

# Making Sense of Mindsight and Brain Science

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## **Week 6 of 12 from the *Transformational Parenting Process***

Prepared by the Jai Institute for Parenting

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When we understand the way our brain is structured, how it works, and how to support its optimal growth and activation, we are giving ourselves and our children the gift of a lifetime. Right now, as parents, we are living with the most sacred, and enormous of missions: We wield the tools that literally shape our children's brains.

Before we look forward and initiate ourselves even more deeply into this process, let us reflect back on what we have learned so far and how you are integrating.

### **A Quick Review:**

#### **The 10 Pillars of Transformational Parenting**

- I. *Which of the 10 Pillars are you finding easier to practice?*

- II. *Which pillar(s) continues to be a challenge for you?*



**How to name and recognize our attachment style based on how we were parented:**

III. *Are you able to notice when you are slipping into insecure attachment?*

IV. *Do you notice when you are securely attached within, and are therefore able to connect with your child?*

**How to be aware of our nervous system “thermometer” - focusing on our physical, verbal, and nonverbal cues of stress.**

V. *What have you learned about your nervous system thermometer? What is your first cue that stress is rising, and a sensory calming tool must be activated?*

**How to engage a sensory calming tool in self-regulation (restoring inner safety).**

VI. *What is your sensory calming tool?*



**How to support your child to find safety in their body before any kind of teaching, redirection, verbal empathy, or problem solving.**

VII. *What is your child's sensory calming tool?*

**How to apologize to our children from a place of self-forgiveness.**

VIII. *How is your self-forgiveness practice developing?*

IX. *Are you finding more willingness to apologize because it is coming from self-compassion vs. shame?*



# *Mindsight and Transformational Parenting*

## **SEEN: The Second “S” in Earning a Secure Attachment**

Mindsight is a term unearthed by Daniel Siegel describing one’s ability to “see inside their own mind, and the mind of another, with curiosity, openness, acceptance, and love.”

When our children feel SEEN by us, and understood without judgment or fear, their brains grow! Feeling seen is a prerequisite for feeling safe. When we feel safe, we develop, integrate, grow, and thrive.

Mindsight is our willingness to see beneath the behavior and truly get curious about what is going on within our child’s thoughts and perception that is creating undesirable behavior.

A response without Mindsight may sound like this: *“HEY! What’s wrong with you? Why would you do that?!”*

The same situation while applying tools of Mindsight may sound like this: *“Hey, love – I saw you grab your sister’s work out of her hands. Help me understand what’s going on for you. I’m curious what you were thinking and trying to do.”*



# *The 6 Core Blocks That Keep Us from Practicing Mindsight with Our Children*

## **1. Conditioned Beliefs About Children**

- Children are born bad and must be taught how to be good.
- Children don't know what they need, think, feel, and dream for.
- Children need to be controlled.
- Children are here to be quiet and in service toward adults.

## **2. Lack Of Awareness And Information**

- Not being aware of our child's brain development creates an incongruence in our parenting. We expect our child to be able to exist and deliver behaviors that are impossible for their development.
- Lacking information on how children's brains develop and what they require to thrive leaves missed opportunities for crucial developmental phases. Our empathy, our secure attachment within ourselves and with our child, and our longing to understand are what GROWS our children's brains. Fear and stress inhibit growth and delay the development of the child's emotional regulatory centers and prefrontal cortex.

### **Low Brain: Beginning at birth and coming to maturation around ages 2 or 3**

The body is the main focus of development. Physical coordination is developing. The child is constantly seeking safety and taking in their environment like a sponge. They are learning patterns and language. When stressed, children in this age range cannot follow verbal cues, have very little impulse control, and are 100% dependent on co-regulation to calm their body's overwhelm and to contain their emotional experience without reacting.

Mona Delahooke, in her book *Beyond Behaviors* notes that "56 percent of parents believe that children have the impulse control to resist the desire to do something forbidden before age three. The truth: toddlers don't start developing these abilities until age three and half or four at the *earliest*."



## **Middle Brain: Beginning around age 3, and coming to maturation between ages 7-12**

Feelings and emotions are the main focus of development. Children are learning how to contain emotions and identify feelings. The child is still completely dependent on co-regulation when stressed. The middle brain holds our emotional regulatory centers, and our impulse control. These are just beginning to develop and will require consistent warmth, empathy, modeling, and compassion in order to fully develop. The middle brain operates at the alpha and theta brain wave lengths, which are similar to a hypnotic state. Our belief systems are formed during this time. Supportive and life enhancing beliefs are formed when the system feels safe and calm. Limiting beliefs are formed when the system does not feel safe, and the brain is stuck in the amygdala (stress, fear, aggression, shame), and hippocampus (memory).

## **Frontal Lobe/Prefrontal Cortex: Beginning in utero and developing until between 25 and 30**

### **From Birth to Age 6**

- Infancy (0-3 Years): Neural connections are being made through relationships and imitating what they are modeled
- Early Childhood (3-6 Years): Language develops, social emotional skills begin to develop, and impulse control is at its beginning

### **Ages 6 to 25**

- Middle Childhood (6-8 Years): Children begin to mature and execute more forethought with their actions. Their ability to control their impulses strengthens
- Adolescence (8-25 Years): Planning, abstract thinking, independent task initiation, and more consistent emotional regulation or impulse control develops slowly for 17 years

*The frontal cortex does not truly take flight until adolescence, when the teenage brain is restructuring itself and experiencing a rapid pruning of old synapses and neurons, and a rebirth of neural pathways. (Brainstorm by Daniel Siegel is an excellent resource for the teenage brain.)*



*What occurs in the prefrontal cortex:*

- Foresight and consideration of the future
- Known as the “personality center”
- Understanding of cause and effect
- Problem solving strategies
- Organizing thoughts
- Inhibiting aggressive or violent behavior
- Impulse control and delayed gratification
- Emotional self-regulation
- Psychological flexibility
- Focusing attention
- Understanding reasoning
- Ability to follow directions with clarity (The ability to switch from what THEY want to what YOU want or what is needed in that moment for the well being of all.)
- Working memory and the ability to follow a multi-sequenced instruction
- Ability to regularly understand hypothetical reasoning and abstract concepts
- Empathizing and truly understanding how their actions impact another

# BRAIN HIERARCHY

## FRONTAL LOBE

- \*Abstract Thinking
- \*Problem Solving
- \*Reasoning
- \*Executive Functioning
- \*Organizing
- \*Motor Functions
- \*Regulates Emotions
- \*Expressive language

## FUNCTIONS

- \*Organizes thoughts on paper
- \*Remembers facts from teacher
- \*Starts and completes tasks
- \*Tells stories

## TEMPORAL LOBE

- \*Speech
- \*Auditory Processing
- \*Hearing
- \*Behavior
- \*Emotions
- \*Short-Term memory
- \*Long-term memory

## FUNCTIONS

- \*Processes what the teacher teaches
- \*Fear
- \*Fight or Flight
- \*Retains Facts

FRONTAL LOBE

TEMPORAL LOBE

PARIETAL LOBE

## PARIETAL LOBE

\*Sensory Information

## FUNCTIONS

- \*Taste
- \*Touch
- \*Smell
- \*Temperature

OCCIPITAL LOBE

## OCCIPITAL LOBE

\*Visual System  
\*Visual Information

## FUNCTIONS

- \*Processes words on a page
- \*Knows shapes and sizes
- \*Recognizes letters
- \*Knows left from right

CEREBELLUM

## CEREBELLUM

- \*Balance
- \*Coordination
- \*Attention
- \*Rhythm
- \*Proprioception
- \*Vestibular

## FUNCTIONS

- \*Kick a ball
- \*Throw a ball
- \*Jump on one foot
- \*Ride a bike

SPINAL CORD



X. *Reflecting on the information above, are you expecting developmentally appropriate behavior of your child(ren)?*

XI. *Do you find yourself expecting your child(ren) to be able to act in ways that are not developmentally appropriate?*

XII. *What needs to shift, if anything, in your parenting approach that is more in alignment with your child(ren)'s brain development?*

### **3. Seeing Through A Lens Of Judgment And Labels**

- Staying stuck in labeling behaviors creates a barrier to understanding. When we come to conclusions about who a child is, we pigeonhole them and stunt their evolution.
- Notice if you find yourself attaching a label, positive or negative, vs. trying to understand where these behaviors are coming from (feelings, needs, thoughts, beliefs).



# Qualities (Judgments, Labels)

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Sincere	Well spoken	Resourceful
Interesting	Rash	Possessive
Happy go lucky	Attention seeking	Humble
Overcritical	Dependable	Reliable
Honest	Reasonable	Creative
Honorable	Illogical	Gracious
Courageous	Thorough	Stingy
Weak	Open minded	Mature
Understanding	Clever	Perceptive
Responsible	Respectful	Fickle
Neat	Self sufficient	Positive
Popular	Thoughtful	Warm
Loyal	Quick witted	Impulsive
Truthful	Eager	Outgoing
Sensible	Resentful	Careless
Practical	Wise	Earnest
Broad-minded	Original	Productive
Self-reliant	Reckless	Shy
Self-confident	Controlling	Careful
Trustworthy	Considerate	Kind
Gentle	Ambitious	Sensible
High spirited	Relaxed	Light hearted
Immature	Boastful	Lazy
Intelligent	Good natured	



XIII. *Which labels do you find yourself attaching to your child(ren)?*

XIV. *If you were to get curious and try and understand what is happening beneath the surface when your child displays these qualities, what feelings, needs, thoughts, beliefs would you find?*

**Note:** for many parents, they struggle to see what is unhelpful about positive labels. Calling your child “such a brave girl” after accomplishing a task she once feared doesn’t seem so harmful, does it? We are digging a bit deeper here, and humanizing our children past labels, into a more fluid state, and out of black and white thinking. Eventually we move beyond “I am brave” or “I am not brave,” and arrive at “I AM.” **I am me**, and when I made that choice I was feeling brave, and my needs for confidence and security were met.

#### 4. Fear and Projection

- When we witness our child display a quality or behavior that activates the fear center in our brain (our limbic system), we are not able to see clearly, and quickly begin the “fear spiral.”
- Example: A 7-year-old is not interested in school work. The parent begins worrying that their child is not going to do well in school, just like them, and therefore not get into college. Because they will not get into college, they will not have a job, and won’t have any friends and will be miserable and all alone. (Note—this typically happens subconsciously, and most parents do not realize the intensity of fear scenarios they concoct in their minds.)
- **When we experience fear in our brain, our amygdala (a part of our limbic system or middle brain) is activated.** This is the center of the brain where we store unconscious, emotional, and somatic memory, called implicit memories. Our body is flooded with emotional, non-visual memories when our child displays a behavior that caused US stress when we were children. This is called a projection, where you see your child through the lens of your unprocessed emotional memories.

XV. *Where does fear come up for you in your parenting?* (Example: My toddler hits me. I'm afraid he is going to grow up to be a violent, aggressive person just like my dad was.)

XVI. *Which struggles of your child create a fear response within you?* (Example: Watching my child struggle making new friends makes me worried sick. I am so scared she will be alone, and depressed.)

XVII. **Get curious, where do your fears stem from?** *If your greatest fear as a parent were to come true, what would that mean about YOU, as a parent?*

## 5. Lack of Self-Awareness And Integration

- If we were not seen and understood as children, we may struggle with seeing and understanding ourselves. We may struggle with accepting who we are and often wonder, *"Who am I, really?"*
- When we live without unconditional self-acceptance and self-reflection, from a longing to understand, we typically only allow a tiny portion of who we are to be seen. We learn which "parts" of ourselves (qualities, strengths, weaknesses) are accepted, seen, and understood, and which are not.

**Let's explore below:**

*As a child, what was the most common label you heard about who you were (too shy, too loud)?*

\_\_\_\_\_

*As a child, what role did you play in your family? The caretaker? The funny one? The moody one? The black sheep? The responsible one? The rebel? \_\_\_\_\_*

*As a child I loved \_\_\_\_\_, but I pretended I did not, in order to fit in.*

*As a child, a quality I wished I had more of was \_\_\_\_\_ .*

*In my family's culture, or larger culture, it was not okay for a girl child to be \_\_\_\_\_.*

*In my family's culture, or larger culture, it was not okay for a boy child to be \_\_\_\_\_.*

*As a child, the qualities I most admired in others were \_\_\_\_\_ (people who sang, people who raised their hand in class, people who laughed and smiled).*

*As a child, I would often pretend to be a \_\_\_\_\_ (dancer, singer, Olympic athlete).*

*As a parent I am most envious of other parents who embody these qualities:*

\_\_\_\_\_.

*As a parent I find I'm most irritated, annoyed, or overwhelmed when my child(ren):*

- Display the following qualities: \_\_\_\_\_
- Don't display the following qualities: \_\_\_\_\_
- Do the following actions: \_\_\_\_\_
- Don't do the following actions: \_\_\_\_\_

*As a parent I sometimes wish that my child(ren) would:*

- Show more of the following qualities: \_\_\_\_\_
- Show fewer of the following qualities: \_\_\_\_\_

## 6. Conditioned and Limiting Beliefs

- Our core self-perception (belief system) is created within our subconscious by ages 7-9, and to a lesser degree, by ages 12-14.
- If we did not experience a caregiver who displayed mostly consistent willingness to understand our thoughts, our mind, our understanding of life, then we lived *without* inner safety, a sense of belonging, and a belief that we are loved unconditionally.
- To cope with such intense feelings associated with these beliefs – like fear, shame, heartbreak, loneliness, and anger – our brain goes into action:
  - Our brain records **what** is happening
  - Our brain attempts to explain **why** that is happening
  - Our brain creates a story that will give meaning, order and understanding to *why* this experience is happening. (Example: My parents do not seek to understand me because I am bad, I am not loved, or I am unworthy.)
- This story, while typically untrue, is *less* painful to a growing child than admitting that their only source of survival is not capable of understanding you, seeing you, and providing you with psychological safety.
- Our brain then makes an unconscious commitment to NEVER experience this pain again. (Example: A 5-year-old tries to tell their parents a story about WHY they hit their sibling, causing the parents to scream at them and force them into their room. This happens repeatedly. From this space of panic the child, in the low brain, creates a story that they are bad, there is something wrong with them—THAT'S why they hit their sibling.)
- Remember children cannot self-reflect! This part of the brain (the prefrontal cortex) does not begin developing until age 7, and development does not end until age 25.
- From that moment on, the child makes sure to avoid trying to explain their actions and learns that using their voice only brings them pain and disconnection.
- Perceiving our children's behaviors through our physiological stress, igniting fear-based emotional memory and limiting beliefs, we cannot accurately access our child. We are not fully present to view the behavior through curiosity and empathy.

## 9 Core-Limiting Beliefs

Our limiting beliefs are connected to strong emotions in our body, our nervous system, and the communication between the head, heart, and body. Our belief system creates our subconscious mind, which is responsible for 95% of all of our thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and reactions, allowing us to understand and see our subconscious.

Programming with compassion and a longing to integrate, you can begin reprogramming the subconscious through the concept of neuroplasticity, so 95% of your brain waves are working in your favor rather than against you. Let's look at the 9 core-limiting beliefs that are created as a consequence of generations of power over or under parenting.

1. I am bad. I am wrong. I am inherently defective.
2. I am unlovable and unworthy of unconditional love.
3. I am not enough and undeserving of goodness and care.
4. I do not belong. I have nothing special to offer. I am of no significance. I am no one.
5. I am incapable. I am incompetent. I am helpless. I am a failure.
6. I am alone. I don't make any sense. I am crazy.
7. Life is cold and unkind. I am heartless. I am mean and unfeeling.
8. Feeling is not safe. Intimacy is not safe. I am not safe in my body.
9. I don't matter. Life is pointless. I don't care.

*Of the 9 limiting beliefs, which three are the strongest for you?*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

*Of these top 3 limiting beliefs which ONE is the strongest for you right now?*

1. \_\_\_\_\_



Are you willing to honor this limiting belief? It was created to protect you from feeling pain as a child. AND, you are not a child anymore, on the outside. Our insides will rise and evolve beyond those limiting beliefs when they feel safe enough to do so. Seeing yourself, and accepting this belief with compassion, is the first step toward to begin the process of pruning from the brain.

XVIII. *If you could send a message to this belief, from a place of calm, clarity, and inner safety, what would you say?*

XIX. *If you could tell this belief what is true about you RIGHT NOW, what would you say?*

# 7 Tools for Greater Mindsight

## 1. Notice When You Override Emotion With Logic

- **Gaslighting child's experience:** "That never happened! I never said that!" versus "Hmm, I remember that differently. Can you share more about how you remember it?"
- **Dismissal of feelings:** "Don't be sad, it's no big deal." versus empathy.
- **Invalidation of feelings:** "There is no reason why you should be angry right now. I've done everything you wanted this morning!" versus acceptance.
- **Sarcasm and non-consensual teasing:** "Oh there you go again! Crying like the world is ending." versus compassion and understanding.

## 2. Look Beneath The Behavior With Root To Bloom Process

*View the following example of the Root to Bloom Process:*

### **FLOWER:**

- Child hits you while you try to get their pajamas on.

### **ROOTS:**

- **Feelings:** Disappointed to stop playing. Scared that bedtime will be stressful like usual.
- **Unmet needs:** Autonomy, connection, safety, play.
- **Thoughts:** Mommy is mad at me. Mommy is rough.
- **Beliefs:** I'm bad. Mommy is not safe.
- **Context of situation:** Bedtime started late and the child just turned off the tv. Child is up way past bedtime.
- **Brain development:** Under the age of 11, and cannot control impulses. Anger=Aggression.
- **Nervous system regulation:** In fight or flight, unable to self regulate. Needs 100% support calming down.
- **Quality of secure attachment:** Raised in a power-over home with daily screaming and threats. Does not feel safe. Goes into fight/flight very easily.



# Root to Bloom Process

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**Your Turn!** Practice sinking beneath the surface and naming all the “roots” beneath your child’s behavior. Choose a specific scenario and see how curious you can be.

**FLOWER:**

*Outward expression of the child’s behavior*

→

**ROOTS:**

*Everything beneath the surface that the parent must pause and take into consideration.*

→ **Feelings:**

→ **Unmet needs:**

→ **Thoughts:**

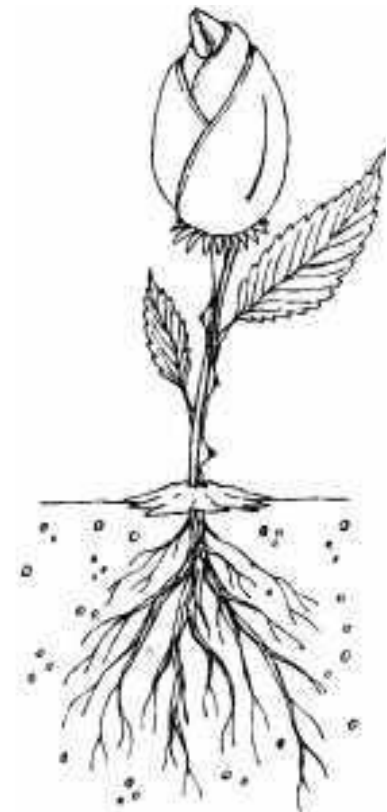
→ **Beliefs:**

→ **Context of situation:**

→ **Brain development:**

→ **Nervous system regulation:**

→ **Quality of secure attachment:**



### 3. Listen vs. Lecture

- Do you notice when you interrupt your child and begin lecturing them?
  - *"Yeah, I know it's hot, but we need to wear sunscreen in order to protect our skin. You know how your uncle did not wear sunscreen and he got very sick. My job is to take care of you and if I did not put sunscreen on, we both may regret it in 20 years. You wouldn't want a parent who didn't care about your skin, would you?"*
- Could you challenge yourself to ask investigative questions versus lecture?
  - *"I saw you pull your sister's book from her hands. Can you tell me more about that?"*

### 4. Use Humility Rather Than Righteousness To Make Your Point

- Avoid *"I told you so"* or *"If you would have listened to me the first time, then..."*
- Keep your reflections neutral and / or empathetic.

### 5. Sportscast

- Name what you are witnessing, to show support for your child's developing insight.
  - *"I see you are focusing on your teeth-brushing. I see how you are going in between every tooth."*
  - *"I see you are picking up the dishes and putting them away. I wonder what you will do next?"*

### 6. Understand Can't vs. Won't — Especially With Directions

- Check-in: Is my expectation appropriate for my child's age and development?
- Example of viewing inaction as *can't* versus *won't*: *"Your body and brain are telling me that you need support cleaning your room right now, and I am here to be that support."*

### 7. Show Up For You!

- I am statements
- Daily Intention
- Daily Reflections



# Summary

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## Takeaways:

- **As described by Daniel Siegel, *mindsight*** is one's ability to "see inside their own mind, and the mind of another, with curiosity, openness, acceptance, and love."
- **We encounter 6 common obstacles to using *mindsight*:**
  - Conditioned beliefs about children
  - Lack of information regarding brain development (pages 5-7)
  - Seeing through judgments and labels (page 9)
  - Fear and projection
  - Lack of self-awareness and integration (based on our childhood experiences)
  - Limiting beliefs (page 14)
- **We can utilize 7 tools to increase our *mindsight*:**
  - Notice when you override emotions with logic
  - Root-to-Bloom process (page 17)
  - Listen vs. lecture
  - Use humility rather than righteousness as your child learns
  - Sportscast
  - Understand can't vs. won't
  - Show up for you!

## Invitation to Practice:

- **Review the list of labels** and notice when you use them. Explore the behaviors you see through a lens of curiosity and empathy, without judgment.
- **Notice when you have an inner dialogue** that says, "*They just won't \_\_\_!*" See if you can imagine the word can't instead of won't. How does this change the way you show up for your child?
- **Use the Root-to-Bloom process** to gain a deeper understanding of your child's inner experience, or for anyone that you are struggling to understand.
- **Review the list of common limiting beliefs.** Seek guidance from your coach to explore where and how these could be impacting your parenting choices and interactions.
- **Celebrate each time you use any of the tools** to increase your *mindsight*. Note these in your journal or share with your coach.



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