

The Neuroscience of Collaboration and the Blueprint of We

Our brains have two main functions that have emerged through millions of years of evolution ~ to connect us for growth, and to keep us safe. We call these two modes the Connected Brain and the Safety Brain. The development of our society has made the Safety Brain our first and main mode of interaction with the world. In keeping the Connected Brain as a secondary mode, we restrict our creativity, productivity, and resiliency.

It's time to learn how to quiet the Safety Brain, and use it to gain greater clarity, so that our Connected Brain becomes our primary mode of interaction.



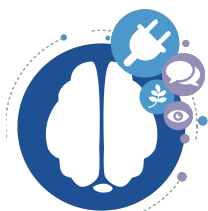
The Safety Brain

The Safety Brain has one job, no matter what it takes, to KEEP US SAFE. Typically, this is the first lens we use to see and interpret the world around us. It functions like an enormous filing cabinet. It is constantly comparing and analyzing what's happening around us to everything we know from the past to determine if any experience threatens our safety. It then takes that information and projects it into the future.

For instance, someone says something to me and my brain takes it in and accesses my past filing cabinet, instantly pulling out every occurrence of that tone of voice, words, nonverbal cues, etc. These occurrences could relate to the person talking, my own personal history, or even from a movie, book, or any other situation imaginable. If the early warning system part of my brain deems that what he said was benign, or maybe even kind, I can immediately drop those files and proceed with the conversation.

If, on the other hand, my past filing cabinet determines that this person has said something unkind or threatening, I immediately take those past files and drop them into my future filing cabinet, believing he will treat me this way the rest of my life. Projecting the occurrence into the future, my brain believes it is keeping me safe by sidestepping the need to re-learn the same thing over and over again.

I've now laid down the neural circuitry that says "be wary of him," and after thinking that thought a few times, the story will begin to run on automatic pilot. I don't even need to remember to be wary of him. Every time I step into a room and see him, I feel the need to avoid him. In essence, the story runs me, versus me running the story. This is why a thousand people can tell us we're wonderful, but we'll obsess over the one person who says we're worthless. Happy, kind, peaceful thoughts don't trigger our Safety Brain in the way that stressful ones do.



The Connected Brain

Our Connected Brain's main job is to do everything and anything to thrive as we meet our needs for energy, emotional connection, and growth. The Connected Brain has evolved to meet our needs through collaboration. It processes information in an intuitive manner and enables creativity and empathy, sidestepping our Safety Brain and our need to judge people or situations. It is the part of our brain that sees oneness over separation.

The Connected Brain knows everything is going to be alright and that stress is a state of mind. It's the part of us that can be happy with things exactly as they are, no matter what is happening. It experiences being "in the now" and loves it as it is. It's the part of ourselves that can be in the flow of what we are doing and who we are with. When this part of our brain is engaged, we have more access to creativity, compassion, intelligence and productivity. When the Connected Brain is our primary mode of interaction we have the ability to build strong connections and rewarding collaborations. (For more information see *Social Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman and *My Stroke of Insight* by Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor).



It's Time to Quiet the Safety Brain

At one time in our history, our ancestors walked a minimum of 12 miles a day, through constantly changing terrains and immediately life threatening situations. You never knew if behind that next rock or bush, lay a lion or a wolf looking for its next meal. Our brains were built for that environment.

Even though that time in our history has past, many of us still run our Safety Brain on high alert, almost all the time. Today, instead of focusing our attention on figuring out whether that slight movement behind the bush is threatening our safety, we focus that same intense attention on every gesture, action or tone of voice, at the office and at home, to determine whether what he said or she did threatens us in any way.

Living this way is extremely stressful. When we are stressed and our Safety Brain is constantly in use, we have diminished or even completely restricted access to our Connected Brain. And our Connected Brain is where our intelligence, creativity, productivity and joy reside.

It made sense for the Safety Brain to evolve an early warning system to look for threats and danger and to put this function on non-conscious auto-pilot. The Safety Brain is a very useful system. Without it, we would be dead. We're not asking you stop using your Safety Brain, we want you to learn how to consciously choose when to use it, rather than letting it run you.

How Do You Quiet the Safety Brain?

There are 5 key ways to quiet the Safety Brain. All 5 can be practiced as part of Collaborative Awareness and the Blueprint of We Collaboration Process.

1. **Create and Reinforce Positive Neural Pathways**

Connect positive thoughts and memories about people with whom you are in relationship through story, art or music. Run these positive neural pathways on a regular basis. The more we run the Connected Brain circuits, or any brain circuits, the more they begin to run on autopilot.



2. **Build Awareness**

Know what it looks and feels like when you are stressed. When we are stressed we believe that our safety is somehow threatened. The earlier you can become aware that your Safety Brain is active, the easier it will be to switch to the Connected Brain, once you know you are not threatened. Build awareness of others by learning information about what actions and reactions mean, directly from the people with whom you are in relationship. More information about the meaning behind a reaction helps us to quiet the Safety Brain. On the flip side, as we develop awareness of what behaviors engage each other's Connected Brain we have the ability to support one another engaging in those in-flow activities.

3. **Question Your Brain**

Are you sure you are truly threatened? Our Safety Brain will do anything to keep us safe - even believe a lie. The act of questioning your brain and engaging curiosity takes activity away from the limbic system and diverts it to the prefrontal cortex where you have a better chance of engaging your Connected Brain.

4. **Custom Design Your Relationships**

When we are mindful of what we are creating, it is easier to establish patterns and practices that support running Connected Brain circuits.

5. **Create a Path Back to Peace**

Plan for how you will return to peace after the Safety Brain is triggered. Creating this plan and writing it down ahead of time, using your most knowing Connected Brain self, gives you access to your Connected Brain even when you have been hi-jacked by the Safety Brain.

When we better know how to engage the Connected Brain, and are aware of when the Safety Brain is running on autopilot, we have the ability to consciously choose which mode of interaction we want to run and when.