

UPSTAIRS BRAIN. DOWNSTAIRS BRAIN.

Imagine your brain is a two-story house, with a downstairs and an upstairs.

The lower areas (downstairs) are responsible for basic functions—like breathing, fight-or-flight responses, and intense emotions like anger and fear.

Unlike the downstairs brain, the upstairs brain is more evolved and can give you a fuller perspective on your world. Imagine it with windows that let in light and offer clearer views.

Let's apply this concept to our messaging. When our downstairs brain is calm, our upstairs brain can be rational and see potential opportunities. But when the downstairs brain is triggered, the upstairs brain struggles to listen or consider multiple sides of an issue.

As advocates, we can calm audiences' concerns, discomfort, and other downstairs brain reactions, enabling them to see the rationale and benefits of our perspective.

With familiarity, trust, and emphasis on shared values and hope, we can help audiences manage negative emotions and tap into different perspectives through a two-step process.

1 | Use familiarity to calm the downstairs brain. Familiarity can come from shared values and trusted messengers with relatable experiences. This may also include acknowledging the complexities of an issue and showing how others navigated their own internal conflicts.

2 | Engage the upstairs brain. Successful messaging moves people toward hope, optimism, and compassion. When audiences feel compassion, they connect with the challenges and aspirations of those who would benefit from policies and are motivated to help them. These audiences also become hopeful that change is possible.



This Good Neighbor Toolkit Helps Build Support for Housing

This is part of a series of six one-page guides to build public support for inclusive housing policies in Colorado. It is grounded in research with Coloradans and the evidence-based Heartwired framework.

For the full Good Neighbor Toolkit, go to bit.ly/goodneighbor toolkit

Upstairs Brain. Downstairs Brain. | Build Trust
Acknowledge Complexities | Calm Concerns
Activate Hope | Align Messages | Change of Heart