

Week 21

Learn About Your Brain with Brainy

- OBJECTIVES:** Understand how two parts of our brain, the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex, operate in regulating our emotions and reactions to stimuli.
Practice kindness.
- PREPARE:** A bell or chime
Let's Be Enemies by Janice May Udry
Optional: Brainy the Puppet
Video of Dr. Daniel Siegel's Model of the Brain
Watch this before class: for the teacher, not the students http://www.drdansiegel.com/resources/everyday_mindsight_tools/
Review diagram of the brain (see Resource Section)
Your Kindness Pals list and Talking Object



NOTE FROM LINDA: *This lesson is written to include Peace of Mind's puppet called Brainy. We have designed Brainy to complement the lessons and stories presented here. The children we work with love Brainy, and it really seems to help them learn. However, you can do this lesson without Brainy by using your hand to make the model of the brain as in the video featuring Dr. Siegel. Wherever it says "Brainy the Puppet" below, please feel free to substitute your hand if you prefer.*



Mindfulness Practice

Invite today's Mindfulness Helper (MH) to come to the front of the class to sit next to you on a chair (or next to you on the floor).

Say: *Let's all be happy for* _____. (sign language applause)

Prompt the MH to choose another student to turn off the classroom lights.

Say: *Let's all be happy for _____.* (sign language applause)

Prompt the MH to say: "Let's get into our mindful bodies. Let's close our eyes. Let's take **five** deep breaths." Remind the children how to do Take Five breathing.

Now take a deep breath, and listen for the sound of the bell. Try to listen to the whole sound of the bell. Open your eyes when you cannot hear it anymore.

Ask the MH to ring the bell.

Ask the MH to choose a classmate to turn the lights back on.

Ask the MH to return to his or her seat.

1. **Brain Science: Introduce Brainy.**

Use Dr. Daniel Siegel's hand model of the brain and Brainy the puppet (or your hand) to explain how the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex come into play when we are angry. (See above.)

Remember, do not show Dan Siegel's video to the class.

You might say:

Today I'd like to introduce you to my friend Brainy. Brainy is going to help us learn about our brains. Did you know that your brain has many different parts? Today we are going to talk about two of them.

Hold up Brainy in the closed position (fingers folded down over your thumb) in the shape of the hand model.

Can you do this with your hand? Tuck your thumb inside and then fold your fingers over your thumb. Now your hand looks a little bit like your brain.

Hold Brainy up next to your head.

The first part of the brain we're going to learn about is called the Amygdala. (Ah-mig-duh-la) The amygdala is the little part of your brain inside here.

Lift your fingers to show the tucked-in thumb.

The amygdala is the part of your brain that reacts to things.

If your Dad says you can't have ice cream after dinner, your amygdala says, "No!! That's not fair! I WANT ICE CREAM!"

If somebody takes some of the Legos you are playing with, your amygdala says, "Hey give those back!! Those are mine!" Your amygdala wants you to grab the Legos back.

Ask: *Can you think of a time when your amygdala told you to do or say something like that?*

Your amygdala feels scared sometimes too. Your amygdala might tell you not to jump off the diving board or not to raise your hand in class to answer a hard question.

Ask: *Can you think of a time when your amygdala was trying to protect you from something? If someone says "Duck!" What do you do? If you cover your head or get down low that is because your amygdala is trying to protect you.*

Your amygdala wants to take care of you, to protect you. But, if we only listened to our amygdala, we wouldn't be very happy. We'd be in fights with people all of the time and we wouldn't do anything that we are scared to do, even really fun things like learning how to ride a bike or learning how to swim.

Luckily, we have another part of our brain.

Fold your fingers back down.

*This part (**pointing to your folded-over fingers or Brainy's front**) is called the Prefrontal Cortex. You can call it the PFC for short. Your Prefrontal Cortex is the part of your brain that helps you to make good decisions. It thinks things over and imagines what will happen.*

Do you remember when we read the story called Anh's Anger? That was a story about a little boy who was building a block tower when his grandfather called him for dinner. He didn't want to stop building and when his grandfather told him that he had to stop and eat dinner, he got so mad that he knocked the tower over by accident and yelled at his grandfather.

Ask: *What part of Anh's brain told him to knock over the tower and yell? (the amygdala)*

Anh learned from his grandfather how to stop and calm down and take care of his anger.

Ask: *Do you remember what he did to take care of his anger? (he used his mindful breathing)*

When we feel angry like Anh did, it can feel like we've flipped our lid (flip your fingers up exposing the amygdala). It can feel like our amygdala is in charge, and we can't think very well because our Prefrontal Cortex or PFC is no longer working.

2. Read Let's Be Enemies.

In Let's Be Enemies, John is mad at his best friend James. When he heads over to his house to tell him how he feels, something unexpected happens.

Say: *I'm going to read you a funny story about two friends who get angry at each other. Each time you notice one of them flipping their lid, when his amygdala is taking over, I want you to make the "flipping your lid" gesture. (fingers up, thumb tucked in).*

You can choose to use Brainy while you read the story to help model the concept.

Stop each time one of the boys flips his lid. Ask:

- What is happening? How can you tell he has flipped his lid?
- What does his face look like?
- What does his body look like?
- What did they do to calm down?
- What did John's PFC tell him to do?

3. Make connections.

To link the book to the lesson and the lesson to life, you might say:

When we take our deep breaths and take care of our anger, it helps to bring our Prefrontal Cortex back in charge (fold your fingers down slowly). It can take a little while to work, but once we have our lids back on we can think about what we want to do. We have choices.

If you were making a block tower or playing your favorite game and your parent called you for dinner, do you have any choices in how you respond?

You might ask for a couple more minutes, ask if you could just finish this round of the game, or maybe just realize that dinner is ready and that your game or tower will still be there when you get back.

Do you see how your PFC helps you see that you have choices and sometimes what your amygdala wants you to do isn't always the best idea?

The next time you get angry, see if you can remember that this is your amygdala talking to you. See if you can use your breathing to help take care of your amygdala. Next time we will learn how to use our mindful breathing to take care of our amygdala and help to keep our PFC in charge.



Kindness Pals

Do the Kindness Pal activity as before.

If there is not enough time for sharing, you can skip that, but be sure to give the students new Kindness Pals.

Closing Words: *Let's have a nice quiet moment with the bell. You can close your eyes or leave them open, but let's sit quietly and listen to the bell. If you want to you can think about your new Kindness Pal and imagine yourself doing something kind for him or her.*

Ring the bell or chime. *Thanks for a great class, everyone.*