Why can’t my kid wait? Understanding the brain science behind impulse control Transcript

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New Year Reflection and Holding Territory

Hi everybody, it's Dr. Laura with Connect My Brain. Oh my goodness, welcome to 2025. Now I realize Sometimes people hear these podcasts and they're not in the same timeframe that I actually recorded it, but this is my first one for 2025. And I am so restored from my Christmas break and really did some great reflection going into the new year and for me, and I'm going to encourage you, no matter where we are in the calendar that you're actually hearing this, but what did you decide to do with 2025? I can share with you and you can hold me accountable.

I am holding on to my territory. i truly believe that God has given me an amazing territory And it is in this realm of being transformed by the renewing of your mind.

And there's so many pieces to this. There's many stories over the years that I've heard. When people are ready to take action, do they actually take actions?

We've talked about this before, but when we get a good idea, something that means something to us. That's a gamma burst going on in your brain. I think of it almost like the 4th of July fireworks.

Wow, I want to do this. Or wow, this is such a great idea. You actually create a bud in you brain and you have to nurture it. And in that beginning burst, we're very excited.

And that's when we really do get our brain's attention is when are really excited about something because it's new, it is fresh. The brain goes, wow, were about to do something.

So this bud begins to grow. But sometimes what ends up happening is after about a week, Most adults go, oh, I've got this, no problem. I can make it happen.

But if we don't take the dedicated time to continue to nurture it, it's not gonna grow. In fact, It will just fizzle away. And this is why so many times, many parents, adults will say, I just can't make it happen.

Well, sometimes you need a little support and we have got some great plans for 2025 to bring more resources to you at the tip of your fingers. But don't wait.

If you want help in this arena, reach out. That's the most important part. Take the first step. Second step is to execute. And when we put things off, then it's almost like you have to wait till it comes around again before you get excited about it.

Why Impulsivity Happens in the Brain

Now, in my goal of taking over, no, standing, It's not taking over. I've already been given it. It standing in my territory and my Territory is connect my brain transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Now my whole life is not my business, but my life style is exactly what I implement in practice. What I teach because it works. But I got sidetracked a few times over the years.

I allowed fear to creep in in different situations. One was during the pandemic. At first it felt like, because parents were saying, you're going to be open, right?

We're gonna bring our kids. But then the fear settled in even to the parents and it really impacted the practice. And I became fearful. Will I be able to continue?

And, I looked outside of what my God-given territory is and my faith and what I have learned over and over again. If I will just stand, He will provide.

that fear did take over, but then it didn't work out. So I took steps in my own power and those steps didn' work. And I did it again last year. I really took an accounting of my steps and I made some very powerful decisions even back in November of 2024, that I could see how I was taking my own steps rather than allowing God to lead.

And this does take us into the topic today because I wanna talk about impulsivity and the ability to actually put the brakes on. You know, we throw labels around all the time.

And I'm not taking away from that, so don't go there. But just the way my brain works, it is, okay, I understand the child is impulsive. I understanding the adult isimpulsive, but the question remains, why?

Why? Did that become the pattern versus the ability to actually put the brakes on, go back, look at the situation and make a reasonable step? I didn't do that when I took steps outside of what God's plan is for me.

And I am very, very clear on that. And so when I look at that, one of those things for me was fear. What happens with fear is whenever the very first event of fear took place, the amygdala in the brain who is in charge of monitoring your environment and making sure that you're safe.

When you have an event that triggers, that's a very important word, triggers this idea of experiencing a threat, the amygdala is gonna go in there and code it.

And for simplicity, I'm going to call that code ABC. Now, the amygdala has put that in its book. This is a potential threat. So it's always scanning for ABC, now over time when it becomes chronic, meaning we're not facing something working through it, the amygdala begins to go, well, there's an A, There's a BC.

There is an AC. And before you know it, it's coding so many things. It's lost its finite role of ABC. and now it is just picking up everything. Before you knew it that bucket is really full of potential interpretation of threats.

And when a threat hits us, it's an alarm clock and that triggers a fight or flight. And there's no way in the world you can put the brakes on because that is already emerging before it ever even reaches the frontal lobe for reasoning.

Teaching the Brakes with Traffic Light Games

Wow. When you think about the speed of how things really happen. So where does it come from that we would learn how to put the brakes on? So when we're talking about putting the breaks on, we are talking the inhibitory pathway.

So the brain is either going to go towards something, that's the reward, or it's going away from something and that is inhibition. So lots of times I think people look at some of the so-called behaviors that we see and we almost think that a child or even yourself should just kind of pop right into the expected behavior.

And that's not how the brain works. The brain is learning. It is even before we conceive a baby, because what goes in to the conception is that not only the DNA, but the cellular energy of mom and dad.

And cellular does include so-called behaviors and thoughts and actions and perceptions. I see it even in my kids. They are our little acorns, and that's the whole foundation behind the subconscious mind.

So this idea of how the brain gets wired, we must always, always go back to the beginning. How did we learn the ability to put on the brakes. So I did a little, I do this Wednesday night, Facebook power, 15 minutes.

And we talked about this even last night. Look at this, even for your child. Use the idea, something right now, tangible that you could actually kind of play around with is the ideas of a traffic light.

What do we do with the traffic light? Does the child, first of all, do they understand what a trafficlight is? So we would always ask that question. And most of them are gonna say, yes, I do.

and probably five, six, seven, they've got the idea of the Traffic Light. Especially when we're in the car, sometimes we actually talk about it and say yes mommy has to stop at the Trafic Light because the light is red.

So these children are just downloading this information even when we don't think it is really a teachable time, they are downloading this information.

So ask your child, what do we do for the red light? Oh, well, you stop. Okay, great. What do you do the green light, oh, we go, okay. what we we for do yellow light.

This is where I have the most fun with children because I get an idea of how that parent is actually driving. And the yellow line, most of them are going to say, Go as fast as you can and get through it.

And really the purpose of a yellow light is stop if possible. So it is the idea, are you able to take that information in and process it? Now that's a game.

Play red light, green light with them. This is also a wonderful way to teach them that they can physically put the brakes on. They can in their brain, learn to put the break sign.

And I've seen many children that have been labeled impulsive. You play that game with them and they can physically stop. So what is the disconnect? The disconnect is my body can physical do it.

and remember when we're talking about children, everything starts in the physical form. They ask you when you're pregnant, do you feel the baby moving?

When babies come out, they move. They're not reading a book, They are not writing a paper and they're figuring out mathematical equations. they are moving.

Movement is everything, even for you. I was talking to an adult woman the other day and she is at a tipping point. where she knows she has to do something.

And I loved it because she also put it in the context that she was wanting to put her body in a new state, her brain in new a state. She wanted to be able to stop taking medications or drastically reduce them because, she wanted conceive a baby.

That's my ideal kind of case. let me walk that journey with you, where if you actually plan to have a baby, like we plan a trip, we planned to run a marathon, the outcome will have such incredibly high positive components if we plant.

And she was recalling for herself that when I explain this idea of cognitive flexibility, if our body is flexible, it's one of the neurological things that are empowering our brain to really understand what it means to be flexible.

And she even said, wow, yeah, I can remember. I was doing yoga and it just seemed like I could handle things so much better. So if we look at the counter example, think of, it doesn't always have to be an elderly person, but this might trigger at least a visual imagery inside of your mind.

When I look at some elderly people and I ask them to turn their head to the right, the whole body turns to right. They've lost the differentiation between the range of motion in their neck versus their body, and they move like a log.

And when you look at their disposition, their disposition is not always in the, I'm ready to click my heels kind of attitude. It's more, you know, uh, um, just okay.

I don't feel great. Um, not charging in life, but if I. Have it in physical form, it's very difficult to have it. In the brain form.

Marshmallow Test and Delayed Gratification

in the way your mind actually works. And we have to always go back and look at that progression and that's what I'm doing with you today, even in concept of impulsivity.

So there's a lot of little tests out there that they look in order to determine can a person put the brakes on and do something that maybe it doesn't appear right away that that's the way that you should go.

Let me explain. It's called the go-no-go test. And in that test, let's say you have two little stimuluses. Maybe one's a circle, one is a triangle. The directions are you touch the circle and you ignore the triangle and so you watch the performance Can the individual, they get the concept that they're supposed to touch something, can they put the brakes on and only touch the stimulus that were told to, like the circle?

There's another one called a Stroop Test. I love it because we actually have all these kinds of little tests right here at Connect My Brain. But on our stress response test, there is a Stroop test.

And the Stroope test is, it's gonna be words of color, blue, orange, red, yellow, green. but the word is written in a different color. So when the screen presents itself, The child has to say, or sometimes they'll even use the pediatric one on an adult, but the child to has say what color the word is written in and don't tell me what the words says.

So it's thrown up on the screen. immediately we see the word. And so typically they're going to say the words, they have to put the brakes on and tell you the color the Word is written in.

Of course, then the screen starts going faster and faster, and it's all meant to be able to assess the ability of the child to put the brakes on. So of course, I primarily work in pediatrics.

One of things that I wanted to do is, what is it that we do when we look at a child and try to determine if they can put the brakes on. So if you are listening to the podcast, I want to describe to you what's called the Marshmallow Test.

And this has been around since like about 1970. I think it's pretty funny. But what they do now is they use tablets and they look at toddlers. This test is typically for children between the ages of two and four.

And what I will do is I'm gonna actually put a YouTube video link in the show notes so you can go back and you actually look a video of this. Don't wanna do that, especially while you might be driving a car and listening to the podcast.

But this was a way, rather than looking at screens all the time, I just think, We are introducing these things way too early into children's lives. And I am gonna make a point in this podcast.

We the parents, you are the parent and you have the ability and the right to introduce to your child things that you feel are okay. you also can take in information and realize that when we do things very, very early, it can create even more problems.

And I'm gonna highlight that in just a minute, but let's focus first. So if you're just listening, what's happening is there's this little kid and he's sitting at a table and I chose an animated picture.

I like cartoon-like pictures for kids. and over on the one side is a graduation cap and the other is like a hat turned upside down like, uh, a gentleman's hat.

And I believe what they're trying to reflect is the ability to learn, graduate and go in a positive direction? Or will I always be looking for somebody else to kind of fill my pot in life?

I mean, those are some big concepts when you really think about it and you're talking about a population of two to four. So there is a marshmallow, literally just a Marshmallow in front of the child.

And in different settings, what the person that's doing the test is going to say is a couple of things. One, they might say, okay, sit here, I'm gonna leave this marshmallow and we don't want you to eat it until mom and dad come into the room.

Other ones will say, okay, here's a marshmallow. I'm going to give you another marshmallow when I come back if you have not eaten this marshmallow, so you can either eat it and not get two, or you could wait and have two marshmallows.

What the test is literally trying to see is can the little person ages two to four Can they hold back, put the brakes on, instant gratification? If we can do that, if we're teaching that concept, the idea of being willing to wait, to put the brakes on.

You're starting the journey of strengthening, because it's there, the inhibitory pathway. And we need the Inhibitory Pathway. It isn't just about the so-called behaviors, but you have chemistry in your brain.

that it has to know do I put the brakes on dopamine or do i give dopamine? Do I Put the Brakes on Serotonin or Do i Release Seratonin? So inhibitory and reward is not just about the action, but it literally is how our physiology works.

So if we see impulsivity on the outside, you've also got just chaos of chemical physiological reactions going on inside. And that is one of the big connect the dot moments that I want to bring into this conversation.

Don't look at this stuff as just the outward behavior, but also understand your mechanical being, your chemical being your brain being are all designed to work together.

And so what is going on on the outside is absolutely going, on, the inside. So I think you could actually play with this one too and check it out and see what your child does.

Okay, so, what happens before ages two to four.

Primitive Reflexes, Withdrawal, and Brainstem Development

What is that all about? Okay, well, I'm sure you remember me talking to you about the withdrawal reflexes, okay? So when we typically just look up the withdraw reflex, the classic picture is something typically associated with pain moving something off.

Okay, so I'm showing another picture now, and we've talked about this. And again, we'll have all of the links so you can go back and actually look at it with the show notes, okay?

But the withdrawal reflexes, when they are mature, when they are adult-like. If you were to touch a hot pot while you are cooking, you do not sit there and go, wow, my flesh is burning.

You literally pull your arm off without even thinking about it. Now, did you practice this technique with anybody? Did somebody introduce this to you and say, okay, let's practice.

put your hand on the pot and then I want you to pull it away as quick as you possibly can. No. If you go back to toddler time when a child might put their finger in a light socket, they get a little zap and they pull away.

Okay, but that wasn't the beginning of that pathway. It's reinforced during that time, but that's not the whole story. And so this is what I mean by we've got to understand how these pathways are created.

If the child is still demonstrating retained reflexes, this going to continue. and their reactions are going to be

controlled by their brainstem versus their higher brain executive function where reasoning would come in and they would be able to have what's called error detection.

Can I realize what I'm about to do is something I shouldn't do and I should put the brakes on. And I see this all the time with kids that absolutely have already been identified as impulsive, and I can see it.

I mean, I'm not saying I cannot see, but I am going further back. Why? This isn't something like a light switch that just turned on one day. This is a process that over time, they would have had a certain kind of stimulation coming into their environment.

And you guys, the stories are incredible. There's no one reason why. there are things that involve children that have been adopted. There have been things where children have had a traumatic birth or a dramatic injury.

I found the other day, I'm doing some research with Dr. Zielinski's group. And so I am in charge of bringing forth additional information into the world of primitive reflexes.

and I've found an incredible journal from a website called MAC Concussion. and it was on four NFL players that they literally captured on video following a severe trauma to their head that, they actually went back into what's called a fencer posture, which is the asymmetrical tonic neck reflex.

You turn your head and your arm and leg on that side, go out. So these things re-emerge. If you had a heart attack or stroke, you would go back into your brain stem, which is the rudimentary place of all learning, in order to recover.

So what happens to the child who has their development interrupted for whatever reason? It could be a mechanical thing, it could a chemical thing. It can be an emotional thing it can a brain development thing It Could be so many examples.

The stories are vast but what happened What happens to them when they are not able to complete the process of development? And that's what I'm trying to bring to you is this awareness.

So where this goes all the way back, is to that withdrawal reflex, which literally starts in the womb right after conception and they go through all that beautiful cellular division and then we start to create the form of life.

Well, life is there from the very beginning, but the typical picture of life, not just the cellular part, you can't get to the baby without the cells first.

So it's life from beginning. I did some more research and I'm going to share another screen with you. And again, this will also be in the show notes. So what's believed is that the withdrawal reflexes are only connected to nociception.

Nociception is the pain meter. There has to be enough firing of noceceptor receptors in order to register pain. For the podcast audience, what I have up on the screen right now is a research article, and it is titled Postnatal Temporal Spatial and Modality Tuning of nociceptive cutaneous flexion reflexes in human infants.

Okay, so postnatal, after birth. So that's the time factor or the word temporal. Spatial is their response to their environment. The noceceptor we discussed is the pain response.

Cutaneous is skin. flexion responses when we do that typical flexing recoil off of whatever is painful. Rather it is a burn or I'm stepping on something in the human infant.

So I have, I wish I could highlight it but what I've done is I just put the blue line over the part that I want to share with you. We further show that infant flexion withdrawal reflexes are not always nociceptive specific.

In 29% of preterm infants, tactile stimulation evoke EMG activity that is indistinguished from noxious stimulation. So in a percent of the babies that they evaluated, they saw the withdrawal response outside of only a painful stimulus.

So that means, and I mean, when you think about when this reflex begins, it begins in the womb. Okay, what's in womb? We are talking baby amniotic fluid, okay, inside of a womb, a well-protected womb and so what the baby feels is light touch.

What the baby feels is vibration, rippling of that amniotic fluid, and that baby is literally pulling away from whatever that is. And none of the stimulation in the womb is painful.

So we have to appreciate that there's other reasons for this reflex, just like all the other reflexes. It's also very connected to the maturation, coordination, circuitry building of all the other circuits in the brain and the body.

And the one that I would like to highlight is the eyes. We've talked with Dr. Zelinsky and we've got that podcast up for you. That central vision is only 6%. The peripheral vision, is 94%. What is it tied to?

The very first thing that it's tied, to is scanning your environment. Now, don't do this next thing in the car while you're driving, but when you are either at a traffic light, stopped, not going through the yellow, or even better yet, completely out of the cars, let yourself look straight ahead.

I'm looking straight-ahead right now. I can see my microphone, I see credenza, my window, the wall under the window. I even see the outer edge of the carpet.

Our eyes are constantly scanning. the environment for survival.

Parent Coaching, Consistency, and 2025 Resources

And my gosh, this is probably the biggest connect the dot to these little kids as to why they have now created a pattern inside of themselves, just kind of jumping to that very next thing without listening.

I did an assessment the other day and one of the tests that I do is the test where I'm looking at that ATNR, asymmetrical tonic neck reflex. And that, AT and R is, the ability to, well, if you still had it, it hadn't integrated, your pattern would be a homolateral pattern, same arm, And so I give this instruction about following these steps, wait for me and I'm going to tell you to switch.

And the little person, he was trying very hard, but then he just started going and i had to put the brakes on him. Wait, don't switch until I tell. So retraining is possible.

Not just possible, it's inevitable. If you go back far enough to where these pathways begin, change is inevitable and that's what we do here at CMB. We connect the dots, we look at your child, we look at how their development happened.

Where did that domino go out of place? And we put the plan together that if you give the brain what it needs, the dominos are going to flow. That is neuroplasticity.

Now, going into this new year, one of the things that I have really reflected on, how do I support my parents? So over the next few weeks, I'm going to be really targeting my podcast towards the parent.

Because one of the things that I've noticed even with the group that we have here, many of parents, they start off with a lot of good enthusiasm and intention, but life does happen.

And we're just coming off of holiday season and so many things Oh boy, don't get mad at me. But they become excuses. Well, we had all this going on and therefore we couldn't do it.

And sometimes we put interruptions into what it is that we're trying to accomplish with our child. Even more important, We teach our children that this is how we do things.

We may start with something but we're not going to complete it. And then we are just going start all over. This is the

point of looking at impulsivity looking at the marshmallow test ages two to four and then going all the way back to the womb.

What have you been teaching your child? And please don't think that I didn't have to look at myself. I did. i'm just further down the road than you. I'm 64 years old.i have adult children.

There's many things I wish I had done differently, but I can bring some wisdom to the equation now. Don't do it like I did it. Let me show you another way.

The most important thing is to teach your child and then to be consistent, to being committed. I have another mom that was wanting to do something for herself and I get finances.

Please don't think that I do because I But right in front of the child, she says, my child is first. And when I get my children taken care of, then I'll work on myself.

What did the children learn in that moment? As I got older, I will have to surrender being focused on me. We have realize how our words and our actions impact our children.

Now, if you're not part of the Connect My Brain community, we really encourage you become a member. We have a parent membership. It's very inexpensive.

I think it's $14.99. And we're putting all kinds of information at your fingertips. we also bring you in to a private Facebook group called Mom's Corner.

And this is where I'm posting all the time. And again, with my goals for 2025, I am putting a lot of information into Mom's Corner because I need my parents to get the reflexes integrated.

The success of this program depends on the integration of primitive reflex. You get changes. If I go and work out my bicep, I'm going to change, but if I don't change the equation and make it permanent by all the other pieces that are necessary to bring balance to the body, it will go away just like a gamma burst, just a good idea.

So I'm going to be helping you over the next few weeks. and I want you to check out the website and watch for we're even going to be really launching.

We had it in our website before we started making all kinds of changes, but on the updated platform we are putting an emphasis on what we call the Connect Journal.

This is a journal that is designed to walk people through a process of being able to gain control of their mind. Now all of our tools definitely work better when you are combining them with a program in office or remote.

That is a big part of what I am truly working on because my community is the world and I want to bring tools to the hands of each of you because I want you to have a gamma burst all the time.

Thanks for tuning in and we will see you next time check out the website connectmybrain.com if you have question send me a message and I'll be happy to connect with you.

Be blessed.