

## Elephants and Goat Brains

Most people come to talk to a counselor because they have intense feelings or bad habits they haven't been able to change. Usually, clients will say something like "I understand logically why I shouldn't feel this way or do this thing, but I still can't seem to change how I feel or what I do."

Let me tell you why this is. It's almost as if we have 2 minds: our logical mind and our emotional mind. The emotional mind has its own brand of logic and does not much respond to reason. Chip and Dan Heath had an article in the Parade magazine a few weeks ago about this. In their book "*Switch: How to Change when Change is Hard*," the Heath's describe your emotional brain like a large, gray elephant and your logical brain like this tiny little rider trying to steer this elephant around.

Similarly, Jon Connelly, LCSW, Ph. D. describes the dichotomy like this, "You've got 2 aspects of your mind. The conscious, reasoning aspect of your mind is super-powerful, but it's about the size of snowflake. The rest of your mind is basically functioning at the level of a goat. The snowflake may try to reason with the goat, but the goat just keeps kicking him in the head!"

How do we resolve this dilemma? Fortunately, the emotional mind is also intelligent, but it has its own brand of logic. Therefore, we have to use language and methods that it understands. The goat and elephant examples mentioned above are not far off analogies. The emotional part of our mind is wired for survival and really does think a lot like an animal.

So, you have to interact with this part of your mind like you would a dog, or a small child. For example, if your dog trembles and hides when there is a thunderstorm, how would you help him calm down? You wouldn't get into a rational discussion explaining how the thunder is actually the sound of the lightning, and expect him to calm down. But, you might hold him, pet him, or talk in a soothing way to comfort him and help him feel safe. If your dog gains weight, you wouldn't pull out a chart and explain how he is consuming too many calories and expect him to automatically start eating less. You have to show him what you want him to do. He may not get it or like it at first, but he can be trained to do things differently.

I show my clients and workshop attendees all kinds of ways to work with this aspect of our minds. What's really cool, is that when you reach both the logical and emotional aspects of the mind, change can happen quickly and lasts longer. As neuroscience discovers more about the brain, we're realizing why traditional talk-therapy approaches aren't always effective for people. You've got to speak the language elephants and goats understand if you want them to stop kicking you in the head!