



## Use Your Brain and Not Your Pain

What we say and what we do, especially in the heat of an emotionally charged moment, can usually be traced back to originate from one of two figurative areas: From our **“brain”** or from our **“pain”**\*. Consider the following:

**Our Brain** – This is the metaphorical part of our consciousness that can put aside emotion to instead use rational and reasonable thinking. Decisions and actions are then based on a combination of sound judgment, reason, logic and good sense.

**Our Pain** – This symbolizes our personal collection of emotionally-charged memories of how we were mistreated, abused, hurt, frightened, cheated, tricked or taken advantage of in the past. This can be especially hard to ignore when the pain comes from a deep emotional scar or when the painful wound is still “open” (e.g. has not healed yet)

Surely you are already aware of the value of thinking before reacting and it is likely that you have been instructed to think before you speak since childhood. However, the question is, are you putting this into practice, especially in difficult, impassioned, or emotionally sensitive situations? *It can be a challenge.* Consider a few common ways to recognize if your thoughts and actions are coming more from your “brain” or more from your “pain”

Our “Pain”...	Our “Brain”...
... <b>Has tunnel vision</b> , focusing mainly on the hurt that is right in front of you. For example: “If you loved me you would not have done this to me!”	... <b>Sees and remembers the “big picture”</b> even during times of stress. For example “I still love you even though I am so disappointed with what you did”
... <b>Is impulsive</b> and quick to blurt out hurtful words or take vengeful actions when triggered, sometimes forgetting the consequences	... <b>Thinks first</b> about words and actions, considering first how negative choices triggered by emotions can often lead to regret later
... <b>Blames</b> : “It’s your fault we are having these problems – What are you going to do about it!”	... <b>Accepts responsibility</b> for own role in a dispute. Recognizes that “it takes two to tango”
... <b>Deals in absolutes and extremes</b> . For example: “You always.... or “You never...” or “This is the worst thing anyone has ever done...”	... <b>Is reasonable and realistic</b> . For example. “I’m feel hurt by what you did, but I’ll eventually get over it, I just may need some time”
... <b>Resents</b> – Holds on to anger and grudges and then rehashes them time and time again often bringing things up again later. Keeping an emotional “scorecard” of bad memories.	... <b>Forgives</b> – Letting go of hurt, pardoning the errors, overlooking mistakes, dropping the issue once it is resolved and leaving it that way for the greater good without bringing up the past

### Know Yourself...Questions for Discussion:

Did anything in the above chart stand out to you personally? What are some of your strengths and challenges?

When it comes to emotional pain, what are some of your sensitive areas? (Think about things that can trigger you)

Discuss and share as a group: What is helpful to you personally when it comes to successfully managing your emotions in a positive way, even when you may be feeling triggered?

\*This concept of “brain vs. pain” is being presented in a very basic and brief format as a simplified tool for decision making when facing stress or conflict particularly when coping with a substance use or mental health issue. Similar expanded and more detailed versions of this concept are outlined and explained in greater detail in several therapeutic approaches such as Dialectical Behavioral Therapy and others.



## Group Exercise- Putting into Practice: *Using Your Brain (and not your Pain)*

### Part 1 – Warm-up Discussion

For this activity the group will work on some challenging life situations. This exercise will require some volunteers to demonstrate the idea of using your brain rather than your pain to make decisions. So to get things started, go around the room and everyone should briefly (1 or 2 minutes) talk about a stressful life situation. **Discuss everyone's answers as a group before moving on to Part 2.**

### Part 2 – Role Play

Directions – Select two willing volunteers willing to use their stressful life situation for a role play. One volunteer should role play acting as their self, and the other volunteer as the other person who is also involved in the stressful life situation. (For example, if the situation being used for the role play is a person arguing with their spouse, one volunteer should be him/herself and the other person should role play as the spouse). The two volunteers should sit in front of the rest of the group for observation.

- ❖ *First*, the volunteer who is acting as their self should role play from the perspective of using their “pain” to speak and make decisions. (Pain = focusing in hurt feelings, blaming, extremes, resentment). Role play and act out the situation
- ❖ *Second*, repeat the same role play again, except this time the volunteer acting as their self should focus on using their “brain” to speak and make decisions (Brain = being reasonable, patient, forgiving, thinking before speaking) Again, role play the situation

Discuss: After the two versions of the role play are complete (using pain and then using the brain) discuss the advantages of using your brain instead of letting your pain speak for you. **Try it again with others.**



Using your “Pain”

#### Things that may come out from the hurt inside us...

Lashing out  
Overreaction  
Irrational behavior  
Regret  
Intolerance  
Conflict  
Rudeness  
Resentment

More pain: “Hurt people, hurt people”



Using your “Brain”

#### If we let our rational brain guide our thinking...

Compromise  
Patience  
Reasonableness  
Understanding  
Compassion  
Empathy  
Mercy  
Peacemaking

Solutions rather than making more problems