

MIDDLE SCHOOL YEARS

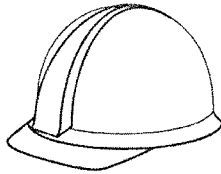
Surviving and Thriving

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PUT YOUR HARD HAT ON

11-18: Major Construction Project

- * A GROWN UP BODY
- * A MATURE BRAIN
- * A UNIQUE IDENTITY



THIS CONSTRUCTION PROJECT IS BEING BUILT ON SHIFTING SANDS

Middle school social scene

- * The changing brain
- * Physical changes
- * Hormonal changes



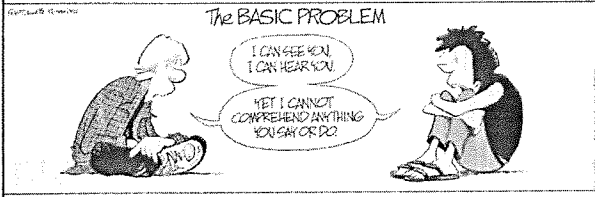
SOUND FAMILIAR?

Does your child:

- * Act like a bad lawyer?
- * Seek approval and time from friends ?
- * Think the whole world is watching him/her?
- * Accuse you of being mad often?
- * Forget things
- * Get embarrassed by you at one moment and then seek affection the next moment?

Do you find yourself:

- * Asking your middle school child: "what were you thinking?"

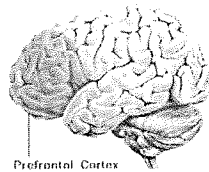


Q: WHY DO THEY ACT THAT WAY?

A: THE BRAIN

The prefrontal cortex of the brain is responsible for:

- * Impulse control
- * Critical thinking
- * Evaluating other people's emotions
- * Moderating social behavior and regulating emotion
- * Organizing, planning, strategizing
- * Starting, shifting and stopping attention

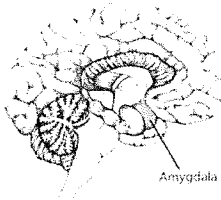


PREFRONTAL CORTEX IS THE MANAGER OF THE BRAIN

For the next 7 to 10 years,
starting at around age 11, the
manager of the middle school
brain is taking a sabbatical
while the brain reorganizes and
rewires to prepare for
adulthood



THE AMYGDALA BECOMES THE MANAGER'S OFFICE TEMP



The amygdala, the emotional
center of the brain responsible
for:

- *Instinctual, gut reactions
- *Takes the lead role over the
decision making department
- *Processes what they are feeling
- *Responsible for empathy

RISK TAKING AND THE TWEEN/TEEN BRAIN

- * There is a peak in the brain's sensitivity to dopamine
rewards from novelty, risk and finding a passion.
- * Reward circuitry in the brain
 - * more activated in the presence of peers,

RISK TAKING IS NECESSARY FOR INDEPENDENCE

- * In order to develop an identity separate from parents kids need bravery to take risks.
- * The main psychosocial crisis of this developmental stage is identity verses role confusion



GOOD RISKS AND BAD RISKS

- * A middle schooler's brain can't always tell the difference between a good risk and a bad risk.
- * Anything that takes a kid out of his comfort zone will fulfill the risk taking drive.

The Middle School Buffet

Create opportunities where your child is allowed to do things that feel thrilling, scary, daring and unknown.

For Instance:

- * Sports
- * Audition for a play
- * Start a business
- * Student council
- * New clubs
- * Volunteer
- * Don't be afraid to let your child quit things to try new things.



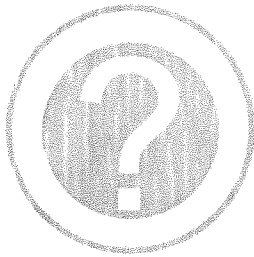
NEW JOB DESCRIPTION

How does knowledge about middle school brain impact your role as a parent.....

While prefrontal cortex, the manager or CEO of your child's brain is on sabbatical, they will need an assistant manager



WHAT ARE QUALITIES OF THE BEST MANAGER YOU EVER WORKED WITH?



RESPONSIBILITIES INCLUDE:

- * Shift from fixing things for your child to teaching your child how to fix things himself
- * Help your child slow down his thinking process
- * Let go of solving their problems
- * Take their problems seriously, but *not* personally

ASSISTANT MANAGER, NOT MICROMANAGER

- * Guide rather than control your child's choices
- * When people are micromanaged they tend to develop feelings of inadequacy



COMMUNICATION

It is appropriate for kids to want to share less about their personal life with you.

Play to your kid's strength by asking advice. Tweens love to solve other people's problems

Ask about talking later if they need to decompress after school and don't feel like telling you about their day



COMMUNICATION

- * Use casual time, to start conversing.
- * Include your child's friends when they are over in your conversations. You earn credibility when they see you not overreacting to what their friends are saying
- * Use social media to strike up a conversation
- * Take advantage of bedtime, not necessarily to have lengthy talks, but to just be present, give physical comforting contact and loving words

HOW TO COMMUNICATE SO YOUR ADOLESCENT DOES NOT FEEL JUDGED

- * "The Botox Brow"
- * Keep a neutral facial expression while listening or talking to your middle schooler
- * Say what you feel instead of showing it on your face

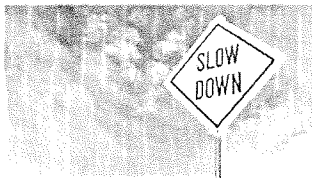
Say what you feel.

RESEARCH IN HOW ADOLESCENTS READ FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

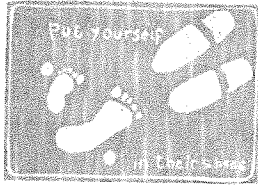
- * Adults use the prefrontal cortex to decipher what a person is feeling based on their facial expressions.
- * Adults correctly labeled emotions about 90% of the time
- * Adolescents used amygdala to decipher feelings in picture correctly labeled emotions about 40% of the time
- * Emotion that registered most predominately in a teen's brain was ANGER
- * Adults can differentiate between pictures of people who look angry, scared or shocked, teens almost always guessed that the person feels angry

PROBLEM SOLVING

- * One of the most effective ways to teach kids to solve their own problems is to realize it is their problem to solve.
- * Your job is to slow the brakes down and help them process through the problem without solving it for them



PROBLEM SOLVING TIPS



- * Always start with empathy
- * Feeling heard helps people become calm
- * Validate what your child is feeling. It does not mean you agree with them, but you acknowledge what they are experiencing

PROBLEM SOLVING STEPS

- * Define the problem
- * Tell you how he feels
- * Brainstorm solutions
- * Pick two favorite ones and imagine out loud how each would play out
- * Choose the solution, explain course of action to you
- * Express feeling about this choice
- * Parent praise effort



Dealing with Big Feelings

- * Dr. Daniel Siegel, "The Whole Brain Child" describes strategies to support the emotional and social growth of your child



CONNECT AND REDIRECT

- * Connect with your child's feelings by naming and validating their emotions before trying to reason with them.



ENGAGE DON'T ENRAGE

- * Engage the upstairs brain rather downstairs brain



NAME IT TO TAME IT

When intense feelings erupt we need to be able to become aware of our emotional reactions and have the vocabulary to label them and make sense of our inner experience.

MOVE IT OR LOSE IT

- * Encourage Physical Activity



LET THE CLOUDS OF EMOTIONS ROLL BY

- * Feelings are states, not traits



USE IT OR LOSE IT

- At ages 2 and 11 the temporal lobe purges information it deems unnecessary to make room for new information.

What is used the least must go first.

- New skills learned in adolescence will be safely stored in your child's brain with repetition and practice and facilitate the development of critical thinking skills.

Changing our Parenting

Once we have children they become a part of us and they define who we are for many years. As for our kids, from the time they are born they are gaining independence and we're letting go of them

This is never more evident to me than when our kids start middle school and our parenting role changes so our children can develop the skills they need to become adults

Metaphor for Parenting

* "A star falls from the sky and into your hands. Then it seeps through your veins and swims inside your blood and becomes every part of you. And then you have to put it back into the sky. And it's the most painful thing that you will ever have to do and that you've ever done. But what's yours is yours. Whether it's up in the sky or here in your hands."

C. Joy Bell C.

Bibliography

* Icard, Michelle: The Middle School Makeover, Improving The Way You and Your Child Experience The Middle School Years

* Riera, Michael: Staying Connected to Your Teen

* Siegel Daniel and Tina Payne Bryson: The Whole Brain Child
