

# Westlake Boys High School



## Being in 'Quaranteen' – what have we learnt about supporting your son in a lockdown?

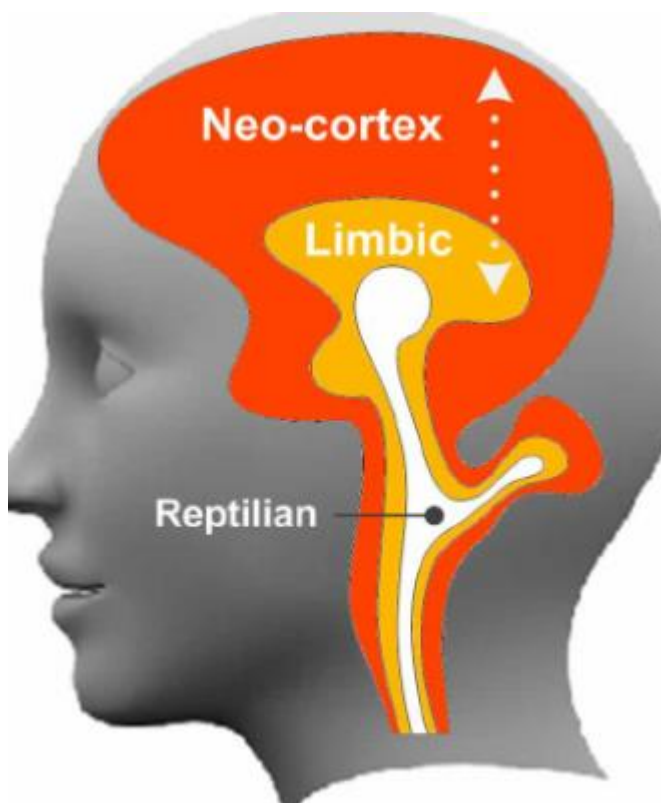
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### How can a little knowledge of the brain help create more successful episodes of online learning?

One of the most significant changes for parents during the lockdown is having to add 'teacher' to their resume (alongside all your other roles). Not only is it a 'teacher' role, but it is applied in a somewhat artificial environment i.e. constant learning behind a screen.

We feel that sharing a little understanding of the brain, may provide some important insights that could better support you when taking on the mantle of being a 'teacher'.

The first detail of brain development that we feel is useful to understand, is the fact that the brain can be viewed as having three distinct levels. These levels all operate and interact for different purposes.



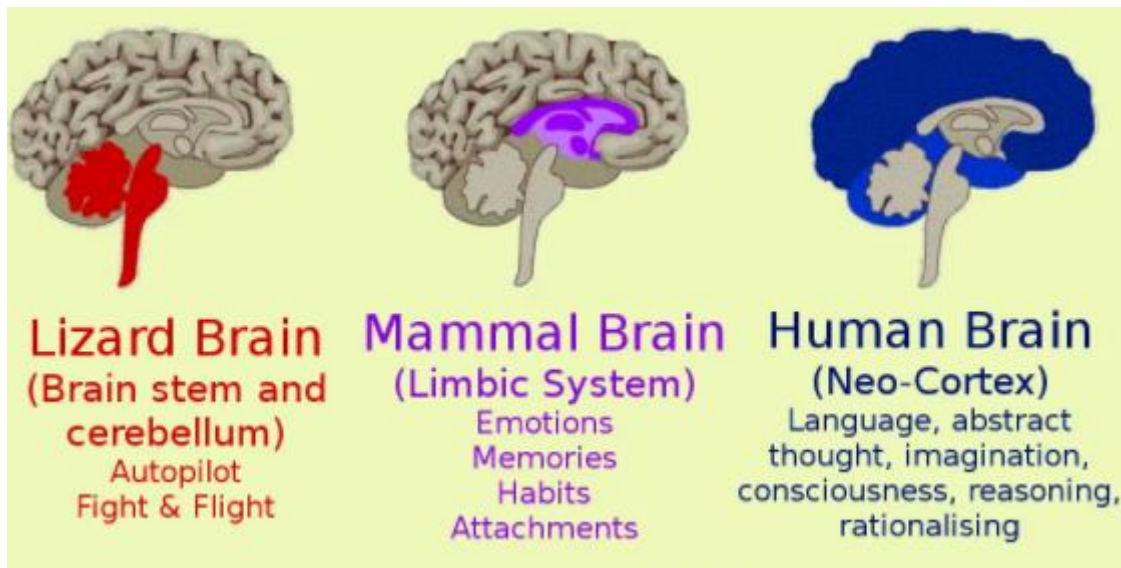
*A good analogy to use is to think of your brain as a city with a long history. It has the oldest part in the centre, where during ancient times the activities for survival will have taken place. As the city developed, new sections were developed around the older parts and then finally a modern (sprawling) section has been developed with greater advancements.*

A secure knowledge of how each level is triggered and/or interacts with online learning is crucial to how your son will learn new information, feel safe in your environment, and perform under pressure.

The oldest part of our brain is what we will call our Reptilian or Lizard Brain, it controls the body's vital functions such as heart rate, breathing and body temperature. The Reptilian Brain is designed for survival and will trigger responses to keep you alive.

The Mammalian Brain, also known as the Limbic Brain records the memories that produce agreeable or disagreeable experiences. Think of this part of the brain as being emotionally driven. The Mammalian Brain is crucial in creating the value judgements that we often make and exert a strong influence on our behaviour.

The Human Brain (Neocortex) is the largest and most recent part of our development and is responsible for development of language, abstract thought, imagination, and consciousness. This part of the brain is extremely flexible and has almost limitless learning capacity.



As a teacher, how these levels of the brain operate, and the impact that you have upon them is of crucial importance to learning. It is too simplistic to think that these levels of the brain operate independently of each other. The reality is that numerous connections are in place and lead to the levels interacting with each other.

We are going to assume at this point that your home, does not have many features that are designed to test the survival mechanisms of your son(s)! Therefore, the most important connections for you right now are those between the Mammalian Brain and the Human Brain.

A successful teacher wants to impact your son at a Human Brain level so that the boys can apply thought, logic and understanding to what it is that we are trying to get them to achieve. However, if the Mammalian Brain is not emotionally satisfied, then it will not allow for those connections to be routed.

Generally, emotions are something that happens to us, much more than something we decide to make happen. For example, your son is unlikely to ever choose to be overwhelmed, scared or worried, but feels these emotions as a consequence of what is happening around them. Much of the explanation for this lack of direct control over our emotions lies in the way that the Human Brain is interconnected. Our brains have evolved in such a way that they have far more connections running from our emotional systems to our cortex (the locus of conscious control) than the other way around.

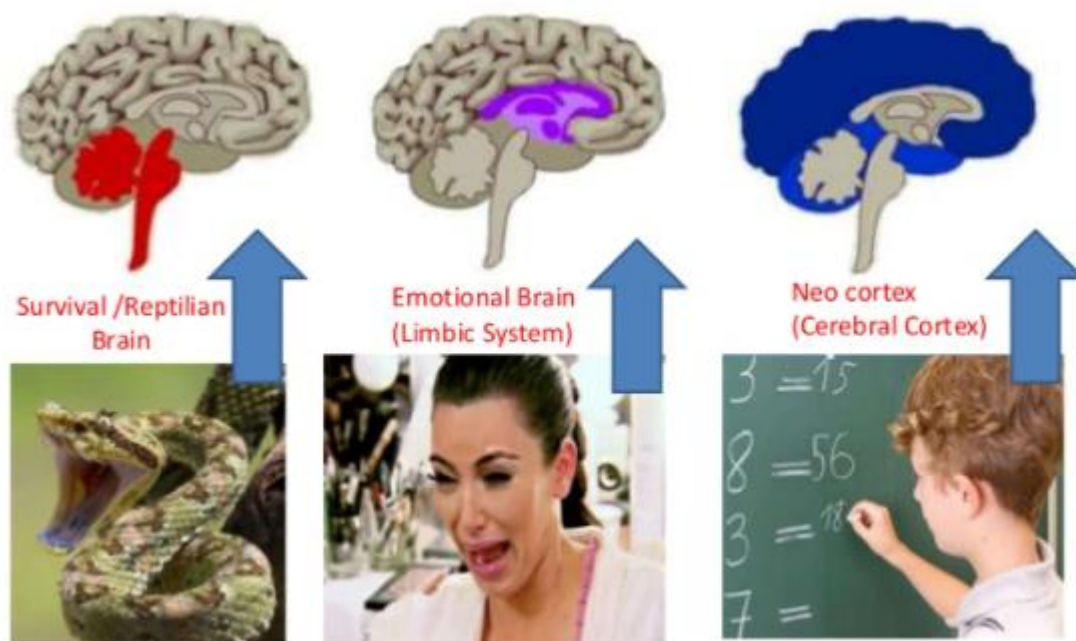
In other words, the noise of all the heavy traffic on the major highway running from the limbic system to the cortex masks the quieter sounds on the little road running in the other direction.

### What does this mean for you as a parent/teacher in lockdown?

Our first piece of advice is that any episodes of learning need to be set out to satisfy the demands of the Limbic Brain. Is the area/environment emotionally safe? Does it allow for positive emotions to be felt?

If not, the neocortex will not be able to engage with lessons at a learning level, as the pathways to this will be 'blocked'.

A good example here would be the teacher who has technical knowledge in abundance, but a boy cannot 'connect' or get 'onboard' with what he/she is wanting them to learn. In this instance, some time away from focussing solely on the outcome of the lesson and investing more in the emotional relationship is the thing that will pay dividends. Ignore your sons' Limbic System at your peril, it is a powerful gatekeeper to the levels of higher learning you are striving towards.



### A reflection activity for boys and parents:

Take some time to recall one of your best lessons or episodes of learning. Write down every reason you can give for this being a 'great' session.

Think about what you were trying to achieve and how you went about it.

For each reason you gave, highlight whether you think it was the Limbic Brain that was stimulated in or the Neocortex.

### How can you apply this reflection?

Invest some time in being intentional about what you are doing to design scenarios that specifically create positive emotions with your son. How can you plan for joy and fun? Think about the impact this will have on the higher levels of learning you are aiming for during our online learning.