RAISING TEENAGERS

Raising a teenager is like getting pecked to death by a chicken.

Raising a teenager: the reason God made wine.

"MOTHERS OF TEENAGERS KNOW WHY ANIMALS EAT THEIR YOUNG."
ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING
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OVERVIEW

- Developmental Tasks of Adolescence
- Adolescent Brain Development: Synaptic Pruning
- Relating and Influencing Teens: Parenting Styles
- Sleep and Learning
- Factors that Protect and Risk Teen Well-being
- The Mental Health Continuum
- Communicating with Teens
GOALS OF CHILD REARING

- Optimal physical development
- Effective emotional, cognitive & behavioural functioning
- Capacity for meaningful occupational participation
- Satisfying relationships & family life
- Rewarding recreational experiences
- Successful adaptation to and participation in one’s neighbourhood and community
DEFINING “ADOLESCENCE”

- Latin *adolescere*: to grow to maturity
- Period before young adulthood where humans develop sense of belonging, security, stability and place in the world
- Parenting approach in adolescence MATTERS to outcomes
- Teaching approach in adolescence MATTERS to outcomes
DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE OF ADOLESCENCE

- Adjust to sexually maturing bodies and feelings
- Develop *and apply* abstract thinking skills (compare Y7 to Y12)
- Develop *and apply* new perspectives of human relationships
- Develop *and apply* new coping skills such as decision making, problem solving, conflict resolution, impulse control, empathy
- Identify meaningful moral standards, values and belief systems
- Understand and express more complex emotional experiences
- Form friendships that are mutually close and supportive
- Establish key aspects of identity
- Meet the demands of increasingly mature roles and responsibilities
- Renegotiate relationships with adults in parenting roles
Renegotiate relationships with adults in parenting roles

- Teens need to question and debate rules and values. This is how they discover who they are and what they believe. It’s a necessary process of growing up and helps them become independent thinkers. The to-ing and fro-ing is part of the experience the brain needs to wire itself in preparation for adulthood.

Is it child abuse to staple a teenager's lips to the wall?
DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS OF ADOLESCENCE

- Achieving Competence
- Becoming Autonomous
- Clarifying Purposes
- Freeing Interpersonal Relationships
- Developing Integrity
- Establishing Identity
- Gauging Emotions
CRASH COURSE IN NEUROSCIENCE...

- **Imprinting** (phase-sensitive; learning occurring at a particular age or a particular life stage – works like memory foam)
- **Memory pathways** (more engrained when strong emotion attached)
- **Priming** (memory effect in which exposure to one stimulus influences the response to another stimulus)
- **Neuroplasticity** (brain’s ability to re-organise neural pathways throughout the lifespan as a result of experience)
- **Synaptic Pruning** (the process of synapse elimination that occurs between early childhood and the onset of puberty; influenced by environmental factors; represents brain’s ability to change with learning)
- **Generalisation**
- **Developmental stages** (‘critical’ and ‘sensitive’ periods)

→ **Implications for Learning and Creating Habits**

- Psychiatry/Psychology: when Biology meets Society – understand families have developmental stages and phases also
SYNAPTIC PRUNING

- Neurons must have a **PURPOSE TO SURVIVE**.
- Synaptic Pruning *eliminates weaker synaptic contacts*, while stronger connections are kept and strengthened.
- **Experience and exposure** determines which connections will be strengthened and which will be pruned; connections that have been activated most frequently are preserved.
- Without a purpose, **neurons die** through a process called Apoptosis, in which neurons that do not receive or transmit information become damaged and die i.e. ineffective or weak connections are “pruned” in much the same way a gardener would prune a tree or bush, giving the plant the desired shape.
- **Neuroplasticity** that enables the process of Brain Development in a Child; and **Synaptic Pruning** which allows the brain to adapt itself to its environment.
EXPOSURE & EXPERIENCE SHAPES BRAIN ARCHITECTURE

Experience Shapes Brain Architecture by Over-Production Followed by Pruning

Center on the Developing Child | HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Neural Connections

birth, 6 years, 14 years

Time-Lapse Brain

- Gray matter wanes as the brain matures. Here 15 years of brain development are compressed into five images, showing a shift from red (least mature) to blue.
NEUROPLASTICITY & REHABILITATION IN ACQUIRED/TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

- Use it or Lose it: if you don’t drive specific brain functions, functional loss will occur.
- Use it and Improve it: therapy that drives cortical function enhances that particular function.
- Specificity: The therapy you choose determines the resultant plasticity and function.
- Repetition Matters: Plasticity that results in functional change requires repetition.
- Intensity Matters: Induction of plasticity requires the appropriate amount of intensity.

→ IMPLICATIONS for LEARNING
The area of the brain that controls “executive functions” — including weighing long-term consequences and controlling impulses — is among the last to fully mature. Brain development from childhood to adulthood:

5-year-old brain  Preteen brain  Teen brain  20-year-old brain

Dorsal lateral prefrontal cortex ("executive functions")

Red/yellow: Parts of brain less fully mature  Blue/purple: Parts of brain more fully mature

Sources: National Institute of Mental Health; Paul Thompson, Ph.D., UCLA Laboratory of Neuro Imaging

Thomas McKay | The Denver Post

I CAN TOTALLY GET AWAY WITH THIS!
Parenting approach in adolescence MATTERS to outcomes.

Parenting style refers to the normative patterns of behaviour and tactics that parents use to socialise and control their children.

The type of tactics (discipline & care strategies) parents use can have a dramatic effect on:

- the child’s development (social, emotional, psychological, physical, educational, occupational functioning)
- the type of relationship between the parents and child
- the child’s mental health and wellbeing into adulthood

...i.e. influence the child’s “success” as an adult.
Support + Care = Warmth/Nurturing
Expectations + Limits = Control/Discipline
Parental Flexibility Matters

![Diagram showing different parenting styles]

- Boss
- Guide
- Absent
- Friend

Control vs. Warmth:
- Control: Expectations & limits
- Warmth: Support & care
Effects of Parenting Styles on Children

**EFFECTS**
- Authoritative
- Permissive
- Authoritarian
- Uninvolved

**Self Image**
- Authoritative: High self-esteem, Assertive
- Permissive: Low self-esteem, Little confidence
- Authoritarian: Low self-esteem, Little confidence
- Uninvolved: Low self-esteem, Hates self/others

**Emotions**
- Authoritative: Trust feelings, Regulate well, Self control
- Permissive: Irregular feelings, Voice feelings
- Authoritarian: Don't trust feelings, Weak behavior
- Uninvolved: Hide feelings, Irregular feelings

**Social Skills**
- Authoritative: Socially responsible, Less peer pressure, Get along, Empathetic
- Permissive: Trouble keeping friends
- Authoritarian: Don't get along, Poor social skills
- Uninvolved: Withdrawn, Disrespectful, Distrustful

**Academics**
- Authoritative: Learn well, More confident, High achievement
- Permissive: Low interest in school
- Authoritarian: Hard to concentrate, Mid achievement
- Uninvolved: Perform poorly, On their own
FAMILY DEMOCRACY
VS
BENEVOLENT DICTATORSHIP
Because I said so... That's Why!
FACEBOOK?

WHY DON'T YOU FACE BOOK AND STUDY?
STUDENT SLEEP

SLEEP DEPRIVATION
AN UNMET PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM
TEEN SLEEP

- Distractibility
- Poor attention span
- Defiance
- Poor organizational skills
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Easily frustrated
- Irritable
- Insufficient sleep
STUDENT SLEEP STATISTICS

73 out of 102 students said that they felt they performed inadequately on an assignment or exam due to lack of sleep.
SLEEP & LEARNING

Stages of Memory

- Encoding
- Storage
- Retrieval
The Stress Continuum
STRESS CONTINUUM

The stress versus performance correlation.
MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM

**HEALTHY**
- Normal mood fluctuations
- Calm & takes things in stride
- Good sense of humour
- Performing well
- In control mentally
- Normal sleep patterns
- Few sleep difficulties
- Physically well
- Good energy level
- Physically and socially active
- No or limited alcohol use / gambling

**REACTING**
- Irritable / impatient
- Nervous
- Sadness / overwhelmed
- Displaced sarcasm
- Procrastination
- Forgetfulness
- Trouble sleeping
- Intrusive thoughts
- Nightmares
- Muscle tension / headaches
- Low energy
- Decreased activity/socializing
- Regular but controlled alcohol use / gambling

**INJURED**
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Pervasively sad / hopeless
- Negative attitude
- Poor performance / workaholic
- Poor concentration / decisions
- Restless disturbed sleep
- Recurrent images / nightmares
- Increased aches and pains
- Increased fatigue
- Avoidance
- Withdral
- Increased alcohol use / gambling is hard to control

**ILL**
- Angry outbursts / aggression
- Excessive anxiety / panic attacks
- Depressed / suicidal thoughts
- Over insubordination
- Can’t perform duties, control behaviour or concentrate
- Can’t fall asleep or stay asleep
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Physical illnesses
- Constant fatigue
- Not going out or answering phone
- Alcohol or gambling addiction
- Other addictions
MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM

- **CHANGE** in behaviours

- Degree of:
  - **Distress** (subjective)
  - **Dysfunction** (observed) = Impairment in daily functioning
  +/−
  - **Duration**
FAMILIES & TEACHERS AS PARTNERS

“It takes a village to raise a child”
Parents make the greatest difference to a child’s educational outcomes.

The research shows that it is what parents do at home that really counts.

The power of parental engagement overrides other factors that have been shown to influence a child’s achievement at school.

Various studies have shown that, when parents are actively engaged in their children’s learning, parental influence **outweighs** factors such as parental education, socioeconomic background or the quality of the child’s schooling.
What is it that parents of successful daughters do?

1. **Hold high expectations** for your daughter
2. **Show interest** in the things your daughter is interested in
3. **Value learning** and model the behaviours of successful learners e.g. read over her assignments and edit WITH her, conduct a post-exam post mortem together; use a term planner, weekly timetable, daily to-do lists; teach her Study Skills (Cornell note taking system, making summaries, active vs passive reading, SQ3R, mind mapping, mnemonics, curve of forgetting)
Parents can make a big difference:

4. Give specific, rather than general, praise
5. Recognise the effort and process, not just the outcome
6. Maintain the structure and predictability to their days and weeks as you did in their early childhood
7. Establish routines that promote health: good sleep, monitor and limit technological device use, healthy eating, exercise and regular study.
8. Don’t be afraid to set boundaries and limits that reflect your family’s values and beliefs

**START NOW:** Y7 SETS THE TONE FOR THE REST OF HIGH SCHOOL & HIGH SCHOOL DIFFERENTIATES PEOPLE FOR THE WORKFORCE
FAMILIES & TEACHERS AS PARTNERS

- **Collaborate** with teachers to learn about strategies to support your daughter both at home and in school – you are the expert in your child but they are the experts in teaching academic content. Work together.
FAMILIES & TEACHERS AS PARTNERS

- Support the school when there are discipline issues.
- Teens will test boundaries. That’s how they learn about the world – by seeing how the adults around them react. This is part of the socialisation process of humans.
- Discipline is FEEDBACK about what is EXPECTED
- Discipline changes the neuronal pathways in a teenager’s brain
- Ineffective and inconsistent discipline *contributes* to child misbehaviour and poor outcomes
- Discipline is directly related to a child’s acquisition of:
  - self-control
  - problem solving
  - conflict resolution skills
  - independence
- These factors are directly related to success.
IMPLICATIONS FOR PARENTING: LEARNING & HABITS
SOURCES OF RESILIENCE IN TEENS
(PROTECTIVE FACTORS)

- High intelligence
- Even temperament /emotional stability
- Physical attractiveness
- Special skills and abilities – accomplishment
- Commitment of parent to child’s well-being and development
- Strong social support network for the family
- Having meaning and purpose
- Optimism and problem solving skills
- One charismatic interested adult***
SOURCES OF RESILIENCE IN TEENS (PROTECTIVE FACTORS)

- Internal locus of control
- Self-worth
- Belonging – strong peer relationships
- Engaged in education
- High SES
- Opportunities for leisure
- Role models (big sister-little sister programs)
- Social skills
- Good physical health
- Community involvement/volunteer work
Sources of Risk

- Poverty
- Community disruption
- Poor health
- Brain injury
- Parental mental illness
- Family violence, abuse or neglect
- Marked marital discord, family disruption, acrimonious divorce
- Recent move/transition
- Disparate parenting styles***
SOURCES OF RISK

- **Low self-esteem** (bullying, low academic achievement, parental put-downs/sarcasm)
- Recent stressors – death, parental ill health, bullying, sporting injury..
- History of mental illness – anxiety, autism, drug and alcohol misuse..
- **Unhelpful thinking styles**
- External locus of control
- Trauma
- **Beware benign neglect**
BEWARE BENIGN NEGLECT

"I'd rather give up than feel like this any longer..."

I'm not close to many people anymore.
RESEARCH SAYS:
Teens feel more secure and are involved in less risky behaviours when one or both of their parents are present in the home at least one of these times. When your teen...

- gets up in the morning
- comes home from school
- evening meal time (with TV off!)
- when she/he goes to bed

BE INVOLVED with your teen:

- Know WHO they hang out with
- Know WHAT they’re doing
- Know WHERE they are
- Know WHEN they’ll be home
COMMUNICATING WITH TEENAGERS
COMMUNICATING WITH TEENAGERS
Best way to communicate with a teenager is to UNDERSTAND what is happening in their brain development.

The pre-frontal cortex is underdeveloped until mid-20s.

Frontal lobe provides us with the ability to differentiate between right and wrong. This explains why teenagers have poor decision making skills. It is due to their frontal lobe that is underdeveloped.

AN ADOLESCENT BRAIN IS LIKE A FERRARI WITH WEAK BRAKES
YOU ARE THEIR FRONTAL LOBE: parents are the surrogate voice of reason.
COMMUNICATING WITH TEENAGERS

- Parental OCD: the need to be right

THE BIGGEST COMMUNICATION PROBLEM IS WE
DO NOT LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND. WE
LISTEN TO REPLY.
COMMUNICATING WITH TEENAGERS

- **Make EYE CONTACT & FOCUS**: teens have an inbuilt bull-dust detector and sensitivity radar.
- **SOUND INTERESTED**: your tone must match the context – if not, they’ll pick it up and see you as a phony.
- **ASK lots of SPECIFIC QUESTIONS**: show interest in their lives – a key to resiliency is the presence of an interested adult.
- **Give FEEDBACK** – **clarify** what they have SAID & what you have HEARD – the frontal lobe changes as a result of experience and does well when it gets feedback.
- **LOOK for and MENTION the POSITIVES** – thanks for putting away the dishes - make them up if you have to: thanks for not putting the cat in the microwave.
FAKE IT TILL YOU MAKE IT
COMMUNICATING WITH TEENAGERS

- Do not constantly remind them of past mistakes
- Don’t start nagging as soon as you walk in the front door
- Let some things go by you
- Avoid confrontations: just creates defensiveness in teenagers and shuts down communication
- Beware ultimatums you can’t keep
- **CHOOSE YOUR BATTLES** – only argue over things that matter (health and safety: sex, drugs, alcohol, sleep, internet, study).
COMMUNICATING WITH TEENAGERS

- **SHUT UP:** sometimes saying nothing is a really good idea – the more you yell, scream and shout, the more THEY will.

- **DON’T TALK TOO MUCH:** don’t go on and on and on. Speak only 2 sentences at a time bce that’s all they can absorb. You have 13 seconds.
Teenager Post # 7650
Telling your parents something funny, but then it turns into a life lesson..
ROLE MODEL: Imagine who you want your kids to become: Be that.
COMMUNICATING WITH TEENAGERS

- Set **VERY CLEAR BOUNDARIES** – draw a line in the sand about what you will not compromise on: let them KNOW.

- On everything else, compromise and negotiate, **DISCUSS CALMLY** until the time comes when you can’t do that and then JUST SAY NO... “Why?”... Because I SAID SO and WALK AWAY. Stick to it.

- Just as the early teen has not grown into their body, science tells us they have not yet grown into their brain either: the frontal lobes of teenagers are located in their parents’ brains.
The way we talk to our children becomes their inner voice.

I don't even want to try anymore because I feel unwanted and annoying and I'm afraid that's all I'll ever be.

Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will only cause permanent psychological damage.

It's okay. I wouldn't choose me either.

My own parents can make me feel like crap and they don't even realize it.
COMMUNICATING WITH TEENAGERS

- Use **HUMOUR**: avoid sarcasm or put downs; make it your modus operandi to be upbeat and conversational; it helps to be funny.

**NOT TO BRAG, BUT I CAN MAKE MY KIDS ANGRY JUST BY SAYING "GOOD MORNING".**

SARCASM MOMMY @SARCASTICMOMMY4
Outsource and recruit: use trusted adults – aunts, uncles, godparents, grandparents, coaches, teachers, priest...

Teens report that they do not want to become DISTANT from their parents, but for their relationship to become DIFFERENT.
CONCLUSION

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- Sleep and Learning
- Factors that Protect and Risk Teen Well-being
- The Mental Health Continuum
- Communicating with Teens
Parents, please take care of yourselves for their sake.

there is no health without mental health
RESOURCES

- www.raisingchildren.net.au
- www.parentlink.act.gov.au
- www.cyh.com
- www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- www.oyh.org.au
- www.aboutourkids.org
- www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
- www.inspire.org.au
- www.youthbeyondblue.org.au
- www.beyondblue.org.au
- www.headspace.org.au
- www.sane.org
- www.reachout.com.au
- Kids help line
  1800 55 1800
  www.kidshelpline.com.au
- Lifeline Australia
  13 11 14
  www.lifeline.org.au
- Parent line
  1300 130 052 (24/7)
- Family Relationships Advice Line
  1800 050 321