



Raising Boys. Raising Girls.

The past decade has been filled with research examining gender. Today there are several publications to discredit the historical notions of rank between males and females. The documentation, however does illustrate the distinct differences between a boy and a girl brain, both at birth and as they grow. The more you read, the more can be learned about the structural and chemical differences between the brains of boys and girls. It is important for parents and educators to learn to appreciate these differences, their affect on behaviour and the influence brain development has on an individual's ability to understand, learn and respond.

For instance, researchers have found that boys' and girls' brains have different "rest states." That is, when a male's brain get bored, some of his functioning shuts down and interferes with his ability to listen and learn. When the female brain gets bored, however, more of her brain stays active.

Raising Boys

In general, the language-related brain activity in girls is both sides of the brain whereas the activity in boys is only evident on the left side. Reliance on different brain areas for accurate language performance suggests that boys and girls are processing language information differently. The left side of the brain is an area especially involved in the spelling of words and their visual identification.

Males are much more likely to be diagnosed with language problems, including stuttering.

Physical activity and movement helps boys' brains to remain alert and active. In addition, higher testosterone levels compel many boys into competition. Integrating movement and improvement-based competition can be a great way to facilitate learning for boys and encourage them to finish work faster, increase retention, and liked school (and homework) more.

Most brain imaging and behavioral task studies confirm that boys, overall, have more advanced spatial abilities. The right hemisphere of the brain is considered the center for spatial skills. Males exceed at mental rotation tasks, the ability to see dimensional objects in the mind.

Speak in a louder tone of voice. Research shows that girls can hear sounds which are softer than boys.

Ask questions of boys to make sure they are hearing you and understanding.

Provide instructions that are clear to the point with fewer words.

Choose non-fiction literature with boy friendly themes, including strong main characters and real life events. Boys enjoy accounts about the way things work, slimy and dangerous things, battles, and adventures.

Music, games or building toys will help a boy engage in conversation.

Recognize that feeling-based questions will challenge boys and increase their discomfort.

Raising Girls

Girls have greater brain activity in several known language areas especially involved in word meanings, sounds of words and other language functions. These characteristics typically help girls develop speech earlier than boys.

Provide a more face-to-face nurturing environment rather than a shoulder-to-shoulder environment found in a boys' world.

Constantly provide positive, verbal feedback.

Girls are visual learners and emotionally influenced by their surroundings. Consider the aesthetics – include comfort, organization and soft surfaces.

When teaching math and science, girls can focus and attend to the material better when the information is tied to the real world and/or social settings.

Encourage girls to keep asking questions until they obtain the answer that works for them.

Allow opportunities for girls to create skits, role play or act out to express themselves.

Girls are less likely than boys to be risk-takers. Encourage girls to take risks by facilitating an environment of openness and understanding. Provide an opportunity for a girl to experience leadership

Females have a cognitive advantage in perceptual speed tasks, which involve matching objects and pictures.

Activity Examples:



Gender Differences in Response to Stress

When girls and boys get upset, they may not respond in the same way. Girls are somewhat more likely to burst into tears while boys are somewhat more likely to hit something or run away. Why do these differences exist? The answer may be more hardwired than you think.

Fight or Flight

The fight-or-flight stress response is the way the body responds to perceived threats whether it is a threat to life and limb such as an auto accident or whether it is a threat to one's self-esteem such as a major test. What happens is that the body gets prepared to defend itself from the oncoming danger or to run away. The following physiological changes occur: The heart begins to beat faster to send blood to the muscles and brain and as a result, the blood pressure increases. The person begins to breathe deeply and rapidly. This will supply oxygen so that the body can produce energy from the increased blood sugar. The pupils of the eyes will widen so that the person can see the danger better.

Although girls do experience the fight or flight response as well, boys are much more likely to experience an increased activation of this physiological response to perceived stress. In any situation, a boy may react suddenly and his behavior may become an issue when he is faced with what he experiences as a threatening situation. Children need to be taught to manage strong emotions and if no one has shown a boy how to control his response, he may not understand why others don't like his outbursts.

Some strategies for helping boys manage their stress response include the following:

- ✓ When excited, encourage your son to run around the edge of a playground or by throwing bean bags at a target.
- ✓ An older boy will need to be taught how to manage his sudden bursts of emotion. The important thing is to help the boy learn to control this excitement, understanding that the reaction is totally normal and necessary. What should not happen is for a boy to be taught that he should not react at all, but that his reaction should be appropriate to the situation. On the playground, he can be loud and boisterous, but he needs to use a calmer voice inside.
- ✓ The only part of the fight-or-flight response that can be controlled voluntarily is breathing. Slowing down breathing facilitates a slowing of other body responses, as well. Yoga breathing is an excellent way to help boys learn to control their physical responses and very young children can be taught to use this method.

- ✓ Asking a boy to stand to answer a question may actually help some boys to think better or going outside into the colder air, may actually improve some boys' ability to think clearly.
- ✓ If you want a boy's attention, you may be more likely to get it if you use a louder voice. Not shouting; just a louder voice. Speaking to an upset boy in a very quiet voice may mean that he does not even hear what is said.

Tend and Befriend

While all females are capable of showing the fight-or-flight response in certain circumstances, females may be more likely to respond with the "tend-and-befriend" response. Females, under stress, are more likely to turn to other females for support and defend each other from perceived threats. Social support helps females manage their response to stress. During tend-and-befriend, blood goes to the center of the body away from the muscles and the individual may find it difficult to move. The worst part of this is that it may be hard to discover when a girl is upset as she will be so quiet. The first indication may be when she gets visibly upset such as crying or is unable to answer a simple question. You will generally want to use a calm quiet voice which will not cause her to become more upset.

Some strategies for helping girls manage their anxiety include the following:

- ✓ walk to regain focus and calm
- ✓ practice deep breathing
- ✓ use visualization to imagine a peaceful, calming place
- ✓ eye contact
- ✓ opportunities to talk about what is bothering her without interruption
- ✓ create a "safe place" to be alone

Girls will more often tend to seek out safety in INTERACTION while boys will more often seek out a safe place through ACTION.

Activity Examples:

For more detailed descriptions of every age and stage of child development visit: www.allthedaze.com