

The Power of the Adolescent Brain: A TAG Talk

Transcript — Segment 5: The Adolescent Brain: What Adults Need to Know and Do

Frances Jensen:

What should all adults know about the new research that explains adolescent behavior? First, adolescents seem to take a long time to process an experience, or make plans, or organize themselves. Sometimes it takes them a long time to consider the consequences of their behavior. Also, the teens' perception of stress and anxiety is actually amplified compared to the adult. The onset of serious mental illnesses actually happens typically in late adolescence or early adulthood as a function of brain development. It's important to know that the Internet can actually amplify the consequences of teen behavior. Cyber-bullying is an example.

This can increase the exposure to stressful stimuli of today's teens and young adults. Because teens brains can learn more quickly, teens are actually more prone to addiction than adults, but on the other hand, they can learn faster. Given the new research about the teen and adolescent brain, these are things that all adults can do to support teens during this pivotal time of brain development. Be available for support and advice, and thinking through consequences of behavior. Provide a frontal lobe assist for your adolescent.

Recognize that there is biology behind why teens tend to make more mistakes, so use these as teachable moments for your teenager. For instance, ask them, "Why do you think this happened? What could you do differently next time?" Work through the problems with them for a teachable moment. Stay connected and engaged in their lives, showing interest in their activities, their friends and their feelings. They need you more than they recognize. Sleep deprivation is not good for learning, so limit the use of electronics and other distractions at night while your teen is attempting to go to sleep.

Learn how to use social media to stay connected to teens. Text, Twitter, Instagram, so that you can be part of their world. Share information about health and other risks without lecturing. I speak regularly to teens about brain develop and talk to them about minding their brain. I find that teenagers are naturally interested in their level of brain development. This is new information and this is the first generation of teenagers that have had this much new information about where their brains are in development.

Teens are at a point of trying to identify who they are, and this information can come in as a very important tool for a teenager as they're trying to explain their own behavior. Teens are excellent learners, and it is valuable to give them examples of cause and effect, of some of the risks that they may be tempted to take, and their consequences.