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Brain-Based Parenting: The Neuroscience of Caregiving for Healthy Attachment, by Daniel A. Hughes and Jonathan Baylin

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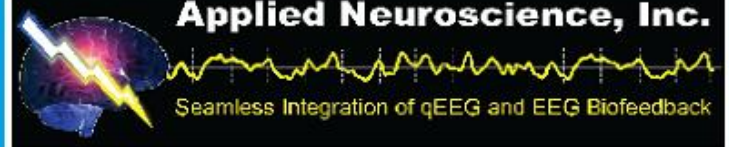
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BOOK REVIEW

BRAIN-BASED PARENTING: THE NEUROSCIENCE OF CAREGIVING FOR HEALTHY ATTACHMENT. Daniel A. Hughes and Jonathan Baylin. *W.W. Norton & Company, New York, New York, 2012, 272 pages, ISBN-13: 978-0393707281.*

One of the challenges faced by clinicians in this time of incredible growth and discovery about the human brain is how to apply the vast array of new discovery and research to the actual practice of therapy and treatment. Nowhere is this more challenging than in the arena of family therapy and the effort to heal families and children. *Brain-Based Parenting* is a welcome and excellent resource for the many therapists working in this field.

The authors offer a basic description of what good parenting entails in relation to the functioning of the brain:

Being sensitive and emotionally responsive to children's needs for attention.

Comforting children effectively and consistently when they are stressed out (what clinicians refer to as *co-regulation of affect*).

Being a good first companion as children are initially learning how to enjoy and stay connected to other people.

Knowing when to let kids struggle and work through challenges to build their own resilience

Protecting children from the dysregulating effects of our own negative emotions by using our powers of self-regulation and stress management—by being the “adult in the room.” (p. 3)

Readers familiar with the last 25 years of brain research, as well as authors such as Dan Siegel and Allan Schore with their work on attachment and relational neurodevelopment, will quickly feel themselves on familiar ground. Indeed, Daniel Siegel offers the foreword for the book.

Chapter 1 offers the reader a thorough but approachable introduction to basic brain development and function as it relates to the development of attachment between the parent and the child. Careful description of the physiological and chemical processes involved in connecting the child to the parent and how this attachment influences brain development is detailed. This development is related to the behaviors and capabilities of the developing child in real terms. For example, what does difficulty in developing secure attachment have to do with a child's ability to self-soothe or elicit support?

Chapters 2 and 3 elaborate on this introduction to structure and function and develop a model called “The Five Domains of Parenting.” The five domains that they have developed are Parental Approach System, Parental Reward System, Parental Child Rearing System, Parental Meaning-Making System, and Parental Executive System. Each of these domains is related to specific skills and abilities that are thought to be essential to “good parenting” and adequate development of the child and parent–child relationship. In turn, each of the domains is explained in terms of the brain structures and functions that are involved. Dysfunction in the underlying brain processes is explained and described in order to help the reader understand how care can be blocked as a result of the failure of the parent's brain to work the way it needs to.

Chapters 4 through 6 offer methods for ameliorating the blocked care by developing a formula called PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy). Once again each of these is explained in terms of how they are produced by and affect the development of the brain, and concrete suggestions are given for behaviors and ways of relating to facilitate the development of the brain for both the child

and the parent. There is even a chapter dedicated to helping the parent to master emotional regulation with a further explanation of how this will also enable the child to master emotional regulation as well.

Chapter 7 provides a review of the material offered throughout the book and nine strategies to help develop the “parenting brain.” It is this final chapter that can be most useful for the professional as it offers concrete interventions that may be used with parents who are struggling with their own dysregulation to such an extent that they cannot effectively parent their children.

The book is well written and does a good job of making sometimes challenging material very understandable for professionals and parents. This is one of those books that a family therapist might suggest a well-educated parent read as a self-help book. It is also a book that

the professional will find useful and applicable to their daily work with children and families. At a more political level, it is also a book that could be offered to those involved in decisions about what sort of programs to support and fund in the area of government human services such as Head Start in the United States for the services and types of programs that best help children to grow and develop into healthy adults. I also found it to be a very good book to use with graduate students in a family therapy program. They felt that the book offered them important and beneficial ways of working with families that addressed the growing realization that we must address the brain in family therapy.

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