

Growing Emotionally Stronger, Glowing Brighter

Connecting with your teenager

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What I hope we get out of our time today



Learn more about teenage brain and development



Learn techniques to better connect emotionally with your teenager



Roleplay tough situations

I'm a passionate and experienced advocate for children's mental health



**Hannah Leib
Schlichter, LCSW**
Grow and Glow
Child Therapy



- Extensive real life work providing **therapy to over 250 children**, each with a unique story and history
- Owner of **Grow and Glow Child Therapy LA in Belmont Heights**. I specialize in anxiety disorders, OCD, self esteem, parenting, ADHD, and divorce in children and teens
- Previously worked as Lead Child Therapist for an LA County Domestic Violence Shelter
- **Life-long passion for mental health in children and teens** focused on action and outcomes
 - **Awarded Fulbright Scholarship** for mental health education in Bulgaria
 - **Founded THRIVE at Claremont Colleges** as the first student-led organization focused on mental health
 - **USC with Master's in Social Work** and **Hebrew Union college with Master's in Non-profit management**



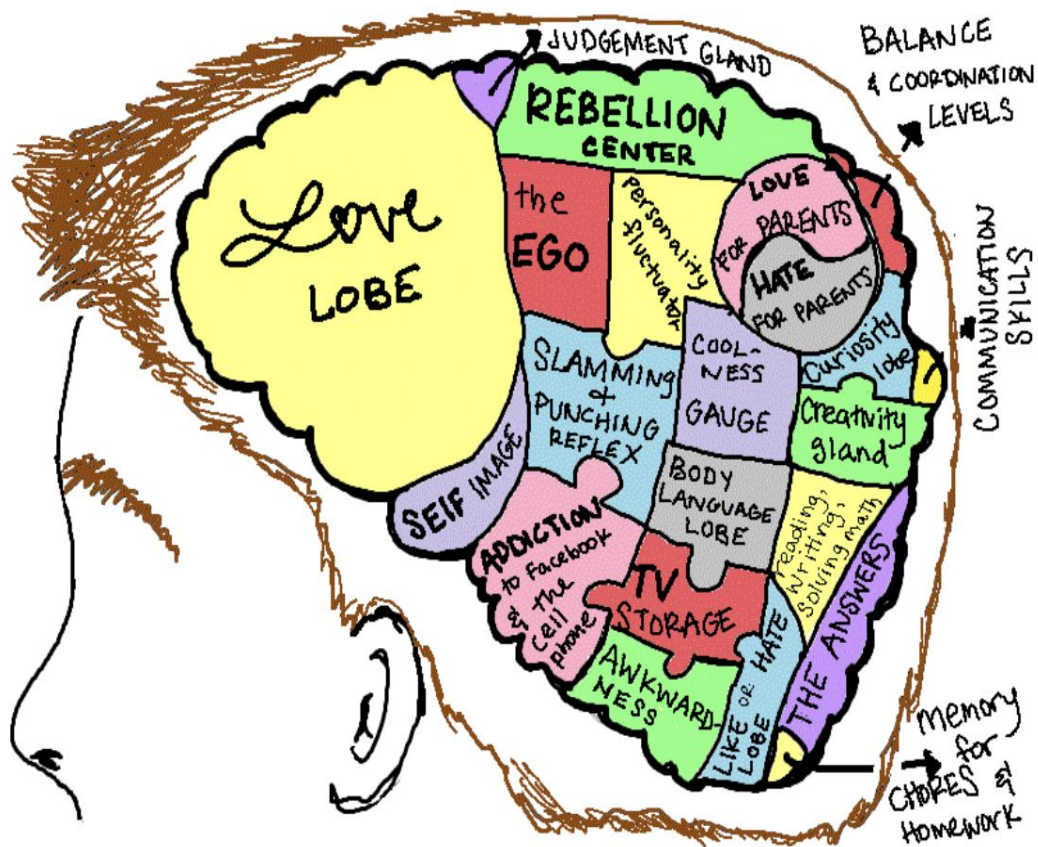
Adolescents are...



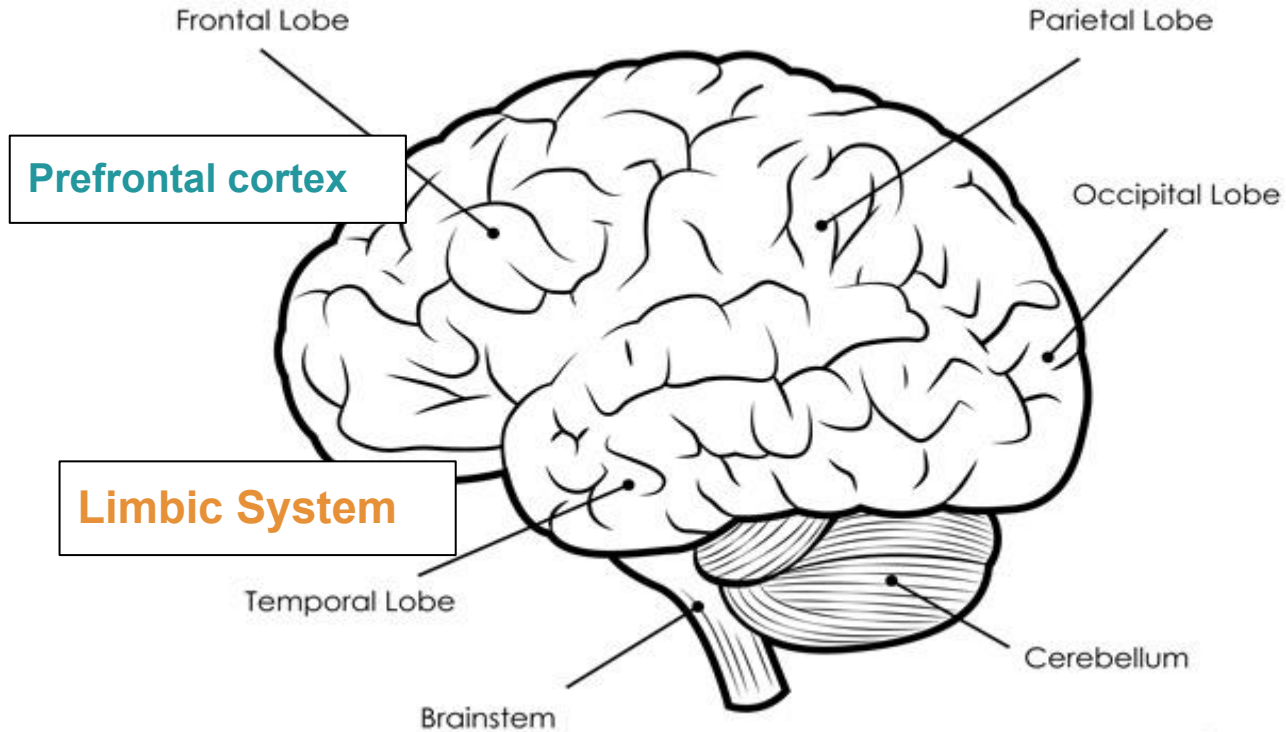
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THE AVERAGE TEENAGE BRAIN



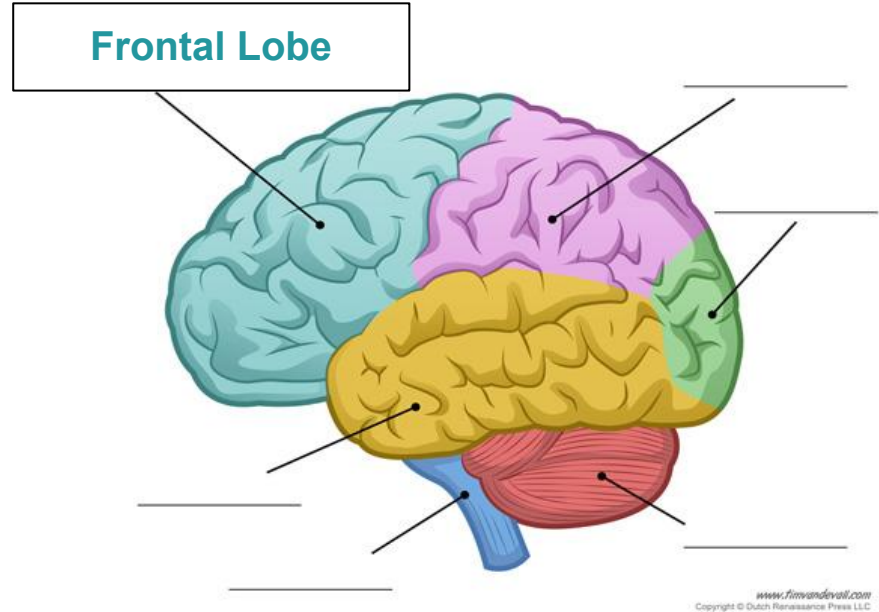
Parts of the Brain



Frontal Lobe - Prefrontal Cortex

● **Blue = Prefrontal Cortex (Thinking Brain)**

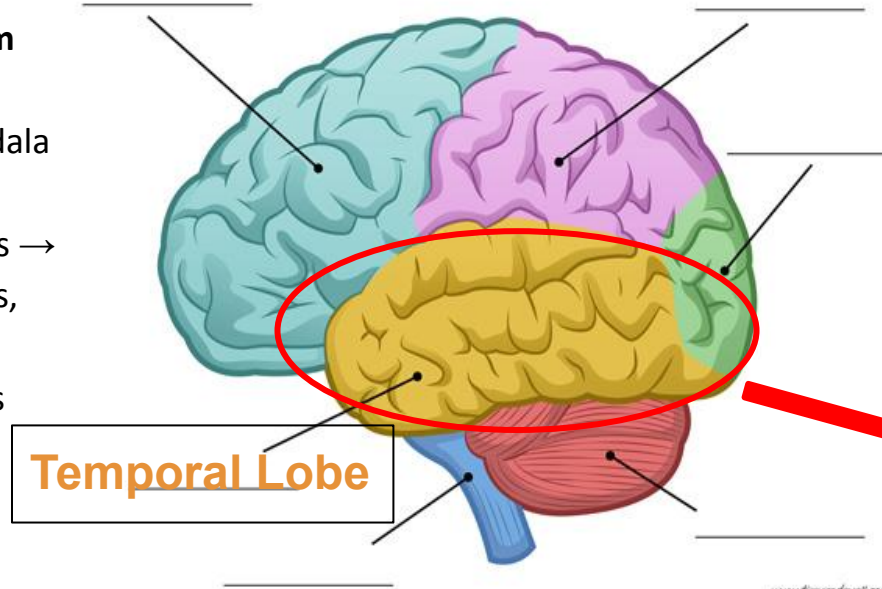
- Controls planning, impulse control, and decision-making
- Still under construction in teens
→ slow to regulate emotions



Temporal Lobe - Limbic System

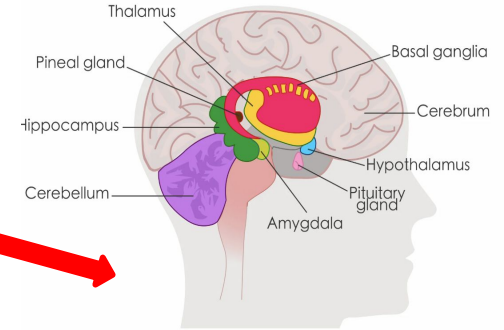
● Yellow= Limbic System (Emotional Brain)

- Includes the amygdala and reward center
- Fully active in teens → drives big emotions, mood swings, impulsive reactions



Temporal Lobe

Limbic System



Understanding the teenage brain – a time of rapid brain development

The Prefrontal Cortex (PFC) is Still Developing

- The PFC is responsible for impulse control, decision-making, planning
- PFC fully mature until the mid-to-late 20s.

The Limbic System is Highly Active

- This area controls emotions and reward-seeking behaviors
- Develops before PFC
- This imbalance makes teens more emotionally reactive and prone to risk-taking.
- This creates a “reward-seeking brain with no brakes.”

The Reward System is Extra Sensitive

- Teens experience a stronger dopamine response to rewards and social approval,
- Highly motivated by peer relationships and instant gratification.

Dopamine and Peer Approval



In every culture across time, **adolescence is a critical stage for moving away from dependence on caregivers**



Teens need to **build relationships beyond their family** to eventually find **mates**, create **alliances**, and form **community bonds**.

- **Hyper-aware of social cues, belonging, and status.**



Around puberty, the brain undergoes a major shift:

- More responsive to **peer feedback**
- **Social rewards** (like fitting in, being liked, or being noticed) light up the brain's **reward center** just like food or money



The teenage brain temporarily **increases the number of dopamine receptors**

- **Risky or novel behavior** becomes more appealing.
- Even small rewards (like a like on Instagram) feel **huge**.
- They're more likely to **chase excitement or stimulation**

Yes- your teen/ tween still needs you

The Pushing Away Is Developmentally Normal—Not Rejection

- Adolescents are wired to seek independence
- To separate and grow, they test limits, challenge authority, and pull away emotionally at times.
- The brain's attachment system doesn't shut off at puberty.
- Teens still need a safe, steady, emotionally available caregiver to return to
- Even though they lean on peers for social support, they rely on you for safety, regulation, and love
- A teen may not say "I need you," but their behavior often screams it—like a withdrawal or outburst.

You Are Still Their Emotional Anchor - they're watching how you show up. Your consistency, calm, and care still provide a secure foundation—one they'll come back to again and again.

Connect with your tween/tween

The “Architect” Mindset:

“Build the Scaffolding, Don’t Control the Blueprint”

Why? The adolescent brain is **under construction**—parents need to provide **guidance** without micromanaging

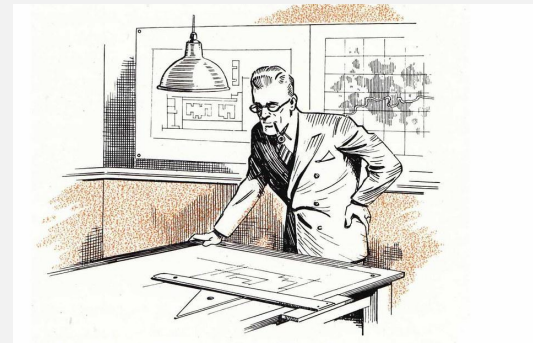
Strategy:

- **Shift from "manager" to "consultant."** Instead of saying, *“I’ll tell you what to do,”* try *“I’m here to help you figure this out.”*
- **Encourage problem-solving:** “What are some ways you could handle this situation?”

Example:

Instead of: “You need to do your homework now!”

Try: “What’s your plan for getting your homework done?”



Connect with your tween/tween

The “Pause Button” *Teaching Emotional Regulation*

Why? Big emotions can hijack rational thinking in teens

Strategy:

- **Teach the 90-second rule:** Brain scans show that emotions like anger last 90 seconds unless we keep fueling them
- **Model emotional “coaching” instead of fixing:** “I see you’re frustrated—do you need time to cool down before we talk?”
- **Introduce physical resets:** Deep breathing, cold water splash, movement (jumping jacks, a short walk).

Example:

Instead of: “Stop yelling and calm down!”

Try: “I get that you’re upset. Let’s break and then figure it out.”



Other techniques:

They remember how they felt more than what was said

 **Side-by-Side Conversations:** Teens open up more during low-pressure moments like car rides or walks.

 **Co-Regulate First:** Calm your energy to help calm theirs—regulation before communication.

 **Name It to Tame It:** Labeling emotions helps activate their thinking brain and soothe reactivity.

 **Reflect Their Words:** Mirror what they say to build trust—don't rush to fix.

 **Offer Autonomy with Structure:** Give choices within boundaries to support independence.

 **Turn Routines into Rituals:** Daily check-ins or silly traditions build bonding and oxytocin.

 **Ask Thoughtful Questions:** Use open-ended prompts like 'What's your brain weather today?'

 **Join Their Interests:** Enter their world with curiosity—dopamine and connection go hand-in-hand.



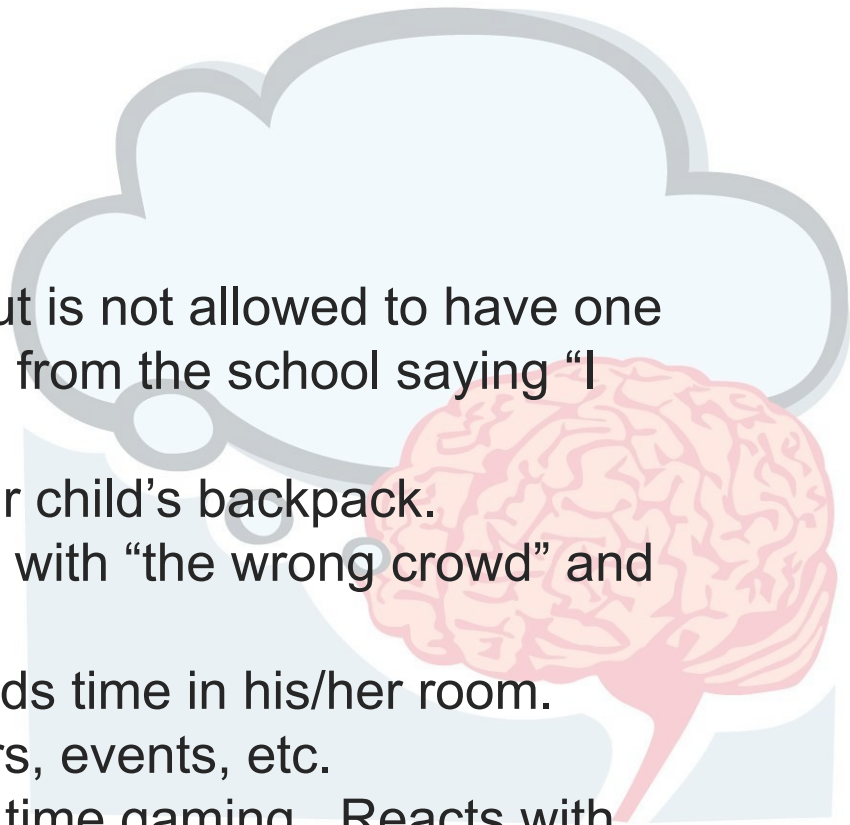
Activity:

How would you respond?

Walk around the room and stand next to the situation that feels most relevant to you, and then we will come back together and talk about it.

Common Situations

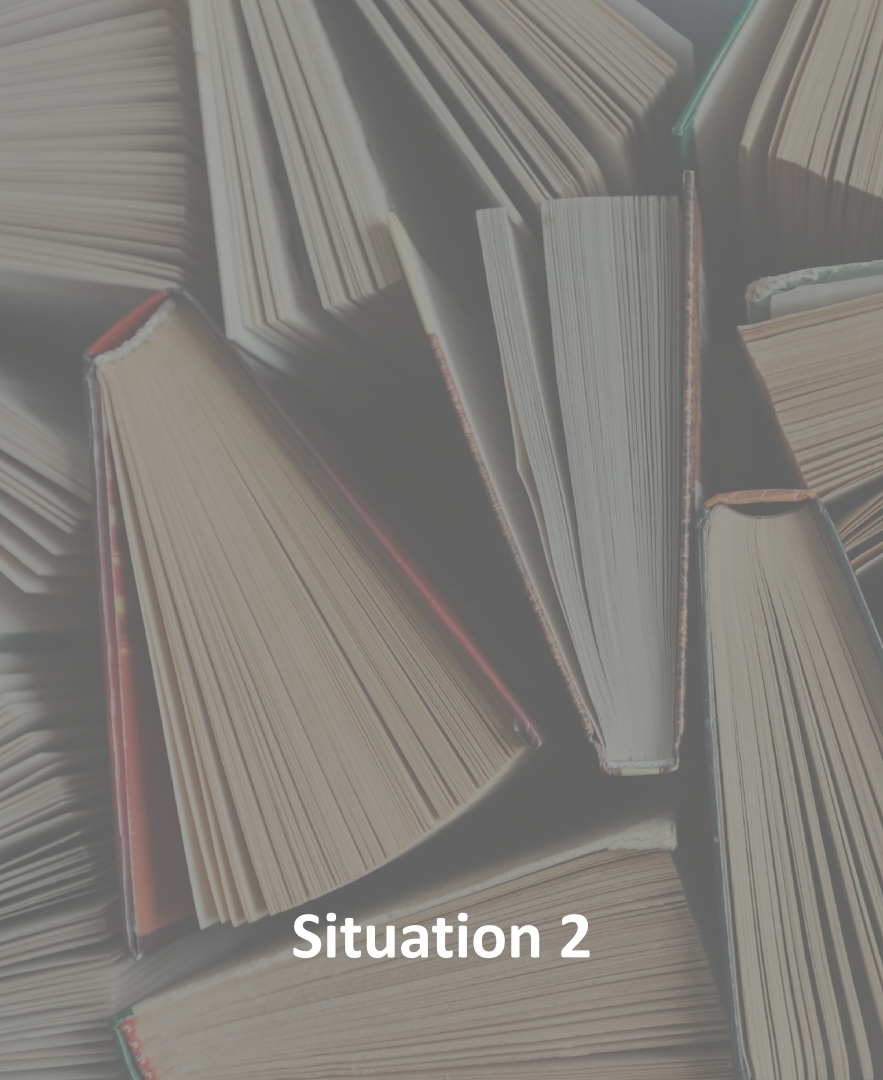
1. Teen has social media account but is not allowed to have one
2. Failing grade or hides a message from the school saying “I thought you’d be mad.”
3. You find a vape (or similar) in your child’s backpack.
4. Your teen has started to hang out with “the wrong crowd” and you see a change in behavior.
5. Your once “social” teen now spends time in his/her room. Doesn’t want to join family dinners, events, etc.
6. Teen spend excessive amount of time gaming. Reacts with anger when asked to stop.





Situation 1

You find out your teen/ tween has a secret instagram account- even though they are not allowed to have social media



Situation 2

Your teen hides a failing grade or deletes a notification from the school portal. When you confront them, they say, “I was scared you’d be mad.”



Situation 3

You find a vape in your teen's backpack.
They insist it's "not a big deal"



Situation 4

Your teen has started spending time with peers you don't trust. They've become more secretive, their attitude has change (the wrong crowd)



Situation 5

Your once talkative teen now spends all their time in their room. They don't want to join family dinners



Situation 6

Your teen/ tween spends most of their free time playing video games, becomes upset when asked to stop,