

Brain Development Facts:

1. Teens lose 1/3 of cerebral cortex causing them to sometimes be confused and very forgetful – starting around age 12, they need to be reminded about simple tasks – rather than hounding them, ask them “how would you like to be reminded?” Do not “do” for your teen, do “with” them. For example, if they often forget their backpack or lunch or gym clothes, have a checklist posted by the front door on what they need to bring to school and pause there before going out the door. Make them responsible for what is on that list.
2. Age 24 is when the male brain is fully developed
3. Playing multiple sports (not specializing) or involved in different activities is important for the wiring of the brain because diverse experiences help development
4. Alcohol and drugs have a profound negative affect on a teen brain
5. Teens interpret situations with the part of their brain that is called their Amygdala (emotion part of brain) which is why they are overly sensitive and personalize everything.
6. Yelling or screaming at teens does not work since this activates the “fight or flight” response – either they end up yelling and screaming back at you or completely shut down.
7. Teens have 40 times the sex hormones of a child and 3 times higher than an adult.
8. Increased testosterone in males causes negative and aggressive thoughts
9. Increased estrogen in females causes moodiness
10. What teens choose to do during adolescence plays a major role in how their brains are wired for life.

Problem Solving:

1. Work problems or frustrations together. Do not solve it for them but say, “if you’ve got a problem, we need a plan”
2. If they cannot come up with a resolution to their problem, ask “would you like to know what other kids your age have done to solve this?” Then offer suggestions.

Maturing:

1. The biggest shift in mature thinking is between 8th – 10th grades
2. Typically the more physically mature kids are more likely to use drugs and alcohol because they do not fit in with their peers so they seek out older kids
3. Socially, the kids that mature really fast or really slow have a more difficult time during adolescence since they stand out more.
4. If a teen is concerned about their development, tell them everyone is born with their own biological clock and there’s nothing anyone can do to change it.
5. Sports and activities outside of school “quiet the critical teen mind” – get them involved.

Friends:

1. Be a driver to activities, get to know their friends
2. Get to know the parents of their friends
3. Ask questions of the parents about what the plan is for a sleepover, party, etc.
4. Give your teen a “password” that only you and they know to allow them to get out of a situation they do not feel comfortable in. For instance, if they are at a sleepover or party, they can call you and say “I feel sick, can you come pick me up?” (if this is your password). You need them to be able to “save face” and get out of a situation if they need to.

Trust Account:

1. Teens need to prove to you they can be trusted by consistently coming home on time, following through on their responsibilities, etc. If they show they are trustworthy, then they can reap the rewards: getting a driver’s license, etc.

2. When they do something very trustworthy, tell them “great job, you just put money in your trust account”

Home Environment:

1. The home environment affects teens – create a positive environment since they tend to be very self-critical.
2. Set up a constructive schoolwork environment with a good desk and lots of space for projects and homework.
3. Sleep is VERY IMPORTANT – be sure their room is dark and they get to sleep at a reasonable hour. 9 hours of sleep minimum for pre-teens and teens.
4. Teens have difficulty going to sleep – make sure to turn computer/phone off 2 hours before bedtime to allow them to relax.

Communication:

1. When making a positive statement, be VERY specific and make them your statements. For instance, instead of saying “that dress looks good on you” (which they will tend to say, “no it doesn’t!”), say “I like that color on you” – make it **your** statement, something you believe.
2. Write notes of encouragement to them - that you are thinking about them, good luck on a test, etc.
3. Give positive feedback and reinforcement 2-3 times more than you normally do.
4. DO NOT take their negativity personally
5. When they tell you about something one of their friends did at school, don’t say, “that was dumb!”, rather say “oh, really? What else happened?” You will get more information this way.
6. Ask questions without “asking questions”
7. Choose your “no’s” – pick your battles.
8. Your tone of voice is very important – no yelling
9. The best time to talk with them is in a casual environment where the focus is on a physical activity like playing catch or going on a walk or even driving in a car.
10. Physical closeness is very important. Lay down with them at bedtime to chat, give them hugs, put your arm around them, give them high-fives. Dads especially need to do this with their sons.

Other tips:

1. Be non-judgmental
2. Visit college campuses – plant the seed about education
3. Grades, Responsibility, Friends (in this order) should be the most important things your teen should be focused on
4. Keep your cool
5. Have their pediatrician talk to them about what to expect in their development
6. Teach them about meditation and visualization
7. Talk often about their choices and consequences for those choices
8. Help them problem-solve, but don’t solve their problems for them.
9. Mistakes are ok as this is how life lessons are learned.
10. Hold them accountable for their actions and BE CONSISTENT
11. Gratitude is important – ask them what they are grateful for to help them maintain perspective
12. Routines and rituals are important

Diet:

1. Limit caffeine
2. Drink lots of water
3. Healthy meals and snacks

4. If you don't buy unhealthy food and snacks at the store, they won't eat them at home
5. Daily multivitamin

Family:

1. Try to have dinner together
2. Set aside consistent, weekly, "family fun" time
3. Have a weekly family meeting:
 - a. Each person states one positive thing about everyone at the meeting
 - b. Each person states their goal for the week (ace the spelling test, etc., win a game, etc)
 - c. Decide what the "family fun" will be for the week
 - d. Air out problems, miscommunications
 - e. If you give teens an allowance, give it to them after the weekly meeting

Book Recommendations:

Living with a Work in Progress

Grounded for Life

Parenting 911

You and Your Adolescent