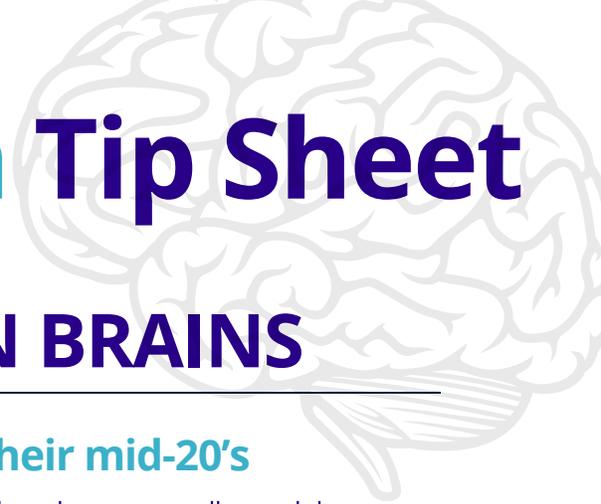




# Teen Brain Tip Sheet



## 5 FACTS ABOUT TEEN BRAINS

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### 1 Teen brains continue to develop until their mid-20's

- When teens are calm, they have the ability to problem solve almost as well as adults.
- The changes that occur between puberty and the mid-20s create a period of intense learning about who we are and who we want to be.
- Drugs, alcohol, and excess stress are particularly harmful to growing brains.

### 2 Different parts of teen brains grow at different rates

- The entire teen brain is growing rapidly.
- Teen emotions are close to the surface because their brains are wired to experience feelings. Their intense emotions are a sign of brain growth.

### 3 Teen brains are flexible

- Teens are searching for new experiences and knowledge. This helps generate more efficient connections in the brain that can lead to new ways of thinking, creative ideas, and opinions about the world.
- Adolescence is a time of opportunity. Teens gain thinking and reasoning, social, and emotional skills, and begin to figure out their interests, goals, and who they are as people.

### 4 The "feel-good" chemical dopamine is highly active in teen brains and rewards new experiences

- All teens must test limits to maximize learning and brain development.
- The highly active reward centers in the brain push teens towards seeking new and exciting experiences.

### 5 Learning doesn't just happen at school

- Teens learn at a fast pace. They need plenty of opportunities to learn.
- Teens are #superlearners! Their brains are rapidly taking in information that will last a lifetime.
- The teen brain is wired to absorb experiences at a fast clip. Brain growth is shaped by the lessons offered at home, by friends and community role models, and in school.



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# Teen Brain Tip Sheet

## 5 TIPS FOR PARENTS

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### #1 AVOID THE LECTURE

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#### Why?

- Lectures are often given when emotions are running high.
  - Teen brains react to emotions first and explanations second. Teens will perceive anger and disappointment during a lecture, which stresses them out. A stressed out brain cannot easily process information and struggles to understand the intended message.
  - Lectures push buttons and enhance fears, but don't teach lasting lessons.
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### #2 GUIDE DECISION-MAKING

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#### Why?

- The reasoning center of the teen brain is developing rapidly but at a slower rate than the emotional center.
  - Parents can guide their teens' ability to make good choices by helping them learn not to make important decisions when emotional.
  - Because peers activate the reward center of the brain, encourage teens to give themselves space away from peers before making big decisions.
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### #3 HAVE CALM DISCUSSIONS

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#### Why?

- Brains work best under calm conditions. Teens are better able to process information and learn while calm.
  - Unless safety is a concern, parents should take time to compose themselves so they can have a calm discussion. Model how to make decisions after you've had a chance to cool off.
  - Teens grow best when we create calm settings that allow them to do their best thinking.
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### #4 SUPPORT EXPLORATION WITHIN SAFE BOUNDARIES

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#### Why?

- Teen brains are wired to seek out new experiences. This is how people gain life-long knowledge.
  - Young people need to test limits and stretch boundaries as they strive to become more independent. They also need boundaries to ensure they stay safe and take actions consistent with good values.
  - Remember to show some flexibility and increased independence as they prove they are responsible.
  - Taking healthy risks allows their brains to grow. Provide plenty of opportunities for teens to try new things that are both exciting and safe.
  - Let your teen fail. With each effort to get back up, young people grow stronger, wiser, and more creative.
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### #5 CREATE A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT FOR BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

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#### Why?

- Encourage teens to eat a well-balanced diet, exercise for at least 20 minutes a day, and get 8-10 hours of sleep. These conditions are ideal for growing brains and mental/physical development.
- Sustained and high levels of stress are damaging to the brain's emotional and physical development. Adult support is essential and protective.
- Alcohol and drugs offer temporary escapes from stress, but can be destructive to healthy brain development. Guide teens toward [healthy coping strategies](#) by modeling them yourself and letting them know healthy choices can make them feel better.
- When parents model healthy behaviors, teens are more likely to pick them up.