



What do we mean by ‘The Chimp Brain’

The Chimp Model by Professor Steve Peters, greatly simplifies the neuroscience and explains how the mind can be seen as having three teams, each with their own agenda and way of working. The Human (you) is mainly based in the frontal lobe, associated with logical thinking and working with facts and truth. The Chimp, mainly based in the limbic system, is an independent emotional thinking machine that works with feelings and impressions. There is also the Computer, spread throughout the brain, which is a storage area for programmed thoughts and behaviours.

The Chimp Brain is responsible for your feelings and they are powerful motivators to ensure that you do (or don't do) certain things that are more likely to lead to your survival and reproductive success. The Chimp brain is there to protect you. To do this it has the following traits:

- **It is very strong!** Emotions and feelings are difficult (but not impossible) to ignore or override – and this is deliberate! They want you to eat, sleep if you're tired, drink if you're thirsty, do things which are fun, avoid things which are boring, run when things are scary, fight when you're angry and not get out of your comfy bed in the morning! Recognise any of those feelings?
- **It wants people to like you – especially those close to you.** Apes are social animals – no ape, humans included, would do very well out in the wild on its own! We need others for help and support, to look out for threats and opportunities and to be on our side. Your chimp brain wants people to like you, especially those you feel close to.
- **It is paranoid.** Your chimp brain is very paranoid. It assumes danger is everywhere and that anyone could be a threat. This is just as well - it's better to be safe than sorry! This means that we can often be cynical, especially about people we don't know.
- **It doesn't like being told what to do.** Why should you do what you're told? What if you don't want to? This is the voice of your chimp brain speaking out.
- **It can be extremely defensive and aggressive.** If you come under verbal or physical attack, your chimp takes emergency control. Except this might be your response if someone pushes in front of you in the queue – it might not actually be a matter of life or death at all. But that is irrelevant; your chimp is there to protect you and deal with perceived threats... and it will not let up. It is, of course, possible to inhibit or suppress this response. However sometimes you will notice that people don't do this.

What does The Chimp Brain do?

The Chimp is intimately associated with your mood and it uses a whole range of chemicals and nerves to exert a sustained effect on your body. When you feel threatened, the Chimp activates the famous 'fight or flight' response, provoking the release of adrenaline and the preparation for action. This affects the whole body; heart rate, blood pressure, state of alertness and digestion are all affected. The formation of new memories is not particularly effective in this state as your brain diverts blood flow to pay close attention to current sensory input that could indicate

something life-threatening. In this 'state' you cannot access your logical rational thinking part of your brain.

However, there is another state for your Chimp to be in. You could be relaxed and comfortable and feel at ease, releasing the hormone oxytocin. This is likely to be the case if you are in familiar surroundings with little to no pressure. Moderate relaxation is ideal for learning.

How can I recognise my Chimp?

You can recognise your chimp by noticing when you are thinking in any of the following ways

- **Overly emotional or irrational thought**, including jumping to conclusions, or black and white thinking: 'He was a bit off with me; he must hate me.'
- **Inner turmoil**, typified by paranoid and 'worse case scenario' thinking.
- And **unwanted feeling**: 'I don't want to feel this way'.

The key question to ask if you think your Chimp might be playing havoc is: "Do I want these thoughts, feeling or behaviours?"

If the answer is 'No'; it's your Chimp.

The first stage of managing your chimp is becoming aware of what they are up to.

