Goldie Hawn to kick off Aspen Brain Forum tonight
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ASPEN – Actress Goldie Hawn will be the keynote speaker tonight for the launch of the Aspen Brain Forum, a three-day conference focusing on health, learning and neurotechnology.

Hawn, a resident of Old Snowmass, will speak on the topic of “Mindful Learning, Resilient Students.” She will also discuss the MindUp curriculum, an educational initiative that her nonprofit foundation started. The event will take place at the Doerr-Hosier Center at the Aspen Institute at 5:45 p.m., with a reception to follow. Tickets are $35 at the door.

Hawn said Wednesday that she plans an informal talk lasting about 30 to 40 minutes. MindUp, she said, has been published by Scholastic Inc. and is starting to catch on with school districts and other education groups across the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom.

“We know so much now – not everything – but a lot about how the brain works,” she said. “And I think it’s imperative that our children learn that and that it is part of their science and learning and school.”

MindUp, Hawn said, teaches children about the brain, gives them an understanding of stress and how to manage it, and helps them improve their focus and social skills.

“All of these things are centered around neurobiology,” she said. “Everything that a child may think or do or feel has a neurological correlate. It kind of puts the child in the driver’s seat; it gives them information they need to navigate.”

Hawn said her program is completely based in neuroscience: Raised in Judaism, Hawn is a practicing Buddhist; in the past the Hawn Foundation has touted the benefits of the Buddhist mindfulness technique, a form of awareness training for youths and adults alike.

“There’s wonderful research done on meditation, and how beneficial that can be,” she said. “But that’s not this program. This program is neurologically based. It does give children what we call ‘brain breaks,’ but it’s not a meditative state. The reason they take the ‘brain breaks’ is to rest their brain because their brain is a muscle.

“Just like all of us, they get frenzied and their attention [lags]. Everybody thinks they have [attention deficit disorder], but they don’t actually; they’re just not focused.”

MindUp also teaches children to work on behalf of the community, committing random acts of gratitude and kindness. Hawn said research has shown that such activity leads to positive behavior among children and adults.

“It’s something great to put into your knapsack of tools,” she said. ” ‘Oh, I’m feeling down today, what do I do?’ Count your blessings. Why? Because actually something is stimulated in your brain, which you may not be able to see, but it does send out neurotransmitters that actually make you feel better.”

Hawn’s new book, “10 Mindful Minutes,” due out Sept. 27, will address many of the same topics. The book has been receiving positive reviews. Bestselling author Dan Buettner wrote, “Goldie Hawn is arguably the most influential happiness expert of our time. She not only has achieved true happiness in her life but radiates it in her...
family and through the work of her foundation."

Amishi Jha, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Miami, also endorsed the book: “Goldie delightfully weaves together personal reflections and practical tips with accessible explanations of the brain’s attention and emotion systems. Firmly rooted in neuroscience and mindfulness, she is pioneering a cultural shift in parenting and education.”

The book is aimed at parents, Hawn said, extrapolating many lessons from MindUp for home use.

Hawn said she plans to just “get up and talk” tonight.

“It won’t be an hour,” she said, laughing. “I’ve found that attention span goes only so far. It’s why learning in shorter spurts is better. People get very fidgety after 45 minutes of sitting and listening to people talk.”

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