

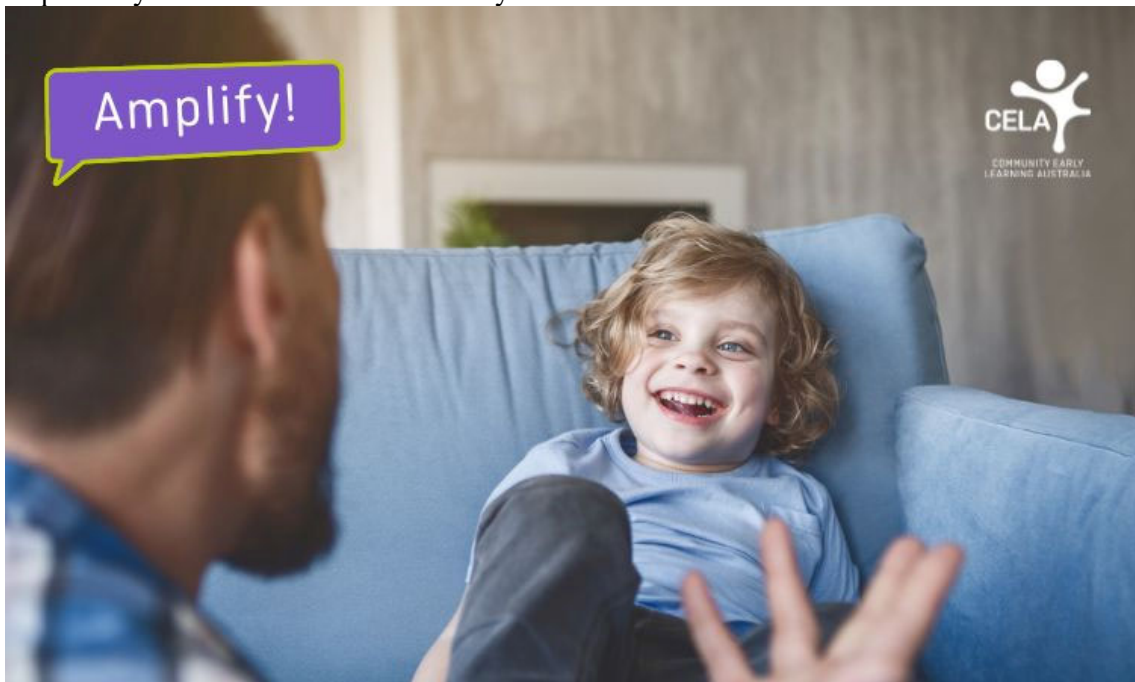
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Tips for communicating respectfully with children

Children learn a lot about conversations from speaking with adults. Speaking respectfully with children will help them learn how to speak respectfully with friends and adults, contributing to their social and emotional development.

Early Childhood Teacher Meg Anastasi shares some tips and ideas about how to speak respectfully with children in various early childhood education situations.



BY MEG ANASTASI ON 14 NOV, 2022

So much of the learning and development which occurs in the early years is based on our interactions with children. After all, research shows that warm, back-and-forth interactions between a child and their caregiver makes their brain light up like nothing else. For this very reason, there is a wealth of literature around the ways we can respectfully and richly communicate with young children. Here are some great tips for ensuring that we keep respectful communication top of mind during our daily conversations and interactions with children:

Talk to the child about the child

Is there anything that anyone loves more than talking about themselves and their loved ones? When we interact with children about their life outside of the early learning setting, we are fostering their strong and meaningful connection to their family, as well as showing them that we have a genuine like and interest in them. We can talk to children about their siblings and

parents, what was in their lunch box, or their favourite game at home. Talking to children respectfully also means acknowledging their feelings; happy, sad or in between.

Ask them questions

They say that a three-year-old child can ask up to four hundred questions per day, and I always wonder if that's why children love when adults ask them questions; it's a simple reversal of the power play that's ever-present between children and their caregivers. If we show a genuine interest in learning more about children, they'll often open up and begin to display much more confidence in the early education setting.

Tip: Leave a long pause after the question to allow the child to really think about what you're asking before prompting them, and when you do prompt, allow the child options to select their answer from.

Use humour

Any seasoned early childhood professional knows that humour is a key tool in establishing connections and trust with young children. Funny little moments where educators put a child's hat on their own head, tell a goofy joke or make a funny face will often engage children and become a funny story they tell their family over the dinner table.

It's not all about learning

Far too often, we focus on "teaching", using every conversation as an opportunity to explain concepts. We talk about behaviour, whether or not the lunch we're eating is healthy, how old a child's siblings are, or even how many blocks the child has lined up on the floor. We know this is beneficial, but sometimes the authentic, rich and meaningful conversations which can make a child's day can be left by the wayside.

Some theorists discuss the need to balance our "dancing talk" and our "business talk", meaning that our bland, instructive language throughout the day is less beneficial than the more personalised, warm and fun dialogue we may have with the children.

Assume competence

When we interact with young children, it's essential that we interact with them as people who are both capable and competent. This means that, although children's vocabulary is still developing, our language with them doesn't need to be over simplified. We can use warm interactions to explain or introduce new words if children are able or not able to understand.

Tell them about the day that's planned

One thing that often gets left by the wayside is speaking with children about the day (or days!) ahead. When sitting with a group of children, you can tell them about what's to come: "later on, we might play a parachute game; what do you think?". We know how essential agency is to a child's well-being and confidence, and it's a great way to engage in a meaningful way which will likely lead to further discussion.

Summary

Speaking respectfully to children is important for their development. There is a wealth of literature around the ways we can communicate with young children.

- Talking to children about their life outside of the early learning setting helps them feel connected to their family and shows them that we have a genuine interest in them.
- Humour is a key tool in establishing connections and trust with young children.
- Assume competence and use warm interactions to explain or introduce new words if children are not able to not understand.
- Ask them questions, show a genuine interest in learning more about them, leave a long pause after the question, and allow the child options from which to select their answer.

Children learn a lot about conversations from talking with adults, so speaking respectfully with children will help them learn how to speak respectfully with friends and other adults.

Further reading:

Amplify!: [Opinion —Why it's vital to reflect on rest time by Meg Anastasi](#)

Amplify!: [What Old Enough! teaches us about child development](#)

Amplify!: [Tips for modelling respectful conversations in front of children](#) (interview with Educational Leader Alison Donkin)

Teacher Tom's Blog: [Ask me a question](#)

Maggie Dent's Bog: [The importance of being heard](#)

CELA professional development relating to this topic:



5 WAYS TO BETTER CONVERSATIONS WITH CHILDREN

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Explore 5 strategies to enhance your interactions and conversations with children.



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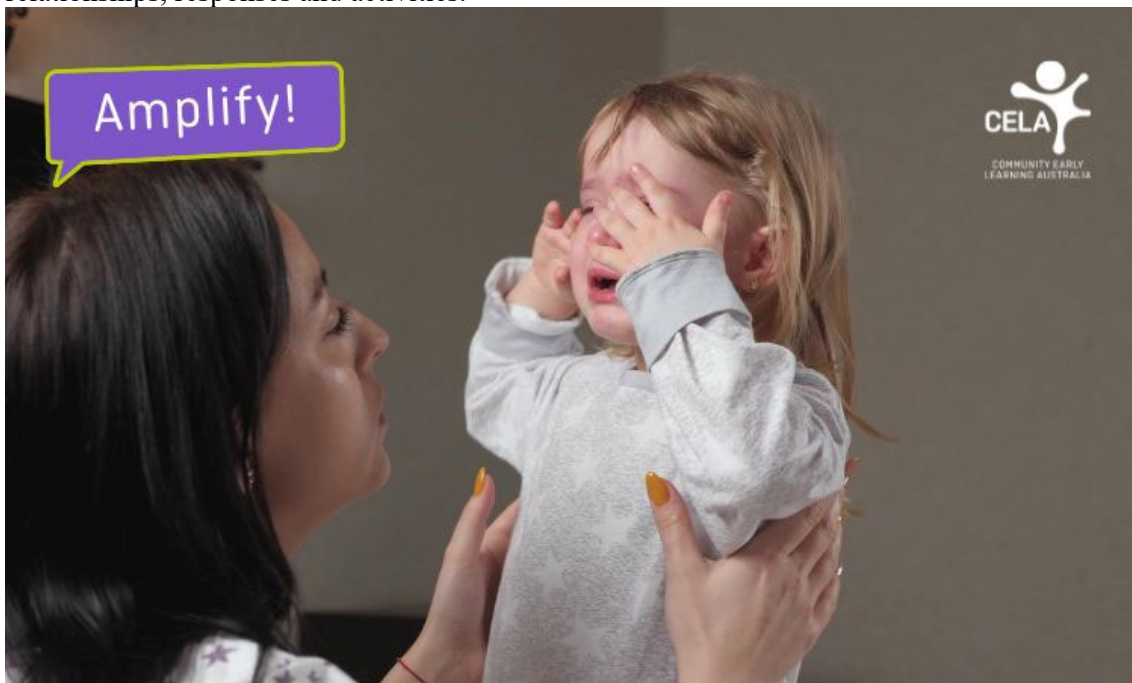
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How understanding neuroscience can help us support children's behaviour

Supporting children during moments of stress or when confronted with behaviours of concern can be challenging in a busy early education and care space, but it is vital that educators feel confident and capable during these situations. Having an understanding of how children's brains respond to stress can equip educators with the knowledge and framework required to confidently support children to navigate these moments.

In this article, we explore why it's beneficial to understand neuroscience when working with children. We provide a topline overview of key neuroscience concepts and how different parts of the brain affect a child's response to stimuli, and share tips from CELA trainer Kerrie Maguire on how educators can help children by boosting the right brain chemicals through relationships, responses and activities.



BY CELA ON 7 NOV, 2022

Neuroscience is the study of the nervous system (i.e., the brain, spinal cord and nerves). Neuroscientists seek to understand the nervous system's structure, how it develops and its role.

An interdisciplinary science that draws on biology, psychology and even philosophy, there are many branches within the study of neuroscience. A cognitive neuroscientist will examine

how the brain underpins thinking, while a behavioural neuroscientist will seek to understand the interplay between the brain and behaviour.

The human brain is truly complex. However, thanks to neuroscience, we have a greater understanding of how the complex structures and processes of the brain impact human functioning and behaviour.

Why is it beneficial to understand neuroscience in early education and care?

Neuroscience is complex and not something we study during professional training, so why should we pay attention to this field of study?

Kerrie Maguire is a learning and development specialist at CELA and facilitator of our [Understanding Neuroscience to Support Children's Behaviour Micro Credential](#). She says that the study of neuroscience, even at a basic level, can support educators to help children co-regulate their emotions.

“We often see behaviour as a choice,” she explains. “But up until the age of eight, the emotional part of the brain is centre-stage of brain development, and children are living in their emotions. I’ve worked with children for almost 30 years. In that time, a positive praise approach has always been a key theoretical approach. But when you understand what is happening neurologically in a child’s brain, you can see that this isn’t always the answer.”

Neuroscience is just one element of the multidisciplinary approach that more and more educators are using in their practice. From neuroscience to positive psychology and emotional intelligence, there is much we can learn from disciplines outside those we traditionally rely on in the early childhood sector.

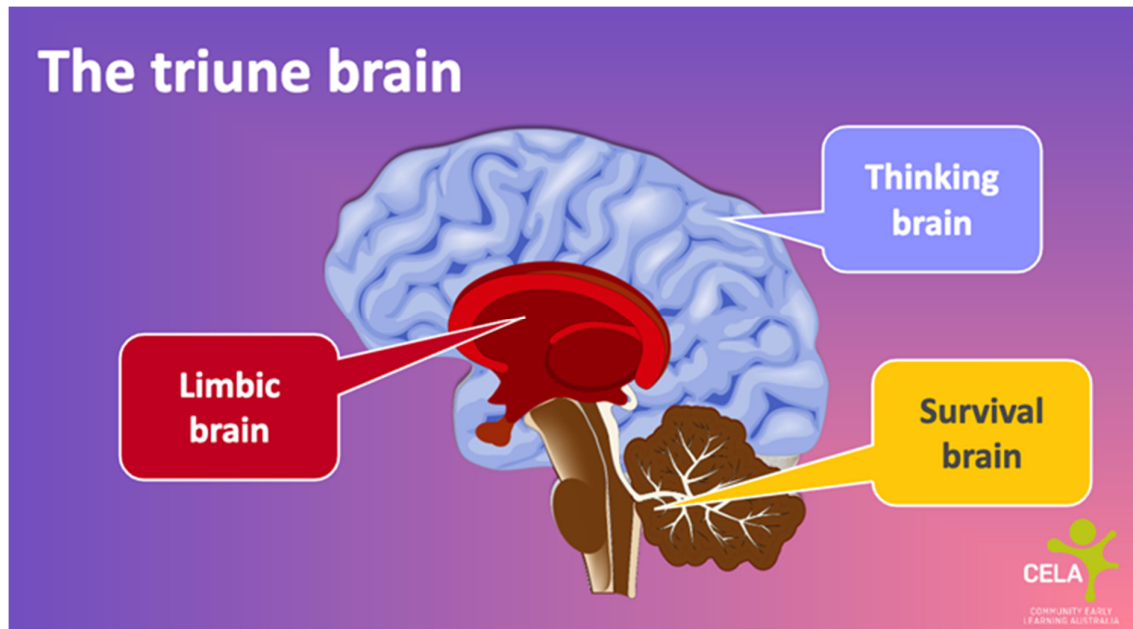
Neuroscience concepts for early educators

As broad as the field of neuroscience is, we can hone in on some key concepts to apply when working with children. These are concepts we explore in CELA’s new Micro Credential to further empower educators, particularly when dealing with children exhibiting behaviours of concern.

The triune brain

In the 1960s, neuroscientist Paul McLean developed the concept of the triune brain. He proposed that mammalian brains (including our human brains) have three layers:

1. Neocortex or thinking/rational brain
2. Limbic or emotional brain
3. Basal ganglia or survival brain (sometimes referred to as the reptilian or primal brain)



A person's response to stimuli depends on which part of the brain they are using. In the neocortex or thinking brain, we can respond rationally to a situation. In the basal ganglia or survival brain we rely on the fight or flight response. In the limbic brain, responses are emotional.¹

“When children are building social relationships, they need to be in the neocortex or thinking brain because that’s where you develop relationships,” explains Kerrie. “This is also the learning part of their brain. When we’re trying to teach children when they’re in the limbic or emotional brain, this isn’t the optimal part of the brain for teaching or learning.”

How the right D.O.S.E of brain chemicals can support children

Another concept we can use as educators is D.O.S.E. The letters in D.O.S.E refer to the four chemicals the brain needs for thinking and learning, sometimes referred to as "feel good" chemicals. These chemicals are dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin and endorphins.²

“One of the things we do in the Micro Credential is to get educators to identify when they’re building those key chemicals for the children,” says Kerrie. “For example, transitions—such as transitioning from indoor activities to outdoor play—can be very stressful for children. I encourage educators to think about the transition activities they can get the children to do, such as walking like a crab or doing 10 star jumps before they move outside. This can produce feel-good endorphins. If we connect with children while they're doing it, then we're also building oxytocin.”

Kerrie explains that these strategies can be used to recognise the limbic states of the children and better support them.

Calming in the eye of the storm

Ensuring that children have good levels of feel good or D.O.S.E chemicals can help place them in the optimal space for learning.

Educators can consider building dopamine, serotonin and endorphins through aspects of the program that focus on music, laughter, singing and dancing. Include frequent brain breaks, consider the lighting and enable access to physical activity and outdoor spaces.

Connections between educators and children can help to release oxytocin, so ensure there are opportunities for these connections throughout the program.

Would you like to build on your understanding around neuroscience and children's behaviour?

Our new self-paced, online Micro Credential takes a deep dive into how the brain impacts children's behaviour to help you support children's learning, well-being and development, particularly when children are exhibiting behaviours of concern. Participants can build their knowledge and understanding by working through a range of tutorials, activities, videos and quizzes at a time that suits them.

What you will learn:

- How the brain is structured using the theory of the triune brain.
- How the triune brain structures integrate with key brain chemicals to enable effective learning or to create behavioural stressors.
- How to understand key neurological terminology to identify limbic stressors.
- How children learn from a neurological perspective.
- How to support children who are exhibiting behaviours of concern.
- How to implement key neurological strategies that support children's learning and wellbeing and reduce professional fatigue.

Suitable for all levels of early education professional | 3.5 hours of study | NQS areas 1, 5, 7 |

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[Learn more about this Micro Credential](#) and how it can support you or your team in everyday practice.

References:

1. Bernard J. Baars, Nicole M. Gage. in Cognition, Brain, and Consciousness (Second Edition), 2010
2. Khiron Clinics, [D.O.S.E. : The brain's happy chemicals, explained](#). January 2020.