

Brain development in adolescent children

What does this mean and why do I need to know?

Being a parent or carer of an adolescent child is great, but it sometimes comes with challenges for both them and you as a family.

As children enter their adolescent years, a lot of physical and emotional changes take place and it's sometimes hard to keep up or understand these changes.

We know that a brain is not fully developed until the age of 25 and so we should try and remember this when we are faced with challenging periods with our children.

The technical part

Teenage children often like to be treated like an adult, which is to be expected, but the development of their brain makes it tricky. An adult will typically use the rational part of the brain (it's called the prefrontal cortex) to make decisions. As a result, decisions are made sensibly, with some understanding of what might happen as an outcome. Adolescents, however, are unable to do this as well as adults.

The adolescent brain mainly processes information using the emotional part of the brain, which is called the amygdala. A teenager's ability to think rationally and make healthy choices increases as the amygdala grows. This increase tends to happen just before puberty, typically between the ages of 10 and 12.

Videos that explain more...

Brain Development in Teenagers - Developed by OxfordSparks, this is a short two-minute video explaining more about how adolescent brain development happens.

[Click here](#)

The Adolescent Brain: Understanding Behaviour - This is a seven-minute video created by the Anna Freud Centre, explaining how the brain development causes changes in behaviour in adolescents.

[Click here](#)

Top tips for parents and carers

1) **Brain development is a marathon, not a sprint**

Accept that these emotional reactions are healthy and normal, and it takes time to settle. Frustrated and emotional responses from parents about a need to mature quicker will not speed things up, so try to be patient.

2) Being completely rational is boring

Humans must first be emotional beings in order to develop the ability for logical thought and reason. When your adolescent is able to understand their full range of emotions including negative ones, they will be better equipped to show more love and kindness. Try to be patient during this phase of development.

3) Understand what is going on in that teenage brain

Accept that this is a necessary process and know that it will not last forever. Although it might not seem like it at times, this is normal.

4) Be kind to them

The stress hormone, cortisol, is more easily produced during this stage of brain development. Try to keep this in mind when your son/daughter is stressing out about issues your adult brain would be able to deal with calmly and rationally.

5) Lead by example

Brain development comes through experiences and effort. The more an adolescent is encouraged and supported in the positive use of the pre-frontal cortex, the more it will happen. It is a tough ask but try to deal with their emotional outbursts using the logical part of your brain.

Where can I get more advice from National resources and support?

The following links provide useful information on how you can support your adolescent child as they develop.

NHS - This page includes advice and several national charities and organisations that can help: [Click here](#).

Young Minds - This website offers an advice line and webchat for parents and carers: [Click here](#).