BRAIN:

- **Teach relaxation**. A key step is to teach relaxation. Relaxing involves the use of mental abilities to calm down, stop intrusive thoughts, take deep breaths, and dozens of other strategies that children can learn.
- **Provide structure**. Predictable rules and structure for traumatized children provide an external order that eliminates the pressure of internal chaos and this comforts the child.
- **Make predictions**. Tell the child your prediction of what they will feel and how they will act in certain situations. The use of predictions can disrupt the habits of reactivity.
- **Develop a stress plan**. A stress plan begins with an acknowledgment (usually from the parent) that reactivity to stress is beginning to occur. Outline steps toward relaxation, such as picking a place and knowing when to reduce stress.

The primary goal of all interventions to impact the brain of the traumatized child is to reduce reactivity and increase higher reasoning centers. At the point the child moves away from reacting to the situation, the following interventions can promote even higher order brain functions.

- **Promote executive functions**. All interventions that encourage use of higher reasoning centers of the brain promote executive functions.
- **Encourage thinking**. Anything that encourages the child to think is a good strategy. Writing, drawing and making choices all require higher order reasoning.
- **Use your words**. When children are encouraged to verbalize thoughts and feelings they must use higher brain regions.
- **Teach self-mastery skills**. Work with internal control such as: visualize calming images, yoga, breathing exercises and aerobic activities like walking or jogging.
- **Use repetition**. Any helpful intervention to impact the brain must be repeated many times to be effective. It is the repetition that builds capacities within the brain by literally forming new neurological structures that over time can replace negative habits where the child has become stuck.

Basic concrete steps like those described can be the most helpful and effective for the child because they alter the brain in positive ways. If you want to know more about how the brain works and how to help it work even better after trauma, my book *Traumatic Experience and the Brain* can outline the next steps. Every traumatic experience has a negative influence on the brain but also remember that every successful experience of coping has a significant impact on the brain as well. The ideas and examples provided here are doable and they work with some of the most damaged children. Therefore I am confident that with practice these concepts and approaches can work with most children.

About the Author: *Dr. Dave Ziegler is a psychologist who oversees the Neurological Reparative Therapy at Jasper Mountain in the mountains of OR. Jasper Mountain has a 27 year history of producing significant improvements with young children who have experienced trauma, have attachment issues, and/or a variety of serious emotional and behavioral problems. More can be learned about the author's books and publications or about Jasper Mountain at their new website, www.jaspermountain.org.*

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- Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky

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