

Seven Key Factors for Teaching Kids Brain-based Coping Skills at Home and School

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1. Stress starts earlier in life than we think. Over 40 classes with more than 750 pre-teens have participated in demonstrations of the coping skills and brain works education project. From **pre-project** student self-report evaluations we know that a large percentage of 4th to 6th graders have difficulty coping with stress, anger or sadness. According to their anonymous self-assessments, from 35% to 100% of pre-teen students need help in dealing with normal, everyday emotional stress and upsets. Accelerated child development today means that many of pre-teens are already at risk of prolonged stress levels that can lead to harmful behavior and learning difficulty. These were earlier thought to be an issue primarily affecting teenagers in middle and high school.

2. Mounting evidence shows brain-based coping skills education works. Student self-report data collected immediately after participating in even a brief (less than three-hour) classroom demonstration project helps pre-teens increase their *brain function literacy*. In the case of Brain Works, knowledge is truly power! What else could cause *40% to 80% of pre-teen students to immediately after the project report gains* in their understanding and ability to regulate responses to stressful and painful events?

3. Classrooms are an ideal place for this type of experiential learning. Learning by doing helps pre-teens to better understand and practice brain-based healthy coping skills. This can be even more effectively accomplished in a safe, peer learning environment -- their classroom. When they learn together, students lose some of the stigma of problems dealing with stress in their life. It is interesting to observe how students learning together about how their brain works and responds to stress learn positive traits by observing classmates during this project and classroom discussions. 8. Many kids (and adults) naturally fear talking about their upsets, emotional wounds and stress. We are culturally conditions to conceal information about how we really feel inside. However, during the Brain Works classroom project it is interesting to see after a few hours discussing coping brain functions students are liberated from this peer "code of silence." Kids learn that their highest (thinking) brain function enables us to name what we feel so we can deal with it more easily. The key is encouraging kids to practice using this higher brain coping ability. Another benefit of classroom discussions is that kids feel empowered to learn they can regulate how their brain responds to upsets. We cannot discount the impact when *coping-challenged kids are given an opportunity to also learn from higher functioning peers*. In every class there is a spectrum of student coping capabilities. Kids are deeply affected by recognizing there are peer good and poor coping models. This is why Brain Works started as a class experiential learning project.

4. Brain Works for Kids is a safe and healthy way of learning. Since the focus is learning how their own brain works in the entire five-year history of demonstrating Brain Works for Kids in classrooms there has never been one complaint receive from a participating student or their parent. What we are offering pre-teens comes at a time when they often start to struggle with who they are, how they feel, and how they fit in. Presented as a science unit, the classroom project is like learning human biology, and comparative traits of reptiles and mammals subjects. Obviously this provides students with more than an "academic" education. It goes on to apply *brain function literacy* in

their everyday life in the way we respond to a coping crisis. We know that some students come to school fighting the shame a pre-teen realizes when they believe they can't cope. For these and all other pre-teens (particularly those with teenage siblings) they already suspect that major changes are in store when they become teenagers. The critical question is "Can we prepare them" so they won't be overwhelmed by an avalanche of stressful experiences tumbling down upon them during the turbulent teenage years. High risk behavior, violent, self-harmful and learning disruptive low-coping responses such as numbing feelings with drugs and alcohol can be turned into youth coping challenges they can learn to avoid!

5. Coping with stress can improve learning. Educators have a vested interest in helping students to learn healthy ways of overcoming stress and upsetting experiences. Conclusive neuroscience research shows that experiencing prolonged periods of stress = impairs the brain's ability for attention, memory and learning. At age 11 or 12 most of a child's brain has become fully developed. Pre-teens are certainly capable of grasping the basics of brain-based coping functions. One bonus is developing greater coping confidence, which increases effective responses to stress that -- if unregulated -- can affect *learning*. Learning and coping skills are both brain-based activities requiring healthy, safe and effective self-management capabilities. Today we beginning to use the Internet (sites such as this one) to educate teachers and parents so they can help pre-teens learn critical life skills through home and classroom discussions and activities.

6. Kids learn coping skills (good and poor) from observing others. None of us were born with the ability to regulate our coping response to frightening, harmful or threatening experiences. The good news is that brain-based coping skills are easily learned by kids from how their parents, peers and even their teachers cope with difficulty, stressful experiences and disappointment. By the time kids become teenagers, students coping patterns may have become intractable habits. They may have acquired healthy or unhealthy coping patterns learned by observing peers and influences including being immersed in entertainment media "messages."

7. Kids can't change their parents or peers. An important coping principle life teaches kids is that it's difficult or impossible to change the way others respond to us or cope with challenges in their life. Yet, we can change the way we personally respond to inevitable, upsetting experiences. They can learn these skills in just a few hours at home or school. But they need a safe way to practice applying basic tools for developing their own healthy brain-based coping ability. This project simply offers tools that pre-teens can use to learn self-management abilities, increase their resilience, and coping confidence. As adults who have gone through adolescence, so we of all people should know how much they will need to use these skills not only during their emotionally turbulent teenage years, but for the rest of their life!

Learning about these tools is not rocket science. Over 750 pre-teens have already done it and practice using healthy brain-based coping skills with overwhelming positive results. There have been over 40 classroom demonstrations in the past five years. Now pre-teens, their parents and teachers everywhere can start using this new Internet learning resource on their own or in groups – at home or at school. On this website is assembled essential information so that families and schools can introduce brain-based coping skills literacy for pre-teen students. Be sure to look through [Resources & Activities \[Link needed here\]](#) Let us know if you'd like more information about Brain Works for Kids by contacting us with [Comments or ?'s \[link needed here to submit form\]](#).