

TEENS MATTER

A PARENTING TEENS DIGEST

Boone County Step Ahead Council

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Teenage Brain Development By Jennifer Lang, MS, LMFT



Have you ever looked at your teen and wondered what happened to the child you once knew? Do you worry about the decisions he is making? Or the lack of responsibility she is showing? Does your teen seem very emotional? Teenagers are often very confusing, both to themselves and the adults around them. It has not been until recent years that we have had a scientific explanation for the many behaviors that had simply been dubbed normal teenage behavior. The answer lies in the teenage brain.

Until the past decade, it was believed that the brain was fully developed by the time a child reached puberty. Research now indicates that the hardware is not completely installed until the early 20's. So, the teenage brain does not (and cannot) function like an adult.

As with other parts of the human body, different areas of the brain develop on different timetables. The prefrontal cortex and limbic system are the two brain areas where we are able to see such large changes during the teen years. The prefrontal cortex is the judgement center of the brain, which means that it is responsible for self-control, emotional regulation, organization and planning. The limbic system is where raw emotions such as anger are generated. The prefrontal cortex has difficulty functioning while the limbic system goes into overdrive. Researchers have found that the prefrontal cortex undergoes a growth spurt at around age 9 or 10, when neurons begin sprouting new connections, or synapses. At about age 12, most of the new connections begin to die off – this process called

pruning ensures that the brain nourishes only neurons and synapses that are useful. The process is often referred to as a “use it or lose it” system. The pruning process continues into the early 20s.

Until the process is complete, most teenagers do not have all the brain power that is needed to make good judgements. Researchers suspect that the excess of synapses make it more difficult for the young adolescent to keep track of multiple thoughts and gain instant access to critical memories and emotions that allow adults to make sensible decisions. Due to the unfinished prefrontal cortex, teens may also have trouble organizing several tasks. For example, they may have difficulty deciding which to do first: call a friend, wash the dishes, or read the book for a report due the next morning for school.

So, what does this mean for you and your teenager? It is an amazing opportunity for your teen. Teenagers can create their own world by determining their own brain development. They can decide if they want to hard-wire their brain for sports, playing music, and doing mathematics - or for lying on the couch in front of the television. Teens are choosing what their brains are going to be good at – learning right from wrong, responsibility or impulsiveness, thinking or video games. This hard-wiring provides another reason for teens to not take drugs or alcohol, because they may permanently alter the balance of chemicals in their brains. Teens who exercise their brains, in effect, by learning to organize their thoughts, to measure their impulses and to understand abstract concepts, are laying the neural foundations that will serve them for the rest of their lives.

As parents, your teens may need you now more than ever. It is important to look at their behaviors as a symptom of a “brain problem” rather than as simply normal adolescent behavior. By addressing the behaviors in this way you open the door to solutions. They need help with problem solving, organization, and deciding right from wrong.

Your guidance and boundaries, as when they were 18 months old, will help them develop healthy, productive brains. Without the help of adults, teens may have difficulty nourishing the right neurons and synapses. This second wave of brain development is nature's way of giving us a second chance – help your teen make the best of it.

Article based on:

Inside the Teen Brain, U.S. News & World Report, August 9, 1999

Getting Inside a Teen Brain, Newsweek, February 28, 2000

10 Wonderful Ways to Love a Teen

- Give them reasons to be proud of you
- Treasure being together as a family
- Consider their point of view
- Include lots of their friends
- Show wholehearted interest without taking over
- Let them learn by experience
- Include them in your life
- Establish guidelines that inspire
- Give a choice in their day-to-day lives
- Be genuine with your praise

From: Ford, J Wonderful Ways to Love a Teen.....
Even when it seems impossible.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!!!!! 365.24219 DAYS A YEAR

Now how did they figure that?

How long is a year? If you answer 365, you'd be a little off. A Year is actually 365.24219 days long. To make things easy, we round that number down to 365. The problem is, if we followed this rounding long enough, seasons would begin to fall at different dates from year to year. That extra quarter-day is all it takes to throw off the calendar. So Leap Years were invented to make up the difference.

Now, we have a Leap Year every year that's divisible by 4 (like 2004) to make up for all the extra quarter-days we skip during Non-Leap Years. But because 0.24219 is not a true quarter-day, we skip the Leap Year on years divisible by 100 – unless the year is divisible by 400, then we Leap. Confusing? Yes. But luckily it helps keep us all on track.

2004 IS THE YEAR OF THE



MONKEY

According to Chinese horoscopes, people's personalities are influenced by the year they are born, not the month. Anyone born in 2004 will be intelligent, hungry for knowledge, talented, inventive and able to influence people. Sounds like a good year for a birthday.

CHEESE BLINTZES

White Bread 20 slices

Filling: 8 oz. Cream Cheese, softened

_ C. Sugar

1 egg yoke (or egg substitute)

_ t. vanilla

Trim crust from bread and roll bread out thin. Spread filling onto bread and roll up like a jelly roll. Cut in half. Melt 1 stick of butter. In a small bowl mix _ c. sugar and 1 tsp. Cinnamon. Roll each blintz in melted butter, and roll in sugar/cinnamon mix. Place on cookie sheet and bake 15 minutes at 350 degrees.

These can be frozen, before baking, and then baked at a later date. Just remove from freezer and bake...do not thaw. Even though these are very simple to make, it does require a little time. Well worth your while.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

