



Nineteen Relational Brain-Skills That Must Be Learned

Skill 1

Share Joy

Mutual amplification of joy through nonverbal facial expressions and voice tone that conveys, “We are glad to be together.” This capacity allows us to bond and grow strong brains as well.

Technical description: Right-hemisphere-to-right-hemisphere communication of our most desired positive emotional state.

Skill 2

Soothe Myself

Simple Quiet

Lowering my own energy level so I can rest after both joyful and upsetting emotions, as I need to and on my own, makes me feel stable. This self-soothing capacity is the strongest predictor of good mental health for the lifetime.

Technical description: Release-on-demand of serotonin by the vegetative branch of parasympathetic nervous system to quiet both positive and distressing emotional states.

Skill 3

Form Bonds for Two

Synchronize Attachments

The essence of a secure bond is the ability to synchronize our attachment centers so that we can move closer or farther apart at moments that satisfy us both. Synchronized attachment centers provide the basis for smooth transfer of brain skills and learned characteristics.

Technical description: Two-way bonds involve simultaneous activation of the attachment centers (Control Center level 1) between two people. This activation helps create a state of mutual mind at the cingulate cortex level (Control Center level 3) that can only be maintained by direct facial contact with one other person at a time.

Skill 4

Create Appreciation

High levels of the emotional state of appreciation closely match the healthy balanced state of the brain and nervous system. Creating a strong feeling of appreciation in yourself or others relieves unpleasant states and stress. Appreciation is very similar to the let down reflex that produces milk flow when nursing and the warm contented feeling that follows for mother and child.

Skill 5

Form Family Bonds

Bonds for Three

Family bonds allow us to feel joy when people we love have a good relationship with each other. We experience what they feel and understand how they see our relationships through our three-way bonds. Joy bonds between two adults form a couple style bond so community joy building requires bonds for three or more.

Technical description: The prefrontal cortex (Control Center level 4) contains our capacity to maintain three points of view simultaneously. When this area is well developed we can understand how others see us, participate in relationships between others and correct our errors about ourselves and how we see others.

Skill 6

Identify Heart Values from Suffering

The Main Pain and Characteristic of Hearts

Everyone has issues that particularly hurt or bother him/her and always have been the way he/she is likely to get hurt. Looking at these lifelong issues helps identify the core values for each person's unique identity. We hurt more the more deeply we care. Because of how much pain our deepest values have caused, most people see these characteristics as liabilities not treasures.

Skill 7

Tell Synchronized Stories

4+ Storytelling

When our brain is well trained, our capacity is high and we are not triggered by the past, our whole brain works together. A simple test as well as a means to train the brain is telling stories in a way that requires all the brain to work together.

Technical description: The four levels of the right-hemispheric control center work together and allow the bonus (+) of having our words in the left hemisphere match our experience. When emotional and spiritual blockage is resolved our whole brain works in a synchronized way. By selecting stories we can test and train our brains to handle specific aspects of life and relationships.

Skill 8

Identify Maturity Levels

We need to know our ideal maturity level so we know if our development is impaired. Knowing our general (baseline) maturity level tells us what the next developmental tasks will be. Knowing our immediate maturity level from moment to moment lets us know if we have just been triggered into reactivity by something that just happened or have encountered a "hole" in our development that needs remedial attention. Watching when our maturity level is slipping also tells us when emotional capacity has been drained in us or others.

Skill 9

Take a Breather

Timing When to Disengage

Sustained closeness and trust requires us to stop and rest before people become overwhelmed and when they are tired. These short pauses to quiet and recharge take only seconds. Those who read the nonverbal cues and let others rest are rewarded with trust and love.

Technical description: All the brain-developing and relationship-building moments that create understanding and produce mutual-mind states require paired minds to stop a moment (pause) when the first of the two gets tired, near overwhelm or too intensely aroused. Those who disengage quickly, briefly and allow the other to rest are rewarded.

Skill 10

Tell Nonverbal Stories

When we want to strengthen relationships, resolve conflicts, bridge generations or cultures we get much farther with the nonverbal parts of our stories than with words.

Technical description: This workout for the nonverbal control center in the right hemisphere develops all the timing and expressive skills used to develop good emotional and relational capacity.

Skill 11

Return to Joy from the Big Six Feelings

Although we live most of our lives in joy and peace we need to learn how to stay in relationship and quiet our distress when things go wrong. When we take good care of our relationships even when we are upset the upset does not last long or drive people away. We quickly resolve our “not glad to be together” moments.

Technical description: The brain is wired to feel six unpleasant emotions. Fear, anger, sadness, disgust, shame and hopeless despair are each signals of something specific going wrong. We need to learn how to quiet each of these different circuits separately while maintaining our relationships. Training under these six emotional conditions covers the full range of our emotional distress.

Skill 12

Act Like Myself in the Big Six Feelings

Part of maintaining our relationships when we are upset is learning to act like the same person we were when we had joy to be together. A lack of training or bad examples causes us to damage or withdraw from the relationships we value when we get angry, afraid, sad, disgusted, ashamed or hopeless.

Skill 13

See What God Sees

Heartsight

Hope and direction come from seeing situations, ourselves and others the way they were meant to be instead of only seeing what went wrong. This spiritual vision guides our training and restoration. Even forgiveness flows from seeing people's purpose as more important than their malfunctions and makes us a restorative community instead of an accusing one. Through our hearts we see the spiritual vision God sees.

Skill 14

Stop the Sark

This Greek work (also rendered sarx) refers to seeing life from our personal view of who people are and how things should be. This conviction that I know or can determine the right thing to do or be is the opposite of heartsight in skill 13. For the sark, people become what they have done (the sum of their mistakes) or what we want them to become for us. Blame, accusations, condemnation, gossip, resentment, legalism, self-justification and self-righteousness are signs of the sark.

Skill 15

Quiet Interactively

Facial cues, particularly of fear, help us to know when we are pushing others too hard. Sometimes we need and want to maintain a high-energy state without "going over the top," like knowing when to stop tickling so it stays fun. Fast recognition and response to facial cues means optimum interactions and energy.

Technical description: Using the ventromedial cortex that is part of level 4 of the Control Center together with the intelligent branch of the parasympathetic nervous system allows us to control the upper end of arousal states. Instead of taking us all the way to quiet/peace this type of quieting allows us to operate at high levels of energy and quiet just enough to avoid going into overwhelm. This system controls aggressive, sexual and predatory urges so we can avoid harmful behaviors.

Skill 16

Recognize High and Low Energy Response Styles

Sympathetic and Parasympathetic

Many characteristic responses to emotions and relationships are strongly shaped by our tendency toward high or low energy reactions. Recognizing who tends to respond with high energy (adrenalin based emotions) and who would rather withdraw helps us match minds with others and bring a more helpful variety to our own response tendencies.

Technical description: Joy, anger and fear are all energy producing emotions (sympathetic) while sadness, disgust, shame and hopelessness all reduce our energy levels (parasympathetic). Tendencies to activate or shut down often become "pursuit and withdrawal" or "anger and tears" instead of healthy relationships.

Skill 17

Identify Attachment Styles

How well we synchronize our attachments (skill 3) early in life leave the most enduring pattern in our personality. These patterns change the way we experience reality. At one end we may give almost no importance to our feelings or relationships and at the other we may feel hurt almost constantly and think of nothing but feelings and people. We may also become afraid of the very people we need. All these factors distort our reality but feel real to us at the time. Knowing how to spot these distortions helps us compensate.

Technical description: Secure attachments bring joy, peace, resilience and flexibility as we mature. Insecure attachments come in three types. An under-active attachment pattern (dismissive) leads to underestimating the importance of feelings and relationships. This group usually thinks things are fine and no big deal. An overactive attachment style (distracted) leads to excessive intensity and an exaggeration of feelings, hurts and needs. This group is always feeling hurt or thinking others are upset when they are not. The third style (disorganized) is afraid to get close to the people they love and need.

Skill 18

Intervene Where the Brain is Stuck

Five Distinctive Levels of Brain Disharmony and Pain

By recognizing the characteristic pain at each of the brain's five levels we can pinpoint the trouble and find a solution if someone gets stuck. The type of pain gives us a good idea of the kind of solution we will need when someone is not "keeping it together," is "falling apart," or is "stuck" as we commonly call these losses of synchronization.

Technical description: There are five levels in the brain when we count the four in the right hemisphere control center and add the left hemisphere as the fifth. By knowing the characteristics of each we know when one level got stuck and what kind of interventions will help. For instance, explanations help level 5 but will not stop a level 2 terror like the fear of heights.

Skill 19

Recover from Complex Emotions

Handle Combinations of the Big Six Emotions

Once we can return to joy and act like ourselves with the six big negative feelings taken one at a time, we can begin to learn how to return to joy and act like ourselves when the six are combined in various combinations. Shame and anger combine to form humiliation. Fear and hopelessness (with almost any other feeling as well) form dread. These combination feelings can be very draining and difficult to quiet.