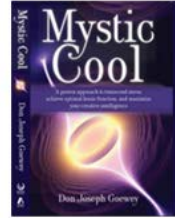




Don Joseph Goewey

*The peace, joy and strength you seek are
as near to you as your own thoughts.*



Back To School

The best predictor of your child doing well

Every good parent wants to empower their child to excel. You buy them school supplies, dress them up in the latest fashion and, if you can arrange it, enroll them in the best school in town. Certainly, these are important steps. But none of these are the *most* important step.

The Most Important Step

The most important step a parent can take is helping their child build the higher order brain function that predicts success and well-being in school and in life. How does a parent accomplish this? It's accomplished by modeling the attitude that transcends stress yourself (see Five Steps on page 4).



Why is it the most important step? It's because stress kills intelligence.

Stress Kills Intelligence

Mitigating stress is essential to developing a healthy brain during childhood and key to achieving optimal brain function throughout life. This is because stress reactions cause stress hormones to flood the brain and research has shown that stress hormones shrink higher order brain networks.¹ These networks drive intellectual, emotional and social intelligence, making human beings smarter, happier, more constructive and more successful in life. Conversely, the deficiencies toxic stress hormones produce result in cognitive and learning disabilities, anxiety disorders, depression and reactive

behavior. A brain chronically under stress is incapable of sustaining peak performance or even happiness.

So here's the problem: the incidence of stress among children is high and it's growing. A survey conducted by the American Psychological Association and the YMCA found that nearly half of teens and more than a quarter of 'tweens (age 8-12) are more worried and stressed than ever before, most to an extreme. Unfortunately, most parents are not picking up on it.² Only 2-5 percent of parents rated their child's stress as extreme.

Why aren't parents picking up on it? It's probably because of their own high level of stress. Nationally, 75 percent of adults report moderate to high levels of stress in the past month and nearly half said their stress had increased in the past year. The majority of adults are now struggling with bouts of anger, overwhelm and fatigue. They are arguing more with colleagues and lovers, and find themselves lying awake at night ruminating over problems.³ Sadly, the study found that most people are doing little or nothing to alleviate the level of stress in their lives.

The Best Predictor of Your Child's Well-Being

Studies in attachment theory have established that the best predictor of a child's well-being is a parent's self-understanding and positive attitude toward life. Both of these are key factors in enabling a person to transcend stress and anxiety. A parent's attitude shapes a child's developing frame of mind, which in turn literally shapes a child's brain. If a parent's attitude is stressed and anxious, as it is with most Americans in these difficult times, it is likely the child's attitude will be as well. Their developing brains will be dominated by the brain's stress response system (fight, flight or freeze) and unhealthy amounts of stress hormones will course through their brains.

This can cause higher brain networks to shrink and more primitive networks to expand. Cognitive functions will dampen and the emotional set point will default to negative. As a result, a child's performance in school is likely to suffer and behavior problems can develop. Additionally, they are more likely to get sick and for colds and flu to hit them harder. That's because stress reactions dampen the immune system. Stress also inhibits the production of growth hormones, dampening a child's physical development.

The best predictor
of a child's
well being
is *you*.

Daniel Siegel, M.D.
Child Neuropsychiatrist
& author of *Mindsight*

This is a picture we can change. It's simpler than you might think. It involves a fundamental shift in attitude anyone can make.

Attitude is Everything, Especially to the Brain

Attitude is extremely “neuroplastic,” meaning it shapes your brain. A positive or negative attitude literally wires the brain for success or failure, health or disease, confidence or insecurity, happiness or anxiety. When it comes to the brain attitude is everything. A shift in attitude that changes your experience to the positive can literally change your brain to function at optimum. A dynamically peaceful attitude produces the greatest neurological benefit. Establish a more peaceful relationship with life and five important changes can occur:

1. The flow of toxic stress hormones cease.
2. Control of the brain shifts from the stress response system deep in primitive brain structure to the higher order networks of the prefrontal cortex.
3. Neural networks throughout the system integrate and expand to generate intelligence.
4. The emotional meter resets to positive.
5. In the absence of stress hormones, immune and growth systems function at optimum.

So what does a parent's attitude have to do with how well their children perform in school this year? Children model everything, especially a parent's attitude. You shift your attitude from stress to peace and your children will follow suit. Soon neural networks that make a person healthier, happier and smarter will expand in both of you, all because of a little inner work on your part.

Stress-Free Is What Kids Want Most

If you think that making this change in yourself won't matter to your kids, think again. It appears that kids understand the importance of a stress free attitude better than parents. It is what they want most for their parents, according to a national study of over a thousand children. ⁴ In the study, interviewers gave children one wish to make for a change in their parents. Their parents were then asked to guess what their child wished for. More than half of parents guessed it was for more quality time together. It was the wrong answer. Most of the children wished for their parents to be free of stress. The research found that kids are very good at reading signs of stress. They are good at detecting subtle cues about a parent's mood, such as their down-turned expression or heavy footsteps.

If our parents were less tired and stressed, said one of the children interviewed, I think that the kids would be less tired and stressed.

I know when my mom has a bad day because when she picks me up from after school she doesn't smile, one young girl told interviewers. She has a really frustrated look on her face.

Every good parent wants their children to be happy. Every good parent also wants to empower their child to excel. The most effective thing a parent can do in achieving both is to teach kids to transcend stress by making the shift themselves.

5 Steps to the Attitude that Rewires the Brain

There are five steps parents can take immediately now to shift their attitude in ways that, neurologically, can wire their child's brain for success. All five are so simple you might think they could not possibly produce a dramatic shift in your attitude, let alone your child's brain function. They can and results are profound, accruing rapidly. Put it to the test for two weeks and see what changes in you and your child.

Here is what you need to practice:

1. Make Time for a Little Physical Activity

The National Institute on Aging found that moderate walking three times per week for a year increased brain connectivity and brain function.⁵ Improvement was especially found in the prefrontal executive networks, which aids in the performance of complex tasks like planning, scheduling, dealing with ambiguity, and working memory.

- Three times a week, take a 20-30 minute walk in a green environment to dissolve stress hormones and oxygenate the brain.
- Leave your troubles at the trailhead and, as you walk along, imagine each step puts your worries and concerns further and further behind you.
- Be at peace. Open your mind and heart and tune into the life teeming all around you.
- Walking in a green area is especially beneficial. After taking a walk in the country, 71 per cent of subjects reported decreased levels of depression and said they felt less tense while 90 per cent reported increased self-esteem.⁶

2. Bust Negative, Stressful Thinking

The mind makes up emergencies that the brain believes are real. The vast majority of these are false alarms but the brain's fear center cannot tell the difference between a real and imagined threat. It's what Mark Twain meant when he said: *My life had been a series of terrible calamities some of which actually happened.*

The brain can churn out troubling thoughts at a rapid rate. It's not your fault. It's the way the brain is wired. You can't always stop thinking a negative thought, but you can stop believing it. If you don't believe an anxious, stressful, pessimistic thought it has no power. It's just a thought that comes and goes. When you don't believe a negative thought, it doesn't turn into stress, anxiety, or depression.

Practice the following for the next two weeks:

- Be aware of negative, anxious, stress-provoking thoughts whenever they occur. Notice the way these thoughts morph into negative emotions that produce a perception of threat.
- Don't try to change these thoughts or feelings. Simply observe them. If you criticize, blame or condemn yourself for thinking and feeling negatively, simply observe this as another negative thought.
- Tell yourself: These thoughts and feelings are in me, not in reality. Take a moment and see the truth in this. Let it sink in. Then refuse to believe the stressful thought.
- Remind yourself that although negative thoughts and feelings are "in me," they are not me. They come and go like clouds. But the essence of your being is like the blue sky these clouds travel through and sometimes cover. Let your mind go completely and become the blue sky for a moment and be at peace.

The more you practice not believing negative thoughts, the more joy you will experience and the more you will see solutions instead of problems.

3. Stop Worrying (The Clear Button)

Eight-five percent (85%) of what we worry about never happens.⁷ As you worry, you release stress hormones that can dull your brains and make you emotionally negative. Worry serves no useful purpose. You can bust worried thinking and spare your brain enormous wear and tear by utilizing the Clear Button:

- Imagine there is a button at the center of your palm that is a biofeedback mechanism that, when pushed, sends a signal to the primitive brain to stop negative, fearful, worried, or pessimistic thinking.

- Press the button and as you do become aware of your breath.
- Count to three, as follows, thinking of each number as a color.
 1. Take a breath, count “**1**,” and think **red**.
 2. Take a second breath, count “**2**,” and think **blue**.
 3. Take a third breath, count “**3**,” and think **green**.
- As you exhale, let your mind go completely. Relax into the present moment. Be right here, right now. Create the intention to be at peace as your relate to stressors and problems that arise during the day, confident in the clarity your calm now affords you.

Why the Clear Button Works

The part of the primitive brain that excites stress reactions is fully developed in a human being by age two. It possesses the intelligence of a two-year old. This is why people resemble a two-year during heightened stress reaction. Every parent knows that you can't reason with a two year's tantrum. You can only distract them from it. Pressing the button, counting to “3” and seeing the numbers as colors is a form of distraction that quiets your primitive brain.

4. Inspire Yourself Regularly

➤ Start Each Day in Quiet.

- Close your eyes or take a downward gaze.
- Tilt your head toward your heart. Follow your breathing.
- Feel each breath softening your heart and opening it wider. After a minute or two, open your eyes.
- Feel appreciation for the gift of another day of life.
- Set your intention to have great day, filled with achieving things,
- Commit to being at peace today. Imagine yourself able to sustain a dynamically peaceful state of mind, extending a positive attitude, regardless of what might be happening around you.

➤ **Take Spiritual Breaks**

Believe it or not, breaks are an important element in *peak performance*. Researchers have found that blood flow to brain networks responsible for memory and learning increases during periods of wakeful rest, such as during a break.⁸ Here is an effective way to take a break:

- Every 90 minutes take a break from work. Step outside or go to a window and see what Mother Earth is doing.
- Look at the sky, notice the quality of light that's present, watch the clouds pass, the wind blow, the rain fall, or whatever is happening.
- Allow your mind to grow quiet and connect with life for a moment.

➤ **Count Your Blessings.**

- Once a week, at bedtime, recall three things that happened during the previous week for which you are grateful.
- Then acknowledge three things in your life for which you feel blessed.

5. Master the Small Stuff

You don't have to be Gandhi to find peace. Peace is in the small stuff. For example, a brain under stress wants to elbow its way to the head of every line or pass the car in front. It always feels late, pressured and victimized. You can actually rewire those brain reactions away. How?

- Practice peace when you feel rushed. Every now and then, choose to stand in the longest line at a store. Use the time to slow your motor and quiet your mind until you are at peace.
- Assert peace in a traffic jam. Listen to soft music or an uplifting interview. Tell yourself, my peace does not depend on my car moving faster.
- When you feel conflict today, tell yourself, "I am not going to let this person or situation control how I feel."
- Quietly do good deeds and acts of kindness.
- Practice receiving compliments graciously.
- Look for the best in someone you know.
- Devote today to seeing your strengths and positive qualities.
- Practice forgiving trivial errors.

Use Peace to Facilitate Brain Power during Homework.

One last thing: Given the mountain of research that has established the role of a peaceful attitude in building a powerful brain, it makes sense to build peace into homework time. Make a ritual that commences homework time by evoking a peaceful feeling in your child.

- Gather the family together and use a bell, gong or singing bowl to chime in homework time.
- Sit quietly for one minute. If the kids giggle, let them, and then motion them back to being peaceful. You can signal this by simply putting your hands together, prayer fashion.
- Do it with a smile, not disapproval.
- At the end of the minute remind the children that there is nothing the brain cannot do when it's peaceful. Tell them if they become agitated by an assignment during homework time to come and talk to you.

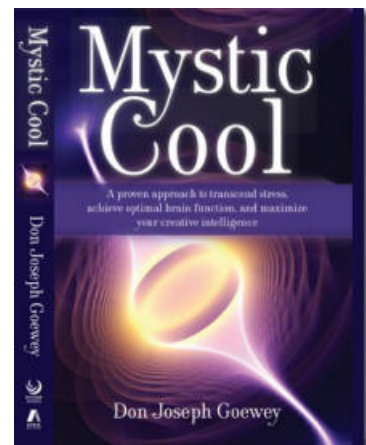
Keep practicing and never give up on peace

Peace is our most powerful human asset. No matter what is going on, never give up. Work for peace, in your heart and in the world. Never give up on it. Your brain will thank you and so will the brains of your children.

About the Author

Don Joseph Goewey has worked in some of the most stressful places on Earth – from cancer wards to prisons to refugee camps to corporate offices – helping people transcend stress and fear to reach a higher potential.

He has collaborated with Carl Rogers, Ph.D., the father of humanistic psychology and Gerald Jampolsky M.D., who innovated a school of psychology based on attitude. He has held executive positions at Stanford Medical School, San Mateo County Mental Health and directed the CAH International, one of the leading programs on psychological crisis.



His book, *Mystic Cool*, was a bestseller at Amazon for books on stress and neuropsychology. *Mystic Cool* defines a proven approach that literally rewires the brain to extinguish stress reactions and light up higher order brain networks that Nature

evolved in human beings to generate an enlightened mind, a successful life and a healthy longevity.

His work and book have been featured in the Today Show, CNN, Forbes, Parent and Child, the San Francisco Chronicle, Monster.com, Disney's *family.com*, and Outside Magazine.

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