

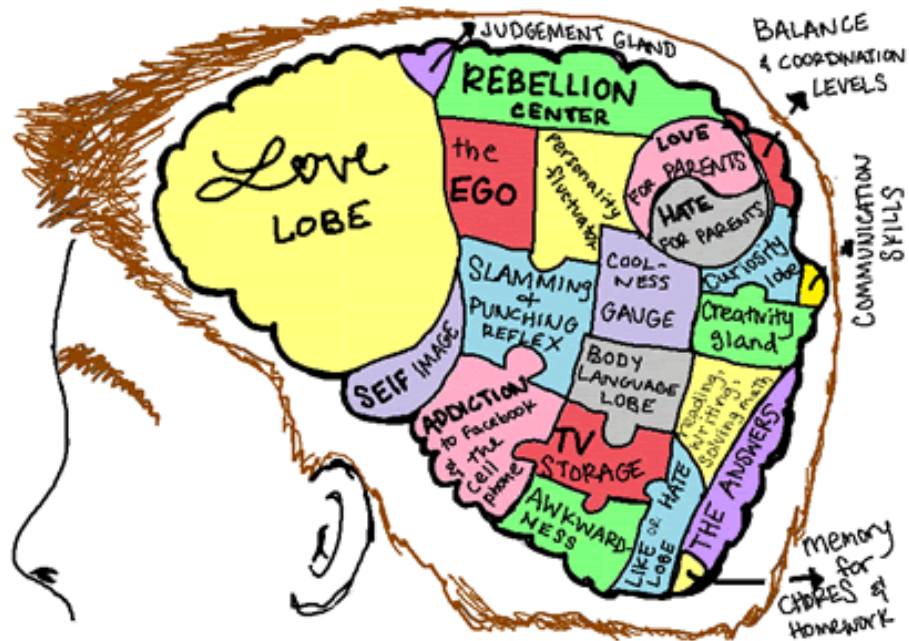
Getting Inside the Teenage Brain



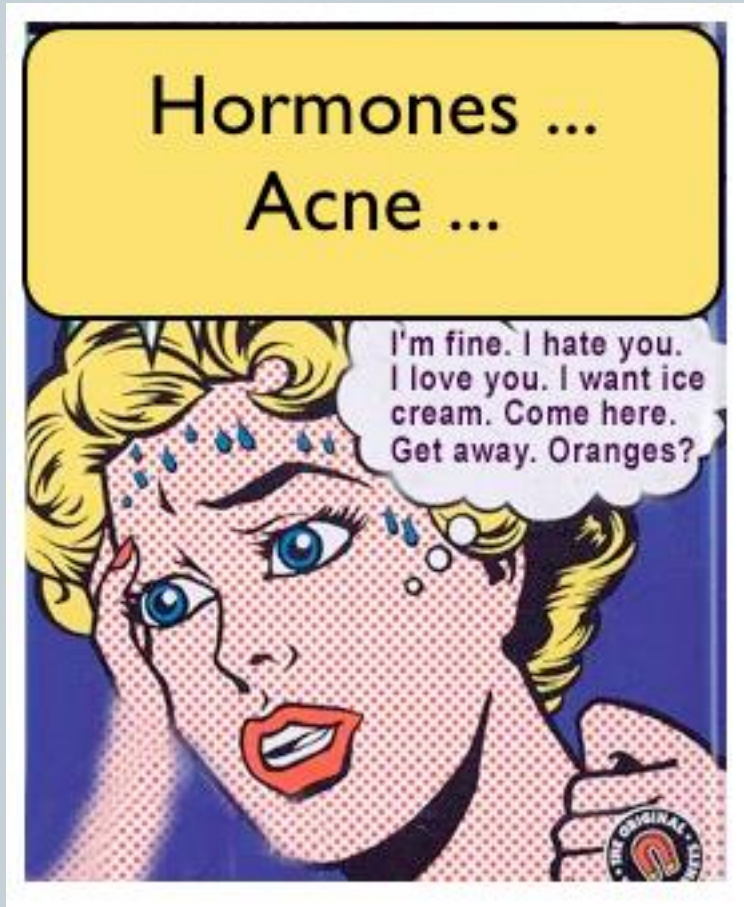
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Myths About Adolescents

THE AVERAGE TEENAGE BRAIN



Raging Hormones Make them “Go Mad”





Teenage boys, goaded by their surging hormones run in packs like the primal horde. They have only a brief season of exhilarating liberty between control by their mothers and control by their wives.

(Camille Paglia)

izquotes.com

Just a Time of Immaturity



- Adolescence is actually an important part of our life cycle that we and those around us can benefit from
- **Can thrive, not just survive**

They are moving from dependence to TOTAL independence



- Not true!!
- What we are working towards is *interdependence*.

Some say pre-frontal cortex is just not fully developed and this leads to immature behaviors



- Too easy an explanation.
- Missing the complexity of what is happening.
- There is “reconstruction” of the frontal and pre-frontal cortex.
- Not just immaturity, but an important time of growth and change.



What other's believe about us can shape how we view ourselves. The first step in being present for our adolescents and being able to help them is to make sure we are thinking about them and this stage in helpful ways.

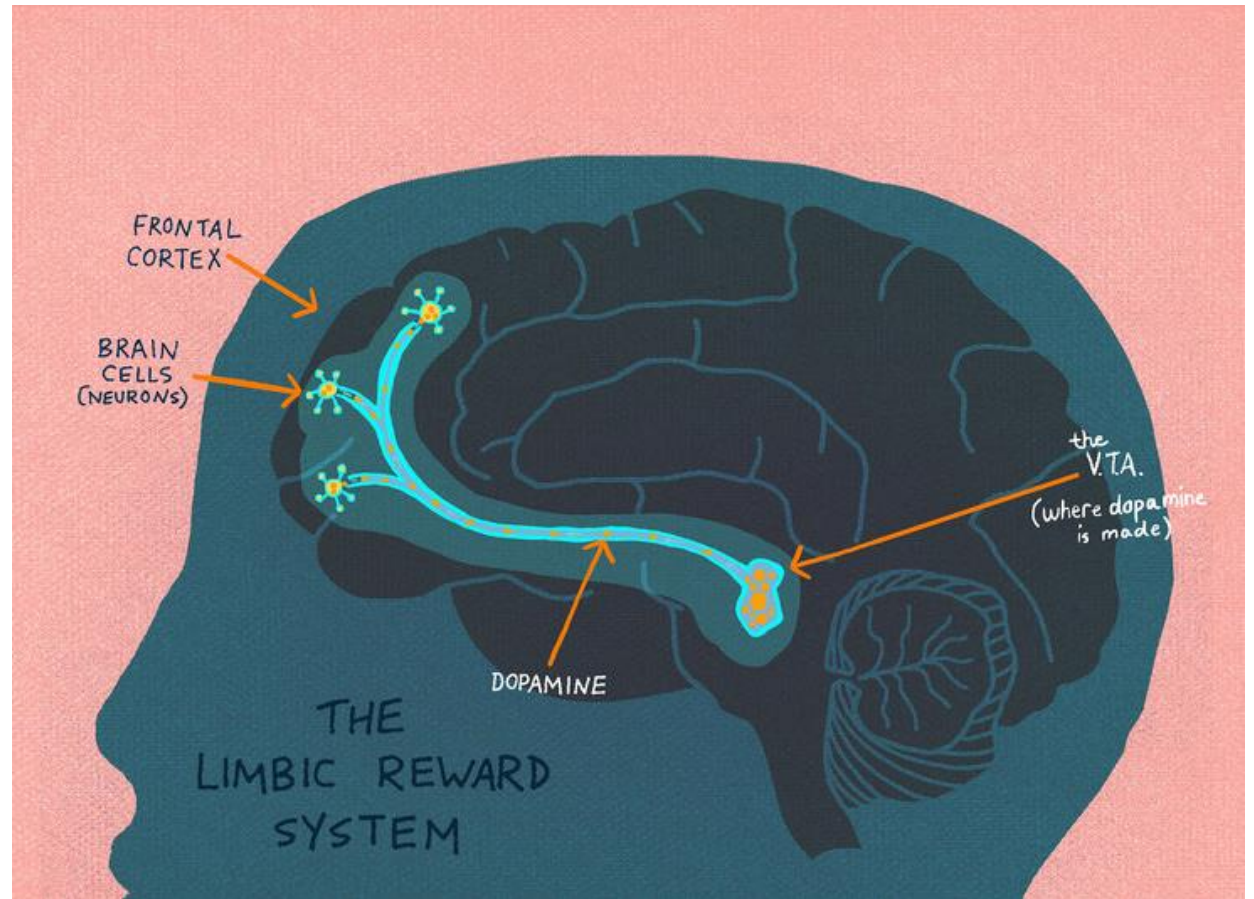
How have you thought of it before?

4 Ways the Adolescent Brain is Different

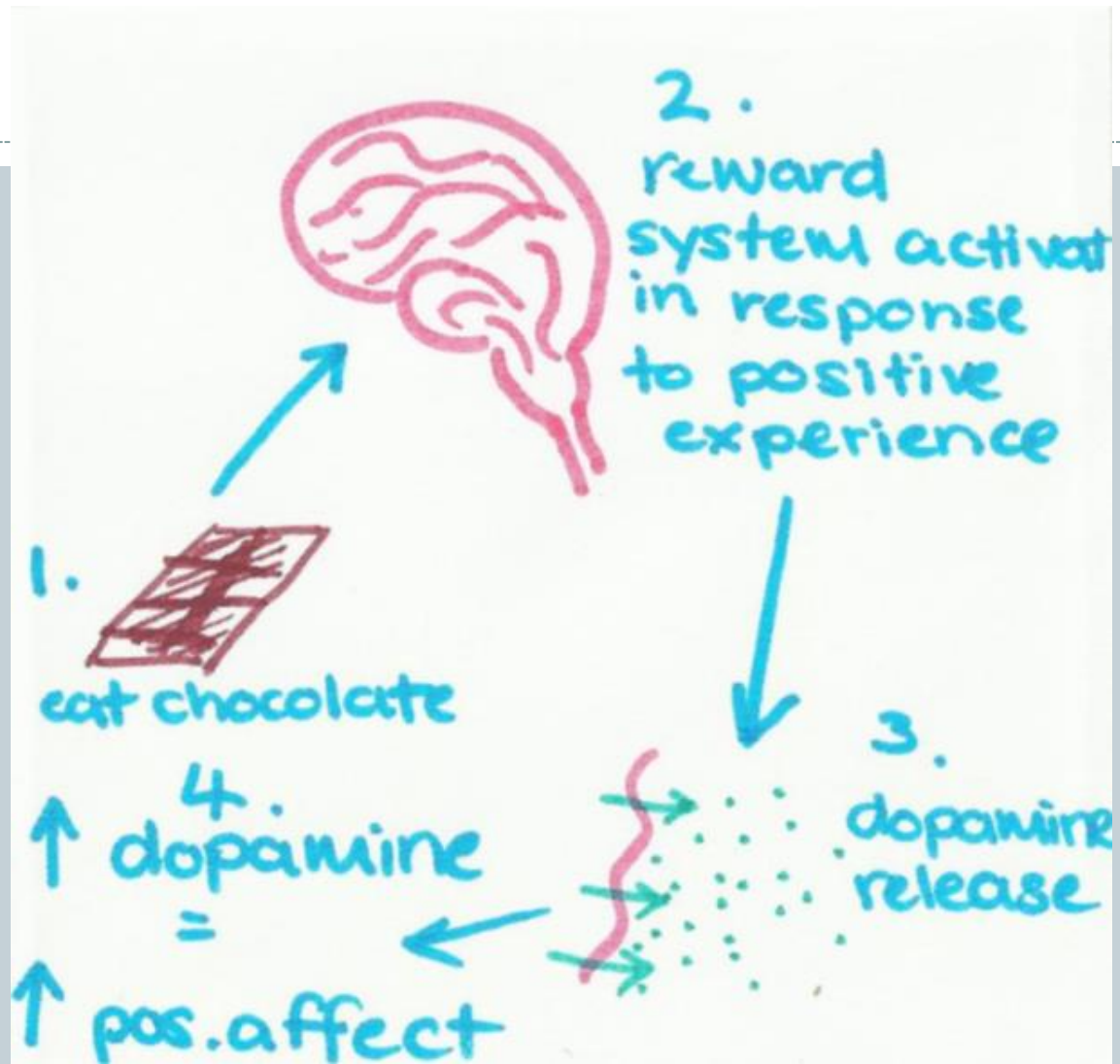


NOVELTY-SEEKING INCREASES
SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT ENHANCED
INCREASED EMOTIONAL INTENSITY
INCREASED CREATIVE EXPLORATION

The dopamine driven reward system is ramped up



Novelty Seeking



Novelty Seeking (cont.)



- Leads to increased impulsivity
- Hyperrationality
 - Just the facts, not big picture thinking
 - More weight on PROS than cons
 - Haven't developed "gist" thinking yet
 - ✦ Example: russian roulette, party trouble
- Susceptibility to addiction
 - Ramped up reward system and developing pre-frontal lead to greater risk of addiction than in adulthood

Novelty Seeking



PROS

- Can lead to more exciting engagement in life
- Willingness to try new things
- Enjoy life
- Allows us to do new things despite “fear” of unknown. Needed for survival

CONS

- Impulsivity
- Risky behavior
- Increased risk of addictions

Increased Social Engagement with peers



Increased Social Engagement with peers



PROS

- Can help create new friendships
- Create new supports and develop *giving and receiving* of care
- Biological perspective: helps us to “leave the nest”

CONS

- Without adult connection, can lead to dependency on peers alone or isolation
- Increases risky decision making.

Increased Emotional Intensity



- Due, in part, to remodeling that is occurring during adolescents of frontal and pre-frontal cortex
 - Pruning of neurons to fine-tune effectiveness of brain
 - Myelination of neurons to increase speed of firing neurons

Let's look at a handy brain model.

MIDDLE PREFRONTAL CORTEX



Place your thumb in the middle of your palm as in this figure.

CEREBRAL CORTEX



Now fold your fingers over your thumb as the cortex is folded over the limbic areas of the brain.



Due to construction zone, this can happen more frequently in adolescents

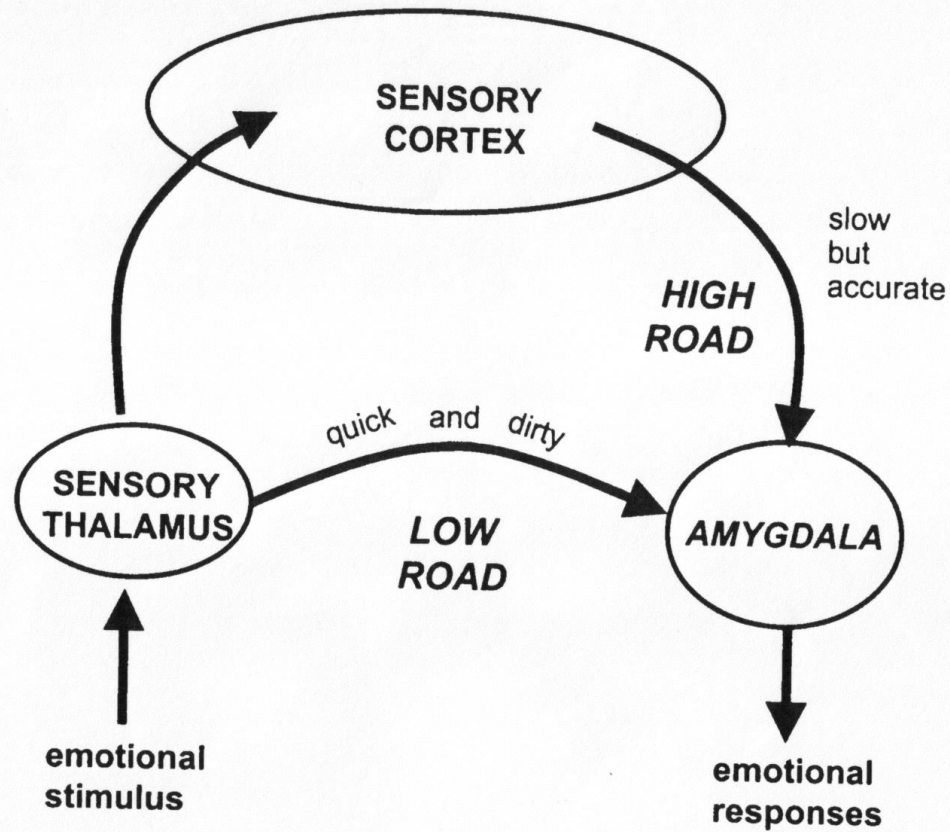
Can take as much as 20 minutes for cortex to come back on line

There is NO reasoning when we are in this state

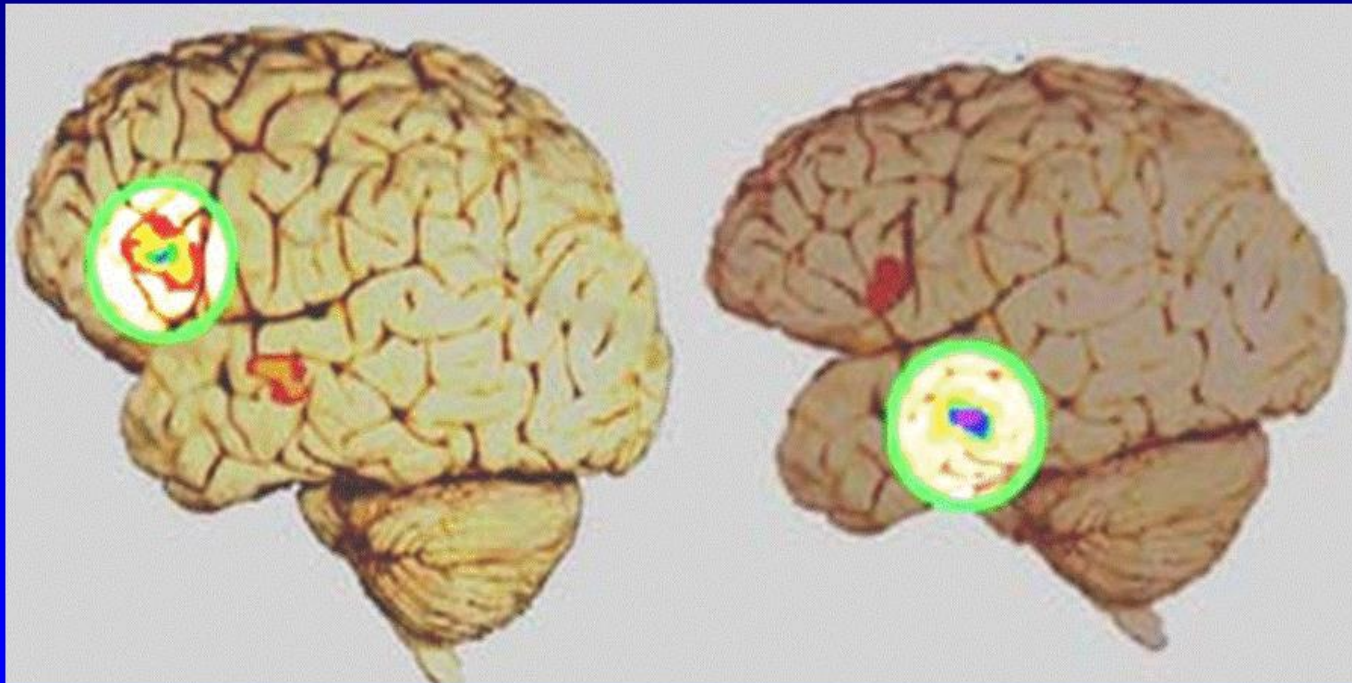


Flipping Your Lid

Increased Low Road activation from Limbic System



When Reading Emotion...
**Adults Rely More on the Frontal Cortex
While Teens Rely More on the Amygdala**



Deborah Yurgelon-Todd 2000.

NIDA

Creative Exploration Increases



- Pre-frontal starts developing “the know that I know”
- More awareness
- Beginning of abstract thinking
- Begin really wrestling with big questions of life and values

This can be a real challenge during adolescence if it does not have positive outlets and check points

Increased Creative Exploration



PROS

- Can lead to real creativity
- Out of the box thinking
- Creative solution
- Positive impact on world
- Getting engaged in world outside their own

CONS

- Can lead to real identity crisis when we add the increased emotionality



The key is integration.

We can use our adult brain to help and guide their brains into better integration. They need us. Even if they are pushing away, we need to understand the developmental purpose of this and not assume that they'll be fine on their own.

How we can help with integration



**BE AWARE OF OUR OWN REACTIVITY
USE OF ATTUNEMENT
WHEN TO ENGAGE AND HOW**

Awareness of our own reactivity



- Clip from “Inside Out”
- Self awareness exercise
- Non-verbals

Attunement



The desire and ability to understand the other's (child/student/spouse) inner world and respect their experience.

Understanding *with* your adolescent; “tuning in”, caring, empathizing, “getting” how the adolescent experiences his/her world.

PACE



- PACE – Dan Hughes model of attachment parenting
 - Playful
 - Accepting
 - Curious
 - Empathetic

ALL DONE WITH LOVE

Playful



DO

- Do engage lightly and lovingly when possible
- Do recognize things that frustrate you and find alternative playful ways to address, rather than resorting to anger, nagging, and yelling

DON'T

- Don't use sarcasm or make fun of a situation or the student
- Don't mistake playfulness for being a push-over or not following through with things

Accepting



DO

- Do be willing to be open to the student's perception or feelings around something
- Accept all emotions that may come from the student, including anger

DON'T

- Don't assume or project negative meaning behind behaviors (i.e. he's just lazy)
- Don't mistake accepting feelings or perception and accepting inappropriate/risky behaviors

Curious



- Action-oriented questions- story telling
- Avoid “why?”
- Non-judgmental, open curiosity
 - How does that seem to you?
 - Tell me about that.
 - What does that mean to you?
 - What do you think happened?
 - What do you think about that?
 - What do you think makes that important to you right now?
 - If you do that, what do you expect to happen next?
 - I think I understand why you want to do that, any reason for not doing it?
 - How do you think it will be for you if it doesn't work out the way you want?
 - Will it be hard for you if you don't get to do that?

Empathy



- Needs to feel real, not sympathizing
- Adults are often unwilling to trust that empathy will work
- Pitfalls
 - Advice giving
 - Lecturing
 - Immediately jumping to problem solving
 - Just naming child's feeling – Teenagers HATE this

Conversation Pointers



- Start on their level
- Avoid preaching/teaching
- Avoid judgment; emphasize understanding
- Attune to feelings over ideas
- Read body language
- Put into words what you are hearing, and ask if you got it right.

From: "What's Love Got to Do With It"
Chirban

De-escalation Pointers



- Don't try to reason when their "lid is flipped"
- Recognize need to save face, especially in front of peers
- Be aware of your own reactivity!! Don't join them in theirs.
- Be willing to guess at their projected thoughts/feelings
- Affect matching CAN work

Big picture ideas on how to help



- Need to address dopamine system. It's there and we CAN'T ignore it. Need to promote safe, structured ways to engage.
- Tap into the positive value, instead of fear or “just don't do it”. Teens can get behind a cause. Ex. Tobacco ads
- They may be more emotional. How can we help them to feel it and deal with it. Name it and tame it. Teach them about their brain. “I know it feels really strong...”
- Honoring changes that are crucial during adolescence instead of disrespecting them.
- They need adults with opinions, given in a caring way, that will hold them accountable. Not another friend.

STAY CONNECTED!!!



DON'T ASSUME THAT SINCE THEY ARE ADOLESCENTS THAT IT'S "NORMAL" TO NOT WANT TO TALK TO ADULTS. THERE ARE HUGE RISK FACTORS FOR TEENS THAT DO NOT HAVE ANY TYPE OF ADULT CONNECTION. FAMILIAL CONNECTIONS ARE OFTEN STRAINED. THEY NEED MORE ADULTS IN THEIR LIVES AND WE AS PROFESSIONALS NEED TO FIND WAYS FOR THAT TO HAPPEN.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE!