What Do You Do When You *Don't Know* What to Do?

1/17/23

Sarah here. We hope you enjoyed last week's blog on roadblocks to intentional parenting. Hopefully, you did the guided self-reflection, so you've begun thinking about how to get past these parenting roadblocks. This week, we're focusing on what you do when you don't know what to do- that is, your problem-solving process.

Problem solving, decision making and learning styles are well-studied domains in the world of psychology. Rather than boring you with an exhaustive research paper, we thought we'd highlight a couple of dimensions related to problem solving on which people may vary. Today we're focusing on the social aspect as well as the thought style of problem solving.

When faced with uncertainty about what to do, some people try to figure things out on their own, while others seek support. Even among more social problem solvers, there can be variation. Some people go to a few trusted individuals, while others more broadly "poll the audience," asking anyone and everyone they encounter for opinions and advice. Among those who use minimal social engagement while problem solving, there are those who prefer to get professional support (from a therapist or physician) and those who get support from a close friend or family member. Some people prefer to ask for support electronically (via text or on social media) while others feel more comfortable doing so in person.

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With respect to thought style, people are often categorized as being more intuitive or more logical in their thinking. These styles impact problem solving. Intuitive thinkers may be more likely to trust their instincts while logical thinkers may have a more methodical way of approaching problems. Intuitive problem solvers tend to focus on their sense of things, "listening to their hearts" or "trusting their gut," while logical problem solvers rely most on their brain to lead them to the best solution. At times, these styles may affect speed of problem solving- it can be far easier to rapidly solve a problem for more intuitive thinkers, given that logical thinkers' deliberate style just takes more time.
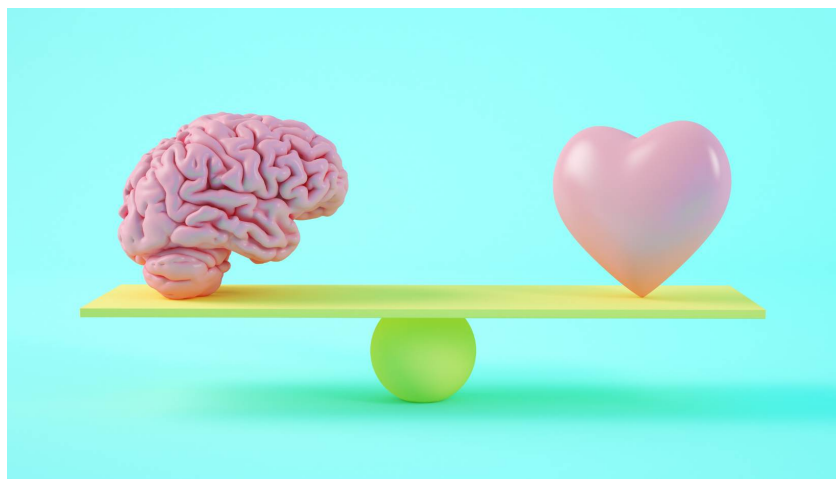
We hope you can see that there isn't a "right" or "wrong" way to solve problems along these dimensions. Issues can arise when we rigidly approach *all* problems in the same way. Being mentally flexible and being able to adapt your approach to the situation at hand is consistently associated with positive well-being. So, it may be useful to consider how *you* solve problems along these social and thinking dimensions. If you're feeling stuck or you're struggling to overcome a particular roadblock, maybe it's an opportunity to do something different. If you prefer figuring things out on your own but you haven't been successful, it may be useful to ask for help. If you are generally a logical thinker but you're struggling to make a decision, maybe it's time to start listening to your instincts. Whatever approach you take, be sure to evaluate how it went so you can learn from your experience.