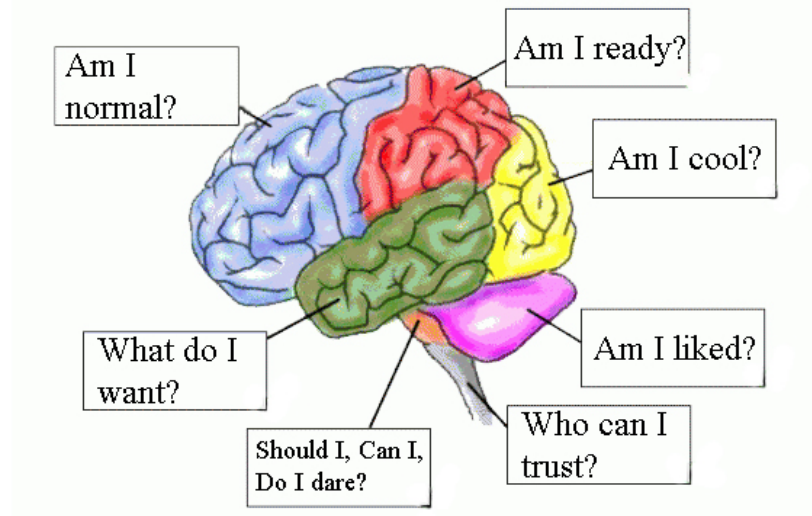


Adolescent Brain Development

Defining adolescence:

Dr. Daniel Siegel defines adolescence as not just puberty but also a developmental time when you are not just dependent on adults but you are not just working with adult responsibility.

The Adolescent Brain:



Myths of Adolescence

Myth 1: Adolescence is not just the teenage years it is from 12 to 24.

Myth 2: Brain does not continue to grow but rather, begins to remodel itself.

- This remodeling causes much of the angst of adolescence, not raging hormones.
- During this period the brain begins to destroy synaptic connection that are no longer need or no longer use.
- The brain is becoming more specialized. This is a period of great creativity.
- It is proven that what you do with your mind can change the function and structure of the brain and it is never more true than now.
- As the brain prunes, it creates more coordination by taking the remaining connections and making them 3000 times better at communicating with each other.
- The brain is going from being a generalist as a child to a specialist of an adolescent.

Myth 3: Adolescence is risky because of impulsivity. It is this plus hyper-rational thinking & neurotransmitters.

- Between the ages of 12 & 24, 3 times more likely to be injured or die from preventable causes.
- Not just about being impulsive – they have hyper-rational thinking.
 - Example given: – Driving a car at a high rate of speed; an adolescent evaluates the risk from a different perspective since the brain is driving them to take risks so they will be able to leave home.
 - So they evaluate the risk – up side – cool story to tell, kids will like me and it is exciting.
 - Down side – I could kill or be killed.
 - They know the dangers but the limbic area skews the balance and fun wins out, they are more willing to take the risk to get what they want.

A Positive Outlook

Rather than dreading it, it is a time we can cultivate. We can help them build their circuits and help them be stronger. When we understand more about the adolescent brain, we will know how to create experiences that are more empowering for them.

When we are willing to look at this adolescent time in a different way, we are able to see and encourage the benefits:

- Emotions & Moodiness = Passion that fuels a sense of vitality
- Prefer their Peers = Helps to develop relationships
- Need for Risk & Novelty = When managed encourages creativity
- Rebellion = Drive to create a better world.

Providing Support for Adolescents

Create a feeling of internal security

- Create a classroom environment where they are safe and accepted as they are.
 - Let them feel what they feel. Don't try to talk them out of it even if you feel uncomfortable with it.
 - Allow them a say in what their space looks like, what has meaning for them?
 - Embrace the changes
 - See them as a natural, healthy development
 - Be open and empathetic

- Let them know their opinion matters
- Peers are important
 - Give them plenty of opportunities to interact with and develop relationships with their peers.
 - Help them develop deep listening skills
 - Give them opportunities to pray and mediation together

This sense of internal security is essential as the brain is preparing the adolescent to leave home – it is telling them to go from the familiar and comfortable where you are safe, out into the unknown, uncomfortable, and potentially unsafe.

Engage them mentally.

Understand that:

- They are developing more sophisticated thought patterns.
- They are more ability for abstract thinking – have discussions that allow them to discuss and explore many sides of an issue, including their own perspectives.
- When they appear bored, it could mean they don't understand. Take the time to understand what is needed.
- They like to focus on things they think are important and may be careless about things they do not view as important.

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Engage them socially.

Teens:

- Want to make a difference
- Want to be of service
- Want respect and to be heard
- Interested in a wide range of experiences
- Want to spend time with friends

Activities that give them opportunity to interact with peers

Provide Spiritual Support

We can support them Spiritually by understanding that they are:

- Capable of self awareness, insight, empathy
- Developing their own ideas about spirituality
- Interested in exploring ideas outside their own
- Beginning to be able to explore those things that are hidden

What Teens Need from Adults

Teens need opportunities for leadership development

Help them realize:

- The more responsibility they take, the stronger and more capable they will feel
- As they take responsibility, they learn they have the power to shape their own life

They can do this by:

- Becoming leaders & role models for younger teens
- Regionally – YOUers and YOU graduates serve as leaders for Uniteens
- Regional Officers share what their experiences through truth talks

Other thoughts on leadership development

- Encourage daily responsibility, not just once in a while
- They can talk with an involved adult if they feel too much is being expected of them
- Taking responsibility can be fun and will open new doors of opportunity

Additional ways to help develop leaders:

- Encourage Uniteens to facilitate pieces of the lesson
- Encourage YOUers to facilitate the whole class
- Consider having YOU Leaders facilitate Uniteen Classes on occasion.

Ideas include

- YOUer can lead Pre-Lesson time
- Sponsor and Teen do lesson together

Make sure to call YOUer by mid-week to discuss lesson and agree about roles of each