REDUCING CHALLENGING BEHAVIOURS USING BRAIN GYM®

By Claire Hocking, Brain Gym instructor, Australia
Presented at the International Brain Gym Conference, Portland, Maine, USA, 2016

There seems to be an epidemic of challenging behaviours emerging in our preschools, schools, workplaces, homes and society in general. Children displaying challenging behaviours, people diagnosed with mental illness including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, anger management issues, bipolar, dementia, Alzheimer's disease, all seem to be increasing at alarming rates.

What are Challenging Behaviours?

Challenging behaviour is a term used to describe those behaviours that threaten the quality of life and/or physical safety of an individual or others. It is the child or adult's actions, reactions and functioning in response to everyday environments and situations.

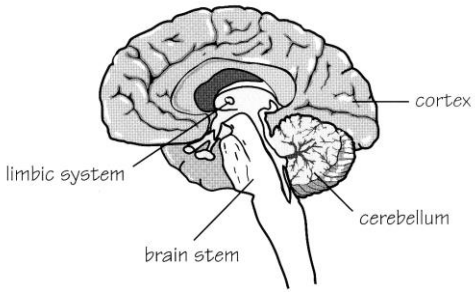
A person with challenging behaviour may have the following:

- Aggressive outbursts
- Have temper tantrums
- Emotionally reactive
- Be uncooperative
- Make unreasonable demands
- Injure themselves
- Be extremely noisy
- Shouts at others
- Self-injury including ingesting or inhaling foreign bodies
- Display physical aggression towards others-kicking, biting, slapping
- Damages property
- Lying
- Disregards laws, rules, manners, social conventions – 'doesn't apply to them'

Many children and adults with special needs and disabilities, such as Autism Spectrum Disorders, ADD/ADHD, post-traumatic stress disorder, high anxiety, depression, mental/emotional disorders, high anger levels, and developmental delays, often experience challenging behaviours.

Stress

As soon as we get stressed our brain/body integration breaks down, leaving us feeling overwhelmed, stuck and switched-off, often resulting in challenging behaviours.



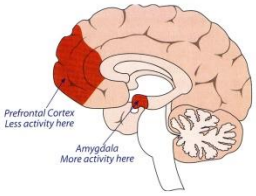
When threatened, our reptilian brain may cause us to flee, fight, or freeze, without the cortex, especially the frontal lobes intervening. This quick non-thinking response certainly has survival value, but in a world where perceived threats may not be life threatening, the activation of the flight, fight, or freeze response can lead to unnecessary and unwelcome challenging behaviours.

In addition to being more emotionally reactive, certain life difficulties can make it more likely to feel threatened by what many would see as harmless or irrelevant events.

Similarly, difficulties with abstract thinking and behaviour, perspective taking and inflexibility can make unexpected events feel like they are major threats to one's integrity. As a result, without cognitive flexibility to understand and process new or challenging events, many individuals are thrown in challenging behaviour situations.

What Research Shows

Research shows the **REAL issue is** the fact that people with challenging behaviours **do not** have sufficient brain connections, hence, electrical activation in their **frontal lobes of their brain** resulting in immature and under-active brain activity.



Many academics refer to this part of the brain as 'executive functioning' which is mainly located in the frontal lobes of the brain. People with challenging behaviours **have poor and immature executive functioning.**

Why do People Experience Challenging Behaviours?

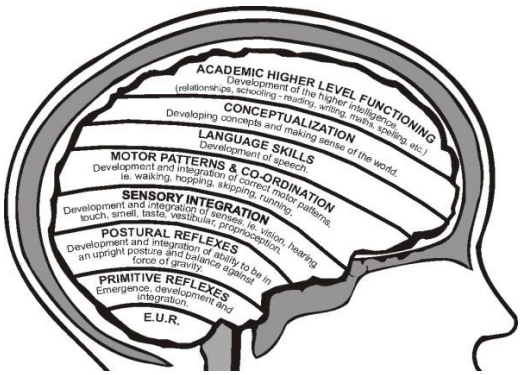
From my Educational Kinesiology assessment I find that people who display challenging behaviours do so because they still have an immature Moro reflex still active in their system, and often all the Early Uterine reflexes, including the Fear Paralysis reflex. It is the correct development and integration of these reflexes in early life that is vital in forming the basic foundation of all future development, learning, behaviour and wellbeing.

The first group of developmental reflexes, called the early uterine reflexes or 'withdrawal reflexes', begin to function as early as 5 weeks after conception and should have 'completed' their role by 7-9 weeks after conception. Full integration of all the early uterine reflexes is vital for the complete emergence, development and integration of all other primitive and postural reflexes. The main early uterine reflex is the Fear Paralysis Reflex.

Babies are born with innate physical, automatic responses called primitive reflexes.
The early uterine and primitive reflexes are automatic, physical responses and movements which do not involve any thinking or reasoning from the higher cortical areas of the brain. They originate and are controlled by the lower centers of our brain, the brain stem or reptilian brain.

The early uterine and primitive reflex movements begin to function in utero, in a set order and are integrated in a specific sequence. Each primitive reflex prepares the way for the next stage of development in the fetus and child by forming the foundation of the basic neural pathways and networks that all further development and learning will be built on, including the development of complex voluntary behaviours and learning.

The early uterine and primitive reflexes and should fully develop for their intended purpose and then fully inhibit or disappear within the first twelve months of life. If the early uterine and primitive reflexes do not fully complete their vital stages of development, they will remain active in the person's system. Part of this integration process is for the early and primitive reflexes to become dormant in a person's system, only to be reawakened if the higher brain center, the cortex, fails. In people with challenging behaviours their higher brain centers continually fail them and the lower parts of the brain is governing their behaviour and putting them continuously into survival mode.



If there are problems in the underlying organization, any neural connections that are dependent on this organization will carry inherent weaknesses and immaturities within them. Appropriate developmental milestones and skills can be significantly delayed or effected if the 'correct' reflexes do not emerge or are blocked and prevented from 'doing their job' efficiently.

If these immaturities persist, children and adults are at risk of experiencing a range of learning and behavioural difficulties at various stages of their lives. Unfortunately retained reflex behaviour often resurfaces and becomes increasing evident when the central nervous system is under stress, such as experiencing traumas, feeling tired or ill, or going through the aging process.

The apparent result will be 'weak links' and/or gaps in the 'wiring' of their neural brain pathways and networks, which may impair all further development, learning and behaviours. When our mind/body circuitry is blocked or parts of our brains are not accessible, we have difficulty functioning with behaviours being adversely affected.

If these early and primitive reflexes remain unintegrated beyond the first year of life despite normal development in other areas, they may cause extra stress on the central nervous system, leaving less energy and function for other development, learning and daily functioning. Learning new things and tackling life's challenges are some of the most taxing pressures on the central nervous system and if there are active retained reflexes, this can easily lead to overload and feelings of overwhelm.

An overloaded system may be affected in many ways. As we are complex individuals this will vary from person to person. The most common effected areas are related to growth, health, behaviour, concentration, schoolwork, learning, vision and balance or frequently, combinations of these.

As we meet changing situations that require new learning and adjustments throughout our lives, we tend to go back to our last stable point of development. For many, this is before sufficient reflex integration has happened. To cope we try to develop varying compensations. Children do not 'grow out' their learning and behavioural difficulties. Children and adults will learn to find other ways to compensate. This will take excess energy and determination often leading to more feelings of anxiety, frustration and anger increasing challenging behaviours.

As soon as we get stressed our mind/body integration breaks down, leaving us learning and living disabled and disconnected; often feeling overwhelmed, stuck and switched-off. Many behavioural, learning and health problems typify this disintegration. When a person can't handle demands of life, they go into reaction/survival mode, which in turn can lead to many health problems and challenging, inappropriate behaviours.

Moro Reflex

The "fight or flight response" is our body's primitive, automatic, innate response that prepares the body to "fight" or "flee" from perceived attack, harm or threat to our survival. When babies perform the Moro reflex movements, their central nervous system is laying down the neural connections to deal with stress in later life. If you have a Moro reflex still active in your system, you may have high stress levels despite constant efforts to relax or 'de-stress'. People with ADHD/ADD always display an extremely high level of retained responses of all the primitive reflexes. These responses often govern their thinking, learning, behaviour and emotions. Their responses are often exaggerated and 'over-the top' and very little will calm them down when having a 'Moro attack'.

Fear Paralysis Reflex

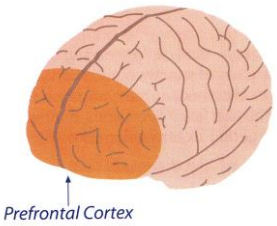
Another automatic innate response is to freeze, do nothing and hope the perceived stress or danger goes away. If you have a fear paralysis reflex (the main early uterine reflex) still active in your system, this may unconsciously be your over-riding response to many life situations. A retained fear paralysis reflex may also be responsible for autistic-like behaviours, mental health concerns, high anxiety levels, panic attacks, phobias, mood disorders, selective mutism, and Alzheimer's disease.

It is almost impossible to cultivate positive attitudes and beliefs when we are stuck in reaction/survival mode. Our rational mind (frontal lobes) is disengaged. Our consciousness is focused on fear, not logic, resulting in feelings of distrust, rejection, anger, and depression. Making clear choices and recognizing the consequences of those choices is often not possible. We react instead, unconsciously shutting down the rational and logical parts of our brain.

Retained reflexes prevent the left and right sides of the brain communicating effectively and keeps the brain and body in a 'homolateral', one-sided state. Complete dominance of the brain, eyes, ears, hands and feet may also be prevented from fully establishing. People with challenging behaviours often show homolateral behaviours with incomplete brain dominance profiles.

The Frontal Lobes

The frontal lobes are the most evolved part of our brain and are the executive part of our brain. They play a pivotal role in the development of all the early uterine reflexes primitive reflexes.



The Frontal Lobes are Responsible for:

- Logical and rational thinking and behaviours
- Mature and abstract thoughts and behaviours
- Self-control - moderating emotional responses and behaviour being able to 'stop-and-think' before you say or do something. Moderating the intensity of those emotional responses is one of the major functions of the frontal lobes.
- Anger management
- Obeying and conforming to manners, rules, and laws
- Attitudes, motivation, resilience, contentment, happiness, coping with change
- Empathy
- Temperament
- Attention span, concentration and focus
- Feeling switched-on
- Organising and planning
- Resilience
- Analyzing problems and problem solving
- Flexibility thinking and behaviour

It is correct reflex and sensory integration that forms neural connections and matures the frontal lobes. If they do not have sufficient neural connections in their frontal lobes, the person will have high risk of difficulties with their learning, functioning and behaviour. Brain research revel that children with ADHD, have approximately 10% less electrical activity in their frontal lobes and are actually smaller in size, compared to so-called 'normal' children.

In other words, for a person to be a competent learner and completely functioning in everyday life, have correct and proper behaviours, positive mental health, and wellness, their frontal lobes need to be adequately activated for mature processing. People with retained reflexes WILL have some degree of immaturity in their frontal lobes as well as other dysfunctions in other parts of their brain.

Brain Gym Activates and Matures the Frontal Lobes of the Brain

The Brain Gym movements easily and effectively assist in calming and maturing retained reflexes by activating and developing the frontal lobes of the brain. Brain Gym gives the brain and body another chance at integrating reflex movements patterns to provide the person with more mature patterns of response.

1. **Deepening Attitudes** and the **Lengthening Movements** directly activates and matures the frontal lobes

2. **Energy Exercises** promotes adequate electrical activity and reduces stress in the central nervous system

3. **Midline Movements** activate and balance both the frontal lobes of the brain

Sensory Challenges

People with challenging behaviors often also have sensory dysfunctions e.g., sensitivity to noise, light, touch, smell and taste, or difficulties integrating all these sensory inputs, as in sensory dysfunction disorder can make innocuous events feel like a threat to one's survival.

When dealing with children and adults with challenging behaviours, it is useful to include the following strategies:

- Use **unscented** toiletries, cleaners, washing powder
- Wear plain single coloured clothes, not patterned, glittery or metallic clothing
- Allow blank spaces to be left on 'busy' walls near where the person sits to allow for periods of visual relaxation
- Avoid fluorescent lights; use full-spectrum fluorescent lights
- Do Brain Gym often as required. Doing Hook-Ups and Positive Points when a person is not experiencing challenging behaviours will assist in significantly reducing the frequency and intensity of future challenging behaviour situations.

Brain Gym for Reducing Challenging Behaviours allows Children and Adults to better:

- Activate their frontal lobes
- Switch-on their brain for optimal learning, functioning and behaviour
- Get themselves more in control when they feel 'switched off' , disengaged, 'out of balance', or overwhelmed, overworked or feeling down, depressed or about to 'loose it'
- Give them effective tools that they can deal better with life's issues and challenges with greater calm and confidence
- To be able to make better conscious positive choices
- To understand and respect themselves in a more healthy way
- To create and maintain healthier relationships with the people in their life, now and in the future

Educational Kinesiology for Reducing Challenging Behaviours

Having an Educational Kinesiology balance with a qualified Educational Kinesiologist*, is the quickest and easiest way of reducing challenging behaviours.

Educational Kinesiology, Edu-K, is a safe and natural therapy that promotes maximum brain integration and effectively reduces the symptoms of stress and anxiety. Edu-K activates and stimulates the formation of more efficient and effective neural connections in your brain and body for improved functioning and performance. An Edu-k balance 'balances' your mind and body systems to identify the bottom line cause of any imbalance and then to resolve it for improved functioning.

*__Claire Hocking__

is one of Australia's leading Educational Kinesiology Practitioners and the Director of the Whole Brain Kinesiology Centres, where she consults privately with all age groups. With over twenty years' experience as a primary and secondary teacher, Claire has successfully used Brain Gym in schools both as a grade, music and special needs teacher. Claire also regularly uses Educational Kinesiology in schools, aged care facilities and health centres. Claire specialises in reducing all types of challenging behaviours both in her clinical sessions and in preschool and childcare centres, schools, workplaces, aged care facilities and in health centres for over 20 years. Professionals, clients and families have been consistently impressed with her positive approach and the results of her work.

Claire regularly works with clients in her clinics with mental health issues and challenges including depression, anxiety, phobias, eating disorders, addictions, bipolar disorders, with pleasing outcomes. Brain Gym can be especially useful for students experiencing any sort of learning or behavioural challenges or deemed to be 'at risk', or students with special needs and disabilities. Claire has also worked with a number of primary and secondary students who were about to be suspended or expelled from school due to their unacceptable behavior. All of these student's behavior and attitudes significantly improved once they commenced having consultations with Claire. All parents and teachers have been very pleased with the results achieved. Claire regularly presents Brain Gym and Kinesiology programs and workshops.

Specialty Workshops are available for specific groups. These are designed to meet the needs of each group. Previous workshops have benefited aged and health care workers, students, parents, educators, and other professionals.

For further information on the 'Brain Gym for Reducing Challenging Behaviours' workshops or to arrange a private consultation, please contact:

Claire Hocking, Dip. Teaching, Cert. A, AST 1, VIT, AKA
Educational Kinesiologist & Brain Gym Instructor
10 Greenleaf Drive, Lara, Victoria, Australia 3212
Phone (03) 5282 5985
Mobile: 041 956 9071
E-mail: claire@wholebrain.com.au
www.wholebrain.com.au