



THE EMOTIONAL BRAIN, PART 1 - “DO YOU LOVE ME?”

By Linda Ranson Jacobs

02/24/2012

Learning about the emotional brain or the limbic part of the brain is an important part of working with the child of divorce. The limbic system is located in the mid part of our brain and serves many functions including:

- Generating emotions/feelings
- Directing our emotions
- Helping to motivate us
- Directing our drive
- Arousing our attachment
- Establishing the ability for us to have attachments and relationships
- Storing highly charged emotional memories
- Being territorial
- Taping events as internally important
- Controlling appetite and sleep cycles
- Storing the unconscious part of the brain (everything ever said is stored in this part of the brain)



Brain research is showing that nurturing and encouraging environments shape brains for a lifetime of healthy adjustments, to strive and thrive. Our early life wires our brain for connecting and attaching to others. Child abuse, constant stress (like that which comes from living in two homes or generally through the divorce of parents) and discouraging environments may alter brain chemistry and affect a child’s learning ability and scripture memorization.

The limbic system or the emotional brain is always asking, “Am I loved?”

The limbic system represents an emotional state. Many children of divorce question if their parents still love them. They need reassurance from caring adults.

Children from divorced homes retain vivid emotional memories and scenes. Some of the kids coming to your church have emotionally charged memories of parents fighting and arguing. These memories are going to be stored FOREVER in their limbic, but we can also store the Word of God alongside those “charged” memories. That is a biggie! Memories attached to an emotion are remembered. Help give these children an emotionally charged happy memory by bringing in fun along with God’s Word and various church experiences and concepts.





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I have a wonderful and happy memory of a lady visiting our small country church when I was a child. I remember so clearly the morning she showed up because she could sing prettier than anyone I had ever heard. Everyone turned around to find out where this lovely voice was coming from and where she was sitting. She was so happy and joyful in the Lord. To this day, some fifty odd years later, I can clearly see Miss Lawana, and I can still hear her voice. Happy times create happy memories!

Many of these children literally cannot access the upper levels of the brain. (How to help these children access the cortex will be discussed later.) Threatening environments are not conducive to helping children become life-long learners or even to recall scriptures. This can include environments where teachers or leaders tack on threats at the end of instructions and directions. While a simple warning may not be intended as threatening the way it is delivered, to many children it will sound like a threat.

The developmental need for the limbic system is connection.

Connection gives child impulse control. Impulse control allows cooperation. Connection means harmony, warm support and pleasant feelings. Connection also includes feeling safe.

The limbic state only has access to a certain set of skills—what we grew up with, such as name-calling, verbal harassment, etc. All the child can think is “Don’t you love me?” In the past we have used reasoning, rewards and bribery, but none of it has worked long term. That’s because a CD continually plays in the brain what has been said and pumped into the unconscious part of our brain. But we can rewrite the CD. We can help children rewrite the CD. To strengthen this part of the brain, it has to be activated. This is done through connections and adding empathy to the child’s situation.

In this part of the brain, “It is all about ME!”

For some children who have experienced severe trauma or events that are uncontrollable, such as emotional abuse or violent environments, their brains have been wired to not be successful. These are the children whose attention is difficult to gain. They may fight with others or take a swing at others. In their minds they are protecting themselves. They are territorial and don’t want other kids close or in their way. You will hear them scream things like, “Stop looking at me!” or “You’re in my place.” These children have learned not to be successful.

Research shows that children like these need to be in programs and classrooms that offer hope and have an encouraging atmosphere of trust, safety, caring and mutual respect. In other words, these environments can





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rewire the brain. A program like DivorceCare for Kids (<http://www.dc4k.org/>) can also help many children of divorce coming to your churches.

Many of these children do not do well in large group environments. If your church places these children in large groups, try to find a way to give them a small group environment for part of the time.

Some children appear to be resilient when it comes to trauma. This could be from the early brain wiring that took place as infants. These children have experienced stable, warm and nurturing relationships with the adults in their lives. They appear to have high levels of serotonin. They trust their caregivers, their teachers and church workers. They feel safe. They have hope and are encouraged even though they may have a temporary setback. Research shows that support systems bolster resilience. Children who have people to lean on, and those who allow others to lean on them, are able to bounce back faster and cope with trying events. A church family can be one such environment that helps children of divorce become resilient.

Come back next week and find out ways to help and what to do when a child is in the limbic part of the brain.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Linda Ranson Jacobs is one of the forefront leaders in the area of children and divorce. She developed and created the DivorceCare for Kids programs. DC4K is an international program for churches to use to help children of divorced parents find healing within the arms of a loving church family. As a speaker, author, trainer, program developer and child care center owner, Linda has assisted countless families by modeling and acting on the healing love she has found in Jesus Christ. More great articles about how to successfully minister to the child of divorce in your church can be found at Linda's website [Healthy Loving Partnerships for Our Kids \(HLP4\) \[http://www.hlp4.com\]](http://www.hlp4.com). Linda also offers support, encouragement, and suggestions to help single parents and those working with single parent children. She can be reached by e-mail at Linda@hlp4.com.

