

# Ep #71 Changing the brain through Role-playing

In this episode, I will be discussing Role-playing and your brain. So let's begin. This is episode 71. Let's begin.

Smarter Parenting welcomes you to our podcast series, The Parenting Coach for ADHD. Here to heal and elevate lives is your Parenting Coach, Siope Kinikini.

I am really excited about what we're going to be talking about today, which is the brain. We're going to be talking about the brain. How the brain works. [And why Role-playing skills with your children is so effective](#) and why it's absolutely necessary for your child to change their behavior.

So let's start talking about the brain. Now, this may sound like an anatomy class in some ways, but I've tried to simplify it in a way that anyone can really understand it because we have listeners who are listening to this podcast from various backgrounds. And I wanted to simplify it and make it digestible to all of you. So let's talk about the brain.

We all have brains, and I know some of you are thinking, "My child does not have a brain sometimes." I get it. Sometimes they're just not thinking the way you would want them to think, but they do have a brain up there and they are processing the world the best way that they can. Trying to figure out how they fit in, what they need to do, how to be successful, how to work through issues that they're confronted day by day. Now, remember, you have a ton of experience and you have a lot of things that have happened in your life that have helped shape your idea of what needs to be done, and your brain stores all of that information, giving you a very unique perspective on the world and how it works.

When our children come into the picture, they're a clean slate, and they are experiencing these things and they're trying to make sense of it. But again, your experience is different. And so, their brain is reaching out and trying to understand everything about the world and trying to make sense of it. Your brain, your child's brain, very different. You may think your child doesn't have a brain. I get it. I've been there, but your child does and they're doing their best to figure out the world around them.

Now, we do have to understand the make-up of the brain and actually what happens when we're processing information. Your brain exists and contains two different types of matter. You have the gray matter and you have white matter. Now for the gray matter, it directs signals and sensory stimuli, that's what it does. So it processes that information. You have white matter, which is fatty tissue and nerve fibers, largely. So when something happens, like you are walking outside and it is freezing cold, your brain is experiencing what is happening. And from the gray

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matter, it actually sends signals down throughout your entire body through this system. We're going to call it a highway, called axons, and they continue to your nerves and that's where you start feeling the additional sensations.

But there's this communication happening with your brain and happening with your body. This communication from the brain telling you, "Hey, you're cold." Your nerves are telling you, "Yeah, you're cold," because you're feeling these things, sending it up to the brain. Then the brain processes that information and says, "Well, you should wear a coat or run back inside and be warm," or whatever you need to do. This communication between your brain and everything else in your body happens very, very quickly.

But remember, everything is being processed and filtered through your brain, the way your brain is functioning. That's why sometimes somebody who put their hand on the stove, it's really interesting because I've seen this, it's happened to me, where I have actually not felt the burn until my brain's like, "Wow!" And then I had to process that, and then I realized, "Oh wow! That was really hot." Even though my nerves felt it, it took a little bit of time for it to make the connection. And my brain is the thing that interprets what is happening around me. So I make sense of that and then it sends signals throughout my body telling me how to react, or how to act, in certain situations.

Now, remember that last sentence that I just said, it helps interpret how you're going to react or act, in certain situations. Think about it through the lens of your child now, okay. They're receiving stimuli all the time through the gray matter, and it's being communicated through the axon, to your nerve endings all through their body. And they are trying to make sense of everything that's happening in their life. They're trying to understand all of it. And so, by trying to understand it, they're sending signals, "Okay, do this. Do that." It's communicating with your child what your child should be doing. And in every situation, this happens.

But sometimes it happens instantaneously, where your brain, because it's so complex, and again, I have simplified this to make it as simple as possible, but sometimes there's a stimuli that affects the brain, and there are parts of your brain that are super effective at recognizing danger or threats. Which leads into our fight or flight. So say you come home, you're angry at your child, you yell at your child, that's a stimuli and the brain is sending a signal down and your brain is interpreting all of that. And sometimes that part of your brain, the medulla will say, "Hey, you're in danger. Freak out. Stop the danger. So fight or flight." They could do either one of those things.

So this complex thing that we call the brain, and we're trying to work through the brain, and [we're trying to help our children understand the world the way that we understand the world to be](#). Now again, parents come with all this experience. They come with all this knowledge. It's been shaped throughout their lives that gives them a very unique and distinct perception of what the world is like. And our children come to the world not knowing any of that. So they're trying to make sense of it, and obviously, they're going to make mistakes along the way. Our job as

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parents is to help decrease the anxiety around the stimuli and to help them process that in a more effective way so that fight or flight is not an issue.

This is why I love the Teaching-Family Model. I love the Teaching-Family Model because we are dealing now with ways that we can teach the brain without them getting into this fight or flight stance. We're teaching their brain and making it a part of their everyday life. Now, how do we teach the brain, and the nerves, and the muscles and all parts of the body to do something well, or to how to respond to something?

Well, as the messages are being sent down the axons. So you have your gray matter sending, your brain is sending these messages through your axon down to your nerves. There is the sheath that is surrounding the axon called the myelin. And think of it like an electrical wire. There's usually a protective covering around the electrical wire. Now, why is that electrical covering there? It's actually to help speed up and concentrate the messages or the electricity down the wire. So it's not being spread out in different ways or it's interrupted in any way. So think of the myelin around the axon as that protection. It actually helps to protect the messages so they go directly where they need to be. Directly. So the more we practice something, the thicker that myelin sheath becomes around the axon, the more natural and the more easy the messages are that go throughout the body in how we respond.

Let's even talk about professionals who are playing a piano, or a professional dancer, or a professional boxer. In any of those instances, their brain is receiving stimuli and it's sending messages throughout their entire body. Now as they practice, what they're doing is they're increasing the connectivity of the brain to their muscles and to their nerves. And by increasing and actually creating a super speed highway from the brain to those centers of their body, they're able to perform at a high level. They're able to do things that would normally be difficult, easier because the more they practice, and the more they concentrate that sheath, the faster the speedway or the highway is in communicating those messages.

It's a fascinating field. And in fact, brain science, it's one of those things that we are still continually learning about. We haven't even talked about [neuroplasticity](#). But we will in just a minute because this actually is a super exciting material. I love it. Anyway, as we're communicating throughout our bodies these messages, professionals practice, and practice, and practice to increase that connection between what their brain is telling them and what their body should be doing. They're actually hijacking some of that fight or flight along the way by teaching their brain and their body how to respond to the stimuli that they're receiving. So the more they practice, the better off they're going to be.

Now, practicing actually consistently over time, you'll find that professional musicians, dancers, professional football players, they'll spend hours and hours and hours on very specific skills in order to master them. Your child needs to learn how to do this type of practice. It's high-intensity practice at first, but after a while, those things that you are practicing become easier. They become simple, and then you can add on more and more difficulty to them. And you imagine a

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dancer who's doing a pirouette, for example. Take somebody who has never danced before and they try to do a pirouette.

After they practice it over and over and over again, their brain starts to send these messages, "Okay, you can do this. This is what you need to do. This is what it's going to feel like. This is how you're going to feel like after. This is your posture." All of these messages simultaneously are going throughout the dancer's body and as they practice it, it becomes more and more reinforced to the point that they can do the pirouette without really thinking about it. They're not thinking of all the technicalities along the way.

Now, we share an example of this whole process in the Role-playing video that you'll find on the Smarter Parenting website. It talks about Role-playing doing the exact same thing, but it uses the example of driving. So I can use that here too. Pretend like you were first learning how to drive. Do you remember how conscious you were about everything around you? It's like, "Okay, am I too close? Am I going too fast? Is this a slippery road? Oh my goodness, it's raining right now." So when you start beginning to learn, you're paying attention to all those things, but as you learn them, and as you do them over, and over, and over, and over again, it actually becomes second nature and so you're not thinking about it.

After a while, you end up driving and you don't remember actually getting in the car and getting to where you needed to be. That's happened to me multiple times where I'm actually like, "Okay, I need to go to work." And the last thing I remember is walking out into the garage and the next thing I'm at work. And I didn't even consciously think about it because I'm just. I've done it so many times. I know the way so well that my brain and my body are communicating about how to do it, but I am thinking about a million other things. And I know that's happened to a lot of parents.

That's the type of communication that we're trying to build with children when we teach them these [behavioral skills](#). That it becomes so second nature to them that their brain is not stuck in a fight or flight. They're not going to throw a tantrum. We're actually teaching their body and their brain to communicate. This is how you're going to do this. This is how you are going to behave.

Now children are naturally because their brains are underdeveloped and they're still forming, we're dealing with a more primitive communication within their body and their brain, and so they're obviously going to move into fight or flight. That's why you have children tantrumming, because they're trying to communicate something to you. But they don't have that superhighway developed yet. And so, our role in Role-playing that with them, practicing these skills, helps to build that myelin around the axon so that communication from the brain to the nerves to everywhere else in the body makes sense. I know this stuff is amazing. It is super fascinating, and it's actually a field of study that I continually, continually am interested in learning about and studying on my own, because personally, I think it's fascinating.

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Now, we haven't really talked about neuroplasticity, but what that means is that your brain actually is more flexible than most people think. So the ability of the brain to adjust and to change is very fluid. Your brain is more fluid than what we previously thought. And that goes particularly to people who believe your child can only be one way. You need to change that thought process because a child is always learning and absorbing new information and making sense of the world. And you can help alter that by Role-playing new situations. By Role-playing what they can do, what they should do. Role-playing things that cause them anxiety. I mean, you can Role-play a million things. But your brain has this ability to be flexible and to be molded depending on where you put your focus. Fascinating, fascinating topic.

What I love about children though, is their brains are still developing and so we have a lot to work with. We have a lot to work with, with young children. [So if we are focused in on what we need to do, we are going to be absolutely successful with them.](#) Now, there are six things that I want to emphasize that parents should do while they are Role-playing that help make Role-playing more effective, or your practice more effective for your child. And these six things are things that I tell all parents when they call in for [coaching](#).

The first one is you need to focus the task at hand. So when you first begin a Role-play, you want to remove the distractions that may exist around so you can focus. We, at Smarter Parenting, call that practicing at a neutral time. You want to practice at a neutral time because you want your child to be able to uber focus. Remember driving, the example I gave of driving. You're so focused on so many things. What you want to do is remove all the distractions in order to help your child focus in on what you are trying to teach them. That's what we teach on the Smarter Parenting website. Find a neutral time when things are calm. Your child is calm and you guys can work through things.

The second thing is to start slow and build coordination. So you're going to start doing things that are doable for your child. Don't start with a Role-play that is too difficult or too hard. You want to start with something small and simple. And as you continue, and as they develop this coordination and the myelin starts to form around the axons, then you want to increase the intensity. Don't start off with something big. You start off with something they can do so they can see success and then build on that.

Now the third thing, you can take breaks. You don't have to do it one session. And in fact, the recommendation is to Role-play often but at different times of the day, so they can incorporate that into their life. So if you're teaching a skill to your child and you're Role-playing, Role-play it in the morning. Then come back to it. Take a break. Come back to it. Role-play it in the evening. Take a break. Practice it in the morning again. In the afternoon after school. You want to practice it multiple times because again, practice makes perfect.

Now, if you remember, professionals spend hours and hours and hours developing these skills. You're going to have to spend some time doing that. And if you want it to stick, you have to invest the time. [So practice, practice, practice.](#) If you start with something small, you'll see

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success there. And actually, that will teach your child and you to continually add onto that. And it actually is a lot easier for your child to start to incorporate these things more easily into their behavior. So, the first one was focus on task at hand. The second one was start slow and build coordination. And the third one was take breaks.

The fourth one is you want to visualize this with your child as well. So when your child is not practicing, you can actually prompt your child to visualize a Role-play that you did previously. And how it felt, and have them describe it. Visualization is a powerful tool for young children because they are so creative in their own minds, in making sense of the world, they can recreate it in their minds. The benefit of doing that is it actually helps cement what they're learning and it actually makes additional connections here more firm. The connections that are communicating throughout their body. So taking some time to visualize is also helpful, in addition to the physical doing of a Role-play. The actual Role-play itself.

One thing that I tell parents, and this is the fifth thing, is you want to integrate as many of their senses into the Role-play as possible. So visual. You want to include what they're hearing. What they're saying. Kinesthesia or movement. So you want to incorporate as many of the senses as possible. Now, why is this important? Well, the more you're able to incorporate all of their senses, the more able they are to remember it. And it makes sense and the brain can actually make stronger connections with what you're teaching. So, incorporate the senses.

Think about it this way. Sometimes we smell something and it brings back a memory. Or we hear a song and it takes us back to prom or whatever it may be. That is a very powerful sense that we have, smell and hearing, in our brain's ability to recall things. So if you can incorporate multiple senses in your Role-play, it will be so much more effective for your child because all of those things working together will help it make sense to them. So, incorporate as many senses as you can.

Now the last thing that I tell parents to do is to reverse Role-play. And by reverse Role-play, what I'm saying is parents need to demonstrate what they want from their child first. They need to be able to do that first, and then their child can copy that. Now, remember, when we're dealing with a child and their brain and the receiving stimuli, a lot of times they're unsure even though you've explained it. So you can use words to explain things, however, then seeing it, hearing it, experiencing it, getting a sense for what it looks like. That is far more powerful than you just telling them what to do.

So reverse Role-play requires you as a parent to do it first. So if you want your child to remain calm when they're frustrated, you show them how to do it first. You Role-play it that way. You become the child, let them be the parent, let them observe what's happening, and then you work through it. That's the best way for your child to learn. And again, that takes in a lot of the incorporating five senses to do it. So those are six things that will make your Role-play more concrete and more effective. [And have fun with it.](#) Role-play is one of those things, especially with young children, they Role-play all the time. They want to be a doctor. They want to be a

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fireman. They want to be a nurse. They want to be a mom. A dad. They want to do all these things, right? So they're used to the Role-play as children.

[Have fun with it. Role-play with them. Joke around with them.](#) Help them understand the skill. What it feels like, what it is absolutely like because we are stimulating their brain and their axons in communicating and building that myelin. So, it's a superhighway and they can logically think through problems and work out their issues. Wow! That is a lot of information. And again, I have simplified it, but I've only done that to help you understand the power of Role-playing and the brain. [What happens in your brain and what happens in your child's brain in helping them absorb all the information you're trying to teach them.](#) The skills are on the Smarter Parenting website and you can go through those.

Now again, most of the skills on there, almost 99% of them include an element of Role-playing. So Role-play. You want to Role-play as much as possible. To have them incorporate that into their daily lives. I wanted to recap with the six things that will help you make Role-play more effective with your child.

The first one is to focus on the task at hand and remove all distractions. Second is just start slow and build the coordination. Third, is to take breaks if you need to in Role-play at different times. Fourth is to visualize the Role-play as well. So you physically do it, you can also have your child think about it and visualize it, what it looked like. Fifth, is to integrate as many senses as possible in your Role-playing. And the last thing is to reverse Role-play. You want to reverse Role-play it. You want to show what it looks like. You want your child to really get an idea and see it for what it is and what you expect from them.

These are things that we cover in the coaching. So if you haven't signed up yet, jump over to the Smarter Parenting website and [sign up for a 15-minute coaching session](#). It's free. And what we do is we go more in-depth into this stuff. We talk about it more in-depth. And I can listen to what's happening in your home and with your child. And we can work through it and I can give you suggestions on things that you can implement and try. You can sign up for that free session on the Smarter Parenting website. So go do it and let's get deeper, folks. All right. That's it for me and I'll see you again next time. All right, bye.

### **RESOURCES MENTIONED IN THIS PODCAST**

[Behavior skills of the Teaching-Family Model](#)

[Ep #46: Understanding the ABC's of Behavior](#)

[Ep #47: Mastering Observe and Describe](#)

[Ep #48: What it takes to change behavior](#)

[Ep #49: Compound effect of Effective Communication](#)

[Ep #50: Changing behavior through praise](#)

[Ep #51: Finding Success with Preventive Teaching](#)

[Ep #52: How to fix negative behaviors](#)

[Ep #53: The importance of Following Instructions](#)

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[Ep #54: Teaching kids to make better decisions](#)

[Ep #55: Reducing bad behavior with Effective Negative Consequences](#)

[Ep #56: Reinforcing good behavior using Effective Positive Rewards](#)

[Ep #57: Teaching kids to Accept No Answers without issue](#)

[Ep #13: Practice leads to success](#)

[Ep #59: The ADHD Smarter Parenting Coaching process](#)

[Ep #67: Consistency creates change](#)

[Ep #69: 4 ways to increase your relationships and fix behaviors](#)

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