

The SOLUTION source

Thunder Bay Counselling Newsletter
By Colleen Ginter, Clinical Counsellor on behalf of Thunder Bay Counselling

For You & Your Family

FALL 2018

ALMOST ADULTS

UNDERSTANDING AND TALKING TO TEENS



With slamming doors and attitude, it can sometimes be a challenge to talk to teens. Although it may not always be easy it will get better as they continue to mature. There are actually scientific reasons behind the way teens act. This information can help you communicate better with teens and maybe help reduce the number of eyerolls you get.

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Centre de counselling familial de Timmins Inc.
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THE TEEN BRAIN

Even though teens look like adults their brains are still developing. Cognitive neuroscientist Sarah-Jayne Blakemore studies how the brain develops in adolescents and suggests that the brain does not stop developing until mid 20s, and sometimes even later. The part of the brain called the prefrontal cortex is the last part of the brain to develop. This section is responsible for impulses, risk taking, emotion control, planning/decision making and social interactions. This means that during the teen's development these functions are not as complex as an adult brain. In the adult brain, the prefrontal cortex makes you think rationally where the teen's prefrontal cortex reacts emotionally because it is not fully developed. This means it is harder for teens to control their emotions and reactions than it is for adults. So, remaining calm is key in keeping teens cool.

Stress and a lack of sleep can also have a big effect on adolescents.

STRESS is heightened compared to adults in the similar situations because the part of the brain that deals with stress is not fully developed. Professor Russell Romeo at Barnard College reports that high levels of stress in teens can affect the hormone levels in the brain, which can lead to mental illnesses, such as anxiety and depression.

SLEEP fuels the brain. Although it may seem like they're just lazy, 2017 Health Report from Statistics Canada suggests teens need between 8-10 hours of sleep a night. The reports also inform that teenage bodies are programmed behind adults making them tired later in the night and awake later in the day.

COMMUNICATION

Although their brain is in development, teens can still understand what is sensible and logical. Here are ways to better communicate with teens.

- 1. BE AUTHENTIC** – teens understand adults better than they think and can tell what is real and what is phony. Be yourself. You are the adult so don't try to act like a teen. The more real you are with them the greater chance of them being real with you.
- 2. DO NOT LECTURE** – have a conversation instead. Keep your thoughts short and simple to avoid the "Stop! I get it already" response.
- 3. RESPECT THEIR OPINION** – this does not mean giving in but rather to hear them out and understand why they feel a certain way. Allow them to speak in the conversation and let them know their feelings are valued but their actions are not.
- 4. DO NOT ATTACK** – the conversation will break down and become defensive. If the conversation sours (on either side) take a break and then return when both sides have settled.
- 5. HAVE ROUTINES AND RULES** – keep clear and consistent boundaries, while keeping in mind independence is key in maturing. Use loss of privileges and negative consequences carefully.
- 6. ADULTS WHO TRY TO CONTROL HAVE THE MOST DIFFICULTY.** Having a balance is key and different for every relationship and stage. Take time to figure out what is best for you and your teen.
- 7. POSITIVELY REINFORCE** – teens still look for support and approval so let them know when you appreciate or like something they have done.

Terri Finch Hamilton suggests ways to reach teens:

- **SEIZE THE MOMENT** – car rides, late nights at home, or other times when you and the teen are alone. These are great times to have a conversation naturally.
- **DO ACTIVITIES TOGETHER** – go have fun! Being able to connect to the teen outside of home is important, even if it's just going for ice cream.
- **LEAVE LITTLE NOTES** – when they were younger did you ever leave notes in your child's lunchbox? Still do it! A note in their lunch can disperse and remind them that you care.

Although some agitation, moodiness, and tiredness are normal it is important to observe and recognize abnormal behaviours that could be signs a teen need help:

- If they stop doing things they usually enjoy
- If they isolate themselves
- If they sleep for extended periods of time or have difficulty getting out of bed with more than 8-10 hours of rest
- If abnormal behaviour continues for an extended time (a few weeks)

If a teen starts behaving differently and you are concerned it is important to ask questions and be supportive rather than judgmental.

PHRASES TO AVOID:

There are some phrases that will automatically shut down a teenager:

“Because I told you so”

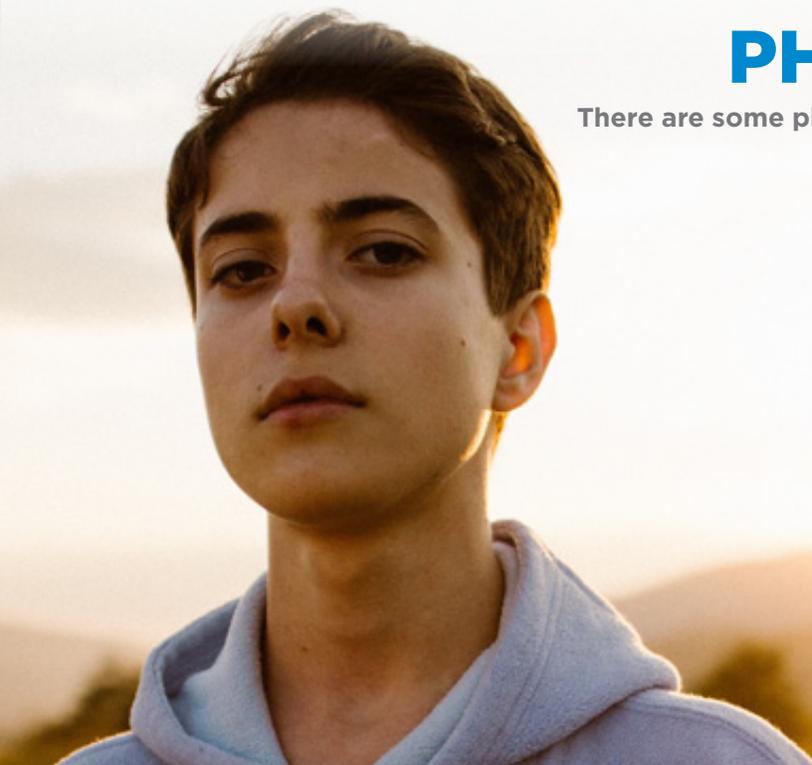
“Some day you'll look back”

“When I was your age”

“You are too young to understand”

“I don't have time to listen now”

“Why can't you be more like _____”



ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

(Adapted from World Health Organization's Stages of Adolescent Development)

EARLY ADOLESCENCE (10-14)

- Starting to test limits
- Compare themselves to their peers
- Begin the process of separating and seek independence
- Hormones become intense

MIDDLE ADOLESCENCE (15-16)

- Conflict and push limits increases. Parents will still need to set boundaries but parents who try to control have the most difficult time
- More self-involvement and concerns within themselves
- Are willing to take bigger chances and rush to be part of the group - friends are very important

LATE ADOLESCENCE (17-21)

- More self regulated and firmer identity of themselves
- Wanting more independence and freedom
- Have defined personal values
- Make independent decisions and are not as influenced by peers

Talking with adults about problems can sometimes be difficult. There are a few things you can try to better communicate with them.

1. **DO NOT GET DEFENSIVE** - it is hard sometimes to not get angry and fight but communicating does not work if either side is attacking the other. Take a break if things get too heated and come back when both sides have cooled.
2. **THINK OF THEIR FEELINGS TOO** - sometimes it can be hard to remember their feelings but remember to think about why they might feel a certain way. What you say can hurt their feelings.
3. **ASK NOT DEMAND** - Things usually go more smoothly, and people are more likely to help, if you ask rather than demand for something. This is not only for parents but everyone.
4. **USE "I" STATEMENTS** - rather than blaming them use an "I" statement like "I feel angry and frustrated" rather than "You make me angry". This will let them understand how you feel and they will not feel attacked.
5. **BE HONEST AND DIRECT WITH THEM** - being honest will let you communicate more openly.

Helping people
is what we're all about.

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Professional Confidential Support

FOR TEENS

**"LIVE WITHOUT PRETENDING,
LOVE WITHOUT DEPENDING,
LISTEN WITHOUT DEFENDING,
SPEAK WITHOUT OFFENDING"**

- DRAKE

