

# The Teenage BRAIN



Scientists now realise that the teenage brain undergoes a **growth spurt** in the same way as the rest of the teenage body. Just as puberty changes happen, such as facial hair in boys and breasts in girls, so do changes happen in the physical structure and layout of the teenage brain.

## Two main changes happen in the teenage brain:

- 1.** Growth of fatty insulation around the brain connections. This increases the speed of brain messages a hundred-fold.
- 2.** Pruning process in the front of the brain, the part responsible for decision making, planning, emotion control and empathy. This process re-shapes the teenage brain.

This growth spurt also happens in early childhood which explains a great deal! Any parent who has experienced *déjà vu* when faced with teenage tantrums; “You are acting like a two year old!” may not be too far off the mark.

The Terrible Twos and the Traumatic Teens seem to have very similar brain changes.



**SO** ... the next time your children give you ‘lip’ or blank you with a defiant stare, spare a thought for the work in progress still taking place between the ears!

# 10 tips for parents of teenagers { to help develop your teenager's brain }

## 1 Quality Time

Quality **one to one time** with your teenagers develops the emotional part of their brains which helps them to feel safe, loved and good about themselves.

## 2 Physical Activity

Encourage **physical activity** at every opportunity. It helps your teenagers develop powers of concentration and **lowers stress** chemicals in their brains.

## 3 Get some Z's....

**Sleep** is essential for your teenagers. Try and limit the amount of computer/tv time just before bedtime, because this activity stimulates rather than calms the brain.

## 4 Really Listen

Take the time to really listen to your teenagers, when their emotions are high or low. Encourage them to **share and name their feelings**. This will help them to avoid future problems with stress and over-reaction.

## 5 Problem Solving

Encourage your teenagers to **solve their own problems** whenever possible, because this helps their brains develop reasoning skills.

## 6 Watch for unusual changes

Drink and drugs have been proven to damage the teenage brain. Notice any **unusual changes** in your teenagers' behaviour and find times to chat about the effects of drink and drugs.

## 7 Physical Affection

Touch and physical affection are so important for brain connections to happen. The more touch and physical contact you give your teenagers now the calmer they are likely to be as adults.

## 8 Clear Boundaries

Teenagers need clear boundaries and to be taught what is acceptable or unacceptable behaviour by using choice and consequence rather than punishment. This helps your teenagers develop the rational part of their brain essential for independence later in life.

## 9 Breakfast

A **protein-rich breakfast** is vital for your teenagers' brain to cope with stress and anxiety. Try and encourage this healthy habit as early as possible.

## 10 Freedom and limits

Teenagers will risk- take and experiment. It is an important part of becoming independent. Give them some **freedom** to explore and try out new experiences .....but within limits!



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