



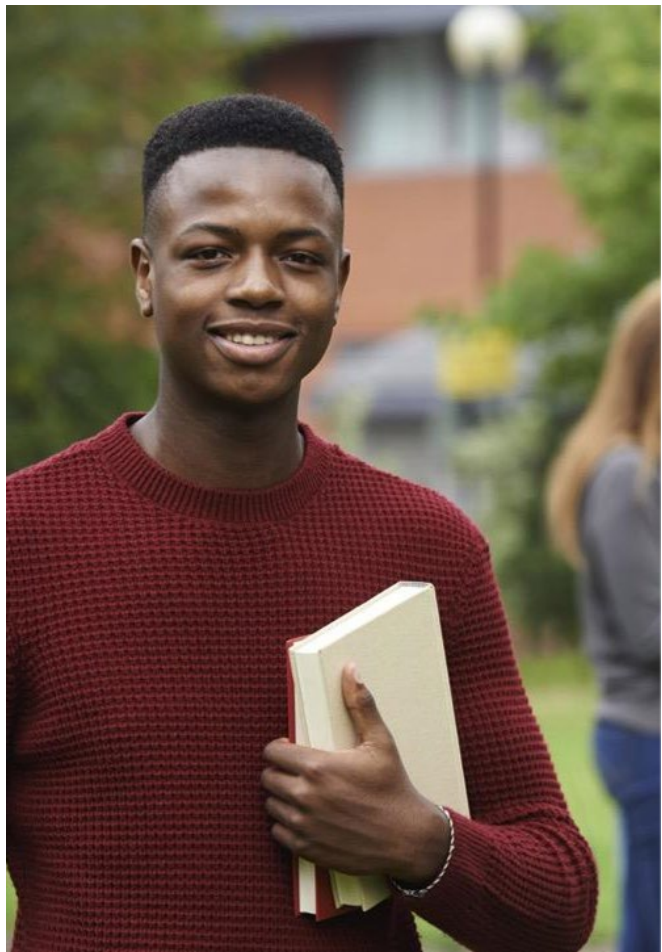
# The Teenage Brain

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**The Jed Foundation**

# Agenda

- The Jed Foundation - Who We Are
- What is Happening in the Teenage Brain?
- Mental Health in Young People
- COVID's Effects on the Brain
- Parenting Strategies
- The Jed Foundation's Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health





# The Jed Foundation

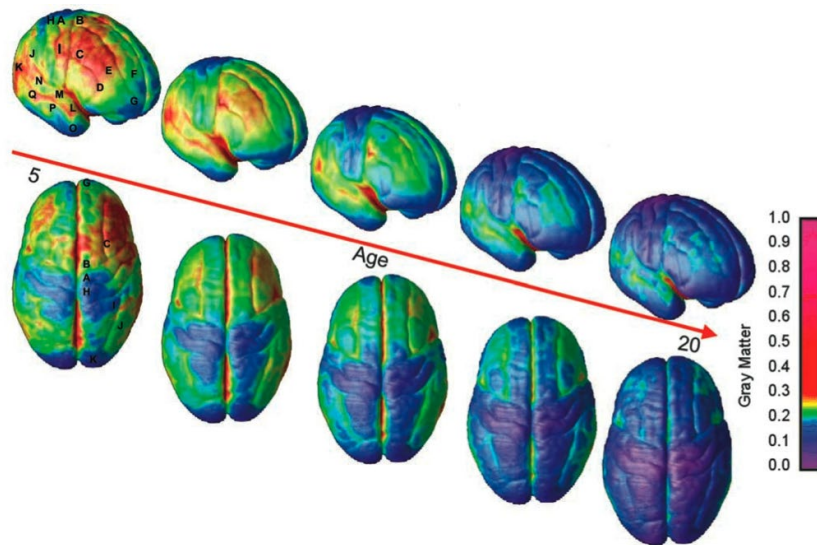
- ❖ JED is a nonprofit that protects emotional health and prevents suicide for our nation's teens and young adults.
- ❖ We partner with high schools and colleges to strengthen their mental health, substance misuse, and suicide prevention programs and systems.
- ❖ We encourage community awareness, understanding and action for young adult mental health.



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# What is happening in the teen brain?

- **Cellular changes** - restructuring and increasing efficiency
- **Organizational changes** - structures reorganizing and more focal functional regions coming together
- Intermittent **hormonal flooding**



# Developmental Opportunities

- Window of increased plasticity
- Childlike enhanced capacity for learning
- Enhanced processing speeds
- Enhanced reactivity to reward (large rewards, not small)
- Enhanced analytic ability
- Increased waves of connectivity – windows of competence and maturity, empathy and self-awareness
- As the prefrontal cortex is increasingly organized, executive function related capacities increase



# Risks & Challenges

- More risk-taking/sensation-seeking
- Increased vulnerability to addictions of all kinds
- Neurobiological vulnerability to stress
- Immature cognitive control capacity in combination with intermittent hormonal flooding
- Enhanced reactivity to social and emotional stimuli
- Higher distractibility,
- Windows of narcissism and impulsivity
- Vulnerability to stress; challenges with sleep

I haven't made  
any really bad  
decisions lately.  
I'm getting  
bored.

# Mental Health in Young Adults



- **1 in 4 young adults** experiences a mental health challenge each year, with issues like depression and anxiety acting as significant impediments to academic success for many students, **yet 46%** are not receiving treatment or counseling.
- **Depression** and **anxiety** rates among teens are rising.
- **60%** of first year college students wish they were better prepared emotionally to leave high school.
- **Suicide and accidental drug overdose** are leading causes of death.
- BIPOC students, LGBTQ+ youth, international students, first-generation students, and other potentially **marginalized populations**, face additional mental health stressors that can place them at incremental risk for adverse outcomes.



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# COVID-19 may be making mental health worse

## COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts

- Increased symptoms or severity of anxiety, depression, PTSD
- Increased substance use and misuse
- Uncertainty of duration
- Fear of infection for self and loved ones
- Grief for people and opportunities
- Adjusting to the “new normal”
- Lack of purposefulness
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Lack of Social Connectedness and missing milestones\*



# Impact of lack of social connectedness

- “There is no vaccine for teenage despair.” - Tali Rosen, junior at Beacon High School in New York City, *New York Times* 2020
- The specifics of their developmental situation make it particularly difficult (and sometimes harmful) for teenagers to be isolated from their peers.
- Individuation and development of independence is thwarted or slowed when they're sitting at home with parents
- Important part of teen development is the realization that peers, not just parents can be a source of emotional support

# Impact of Missing Milestones

- Missing participation in school and extracurriculars is harmful for teenagers' development and well-being.
- Adolescents need a sense of purpose to help develop what will become their young adult identity and many of the activities that support purpose are suspended right now.
- Opportunities to form new connections is nearly impossible.
- College bound students may feel anxious or ambivalent about post secondary options



# Parenting the Teenage Brain

# Working With the Teenage Brain



- Teens need their passions to be sculpted by experience.
- Teens need a net for mistake-making around social rules, emotion regulation, and decision making.
- Teens need adults in their lives to allow/facilitate the development and implementation of strategies, plans, and goals at increasing levels of difficulty. (Scaffolding)
- Teens need us to understand behaviors without ignoring risk.
- Teens have a passion for abstract principles and some enhanced narcissism...use these to your advantage.
- Teens love facts; they don't appreciate arguing about differing values.

# Shift Communication Styles



- LISTENING IS KEY! Listening has more impact; makes teens feel they matter, gets messages of caring and safety across.
- Communication openers: Make it clear that you are ready and willing to listen, that you care what your teen thinks, that his/her ideas are important.
- Repeat what you heard, make sure you got it right.
- Encourage thinking through – “What do you think should happen?” How would you do it? Let’s both offer ideas about how to handle it.
- Communicate during activities that the teen enjoys doing with you.
- Permit privacy; teens have the right not to share everything.
- Allow (and be curious about) opinions that differ from yours.

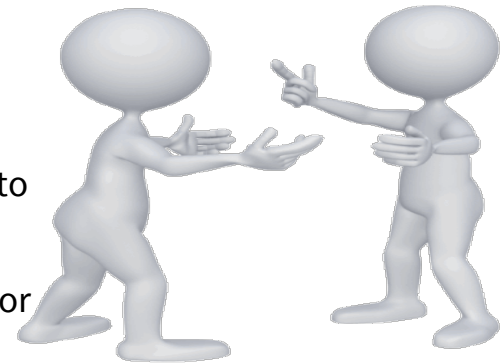


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# Arguments: Take a Different Perspective

**Very few teens like arguing with their parents. Here are reasons why they tend to argue anyway:**

- They are still developing communication skills (they can make us feel defensive in their approach).
- They want to be independent and have input and control. They want to be able to make small decisions on their own.
- They can be single minded and even more so when feeling controlled or pressured. They can actually get so dug in that they will inadvertently undermine their own goals in order to resist control or micromanagement.



# Recognizing and Responding to Hot and Cold Cognition

## Hot Cognition



- ❖ Withdrawal, sarcasm, intensity
- ❖ Externalizing, raised voice, strong emotion, “Always” “never”
- ❖ Listen, be quiet
- ❖ Situations with potentiated reward can elicit
- ❖ Presence of peers can be a trigger
- ❖ People who have meaning in child’s life can be a trigger

## Cold Cognition



- ❖ Thinking during periods of low arousal; clear-headed, measured thinking
- ❖ Cognition in contemplation of the hypothetical or impersonal
- ❖ Cognition in the absence of peers, social pressures, emotional intensity
- ❖ Ability to think things through and consider possibilities at its highest

# Trust versus Control: Strategies

- The “Danbury Mall” trip,
- The expectations, consequences, negotiation note,
- Share harrowing stories,
- “With freedom comes responsibility”
- Communicate your values, don’t defend them.
- Communicate and discuss limits in advance, not after a rule violation.
- Get input, be willing to flex where and when it works.
- Build a compromise culture. Let teens influence decisions and rules.



**"Don't call me a teenager. From now on, I want to be referred to as a pre-adult."**

# COVID Specific Strategies

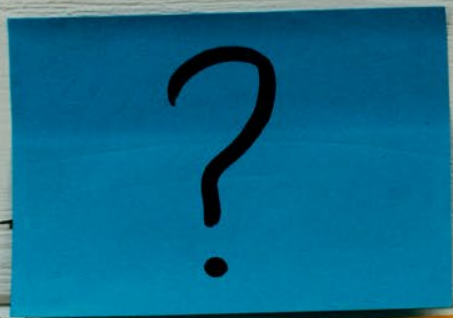
- Routine
- Purpose
- Check in
- Help them connect
- Keep an eye on news exposure
- Keep an eye on screen exposure
- Surprise them



# JED High School Comprehensive Approach

- ❑ The **Comprehensive Approach** provides high schools and districts with a framework to support and improve student mental health and reduce risk for suicide
- ❑ This approach encompasses a series of recommendations grouped under **seven broader domains**
- ❑ Our work with high schools and colleges is a **technical assistance model** that helps schools evaluate their systems and policies related to student mental health







**Hang in there!**

