Worlds Apart
“Amazing Observations”
About Adolescence

Presented By
James Campbell, LPC/AC, CACII, MAC

Adapted in part from Jeffrey M. Georgi, M.Div., CCAS, LPC, CGP Clinical Associate Dept. Psychiatry and Surgery Duke University Medical Center And Dr. S. David Hall
At the completion of this brief workshop, participants will:

• Gain an understanding of the developmental tasks of adolescence.
• Grasp the vulnerabilities particular to adolescent development related to substance use.
• Develop a deeper understanding of the role of traditional and social media on adolescent culture.
• Gain exposure to and a conceptual understanding of the role of experiential exercises for adolescents.
There are lots of thoughts out there on adolescents and how to work with them.
Mark Twain had a few thoughts........
What is adolescence?

• According to Encarta World English Dictionary adolescence is:

1. time preceding adulthood: the period from puberty to adulthood in human beings
“Amazing Observation” 1

- **Adolescents are not adults.**

  Adolescents have a hard time remembering that fact.
  
  So do their families.
  
  So do we.
The Adolescent Brain

- Driven to learn
- Complicated beyond imagination
Adolescents do not think like adults.
Brain development

- Tremendous acceleration of neuronal growth throughout the second trimester.

- Age 6 to 10 marks another dramatic period of neuronal growth.
- Beginning in early adolescence neuronal density declines and pruning rate increases.
Adolescents are literally losing their minds…and developing it!

As dendrites are pruned in adolescence the brain becomes more efficient at what it does repetitively.

BUT

It is losing some of its “liquid” thinking.
Question:

What are the pros and cons of this “pruning” process?
Adolescence, not Puberty

• Puberty – secondary sex characteristics develop and potential for reproduction is attained.
• Reached earlier than previous generations
• Not to be confused with adolescence
• Adolescence lasting longer
• We have a development gap
• Biology parallels the psychological and social requirements of adolescents. (Goleman)
The Adolescent Brain

• The adolescent brain is different from the adult brain.

• It is geared to learn.

• Nucleus Accumbens (NA) - the brain’s novelty alarm bell and part of the brain’s reward/survival pathway.

• During first decade of life, energy is focused on growth in this area particularly the increase of dopamine receptors.
The Adolescent Brain

- As kids move into adolescence, the “energy” in the NA drops - decrease in dopamine receptor sensitivity levels (White, 2003).

- How hard is to make a child laugh?

- Adolescents often look bored and depressed.
The Adolescent Brain

• Kids need more external stimulation to activate the NA which leads to risk taking.
• We need our kids out of the nest and exploring their world.
• The adolescent brain is hard wired to seek more stimulation and novelty.
Adolescents are not young adults; they are big kids.
The Adolescent Brain

• Adolescents have a biological mandate to explore their world.
• During adolescence growth in the central core of the brain is solidifying (learning/emotion).
• There is increased activity in the prefrontal cortex (the judgment/planning center).
• The connections between the learning/emotional center of the brain and its judgment center are strengthening.
Boredom is deadly.
Adolescent Brain Development

• **If we do not take advantage of the brain’s ability to learn during adolescence the window narrows. Why?**

• **Intellectual stimulation and relational connection are central to adolescent maturation.**

• **Emotional safety and relational connection increase learning capacity. Why?**
The Adolescent Brain

- Experiences that challenge the adolescent emotionally, physically, and intellectually take advantage of this novelty need.
- Combined with purposeful awareness activities, experiential techniques increase prefrontal maturation.
- Energy in explicit and implicit memory can be channeled to over ride previous and unproductive behavioral patterns.
Drugs do not help the process.
Add *nicotine* to the mix

- One dosing episode increased genetic activity (mRNA for arc and c-fos) that increases dendrite formation and synaptogenesis in adults and adolescents. (Landry, U. of Wisconsin, 2006)
- Adolescent brain response was twice that of the adult brain, particularly in the PFC (Schochet, 2006)
- Adolescent brain “learns” the re-enforcement with greater energy. (memories are more powerful)
- Nicotine is the gateway drug and seems to prime the brain for addictions to other substances independent of genetic heritage.
Alcohol negatively impacts the hippocampus (Swartzwelder, DUMC).

Alcohol negatively impacts the prefrontal cortex particularly during binge use (Crews, UNC).

Alcohol blocks long-term potentiation and leads to blackouts (White, DUMC).

Alcohol interferes with memory migration.

This impact may be life long (Wilson, et.al., DUMC).
The Adolescent Brain
what gets in the way of learning

• It’s not just the alcohol that is the problem.
• After four or more drinks (1 beer 12 oz, one glass of wine, or 1.5 oz of liquor) the adolescent brain experiences significant stress through withdrawal. (Pendergast U.of K.)
• Younger brain tissue is up to five times more sensitive to over excitability during withdrawal. (Pendergast U.of K.)
The Adolescent Brain
what gets in the way of learning

• IQ can be significantly impacted by a pattern of binge use, (S. Brown, U. Cal. at San Diego).

• Just two years of binge use can lower IQ as much as 10%, (S. Brown, U. Cal. at San Diego).

• It is the binge use pattern of alcohol that is exactly what has been documented as normative within the adolescent population, (Weslcher, Harvard).
The brain images below show how alcohol may harm teen mental function. Compared with a young non-drinker, a 15-year-old with an alcohol problem showed poor brain activity during a memory task. This finding is noted by the lack of pink and red coloring.

Image from Susan Tapert, PhD, University of California, San Diego.
Addiction

• Over diagnosed in adolescents
• A devastating and misunderstood disease
• Treatable but not curable

• Multi-systemic
  • Long term treatment
  • Address co-mingling disorders
  • Recovering family and community
The Adolescent Brain

- Environments must be safe and free from alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

- The power of family systems cannot be overlooked.

- If an adolescent resides with or returns to a family system that has not changed there is a powerful “gravitational” pull toward regression and relapse.

- Successful interventions require significant time to solidify lasting change.
Adolescents need support to be healthy.

More often than not, the adolescent you meet is a symptom of the problem and not the problem itself.
What is the primary function of adolescence?
Consider this...

Coolness is subjective.
This is a generation gap.
(Is this a new concept?)
“The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers.”
How Can We Support the Adolescent Brain and Development?

- Develop longer more general life skills: stress management and mindfulness, getting social support and asking for help, increasing physical activity, building study skills, nutrition, team work and a sense of belonging.
- Altruism
- Use influential role models (family is the most important).
- Capitalize on relational and emotional impact on memory.
- Help adolescents make positive memories.
- Use the power of families.
Supporting the Adolescent Brain

- Families need to invest in their child’s brain defense.
- Give adolescents clear reasons to take care of their brains.
- Nourish the brain - knowledge – experience (novel) – nutrition -
- Anchor memory with affect.
- Provide supportive structure.
- Use mindfulness and recognize “clutter” is a distraction.
Adolescents need your support to grow up healthy.

If only your adolescents change, it will be MUCH harder for them to maintain the changes in other groups/classes.

You cannot out-teach, out-counsel, or out-parent addiction.

You cannot control behavior, but you absolutely can influence it.

Build the relationship with your adolescents.
Adolescent treatment should not look like adult treatment.
**Differences in Working with Adolescence**

1. Effective adolescent treatment should be done by someone who actually likes adolescents and can engage with them.

2. Effective adolescent treatment must take advantage of “novelty needs”.

3. Effective adolescent treatment should take learning styles into account (visual, auditory, and kinesthetic).

4. Effective adolescent treatment must take developmental tasks into consideration.

5. Effective adolescent treatment must include and impact systems in which the adolescent is engaged.
What Environments are Teens Drawn to?
Clubs
Prom
The Great Outdoors
Concerts
Games
WOW!

Doesn’t this look and sound just like our groups and group rooms?
Why do we refuse to apply what we all know?
How about your offices, classrooms, and facilities?

• Are they inviting to adolescents?
• Are they inviting to families?
• Do they allow for creativity?
• Do they provide adequate space for teens of different genders or backgrounds?
Let’s Talk

- Let’s consider what we are doing to engage our students, systems and families that isn’t working.

- Let’s consider what we are doing to engage our students, systems and families that is working.

- What could we do to better engage students, systems and families?
What makes up media in the adolescent world?
Are we engaging our young people where they are?

How in touch are we with their world?
Learning Styles

Visual

Auditory

Kinesthetic
Bringing It All Together (Experiential Approach)
WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS SPECIFIC TO ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT WE HAVE LEARNED TO CONSIDER SO FAR?
ADOLESCENTS HAVE A NEED FOR EXTERNAL NOVELTY!
NOW LET’S BRING IT ALL TOGETHER...

...AND CONSIDER SOME PRACTICAL WAYS TO WORK WITH THESE UNIQUE CHALLENGES IN OUR UNIQUE PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES.
So let’s talk about it.
Bridging the gap between the worlds...
Questions and Thoughts
Contact:

James Campbell, MA, CACII
Director of Family Excellence Institute, LLC
Founder of Family Excellence, Inc.
Associate Pastor, Connection Fellowship
President-elect, SCAADAC

Author of:
Broken: Finding Peace in Imperfection
Perfect Marriage     Twenty Myths that Can Really Mess Up Your Relationships
Don’t Forget Me (releases Fall 2018)

(864) 360-1636
jamescampbell@familyexcellence.net  www.familyexcellence.net

James Campbell and Family Excellence Institute, LLC

Twitter:  @jcampbellgreen