



A is for Awareness

AARMA Principle #1 – Noticing before Reacting

Continuing our theme of building our children's Human AARMA, let's look at the first AARMA Principle – Awareness – developing the ability to pause, notice and make wise choices.

Awareness

The key to productive behaviour and wise choices is Awareness. We must consistently support our little and mind-sized humans to develop the habit of pausing, noticing and thinking through their choices.

Awareness is that moment when the brain wakes up to what it's doing. It's the first AARMA Superpower we want to help children develop as they grow their toolkit for being a better human. It is the skill of **noticing before reacting**. It's teaching our kids (and ourselves) to tune into what is happening in their brain and body before they act.

The science

The brain loves shortcuts. It develops 'habits' and 'automatic responses' to save mental energy. That's why we sometimes act before we think, speak before we pause, or judge before we understand.

Awareness interrupts that autopilot. It's the pause between feeling and doing - the moment when the **Wise Handler Brain** (pre-frontal cortex) has a chance to take control of the **Guard Dog Brain** (amygdala/limbic system).

When children and teens learn to notice what they're feeling, thinking, or doing without judgement they can **diagnose** what's happening inside their brain and make more useful choices in the moment.

Remember, this is not natural or easy for any human, and is particularly difficult for little humans, but mastering this superpower is the key to living happy and healthy lives.

Classroom (or home) activity

Primary (little humans): Play 'Pause and Choose': play music and move/dance around. When the music stops, everyone freezes, takes a slow breath, and names one emotion they've felt today. Talk about how naming emotions helps their brain to stop, calm, notice and make wiser choices.

Secondary (teens): Practice a five second pause before replying or reacting when something feels frustrating. Practice when things are calm. Afterwards, discuss what shifted when they gave their brain time to catch up.



Our job as big humans

We can't expect little and medium humans to do what we don't model ourselves. Our job is to be the calm in the chaotic moments help them name what is happening and what they are feeling without shame or blame calm their brain first, then you can teach about better choices and behaviour once the calm has returned.

Remember, an outburst is not an attack, it's a signal. It's their Guard Dog brain trying to protect them from something that feels threatening, even if it doesn't make sense to us.

These are your moments to guide, not to punish. The more often we support reflection over reaction, the more their Wise Handler learns to lead. Know that every time you help a child or teen pause and reflect, you are literally helping them rewire their brain for better behaviour and emotional control.



**Helping our
Little Humans
grow into BETTER
Big Humans!**

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Tips for teachers, parents and carers

- Model your own awareness out loud. "I'm noticing that I am feeling upset. My brain wants me to...but instead I'll take a breath and give my brain a chance to make the right choice".
- Build 'noticing' rituals. "What did you notice about yourself during this last lesson - what did you think about, how did you feel?" "What do you remember about school today - did you notice anything different or unusual?"
- Praise the pause. When a child or teen stops themselves mid-reaction, name and celebrate. "Well done on staying calm in this difficult moment."
- During, or after, tricky moments, gently ask, "What did your brain want to do first, and what did you choose to do? Did you listen to it or did you stop and make a wiser choice? What will you try to do differently next time?"
- Create a classroom or family pause cue: a word, gesture or deep breathing movement that everyone uses when emotions arise.

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