



Emotions and the teenage brain

Allow your teen to make rational decisions by providing them with structure and guidance



The emotional brain of a teenager develops and matures earlier than the thinking brain. Allow your teen to make rational decisions by providing them with structure and guidance. Dr Michael Nagel, Psychology Educator explains how the teenage brain grows and matures and ways parents can support their teen.

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Michael: A lot of parents like to think they could change a teen's behaviour but it's probably more important to understand a teen's behaviour.

One of the things I think that's really important for parents to always keep in mind is that teenagers aren't miniature adults. And they often do need the same sort of structures and boundaries and guidance that a four or five-year-old might need. The way the brain matures, is in such a way, that kind of... from the back to the front; from the inside out.

So the teenagers is in the midst. Their flight or flight response is the emotional part of their brain, which is called the limbic system, is well and truly mature long before the frontal lobes. And particularly the right prefrontal cortex which sits behind the right eye. Now that's really important because it's that region of the brain that allows us to make responsible decisions. It allows us to do abstract thinking. Allows us to regulate our emotions. And through the teenage years, it's going through a major restructuring process.

So what we know is that teenagers are generally hot-wired for emotion and that kind of runs like a car.

Where the emotions... they accelerate but the brakes, the frontal lobes, just aren't working.

And so more often than not, what you have are young people who are hot-wired for emotion but often will do things that might make a five-year-old cringe in disbelief. It's important for parents to keep in mind that they have to find the balance between allowing their young person to be an independent young person but also the support and guidance to help make sure that they don't make mistakes as they traverse through adolescence in the teenage years.

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VO: You can discover more on the Spark Their Future website.

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