



Sometimes our brains become overwhelmed with feelings of fear, sadness or anger, and when this happens it is confusing, especially to children. Children need to be able to make sense of what is happening in their brain. Children also need to have the words to talk about how their brain is feeling. It is like a foreign language, if other people in the family speak the same language, it is easier to understand each other.

The Brain House is a way of having conversations about the brain, but making it fun and interesting for a child to understand.

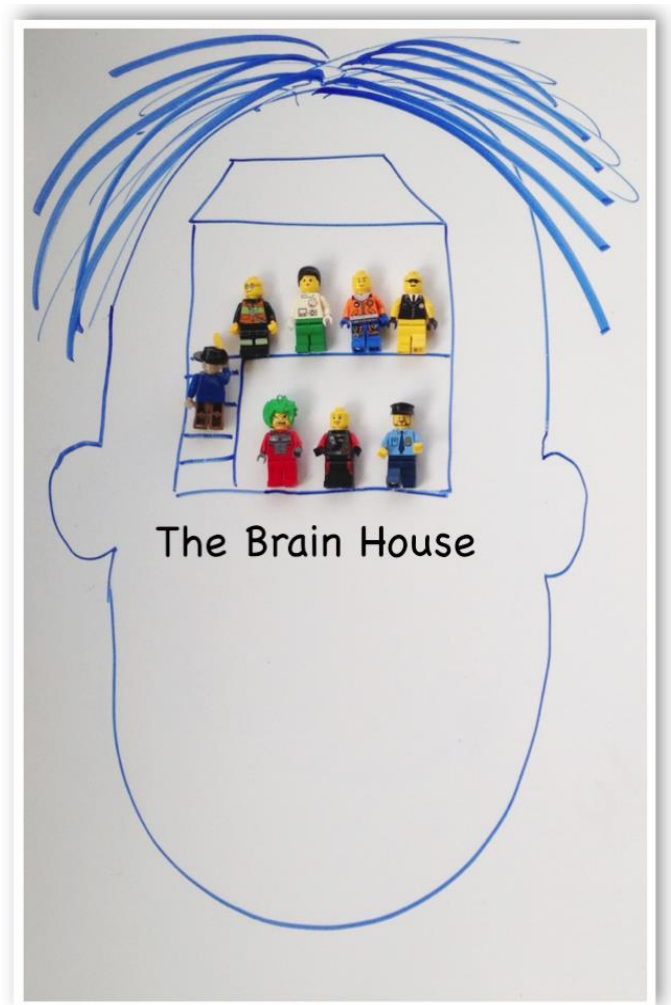
Tell children that their brains are like a house, with an upstairs and a downstairs. This idea comes from Dr. Dan Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson's book 'The Whole Brain Child' and it's a simple way to help children to think about what is going on in their head. This idea has been taken one step further by talking about who lives in their house. Tell them stories about the characters that live upstairs, and the ones that live downstairs. This is the same as talking about the parts of the brain that are our 'Thinking' brain and our 'Feeling' brain.



Introducing The Brain House: the upstairs and the downstairs

The upstairs characters are thinkers, problem solvers, planners, emotion regulators, creatives, flexible and empathic types. You could give them names like Calming Cath, Problem Solving Penny, Creative Craig, Flexible Felix..... These characters are the feelers. They are very focussed on keeping us safe and making sure we are okay. They look out for danger, sound the alarm and make sure we are ready to fight, run or hide if we are faced with a threat.

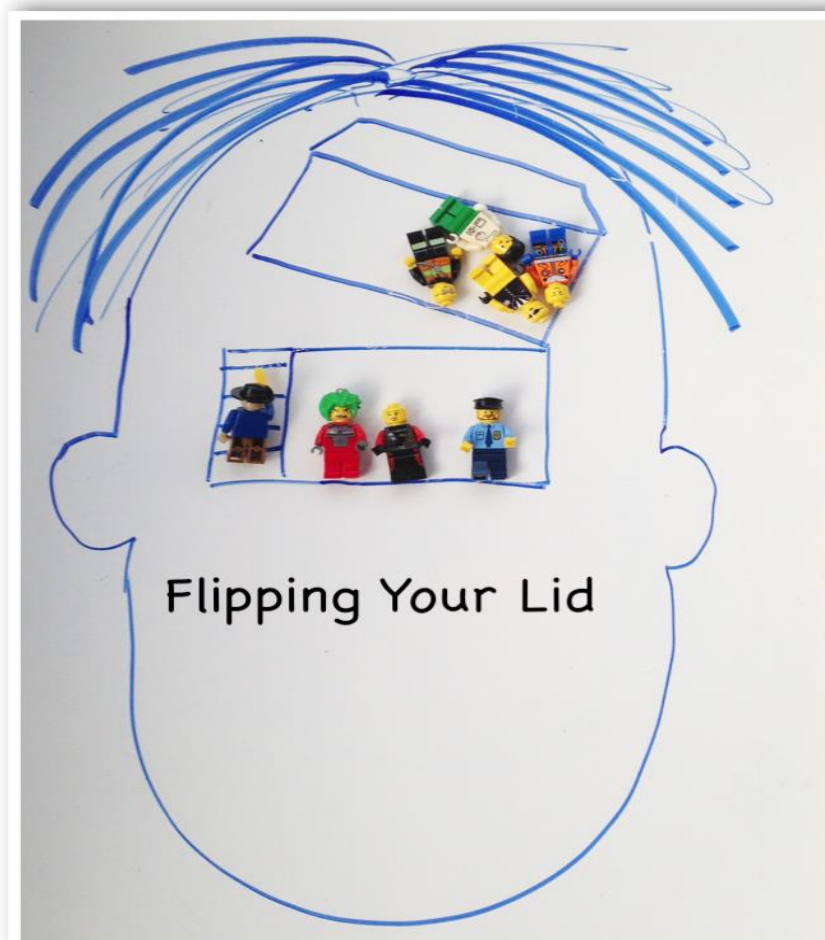
In the downstairs of the house, there are the characters like Alerting Alfie, Frightened Fred and Big Boss Barney. You could change their names, ask your child to help you, they could be well known characters or made up people/animals/aliens.....



Flipping our lids : When 'downstairs' takes over.

Our brains work best when the upstairs and the downstairs are very busy with characters carrying messages up and down to each other. This is what helps us make good choices, make friends and get along with other people, coming up with exciting games to play, calm ourselves down and get ourselves out of troubled situations.

Sometimes the downstairs brain, Alerting Alfie spots some danger, so Frightened Fred panics and before you know it, Big Boss Barney has sounded the alarm telling your body to be prepared for danger. Big Boss Barney is a bossy character and he shouts downstairs 'THE DOWNSTAIRS BRAIN IS TAKING OVER NOW!, UPSTAIRS GANG, YOU CAN TAKE OVER WHEN WE ARE OUT OF DANGER AGAIN!' The downstairs brain **flips the lid**, on the upstairs brain. The stairs between the two parts of the brain are no longer connected.



Sometimes, flipping our lids is the safest thing to do.

When everyone in the house is making noise, it is hard for anyone to be heard. Big Boss Barney tries to keep the upstairs brain quiet so the downstairs people can get our body ready for danger. Big Boss Barney then tells the other parts of the brain and body to switch off or on. She can make our heart beat faster so we can run very fast, or our muscles to fight as hard as they can. She can also tell us to be very very still so we can hide. She tries very hard to keep us safe.



Ask your child to use their imagination and see what reaction would be safest.

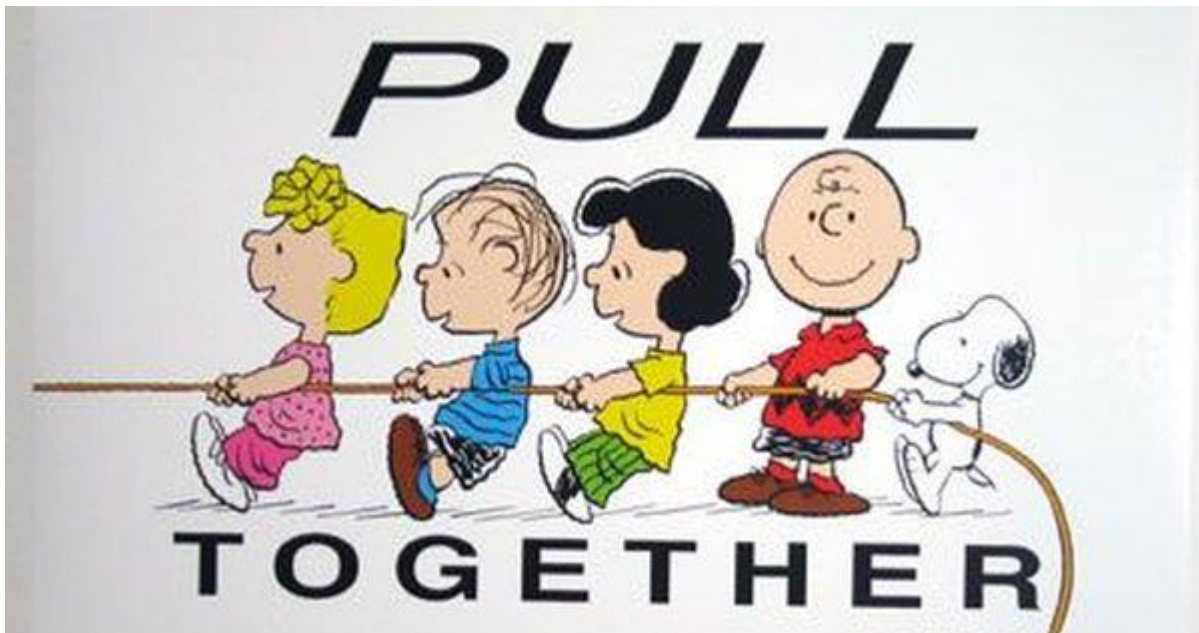


Think of examples when people can flip their lid. Choose things that won't make your child feel anxious.

'Can you remember when Mum couldn't find the car keys and we were already late for school. Remember how I kept looking in the same place over and over again. That's because the downstairs brain had taken over, I had flipped my lid and the upstairs brain wasn't working properly'



When the downstairs brain gets it wrong, sometimes we do flip our lids, but we still need help from the upstairs gang like Problem Solving Pete and Calming Carl to help us.



It is good to explain to your child that adults have had time to practise, so they don't let Big Bossy Betty take over very often, because they use Problem Solving Pete and Calm Carl more. Big Bossy Betty sometimes takes over a lot in children because the little things can be very stressful to them, this is because their brain is still a bit of a building site.



For children to know that Big Bossy Betty took over today and shut down the upstairs brain is easier than thinking that what they did today at school, that got them into trouble, was really bad.

When your child next begins to look annoyed or upset and you have this shared language and understanding in place, you can ask things using the characters. 'Looks like Big Bossy Betty is going to flip the lid, what can Calm Carl do to help?'



AND REMEMBER TO FOLLOW THE SAME RULES YOURSELF!!

Where to go from here.....

Don't expect it all to happen in one day, a house move doesn't! Learning about brains takes time. Here are a few ideas to get you started with the exercise.



- 1. Draw the brain house and all the characters, or make one out of lego! Use a dolls house, or two shoe boxes on top of each other.**
- 2. Draw a picture of what it looks like when the downstairs flips the lid.**
- 3. Cut out characters from comics, or print off internet. Ask a professional at school/support if you don't have a printer.**
- 4. Write stories about the characters in the brain house, give them names and personalities.**