

Teen Brain And Behavior

Part 2 in a 3-part series

BY MANHASSET PRESS STAFF

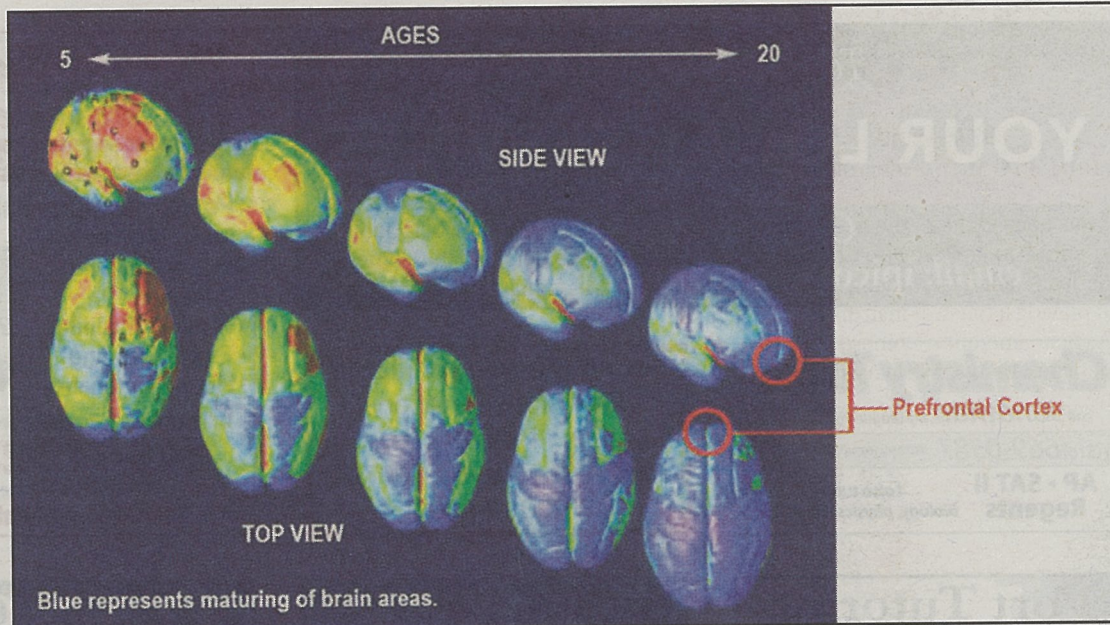
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Manhasset CASA's Talk. They Hear You. Underage Drinking Prevention Campaign is proud to feature the second work in a series from the Partnership for Drug Free Kids about the development of the adolescent teen brain.

The parts of the adolescent brain that develop first are those which control physical coordination, emotion and motivation. However, the part of the brain which controls reasoning and impulses—known as the prefrontal cortex—is near the front of the brain and, therefore, develops last. This part of the brain does not fully mature until the age of 25.

It's as if, while the other parts of the teen brain are shouting, the prefrontal cortex is not quite ready to play referee. This can have noticeable effects on adolescent behavior. Parents may notice some of these effects in teens:

- Difficulty holding back or controlling emotions;
- A preference for physical activity;
- A preference for high excitement and low effort activities (video games, sex, drugs, rock 'n' roll);
- Poor planning and judgment (rarely thinking of negative consequences);
- More risky, impulsive behaviors, including experimenting with drugs and alcohol.



The development of the adolescent brain and behavior are closely linked. In a wink, hormones can shift your teen's emotions into overdrive, leading to unpredictable—and sometimes risky—actions. Unfortunately, developing brains may be more prone to damage. This means that experimentation with drugs and alcohol can have lasting, harmful effects on your teen's health.

Research shows that alcohol abuse during the teenage years negatively impacts the memory center of the brain (the hippocampus).

The use of drugs and alcohol may also disrupt the development of the adolescent brain in unhealthy ways, making it harder for teens to cope with social situations and the normal pressures of life.

Moreover, the brain's reward circuits (the dopamine system) get thrown out of whack when under the influence. This causes a teen to feel in a funk when not using drugs or alcohol—and going back for more only makes things worse.

It is important to urge your teen to take healthy risks. Not only will participation in constructive activities—such as athletics or the arts—help him or her form positive lifestyle habits, it will help your teen's forebrain to develop as well.

For information about the Partnership for Drug Free Kids, go to www.drugfree.org. For information about how you can support Manhasset CASA's Talk. They Hear You. Underage Drinking Prevention Campaign, go to www.manhassetcasa.org.



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