

Family Connections

Volume 1, Issue 3

July 2008

The Teen Brain

Often parents feel mystified as they watch their child become a teenager. Their daughter who was once sweet and friendly, now is thorny and angry. Their son who once went out of his way to help his mother, now seems lethargic and unpredictable. A teen's thinking and decision-making seems to be irrational and impulsive. Well, it is! Teenagers are unable to think like adults, because their brain is not fully developed.

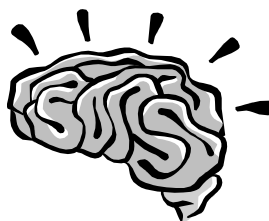
There is a science to the brain and new research has given us all kinds of information about what makes teens tick. Research shows that the brain does not fully develop until about the age of 25. The brain develops from back to front. The back of the brain or **the cerebellum** develops first and is responsible for interacting with the environment. The cerebellum manages coordination, physical activity, and sensory functioning like vision, hearing, touch and negotiating space.

The middle area of the brain, also known as **the limbic system** is what helps us coordinate those functions. For example, figuring

out where the light switch is in a dark room. The middle of the brain also includes the **amygdala**, which controls emotions and is highly sensitive during adolescence. This is why your teen explodes when you ask, "How was your day?" Most of a teens thinking is done with this highly emotional part of the brain.

The last area to develop is the **pre-frontal cortex**. The pre-frontal cortex is responsible for "executive functioning," which is planning, organizing, prioritizing and suppressing impulses. Since the last area to develop is the area for rational thinking, then teenagers aren't able to think effectively through consequences.

Remember when the excuse for teen behavior was "raging hormones?" Brain science does not discount this and here is how it fits in. Hormones have a significant impact on an area of the brain called **the limbic system**, causing teens to seek experiences that create intense feelings. Combine that desire with an inability to regulate impulses and you can begin to understand why teens are they way they are.



Understanding how the teen brain develops can help us understand why our children experiment with alcohol and other drugs. Emotions, physical activity and motivation have greater influence over their behavior than the reasoning area. The ability to think through the consequences of their risk taking behaviors is not fully developed. It also helps explain why talking with your teen about recovery and treatment issues can feel so frustrating. None of this, of course, excuses their choices; it perhaps can provide one aspect of an explanation for their choices. One way parents can help is to act as their teen's **pre-frontal cortex** and help them organize and think through the consequences of their behavior.

For more information on the teen brain, go to www.Time.com or www.PBS.org, type in "teen brain" in either search feature. Also check out, www.drugfree.org/teenbrain/ for easy to understand video by adolescent expert Dr. Ken Winters.

Quote of the month

A small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.

-Margaret Mead

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Illinois Budget Changes Touch Adolescents

The Illinois budget process is complex, but it is important for parents to understand. The recent budget process included reductions affecting substance abuse treatment services, including services for adolescents.

In February 2008 Governor Blagojevich presented a state budget proposal to the Illinois General Assembly that included important increases to programs involving children and families and stressed the need for an increase in **capital funding**. The Governor's proposal was \$1.7 billion over expected revenues.

In May 2008 the General Assembly passed a number of **appropriation bills** that also increased funding to a number of social programs adding to the already proposed shortfall. Recognizing the budget proposal was not in balance, the Governor called the General Assembly back into session for July 9-10 to pass **revenue proposals** to balance the budget. The Senate passed the necessary proposals. The House did not. Because Illinois State Law requires the State Budget to be in balance when it is

passed, Governor Blagojevich vetoed sections of the budget in order to balance it.

For example, the Governor cut \$200 million from the Department of Human Services (DHS), which includes cuts to the Division of Mental Health (DMH) and the Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse (DASA). The cuts to DASA affect treatment services.

When the House went back into session mid-July they voted to override many of the Governor's vetoes, including the veto eliminating many treatment services. However, in order for the House's overrides to take effect, the Senate has to approve them before the end of July. The other possibility for funding restoration is when the General Assembly returns to session in November.

The Senate did not vote on the overrides in July, stating the House should have approved additional money to pay for the increase in spending. The House did not approve the Senate's proposals for raising money, because they considered the propositions to be irresponsible.

The end result of the budget changes was that addiction services were cut by \$55 million, which included changes in outreach, case management and early intervention services for adults and teens.

In a letter to agencies, DASA Director Binion Taylor wrote, "DHS believes that it is vitally important for all clients to have access to a full continuum of care and adequate recovery support services. To the greatest extent possible, we are attempting to preserve the substance abuse treatment slots." Adolescent treatment providers will be affected in different ways as a result of these cuts. The staff at your agency can answer any questions about how they are affected by the budget cuts.

Some Definitions

Capital funding is spending for long-term infrastructure projects.

Appropriation bills are drafts of laws that specify the way money should be spent.

Revenue proposals are specific ideas to raise money, usually in taxes, fees or sale of assets.



Join the voices of
Recovery!
Real people,
real recovery.
Recovery Month
September 2008!

September is Recovery Month!

By Emma Redmond, DASA

The 2008 National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month will be celebrated in September. The theme is "**Join the Voices for Recovery: Real People, Real Recovery**" and the focus is on celebrating those in recovery who have a renewed outlook on life because they sought help for their addiction.

Recovery Month is a **nation-wide celebration** that brings together the individuals af-

ected by addiction who have made a step toward long-term recovery, their families, and treatment providers who have helped them achieve recovery. **Celebrations serve to support and encourage others** on a road to recovery and to help de-stigmatize addiction and the people affected by it. Families are an important part of the celebration because of their own recovery from addiction's impact.

The activities in communities across the United States aim to show that treatment works and that recovery is possible. Attend the September recovery walks and make public the number of people recovery touches. More information will be provided in next month's newsletter about how you and your family can join in these activities. See "Upcoming Events" on the next page to see recovery events already scheduled.

Resources for Families

www.notinmyhouse.org—a new website that addresses prescription drug abuse by teens. Provides parents with information on how to talk to teens and how to prevent it.

www.drugfree.org/teenbrain/ - An informative website on understanding the teen brain.

www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov—a web based resource for families to find treatment facilities for the people they love.

A Beautiful Boy: A father's journey through his son's addiction by David Scheff—This is the story of a teen's addiction through the eyes of a parent.

Tweak: Growing up on Methamphetamines by Nick Scheff— This is described as a powerful memoir of alcohol and drug addiction and a companion to the above book. Available in September 2008.

www.state.il.us/budget/— This is where you can see a **copy of the budget**-all 494 pages. It's not easy to plow through, but it is there if you are interested.

www.voices4kids.org— This is the website for **Voices for Illinois Children**, a non-profit policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring children in Illinois grow up in healthy environments and receive good education. In the last few weeks they have written **several informative issue papers** on the current budget crisis, which are available through their website.

www.iadda.org—**Illinois Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Association**. This organization is dedicated to promoting public policy that supports healthier families and safer communities. It also works to educate the community on substance abuse and addiction. On IADDA's website you can click on "governmental affairs" and **find out who represents you** in state and federal government.



Do you have a resource that you would like to share with other parents? Send your ideas to sfrankIFF@yahoo.com

Upcoming Events

September 13 - Chicago Recovery Walk (Sponsored by Congressman Danny Davis)

September 13— Wild About Recovery, Miller Park Zoo, Bloomington, IL from 5pm—7 pm. Contact alumni@chestnut.org or 309-827-6026 for ticket information.

September 20 - Springfield Recovery Walk—Kick-off at the Illinois State Capital. Event starts at 9am and will go into the afternoon with a party at Lincoln Park.

September 27 - Peoria Recovery Walk

(Watch www.CILRC.org for more information on Walks or go to www.recoverymonth.org for more events in your area or to see how you can plan an event.)

October 25, 2008 - "**Parenting Youth with Emotional Challenges: Effective Interventions**" Parent Conference at Northern Illinois University-Naperville, IL

Legislative Trainings— Agencies can organize trainings for parents on the legislative process by contacting Stephanie Frank at sfrankIFF@yahoo.com or (773)465-6959.

