

Parenting Revolution

Teenager Edition

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Mind

ACTIVITY SHEET

In this session, we'll explore what makes your teenagers tick; from their early brain development to their current thinking patterns. A healthy mind is one which is fixed on truth (position) which in turn, both reflects and reinforces the health of one's soul and spirit (heart). How your teenager thinks influences the way they feel, and how they feel largely governs their behaviour. Put simply, a healthy mind leads to a healthy heart, and a healthy heart influences everything else. Therefore, the importance of healthy thinking (pruning toxic thinking patterns and cultivating truth) cannot be underestimated.



OBJECTIVES SUMMARY

The session designed to help you:

- (a) understand how the teenage brain develops
- (b) encourage the development of a healthy mindset
- (c) lead by example and communicate effectively with your teenager

The human brain is the most complex, intricately designed structure in the known universe. Not only is it the command centre for your teenagers' nervous system, but it also helps regulate their thoughts, emotions and behaviours. The adolescent brain is still under construction – continuing to develop, grow and adapt throughout their teenage years (and well into early-adulthood).



Under Construction

Neural connections are constantly being created as your teen learns more about the way the world works. This also means that your teen is incredibly impressionable. Therefore, it's wise to evaluate what influences the way your teenager looks at the world (shaping what they think, the attitudes they wear, and the beliefs they adopt).



Rank the level of impact the following influences have on your teenager from 1 (greatest influence) to 9 (least influence):

- MAINSTREAM MEDIA
- PARENTS/GRANDPARENTS
- GAMING CULTURE
- FRIENDS/PEERS
- SOCIAL MEDIA
- POP CULTURE
- TEACHERS/SCHOOL
- CHURCH/YOUTH PASTOR
- BOOKS/AUTHORS

Q: As you reflect on this list of influences, what strikes you as being of benefit to your teenager?

Q: As you reflect on this list of influences, what strikes you as being of great concern to your teenager?

Q: Who or what, would you like to be the greatest influence on the way your teenager sees the world?

A sound mind is like a healthy garden.

GARDENS DON'T FLOURISH BECAUSE THEY HAVE NO WORMS, WEEDS OR WILDLIFE. RATHER, GARDENS FLOURISH WHEN INTENTIONALLY TENDED TO BY A GARDENER.

IT'S NOT THE ABSENCE OF NEGATIVE INFLUENCE THAT HELPS YOUR TEENAGER CULTIVATE A HEALTHY MIND, RATHER, IT'S THE INPUT OF POSITIVE INFLUENCES (EXPOSURE TO TRUTH AND INTEGRITY). GIVEN THAT YOUR TEENAGER IS SOAKING UP EVERYTHING IN THEIR ENVIRONMENT (THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY), AS A PARENT, YOU HAVE THE GREAT RESPONSIBILITY OF MAKING SURE YOUR TEEN IS BEING SURROUNDED BY HEALTHY, POSITIVE INFLUENCES WHICH SERVE TO BOTH GUIDE AND GUARD THEIR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS.

Use It or Lose It

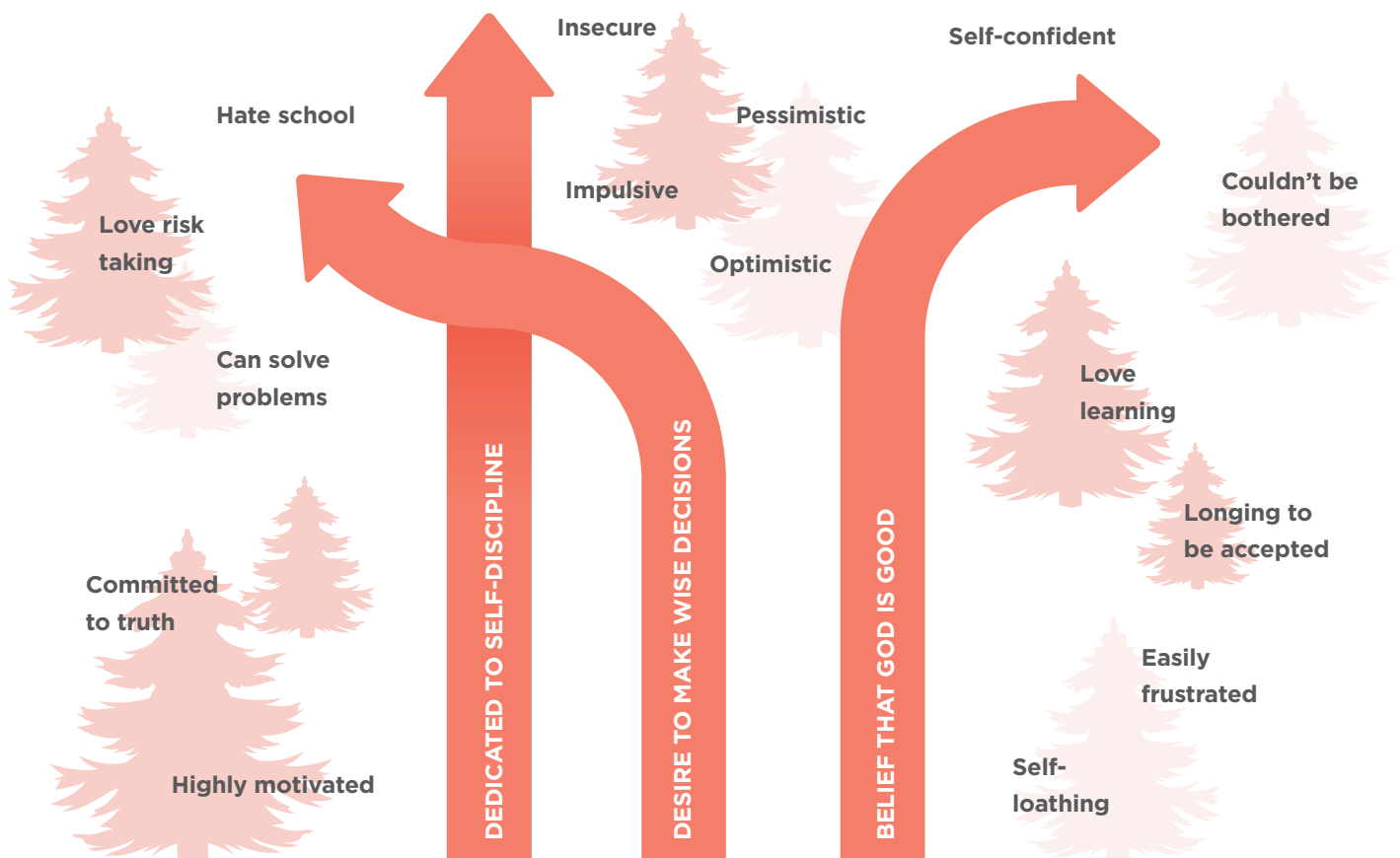
Neuroplasticity refers to the brain's ability to continually adapt and change. The experiences your teenager has serves to reinforce or redirect neural pathways. Neural pathways are like walking tracks in a forest. At first the track may be difficult to see. However, the more it gets used, the clearer the pathway becomes. However, if that track isn't used for a while, eventually the undergrowth returns, and the track is no longer so visible or accessible. Basically, your brain has a 'use it or lose it' policy. This is great news! Not only can your teenager intentionally cultivate a healthy mindset, they also have the capacity to eradicate patterns of toxic thinking.




What are the top 3 'brain tracks' (mindsets) you would like your teenager to develop?

What are the top 3 'brain tracks' (mindsets) you would like your teenager to eradicate?

01			01
02			02
03			03





NEUROSCIENTIFIC RESEARCH HAS SHOWN, THE HUMAN BRAIN IS FAR MORE MALLEABLE AND FLEXIBLE THAN ORIGINALLY THOUGHT. THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE FOR THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN. TEENAGERS ARE BECOMING INDEPENDENT THINKERS, DISCOVERING THEIR OWN IDENTITIES AND FORMING THEIR OWN BELIEF SYSTEMS BASED ON THEIR ENVIRONMENT AND THEIR EXPERIENCES. AS SUCH, THEY ARE EASILY INFLUENCED BY THINGS THAT MOVE THEM EMOTIONALLY. FOR THIS REASON, IT'S BEST FOR PARENTS TO ENCOURAGE THEIR TEENS TO REMAIN FLEXIBLE IN MIND, BUT FIXED IN HEART.

**“Above all else,
guard your heart,
for everything
you do flows
from it.”**

Proverbs 4:32 (NIV)

The FINAL Frontier

During the first few years of life, the brain undergoes rapid development. In fact, your teenager's brain was already 80% of its current size by age 3, and by age 7, most of their cognitive facilities were established. But adolescence is the final frontier for your teenager's brain, as they undergo one more critical period of cognitive development. As your teenager learns to become more independent and refine their abilities to internally regulate their thoughts, emotions and behaviour, they develop maturity. The prefrontal cortex, located right behind the forehead, is the part of the brain that's responsible for executive decision making, empathy, impulse control, long-term planning and problem-solving. This is where wisdom lives. But unfortunately, this is the very last part of the brain to fully develop.

Q: Reflect back to your own adolescence. What were the greatest initiations, incentives and inspirations that helped you 'grow up' and mature?



Identify some of the 'key' ways you could positively influence your teenager? ✓

Empathise with them		Pray with them		Befriend their friends	
Surround them with role models		Support their autonomy		Choose their own consequences +/-	
Freedom in exchange for trust		Give them greater responsibility		Plug them into a church youth group	
Watch and discuss movies together		Travel together (broaden horizons)		Sign up for church/ community serving	
Engage them on social media		Encourage their own decision making		Allocate chores and teach excellence	

Cultivating a Healthy Mindset

Teenagers typically assume that the way they feel is a direct result of what happens to them. For example, “giving speeches makes me anxious”. The underlying assumption is that feeling anxious is caused by the external factor of having to give a speech. However, this isn’t quite true. While certain situations may correspond with certain feelings, emotions are actually mediated by ‘thoughts’ concerning the situation. Simply put, situations trigger thoughts, thoughts impact feelings, and feelings influence behaviour. Helping teens understand this, empowers them to not ‘jump to conclusions’ and be more intentional about cultivating a healthy mindset.



Find a quiet time to sit down with your teenager and run the following scenario by them:

Suppose you went to a party where you don’t know many people. You get introduced to someone your age. As you’re talking, you notice them looking around the room. They don’t seem to be making much eye contact with you when chatting. They keep checking their phone. All of a sudden, they walk away – leaving you awkwardly standing all alone.

How does it make you feel? (can select more than one emotional response)

Rejected	Annoyed	Insecure	Other
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What thoughts might lead you to feel that way? (record your teen’s answers below)

REJECTED	EXAMPLE: “They obviously don’t like me”
ANNOYED	
INSECURE	
OTHER	

If you saw them again later on, what would you do?

A. Go up and talk to them	B. Ignore/snub/reject them	C. Other
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How might you feel or respond if you found out: (record your teen’s answers below)

OPTION A: They suffer from anxiety and have great difficulty talking to strangers	
OPTION B: Just before they met you, they learnt their mum had been in a car accident	

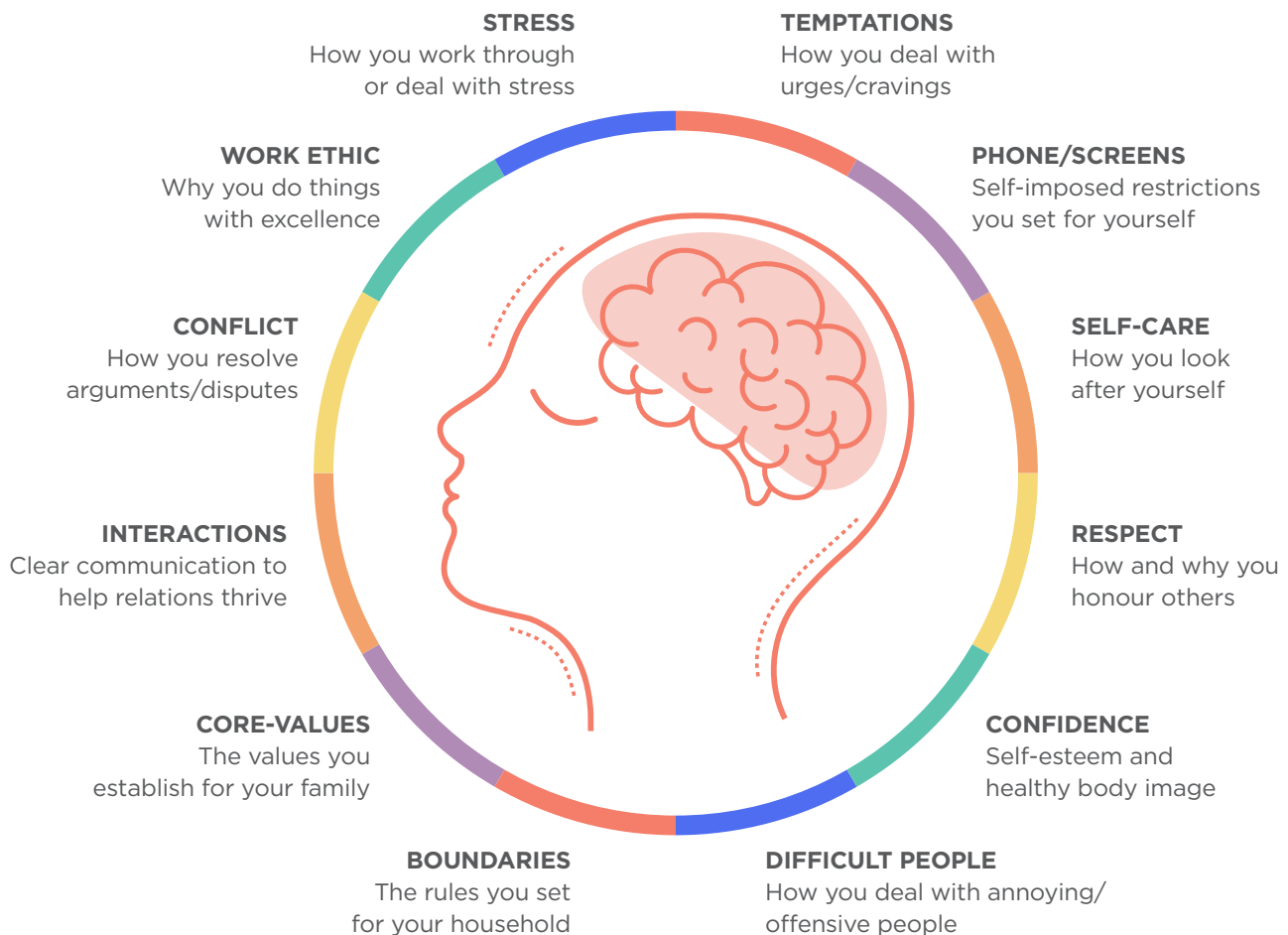
MORAL OF THE STORY = Don’t jump to conclusions.

If you would have known Option A or B when they first met, you would not likely have felt rejected, annoyed or insecure. Even though the ‘situation’ would have been exactly the same (them being distracted and then walking away), what you ‘thought’ would have led you to feel, and therefore, respond differently. It’s not that the ‘situation’ makes you feel and react in certain ways, it’s what you think that matters.

Teach Less - Model More

Whether or not you're aware, your teen is watching how you process difficulties and respond to challenging circumstances. Therefore, lead by example and model in a way your teen can emulate. They may not be able to read your mind but you can be intentional about 'speaking your mind'. Rather than teaching your teens 'what to do', talk them through 'what you have done'.

Consider your rationale and convey the 'why' behind the 'what' for each of the following:



FIND TIME TO COMMUNICATE THE THOUGHT BEHIND YOUR OWN ACTIONS/CHOICES. THE 'RIGHT TIME' MAY BE DURING A CAR TRIP, AT THE DINNER TABLE, OR IN RESPONSE TO AN INCIDENT THAT HAPPENED THAT DAY.

Intentional Conversations

Take time each day to have intentional conversations with your teen about what's going on in their world. Consider using the following 3 steps for successful conversations.

01

ASK 'OPEN-ENDED' QUESTIONS

It's difficult to know how to start a meaningful conversation with your teen, especially when the usual response is nothing but a grunt or an eye roll. An open-ended question is one which cannot be answered with a "yes" or "no" response. Doing so allows space for your teen to process things out loud, and to feel like they're in control of the conversation (rather than feeling interrogated with closed-ended or leading questions).

EXAMPLES:

- *"Tell me about your day?"*
- *"What are some of the challenges going on at school right now?"*
- *"What was that experience like for you?"*
- *"And then what?"*

02

USE 'EFFECTIVE' AND 'AFFECTIVE' LISTENING

Active Listening is a crucial skill for parents of teens. Effective listening is when you're able to communicate to your teen, not just what you heard them say, but that you seek to understand it. Affective listening is the skill of hearing the emotion behind the information being conveyed and having empathy for the way they feel.

EXAMPLES:

- *Give your undivided attention (turn off TV, put phone down, remove distractions)*
- *Use non-verbal gestures (e.g. nodding, facial expressions) to show you're listening*
- *Use verbal gestures (e.g. "yes", "mmhmm") to convey agreeance/understanding*
- *Remember relevant/associated details from previous conversations*
- *Ask questions (this helps to clarify understanding and convey genuine interest)*
- *Paraphrase (or "parrot back") main points and clarify how it makes them feel*

03

VALIDATE IMPORTANT/MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES

Validating is the art of making your teen feel heard and understood. This not only builds empathy, but it encourages your teenager to communicate more. Validating doesn't mean that you agree with them, but it communicates that you can see their point of view and recognise how important it is to them.

EXAMPLES:

- *"Wow, that must have been really tough."*
- *"I can see how important this is to you."*

When it comes to problems, teens who genuinely feel ‘heard’ will be far more willing to ‘listen’.

Rather than just telling your teen what to do, show them HOW TO THINK. Help them develop insight into difficulties, identify potential solutions and discover the best way to move forward.

Identify, Inform & Implement Solutions

Why do you think they did that? What’s driving/motivating them? What do you think they will likely do next? Knowing that, what could you do in advance?

Sounds like there are many challenges and obstacles. So, what’s the most important thing you probably need to be focusing on? Then what?

If you broke it down into bite-size chunks, what would be the easiest thing you could accomplish? Maybe start with that... what do you think?

Who do you know that really understands this well? Do you think they might be able to help you? Have you got anything to lose by asking them?

What’s the worst-case scenario? How likely is it that this would happen? And, just for argument’s sake let’s say that does happen; then what could you do?

What’s the best-case scenario? How likely is it that this would happen? And, let’s just say you’re successful; what would have been required to make it work?