

Feeding Dreams

Helping Kids Build Better Brains
to Maximize Potential



Simon J. Evans, PhD

I dedicate this book to my wife, Marne and my kid's Aidan and Kian.

They provide constant inspiration to reach out and
add something positive to our world.

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My parents, Reg and Betty Evans, have also contributed to this book. They taught me at a very young age the value of following through and not quitting, which has been an invaluable tool in this endeavor. They have always supported me, even when they questioned my decisions.

Stepping from a world of academic science to one of private authoring is a big leap. I would not have known what to do without the coaching of Glenn Dietzel, John Paul and Deborah Micek, and Stephen Pierce.

I am also grateful to everyone that provided recorded interviews, for which links can be found throughout the book: Dr. Alan Logan, Dr. Dean Miller, Chef Ann Cooper, Coach Cliff McCrath and Mr. Chick Moorman. Their insight and efforts to improve people's lives is inspirational to us all.

These pages represent all of my teachers, mentors and coaches in one way or another. It is impossible to know how the lack of any experience would have changed my course.

About the Author

Simon was born to British parents in England. He grew up in Seattle, Washington after his father accepted a job with the Boeing Airplane Company. When Simon was in kindergarten, his teacher told his parents that he was going to be a scientist – she was right.

After high school Simon earned a B.S. in Biology and then a PhD in Molecular and Cellular Biology. Dr. Evans spent the last decade studying neuroscience and the effect of stress on the brain. However, with current U.S. trends of decaying health he has turned his attention to the interaction between nutrition, exercise and mental health. At the time of this writing he was applying this focus as a research scientist in the Psychiatry Department at the University of Michigan.

In addition to Simon's scientific interests, he is an avid soccer player. Simon played competitive youth soccer, captained his college team and was an all conference college player. Simon has been volunteering his time as a youth soccer coach for the last two decades. He now coaches kids at several levels and holds a national coaching license.

Finally, and most importantly for this book, Simon is a parent. His scientific background gives him theoretical understanding of how the brain works, his coaching background gives him experience teaching kids, but his role as a parent makes him a realist. He knows what parents can realistically do in today's society and understands the dilemmas that they face.

Dr. Simon Evans lives with his wife and two children near Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Preface

What is Different About this Book?

I wrote this book because I see an alarming trend in today's society. Kids are losing their health and not reaching the potential that is their birthright. Some experts believe that today's youth could be the first generation to have a shorter life span than their parents. I hope to motivate parents to take action by clearly explaining the consequences of inaction. Unfortunately, in today's world the path of ill health is the default path. We must be proactive to overcome social trends and raise healthy children to set them up for the life of success that they deserve.

This book is for parents who feel lost in the sea of advice from medical professionals and the media. I propose a simple system that you can use to propel yourself and your kids forward in any area of life. We must focus on prevention in order to save our kids from years of future treatment.

Although this book is for parents, it's not really a parenting book. Parenting books deal with the way *you* act with your kids. They teach you to respond instead of react. That is important strategy and there are many quality books to teach you that skill. However, this book works from a different perspective. This book is about tapping into what is already there in your kids. It is about removing common barriers that hold your kids back.

This book fills a need for parents looking to optimize their children's potential. There are plenty of good books on children's health that focus on diet and lifestyle. But these do not discuss how to employ your child's mind for the best success. Likewise, there are many quality books on fostering children's emotional maturity and imagination. But they skip over the importance of optimizing the physical brain as the foundation required to apply these principles. This book is a primer to provide your child with everything they need to maximize their own potential.

Think of it this way. If you put a NASCAR driver into an old jalopy and threw him out on the track could he compete? Of course not. You could put Dale Earnhardt, Jr., one of the best drivers in the world, into a Ford Edsel and he wouldn't stand a chance. This might sound ridiculous but I'm making the point that the vehicle is just as important as the driver. The driver is your child's mind and the vehicle is their brain and body.

You could be the best caring parent in the world and do all the right Dr. Phil type stuff. However, if you are not simultaneously optimizing your child's physical brain, their core equipment, then you are missing a key part of the formula. This book is about doing that.

What will you gain by reading this book?

I encourage you to read this book to identify the areas where you see the need to improve. Some of the content in these pages will set off a light bulb in your head for a 'eureka' moment. Other parts may simply reiterate things you already know. Yet other parts you might flat out disagree with. That's good. You should never read anything blindly. You must adopt philosophies that align with your own character and teach your kids to do the same.

In this book:

- You will gain a unique perspective and an ACTION™ plan that will help you raise successful children.
- You will learn how your child's physical health effects their brain, why you should be concerned and what you can do about it.
- You will learn the importance of downtime, relaxation and sleep for intellectual function.
- You will learn how to bring out your child's creativity and independence.
- You will learn how to create adaptable thinkers to prepare your kids for success in the inevitably fast-paced world they will face as adults.

The title of this book, Feeding Dreams, underlies the philosophy that it is our job as parents to promote our children's success by giving them the tools they need to accomplish their dreams. Don't be a dream stealer. Don't hold them back. All kids have big ambitions in their heads. They don't need us to design a life for them. All they need is for us to help them break through the barriers that hold them back and get out of their way. They need us to cheer them on. They need us to support them physically, emotionally and socially. This book will help you identify the barriers that are holding *your* kids back and provide you with a plan to remove them.

Life is a challenge and perhaps one of the greatest challenges is doing a good job as a parent. Everyone comes to parenthood from a unique perspective. Some of us go into parenthood scared to death. Others go in overjoyed. Others go in believing that parenthood is their chance to undo all the stuff that their parents did to them. Yet in the end, it never turns out quite how we expected.

We all know that kids don't always do what we want them to do or react to situations the way we think they will. That's a good thing. It means they are individuals and march to their own beat.

Who should read this book?

This book is for parents who want their kids to achieve their maximum potential in life. It might sound like this book is for all parents. What parents would not want that? However, there is a subtle distinction in the first sentence that I want to make very clear. This book will help parents draw out their child's unique potential. It is not for parents that want to impose their own vision of super stardom onto their children. This book is for parents who recognize their child as a unique individual and is not for parents who are guiding their children to fulfill the dreams that they, as parents, were unable to reach. If you are a parent who recognizes your child's individuality and want to help maximize their success then read on. If you already

have your child's life mapped out for them then put this book down. It is not for you.

Chapter 1. Set it up – Preparing the Stage

I believe that kids have a birthright to lead successful lives. As parents, we simply need to feed their dreams by providing them with the necessary tools. Feeding dreams means to nourish your child's brain and body with good eating, exercise and sleep habits, to nourish your child's mind through learning experiences and to nourish their spirit through reflection and self-development.

There is a law of physics that says 'a body in motion will stay in motion until acted upon by a force to stop it or change it's course'. I believe that kids are born in motion and on a course for success until someone acts on them to change their course. Buckminster Fuller, the engineering genius of the mid-1900s had this to say:

"All children are born geniuses. 9,999 out of 10,000 are swiftly, inadvertently, degeniusized by grown ups".

Although this quote is somewhat whimsical, it is more insightful than first appears. I spend a great deal of time in Chapter 7 discussing the beliefs that we arm our kids with. This quote is more accurate than you might think.

Another law of physics says 'a body at rest will stay at rest until acted upon by a force to move it'. So many kids are inadvertently stagnated and halted along the pathway to growing up. Many will stay stagnated for much or all of their adult lives. We must act as a force to move them and keep them in motion.

Biology has programmed us all to develop and grow up. This is unpreventable. Our children will grow up. We simply need to supply them with tools that they need to stay on a trajectory for success as they do. Sometimes this requires our action to help them. However, sometimes it requires our inaction to allow them to find these tools themselves. Sometimes we just need to get out of their way.

The unfortunate reality of today is that most kids are not getting what they need to grow up to their potential. The trends of modern society have erected barriers that hold our kids back. This is not by design. I am not a conspiracy theorist suggesting some grand plot. It's just an unfortunate reality. The nutritional value of our foods have declined, physical activity is no longer a daily routine, hectic schedules prevent appropriate rest and sleep, formulaic teaching methods are stripping creativity, the freedom to dream is squashed by the need for financial security. These are all common barriers that prevent most kids from reaching their true potential. It is our job as parents to take proactive measures to remove these barriers from our kid's lives or empower them to break through the barriers themselves.

Feeding the mind, body and spirit

This book has two main sections. Each section is comprised of several chapters that focus on different major areas that children need to become their best. I suggest that you read them in order because each chapter builds from the one before.

It is like building a house. Before you can start construction, you must level the ground and dig out for the foundation. Then you pour the foundation, let it set and start framing the walls. Then the roof goes up and the exterior walls are covered. Finally, you work on the interior and apply the finishing touches. If you don't follow this sequence the structure might look good for a while but it will not be sound and risks falling apart.

The beginning part of this book is like leveling the ground. It conveys an attitude about physical health that you must adopt. If you don't believe in the cause you will not succeed in the mission. You must understand why physical health is so important in your children before you can start applying the foundational principles to achieve it. Next, you can build a strong framework of independence that will stand all tests of weather. This allows the addition of the finishing touches that

bring out imagination and creativity. Your child will become a person of sound body and sound character that will contribute great things to his or her world.

Laying the Foundation of Physical Health

Giving your kids the gift of physical health is crucial for them to maximize their success. I will outline the importance of nutrition, physical activity and adequate rest in creating optimal health today and for the rest of their lives.

If you already try to feed your children well and ensure they get enough physical activity and downtime then I applaud your efforts. I will reinforce the importance of these efforts and explain why they are so critical for your children's life-long success. You will understand how physical health actually 'rewires' the brain for success. You will understand how the value of physical health goes far beyond physical fitness and weight control and actually optimizes the mind, brain and body.

If you are currently less than proactive about your child's nutrition and physical activity, I hope to give you the motivation you need. I will explain why ignoring this important issue is like letting your kids play on the freeway in heavy traffic. The studies are clear. Unhealthy youth grow up to have a much greater chance of getting seriously ill as adults. If you choose not acknowledge this fact you are setting your kids up for a life of ill health. This might sound harsh, but it is an undeniable truth.

Building Creativity and Independence

We must also foster creativity, imagination and independence. In order for kids to succeed in life, they must think clearly and act with confidence. You will learn how a physically healthy brain is a much better scaffold to build creativity and leadership. In the second section of this book I talk about how the process of acquiring these traits, through new experiences, actually feeds back to improve brain function.

Amazingly, the interaction between physical health and intellectual experience cooperate to strengthen brain circuits that control stress and emotion.

There is ample scientific evidence that a physically healthy lifestyle contributes substantially to mental health. The foods you eat, the amount of physical exercise and sleep you get definitely influence your mood, your confidence, and your level of independence.

The degradation of either physical or mental health can create a downward spiral in both of them. It is our job as parents to promote the upward spiraling in our kids. We must ensure that when they have left our nests to pursue their own independence that they have momentum in the upward direction. They will face many challenges in early independence. Their physical and emotional health and the strength of their own beliefs in maintaining them, will largely determine their response to these challenges. We must arm them now with empowering beliefs and habits. The focus of this book will discuss how we can do this by addressing each of these in a systematic plan to feed their dreams and their potential.

I would be remiss to cover the topics that I do without providing you with a plan to improve. Each chapter ends with the systematic ACTion™ approach to identifying the areas you need help, giving you a clear plan of what to do and monitoring your progress. So many books jump straight into doling out advice without first determining whether you need it.

Have you ever had a telemarketer call you at home and jump straight into a breathless 2-minute sales pitch before they take the time to determine if you might need their product? We all have. Why do they do that? If they just asked a couple of questions first to determine your interest, they could save themselves so much time. Then they only need to make their recommendations to the right people.

For example, I live a 6-year old house. It's in good condition because it's fairly new. But on several occasions I've answered the phone to find telemarketers selling

windows. They go through the sales pitch without breathing and ask if they can come out and do an estimate. I finally get the chance to tell them I live in a new house and don't need windows. They quickly drop the pressure when they realize I am not a good prospect. If they would have found out that information first, they could have saved both of us a lot of time, made more calls and captured more sales.

The ACTION™ plan that you will find at the end of each chapter will revisit that chapter and help you evaluate your personal needs. It will help you hone in on the areas that you need the most help so that you can efficiently move forward with improving your family's life and not try to fix things that aren't broken. Most people can use at least some help in each of the topics that I discuss, but you might find that you have some of them under control. That's great. We need to find that out up front so that we don't waste your time. As a parent, I know you are busy so let's get you what you need and move on.

The ACTION™ system will take you through three basic steps, specifically designed for each topic area. The general steps are:

1. **A**ssess your situation and evaluate your strengths and weaknesses.
2. **C**ommit to taking action to fix the holes identified in the first step.
3. **T**rack your progress, provide feedback and adjust the plan if necessary.

I will take you through a detailed analysis of each chapter topic using this system. You can identify the areas where you need work and the areas that you are already doing well. To make the most out of the ACTION™ plan at the end of each chapter get the workbook at <http://www.thebraincode.com/workbook.html>.

Let's get started right now and jump into laying the foundations for your child's physical health.



Chapter 8. Put it all Together – Synergy

This brings us to the last chapter. Why did I choose to focus on the topics I did? Hopefully, by now you realize that these topics are all related because they all affect how our brains function. Working on the brain and body at the same time as the mind and spirit, benefits all of them.

The brain is the master integrator of everything we do and experience. It is the ultimate machine. By focusing on the brain, you will inadvertently optimize your body, mind and spirit as well. It all comes back to the brain in the end.

The first section of this book talked about using physical health as a way to build the infrastructure of your kids' brains. By paying attention to their diet, physical activity and sleep needs, you are giving them the raw materials that they require for optimal development. You are laying the foundation that will allow them to realize their intellectual and emotional potential.

I talked about how exercise and experiences both contribute to increasing the performance of brain regions and pathways responsible for attention, responsiveness, and handling stress. I talked about how nutrition supplies the raw materials to build these pathways and protect against attacks that try to stop us. I also talked about how sleep regulates our biological rhythms to control many functions, including fat storage, growth and learning. These all contribute to building the best brain circuits that we can.

In the second section I talked about building upon the infrastructure created by the habits of section one. I talked about giving your kids the ability to experience different environments that promote adaptability and about filling their minds with independent, creative and empowering thoughts.

In the end, it's all about optimization. What are the chances that your kids will reach their potential and achieve their goals and dreams? The more you pay attention to the topics detailed in this book, the better odds you give them. Do you want them to be ahead of the curve right now or behind it? Do you want them to continue health and clear thinking into their older years or decay with those that ignored these issues? Will they create a life of happiness and pleasure or disappointment and pain? These questions may seem provocative but the answers largely depend on the actions you take today.

I sincerely hope that you found the content of this book useful. I hope that I have given you the motivation to be proactive about physical and mental health. If you were already proactive, I hope that I have given you the drive to stay the course, and have given you some different perspectives on how to do that. I hope that as you finish this book you don't just go back to doing the same old things but that you identify the areas where you can improve and take action immediately to do something about it.

I encourage you to contribute your own experiences, stories and motivators at <http://www.thebraincode.com/brainblog>. You can enter comments in the ongoing

discussion pages, add kids recipes, physical activities or other advice. As I said in the beginning of the book, we all come to parenting from a unique perspective. We are all in this together. The more our kids can positively influence the world the better it is for all of us.

Any successful person will tell you that accountability to someone was a key factor in his or her accomplishments. A minority of people have the discipline to be accountable to themselves. Most of us need to have someone else there, keeping our momentum going. If you found this book helpful and need that extra help to move forward in your life then visit <http://www.thebraincode.com/programs.html> to learn about individualized or group programs. It is my goal to help you get to where you want to be.

Your kids are your dreams so feed them well.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Evans". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.