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Assertiveness is not a personality trait; it is a neurological state.

Here are some fascinating brain facts and resources to explain the neurobiology of assertiveness and the "Big Voice."

[1. The Neurobiology of the "Big Voice" \(National Library of Medicine\)](#)

The Vagus Nerve and the Larynx The "Big Voice" is deeply connected to the Vagus Nerve (Cranial Nerve X). The vagus nerve is the superhighway of the parasympathetic nervous system (the "rest and digest" state), and it directly innervates the muscles of the larynx (vocal cords) and pharynx.

- The Fact: Because of this direct biological wiring, our vocal tone is an acoustic broadcast of our autonomic nervous system.
- The Application: When an adult is in a "Survival" or "Emotional" state, the vagus nerve withdraws its calming influence. The vocal cords literally tighten. The voice becomes either thin, high-pitched, and strained (Passive) or loud, forced, and tight (Aggressive). The "Big Voice" (Assertive) is only physically possible when the ventral vagal complex is engaged, creating a warm, resonant, and calm tone.

The Threat Response: Why Passivity and Aggression are Default Assertiveness requires the Prefrontal Cortex to be fully online.

- The Fact: When humans anticipate conflict or misbehavior, the brain's amygdala often flags it as a physical threat. This triggers a release of cortisol and adrenaline. In this state, the brain defaults to its evolutionary survival mechanisms: Fight (Aggressive communication) or Flight/Fawn (Passive communication).
- The Application: To use the Big Voice, educators must first regulate their own nervous system. You cannot be neurologically triggered and assertive at the same time.

The Neurology of "The Voice of No Doubt" In Conscious Discipline, Dr. Becky Bailey teaches adults to find their assertive voice by thinking of an undeniable fact (like,

"The ceiling is above us" or "The sky is blue") and then delivering their instruction ("It is time to line up") with that exact same tone.

- The Fact: This is a brilliant neurological hack. Thinking of a concrete, objective fact forces blood flow and electrical activity out of the emotional Limbic System and up into the logical Prefrontal Cortex. It grounds the speaker's brain in reality, instantly lowering cortisol and relaxing the vocal cords to produce that safe, authoritative resonance.

In Conscious Discipline, the "Big Voice" is the voice of the assertive leader. It is a specific way of communicating, distinct from passivity or aggression. Its primary goal is to provide safety and clear boundaries for children (or even adults) without using fear or shame.

Here is a breakdown of what makes the Big Voice effective:

1. The Core Philosophy (Conscious Discipline)

The Big Voice is rooted in the idea that "I am in charge of keeping you safe, and you are in charge of helping to keep it that way." It is not a loud or yelling voice; rather, it is a firm, calm, and confident tone that tells the child exactly what to do.

2. Characteristics of the Big Voice

To use the Big Voice, you focus on three main physical and verbal traits:

- Tone: Even, calm, and rhythmic. It lacks the "up-talk" of a question (passive) and the "sharpness" of a bark (aggressive).
- Body Language: Upright, assertive posture with direct eye contact.
- Language: Tells the child what to do rather than what to stop doing. It focuses on the "usable information."

3. Assertiveness vs. Aggression

Conscious Discipline distinguishes the Big Voice from other common communication styles:

Style	Tone	Message Sent
Passive	Whining, questioning, or pleading.	"I'm not sure I'm in charge; please help me."

Aggressive	Yelling, shaming, or threatening.	"I'm going to make you do this because I'm bigger/stronger."
Assertive (Big Voice)	Firm, factual, and direct.	"I am here to keep you safe. Use your walking feet."

4. Why it Works

From a brain-state perspective, the Big Voice targets the Executive State.

- When a teacher or parent yells (Aggressive), it triggers the child's "Survival State" (fight/flight), making learning impossible.
- When a teacher uses the Big Voice, it provides the structure and calm necessary for the child to feel safe enough to regulate their own behavior and follow directions.

How to Practice It

A simple formula for the Big Voice is:

1. Name the child.
2. State the desired behavior (e.g., "Sit in your chair," not "Stop standing up").
3. Use a "downward inflection" at the end of the sentence so it sounds like a statement of fact, not a request for permission.

2. The Vagal Maneuver

How directly the nervous system is tied to the voice, have them do a quick physical exercise. Have everyone tense their shoulders up to their ears, hold their breath, and try to say, "I need you to sit down" in a calm, assertive tone. It's physically impossible—it will sound strained or angry. Then, have them drop their shoulders, take a deep diaphragmatic breath (with the exhale longer than the inhale—a proven vagus nerve stimulator), and say it again. The difference in resonance is immediate. The Neuroplasticity Angle reminds the audience that a child's inner voice is built from the voices of the adults around them. By using the Big Voice (clear, calm, and direct), adults are firing and wiring new neural pathways in the child's brain. We are literally lending them our Prefrontal Cortex until theirs is fully developed.

3. Resources to Share

Here are excellent resources that bridge the gap between brain science and behavior:

- [The Polyvagal Theory in Education](#). While Dr. Stephen Porges' original work on Polyvagal Theory can be highly academic, exploring how his theory applies to education clearly validates Conscious Discipline. His research explains exactly why a teacher's facial expressions and vocal prosody (tone of voice) either signal "safety" or "threat" to a child's nervous system.
- ["The Whole-Brain Child" by Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson](#). This is a fantastic, accessible resource to recommend to teachers and parents. It perfectly aligns with the Conscious Discipline Brain State Model, specifically addressing how to integrate the "upstairs" (Prefrontal) and "downstairs" (Limbic/Stem) brain through connection rather than coercion. [Refrigerator sheet](#)
- [The Conscious Discipline Podcast: "Teaching Kids to Use Their BIG Voice"](#) Dr. Becky Bailey has several podcast episodes and free articles specifically dedicated to the mechanics of the assertive voice. Pointing your audience toward the Conscious Discipline website's free resources on "The Skill of Assertiveness" gives them actionable homework.

Interesting articles:

- [Child engagement](#)
- [Teaching Through a Polyvagal Lens: Using the Science of Safety to Co-Regulate in the Classroom](#)
- [The Vagus Nerve: A Neuroscientist's Perspective](#)