

# **SESSION 4: STRESS AND THE BRAIN**

**Welcome and Review Last Week's Homework & LIFE Starters: 20 minutes**  
**Session #4 Teaching: Stress and the Brain: 10 minutes**

Days and nights, weeks, months, seasons, high and low tides, sleep and moon cycles... all examples of how God created the world and our bodies to move in predictable patterns. In a perfect world, these patterns allow for proper physical growth, resulting in healthy relationships, and emotional processing. For children that have experienced trauma or long periods of stress, the fight, flight or freeze impulse takes over and doesn't let go without a lot of healing. Dr. Karyn Purvis, an renowned expert on Childhood Trauma and Development says "Deprivation and harm suffered early in life impact all the ways that a child develops; coordination, ability to learn, social skills, size, and even the neuro-chemical pathways in the brain. These consequences can linger years..." But did you know that God also created healing possibilities for our brains and our children's? Studies show that cementing new habits and behaviors in the brain takes approximately 400 repetitions... **unless** it is done through playful connection. In that case, it takes 10 to 20 repetitions.

Imagine these real-life scenarios: A 4 yr old child comes to the dinner table, sees what is being served and immediately starts melting down and refusing to eat. A toddler in her Foster mother's arms enters a classroom full of people at church and starts screaming and trying to escape. A 10 year old in school starts making nonsense noises and pacing the classroom. These are all behaviors that we might see as sinful defiance or rude behavior if we just look at the surface. But for all children, especially those who have experienced trauma, neglect or abandonment, there is a lot below the surface that is driving the behavior. It's our job as parents to navigate it and help our kids resolve the emotions and teach them positive coping skills.

In these situations behavior was a communication method. Taking time to "be curious" (analyze, ask questions, think before responding) about what is driving a behavior will help you determine the best course of action. The parents had to have grace in the moment, do what they could to bring calm and comfort to the child, and the answers ended up revealing themselves later. The defiant, angry child at the dinner table had once seriously choked on chicken.. His body and brain remembered it, even if he couldn't explain it. The screaming toddler in mom's arms had experienced prenatal drug and alcohol exposure, and the fluorescent lights and crowded room made her brain feel like it was on fire. The boy in the classroom was confused but didn't have the emotional awareness to explain that. 1st Corinthians 13 gives us some great examples of how we can approach the difficult behaviors that we might see in our children.

## **Small Group Discussion: 15 minutes**

- What kinds of things teach a child that they can trust their parent(s)?
- How can we model trust in our Heavenly Father to our children?
- Do you struggle with trusting God with your children and their futures?
- Can you think of any scriptural examples where a parent did or didn't trust God with their children?

## **Small Group Wrap-Up: 10 minutes**

What did you cover in your small group time? What were the biggest take-aways and action items?

***Discuss This Week's Homework on next page: 5 minutes***

•Do your LIFE Starter Journalling and make time to continue the discussion from your small group breakout time.

***Resource: The Whole Brain Child***

# SESSION #4

## WK. 4 DEVO 1

### **Read 1 Corinthians 13**

*Journal about how we can approach the difficult behaviors that we might see in our children.*

**L=Listen** in your journal by writing the date and the Scripture you're studying. After you've read the passage a few times, focus on a verse or two that stands out to you and then write out those verses in your journal.

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**I = Investigate** the context around today's Scripture reading. To whom was this written? Why? How does this passage fit with what comes before and after it? What is the Holy Spirit communicating through this text? Feel free to use Bible study tools for commentary: [Bible Study Tools](#), or [Easy English Bible](#).

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**F=Focus** to the text to make it applicable for your own life. What is God saying to you personally through this passage? How can you apply what you've read?

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**E = Engage** God. This can either be a short prayer or an action that you can take that day after reading the text. Is there a command to follow in the text? How are you different because of what you've learned?

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# SESSION #4

## WK. 4 DEVO 2

### **Read 1 Peter 5:1-11**

*Journal about being more humble in your approach to leading.*

**L=Listen** in your journal by writing the date and the Scripture you're studying. After you've read the passage a few times, focus on a verse or two that stands out to you and then write out those verses in your journal.

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# SESSION #4

## WK. 4 DEVO 3

### **Read James 5:7-20**

*Learn to be patient in suffering.*

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# SESSION #4

## WK. 4 DEVO 4

### **Read Titus 3**

*What areas can you improve in your modeling of Jesus Christ as a parent?*

**L=Listen** in your journal by writing the date and the Scripture you're studying. After you've read the passage a few times, focus on a verse or two that stands out to you and then write out those verses in your journal.

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