



NATIONAL FAMILIES IN ACTION

PARENT CORPS



# Brain Development 101

## Brains in Transition

Brain development is a life-long process. Rapid periods of change occur not only prior to birth and during infancy, but also during adolescence. Among the brain regions undergoing transformations during the teen years are the prefrontal cortex and the mesolimbic brain regions, which controls “executive functions” that are critical for learning, decision-making, and judgment. These areas provide teens with the ability to plan, execute plans, solve complex problems, inhibit inappropriate impulses, and integrate feelings with thinking—many of the characteristics of a successful adults. However, these same brain regions are particularly sensitive to alcohol and other drugs.

## Wiring

Since many complex changes in brain wiring take place during the teens years and even into the mid-20’s, these years offer both great opportunity and great vulnerability for adolescents. As parents, we can provide information about how to capitalize on opportunities and minimize risks.



## Healthy Brain Campaign

To help teens have more energy and achieve their best, here are some ideas:

- Avoid alcohol, tobacco and other drugs
- Exercise your brain—Hours of TV do not promote healthy brain growth. Talk, read,

look at maps, learn a new hobby. Take classes that are challenging, but not overwhelming. Active use strengthens the brain.

- Protect your head! Always use a seatbelt. Wear helmets during sports
- Provide good nutrition—Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables and drink enough water (6 to 8 glasses per day)
- Get plenty of physical exercise
- Get enough sleep. Getting less than 6 hours can cause problems with coordination, thinking and mood. Most people need 7-9 hours of sleep, and teens may need more.

## “Learning to Drink Responsibly”

Some young people talk about “learning to drink responsibly” before they get to college. **Learning to be responsible about drinking does not require learning how to drink.** Parents may think about introducing their kids to alcohol at home. Stop and think

Studies show that the younger teens are when they start drinking, the more likely they will develop problems with addiction in the future. Furthermore, the legal drinking age is 21. If you say to your child,

“It’s OK to break the law as

long as you do it here with me”, you are sending them a basic message that individuals can decide which laws they will obey and which laws they will break. Instead, we can educate our children to make responsible decisions about **NOT** drinking.

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### DON'T BUY IT And don't let your kids buy it either

- Tobacco industry says it doesn't want your kids to use tobacco.—BUT it spends \$41 million a day trying to get them to.
- The alcohol industry says it doesn't want your kids to use alcohol—But the industry exposes underage kids to 92 percent more ads for “alcopops” and alcoholic lemonades than adults
- Some Internet sites sell kids OxyContin without a prescription—They say doing this is legal

# Back To School Homework for Parents

Going back to school signifies a time of new beginnings—new schools, classes, and friends. It can also be a time of new challenges for many young people when it comes to drugs. As a parent, doing your homework and being a positive role model can impact your teen's decision not to use drugs. Parents can get smart about the risks associated with teens going back to school and make the grade in keeping their kids drug-free by completing the “homework assignments” below-

There are some simple steps you can take to keep track of your child's activities. Of course, your kids might not like you keeping tabs on where they are and what they are doing. It won't be a democracy, and it shouldn't be, according to many parenting experts. In the end, it's not pestering, it's parenting.

## **Be aware of challenges facing your teen as they enter high school.**

Teen acceptance of marijuana use and perceptions of normalcy increase dramatically during the transition from middle to high school, corresponding with an increase in use. Nationwide data indicates that the most dramatic increases in drug use occur between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades and 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades, and the rate continues to climb significantly between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

## **Get to know your teen's friends and where they hang out.**

Research shows that the majority of teens (ages 12-17) who smoked marijuana report getting it from their friends and usually received it inside a home, apartment, or dorm. Hanging around users of marijuana often means exposure not only to other illegal drugs, but also to a lifestyle that can include trouble in school, engaging in sexual activity while young, unintended pregnancy, difficulties with the law, and other problems.

## **Help you teen reject peer pressure.**

Young people who learn a lot about the risks of drugs at home are up to 50% less likely to try drugs than their peers who don't get drug information from their parents. In fact, two-thirds of young people said that losing the respect of family and friends is one of the main reasons they don't smoke marijuana or use other drugs.

## **Schedule time with your teen to discuss your family's “no-drug use” policy**

And enforce rules with clear consequences for breaking them. Make your position clear when it comes to dangerous substances like alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Don't assume that your children know where you stand. Although virtually all parents in America (98%) say they talked with their children about drugs, only 27 % of teens – roughly one in four – say they're learning a lot at home about the risks of drugs.

## **Eat meals together as often as you can.**

Meals are a great opportunity to talk about the day's events, to unwind, and to bond with each other. Studies show that kids whose families eat together at least 5 times a week are less likely to be involved with drugs or alcohol.

## **Involve your teens in supervised activities.**

Approximately 91 % of youths nationwide participated in one or more school-based, community-based, Church-or-faith-based or other activities during the past year. And, teens involved in after school activities or programs were less likely to have used cigarettes, alcohol, or illicit drugs in the past month than youths who did not participate in supervised activities during the past year.

## **Check in with your teen after school.**

The danger zone for drug use is between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m. If you can, try to arrange flex time at work so you can be home during those hours. Or, you can get your teen into a routine of calling you when they get home from school to check in and let you know when they get home from school to check in and let you know where they are. If your child will be with friends, make sure there is adult supervision –not just an older sibling.

## **Watch for a decline in your teen's school performance**

Students with a “D” average were five times more likely to have used illicit drugs in the past month than students with an “A” average. Also, teens with particularly negative attitudes about school were two and a half times more likely to have used marijuana in the past year than youth with positive attitudes towards school.

# Parents Homework Cont.

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## **Know the warning signs of drug use.**

Changes to take notice of are: acting distant from family and friends, hanging out with a different crowd, changes in moods and attitudes, lack of interest in personal appearance, changes in clothing, and dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits.

## **Be a better listener.**

Ask questions – and encourage your teen to ask questions of you. Paraphrase what your child says to you. Ask for their input about family decisions. Showing your willingness to listen will make your child feel more comfortable about opening up to you.

## **Stay involved in your teen's life.**

Help your teen with homework assignments and projects, limit time spent watching TV and using the Internet, limit the amount of time spent with friends on school nights, give him or her responsibilities around the house, and remember to recognize successes and good behavior.

## **Get to know the parents of your children's friends.**

Our children understand networking. They stay in touch; they know each other's telephone numbers; they find out what's going on; and they plan activities together. It's time parents did the same! Parents need to learn the names of their teen's friends. They need to get to know the parents and guardians of those friends. Through networking as parents you will have the opportunity to become a significant force in the community and the life of all its children.

# College visits and getting ready for College

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As we guide our teens to choose the "right" school, there are many factors to think about. A large or small school? How far from home? A rural or urban setting? What majors are available? In state out of state? As most college kids are under 21 and still not legally eligible to drink, an important additional question that we can consider is "What is the alcohol and other drug scene on campus?"

The consequences of college drinking and other drugs use are more significant, more destructive and more costly than many parents realize and may affect your son or daughter whether or not they drink.

- 1,700 students die each year from alcohol-related unintentional injuries
- 599,000 students are unintentionally injured under the influence.
- 696,000 students are assaulted by another student who has been drinking

The transition to college is often so difficult to negotiate that about 1/3 of first

year students fail to enroll for their second year. Excessive alcohol consumption or drug use is one of the factors.

## **How does excessive alcohol or other drug use harm college students?**

College is a time of new friendships, interests and experiences. For many students it can also be a time of drug use and/or excessive alcohol use (binge drinking). The College Alcohol Study at Harvard reports that kids who drink in high school are more likely to be binge drinkers in college. Consequences to those students who drink excessively or use other drugs may include:

- Missing classes/falling behind/academic failure
- Doing something they regret/forgetting where they were or what they did
- Fighting/damaging property/having trouble with campus/local police
- Driving after drinking or using drugs/crashes/date rape

- Alcohol poisoning/serious injury/death

## **What can you do to help your college bound student?**

Before your teen leaves for a college visit or enters college in the fall, talk about what the culture is likely to be and your expectations that they not abuse alcohol or other drugs. Parents remain a key influence on college students.

- Call frequently during the first critical six weeks and throughout the first year– ask about roommates, classes, extracurriculars, social activities.
- Discuss penalties for using fake ID's, underage drinking, and how alcohol/drug abuse can lead to academic failure, violence, date rape, or alcohol poisoning.
- Emphasize where they can go for help for themselves or a friend.



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**DRUG PREVENTION  
STARTS HERE**

**Parent Corps**

Drug dealers are using the Internet to sell their drugs. Some people believe that ordering drugs on the Internet --- particularly prescription pharmaceuticals (pills) --- is a safe, legal and easy way to get high. Nothing could be further from the truth.



There are millions of websites offering drugs such as Vicodin™ and Xanax™ to Internet users. Spam messages to user's emails advertise that these drugs are available with the click of a mouse and a credit card number. Many sites claim you don't need a doctor's prescription to buy these powerful drugs. And some ask you to fill out a bogus questionnaire to make their drug dealing look more legitimate. What you don't know can really hurt you.

Here's a few things to be aware of:

- Selling or buying controlled substances without a legitimate doctor's prescription is a violation of law.
- Many of the websites offering controlled substances are located overseas. Usually, there are no doctors involved in these enterprises. You have no idea where the drugs are made, what's actually in them, or who's behind the drug ring selling you controlled substances. This kind of a transaction is a felony (a violation of Sections 957 and 960 of Title 21, United States Code) --- very serious stuff.
- You might think that these pills come from a sterile factory overseas. Think twice: often these products are stored in trucks, cars, bathrooms, or homes with unsanitary conditions. Why would anyone put this in his or her body?

# BE A "WISE" Parent

Parenting is a tough but rewarding job, especially when you can see your children growing up healthy and secure.

It is important to try and remember this time in your own life in order to better relate to what your child is experiencing. Sharing stories from your own adolescent years with your children can help bridge the age gap.

Communication is an important part of parenting. Parents who communicate clearly and listen are more in tune with their child's needs.

The following are some helpful tips. They spell "**WISE**," as in wise advice:

- **"W" is for Welcome.** Your teen needs to know that you care and are eager to talk.
- **"I" is for Interest.** Show your interest by asking questions in a comfortable order and style.
- **"S" is for Support Good Goals.** If your teen son or daughter has hope for the future, they are more likely to make better choices.
- **"E" is for Encourage, Educate and Empower.**

Your responsibility is to educate and encourage your teen to make good decisions.

You can be a good parent. Remember that most children will thrive in any atmosphere as

long as they experience love, patience and understanding.

