

# Understanding the Teen Brain

It doesn't matter how smart teens are or how well they scored on the SAT or ACT. Good judgment isn't something they can excel in, at least not yet.

The rational part of a teen's brain isn't fully developed and won't be until age 25 or so.

In fact, recent research has found that adult and teen brains work differently. Adults think with the prefrontal cortex, the brain's rational part. This is the part of the brain that responds to situations with good judgment and an awareness of long-term consequences. Teens process information with the amygdala. This is the emotional part.

In teen's brains, the connections between the emotional part of the brain and the decision-making center are still developing—and not necessarily at the same rate. That's why when teens experience overwhelming emotional input, they can't explain later what they were thinking. They weren't thinking as much as they were feeling.

While your child's brain is developing, your child might:

- take more risks or choose high-risk activities
- express more and stronger emotions
- make impulsive decisions

## What's a parent to do?

You're the most important role model your kids have. Sure, their friends are important to them, but the way you behave and fulfill your responsibilities will have a profound and long-lasting effect on your children.

How you guide and influence him will be important in helping your child to build a healthy brain too.

### **You can do this by:**

- Discussing the consequences of their actions can help teens link impulsive thinking with facts. This helps the brain make these connections and wires the brain to make this link more often.
- Remind your teens that they're resilient and competent.  
Because they're so focused in the moment, adolescents have trouble seeing they can play a part in changing bad situations. It can help to remind them of times in the past they thought would be devastating, but turned out for the best.
- Become familiar with things that are important to your teens.  
It doesn't mean you have to like hip-hop music, but showing an interest in the things they're involved in shows them they're important to you.
- Ask teens if they want you to respond when they come to you with problems, or if they just want you to listen.

Parents tend to jump in with advice to try to fix their children's problems or place blame. But this can make teens less likely to be open with their parents in the future. You want to make it emotionally safe and easy for them to come to you, so you can be part of their lives.

- Use family routines to give your child's life some structure.  
These might be based around school and family timetables.
- Provide boundaries and opportunities for negotiating those boundaries.  
Young people need guidance and limit-setting from their parents and other adults.
- Talk about feelings- yours, your child's and other people's.  
Highlight the fact that other people have different perspectives and circumstances.  
Reinforce that many people can be affected by one action.

## Signs of trouble

It's normal for teens to be down or out of sorts for a couple of days. But if you see a significant mood or behavioral change that lasts more than 2 weeks, it could mean something else is going on, such as depression.

If you think your teen could be depressed, promptly seek professional treatment for your child. Depression is serious and, if left untreated, can be life-threatening.

Your teen needs your guidance, even though they may think they don't. Understanding their development can help you support them in becoming independent, responsible adults.

Information provided by:



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### **Medical Reviewers:**

- Sather, Rita, RN
- Shelat, Amit, MD