



The Tiger in Your Classroom

What do you look at when you have a child who is not performing in class?

Is there something more the child should be doing? Is there something more we as teachers or parents could do? Are we addressing this child's individual learning style? Is the classroom's environment conducive to their needs?

There are many aspects that can be looked at, yet we could be missing a crucial part of the picture. If this child is stuck in 'survival mode', none of these external factors are going to have the impact we would like.

Today's children are often in a permanent state of survival mode or 'flight-or-fight' response, due to a number of different stresses being placed upon them both at home and at school.

Let's have a look at what happens to our body when we are stuck in flight-or-fight mode. Remember that this is one of your body's basic reflexes that has been with us since early man. It has been called a 'response to the Sabre-toothed Tiger'. It is when all parts of your body go into survival mode so that you can best respond to danger.

The blood goes to all of your large core muscles so you can either fight or run. Have you ever tried to unlock a door in a hurry when the phone is ringing inside with what you know is a very important call? Did your fingers feel a bit like fat sausages? We lose our ability for fine motor control - not important if we are about to be eaten, but not so good if we are in control of a key or pen or pencil.

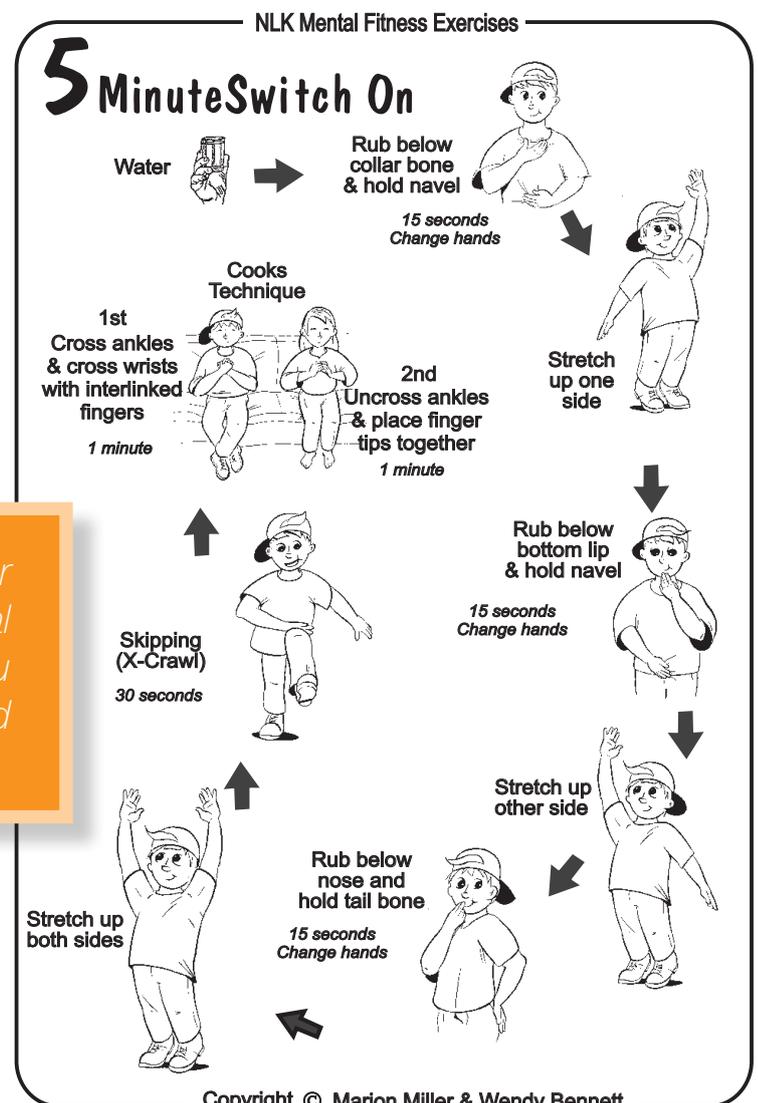
The digestion of our last meal is also not important if we are about to be eaten, so the blood leaves our digestive system. This can translate into indigestion or stomach ulcers in adults but with our child it is probably 'just' a pain in the

stomach. This could well be a familiar story to parents getting their children off to school in the morning.

Another very handy survival mode is that our peripheral vision kicks in, so we can see where the 'tiger' is going to come at us from. Can you remember looking up a number in the phone book when there is a bit of a

panic on? Yet we ask these children to read, a task needing close focus.

Where do we tend to place these children in our classroom? Possibly near the front so we can keep an eye on them? This leaves these children needing to check out every movement or noise behind them in case it is the 'tiger' their body is endeavouring to save



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them from. If they were in a back corner they may feel safer.

How often have you asked this child - when they have done something irresponsible - “Why did you do it”?

The answer invariably and quite honestly is “I don’t know”. When in survival mode, our actions or responses are driven from the more primitive areas of our brain, where there is no analysis of whether it is right or wrong. To have a rational response we need to access the neo-cortex area of the brain - not possible when in flight-or-fight mode.

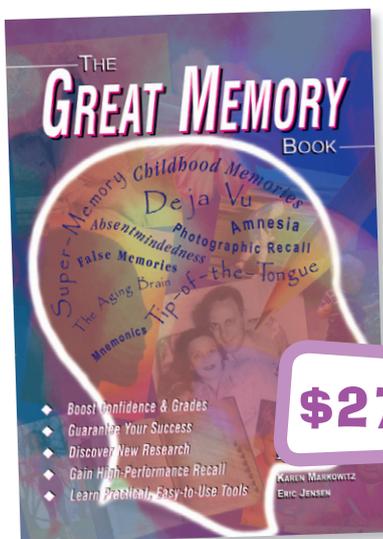
As a classroom teacher, we have little control over the stresses that our pupils bring with them from home. What we can do though, is to start the day with some Neuro-Linguistic Kinesiology (NLK) Mental Fitness Exercises.

NLK is a truly holistic approach to personal change and development. It is a way of improving performance and well-being in all areas of life. The Mental Fitness Exercise programme is a series of exercises that can be used at home, at work or in the classroom to enhance and support all areas of living and learning.

Some of the exercises work by activating the body’s electrical energy, others by releasing stress, or stimulating the two brain hemispheres by using both sides of the body.

The 5-Minute Switch On routine (see illustration, pg. 14) that is part of this programme helps to relieve stress and activate the neo-cortex area or rational part of the brain, thereby getting children in a state where they are ready to learn, rather than being ready to run from their Sabre-toothed Tiger.

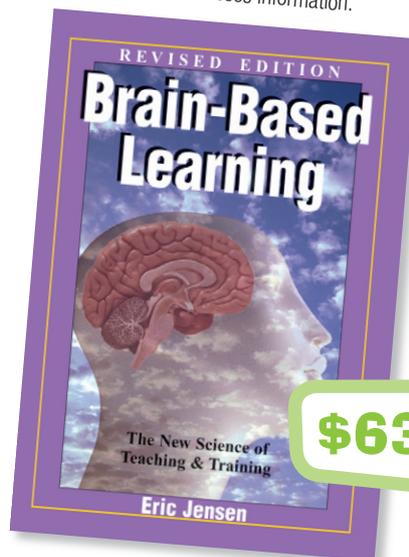
Eric Jensen Resources



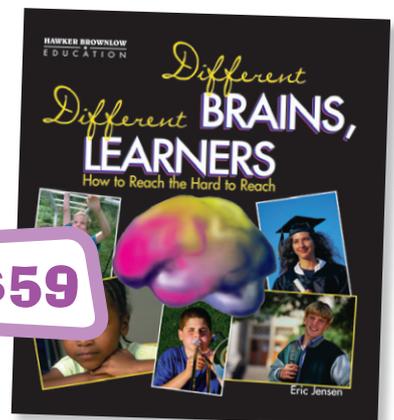
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This practical, comprehensive guide connects the latest brain research with strategies to help you identify and cope with the most common learning disorders occurring in today’s classrooms.

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