

Teen brain development

Brain development in teens

New imaging techniques show that adolescents' brains actually work differently than adults when processing emotions and reasoning. The more emotionally charged a situation is, the less likely an adolescent will be able to make a good, logical decision.

"What were you thinking?" is an often-heard refrain from parents of adolescents. It is not that the adolescents are not thinking; rather, given the way their brains process information, the emotional impulses often win out over cool, rational thought.

A complicating factor: puberty.

One hundred years ago, maturity in reasoning, and emotional and sexual function, occurred in most people during the mid to late teen years. Today adolescents tend to reach puberty at a significantly younger age, as early as 12 or 13 years for the average girl.



Teens are finding themselves with grown-up, sexual bodies before they have grown-up, logical brains.

Feelings of being loved and desired, the excitement of early romance and new sexual urges create a firestorm of emotional responses and rational thinking can be missing. Teens in this situation are vulnerable to predatory behavior and peer pressure when it comes to sexual activity.

What parents can do

- ♥ The most important thing a parent can do is to understand that an adolescent often is not capable of making a calm, logical and rational decision when under emotional pressure.
- ♥ Keep the lines of communication open and to talk frequently. Avoid the urge to be judgmental, and teach your teen about healthy responses to pressure.
- ♥ Get to know the people your child associates with, including other kids and adults.
- ♥ Set clear ground rules. Expect your teen to tell you where he or she is going, with whom, why and for how long. Use appropriate discipline to respond to failures in trust such as missed curfews.
- ♥ Trust your instincts. If you are uneasy about your teen's relationships with others or his or her activities, respond by guiding your teen in a better direction.
- ♥ Establishing independence and pushing boundaries are a necessary and normal part of your teen's development; a head-on confrontation is not likely to get the desired response.

Resources for Parents

- ♥ Contact Children's Hospital of Wisconsin at 414-266-5423 to request your free booklet, "*Practical Advice for Parents of Teens.*"
- ♥ Contact Children's Health Education Center at 414-765-9355 for information about parent education sessions including **Communicating with Kids** and **Parenting Teens**.