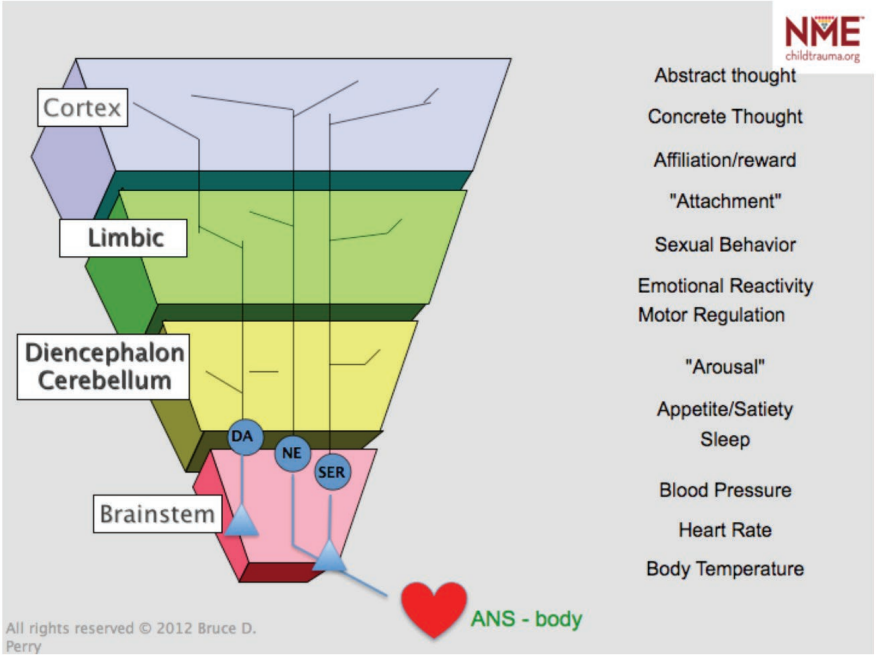


The brain develops and is organized from the bottom up. The functions our brain controls (see the list on the right) start with our basic body functions low in the brainstem and move up to the highest functions in the cortex. All four areas of the brain work in concert with connections from bottom to top and top to bottom.

Children who have suffered from early childhood trauma are likely compromised in the lower regions of the brain. Until we pay attention to these lower areas and work to bring about healing and new organization, we will struggle with the futility of trying to talk our kids into better behavior, and we will struggle with healthy relationships.

Teachers do want to understand why struggling kids can't learn and why they seem to not care. They usually blame the child, the child's parents, and then themselves.

What they can know is this: struggling kids are often the victims of childhood trauma. They have a weak foundation when it comes to brain organization, and until steps are taken to improve lower brain function, the ability to learn will not improve.

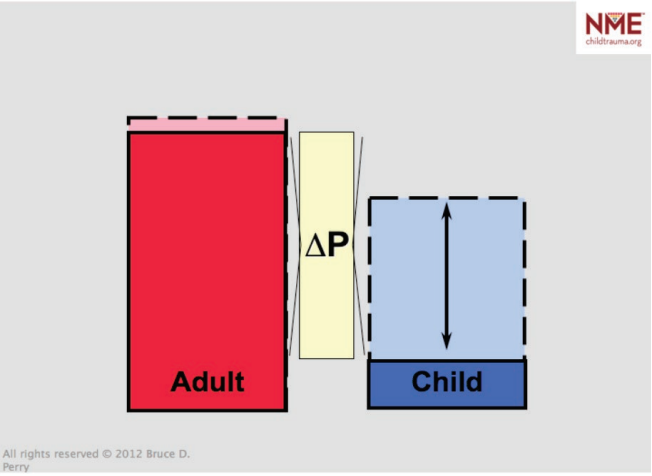
Lower areas are improved by good diet, steady doses of exercise, regular sleep habits, many positive relational interactions, and a steady dosing of patterned, repetitive, rhythmic movements that serve to bring calm and order to a clattering brain.

Adaptive Response	REST	VIGILANCE	FREEZE	FLIGHT	FIGHT
Predictable De-escalating Behaviors *(behaviors of the teacher or caregiver when a child is in various states of arousal)*	Presence Quiet Rocking	Quiet voice Eye contact Confidence Clear simple directives	Slow sure physical touch "Invited" touch Quiet melodic words Singing, humming music	Presence Quiet Confidence Disengage	Appropriate physical restraint Withdraw from class TIME!
Predictable Escalating Behaviors *(behaviors of the teacher or caregiver when a child is in various states of arousal)*	Talking Poking Noise Television	Frustration, anxiety Communicate from distance without eye contact Complex, compound directives Ultimatums	Raised voice Raised hand Shaking finger Tone of voice, yelling, threats Chaos in class	Increased or continued frustration More yelling Chaos Sense of fear	Inappropriate physical restraint Grabbing Shaking Screaming
Regulating Brain Region	NEOCORTEX Cortex	CORTEX Limbic	LIMBIC Midbrain	MIDBRAIN Brainstem	BRAINSTEM Autonomic
Cognition	ABSTRACT	CONCRETE	EMOTIONAL	REACTIVE	REFLEXIVE
STATE	CALM	ALERT	ALARM	FEAR	TERROR

Parents and teachers can learn to watch the State of their children:

- If they are calm, they can access the highest parts of their brain. They are able to do creative work, using the things they know to create new things like poems, pictures, essays, sculptures, and models.
- If they are alert, they can handle the stress of learning new things. They can work in groups, share responsibility, and enjoy most class interactions.
- When they become alarmed, however, they will act emotional or possible drift into daydreams as they try to escape this heightened stress level. If alarmed, they cannot learn well, and will start to activate their fight or flight mechanism. This is what happens when kids start to act out or seem disengaged.
- If a child moves into the fear state, they will become reactive and will fight, run or possibly faint. No clear thinking can happen in this state. Learning is impossible.
- If in terror, the child will not even remember what has happened during a conflict. He or she is on auto-pilot and has no control over their actions.

Parents and teachers can learn to use regulating interventions to help get their students and children back to a state where they can both learn and reason. In fact, unless we do regulate ourselves and then help regulate our children, no learning or reasoning is even possible. The lower regions of the brain need attention first.



In most adult/pupil relationships, the adult often has a huge power differential. The adult is usually bigger, more experienced, controls the money, in charge of consequences, and has other human resources to enforce rules meant to control. When the adult resorts to using this power differential during a conflict, it is likely that the child will quickly move along the stress continuum, from alarm to fear and possibly to terror. This reaction will usually show up in one of two ways:

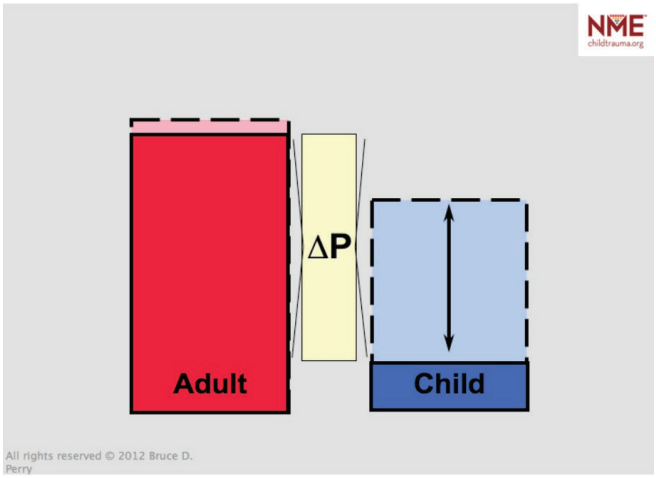
1) the child will get reactive and fight back or run

2) the child will dissociate, become quiet, and disengage from the conflict entirely.

In this scenario, both the adult and the child are motivated by fear. The adult will survive by using her/his power to win. The child will survive by trying to scare the adult away, by running away, or by escaping to a dream-like state.

When the power differential is great, everyone involved loses. There is no good outcome possible since everyone has reacted in fear.

When the adult involved in a conflict with a child chooses to reduce the power differential, there is a much greater chance to resolve the problem. For example, if the adult takes a knee or sits down, she reduces the sense of physical domination.



If the adult lowers his voice and stays calm during any verbal interaction, he is able to be firm without being loud. This reduces the sense of domination, and most children are likely to mirror this calmer behavior. If the adult gets smaller, gets softer, but sticks to her plan of action in this conflict, it signals the willingness to positively solve the problem without showing any inclination to give in.

Children feel safest when life is predictable. They want adults who are in control without being big, loud and unreasonable. Many repetitions of this kind of interaction will eventually result in positive brain change for both the adult and the child. It takes practice, but it works when we patiently work through the change.

Here is hierarchy of needs for a successful classroom that teachers and parents can agree upon. It all begins with safety. Teachers, students, and parents should expect their school systems to provide a sense of safety for all involved in the education program. **Safety is first.**

Once kids and teachers feel safe, there is a chance for engagement. Engagement means keeping students calm and alert...in the learning or engagement zone. To do this requires creativity, a sense of humor, and a classroom run by an instructor who knows when to use transitions and sensory breaks to reengage students who need to be brought back to the learning zone.

When students are engaged, they begin to succeed. There is no greater motivator than success. The best teachers find ways for all kids to succeed regardless of their stage of development. Know the stage of development and watch the state of arousal. Teach with both in mind. Success usually means less acting out, less daydreaming, and more curiosity, the fuel that energizes students to want to know more.

Greater success leads to self-esteem, which leads to better relationships. Good relationships are "miracle grow" for the brain. Nothing is more powerful. We must find ways to increase the number of positive human interactions for our children.

Finally, with this foundation, the teacher can challenge her students like never before. Teachers can enjoy helping students attempt difficult tasks that stretch them and yes, stress them. In fact, students confident in their foundation will yearn to be challenged and their curiosity will lead them to desire exploring new frontiers.