

# Effective, Short-Term Therapy: Utilizing Finger Labyrinths To Promote Brain Synchrony

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## Abstract

*For many centuries, universal labyrinths have promoted a greater sense of group cohesion, self-awareness and spiritual growth among its users. Today labyrinths are used at hospitals, schools, churches, prisons and private practices. It is believed that they serve a holistic function, namely to bring more balance to our lives. In the past few years, thanks in part to the development of the IntuiPath (a two-person finger labyrinth design), finger labyrinths are finding their way into therapeutic settings. Their influx into these settings is largely due to their effectiveness in facilitating relaxation and Brain Synchrony, which can result in a more rapid establishment of trust, greater creativity and learning capability. This can foster enhanced interpersonal and intra-personal communication, leading to swifter and more complete issue resolution.*

## Key Words

*Finger labyrinth, intuition, trust, relaxation, therapeutic tool*



**A** labyrinth is a path for assisting mental focus, group cohesion, and spiritual connection that has been used by many cultures and religions at different times throughout history. Labyrinths are considered by many to serve a holistic function, namely to further those who are on the path to a more balanced psychological, emotional, spiritual and physical well being (Torrez, 1994). Labyrinths have been, and continue to be used at hospitals, schools/universities, prisons, churches and parks.

Unlike a maze, which has many dead ends and wrong choices designed to trick the mind, a labyrinth is a design with a single, winding, unobstructed path from the outside of itself to the center. The labyrinth user makes no choices in direction. Therefore, the labyrinth path (because there are no choices in direction to be made) naturally fosters mental relaxation and introspection, and is frequently viewed by its users as a metaphor for our spiritual life journey. In other words, like life, labyrinths contain many twists and turns but no dead ends. There are always other options (Artress, 1995).

The process of organizing sensory information in the brain in order to make adaptive responses to life situations, is known as Sensory Integration. An adaptive response is defined as an "appropriate action in which the individual responds successfully to some environmental demand; it implies dealing with environmental stressors in creative and useful ways" (Ayres, 1979). This author believes that the above quote sums up the challenges and goals of

effective psychotherapy: to assist our clients to think and act in more adaptive ways to their personal obstacles. This author suggests that one way to shorten the time for clients to gain the confidence to delve into the deeper realms of their issues and bring them to resolution, is to promote relaxed brain wave activity in both the client and therapist. In this author's experience, a two-person, finger labyrinth can facilitate this brain wave shift to more relaxed states. Before getting into the therapeutic value of finger labyrinths, it is important to lay some groundwork in brain wave research to support this contention.

From biofeedback studies, we know that mental and physical relaxation occur when the brain is generating a wave of either 9-14 cycles per second (cps) known as Alpha (gentle relaxation), or a 5-8 cps wave known as Theta (a deeper form of relaxation and creative, non-linear thinking). However, unlike Alpha and Theta, Beta brain waves (15-40 cps) represent our normal, busy, linear-thinking state, that which is involved in everyday thought and physical activity.

As brain waves shift from Beta activity down to Alpha and Theta activity, there is a corresponding increase in the balance created between left and right hemispheres of the brain (Fehmi & Fritz, 1980). This balance is referred to as "Brain Synchrony." Brain synchrony, such as that seen in those who meditate regularly, has been shown to result in "deep tranquility, flashes of creative insight, euphoria, intensely focused attention, and enhanced learning abilities (Hutchison, 1994)." Brain synchrony, therefore, creates an opportunity for greater intuitive awareness (Fehmi & Fritz, 1980).

If the findings of Ayres (1979) on Sensory Integration and adaptive responses are applied to this discussion of brain synchrony, it is suggested that as clients become more relaxed in the presence of their therapists, they move towards achieving brain synchrony. In that state they are more likely to receive intuitive flashes that promote self-understanding, greater problem-solving ability and a more creative interaction with their environments. This often results in greater ease in making adaptive responses, reducing the time needed for continued therapeutic intervention.

Taking this a step further, in the experience of this author, when the therapist and the client are both working from a more integrated brain activity perspective, they can respond to one another with less guardedness and use a combination of intuition and logic to address an issue. A tool that promotes enhanced relaxation (therefore increasing the chances for brain synchrony) for both the client and therapist is a two-person, finger labyrinth design.

The two-person finger labyrinth design is a mirror-image labyrinth pattern. Although prior brain wave research has not been done on finger labyrinths per se, it is this author's premise that moving or gliding a finger through a single, continuous, inlaid path (referred to as fingerwalking) quiets the mind, relaxes the body, facilitating a single-minded focus, which in turn acts as a catalyst to the formation of both Alpha and Theta brain wave states. From the discussion on brain wave activity earlier in this paper, achieving these states facilitates brain synchrony. As a result of this enhanced relaxation and synchrony, it has been this author's experience that finger labyrinths seem to enhance both interpersonal and intra-personal forms of communication.

The fingerwalk takes an individual from the outside of the labyrinth design to its center. Getting to the center is not the object or goal of the experience, such as in a game; rather it is the communication that bubbles up from the depths of each person's awareness along the fingerwalk journey to and from the center which is most valuable as a therapeutic catalyst (West, 1999). Because these designs contain no blind alleys or dead ends, which promote active thought and decision making, the fingerwalk journey becomes one of