

## ARE YOU IN YOUR RIGHT MIND?

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*"What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us."*

*-Ralph Waldo Emerson*

**ARE YOU IN YOUR RIGHT MIND?** Why should it matter?

*Have you been in meetings where everyone was in deep discussion or trying to come to some consensus on a particular issue?*

*Does anyone in your family disappear into a room for a long time?*

*Do you know people who give explicit details when discussing a movie they've seen or a place they have visited?*

*Do you have difficulty understanding why others do not see a situation as you do?*

The problem may not be that someone else is stubborn, but how each of us perceives a situation at a particular time. It is all in how our brain processes information that it receives. Understanding differences in how the brain processes information helps us understand differences in people. This understanding can increase our appreciation and tolerance of ourselves and others.

This program topic will help participants:

\* enhance self-awareness by better understanding how we think and process information,

\* identify our lead-thought or dominant brain hemispheres, and

\* increase personal and family self-esteem through appreciation of different processing styles.

### Introduction

Our brain is like a complex computer system composed of two hemispheres. These hemispheres have different and overlapping skills or ways of thinking. The right side of the brain processes information in a rapid, spatial, and perceptual manner. The left brain processes in a different but equally complex verbal, analytical manner.

Scientists have shown we are one person with a two-sided brain; each half has its own way of knowing and perceiving reality. The two hemispheres can cooperate, with each half contributing its special talents. At other times, the hemispheres may work alone, with one half "on," and the other primarily "off." Individuals may shift back and forth but tend to prefer one side. Although this preference does not usually change, it is possible to develop skills in both hemispheres of the brain.

An example is when two people discuss a meeting. One may emphasize the content, the discussion, the decisions made, and the future goals. The second may discuss the people

present, the news shared, and the reactions to decisions. Each has a different perspective of the meeting, depending on how they processed the information.

### **Each Person Has a Dominant Side**

*To help identify which hemisphere is dominant in members, ask them to complete the quiz in the participant leaflet, or to participate in the following activity.*

#### Physical characteristics of sidedness

*Have members choose a partner. Ask them to stand one in front of the other, both facing the same direction. Have partners check the following physical characteristics, and note whether it is the "left" or "right" that is being talked about. Read the following descriptions.*

1. If members have on jackets with shoulder pads, ask them to remove jacket or sweater. The partner should stand behind and place her/his hands on the top edge of the partner's shoulder. Which shoulder is higher? (Answer is either right or left.)
2. Turn and face your partner. Smile. Which side of the smile is higher?
3. Fold your hands together in front of you. Which thumb is on top? This should be the most natural and comfortable position for you.
4. Make a telescope with your hands. Pretend you are using the telescope. Which eye do you use to look through the telescope? (This is the eye you would use to look through a camera lens.)
5. Which of your feet is larger?

*If you answered more questions as "left," your physical tendency is to process more "right brain." If you answered more questions as "right," then your tendency is to process more "left brain." If you have almost an equal number, then you tend to process more "whole brain."*

Were the results consistent? Most people have mixed signs, indicating they use both sides to process information.

The left hemisphere of the brain controls the right side of the body, while the right hemisphere controls the left side. A stroke in the left hemisphere may paralyze the right side of the body. The stroke may cause the loss of certain functions such as language skills. If a person processes primarily right brain, the left side of the body will tend to be larger, stronger, and more developed.

### **Whole Brain Processing**

Each of us is a whole brain thinker. However, one side tends to take lead-thought or be dominant. In thinking, for example, the brain is in constant self-talk. However, one side tends to "talk louder" or take lead-thought.

The dominant hemisphere may decide the person's outlook on life, the areas in which the person excels, and the manner in which the person responds to stress or crisis. Since the styles of thinking are fundamentally different, the two hemispheres may have different and conflicting responses to the same event.

It's beneficial to develop both sides of the brain because this increases resources for problem solving. By being aware of ways to stimulate the nondominant hemisphere, individuals may better cope in different life

situations. Some ideas of ways to strengthen the two hemispheres are provided in the

participant leaflet. *You may want to review some of these ideas with participants.*

The idea is to strive to be a whole brain processor. If you tend to process dominantly left brain, by developing the right side you may become more creative or empathetic. By developing the left side, a right brain processor may become more logical and analytical.

Another way of developing whole brain thinking is to jump rope or "cross march." Each activity requires the use of both sides of the body simultaneously.

*The following exercise, "Cross Marching," may be used to provide participants time to stand up and stretch. Ask members to stand. Have them lift the right knee and touch the left elbow, then lift the left knee to touch the right elbow. Do this 10 times.*

### **Left Brain - Right Brain Characteristics**

Verbal vs. nonverbal - Verbal skills generally are located in the left hemisphere. The right brain processor may have difficulty naming or labeling a common object, but may notice the nonverbal characteristics of a speaker.

Analytical vs. synthetic - The analytical left brain processor works one step at a time, piece by piece—often this is slow and tedious. The synthetic right brain processor tries to discover relationships and make things whole.

Symbolic vs. concrete - The left brain processor thinks in symbols, numbers, and letters. The right brain processor needs the concrete and learns by doing, touching, and moving.

Temporal vs. nontemporal - Right brain processors have little sense of time. They get involved in a project and have no idea of how much time has passed. Left brain processors are generally more punctual.

Rational vs. nonrational - The left brain processor is rooted in reality and has to see the

logic and reason behind a decision. The right brain processor may suspend reason in search of a better way of doing things and may dream about the way things could or should be.

Logical vs. intuitive - The left brain is sequential and logical, 1-2-3, one thought at a time with a priority system. The right brain is bombarded with many random thoughts with no priority.

Linear vs. holistic - Linear means part-to-whole. While the left brain takes little pieces, arranges them in logical order, and comes up with a conclusion, the right brain needs to see the whole picture. Holistic, whole-to-part, means the right brain starts with the total concept and then proceeds to look at the pieces.

Last thing said - The last thing said is remembered more easily by the right brain processor.

Singular vs. simultaneous - Right brain processors often desire to do two or more things at the same time. Left brain processors usually like to do one thing at a time, finishing one project before beginning another.

Remember, the way your brain processes is neither good nor bad. Circumstances may dictate if the quality is an asset or a detriment. The situation determines what needs to happen and which side should take lead-thought. The following ideas may help you see how some common situations determine lead-thought.

Creativity tends to be a right brain skill. The right brain person may take four or five different cross-stitch patterns, put them together with new colors, and make something

original. The left brain processor tends to do exactly what the pattern says.

When cooking, left brain processors follow the recipe exactly. Right brain processors like to use their creativity in the kitchen.

How do right brain processors clean? The "jam-it, cram-it" approach. The left brain processor usually likes neatness and order.

Visualization is easy for many right brain processors. They think in pictures. Left brain processors think in words and may have difficulty visualizing.

*Ask participants to take a pen or pencil and on a sheet of paper indicate how to get to their house.*

*Left brain processors generally write out step-by-step directions. Right brain processors generally draw a map. Some people have well integrated processing and describe with both maps and directions.*

The different hemispheres have other characteristics. For example, left brain processors like order and stability; right brain processors like a more informal way of life.

While they may have trouble expressing their thoughts in words, the right brain processor prefers essay tests. The left brain person usually likes multiple choice tests.

*If there's time, you may want to talk about some characteristics of different people that might indicate if they are right brain or left brain people.*

## Summary

The right and left brain have overlapping skills and different ways of thinking. Understanding the differences increases appreciation of self and others. Individuals have a natural tendency to prefer one side or the other. Whichever the preference, both sides of the brain are used and thought processes shift between sides. The ultimate goal is to process with the whole brain.

***"The human mind once stretched to a new idea, never goes back to its original dimensions."***

***- Oliver Wendell Holmes***

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Adapted from "Right Brain - Left Brain: Appreciating Self and Others" by Kathy Goodbar, Nancy Hudson and Carol Baumann, Ohio FCL trainers.

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