

Understanding the adolescent brain

Supporting our teenagers with emotions

Overview

- Understanding adolescence
- Looking at the teenage brain- how amazing and how frustrating it can be
- What we as parents/caregivers need to remember
- What our teenagers need to know



What is Adolescence

- Ages 12-24
- Unique period of biological, psychological and social development
- A time of change between child to adulthood

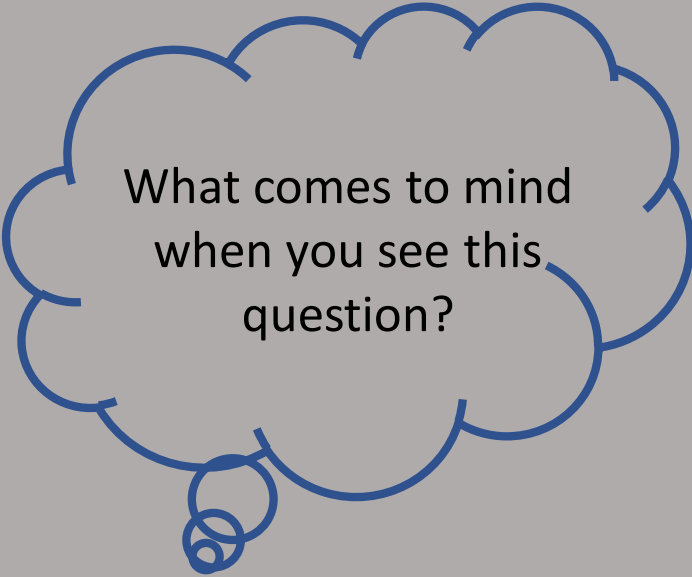


- We know now that adolescence stretches as far as age 24, very often they had left home by this point
- Society concerns and stereotypes about adolescents
- This stage can feel daunting for parents
- Massive benefits of this stage of life even if it can feel really daunting

A silhouette of a person walking a tightrope between two large, dark, irregular shapes against a sunset background. The person is in the center, walking from left to right. The background is a gradient of orange and yellow, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The two large shapes are positioned on either side of the tightrope, acting as supports. The overall scene is a metaphor for balancing risk and reward, or the pursuit of a goal.

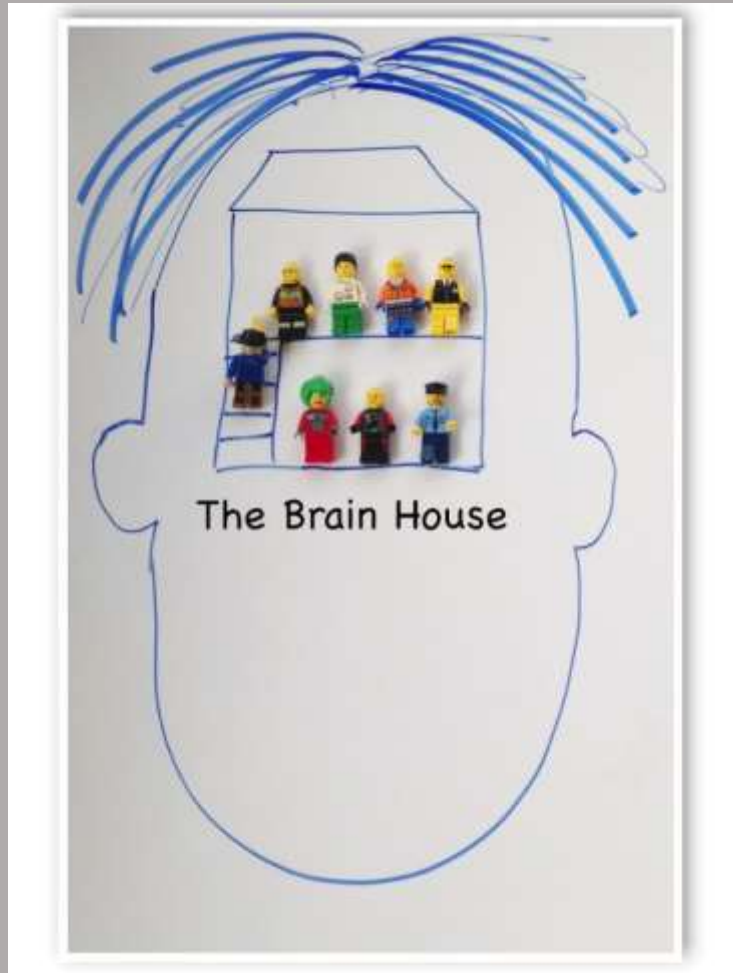
‘A period of life with the
most power for courage and
creativity’

What stands out about your adolescent?



What comes to mind
when you see this
question?

The upstairs and the downstairs



- We know that different parts of the brain develop at different rates throughout childhood and adolescence.
- The downstairs part of the brain is what we call the limbic system. This part of the brain is almost full developed at birth.
- This part of the brain keeps us safe- fight, flight and freeze response and is driven by our emotions

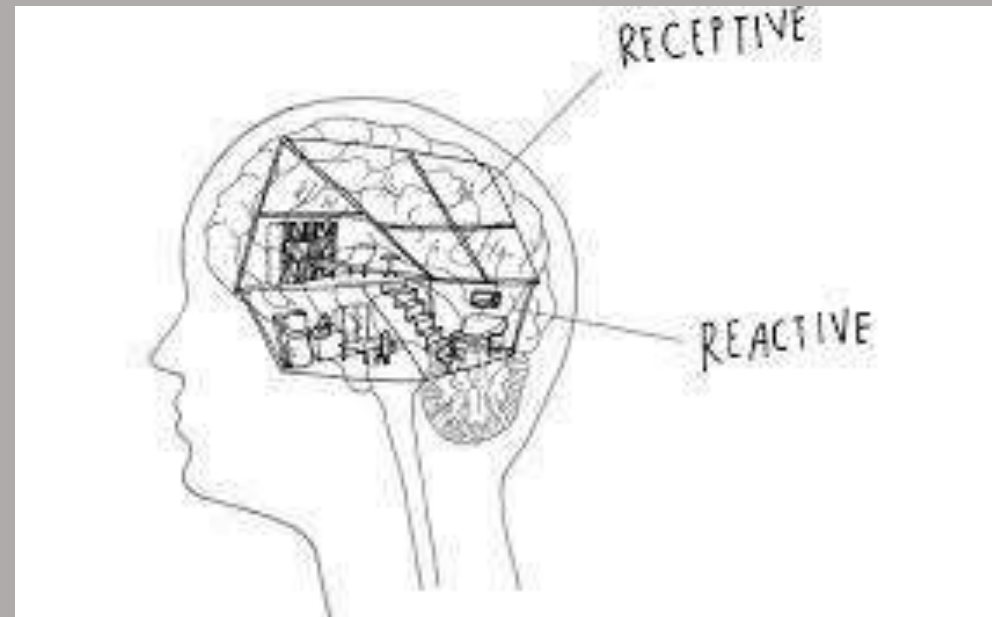
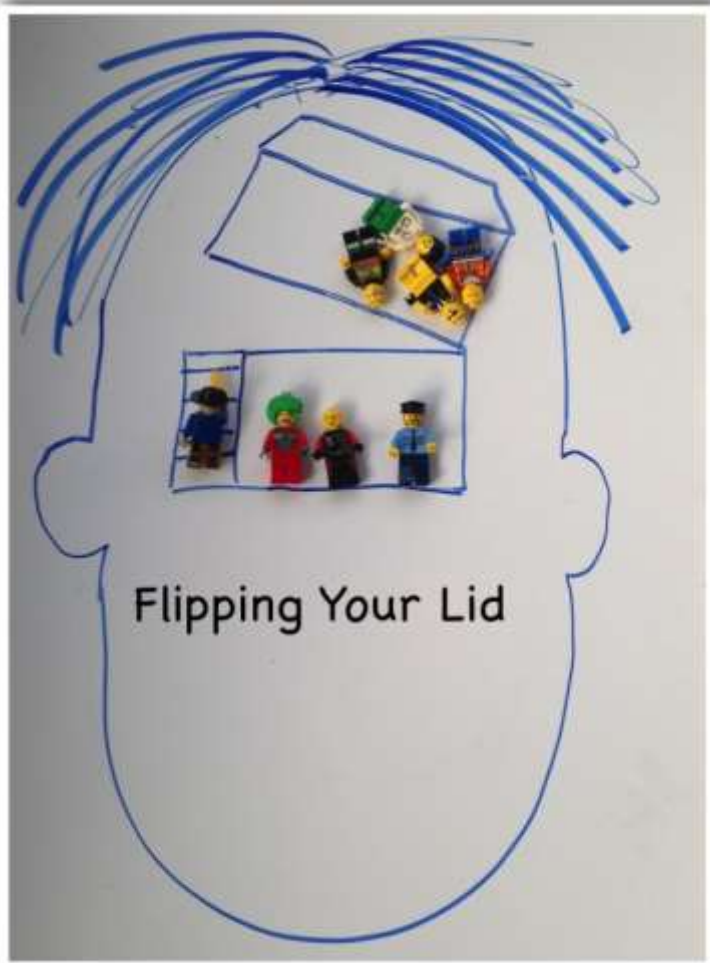
- The upstairs part of the brain we call the pre-frontal cortex, this sits just behind the forehead.
- This part of the brain helps us plan, organise and think about consequences.
- This part of the brain isn't fully developed until mid 20s and coincides with the end of adolescence

This means our teenagers don't have full access to the thinking part of the brain. This creates a gap between high level emotions all teenagers experience and their ability to manage this emotion in a helpful way.

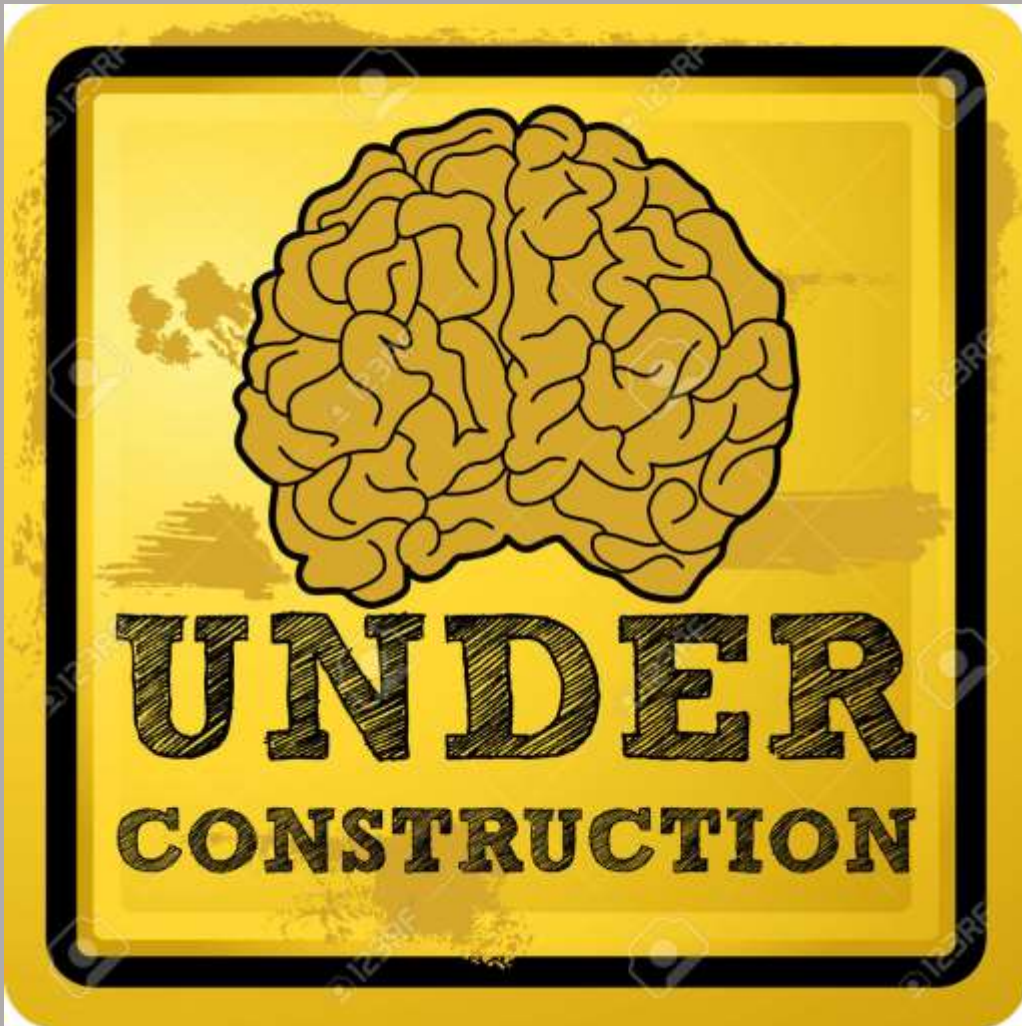
'Flipping your lid'

Dan Siegel calls this 'Flipping your lid'

- This can happen to adults when they become overwhelmed, but this happens to adolescence much more often because of all of the remodelling and reframing that's happening, especially in the upstairs part of the brain



Brain under construction



Two big things happening in the brain during adolescence- Both important for getting ready for adulthood.

- First stage is called 'Pruning process' This is the stage that starts to get rid of all the pathways they are no longer using to allow the brain to specialise in what's really important, and to keep space for things that the young person is most interested in.
- If the young person takes time to specialise in a certain area they enjoy when they are going through this stage, it will be much easier for them to learn it than when in adulthood.
- Second stage is the part where connectivity between those parts of the brain start to increase. The increase in connectivity makes our brain work faster and much more effectively. It will lead to a much more integrated brain.
- The adolescent will become more proactive instead of reactive.
- As parents/carers we have to remember that on the road to this connectivity there is a gap, where decisions are influenced by their emotions.

The **Essence** of the adolescent brain

Emotional Spark

Social Engagement

Novelty

Creative exploration

We will look at the upside and the downside of each of the components

Emotional Spark

Downside

- Intense emotion can rule the day. The adolescent can be impulsive and the emotion and mood can shift rapidly

Upside

- Life can be filled with energy
- Passion
- Vitality
- Trying new things
- Meet new people
- Gives them the skills and ability to leave home and live an independent life

Social engagement

Downside

- Teens can become pre-occupied with friendships and peer relationships and start to exclude adults. This can lead to increased risk taking behaviour
- The need for social acceptance can be more important than anything else

Upside

- Enhances peer connectedness and creates new friendships
- The drive for social connection leads to the creation of supportive relationships which are the best predictors of wellbeing and happiness throughout life

Novelty seeking

Downside

- Sensation seeking and risk taking that overemphasise the thrill and downplay the risk= dangerous behaviours and injury
- Impulsivity- an idea can become an action without a pause to reflect on the consequences
- Dopamine- need more to get the same feel good factor

Upside

- Being open to change and living passionately
- Exploration of novelty can lead to new interests and opportunities to do things in a different way
- Sense of adventure

Creative exploration

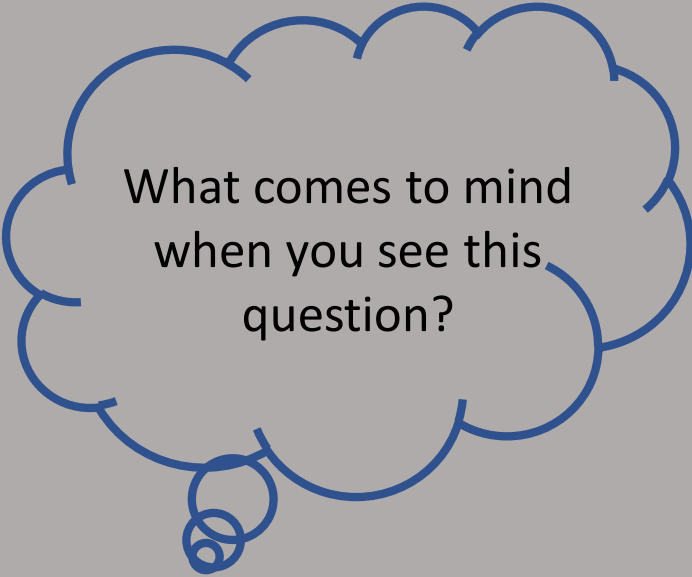
Downside

- Searching for meaning of life can lead to a crisis of identity, vulnerability to peer pressure and a lack of direction and purpose

Upside

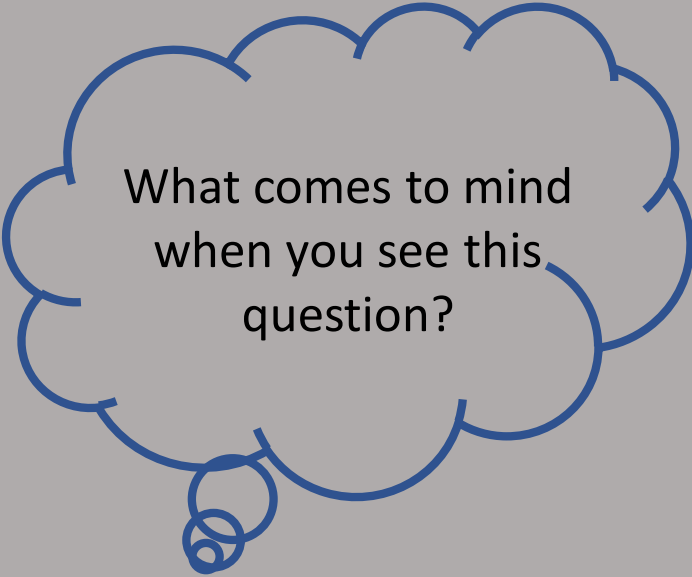
- Experience the ordinary as extraordinary
- Seeing the world through a new lens

What are some of these areas you see in your adolescent that you feel concerned about, or create challenges for you or your family?



What comes to mind when you see this question?

What are some of these areas you see in your adolescent that have a positive impact on them and your family?



What comes to mind when you see this question?

What we as parents need to remember

- Transitioning from the manager to the coach- our relationship is our leverage
- Respect trumps information
- Force never works but persistence does

- Connection matters- Touch, Routines and rituals, privileging 'hanging out' and purpose and meaning.



How we communicate matters

- Strike while the iron is cold
- I statements
- Give to get
- Have a few solutions in mind
- Be specific
- Put yourself In their shoes
- Don't give up
- Rupture and repair



What our teenagers need to know

- Your brain is changing, and you have the ability to influence those changes
- You have so much capacity, but your brakes are still developing
- What fires together wires together
- You might get the wrong end of the stick
- Its normal for relationships with your parents to change
- You are the one in charge of your decisions



If you were going to write a letter to your adolescent,
what would you like them to know?



What are the two things you are going to take away from this session?

