

IT'S NOT IN THE GENES



ATTENDING A NEUROSCIENCE CONFERENCE INSPIRED A THOUGHT OF SIMPLICITY THAT RELATES TO EVERY DAY LIFE



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I'm sure my intelligence quotient increased this week merely by attending the International Conference of Applied Neuroscience. You're welcome to contest this but I'm enthusiastically owning it.

As I basked in the company of a bunch of mental health workers with PhDs, GPs, psychologists, counsellors and social workers, I marvelled at their earnest desire to help and inspire people to wellness.

You'd think my newly acquired intelligence would produce an article featuring some rather substantial long words starting with neuro and ending with brain-derived neurotrophic factor.

While these terms are incredibly

important, I've kept it simple for us.

Love is the answer.

For all this listening and learning from thought leaders in my field, you'd think I'd need to share much more today. While there were some fascinating insights to share in subsequent articles, this is a simple, beautiful place to start.

No matter how compromised your home life was as a child, how much you're grieving from loss, how bullied you've been, neglected, lonely or subsequently depressed you feel – finding someone to provide you emotional attentiveness can be your turning point toward thriving and finding joy. Enjoying the trusting therapeutic alliance with another beautiful human who will listen, guide and support your choice to grow is a gift. Those people who help you realise you truly matter are paramount.

Did you also know that feeling bad over life's curve balls does not mean you necessarily have a mental disorder?

Our immediate society means we expect an instant fast connection and quick fix. I'm talking about the next Netflix episode "coming up" in eight seconds, high-speed online information – not on the Sunshine Coast unfortunately, fast food and a pill for

anything else. Death and grieving, losing your job or feeling down when life isn't going so smooth may not mean you require a mental health diagnosis. Adversely, experiencing true joy as a comparison to life going great doesn't mean you are manic.

Life sure is a roller-coaster and building resilience with your toolbox of healthy strategies is worthwhile. When you can't get out of your funk, lean on a mental health professional to help you navigate your way out and decide if you need medicinal support. Just saying, it doesn't always mean you're about to be diagnosed with a ghastly disorder.

Furthermore, gone are the days we can blame our inherited genes for all our shonky habits, depression, anxiety or any tendency to chew with our mouth open. Sorry folks, you can only allocate 2 per cent of your "pre-determined" genes to that. The rest are non-encoded, which means the other 98 per cent is affected by your environment and subsequent ability to self-regulate, apply self-discipline and be resilient in the face of adversity. Genes only lay out potentials and vulnerabilities but don't dictate your thoughts, feelings or behaviour. You can even turn them off by changing your behaviour

and environment. Change that and your brain changes. Very cool.

This has been found to apply to other mammals. Did you know that research studies prove that rat pups who were lovingly licked by their rat mummy have greater resilience and regulation than those who didn't enjoy such a caring environment? These happy little rodents enjoy a more effective thermostat for stress featuring less cortisol and more serotonin – the happy neuro-juice.

Love is the answer.

With special thanks to Dr John Arden, author of *Mind-Brain-Gene: Toward Psychotherapy Integration* for his inspiring presentation and interview.

I look forward to sharing more wondrous neuro-facts and how they relate to our relationships. Listen in for my interviews with some of the esteemed authors and neuroscientists on Friday mornings on the Salt 106.5 breakfast show with Kristian.

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