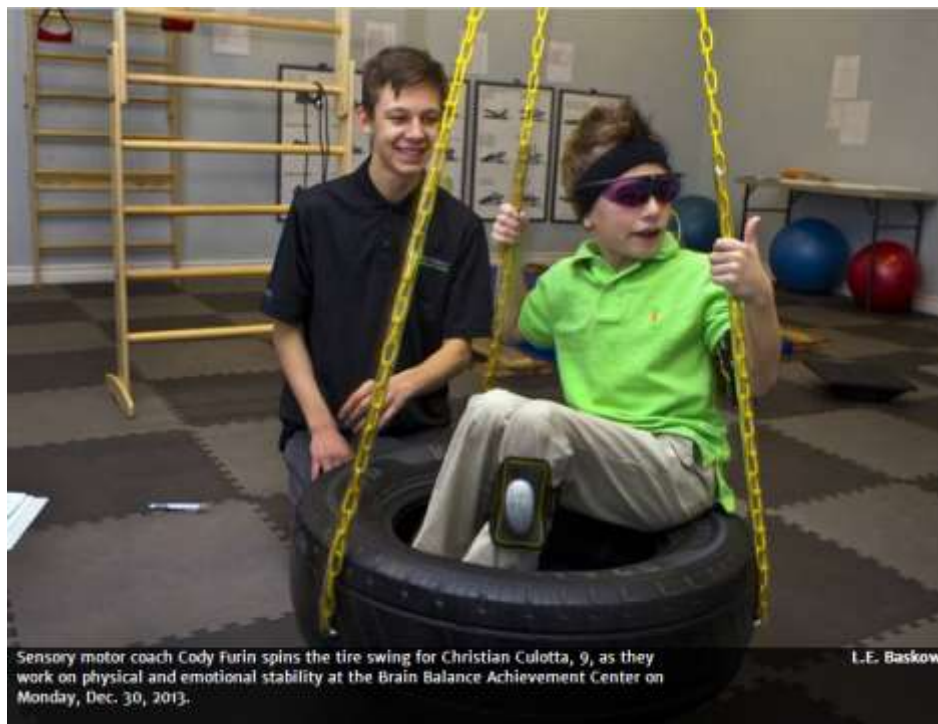


# VEGAS INC THE SUNDAY

MEET: BRAIN BALANCE ACHIEVEMENT CENTERS OF HENDERSON:

## Learning center insists: 'The brain can be changed'



**Name of business:** Brain Balance Achievement Centers of Henderson

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**Website:** [www.brainbalancenv.com](http://www.brainbalancenv.com)

**Hours of operation:** 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday

**Owned by:** Dr. Susan DeVito

**In business since:** 2011

**Describe your business.** Brain Balance Achievement Centers is a nationwide supplemental learning center that helps children ages 4 to 17 struggling with learning and behavioral disorders — including ADD/ADHD, dyslexia and Asperger's — reach their academic, social and behavioral potential.

## **Brain Balance Achievement Center**

The program uses sensory motor exercises, neuro-academic work and nutritional guidance to address the root cause of many learning and behavioral issues. The focus is brain-based, not drug-based. We subscribe to the theory that the brain can be changed, something once thought impossible. That means your child's problems aren't permanent and the situation isn't hopeless.

### **What sorts of activities do you do with children?**

Our kids come to Brain Balance one hour each day, three days a week, for 12 weeks. They participate in 30 minutes of sensory motor activities and 30 minutes of cognitive activities to stimulate the weak hemisphere of the brain. We use a robust customized program with sensory motor and academic components to stimulate different areas of your child's brain where there's a lack of proper connections.

The best way to understand the process is to think of an orchestra. It has many sections whose volumes must be raised simultaneously so that the end result is harmonious and all the various instruments can be heard. Once the functions are repeatable, we raise the bar, increasing the intensity, frequency and type of exercises for optimal function.

We practice activities that enhance posture, auditory and visual stimulation, strength, timing and rhythm. Vestibular and mirroring exercises help with coordination and balance. Academic exercises include word reading, reading comprehension, pseudo-decoding, math reasoning, numerical operations, listening comprehension, oral expression, spelling and written expression. Additionally, we believe that proper diet and nutrition are critical elements to the successful treatment of neurobehavioral disorders. We design an easy-to-follow nutritional program including a food elimination diet, fatty acid supplements, neurotransmitter balancing and recommendations for vitamins, minerals and supplements.

### **Why do you think learning disorders are on the rise?**

Two reasons: better recognition and knowledge about learning and behavioral disorders and environmental factors.

Better recognition makes up about 25 percent. The rest are new cases due to multiple environmental factors that can cause developmental delays during the early years of life. ADHD is the single most common childhood disorder, it is the No. 1 health-related problem children face and is the No. 1 reason children receive medication (75 percent of medication from pediatricians is for ADHD). Perhaps most alarming is that researchers can't explain why issues such as ADHD develop. There is not necessarily a genetic issue. Instead, it seems as though these children have normal genes that don't get "turned on." Segments of these genes should be switched into action as development occurs, yet, in children with certain learning disorders, the segments never seem to get kicked into gear.

Also, our environment has changed dramatically in the last 20 years. Consider the access and use of technology, for example. Increased screen time plays a significant role in causing developmental delays in kids before the age of 3 and can have negative affects beyond that. Our muscles develop because we use them. Our brains work the same way. If we don't use our brain to its full capability and build synapses and connections, it's the mental equivalent of not exercising and allowing our body to get unhealthy and weak. That can have disastrous effects for our kids, especially in crucial development stages.

### **What should parents look for if they think their child has a learning disorder?**

Parents should compare their child's behaviors with his or her peers'. They should also consider whether the child has met all developmental milestones. Did they do the following early or late, not at all or awkwardly: crawl, walk, talk, engage in parallel play? Do they have sensory issues, excessive fears and appropriate social interactions?

When a child is in elementary or middle school and still experiencing meltdowns, it's very much a sign that their brain hasn't matured with their age. Learning and behavioral disorders result from the brain age and chronological age not being in sync.

In order to be diagnosed, the condition must cause significant impairment in at least two settings, usually both at home and at school. It is normal for all children to be inattentive, hyperactive and impulsive sometimes, but for children with ADHD, these behaviors are more severe and occur more often.

### **What do you tell parents who are concerned about a child?**

First, take a deep breath. If parents believe their child has a learning disorder or if the child has been diagnosed, the first steps are to assess and identify the situation. This can be done by deciphering which side of the brain is immature. For example, kids with dyslexia have a left-brain delay, yet, because they often struggle with academics, they tend to get lumped in with kids with ADHD, who have a right-side delay. That's why it is so important to be sure your child has the correct diagnosis.

### **What can parents do to help their special-needs children blossom?**

Eliminate and/or decrease screen time. School-age children should have only one hour of screen time per school day and no more than two hours on weekends. Give them chores to do or make them move their bodies by playing outside. The more they can interact and get hands-on with the world they live in, the more they can build connections in the brain and develop mentally and physically.

### **Who are your customers?**

Families who are struggling. Many of the parents struggle as much as their children and have tried tutoring, therapy, medication, rewards and consequences, IEP's and 504 plans through school, to no avail. Many of them are desperate for help.

### **How is your staff trained?**

Everyone has to be trained in-house and through our corporate training program. Dr. Robert Melillo, the clinician and researcher who created this program, still oversees the top-down training for our directors and coaches.

### **What is your business philosophy?**

To change the world one child and family at a time so everyone can be happy, healthy, independent and productive.

Being a business owner, my philosophy is to know every aspect of my business, always strive for excellence and keep good statistics. Numbers don't lie. They don't tell the entire story, but they do provide valuable information that guides decision making. That allows me to separate my feelings and focus on results, which is what parents want. I respect people's time and perspective, listen to what they say, watch what they do and try to build a bridge between the two.

### **What's the most important part of your job?**

Communication, both with families and the community.

I recently spent two hours educating, inspiring and collaborating with more than 30 teachers and administrators at a Clark County elementary school to help them better understand their students' developing brains. As part of enrollment in Brain Balance, our program director visits each child's school to get better insight into his or her challenges. Building relationships and understanding with parents and professionals is a key component to what we do.

### **What is the hardest part about doing business in Las Vegas?**

Not speaking multiple languages. I wish I spoke Spanish, Russian, Mandarin, Hebrew and French just for the beauty of it. If I knew even one more language, I would be able to more fluidly communicate with some of our parents without the assistance of an interpreter.

### **What is the best part about doing business in Las Vegas?**

The diversity and the weather. Vegas is a melting pot. Meeting people from all over the world and forming friendships with people from different cultures is exciting to me.

On a practical note, the ease of our international airport is beneficial. I love being able to travel to the airport in 10 minutes.

### **What obstacles has your business overcome?**

The biggest obstacle has been building a team in a transient area. All businesses seek the most talented, knowledgeable and passionate employees possible. Since we need to train all our team members in-house, it's a costly experience. Because Vegas is so transient, we've spent a lot of time and money training employees, and many move on all too quickly.

### **How can Nevada improve its business climate?**

By changing our attitude that driving from Henderson to Summerlin or North Las Vegas is far. Las Vegas is a very easy place to get around, yet, we function like we live in three different areas.

I'm originally from New York, where it takes 30 minutes to travel 5 miles and bumper-to-bumper traffic is the norm. It's easy to get around in Vegas. People need to change their attitude about what is and isn't "convenient."

### **What did you learn from the recession?**

To manage financial margins better by determining a successful growth margin and sticking to it, because nothing goes up forever.

I opened Brain Balance during tough economic times when borrowing money wasn't an option. My husband and I invested our own money in it and downsized our life. It has paid off for us and more than 150 families so far. Doing business debt free has been both liberating and empowering.



Dr. Susan DeVito coaches Chase Black, 7, and Cash Johnson, 7, on the balance beam within the Brain Balance Achievement Center on Monday, Dec. 30, 2013.



Dr. Susan DeVito steadies Chase Black, 7, as he hangs on the monkey bars for strength conditioning within the Brain Balance Achievement Center on Monday, Dec. 30, 2013.



Dr. Susan DeVito spins Cash Johnson, 7, on the tire swing for physical and emotional stability within the Brain Balance Achievement Center on Monday, Dec. 30, 2013.