

What Happens in the Brain When a Child is Dysregulated?

Reading Suggestions/Source Material:

The Whole-Brain Child by Dan Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson

The Yes Brain by Dan Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson

When a child becomes overwhelmed—angry, scared, frustrated, or out of control—their **amygdala** (the brain's emotional alarm system) takes over.

The Amygdala: The Brain's Smoke Detector

- The amygdala is a small part of the brain responsible for **detecting danger**.
 - When it senses a threat (even something small, like “I don’t want to wear those socks!”), it sounds the alarm.
 - This **triggers a fight, flight, or freeze** response—even if there’s no real danger.
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Dan Siegel's "Flip Your Lid" Metaphor

Dan Siegel uses the **hand model of the brain** to explain this:

1. **Calm State:**

- The “upstairs brain” (thinking, problem-solving) and “downstairs brain” (emotions, survival) are connected.
- Child can listen, reason, and respond.

2. **Flipped Lid:**

- When the amygdala is activated, the “upstairs brain” disconnects.
- The child can’t think clearly, use words, or control their actions.
- Logic is offline. Emotion is in charge.

🧠 Quote from Dan Siegel:

"When we 'flip our lid,' the upstairs brain is no longer in control—and the downstairs brain takes over."

💡 [Video Explanation of What is Happening](#) 💡

🧸 What This Means for Parents

- Children aren't being "bad"—they're overwhelmed.
- When their lid is flipped, they **can't** learn, reason, or listen until they feel safe.
- **Co-regulation** is how we help them "reconnect" their brain.

🪄 Your Role:

- Be the calm in their storm.
- Stay close, soft, and safe.
- Don't try to teach or explain when they're dysregulated—**wait for the lid to come back down**.

💡 [Video Explanation and What to do as a Parent](#) 💡
