

SPAN Meeting April 17, 2014 Meeting Minutes

1. SPAN Board for next year:

Lisa Garborg, Co-president

Apryl Henry, Co-president

Julie Mueller, Vice President

Anne Fry, Treasurer and Webmaster

Rachel Jensen, Secretary

Heather Banas, Elementary Representative

Joan Shopbell, Elementary Representative

Becky Smith, Elementary Representative

2. **Treasurer's report (Anne F.):** Anne reviewed our expenses for the year (speaker's fee, printing, Family Fun Night)

3. **Anne Tyler (Rinkenberger), MS, LMFT**—speaking on Supporting the Special Needs of Gifted Children: Neuroscience Implications for Regulating Emotions and Behavior

*Please see <http://tylerinstitute.org/handout-4-17-2014/> for a copy of her (detailed) power point presentation and a copy of a handout that guides you toward making a family plan for dealing with meltdowns/tantrums/explosions. You can view many of the resources she recommended as well as a description of her practice at <http://tylerinstitute.org/>. You can email Anne at anne@tylerinstitute.org.

Objectives for Anne's talk:

1. Develop an awareness about the neuroscience of learning and how that can inform the learning process of gifted kids
2. Learn about some of the reasons why gifted kids have trouble with emotional and behavioral regulation
3. Learn strategies to improve how gifted kids regulate their emotions and behavior

Neuroscience of learning highlights:

*We have 3 main parts to our brains: reptilian brain, limbic (emotional) brain, and neomammalian (pre-frontal cortex)

*Learning is the building up of connections between nerve cells to form templates; templates are the pattern of nerve cells firing in a specific way to activate memories of all actions, thoughts, and emotions; templates must form for a memory to be created.

*To form templates, brains need both glutamate (available all of the time—it “excites” nerve cells) and dopamine (needs to be released; calms down the effects of

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glutamate).****Dopamine release is predominately under the control of your limbic (emotional) brain.****

*Dopamine can be released during stressful situations (not necessarily a positive thing); it can also be activated in a more healthy way through **reward** and **anticipation of reward**. The dopamine then goes to the “right” place for optimal learning.

*20+ years of research on what helps us learn the most has shown that the most important thing is a student’s relationships with the people around them (teachers, parents, etc.); this is in line with the limbic system controlling the release of dopamine.

Why gifted kids explode (have difficulty with emotional/behavioral regulation)

highlights:

*They have special needs (learning disabilities, ADHD, Asperger’s, anxiety, depression, other mental health needs); executive functioning skills are weak; they feel high levels of stress; they have intensities/sensitivities.

***Often what looks like oppositional behavior is behavior that is a result of anxiety.**

*Executive Functioning (EF) skills include the abilities to control emotions, inhibit responses, be flexible, use working memory effectively, sustain attention, initiate tasks, plan/prioritize, organize, manage time, persist, and monitor their own thinking (metacognition). When gifted kids aren’t challenged in meaningful ways, as many are not in their early school experiences, they have no need to start to develop these skills (while their age-like peers are developing them). These skills are not fully mature in typical males until their late 20’s and in typical females until their mid-20’s.

*When EF skills aren’t developed, tantrums and explosions can occur. The “stress” brain (amygdala) takes over; “fight or flight” response occurs—these are the only options for someone when the “stress” brain takes control. The “thinking” brain has no control.

How to manage explosion/tantrums and help kids to learn to regulate highlights:

*Have a calming plan before you need it; start with a safety plan: no hurting anyone, no destroying anything, no running away, no saying hurtful things. Basic calming plan: If anyone gets upset (“stress brain” is taking over), talking stops, everyone (ALL family members) takes a break and calms themselves down; when “thinking brain” returns, then you can talk about the situation and problem-solve. Taking a break could involve deep breathing, walking, stretching/relaxing.

*To help prevent explosions, gifted individuals with intensities should have an intensity management plan. Those with physical and/or sensory intensity should schedule movement, action-oriented play and activities; those with intellectual intensity may need regular intellectual stimulation in an interest area; those with imaginational intensity need planned reading, storytelling, role-play games, etc.; those with emotional intensity need regular times to talk and process feelings and experiences.

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*Highly sensitive kids' "stress brains" take over much more quickly because they take in high amounts of stimuli. Highly sensitive kids usually have sensory, imaginal, and/or emotional intensities. Suggested daily calming activities: exercise, repetitive motion activities, deep breathing, humor, change of scene/activity. Suggested sensitivity management: increase awareness of sensitivities (name what you experience); plan for situations that could be overwhelming—eliminate or reduce.

***You need to parent gifted kids differently due to their intensities and sensitivities; many popular parenting methods do not work with gifted kids.**

*There are phases of escalation of tantrums/explosions. First is anxiety and/or frustration: After a child practices recognition of precursors to tantrums (have child try to analyze what is happening in his/her body before a tantrum so that he/she can recognize the warning signs), he/she can work to prevent the escalation here; parents can help if they have this recognition. Second is agitation (edge of "losing it"): offer the child 3 choices...an active (physical) choice, a quiet choice (could have a "calming box" with books, fidget items, etc.), or something with a parent (some kids have the need to be near a parent as opposed to separate in a "time out"). Third is acting out (the meltdown/tantrum/explosion): kids are unable to listen to others or calm down immediately; there should already be a plan in place for what will happen when a meltdown occurs (calm-down time for everyone; no talking during tantrums; everyone needs to take care of themselves; parent can do something away from the child having the tantrum as long as the child is safe).

*Problem-solving skills need to be taught. After a meltdown, **ask** questions about what happened and led to tantrum; **don't tell** the child what you think happened. This helps the child toward self-awareness. Have the child focus on physical feelings so that they can be recognized "next time." Recognize and acknowledge that there will be a next time.

*It's important to schedule time for connection, fun, and bonding. Don't let frequent meltdowns/stress lead to these times NOT happening. They can lead to changes in the modes of interaction to more positive rather than negative.

This was SPAN's last meeting of the school year. Please contact us at span.priorlake@gmail.com with concerns. You can also view our website <http://mcgt.net/priorlake/> for updated information. We'll post our 2014-15 meeting schedule when we have determined it.