

A Dying Art of Brain Building



As a kid, I remember my grandparents always had a table set aside in their den, in their dining room, in the corner of their kitchen, wherever they could find a place for it. The table was always covered with pieces of the latest jigsaw puzzle they were working on. They kept it out and routinely worked away at it, bit by bit.

It wasn't until I was looking to complete a list of advent activities for the kids last December that I really started to consider the benefits of this centuries-old activity. When we sat down as a family to work on the puzzle together, it became apparent that the skills necessary may have grown weak.

"I can't find the right piece!" (Five minutes into it.) "How long is this going to take?"

There's an art to it.

So, my husband and I began to show our boys how to build a large puzzle. First, they needed to find the corner pieces. Then, we asked them to hunt down all the edge pieces, so we could put together the border. Finally, we gave them groups of colors or images to look for that would bring a section together.



Many of you may be nodding your head by now. You are keenly familiar with this process. But, do you know what is going on

in your brain while you are working on a puzzle? Most people know that puzzles help exercise the brain and strengthen it, but a lot of them don't know the "how".

Building a jigsaw puzzle is one of a few activities that simultaneously uses both sides of the brain. The left side of your brain sees all the separate pieces and works to sort them out logically. The right side of your brain sees the whole picture and works intuitively (with a gut feeling or awareness). When we exercise both sides of the brain at the same time, we create pathways between the two and increase our brain's efficiency and capacity.

And while your brain is being revived, your body is settling into a meditative state where your heart rate and breathing are slowing down, and your blood pressure is dropping. It provides a relaxed atmosphere that promotes conversation and teamwork as a family.

Brain Building



Now, as an educator, I had a hunch about puzzles that piqued my interest when we were working as a family. My son struggles with inattentive ADD ([Did you know there were two different kinds?](#)). It is satisfying for

him to use his laser focus on finding pieces that contain certain images or colors, and finally putting all the pieces together (Don't we all feel that way?).

In doing some research about jigsaw puzzles, I discovered that the practice can strengthen spatial co-ordination. This has to do with organizing things or packing a bag so that everything fits and has a place. People who have ADD can have trouble keeping things organized and putting things together in a way that fits. Also, this has to do with mapping out locations or

places in the mind, to know where things belong or where they can find them.

Puzzle building also strengthens observation skills, in seeing the picture as a whole, as well as each individual part. Those who have attention issues may have the ability to hyper focus on things they are interested in. But they can struggle with finding things or grasp the understanding of an entire process. Working on a jigsaw puzzle can strengthen the brain in these areas. It also helps with breaking down a project into tasks and letting something go for a while even though it is not complete.

I haven't even began to mention the strengthening of memory, concentration and problem solving. Isn't it amazing, all the benefits you can get out of such a simple activity.



So, when was the last time you put together a puzzle?

What was the biggest puzzle you ever worked on?

I hope it hasn't been long.

You may find it's just what your brain needs.