

Making Neuroscience Fun



A Brain Awareness Program for All Ages
It's SPECTacular!

Story General Information

A SPECTacular Trip to the Zoo (🧠 A Brain Health Story) (Second Grade – 7-8 yrs.)

In this story, the children set out on a SPECTacular adventure to explore the “Brain Zoo.” By comparing the four major components of a healthy brain (Social, Physical, Emotional, & Cognitive) to exhibits in a zoo, they will develop a deeper understanding of their brains’ functions.

- 🧠 The different functions of your brain allow you to carry out your daily lives.
- 🧠 Each SPEC component contributes equally to your overall brain health and a decrease in one area can affect your overall brain health.
- 🧠 Each person (and animal) has a unique brain and can utilize the SPEC components in different ways to maintain a healthy brain.

The facilitator begins by introducing themselves, neuroscience, and the program, Brain Health: It’s SPECTacular. Brain Health is about maintaining a happy, healthy brain to feel good. The beginning letters of SPECTacular (SPEC) each represent a component of Brain Health the children have learned about in previous stories. The facilitator reviews each component (Social, Physical, Emotional, and Cognitive) and its importance to staying healthy and happy. This summative story focuses on the functions of the SPEC brain and how each component allows people to live their daily lives.

In this story, the children are asked questions about animals and the zoo. Then, they talk about what the brain allows them to do. By discussing and visualizing these two familiar topics, the children can easily draw connections between their prior knowledge (animals and habitats) and the similar patterns in the four components of a healthy brain as they take their trip around the “Brain Zoo.”

The first exhibit is “Friendship Rainforest.” A support system (such as friendship) is the key to developing the social component of a healthy brain. Social support systems provide someone with resources to respond to stresses in their daily lives. It is important to learn how to build, develop, and nurture friendships at an early age to help reduce negative stressors (bullying, peer victimization, and symptoms of depression). The children learn the significance of creating healthy relationships with peers. Friends should build you up, support you, create confidence, and help you when you are in need. Like the beautiful tropical birds sing and chirp to one another, people need communication and socialization to build and maintain a healthy brain.

The next stop is “Movement Safari” or Physical Health. The children share ways they move their bodies (running, dancing, biking...). When moving their body, they not only develop strong muscles, but also a strong brain. A strong brain is a healthy brain. Cheetahs, the fastest animals in the world, can be seen on the safari. Cheetahs are a reminder to move!

The “Moody Arctic” is the third exhibit. The brain allows you to experience different feelings, moods, and emotions. Just as a penguin or polar bear are affected by their environment or other animals, people are too. Emotional health is about experiencing a feeling, identifying the root of that feeling, and expressing that feeling. It is important for children to know it is okay to feel mad, sad, happy, confused, worried, scared, and so on. It is also important for them to know they are unique and how they cope with each feeling is different from other people. Understanding their emotions and how to handle them is key in improving Emotional Health.

The final exhibit to visit on the SPECtacular trip to the zoo the “Thinking Jungle.” The “Thinking Jungle” teaches about the importance of Cognitive Health. Brains are always thinking and learning, and changing. Just as jungle animals (gorillas, monkeys, elephants) can learn sign language, solve puzzles, and develop strong memories, so can people! For the brain to be healthy, it is imperative for the brain to change, learn, and think!

As the children end their adventure around the “brain zoo,” they are reminded of how important each exhibit (or component) is to a healthy brain. When one zoo exhibit is closed, you do not get the full experience when visiting. The same is true for the brain. If one SPEC component is not healthy, the brain is not functioning at full capacity. The brain is also a unique feature of each person. No two brains are exactly the same, just as no two zoos are exactly alike. Therefore, how one person cares for their brain is different from how a friend cares for their brain. They need to recognize what makes their brain special and embrace the uniqueness! A SPECtacular brain is a happy, healthy brain!

Story Objectives

- Students will explore and discuss how the components of SPEC Health foster and create a healthy brain.
- Students will enhance their social skills and awareness by answering questions and contributing to class discussion to identify how to maintain and promote a healthy brain.
- Students will identify that the brain allows them to do everything.
- Students will recognize that each brain is unique like people and animals are unique.
- Students will relate and compare behaviors of animals to their own behaviors.
- Students will discuss the benefit of social support systems in developing self-confidence and a healthy brain.
- Students will express how their bodies move and that physical movement not only strengthens the muscles but also their brains.
- Students will name and discuss different emotions, the importance of feeling emotions, identifying the root, and learn that handling each emotion is unique to themselves.
- Students will explain how the brain changes (learning/thinking) and why it is important for their health.