

# Handout for Working With Older Kids

## Sue Downey

### Developmentally Speaking

- ❖ Most 8-13 year olds are still concrete thinkers for the most part. While they can understand abstract thoughts, their choices are still often made based on concrete thinking. As teens mature, they will develop more capacity for complex thought.
- ❖ Still center of attention, still believe that bad things won't happen to them.
- ❖ Search for independence drives them to question all authority and begin to turn to peers instead of authority figures as influencers.
- ❖ Exploring identity by experimentation. This can manifest itself as extreme changes in clothes, music, hair etc.. or in their choices of friends.
- ❖ Surging hormones mean moodiness, aggression, and mood swings.
- ❖ Self involvement combined with their mood swings lead to dramatic and emotional outbursts. They are seeking out strong emotional situations and stimuli.
- ❖ Sexual awareness can lead to confusion and anxiety as the feelings can be overwhelming.
- ❖ Brain functions in the prefrontal cortex do not fully mature until early 20's. Can affect ability for teens to make choices and see the whole picture. They are still making most choices from Flight or Fight center of brain.
- ❖ May be awkward or clumsy due to rapid growth spurts.
- ❖ Need way more sleep than they usually get.

### Cooperation

- ❖ Use a problem solving approach and use teamwork to make teens and tweens responsible for helping to solve problem.
  - “How can we get out of the house on time?”
  - “What can the plan be to get your project done and handed in on time?”
- ❖ Find their currency and use it when you can't find a natural consequence.
  - screen time
  - cell phone
  - independence

- ❖ Always look thru the lens of what is IMPORTANT TO THEM. What do they developmentally need?
- ❖ Study from Harvard reported that teenage brains actually shut down when offered criticism from parents/adults and what they perceived as nagging. Better to ask them questions and suggest their own solutions.
- ❖ Get them to buy in to solutions by making them a part of problem solving team. Can use family meetings, contracts to facilitate the process. Let them set the terms of accountability. Look at discipline as a learning opportunity as opposed to behavior controls.

### Teen Brain

- ❖ Second burst of neuronal sprouting happens right before puberty, peaking at about age 11 for girls and 12 for boys. Same “use it or lose it” process as when they are under 3. Major roadwork happening in adolescent brain.
- ❖ Decision making power depends on time and information. As they become more abstract thinkers in later teen years, and the frontal cortex pathways are strengthened they can make better choices and computations. However, in the heat of the moment, the amygdala is driving the bus.
- ❖ As they gain new “powers” they need to experiment to use them.
- ❖ Because of rapid changes in adolescent brain- this is typically a time where mental disorders such as anxiety, depression and bipolar disorder will emerge.

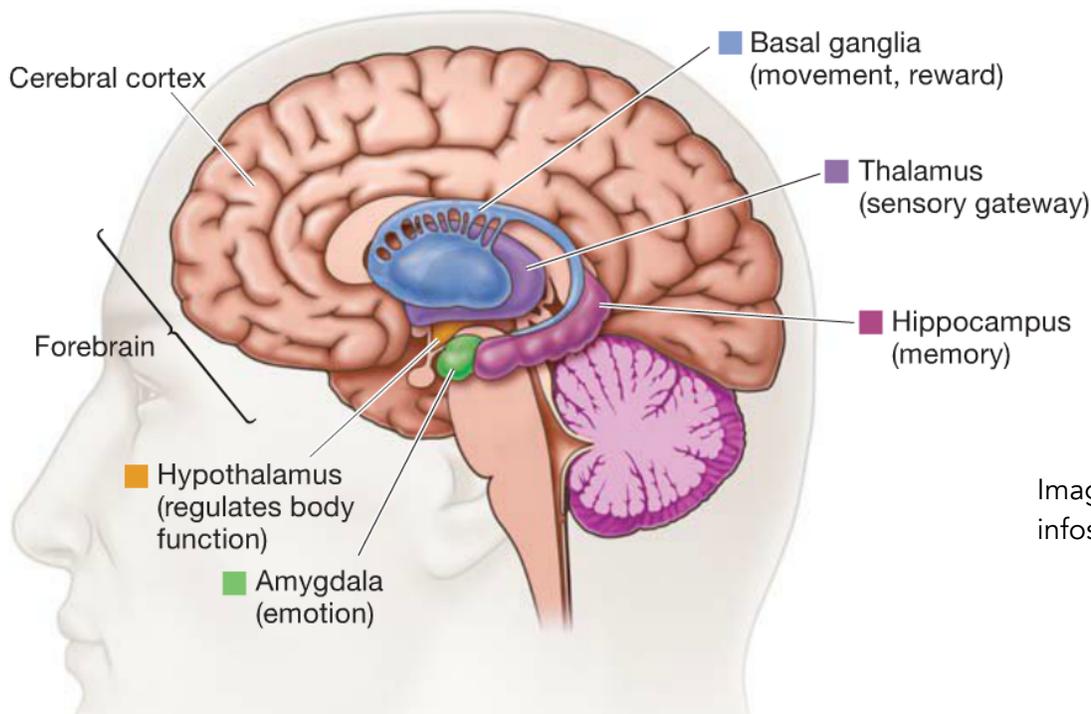


Image from  
infoscience.blogspot.com