



THE POWER OF THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN

with Frances Jensen, MD, FACP

■ Discussion Guide for Families

This discussion guide is designed for families who are interested in learning more about adolescent brain development and the implications for parenting and supporting teens.

For many years, scientists believed that an adolescent's brain was similar to an adult's brain. However, over the last decade the scientific community has learned that brain development occurs throughout adolescence and continues until the mid-20s. Motivated by her personal experience of parenting two teenage boys, and drawing on clinical experience and research, neurologist Frances Jensen, MD, FACP, shares what researchers have discovered about adolescent brain development, functioning, and capacity. Dr. Jensen explains how these findings dispel commonly held myths about the teenage years and provides practical suggestions for families with adolescents.

This guide can be used in a variety of settings including parent/school association or other school meetings, parenting classes and support groups, or in community or faith-based settings. Here are a few planning tips:

- Plan for participants to watch the full video (approximately 30 minutes long) or to watch the individual video segments (each approximately 4-6 minutes long).
- Decide who will facilitate the conversation.
- Allow about 30 minutes to discuss the questions. If the group is larger than 10 people, consider breaking into small groups.
- Ask the facilitator to walk through the resource list with the group (and, if possible, to review the resources themselves before the session).

■ Discussion Questions

1. Dr. Jensen describes how the brain continues to develop until a person reaches their mid-20s. What surprised you most? Does this information change the way you think about teenagers and how they act?



2. Dr. Jensen explains how adolescents are prone to impulsivity and risk-taking, that teens need to take some risks, and that many risks are positive! What are some examples of positive risks that adolescents take? Will this information change the way you will interact with teenagers in your family? How?
3. The adolescent brain learns quickly, yet it is also prone to another form of learning – addiction. In what ways can you encourage the positive type of learning for the teenagers in your family? Conversely, how might you discourage the negative learning of addiction by talking with teens about substance abuse?
4. Mental health issues often first emerge in adolescence. What are some signs of mental illness that you should be aware of?
5. Dr. Jensen is dedicated to informing adults and teens themselves about the power of the adolescent brain. What information will you share with others, for example parents, coaches, and teachers? What will you share with teenagers in your family?

■ Additional Resources

- Frances Jensen, MD, FACP, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide for Raising Adolescents and Young Adults*
- <https://www.harpercollins.com/9780062067869/the-teenage-brain>
- National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)
- <https://www.drugabuse.gov/>
- NIH/NIDA for Teens: Brain and Addiction (content for teens)
- <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts/brain-and-addiction>
- NIH/NIDA, Brains in Progress: Why Teens Can't Always Resist Temptation
- <https://www.drugabuse.gov/about-nida/noras-blog/2015/01/brain-in-progress-why-teens-cant-always-resist-temptation>
- NIH/National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), Child and Adolescent Mental Health -
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/child-and-adolescent-mental-health/index.shtml>
- NIH/NIMH, The Teen Brain: Still Under Construction
- <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/the-teen-brain-still-under-construction/index.shtml>
- Society for Neuroscience, Brainfacts.org: Teens, Neuroscience, and Society
- <http://www.brainfacts.org/in-society/in-society/articles/2011/teens-neuroscience-and-society/>