

Flipped Lids – Understanding the brain

Trying to understand what is happening inside your child's brain (and yours) is not always easy. A very simple model using your hand developed by Dr Dan Siegel has made it a little easier to understand the brain process and behavioural responses involved when emotions are running strong. With this new understanding of brain connections in mind, we are better able to respond sensitively and appropriately in highly emotional situations. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm9CIJ74Oxw>)

Flip the Lid (Hand Model of the Brain)

Make a **Fist** with your thumb tucked inside your fingers. This is a model of your brain.



Thumb = Midbrain (Stem & Limbic) = Emotional Brain. This is where emotions and memories are processed. This is where the fight, flight & freeze is triggered.

Fingers = Cerebral Cortex = Rational Brain. Houses our ability to think and reason.

Fingernails = Prefrontal Cortex = Problem-Solving

When something triggers us, we are prone to “**Flip our Lid**” which means the Prefrontal Cortex (Fingernails) have a very poor connection with the Midbrain (Thumb), and we're not able to access the logical, problem-solving part of our brain. Our emotions are overriding our ability to think clearly.



-Dr. Dan Siegal

- *Survival Brain = Brain stem (Palm)
- *Emotional Brain = Midbrain (Thumb)
- *Rational Brain = Cerebral cortex (Fingers)
- *Thinking Brain = Prefrontal cortex (Finger nails)

- As you close your fingers over your thumb, which is situation in the palm, just above the brain stem all four brains are connected and working together in harmony, however sometimes the emotional brain (thumb) and the rational brain (fingers) don't communicate well.
- The emotions of the midbrain can become so overwhelming that the "fight-or-flight" reflexes are triggered resulting in "Flipping Our Lid" (see figure 2 with fingers up in the air).

- When we "flip our lids" the rational brain has poor connection with the emotional brain, and this often leads to intense feelings and emotions and we are unable to access the logical, problem-solving part of our brain. It is at this time that we need to calm our anger and ease our fears in order to restore our rational brain to its coherent state (fingers closed back over thumb).

- Children and adults experience a flipped lid, but as children's brains are not fully mature (a fully mature brain with all parts communicating effectively is between 21 and 30 years of age) they need more support and guidance to help calm down and respond to these strong emotions (re-connecting the prefrontal cortex with the midbrain).

- As children 's brains are developing it is important to remember that during times of high emotional reaction and 'flipped lids' the emotional brain and rational brain are not communicating effectively so please remember that any responses are not personal or purposeful, rather they are normal reactions from the developing brain – they just need some loving restoration.