



Reshaping the Clay

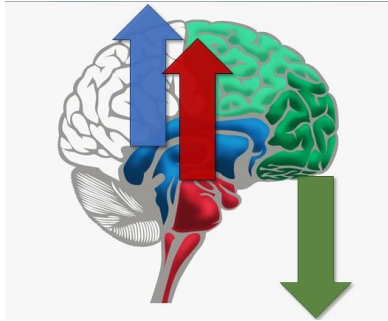
Reflecting the glow of recovery from Starlight at Tamassee

By Jon Holland, CEO of Tamassee DAR School

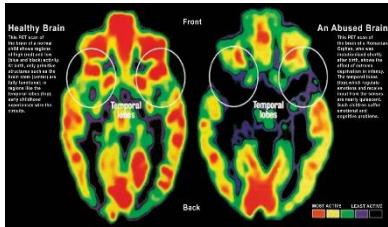


Imagine a potter's wheel with a lump of clay sitting on it, damp and ready to mold. This potter's wheel rests in a master's workshop, but the master is also a teacher. She welcomes students to learn the craft. Now imagine a novice sits down at the wheel and begins shaping a piece. How will it turn out? What will it look like? Then the master sits down, and she take the same lump of clay and reworks it. Her skilled hands patiently mold and work the clay until it is transformed into something amazing.

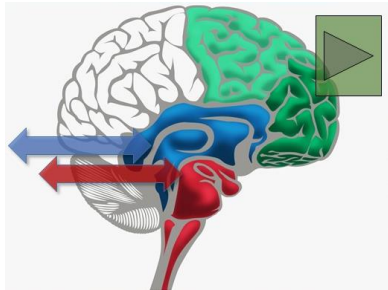
The process of healing from trauma is like reshaping the clay. Addiction is a brain disease brought on more often than not by childhood trauma, and the trauma shapes how the brain develops. Our brains develop from front to back. First, the part of our brain controlling automatic body functions like our hearts beating and breathing forms first – call it our survival brain. Then the part of our brain regulating our emotions and relationships develops – call it our emotional brain. Together our survival and emotional brains decide in the first years of life if the world is a safe and loving place.



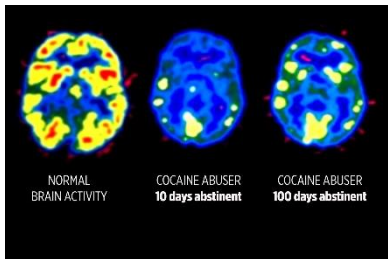
If so, we usually become secure, creative, and playful. If not, we often respond with fight, flight, freeze, or fawn behaviors.



When a child experiences trauma – abuse and neglect, caregivers struggling with addiction, domestic violence, homelessness, the loss of a caregiver, and the like – a child’s brain is shaped by fear and pain. The literal structure of their brain wiring changes. They become hypervigilant for the toxic stress they live in. They become bottom brain heavy. The part of their brain guiding thinking, planning, problem solving, goal setting, emotional regulation, and empathy – call it the executive brain – get less wiring and is underdeveloped. The brain spends most of its energy trying to survive and erupting in emotions dictated by fear and shame. This child’s brain is shaped for addiction.



But the brain can be reshaped! It’s what scientists call neuroplasticity. When the Master sits down at the potter’s wheel, a person’s brain can be patiently, slowly reshaped by love. Being loved by healthy, safe people over time and allowing God to touch the painful memories of our past with his healing presence will quite literally rewire the brain. The survival and emotional brains begin to settle into safety and connection. The executive brain begins to guide healthy life choices, express appropriate emotions, and set fulfilling life goals. The Master makes something beautiful.



At Starlight at Tamasee, we believe the Master can and will heal addicted brains. We believe patient, wise love in a community of holistic services will reshape broken brains to function at their highest potential, and we offer this community to children and mothers in recovery. To learn more about Starlight, visit starlight.tdarschool.org, or contact us at starlight@tdarschool.org or 864-944-1390. If your church or civic group is interested in a presentation on recovery, contact Jon Holland at jholland@tdarschool.org.