

The Crocodile, the Elephant and the CEO

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The brain of your child is a complex organ with many systems and sub-systems. Few parents try to understand this energy sapping, powerful machine that controls our and our children's behaviour. Unless parents explore the wonderful world of the human brain, they will never understand the mechanics behind neural processing and how it affects the way children react or respond to events in their lives.

As a father, educator and leader, knowledge of brain processing is essential in my work. Let's simplify these systems by seeing the brain as having three levels. The first level is a Crocodile, the second level is an Elephant and the top part of our brain will be called the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of our behaviour.

Problem solving and decision making happens in our CEO.

This is what neuroscientists call the pre-frontal cortex (PFC). All incoming information is filtered by our Crocodile (level one) and our Elephant (level two) and only once they allow the data to pass through their systems and sub-systems, does it reach our CEO.

Your child is protected by his Crocodile. It has sharp teeth to snap at those who may hurt him. He may shout or scream,

punch or scratch when that incoming data triggers a memory of fear or hurt. His crocodile has a strong tail that can whip out and flatten someone with sarcasm or put downs. Name calling is crocodile tail behaviour. Punching is the outworking of a reactive crocodile. But the crocodile also has a thick skin. Sometimes a child may not react with his teeth or tail, but choose, unconsciously to withdraw behind his thick skin. This withdrawal may lead to depression as an adult.

OUR CROCODILES NAME IS MARUFAD

- **M** = Mindless – it does not have the privilege of being mindful like the CEO is.
- **A** = Automatic – it cannot manually process the issues and make the right choice like the CEO does. Marufad reacts in an automated programmed manner without considering all options.
- **R** = Reactive. Marufad REACTS when the incoming signal sparks a memory whereas the CEO responds once it has pondered all options found in memory banks.
- **U** = Unconscious. Often, when sitting with your child after an incident you may guide him by saying"You should have thought about that before you reacted!" Not possible when the crocodile is in full flight!
- **FAD** = Fast And Dirty. Those of us who dwell in our Crocodile brain are always apologising for our behaviour or regretting what we said or did.

Bringing up children successfully means making sure that they are SAFE. When the crocodile feels safe, 'Marufad' allows the data to move into the next level of our brain system, called the Elephant. Our environments must be SAFE PLACES. How safe is your home at the end of a working day or the trip to school by car or taxi? How safe is the dialogue between the adults and siblings in your home? How safe is the school environment? South Africans don't feel safe in many communities. We may wonder why the current generation is perceived as being disordered and rude. Our children are simply a bunch of crocodiles living in a world where the adults are not providing a sense of SAFETY for them.

The Elephant is our Limbic brain. This huge, complicated group of organs work together, processing the incoming data from the Crocodile. The Elephant brain asks the questions, "Do I belong?" "Am I loved?" The elephant is an amazing creature! Strong and formidable, gentle and loving, this animal will eat an apple from your hand, but tumble a 4x4 when bewildered. The Elephant never forgets and when the incoming signal sparks a state of bewilderment, the brain reacts emotionally. Tears, tantrums, outbursts and, "I just cant do it!" rants, are all signs that the elephant is bewildered. Too many parents and educators generate bewildered environments. Parents pressurise their children to be too busy. Hurried parenting

is dangerous for the elephant. The overwhelmed limbic brain prevents access to the CEO, trashes the jungle and evokes 'Marufad' to contribute to the carnage. Psychologists and doctors often medicate to calm the crocodile and the elephant into submissive zoo inhabitants.

When the Crocodile feels safe and the Elephant feels a sense of belonging, we gain access to the CEO. I call the seven BIG functions of the CEO:

TOP WIFE. Yes, there is always a woman in the roof of our head.

- T = Time Management
- O = Organisation
- P = Prioritisation
- W = Working Memory
- I = Impulse Control
- F = Flexibility and
- E = Empathy.

It does not take a rocket scientist to quickly comprehend that it is the BIG SEVEN that is at the heart of all our disciplinary problems at schools. The CEO of our children cannot be activated because they do not feel safe and loved.

The challenge for parents and educators is to make our children feel safe and give them a sense of belonging. When systems are in place to create a safe and loving home or learning space, we will then be raising and teaching whole brain people. Without the sense of safety, we produce bewildered elephants and irate crocodiles in our homes, schools and eventually, in the workplace. 🐘