



FRONTAL STRIATAL LOOPS

WHAT IS A FRONTAL STRIATAL LOOP?

A Frontal Striatal Loop (also known as Fronto–Striatal Loop) is a neural pathway in a part of the brain called the Basal Ganglia, which is associated with reward and movement.

In Autism, these loops can become 'overconnected'. That is, the pathway gets re-wired on top of itself over and over again. This results in a particular movement, speech pattern, thought or emotion getting stuck on repeat over and over again (or popping up every time a specific situation arises).

Sometimes clinicians call these 'sticky thoughts' or 'stuck patterns'. They can range from fairly harmless to extreme.

Some examples of Frontal Striatal Loops I've seen in my work include:

- Asking, "Is this my water" before being able to drink something.
- Making sure every opened door is closed before leaving a building.
- Asking the same question repeatedly, regardless of what answers are given.
- Rubbing sand in a sandpit against hand over and over again.

HOW BEST TO SUPPORT SOMEONE WITH A FRONTAL STRIATAL LOOP?

Frontal Striatal Loops can be tricky things to manage. Ideally, interrupting the behaviour associated with a loop is the best way to stop them from being re-wired and reinforced. This can be a distressing process and might not always be possible (for example with speech loops). But do what you can.

Additionally, try the following:

Short term supports:

- Use language like, "try and change the thought", "change the picture" or "put something else in your mind".
- Avoid saying what you want them to stop. Naming the item or action can bring it into focus for the person in an unhelpful way.
- Ignore the behaviour and support their arousal. Often optimising arousal enables a person to override the loop more successfully.

Long term supports:

- Change the way you do things with the person you support as often as possible. Even try things like driving different routes to your appointments. Initially this may be challenging for your loved one, but greater variety equals a brain that is more connected between regions – not just within them.