

**GCCHM Leadership Certification  
Level V, Course #4**

**How to Communicate With Children  
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(Presenter's Notes)**

An American journalist, Sydney J. Harris, once said, "The two words 'information' and 'communication' are often used interchangeably, but they signify quite different things. Information is getting out; communication is getting through."

The purpose of this presentation is to give some understanding on how we can effectively get through to children. In order to be successful teachers and parents we need to know how to be effective communicators.

Using research findings from neuropsychology, I have attempted to simplify concepts and ideas from these findings to help us be effective communicators that in return will enhance positive relationship between children and us.

If you cut the brain in half, you will notice that it has three parts.

**Parts of the Brain**

- Cerebral Cortex, the Gray matter, which houses the "*higher and nobler*" powers is above the Limbic Brain.
- The Mammalian or the Limbic Brain is the part of the brain that is above the Reptilian Brain but *at the base* of the Cerebral Cortex.
- Reptilian Brain is *the base of the brain*. It's the part of the brain that connects to the spinal cord.

**The Brain**

- Different researchers use various terms such as *reflective* and *reflexive* in reference to how the three parts of the brain function in relation to each other.
- Taylor and Brewer use the terms downshifting and upshifting, terms linked to gears of a car so as to make it easier to understand the functional relation of these three-brain parts.
- They liken a brain to a three-gear car.
  - \* 3<sup>rd</sup> gear--Cerebral Cortex or Gray Matter
  - \* 2<sup>nd</sup> gear--The Mammalian or the Limbic Brain
  - \* 1<sup>st</sup> gear--The Reptilian
- Downshifting is a term they use when describing the natural phenomenon of the brain when it perceives danger.
- This means that when a threat is perceived, the brain, many times, in a flash of a second *downshifts* from "gear 3" of the brain to either "gear 2" or "gear 1."

## Functions of the Brain

- Thinking -- Brain layer (3<sup>rd</sup> Gear)
- Emotional Brain – (2<sup>nd</sup> Gear)
- Action-Brain (instincts and reflex behaviors (1<sup>st</sup> gear)

## Function of the Reptilian Brain (1<sup>st</sup> gear)

Before I mention the functions of this brain, let me mention that the term reptilian is derived from the word *reptile*. If all what we had was the reptilian brain, we would be no different from reptiles.

## Functions of the Reptilian brain relevant to this seminar:

- Heart beat.
- Breathing.
- Ability to react instinctively in fight or flight situations. (Secretion of adrenaline)
- Maintaining body temperature.
- Balancing the body so that you don't fall.
- Sexual desires (reproduction) / lust.
- Rigidness and compulsive behavior.
- Informs the 3<sup>rd</sup> gear, the thinking brain (Cerebral Cortex), to organize the defense system in emergency situations.
- The action brain comes handy in many ways. For example, when you have suddenly been attacked either by a snake or robbers, it is this action brain, which makes you act instinctively in self-defense. What matters under these circumstances is not logical thinking, the executive powers housed in the cerebral cortex (gear 3), but quickly defending self.

Ellen White uses in her books the term ***base passions*** more than 105 times. It is interesting to note that she uses the term in reference to sexual and immoral activities. (*Mind, Character, and Personality, Vol. 1, Chapter 25* and *Pastoral Ministry, Chapter 9* entitled, "Ministerial Ethics\Ethics and the Opposite Sex".)

Her expression, I believe, is derived from this understanding of these three parts of the brain. Lustful activities are not a result of gear 3 brain, what she calls *higher and nobler powers* (1 MCP Chapter 25), but they are a result of parts of the brain which are at the base of the cerebral cortex, the moral and reasoning brain. Sex, lust, rough-like and animal-like behaviors are housed in gear 1 and gear 2 of the brain-gear analogy.

As you can see, if all we had was this part of the brain, we would be no different from animals. We would be like reptiles.

## Functions Of The Emotional Or Limbic Brain Layer In More Detail (2<sup>nd</sup> Gear)

- This is also known as the Pain/Pleasure Center Brain. Sexual emotions are also housed here. You enjoy food because of this brain.

- Addictive behaviors are a function of this brain.
- Extremely sensitive stressors, especially that relate to trauma, are in this brain.
- It records memories of behaviors that produced agreeable and disagreeable experiences. That's why it is referred to as the emotional brain.
- It helps in the bonding between mother and child.
- This is the seat of the value judgments that we make, often unconsciously, exerting strong influence on our behavior.
- Emotions such as fear, anger, etc. are housed in this brain.

### **Functions of the Thinking Brain Layer (3<sup>rd</sup> Gear)**

- It deals with the power of choice.
- Helps you know what you are doing.
- It helps in making plans.
- It helps you to set goals, focus and pay attention.
- It manages emotions.
- It helps you develop and use your conscience.
- This is the layer of the brain that perceives positives and negatives.
- It is composed of two hemispheres known as the Left Brain and the Right Brain.

**Now you may be asking where does communication with children come in, in this information I have given you?**

### **Analogy of Gears**

- Let us pursue our analogy of gears. If a car is in gear 1 and the driving conditions become very hard, probably as you go uphill or there is sustained slowness due to heavy traffic, the engine may stall and stop.
- This is the same with the brain. When the brain perceives danger, the conditions of the 'road' of the brain will change. And if the brain remains in 'low gears' longer than it would have remained under normal circumstances of its normal functioning, it will affect the personality of the person.

**Some of the things that will cause the brain to downshift include: -**

- Stress.
- Fear.
- Trauma.
- Crisis
- Scolding (shouting).
- Confrontation.
- Feelings of unfair treatment.
- Demeaning, ridiculing, despising.
- Punishment instead of discipline.
- "I will beat the devil out of you."* or a parent pulling a child's ear and says. *"What are these ears for?"*

- Watching horror movies and violent cartoons.
- Exposed to fights and arguments of parents.
- Stronger kids at home or school constantly bullying weaker kids.
- These things plus many others will have the child's brain continually lodged in a downshifted mode.

### **Dangers of Downshifting on (in) Children**

- Research shows that if the brain stays in a downshifted mode for long periods of time, it reduces neuron growth and may cause learning inhibition. Learning is impaired.
- Linked to number 1, when the brain has downshifted, a child will have a hard time remembering things. This has the potential of affecting a child's academic progress.
- To give an example of how memory is affected when the brain has downshifted; when you are in church and you are suddenly asked to mention one of your favorite songs, since your brain was not expecting it, there are times when songs just disappear from your head. Because of this sudden stress, gears of your brain downshift into the area of the brain that does not store this kind of information.
- When the brain has downshifted, the child may have a hard time making right choices.
- If the threat continues making the gears remain for long periods of time in gear two (the brain of emotions and some sex drive) or gear one (the brain of fights, aggression, lust and sex) and that these threats to the child are repeated over and over, the behaviors of these brains will eventually characterize the child.

### **Recap: Downshifting of the Brain**

- Children who live in an environment where they are threatened all the time, whether the threat is at home, church or school, the effect on the child's brain is down shifting.
- When the brain has downshifted, the executive functions of the brain, which are housed in the thinking brain, gear 3, don't function optimally. Remember that memory, power of choice and such executive functions are housed in the cerebral cortex - gear 3 of the brain.

### **Lessons for Parents and Teachers**

- Learn to speak to children in a non-threatening manner. Don't say, *"Don't touch my books or else..."*
- Control your tone of voice.
- Be as patient as possibly can when a mistake has been done.
- Model good-buy behavior
- Learn to correct positively. Discipline and punishment are two different things.
- Learn to say, "I am sorry."
- Develop a relaxing environment in your home / Sabbath School classroom.
- Learn to appropriately touch children.
- Pray for and with children.
- Learn to use "heart to heart" talk with your children as opposed to "business talk." Many parents communicate thus with their children:- "Eat your greens," "Make your

bed,” “Show me your grades,” “You are always late for school,” “You always wake up late on Sabbath days messing my Sabbaths. Today, we will go to church without you.” “Don’t touch my books,” etc.

- This kind of communication which we can term as “business talk” or level “1” communication, downshifts the brain.
- The “Heart to Heart” talk is the one you need when you communicate with your children: “I see that you are limping, did you hurt your leg?” “We were hoping you would get an ‘A’ but you got a ‘D’. What can we do to improve your grade?”
- “Do you want to share with me how Jesus used you to help somebody at school today?” This kind of communication will not downshift your child’s brain.
- The Bible has lots of passages that deal with the subject of communication – admonishing us to speak gently to one another. I have appended a few at the end of this presentation.
  - [Proverbs 18:20-21](#) : .... Death and life are in the power of the tongue,..... (ESV)
  - [Ephesians 4:29](#) : Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, .... (ESV).
  - [Matthew 15:11](#): It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles (destroys) a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles (destroys) a person. (ESV)
  - [Proverbs 15:1-2](#) : A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly (ESV).
  - [Proverbs 17:27](#) : Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.
  - [Proverbs 12:25](#) : Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.
  - [Psalm 141:3](#): Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!
  - [2 Timothy 2:16](#) : But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness.
  - [Colossians 4:6](#) : Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.
  - [Proverbs 21:23](#) : Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble.
  - [James 3:9-10](#) : With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.
  - [Matthew 12:36](#) : I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak.
  - [Proverbs 10:19](#) : When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.
  - [Psalm 39:1](#) : To the choirmaster: to Jeduthun. A Psalm of David. I said, “I will guard my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth with a muzzle, so long as the wicked are in my presence.”

- [Proverbs 15:4](#): A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.
- [James 1:26](#) : If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.
- [Proverbs 10:31-32](#) : The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut off. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked, what is perverse.
- [Proverbs 16:24](#) : Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.
- [Ephesians 5:4](#) : Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.
- [Proverbs 31:26](#) :She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.