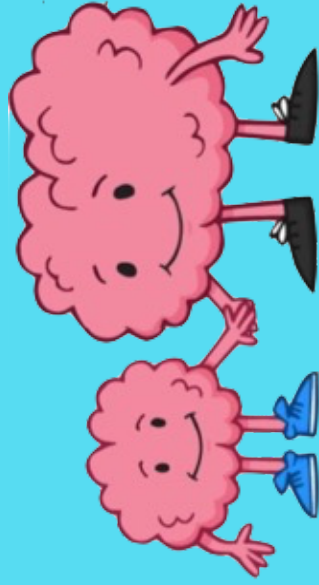




*Attachment and Trauma Treatment
Centre for Healing (ATTCH)
Healing life's hurts through awareness,
compassion, & self-care*

Big Brain, Little Brain: "Flipping Your Lid"

Adapted from Siegel, D., & Bryson, T., 2012



INFORMATION AND STRATEGIES

WHAT IS "FLIPPING MY LID"

Let's learn how your brain works. When you "flip your lid" it means that your feelings get so big that you lose control of your ability to think and act clearly. You may start:

- kicking, screaming, pushing, throwing things
- fidgeting, acting restless, trying to run away from a situation
- feeling numb, unable to move, find it hard to speak.
- feeling! unable to control your reactions

SO HOW DOES THIS HAPPEN?

"HAND, BRAIN MODEL"

Pretend your hand is a brain.
Your wrist is your brain stem.
It helps you with life functions like breathing, your heart beating, and sleeping.

1



2

Place your thumb across the palm of your hand to make a number 4, pointing your fingers straight up. Your thumb is your "little brain" and is where emotions, memories, and senses are stored. It is the feelings part of your brain.

3

Put your four fingers over your thumb. That is your "big brain" and it hugs your "little brain". The "big brain" helps you to think, reason, problem solve, and have self-control. It is the thinking part of your brain.

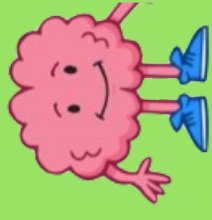


Your "little brain" is like a security guard. When it feels like you are in danger, it reacts and goes into protection mode. It takes over your "big brain", and puts you in a "fight, flight, or freeze" response. Fight, flight or freeze is a way your body acts during stress, by fighting back, or running away from the danger, or losing the ability to move or talk, like mentioned before.



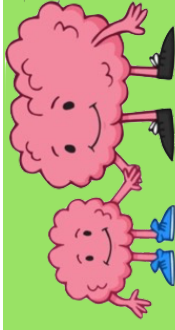
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Your "little brain" also activates your brainstem. This means when it feels in danger, you may feel your heart and breathing speed up, your face getting warmer, or your tummy aching. When your "little brain" and "big brain" stop talking to each other, you 'flip your lid'. Now, put your four fingers back up straight. When your lid is flipped, it makes it very hard to control your feelings, or think clearly.



4

To help get your thinking brain back on track, and have all three parts of your brain communicating together again, you need to calm your big feelings, and ease your overwhelming emotions. By doing this it will help your "big brain" to hug your "little brain", and you will feel calm again.



6

STRATEGIES: ABOUT TO "FLIP YOUR LID"

When you feel like you are close to "flipping your lid" because your feelings are getting bigger and are becoming overwhelming, you can help keep your thinking brain and emotional brain together by first noticing how you are feeling. This will help keep you calm and respond to big emotions. By noticing the big feeling that is overwhelming you – mad, sad, or scary, for example, you can recognize the big feeling growing inside, and help it not overwhelm you, so you don't "flip your lid". Try some of these strategies.

- Take a break from the activity
- Hug a person or a teddy bear
- Deep Breathes in your mouth and out your nose
- Listen to calming music
- Think about a relaxing place
- Blow Bubbles
- Find five things you can see in the room
- Hold something cold or warm
- Squeeze a stress ball or something squishy
- Colour
- Chew some gum
- Push against a wall

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