



# Brain Talk

# Home Letter



Brain Talk

## Welcome to Brain Talk!

Brain Talk is a curriculum designed to teach students (and adults) about their brains, and how to use critical thinking to respond mindfully rather than react impulsively. This curriculum consists of eight units that introduce key components of the brain and build the narrative of neural integration. With each unit, students will learn about new brain structures, their functions, and how they work together to allow an individual to identify future goals, brainstorm options for how to respond, and choose the response that best aligns with their ultimate goals.

The introductory unit provides a foundation for understanding the brain's role as the director of **thoughts, emotions, and behaviors**. Although thoughts, emotions, and behaviors exist independently of one another, it can sometimes be challenging to determine where one ends and another begins. Throughout this unit, students will start to identify the thoughts and emotions that underlie their decisions to follow through with particular behaviors. Some thoughts just appear *automatically*, while others are generated as a result of *critical contemplation*. Similarly, some emotions are so *gentle* that they are difficult to detect, while others are so *strong* they can leave an individual feeling out of control. Behaviors that occur *faster than the speed of thought* are known as **reactions**, while those that occur as a result of *mindful decision-making* are known as **responses**.

Each new unit of the Brain Talk curriculum will provide accompanying home support materials. These home support activities are designed to create opportunities for you and your student to review learned material, cement understanding, and further explore each Brain Talk unit. Below are recommended activities for continued learning about Unit One of Brain Talk:

- Invite your student to describe the three domains controlled by the brain: thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Encourage him/her to distinguish automatic thoughts from critical thinking, gentle emotions from strong emotions, and reactions from responses.
- Together with your student, share situations that tend to evoke strong emotions versus gentle emotions. Discuss the typical outcomes of these experiences: do you sometimes feel “hijacked” by your emotions? What strategies can you use to remain mindful during an emotionally-charged situation?
- Model your own understanding of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors by sharing the thoughts and emotions that accompany your impulsive reactions versus those that accompany your mindful responses. Often, reactions are accompanied by automatic thoughts and strong emotions, while responses are accompanied by critical thinking and a more neutral awareness of one's emotional state.