 15 new brain ideas as well as time management and goal-seeking skills.

You, as a parent or teacher, can have a strong indelible impact on children's lives if you consistently do the right things to help them grow in dignity and with equal self-respect and respect for others.

This website was designed to motivate parenting behavior related to rational liberal humanistic values such as the respect for law and the appreciation of diverse cultural ideas and behaviors. Also this website promotes a revulsion for all kinds of prejudice, both implicit and explicit.

This means that it is important to teach children to recognize how racial discrimination and the various prejudices about agism, employment discrimination, ethnicity, gender bias, and sexual orientation need to be challenged continually through open family or classroom discussions.

For example, it is important to have family values that are clearly enunciated on a daily basis to remind children that there is a right and a wrong way to behave with respect to ethical values. The family or classroom standards of correct conduct need to be a conscious reality with many reminders of the right way to treat others and spend one's time. Eventually, it is important for children to learn how to use their creative imaginations and logical reasoning skills to defend social values and to understand the reasons for believing them at deeper levels as they grow older and become more mature.

All of these serious social issues can be discussed and argued within the family or classroom settings by applying critical thinking skills and critical reading strategies. Such rehearsal or practice sessions in the family or classroom social contexts can give children a better understanding of how to maintain their own attitudes toward others who may have prejudicial attitudes or habits. Prejudiced people are usually bullies since they have selfish closed minds.

Parents and teachers need to remember that there is a difference between people with open minds who have "**growth mindsets**" and people with closed minds who have "**fixed mindsets.**" regarding deep seated habituated childhood beliefs about the meaning of life and the causes of human nature.

Knowing the difference yourself can give you the ability to have a robust "**growth mindset**" based upon personal choices instead of being limited to a "**fixed mindset.**" The cause of fixed attitudes is usually due to traditional cultural ideas devoid of scientific explanations. They are usually internalized by childhood acculturation training that includes political and religious attitudes which rely heavily on habits of magical thinking instead of logical reasoning.

See the following information box for publication data about two great books, *Mindset* by Carol Dweck and *Mathematical Mindsets* by Jo Boaler. Both authors are professors and research scientists at Stanford University.

MINDSET:
The New Psychology of Success
by Carol S. Dweck.
Random House, 2006,
2016 updated edition (i-xi, 301 pages)

MATHEMATICAL MINDSETS:
Unleashing Students' Potential
Through Creative Math, Inspiring
Messages, and Innovative Teaching.
by Jo Boaler.
Jossey-Bass/A Wiley Brand, 2016
(i-xiii, 292 pages)

To learn the new brain vocabulary, parents need to teach their children modern critical thinking skills and critical reading strategies and reinforce them frequently. In this context, the word "critical" means having the reasoning skills to evaluate the content of new information a child is thinking or reading about at the time he or she is exposed to it.

It means not taking new information for granted without using reasoning skills to evaluate the content as being true statements with supporting factual evidence. In short, it means not blindly or mindlessly accepting the new content as true when it is actually false!

This positive critical attitude toward new information is especially urgent when dealing with information from social media feeds and online contacts and unsolicited email spam.

Humanist parents and teachers need to use their intellectual intelligence (IQ) and their emotional intelligence (EQ) to reason effectively with children. They need to create a fulfilling philosophy of life for themselves at the same time they teach children the same love of wisdom. This social intelligence [SE] is based upon modern humanistic secular principles for understanding our mental forces in the context of evolutionary biology and cognitive neuroscience.

Specifically, children need to be taught the correct words that describe their mental forces in order to become more resilient concerning their lifelong safety and security needs as well as their personal independence and social belonging needs. This is the time that their youthful minds are most impressionable. This is also the time when they are naturally most curious about everything.

instantly go to:
BRAIN MINDFULNESS
FOR HUMANIST FAMILIES

As a humanist parent or teacher (or any adult responsible for teaching children), you need to create "**balance**" in your own life or in the classroom so you can cope with the challenges of being a role model by expressing responsibility for the children under your care. You have the adult willpower to create more resilience and less confusion in the minds of children, either in the family or in the classroom.

The goal of increasing "**cognitive surplus**" for children and for yourself means that you can prepare yourself for

emergencies and also provide yourself with the basis for fulfilling future family interactions. You can mindfully choose to create "**cognitive reserve**" every day while interacting with children about many routine behaviors.

Conversely, you can reduce "**cognitive dissonance**" in your own life (as well as in the lives of the children you influence), by teaching them how to cope conscientiously (mindfully) with negative emotional feelings or traumatic social problems or the threat of such adversities.

Such serious problems can include emotional traumas or excessive stress caused by the continuous disruptive advertisements both online and on TV programs that expose children to hyperbolic cravings for consumable objects and unrelenting violence. Even being exposed to adult subject matter on cable and network TV programs can cause damage to children's minds. All of these artificial distractions --- day after day and year after year --- can become tragic menaces in children's minds.

You can increase cognitive surplus and therefore emotional resilience by increasing the synapses (density of the neuronal connections) throughout your brain and nervous system by doing a variety of interesting and challenging new activities on a daily basis as well as by willfully reducing extreme distress. This includes regularly getting enough sleep, eating sensibly, and exercising moderately. By emphasizing as many positive feelings as possible related to these activities, you will be using your flexible willpower to optimize your adaptable self-identity as you face the future!

Children must be trained by their parents and teachers to satisfy their own age-related developmental needs for

physical, intellectual, and emotional growth through the predictable developmental stages and the teachable moments of their young lives. This task is much easier for children when they see their parents and teachers modeling healthy responsible adult behavior within their family or classroom.

Also, parents with emotional problems, such as bipolar disorder or borderline personality disorder, can become dysfunctional role models for their children instead of being responsible caregivers. Such examples of bad adult behavior can have lifelong adverse impacts on the mental and emotional development of children. This is because children who are witnesses to bad adult parental behavior learn negative habits from imitative behavior. Such constant bad adult behavior can damage the immune systems of children since they are easily injured by chronic traumatic family emotional stress.

In addition, the mind-numbing assault on the brains of children by the ubiquitous mass media and the addictive social media and the omnipresent advertisements and commercials can seriously damage the young minds of children. Memory problems can be caused by the steady continuous exposure to the mass media and social media. And such time consuming irrelevant watching can lessen the amount of time children can devote to reading books and having important family discussions about personal values and social issues.

Unfortunately, movie advertisements and other loud commercials that demand the attention of children often compete with educational programs for the precious limited time children have during their childhoods for independent educational pursuits and deeper thinking. The limited time for freestyle education and play can be further jeopardized by the disruptive bombardment of

noisy TV programs and addictive video games designed to capture attention through loud music or bursts of colorful pictures.

In addition, the education time for learning essential cultural knowledge can be further lessened by the decreasing number of face-to-face human contacts. Children are spending more of their discretionary time straining their eyes and necks as they concentrate on video games on their handheld devices known as "screen time" rather than playing with their friends.

Also, if children were not constantly pressured to waste so much of their precious time watching appealing but often unessential media commercials, they could become more enthusiastic about gaining an understanding of science, history, politics, art, and their own health. They might even become more motivated to understand how their brains work!

Also, exposure to violent movie advertisements during TV commercials and film trailers can disrupt the healthy flow of normal daily activities and feelings of children. Loud advertisements constantly condition children to accept the preponderance of artificially contrived violence and unethical behavior just so businesses can sell more film or streaming tickets for maximum profits!

Commercials often portray criminal behavior, such as gun violence and exploding bombs, simply to shock viewers into paying more attention to the commercials. They are particularly insidious because they often have no socially redeeming value. They are simply made to divert the attention of children away from natural social contacts! They show brutal interpersonal conditions on TV or online as though they are normal adult activities. However, they simply glorify conflict and violence simply to make money from the violent activities.

In summary, it is unfortunate that the brains of children are constantly distracted and that their young lives can be reduced to simplistic habits. This is in spite of the fact that they need to be developing an appreciation for the increasing complexity of modern global civilization. Children are growing up in the most complicated communities with the most options in human history, but also the most confusing distractions and unexplained abstractions because of their shallow educations.

The new brain knowledge provides the best protection for children's brains. Children are now the most vulnerable targets of misinformation and disinformation from adult propaganda businesses who seek maximum profit no matter how much damage ads do to the children. For example, there are many unethical and unscrupulous sales people and trolls online and in shopping malls who pose a danger to children. In the past, they tempted kids to buy expensive video game characters with greater powers in order to give the kids more chances to win more points in their video games without parents knowing until the bill arrived in their bank accounts!

Many businesses targeting children for profits are conniving and unscrupulous at the same time.

HUMANIST EDUCATION PRINCIPLE

The fundamental **Humanist Education Principle** is that parents and teachers need to give children the instruction and the reinforcements they need to keep their brains and minds and bodies healthy for a lifetime of challenges and changes. To achieve this important humanist objective, the new brain ideas should be discussed continuously in all families and classrooms.

This educational process can involve the use of **"checklists"** to empower children to keep track of their activities and responsibilities on a daily or weekly basis. Also, their achievements and plans and expectations can be discussed regularly in the family in constructive ways.

All family members and all students in both public and private schools can participate and contribute to the quality of community life by being encouraged to communicate and share brain facts. Brain facts can help children optimize their brain functions during the usual sequence of predictable ages and stages of childhood growth curves.

Now it is possible to teach the facts about the new brain vocabulary to all children, young and old at home or in classrooms. Then they will be prepared with clearly understood scientific facts and humanistic values about their brains when they enter nursery school or kindergarten. With that factual educational background, they will be able to comprehend more complex brain ideas and mental functions and how to control them by the time they graduate from high school.

For example, when started early in the family or classroom, children can easily identify the parts of their brain's physical structure and distinguish it from their mind's mental functions. Their primary mental functions can be named **"mental forces"** or **"willpower"** within specific social contexts, such as family or school, by using proper words to control their emotions and describe responsible behavior.

This ethical principle assumes that children can learn to depend on the true brain knowledge about essential facts and skills and values that can add meaning to their lives. Fortunately, children can learn to rely on the true source of their thoughts and emotions, which is the interactive

relationship between their working memory and long-term memory systems inside their bodies instead of being confused by false myths and metaphors of alleged super spirits outside their bodies.

Specifically, children need to learn the difference between the silly magical depictions of reality portrayed in many movie and television shows, such as popular Disney fairytales. The point is that the source of children's basic knowledge about reality should come more from their personal relationships with real people and genuine natural environments instead of from their artificial relationships with fictional characters and artificial landscapes depicted in movies and animated cartoons.

The usual steady focus on fictional characters and artificial landscapes is not adequate for developing human potential. This means that children should be taught early to distinguish true authentic human aspirations from the fake artificial pretend portrayals of fictional stories in many books, movies, and television shows.

Moreover, during the past 30 years, the new evidence-based brain knowledge has been verified over and over again. Now, parents and teachers can use the new brain knowledge with its specific vocabulary of brain words to teach children about their mind's functions (mental forces) and the progressive mindfulness skills necessary to activate their new brain knowledge. The new cognitive neuroscience knowledge really matters because it can empower people to understand how to activate their minds and optimally expand their mental functions.

And they should be taught to value their own physical bodies and interactions with real people rather than the fictional characters in movies or on TV. In addition, they

should be taught to question the traditional religious and/or spiritual lifestyles of their parents and peers. In other words, children need to be prepared by their parents and teachers to resist the make-believe Hollywood versions of life. The fact that many children are eager to seek fame, even for 15 minutes, is a pathetic ridiculous goal when it is so much more important to seek companionship and knowledge about the real world.

Each new day, children can wake up and strive to learn more about the real world of cause and effect! Such an altruistic humanistic optimistic ethical life can maximize loving kindness no matter what a child's personal and social challenges are. This value system provides a solid foundation for a child to become a greater trustworthy person within their family and friendship circles.

Furthermore, children need to learn that the new brain knowledge will give them an intellectual advantage and greater leverage in their natural competition with others in the future. By knowing the real source of their emotions and ideas, the new brain knowledge can help children learn how to control their thoughts and feelings better by using the most important brain ideas ever discovered during the past 12 thousand years of human history. Since the end of the neolithic era and the beginning of farming by humans, approximately 10,000 BCE, there has been no knowledge to match the importance of our present brain knowledge for understanding human nature.

In this linguistic context, the overall function of humanist parents and teachers is to teach children to make good choices based upon scientific and humanistic logical reasoning rather than blindly obeying traditional rules based upon obedience to the authority of various social elites.

Parents and teachers can make mental notes or written lists of the number of times they have to remind them to stop focusing too much on screens and start making more face-to-face contact with family members and their friends. This kind of checklist or "**bullet-journal**" thinking is very important for parents and teachers as they instruct children within the family or the classroom.

After children learn the new brain knowledge, with its specific brain vocabulary, they will be able to become leaders during the rest of their lives in whatever professions they want to master. The new brain knowledge provides the best protection for children since kids are the most vulnerable targets of dangerous business interests. Many dangerous commercial temptations lurk online or in mini-malls everywhere.

Children need to rehearse positive lifestyles and make important decisions about how they can use their free time to learn better ways of studying and playing with others. And children can think mindfully about the consequences of their past decisions. To do this, they can learn to be more responsible for their decisions by using their creative imaginations when they think about any mistakes they may have made in the past.

Parents and child caretakers can encourage children to do collaborative thinking about important past decisions within the context of loving kindness every day. They can imagine successful outcomes for whatever activities they think could make them happiest and wisest in the future.

In addition, this secular humanistic linguistic "**whole brain**" context has a mindfulness frame of reference. It can give you a reliable way to guide the behavior of your children and to evaluate the results of your parenting practices.

This educational process can involve the use of **"checklists"** to empower children to keep track of their activities and responsibilities on a daily or weekly basis. Also, their achievements and plans and expectations can be discussed regularly in the family in constructive ways.

For example, the young brains of children need to be protected from the daily exposure to the incessant advertisements in addition to the unlimited video games on their computers, TV sets, phones and other hand-held devices. Parental-child discussions about the threats to healthy brain development can be scheduled at regular weekly family interactive sharing meetings or seminars. At these meetings, you can repeatedly teach children not to be distracted by the mass media and social media advertisements and online shopping choices.

Today, when a child's success in life depends more than ever before on learning independent thinking skills and emotionally intelligent reasoning skills, it is vitally important to teach them how to determine the rational benefits and probable risks of their decisions. Children can practice using critical thinking skills and critical reading strategies to learn and master the basic facts and ideas related to their brain structures and their mental functions. The more knowledge they learn, the healthier their brains will become and the better their mental functions will work!

WHY THIS MATTERS: This website can help humanist parents and teachers educate children using the new **"whole-brain"** thinking approach to the scientific understanding of brain structures and mental functions. It is the best way that humanist parents and teachers can integrate the new brain knowledge into family communications and school teaching to produce responsible, resilient humanistic children.