



# THE POWER OF THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN

with Frances Jensen, MD, FACP

## ■ Discussion Guide for Professionals

This discussion guide is designed for professionals who are interested in learning more about adolescent brain development and the implications for their work with 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 professionals.

The guide can be used in a variety of settings including staff meetings, conference sessions, or trainings.

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 the teenagers you work with and how you interpret their behavior?



2. Dr. Jensen explains how teens 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 you could encourage in the work you do with adolescents, and how might you encourage these positive risks?
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 who you work with? 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? If you are concerned that an adolescent you work with may be exhibiting signs of a mental health issue, what would you do?
5. Dr. Jensen is dedicated to informing adults and teens themselves about the wonders of the teenage brain. What three key points will you share with co-workers and colleagues? What three key points will you share with the teenagers you work with?

### ■ 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/>