

The Teen Brain

The human brain does not fully develop until the age of 25, according to the latest research by Dr. Jay Giedd, Chief of Brain Imaging in the Child Psychiatry Branch of the National Institute of Mental Health. The last part of the brain to mature is the prefrontal cortex; the area where “sober second thoughts” are located; the values, morals and judgment center of the brain.¹

Knowing the limitations of the adolescent brain does not excuse bad behavior. It does, however, reinforce the need for parents to provide persistent support and guidance. Here are a few things you can do to help your child navigate this time of life.²



Stay connected. Spend time together and maintain an open line of communication.

Be patient. Your teen needs your patience. They also need your motivation to help them achieve their potential.

Be consistent. Be persistent and predictable about the boundaries you set and the consequences you claim will accompany violations.

Set expectations. Let your children know, on a regular basis, what is and what is not acceptable behavior. Don't make assumptions.

Don't overreact. While their responses may provoke you, keep in mind that the playing field isn't level. Exercise wisdom to assess when an open ear is more effective than an open mouth.

Discuss the risks of sexual activity. The adolescent mind is already prone to risky behavior, since the self-control mechanisms are still under development. You need to deliver a strong message on abstinence.

Discourage any use of drugs and alcohol. Insist on a drug-free, alcohol-free standard for your child.

Talk short-term. While your goal is to direct your teen to a brighter future, the adolescent mind has a hard time looking very far down the road.

Think long-term. By disassociating consequences from actions, well-meaning parents can actually weaken their teen's motivation and ability to make better choices in the future. While some mistakes should be avoided due to the severity of their consequences, many bad choices can be turned into good learning experiences. Use your discretion.

Hang in there. Nothing can take your place in their lives, so don't let anything else try.

Stay Active! Stay Involved! Stay The Parent!

For more in-depth information, ask for your free copy of “What were you thinking?” New discoveries about the teen brain.”, by e-mail at: www.askalex@elizabethnewlife.org.



¹The Empowered Parent Magazine 2007, Project SOS, Inc.

²“What were you thinking?” New discoveries about the teen brain., The Medical Institute, 2005.

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