

WHY DO TEENAGERS ACT THAT WAY?

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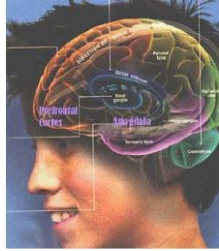
What first comes to mind when we
think of adolescents?

Outline

- Brain and cognitive development
- Peer groups
- Risk taking and factors influencing risk
 - Substance use and abuse
 - Sexual risk
- Promoting positive development

Brain Development

- Scientists note that the adolescent's brain is different from the child's brain and that in adolescence the brain is still growing
- We now know that maturation is not complete until about 25!



Brain Development

Prefrontal Cortex and Amygdala

Prefrontal cortex
This "judgment" region reins in intense emotions but doesn't finish developing until at least age 20.

Amygdala
The seat of emotions such as anger; this area develops quickly before other regions.

Teen Brain: Prefrontal Cortex

- Area of the brain associated with:
 - Thinking
 - Decision making
 - Planning
 - Organizing
 - Coordinating

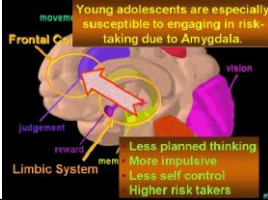


"I'm afraid the brain scan results confirm your worst fears, Mrs. Taylor."

- Hasn't fully matured to help teens make the best decisions

Teen Brain: Amygdala

- Area of the brain associated with emotions
- Teens rely on it more when processing emotional information; adults rely on the prefrontal cortex
 - May explain why adolescents react more impulsively than adults

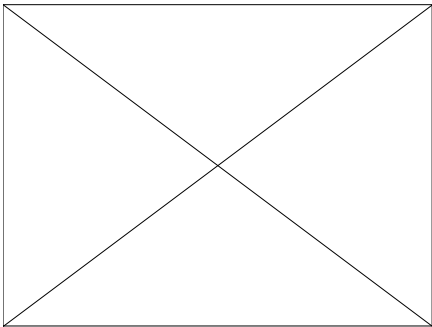


Why do teens act that way?

"The parts of the brain responsible for things like sensation seeking are getting turned on in big ways around the time of puberty. But the parts for exercising judgment are still maturing throughout the course of adolescence. So you've got this time gap between when things impel kids toward taking risks early in adolescence and when things that allow people to think before they act come online. It's like turning on the engine of a car without a skilled driver at the wheel."

--Laurence Steinberg, Professor of Psychology

Video



Why do teens act that way?

- Research suggests that compared with adults, teens value rewards more than consequences
- Psychologist Laurence Steinberg says think of it as an equation—where consequences are not given the weight they should be. When teens are around friends, that throws off the equation even more

Teens rely more on their feelings and impulse
NOT logic and planning

Peer Influence

- Myth: Peer groups recruit and convert good kids into bad ones

Teens seek out peers who are similar to them, who share the same interests

- According to research, teens who have a strong social circle and are well-liked are more successful.



Need to separate from family



Move toward autonomy and develop identity



Immature brain development



Risk Taking

Most teens are well adjusted but sometimes teens struggle

Risk taking

TEEN-AGE MOUSE



• Teens aged 14-17 are the biggest risk takers

They do evaluate risk and even overestimating risk sometimes

• They take chances because they weight risk and rewards differently than adults—more focus on reward!

Especially social rewards like gaining approval of peers

Teen Substance Use

• Alcohol and nicotine the most commonly used substances
• 2/3 have tried alcohol; 1/2 have smoked

• Misconceptions include that use of all substances is widespread and that it is behind other problems associated with this age group.

• Not all teens who try substances go on to abuse them so it is important to distinguish between use and abuse.

According to research teens who try substances are more socially skilled.

Factors Influencing Substance Abuse

- Psychological
 - Hostile personality characteristics
 - Accepting attitudes toward substances
 - Positive expectations from risky behaviors
- Familial
 - Conflicted family relationships
 - Permissive, uninvolved, or rejecting parents

Factors Influencing Substance Abuse

- Social and contextual
 - Drawn to friends who abuse substances
 - Overestimate how common substance use is
 - Availability of alcohol or drugs
 - Community norms of substance use
 - Substance use as presented in the media

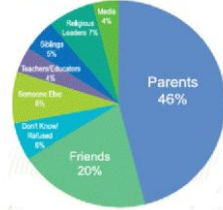
Teen Sexual Activity

- Early sexual activity (i.e., before age 16) is associated with maladjustment
 - Lower academic achievement and experimentation with alcohol and drugs
 - Teens who engage in early sexual activity are less likely to practice safe sex.
- After age 16, sexually active teens are not different than abstinent teens in self-esteem, life satisfaction, psychological disturbance.

Factors Influencing Sexual Activity

- Psychological
- Familial
 - Poor parent child communication and parental monitoring
- Social and Contextual
 - Sexually active peers
 - Disengagement from school and community

In 2010, teens across the country, ages 12-19, were asked: "When it comes to your decisions about sex, who is most influential?"



What can adults do?

Promote positive youth development!

We should focus on helping young people develop strengths rather than preventing them from getting into trouble.

- Competence
- Confidence
- Connection
- Character
- Caring/compassion

Promoting Positive Development: Home

- Encourage and model healthy habits
- Provide supportive environment with clear expectations
 - It is really important to maintain your loving, respect based relationship with your child even through the tough times. Don't panic over a mistake!
- Open communication and provide honest answers
 - Teens want to talk to parents about substances use and sex
- Know friends and what they are doing

No factor seems to influence adolescent adjustment more than the quality of his or her relationships at home

Promoting Positive Development: Schools

- Emphasize intellectual activities and career exploration
- Have committed teachers
- Well integrated into the community
- Encourage student involvement with education and various groups

Promoting Positive Development: Community

- After school activities with supervision
- Provide opportunities:
 - Community service
 - Volunteer activities
 - Mentoring
 - Skill building

QUESTIONS?
