

SUMMARY

THE YES BRAIN

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Summary of “The Yes Brain” by Daniel J. Siegel, M.D., and Tina Payne Bryson, Ph.D.

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Learn How to Cultivate Courage, Curiosity, and
Resilience in your Child

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Introduction

Parents nowadays are concerned with doing everything they can to make sure they have helped their children become capable of living happy and meaningful lives. One of the keys to this is being able to continue to make good decisions even when life is difficult. To do this one must help their children and themselves develop a *Yes Brain*, which is simply the culmination of four main characteristics. The first is balance, which is the ability to take control of your emotions and behavior so children are less prone to outbursts and loss of control. The second is resilience, the ability to be positive and hopeful about your future, even after things don't go your way and you are faced with disappointment. The third is insight, which is the ability to see your internal motivations and what causes your emotions, so you can learn how to make better decisions and gain stronger control over your life. And the last is empathy: the ability to understand where other people are coming from and how they feel, so you can act when necessary to improve your life and the lives of others. Through this book, you'll learn how to nurture your children and cultivate a *Yes Brain* in them from an early age in order to help them lead a happy and meaningful life.

The Importance of Developing a Yes Brain

If the words *yes* and *no* are consistently repeated to you, you'll notice that each has a different psychological impact on your brain. For instance, *yes* is more positive while *no* is more negative. A No Brain leaves you reactive and not in control of your actions; therefore, you essentially become a puppet for any emotions that may encroach in your brain for whatever reason. On the other hand, a Yes Brain fosters receptivity, which is when you become open to trying new things and forming new ideas. A Yes Brain makes us active learners and participants in life, thus putting us in a state of mind of peacefulness, and allowing us to learn new things and make new plans.

On the other hand, a No Brain means you have a defensive and *reactive* outlook. As a result, a No Brain makes it incredibly difficult to connect with other people and make good decisions. Everyone falls into a No Brain state from time to time, even adults. But if you have the underlying Yes Brain as your default, then these failures and tantrums will be short-lived. Your Yes Brain will quickly start to think of new plans that will make your life better versus your No Brain ruminating on your failures.

So how can you teach your child to develop this attitude? Teaching your kids to have a Yes Brain does not mean you always say yes to them. It *does* mean helping your children understand how their actions make them who they are, and giving them the skills to control who they are becoming and deciding who they want to be. Unfortunately, society doesn't make developing this attitude easy. In fact, many things in the world foster more of a No Brain way of thinking rather than a Yes Brain, from school, to media, to other people, a lot in the world would rather appeal to your reactive No Brain side. Therefore, the best way to teach your children is to model the behavior.

For example, let's say your son has a meltdown each time he loses a game or makes a mistake on the soccer field. When a parent has a No Brain response, they might say something like, "Look, other kids aren't crying

when they miss a goal, so you shouldn't either." This response simply shames the child and embarrasses him for crying. Instead, it's important to develop a Yes Brain attitude and learn the techniques to help empathize with your child. Techniques like deep breathing can help you comfort your child, calm them down, and make them aware of their behavior.

The Yes Brain isn't about pressuring parents to never make mistakes with their children; instead, it implores you to relax, neither you nor your children are expected to be perfect. If you expect this, you will always end up with disappointment. Our children's brains are very much affected by the relationships and experiences they have with their parents. Sometimes it is much better to ask them questions than to tell them answers, especially when it comes to their feelings. That way, we are not invalidating how they feel but letting them work out why they may be feeling a certain way.

You see, brains are much more affected by nurture than nature. Science backs this up with the research of Neuroplasticity and Interpersonal Neurobiology (IPNB). Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to constantly change throughout your life; meanwhile, IPNB looks at neurobiology through an interpersonal perspective, which means it deals with how our mind, brain, and relationships combine to form who we are. Therefore, a Yes Brain means having the ability to integrate and become aware of how all of these things work together to make you who you are. If you are aware of these connections and teach your child how to also be aware, it gives them more control over their life, which is one of the main purposes of fostering a Yes Brain.

The Balanced Yes Brain

How do you feel when things are going well in your life? Perhaps you feel excited and optimistic about the future. However, the moment something goes wrong, how do you react? If your mood quickly degrades as soon as something goes wrong, then your mind is lacking balance. Out of the four qualities that comprise a Yes Brain, balance is the first. It is very common for children to not have mastered balance and act out at times, whether they act out physically or mentally usually depends on their age and where they are in their life.

However, if they don't act out at all, then that is more cause for concern since experiencing these losses of control is part of navigating your emotions. These outbursts due to an unbalanced mind happen in varying ways and in varying amounts, but they usually happen in the form of either anger, non-responsiveness, chaotic tantrums, anxiety, or depression. On the other hand, the behavior you see from a balanced Yes Brain reflects an adjustable, flexible, rational, meaningful, empowered, and responsive reaction.

The reason that balance is the first on this list is that it is essential for working with the remaining three factors: resilience, insight, and empathy. Having a certain amount of balance is necessary to function in society and is crucial to getting the outcomes you want. Without any balance, you'd just be a ball of chaotic emotion, unable to control your reactions to the world around you. That is why, as parents, balance is one of the most important and basic skills to teach your children. Depending on the specific emotion your child is feeling, they may be able to tolerate a lot or a little bit before they lose control. Everyone is different with what their triggers are and how much they can tolerate in any given circumstance, but by cultivating balance, you can help teach your child's brain incredible tolerance.

However, balance doesn't mean maintaining your control all the time; in fact, as humans, this is near impossible. Instead, it means focusing on the

speed at which we can regain control over ourselves after we face any form of personal disappointment. To better teach your children how to respond in a Yes Brain form, you must respond to their emotional outbursts in a Yes Brain way. For instance, how many parents experience their child crying each time they drop them off at school? A No Brain response might tell the child to be a “big girl” or “big boy;” however, a Yes Brain attitude assesses the outburst from a new perspective.

One technique is allowing the child to express his or her feelings by creating an illustrated book about school mornings. This simply allows the child to express the difficulty of saying goodbye while also placing importance on the fun and excitement that the school day brings. In the end, teaching children how to balance their emotions is important for helping them regain their emotions and tuning into how they feel.

It is important for parents to assess their children to find out what triggers them, and how broad and unique their specific emotional zones of control are. That way, as parents, you are able to help your child develop and maintain balance in the day to day challenges they are bound to encounter.

The Resilient Yes Brain

Now that we've discussed balance and staying in control of your emotions, it's time to discuss resilience and strengthening your ability to stay in control. If you are a reactive parent and your child misbehaves, your first thought will be to tell your child to stop and make their bad behavior instantly disappear. Since these outbursts are more about communication, it is important to listen to the message your child is trying to convey and instill the necessary skills they need to handle the same situation better next time. This doesn't mean that you or your child will always be calm and peaceful, it means that you can understand and adapt to your emotions as they arise from a place of resilience and understanding.

One way to help your child learn more resilience isn't by using rewards or punishment, but by using stories and roleplaying to validate your child's feelings. In fact, telling them that they are overreacting or that something "isn't a big deal" is a trait of a No Brain attitude. Instead, validate their feelings and think of a plan that will help them understand why they may be feeling fear in the first place. For example, say your child wants to start a new sport, like Little League baseball, but he is scared to start. Instead of telling your child that he has nothing to be scared about, validate his fear but also encourage him to try. Just simply show up to the first practice! While the first practice might not go well, it'll get easier over time, and soon, your child will have a new favorite hobby.

You see, a child's behavior is simply a form of communication and you must teach your child how to be resilient. Building this resiliency makes it so your child is actively choosing how to respond to life's difficulties rather than being at the mercy of their emotions. You strengthen this response in your child by helping them learn and grow from disappointments. More specifically lovingly teach them, let them know you are there for them, and that you know what they are doing is difficult. Validation and praise are tenants of improving resilience instead of invalidation and rebuke.

To be able to help your child in difficult situations, your relationship with them is key. You must help them feel secure in themselves and their relationship with you. To do this, you must *listen* to what they are saying to you with their words and actions, then you can more effectively calm their mood with your actions. When your child knows that you are their safety net in a healthy and supportive way, they'll be more willing to explore and try new things on their own. They should know that if they encounter something they can't deal with, they can always come to you for your loving support. Your relationship with your child is also important because a deep relationship with him or her is the only way you'll be able to correctly assess who they are and how to help them improve their resilience.

The Insightful Yes Brain

The next skill is the ability to acknowledge and understand ourselves and then use that understanding to be in better control of our actions and emotions. This skill is called *insight* and it isn't easy for kids or adults to cultivate this skill, but it is necessary if you hope to understand yourself and connect with others in a meaningful way. In fact, it is common for people to act out their inner emotions without consciously knowing why they are feeling them. For example, you might blow up at your kids but do you ever step back and analyze your behavior? Probably not. Luckily, you can train yourself and your kids on how to develop insight.

To have insight, it is important to look at your emotions from two perspectives: your own as well as the other person. To do this, you must pause and put yourself in the shoes of the other person when you begin to feel like you're about to burst. This gives us a broader perspective over the events happening to us, and in turn, gives us more control over our reaction to the situation. You see, insight is all about taking a moment to think when we feel our tension rising, and instead of losing control, taking a moment to view the situation from the outside to give us a calmer, more rational perspective.

Too often we react without thinking, this generally leads to a less than favorable outcome. If we don't take a moment to think when the tension is rising, it becomes very difficult to remain in control of ourselves and our emotions. When we lose control of ourselves, we enter a No Brain state. Imagine how things would turn out differently if your children always take a moment to think, and in turn, make insightful choices whenever a problem arises in their life. If your children are taught this skill, it can trickle down to generations to come, making your whole lineage more prepared for the world.

For example, say your eight-year-old child tends to become "hangry" when she hasn't eaten in a few hours. Instead of allowing her to throw a tantrum,

simply teach her about her reactions. You can teach her about the red zone and green zone. The red zone is when she reacts negatively and the green zone is the positive zone she should aim to stay in. In this situation, you can simply say, “When you reach the top of the red zone, you erupt like a volcano!” Then you might add, “It’s okay to get upset but perhaps try taking a moment to pause and think about why you may be exploding.” This way, you are teaching your child an effective way to handle her feelings. Of course, the volcano trigger can be many things: anxiety, going to school, etc. but teaching them at a young age how to respond to these situations will help them gain control of their emotions in the future.

Of course, there are situations in this world where you lose no matter what choice you make, but when you have a Yes Brain mentality, you have the advantage of choosing how you respond. It’s important to note that having strong emotions and expressing them isn’t a bad thing, but it’s more important to acknowledge how we choose to express them and whether we are able to maintain control over ourselves in the process. You see, one of the greatest lessons we can teach our children is to recognize when they are losing control of their emotions.

The Empathic Yes Brain

It's time to learn about the final skill: empathy. Empathy is the ability to understand and be compassionate about the feelings of others. People who display empathy are generally happier and less frustrated; therefore, it is important that we can imagine how another is feeling to the point of understanding, but not beyond the point where we stop thinking about our own feelings and perspective. In other words, we must still maintain our sense of self even while actively using our empathy.

Contrary to popular belief, empathy is a trait that you can learn. It is something that can even be instilled in the most seemingly self-centered individuals, thanks to neuroplasticity. Remember? Neuroplasticity is the ability to change your brain so learning empathy is certainly doable. When you apply all of the other lessons of The Yes Brain, empathy comes almost naturally. In fact, when our emotions are balanced, we are resilient to stressors and are insightful about our lives and the lives of others.

To teach your child about empathy, begin by thinking about empathy in the way you think about math and reading. When your child is weak in one of these areas, you don't simply give up and consign your child to never be able to read; instead, you find out the areas of reading they are weak in and teach them how to improve. Much of the same outlook is useful to have when teaching your child empathy.

The opposite of empathy is selfishness, but it's important to note that selfishness in children is incredibly *normal*. In fact, children thinking about themselves first is human nature, it gives them a better chance of survival. As parents, we are constantly trying to develop positive skills in our children that will last long into the future, but your most important role is to focus on the present. The present is where change and learning take place. You must give your child time to develop and not be overly concerned with how they may be in 10 years because of some worrying self-centered action. Instead, when you see these selfish qualities in your child,

use them as a chance to teach them the correct response using the many techniques you have learned.

To further ensure you are thinking correctly about empathy, it's important to realize empathy isn't simply pleasing people at your own expense.

Instead, empathy is considering people's feelings while still being sure of your own desires and working towards them. While teaching this skill may seem overwhelming and difficult, that's because it can be. Think about it. If it was easy, we'd all easily be perfectly balanced individuals, right?

Unfortunately, that's not the case. The good news is that all of our lessons can be worked on in normal, everyday events. This doesn't mean that you have to treat every day like a parenting sitcom, in which you sit down and have a meaningful heart-to-heart with your kids and impart important lessons. Instead, some of the most important lessons are taught when you play with your kids, read or create stories, playfully debate, show off your senses of humor, or simply just spend time together.

In the end, all we're trying to do is help our children form lasting connections in their brains that align them with other people and their feelings. We want them to be involved with people and instinctively think about and feel concern for those around them. Additionally, we simply want them to actively care about others and understand right from wrong.

Final Summary

With the lessons you have learned, a successful child can operate from a place of balance, resilience, insight, and empathy in their day-to-day life. You see, nurturing a Yes Brain is more likely to reveal a person's passions and desires, but the aim shouldn't be becoming the top of the class, the top person in your field, or even the most popular person around. Instead, fostering a Yes Brain means aiming to teach your child how to understand themselves and their emotions. Rather than teach conformity, the Yes Brain teaches you how to be your authentic self by finding out what is truly important to you. It is also supposed to teach you how to live a fulfilled life where you make active decisions to become the person you want to become in a healthy and calm way. A Yes Brain helps a child develop an integrated and connected self-awareness so they can have a meaningful life of rich connections, interactions, and emotional stability. Now that you've read the tenants of The Yes Brain, you as a parent have to decide whether this definition of raising a successful child is your own definition as well. In many communities, outward success is valued so highly that it can be extremely difficult to maintain the tenants of The Yes Brain with your children. We just challenge you to use this scientific research to optimize the brain development of your child while using these methods and seeing what works for you. At the end of the day, the goal is to help your child figure out who they are and what they want to be.



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