



SOMETIMES MY TEENAGER DOES NOT USE HER BRAINS AND MAKES REALLY POOR DECISIONS. SHE KNOWS WHAT IS RIGHT BUT OFTEN CHOOSES TO DO WHAT IS WRONG. WHY IS THIS?

Adolescence is the second time in life that your teen will actually act like a child. Don't be surprised if your teenager throws tantrums and makes unreasonable demands that one might typically associate with the terrible twos or terrible teens. Here is the thing; teens actually know their behavior is inappropriate. In fact, if you ask a teen if drinking and driving is dangerous or eating an entire pack of Oreos is unhealthy, they will tell you it is!! So why do they pretend to be asleep when it is time to do household chores? Blame it on the brain!

Teens are people with sharp minds, but they just are not sure what to do with them. Adults understand risk no matter how remote it may be as our brains are fully developed. Teens, however, don't organize and understand life in the same manner that we do--a full grown body, does not equal a full grown brain.

During adolescence, the teen brain is only about 80 percent developed and does not mature until the mid 20s. Because the brain is still growing, environmental factors can significantly impact their developing minds. Teenagers are truly sponges of information making adolescents more capable of learning, memorizing, and retaining information than most adults. So why do these highly intelligent beings do stupid things? Impulsivity trumps logic!

Just as the brain allows teens to learn and retain, info, it also makes adolescents susceptible to negative influences. Primal instincts can take over causing teens to choose what feels good versus what is right. In fact, there is a specific part of the brain, the amagdlia, that causes kids to follow these urges instead of following their intelligence. For these teens feeling good is more important than making good decisions; for these teens watching television is more important than studying for a test.

To avoid negative brain development, parents should monitor their child's activities and encourage them to use their brain productively. As teens grow, the brain starts to prune the unused portions and hard wire the used areas. That is, kids that are involved in academics, sports, music, etc will hard wire their brains to better absorb and enjoy these activities. Kids that are allowed to be lazy will hard wire their brains to be adult couch potatoes.

Positive supports are the best methodology to ensure proper brain development. Teenagers need to be surrounded by compassionate adults and caring institutions that help teens learn specific, consistent, and appropriate behaviors. This does not mean forgo discipline when teens make impulsively poor decisions, rather it means talking about how one is feeling now and how one would have felt if they did the "right thing". It is always better to have a conversation than an argument.