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BRAINwaves

an e-newsletter from **THE UPSIDE NMOO**
 organization

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WEBINARS

APRIL 21
 "Giving a Fish a Bath: The Untold Story of the Adolescent Mind"

MAY 19
 "Trouble Letting Go: Understanding Addiction and the Developing Brain"

JUNE 16
 "The Saddest Song: Teens, Suicide and the Developing Brain"

Webinars are conducted the third Tuesday of each month from 1:00 - 3:00 p.m. EST.

Sign up for one, two, or all three -- you decide, no limitations!

Registration details at our website: www.upsidedownorganization.org

Vol. 2, Issue 2 MARCH 2009

FEATURE ARTICLE: Tackling Test Anxiety

By Frank J. Kros, President of The Upside Down Organization



"Yikes ... WHAT IF I CHOKE?"

Overcoming Test Anxiety is Not As Easy as You May Think!

My daughter McKenzie, 17, is taking the SAT for the first time this month. As a parent and occasional test-taking coach, I've offered McKenzie advice along the way. As the testing approaches, one of the primary concerns she has is test anxiety. "What if I choke?" is a looming question in McKenzie's busy mind.

What is Choking?

The term "choking" is often associated with sports in that put on the 18th hole to win a golf tournament or the basketball game with seconds left on the clock, are quickly associated in our brains. But choking can occur in a wide variety of contexts, including the classroom or test situations. Whether it's in the freethrow to win a game or choking and athletic performance, an occurrence in a wide variety of contexts.

Florida State University psychologist Roy Baumeister defined "choking" in 1984. He described it as "performance decrements under pressure circumstances." Simply put, some people perform less well when real or perceived circumstances exert stress on the brain. Since the 1980's researchers have studied what kinds of factors lead to choking and what might be done about them. Not surprisingly, high performance is often affected by pressure.

ance expectations and audience presence make them
able to choke. McKenzie clearly has high expectat
performance and, in a sense, audience presence in the
peers and desired college eventually viewing her S
seems choking is an authentic concern.

ain highly vulner-
ions for her SAT per-
form of her parents,
AT scores. So it

Another Level

Ironically, in addition to the high expectations an
view of her test scores, McKenzie may be further at
causes she has prepared extensively for the SAT.

de eventual audience re-
risk for choking be-

In a 2005 study of undergraduate students, Sian L.
city of Chicago provided 93 students with a challen
then introduced rigorous time constraints and also
were being filmed as a means to increase pressure o
ance. The results?

Betlock of the Univer-
ging mat test. Betlock
told the test-takers they
n students' perform-

Test-takers who had previously demonstrated the bes
capacity--the ability to store and manipulate mat
less pressurized contexts--were the ones who chok
under pressure. Betlock hypothesized that stress us
tive horsepower that would otherwise be devoted to
tasks, decreasing the performance of capable people
superior reasoning abilities on exams.

tw working memory
hematical information in
ed most spectacularly
es up the same cogni-
mental
wh depend on their

Betlock's reasoning is consistent with my mentor an
sen's teachings about the impact of stress on the f
thinking center, the frontal lobes. The stress horm
structs, alters a number of thinking processes int
blood flow. When cortisol is present in sufficient
frontal lobes is re-routed to the limbic system, th
work. With less blood flow to the brain's reasoning
this area would be expected to diminish. Betlock co
to do subtraction in your head as you're retaking the
"Yikes... oh, no," that worrying is really a problem a
for the same resources as your working memory." The
the less you'll remember.

d colleague, Eric Jen-
unction of our brain's
one cortisol, Jensen in-
he brain, particularly
amounts, blood flow to the
e brain's emotional net-
center, performance in
ncurs: "If you're retrying
SAT, and your thinking
tic because it's competing
more you worry,

What to Do? Stress Inoculation

So, how do I advise McKenzie about the specter of c
she's vulnerable. Researchers seem to agree that so
noculation is the best response to choking.

hoking? Obviously,
me type of stress in-

Stress inoculation means simulating the expected p
closely as possible before the actual event--pref
By rehearsing the pressure-packed circumstances sev
has the opportunity to adapt to the increased anxie
moderate the stress response.

ressure situation as
erably more than once.
eral times, the brain
ty and more effectively

McKenzie should not only review her notes and practice strategies in a low-stress study context, but she should also take practice SAT tests in novel settings, like a library or bookstore, with the rigorous time constraints used in the actual SAT. The novel environment is important for two reasons. First, McKenzie will be taking the actual SAT in an environment she has not been in before--the cafeteria of a high school she has never visited. Second, the unpredictable distractions she'll encounter in the community library or bookstore will pre-

pare her brain to adjust to the application of the rigorous environment in an actual SAT in an area of a high school she'll encounter in the community library or bookstore will pre-

"If you're trying to do subtraction in your head as you're taking the SAT, and you're thinking 'Yikes...oh, no,' that worrying is really problematic because it's competing for the same resources as your working memory." The more you worry, the less you'll remember.

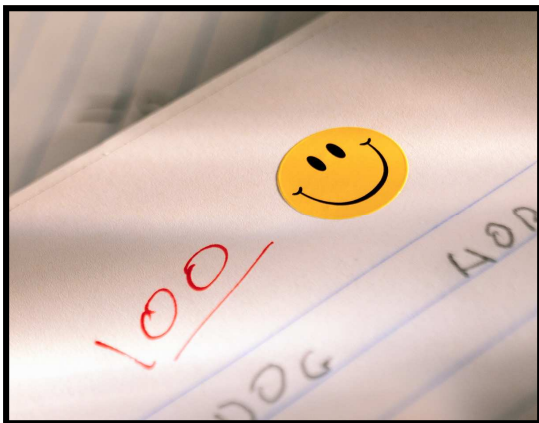
The distraction she will certainly encounter while taking the real SAT. The time rigor is especially important. Not only is the test-maker's primary means of separating average performance from excellent performance, but practicing under the time constraint can help train the frontal lobes' self-monitoring function to recognize when the pace that should be kept to answer all questions in the allotted time.

taking the real SAT. The time constraint is one of the ways the test-maker separates performance from excellent performance, but practicing under the time constraint can help train the frontal lobes' self-monitoring function to recognize when the pace that should be kept to answer all questions in the allotted time.

Anything Else?

For students who know the material being tested and have exhibited mastery of the content being tested, the pressure, the experts advise: "Just go for it!" Well-meaning advisors often coach students to "take their time." They believe that slowing down will help test-takers calm down and lower their anxiety. But if you are well-rehearsed, it is actually better to go with it. Why? Focusing on your performance by slowing down may actually thwart the normal brain processing of tasks that the student's mastery has made "automatic." Test-takers may choke under pressure because stress (cortisol) interrupts their established processing of mental tasks that have been so well learned they have become second nature. If it's not broke, cortisol will break it.

For students who know the material being tested and have exhibited mastery of the content being tested, the experts advise: "Just go for it!" Well-meaning advisors often coach students to "take their time." They believe that slowing down will help test-takers calm down and lower their anxiety. But if you are well-rehearsed, it is actually better to go with it. Why? Focusing on your performance by slowing down may actually thwart the normal brain processing of tasks that the student's mastery has made "automatic." Test-takers may choke under pressure because stress (cortisol) interrupts their established processing of mental tasks that have been so well learned they have become second nature. If it's not broke, cortisol will break it.



In the Classroom

Teachers can lessen the impact of test anxiety in the classroom and on high-stake tests by following the stress inoculation and "just go for it" strategies. Teachers should routinely place students in test-taking situations that closely mimic those of the actual testing event. In addition, if the high-stake test is to be given in a location different than where the students learned the content, teachers should provide testing experiences in novel locations with similar time constraints.

UDO is Going G R E E N !!!



If you've ever attended a UDO presentation, you know you get lots of paper! Copies of the visual presentation, contact cards, empathy cards, and activity sheets are just a few of the many pieces of paper you typically receive from us. However, after doing a little BRAIN-STORMING, we think we've found a better way!

In the interest of conserving natural resources and UDO will be changing our "paper approach" to present months. Instead of double-digit pages of material, "Participant Workbook" for our hosted workshops and presentations. These participant workbooks creatively use less space, organize our materials in understandable workshop experience for each participant. After book concept presentations at Alton Middle School and the Judicial Master's Training Series in Maryland, the feedback we are in the process of creating participant workshop presentations. UDO will be improving the workshop experience for our customers while also improving our environmental

increasing sustainability, and over the next several months you'll be receiving a many of our off-site presentations consolidated into chunks, and customized pilotings of the participant workbooks in Alton, IL and the Judicial Master's Training Series in Maryland. The feedback we received was terrific and we are in the process of creating participant workshop presentations. UDO will be improving the workshop experience for our customers while also improving our environmental

UPSIDE DOWN WORKSHOP --- Register today for only \$139 per person; 3 or more registrations and pay only \$119 per person!

Right From the Start: Building Great Brains from Birth to Age Eight

Presented by

Frank Kros, MSW, JD

April 17, 2009

Hilton Garden Inn - Arlington

1333 Courthouse Road | Arlington, VA | [\[Directions\]](#)

9 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

CEU credits: 6

Early Bird Registration rate: \$149 (through 4/7)

Registration rate: \$169 (starting 4/8)

Group rate: \$129 (three or more registrants)

Right From the Start: Building Great Brains from Birth to Age Eight - cont.

Neuroscience is overflowing with fresh insights and valuable information on nurturing and educating new brains. From birth to eighty years of age, the brain has very specific emotional, nutritional and intellectual needs. When these needs are adequately met, children flourish. When these needs are not met, predictable consequences result that require highly targeted interventions.

Learn how to build the foundation for a healthy, happy brain and how to help brains struggling to achieve a positive development start. Discover these seven key strategies that can make a difference and help to keep these young brains healthy and on the right track!



**OF OUR MOST REQUESTED AND POPULAR WORKSHOPS
OPEN TO THE PUBLIC:**

Rethinking Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD): What Works, What Doesn't and Why

Presented by

Frank Kros, MSW, JD

April 22, 2009

Hilton Garden Inn - BWI

1516 Aero Drive | Linthicum, MD | [\[Directions\]](#)

9 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

CEU credits: 6

Early Bird Registration rate: \$149 (through 4/12)

Registration rate: \$169 (starting 4/13)

Group rate: \$129 (three or more registrants)

Children and youth with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) have unique brains. Like all brains, AD/HD minds have strengths and weaknesses. In this illuminating workshop, you'll learn the 12 Power Tools for maximizing the strengths and minimizing the contextual weaknesses of the AD/HD brain.

This seminar explores how and why the AD/HD mind works differently from non-AD/HD minds and is packed with scores of practical interventions for improving learning and behavior.

WANTED: Great People Looking for a Great Organization Where Purpose and Passion Rule the Hallways!

The Monarch Academy Public Charter School, set to open in Fall 2009 in Glen Burnie, Maryland, is seeking teachers and staff that have an intense passion for teaching children in a highly engaging global community of the 21st century. At the Monarch Academy learning environments will stimulate students in a way that touches the emotions, engage the intellect and excite the senses through Expeditionary Learning, TransEd, and state-of-the-art brain-based teaching strategies.

As an Expeditionary Learning School, the Monarch Academy will integrate active learning, character growth and teamwork where students spend much of their academic day involved in learning expeditions, which are single-topic, in-depth studies that engage students in comprehensive research, hands-on learning experiences and unique presentations that draw on people in the community who will expose students to how what they are learning in school is applied to real life. Additional information about employment at the Monarch Academy can be found at: <http://www.monarchcharter.org/AboutUs/Employment/tabid/75/Default.aspx>.

Become a part of our team and explore the endless opportunities that will await you every day!

ASK FRANK

Frank Kros, UDO president, answers your questions about adults, kids and the brain.



Dear Frank// I just attended my third UDO presentation. I really enjoy the information your organization provides and the energy you and your presenters bring to the workshops. However, I notice that I'm getting to the "end of the list" for workshop that are relevant to my work. Any new workshops on the horizon? Also, I would like to learn to present material like you do. Anything available along that line?// **Alexin Baltimore**

Dear Alexin Baltimore// Thanks for your question and, most of all, thanks for your support! There are three new initiatives at the Upside Down Organization that you may find of interest.

First, we will again be offering our multi-day experience on teaching and presenting called "What's the Brain Got To Do With It? Using Neurosciences to Deliver Phenomenal Presentations." If you'd like to learn to present and teach material in a fun, engaging and brain-compatible

way, this experience is for you! You'll learn our designing powerful learning experiences that stimulate your thinking, improve their memory and leave them anxious with scores of the techniques and strategies presentation so popular. This is a real experience receive individual coaching from UDO presenters and your time practicing your new skills and getting immediate feedback from your audience. This year's "What's the Brain Got To Do With It?" session will be held May 29, 30 and June 1 in Baltimore, MD last year's participant said:

"ESPRAC" method for ates your audience's ious for more. You'll that have made UDO's in which you will re- pend the majority of mediate feedback from Do With It?" session . Here's what some of

- "Hands-down the best hands-on workshop ever!"
- "The feedback and assessment from the other participant's was invaluable and helped me to improve immediately. I can't wait to get back to work and apply everything I learned."
- "I was so nervous when I found out I was going to be video-taped, but WOW! Seeing myself and receiving an expert's critique was so helpful!"

To learn more about this unique experience, check out additional information on our website under the ["Open Workshops"](#) tab!

Second, we will be making an important change in our hosted workshops. I call it "bifurcation." Because we have many repeat customers who have attended more than one of our workshops, we have received feedback that the "basic brain information" at the beginning of each workshop is repetitive for those who have heard it before. As a result, our future hosted workshops will be offered in two parts. From 8:30 a.m. to 9:45 a.m., we'll cover the basic brain information. After a short break, we'll offer the balance of the workshop from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. If you've had the brain information before, come at 10:00 a.m. You'll receive a discount on your registration! If you're attending for the first time and want the brain introduction, come at 8:30 a.m. and learn about the awesome human brain! We appreciate the feedback from our repeat customers and hope you'll find this change offers a convenient choice.

Third, UDO will be introducing a new workshop this fall: "Child Abuse and the Brain: The Impact of Trauma on Child and Youth Development." Like the two items above, this workshop was created in response to feedback from our customers. The workshop was developed by combining over 25 years of experience in children's services with the cutting-edged discoveries revealed by neuroscience. Watch this newsletter and our website for more information on this insightful new offering from UDO!

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Guide to upcoming events and The Upside Down Organization workshops:

Apr. 18

[UMSSW: "Rethinking Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder \(AD/HD\): What Works, What Doesn't and Why"](#)

Presented by Tracy Kessler/Baltimore, MD



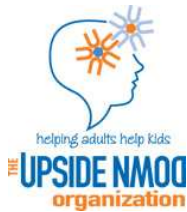
Apr.22

[OPENWORKSHOP:"RethinkingAttention-Deficit/HyperactivityDisorder\(AD/HD\):WhatWorks,WhatDoesn'tandWhy"](#)

PresentedFrankJ.Kros
Linthicum,MD

[\[RegisterforanOpenWorkshop\]](#)

[\[FullEventCalendar\]](#)



[The Upside Down Organization \(UDO\)](#), formerly The Institute for Transformation Education, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the education and advocacy of Transformation Education, an organizational philosophy and operating system for child-serving organizations. UDO offers professional development experiences, mentoring services, learning tools and organizational branding that help improve the skills of people who educate, parent, guide and care for young people.

Visit [UDO online](#), contact 410-444-5415 or e-mail info@upsidedownorganization.org.