The Teenage Brain

“The teenage brain is like a car with a good accelerator but a weak brake. With powerful impulses under poor control, the likely result is a crash.” (Laurence Steinberg, Temple University psychology professor)

Even at ages 16-18, when compared to adults, juveniles on average are more:

- Impulsive
- Aggressive
- Emotionally volatile
- Likely to take risks
- Reactive to stress
- Vulnerable to peer pressure
- Focus on short term pay offs rather than long term consequences
- Likely to miss alternative courses of action

This use to be blamed solely on hormones, but with the advent of new imaging techniques recent research into adolescent brain development has backed up commonsense notions about teen behavior, like impulsiveness and vulnerability to peer pressure.

95% of our brain structure is laid down by the age of 5-6. But recent brain scans using MRIs have discovered changes in the brain’s structure that appear late in child development – as late as early 20’s

Just before puberty there is a rapid growth in the prefrontal cortex (the CEO of the brain) that controls, reasoning, making judgments, and impulse control. This brain development mirrors the rapid growth of neurons in infants to age three.

Developmental stage of adolescence is to become independent but teens still need adults to guide and provide structure. To help them make the connections to behavior and consequences.

Studies estimate that there are 11 million underage drinkers in the US - 2005. Alcohol may harm the development of the brain in adolescents even more than the adult brain.

At a time when the teen brain is developing the ability to have better reasoning, better impulse control, and be able to stand up to peers, alcohol could be doing more long lasting damage than researcher had imagined.

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