



The Limbic System Explained

Supporting you with ways to help you and your child regulate



A resource to support the webinar delivered
by Nicola Reekie &
Nanny Aut (Inside Aut).

Jan 2024

The PDA Space Portal
(www.thepdaspace.com)

Created by Helen Edgar



What is The Limbic System?

The limbic system is a complex set of brain structures involved in emotion, motivation, memory, and sensory regulation which can impact the way a person behaves and responds and can be affected by trauma.

Nanny Aut ([Inside-Aut](#)) explains to [The PDA Space](#) how autistic brains, and especially PDA brains are primed to actively protect us.

Nanny Aut has a FREE course to help provide an understanding into the autistic brain. This short course is available on their website and there is also a link to a more indepth course (www.inside-aut.com).

This booklet is a brief over view sharing key moments of what was discussed in this fabulous webinar which is available to watch in [The PDA Space Portal](#).

You will meet **Panic Monkey, Dino Brain and the Air-Traffic Controller** and look at how these factors interact with:

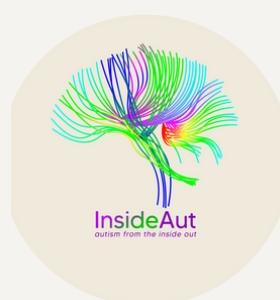
Senses

Processing

Energy

Environment

Damage



What does our brain really do?

Different parts of the brain do different jobs. When we want to understand behaviour then the pre-frontal cortex and the limbic system are what we need to focus on.



Panic Monkey

Is one of the survival mechanisms in the limbic system - not in charge - but can take over if there is a threat

Air Traffic Controller

In charge of the central cortex



Dino Brain

In charge of the amygdala



Air Traffic Controller

Different parts of the brain do different jobs. The central cortex helps to manage decision making, motor planning and organising the other processing systems.

Air Traffic Controller

In charge of the central cortex



Responsible for logical decision making and deciding what is and is not important for us to act upon.

Neurodivergent people (eg. Autistic / PDA / ADHD) have spiky profiles which means some things may be much easier to manage than others. This can also affect the sensory system and make it harder to decide how to move and regulate in the best way. It takes a lot of energy managing everything!

The air traffic controller can get overloaded and effectively stop paying attention to what's going on outside because it may feel too much. This means it's no longer in a position to watch out for danger and take action.



Panic Monkey

Different parts of the brain do different jobs. The limbic system keeps a look out for all different types of danger. It is like having a health and safety officer inside our brains.

Panic Monkey

Is one of the survival mechanisms in the limbic system - not in charge - but can take over if there is a threat

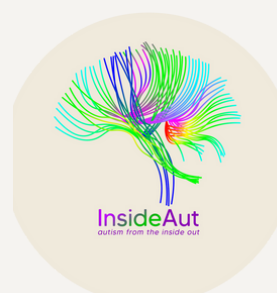


If Panic Monkey feels any signs of threat (emotional, physical, social, sensory or past memories) then it will alert the Air Traffic Controller.

The problem is that sometimes the Air Traffic Controller is overloaded and can't always respond quickly enough or logically. Panic Monkey then tries to take over controlling the brain based on emotional rather than logical thoughts.

High alert mode is then activated which can mean a person experiences anxiety and the response may be more sensory and emotional.

As part of the process of Panic Monkey trying to help he will call up Dino Brain.....



Dino Brain

Different parts of the brain do different jobs. The amygdala is the most primal part of the limbic system and acts in defence to protect you in what ever way it feels is best.

Dino Brain

In charge of the amygdala



If Panic Monkey says there is a threat then Dino Brain will act in any way it can to protect you and try and keep you safe.

Dino Brain will respond by any of these modes depending on the person and situation:

Fight
Flight
Flood
Fawn
Flop
Freeze

We can help young people manage their Panic Monkey and Dino Brain by creating a sense of safety, connecting with them and really understanding their needs.



Creating Safety

To create a sense of safety Nanny Aut suggests there are
5 Key Stressors:

**Sensory
Processing
Energy & Well-Being
Environment
Damage & Trauma**

Lowering demands and spending meaningful time with and alongside your children can help you build your relationship. Connecting and finding out more about how each others limbic system works will help to create a feeling of safety.

Remember it is not just your child's feeling of safety that is important it is also your own as parent/carer.

Children will learn from us and also pick up on our subconscious responses to our own trauma. If we as adults feel dysregulated our children may mirror this response. It can be helpful to model what you do to help yourself when you feel overwhelmed so your children can learn healthy ways to respond in a low demand way.

It can be really hard to break a cycle of past trauma responses and not repeat patterns of behaviour with your own children. The more aware you and your family become of when Panic Monkey or Dino Brain may be in the driving seat the easier it will be to spot the signs and respond in different ways.



Regulation

Different parts of the brain do different jobs and will also respond to different ways of regulating.



Dino Brain

You will need to support your child to settle Dino Brain first.

A change of scene and activities such as tapping, rocking, walking, swinging and even listening to music with a strong beat may help!

Experiment with what works best for you and your child.

Panic Monkey

Everyone's sensory system responds differently. You will need to explore what works best for you and your family. Activities could include:

- deep pressure massage
- being wrapped in a heavy blanket
- holding ice cubes or blowing bubbles
- walking or stretching activities

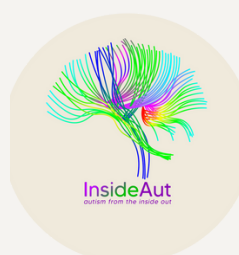


Air Traffic Controller

This is the last part of the brain to be settled. If you miss out on settling Dino Brain and Panic Monkey First you will end up going round in circles.

Grounding type of activities may help eg. 5 thing you see, 4 things you can touch, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, 1 you taste

Engaging in special interests can help create a comforting flow state



Signposting

1

www.thepdaspace.com

Family support workshops, webinars, coaching and online peer support groups. (Founder: Nicola Reekie)

2

www.inside-aut.com

Nanny Aut's website, courses and information about autism

3

www.autismunderstood.co.uk

Website designed by autistic young people, for autistic people (Founder: Spectrum Gaming)

4

www.autisticrealms.com

Autism/ education/ mental health articles and resources (Founder Helen Edgar)

Please seek professional advice if needed.



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