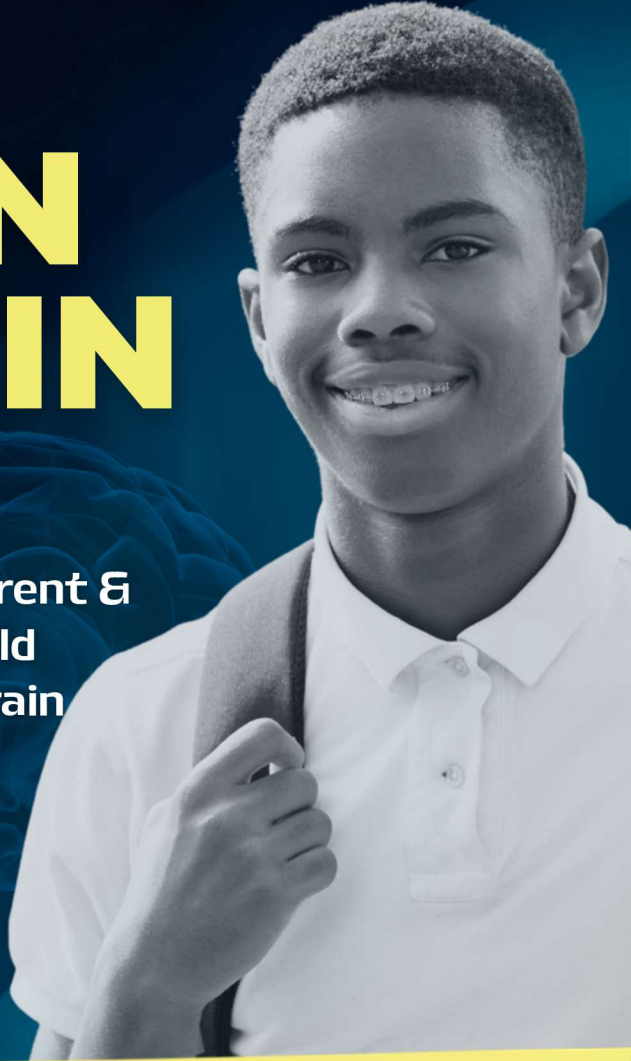




INSIDE THE TEEN BRAIN

What Every Parent &
Caregiver Should
Know About Brain
Development &
Substance Use



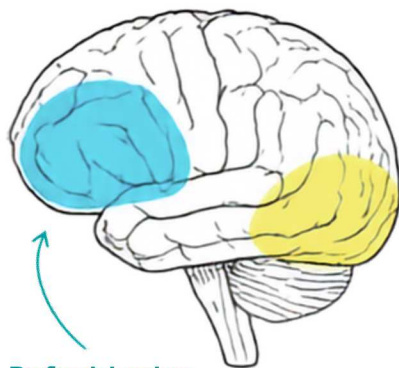
JUST SAY NO
AND HERE'S WHY...

WHAT'S HAPPENING INSIDE THE TEEN BRAIN?

The teen brain is still under construction.

Adolescence is a period of significant brain development. The brain continues to mature into young adulthood, including the prefrontal cortex, an area involved in planning, prioritizing, and decision-making.

At the same time, teens are becoming more independent and navigating new experiences, relationships, and social situations.



Prefrontal cortex:
involved in planning,
prioritizing, and
decision-making

THAT COMBINATION MATTERS!

A developing brain + new experiences = an important time for learning.

The teen years aren't simply about "bad decisions." They're a time when young people are building the skills they'll use to make decisions throughout adulthood.

WHAT CAN ADULTS DO?

Give teens opportunities to:



Ask
questions.



Consider
consequences.



Practice
decision-making.



Learn from
mistakes.



Talk to
trusted adults.

WHY CAN RISK FEEL DIFFERENT TO A TEEN?

It's not just about knowing right from wrong.

Teenagers can understand that something is risky and still make a different choice.

Why?

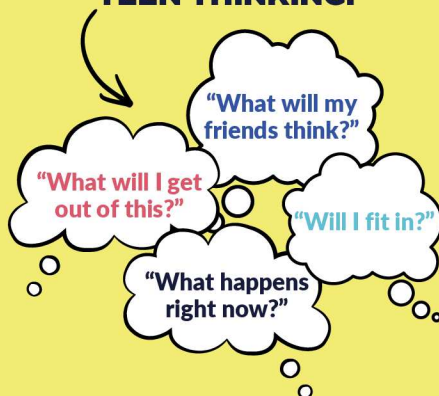
Social experiences and peer relationships become especially important during adolescence. The National Institute of Mental Health notes that this emphasis on social experiences, combined with continued development of the prefrontal cortex, can contribute to risk-taking when the perceived social benefits outweigh possible consequences.

Think about the difference:

ADULT THINKING:



TEEN THINKING:



This doesn't mean every teen will make risky choices. It means the people and environment around them matter.

That's where trusted adults come in.



You can help a teen slow down and consider:

- ✓ What are my choices?
- ✓ What could happen next?
- ✓ What matters to me?
- ✓ What choice supports the future I want?

WHAT DOES SUBSTANCE USE HAVE TO DO WITH THE DEVELOPING BRAIN?

Adolescence is an important time for prevention.

Alcohol, nicotine, marijuana, opioids, and other substances can affect health and development. NIDA identifies the adolescent years as a critical period for substance-use prevention because the brain is still developing and remains highly adaptable.



That doesn't mean that every young person who encounters a substance will use it.



It means prevention matters during this stage of development.

Prevention is more than saying

"Don't use drugs."

It's also about helping young people understand:



THE FACTS

What do we actually know about substances?



THE RISKS

What could happen now and in the future?



THE PRESSURE

How might friends, social situations, or other influences affect a decision?



THE CHOICE

What can I do if I'm offered something?



THE SUPPORT

Who can I turn to if I have questions or need help?

Accurate information gives young people a stronger foundation for making informed decisions.

WHAT CAN PARENTS & CAREGIVERS DO?

You don't have to have "the talk."

Have many conversations.

Instead of waiting for a big moment, use everyday opportunities to talk about choices, pressure, health, and substance use.



Try these five things:

1



Be curious.

Ask what your teen is hearing from friends, school, or online.

2



Listen before lecturing.

Understanding their perspective doesn't mean agreeing with it.

3



Share the facts.

If your teen has a question, make it an opportunity to learn together.

4



Talk through scenarios.

Ask what they might do in a situation involving pressure or a difficult choice.

5



Keep the door open.

Let them know they can come to you with questions without automatically getting a lecture.



Remember:

You don't have to know everything.

You just need to be willing to listen, learn, and keep talking.

FIVE CONVERSATIONS TO START TODAY



You don't need a perfect opening.

Try one of these:

1.

"What are you hearing about drugs or alcohol from people your age?"

2.

"Why do you think some people decide to use substances?"

3.

"What do you think makes it hard for someone to say no?"

4.

"What would you do if someone you knew offered you something?"

5.

"If you ever have a question about a substance, would you feel comfortable asking me?"



THEN LISTEN.

- ✓ You don't have to have all the answers.
- ✓ You don't have to turn every conversation into a lesson.
- ✓ Sometimes the most important thing you can communicate is:

"You can always come to me."

“BUT WHAT IF MY TEEN SAYS...”



Try these responses to keep the conversation going.

“EVERYONE DOES IT.”



Try:

“It might seem that way. What makes you think everyone is doing it?”

Perceptions of what peers are doing don't always match reality.

“IT'S NOT A BIG DEAL.”



Try:

“What makes you feel that way?”

Use their answer as an opportunity to share accurate information rather than immediately shutting down the conversation.

“YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND.”



Try:

“Maybe I don't understand everything about what you're experiencing. Help me understand.”

You can learn about their perspective without giving up your role as the adult.

“I ALREADY KNOW.”



Try:

“That's good. Tell me what you know.”

This gives you an opportunity to identify misinformation and fill in the gaps.

“WHY DO YOU CARE SO MUCH?”



Try:

“Because I care about you and the future you want.”

Your teen doesn't need perfection. They need a caring adult who listens, stays calm, and keeps showing up.

THE CONVERSATION DOESN'T END HERE.

Keep talking.

One conversation won't prevent every risky decision and one conversation doesn't have to.

Prevention happens through ongoing conversations, trusted relationships, accurate information, healthy coping skills, and support.



Your teen doesn't need a perfect parent.

They need an adult who is:

- ♥ Present.
- ♥ Open.
- ♥ Consistent.
- ♥ Willing to listen.



**START WITH THE FACTS.
KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING.**

THE FACTS. YOUR FUTURE.

Want to learn more?

Visit our website for additional resources, information, and tools for parents, caregivers, and educators.



Community
Coalition
Alliance

**THE
FACTS.
YOUR
FUTURE.**

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