

Train Your Brain

LETTING GO: *Key Brain Activities*

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Amygdalae

- Almond-shaped nodes, one in each hemisphere, resting on top of the brain stem
- Main region categorizing experiences with the feeling tone of pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral
- Our response to that feeling tone – approach the pleasant, avoid or attack the unpleasant, pass over the neutral – creates craving, then clinging, then suffering; thus, attention to that tone is vital.
- Amygdalae emphasize negative experiences, a key source of the brain's innate "negativity bias"
- They react quickly and intensely, often swamping more reasoned frontal lobe responses.
- They help activate the "fight-or-flight" stress hormone cascade; chronic arousal has bad effects.

Prefrontal Cortex

- Located behind your forehead, and especially behind your eyes
- Decides what to let go of
- Sends signals to the emotion circuits of your brain to settle down and move on
- Initiates and sustains your resolve – or what some might call Right or Wise Intention.

Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS)

- The "rest-and-digest" wing of the autonomic nervous system
- Fosters the relaxation, calm, and positive emotions that
- More primary than the stress-focused sympathetic nervous system (SNS); it's great to realize that your hard-wired resting state is relaxed, peaceful, and ongoing
- Connected like a seesaw, as the PNS activates, the SNS is suppressed; routinely stimulating the PNS is thus a great way to reduce and heal chronic stress reactions
- Major ways to light up the PNS include full breaths, deliberate relaxation, positive feelings, meditation, yawning, and stimulating the lips.

Anterior Cingulate Cortex (ACC)

- One in each hemisphere, shaped like a finger, close to the center of your head
- Monitors conflicts in attention and goal-pursuits
- Tells you how well you letting go, and sends warning signal if you start holding on instead
- Strengthened by meditation, and by activities that integrate thinking and feeling

Insula

- One in each hemisphere, near the ACC, also finger shaped
- Closely connected with the sensory, emotional, and executive regions of the brain
- Especially involved with interoception, the sensing of the internal states of the body
- Since that sensing is key to empathy, the more aware a person is of her internal states, the more empathic she tends to be (and the insula lights up when we are being empathic).
- So, a good way to become more empathic is to pay more attention to your internal states, which will actually thicken the neuronal connections within your insula.

For more information

- Go to www.WiseBrain.org