

Behavior and the Adolescent Brain

This document is a summary of the Beautiful Brains article written by David Dobbs and published by National Geographic Society in 2013.

Neurons

Neurons (brain cells) in the frontal lobes of the brain are not fully connected.

- Results in slow, inefficient, and ineffective problem solving, judgment, reasoning, organization, time management
- Impact on ability to stop and think, “Is that a good idea?” or “What is the consequence of this action?”
- Teens are just developing these connections and are slower to think through all of the consequences of their actions

Sensation Seeking

Sensation seeking is “neural buzz,” not necessarily impulsive behavior

- Teens may actually plan a sensation-seeking experience
- Impulsivity generally drops around age 10, but the thrill-seeking peaks at age 15
- Love for novel experiences – open to the new
- Upside – increases circle of friends
- Channel this into positive, risk-taking behavior

Risk Taking

- Teens take more risks – not because they don't understand the dangers, but because they weigh risk versus reward differently than adults
- In situations where risk can get them something they want, they value the reward more heavily than an adult would
- It can be infuriating to adults who see the risks clearly and realize the reward is not worth the risk

Social Interactions

The adolescent brain is wired for social interactions

- We enter a world made by our parents, but we will live most of our lives, and prosper or not, in a world run and remade by our peers
- Knowing, understanding, and building on relationships with peers bears critically on success
- Example: “But, Mom, all my friends are doing it!”
- Relationships with peers are prioritized above almost all other things during this time
- Important note: Student involvement will be critical for SWPBIS to be successful

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