

Encouraging **Your** Wellness

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Facebook Responsible for the Majority of Divorces?

Positive Parenting— Understanding Your Complicated Teenager—A Look inside their Heads

As recently as 15 years ago, parents and scientists alike threw up their hands and cried, “Hormones!” when trying to understand teens. While we know that hormones play a part, advances in science are enabling us to study how the brain changes over time. What researchers have learned is that the teenage brain is still very much a work in progress, and still functions quite differently than that of an adults. While their brains may be fully developed in the areas responsible for things like hand/eye coordination, other areas are still quite immature. Areas of the brain that are responsible for tasks such as thinking ahead and weighing priorities are not well developed until later in our 20’s! This may explain why so many teens engage in things like “sexting”, or posting inappropriate material on YouTube without any forethought that this footage will be available to those later interviewing them for college or employment. One author compared the teenage brain to a Ferrari—sleek, shiny, fast, and corners really well—but is has really crappy brakes! Let’s take a closer look at what’s going on in there.



Scientists are now understanding that the prefrontal cortex, responsible for things like organizing plans and ideas, forming strategies, and controlling impulses, is not fully developed until our late 20’s. This is what leads parents to question, “If my child is so smart, how can they be so clueless at the same time?”

At times, you may see your teen perform these skills, but most likely it will be

Simple Ways to Take Care of Your Brain

I have been reading a book by a neuro-psychologist that has been fascinating and complicated all at the same time. The concept is Neuroplasticity—the brain’s ability to be flexible and to rewire in response to experience. I have found it very useful in my work with clients trying to achieve change in their lives. To be our best, we must take care of our brains—and science is showing us how. Here’s a list of some of the top ways:

- Aerobic exercise is one of the best things you can do for your brain. Why? Brain growth and neural connections are enhanced, making it a Miracle Grow for the brain.
- Weight training has been shown to improve cognitive functioning such as decision making, resolving conflict and improving focus.

Dear Readers,



Happy Summer! I hope this newsletter finds everyone enjoying being in the great outdoors and that wonderful feeling that summer can bring. I also hope this issue of **Encouraging Your Wellness** finds you happy and staying healthy. And, as always, I hope you find this newsletter informative as well as inspirational in helping you be the person, parent, and partner you want to be. Happy Reading!

This newsletter comes to you following my week long vacation of camping and hiking to my hearts content. There really is something about experiencing nature that restores peace and wellness for me. I am always surprised when I ask a client what they do that restores them, recharges their batteries and nurtures their very soul, and they don't have a clue. I try to make figuring this out a top priority. Life is Hard! If we don't stop to enjoy something we find wonderful and pleasurable, how do we cope with the difficulties we face everyday? If we don't slow to refuel ourselves, how can we possibly function at our best—how can we beat the stress we experience? I challenge you—if you don't know what it is that really restores you—dedicate this month to finding it. This summer, discover what works to help you be your best self.

Teens are physically programmed to stay up later and sleep in later than children and adults.

Understanding your teen...Cont'd from page 1

inconsistent, at best.

Dopamine levels are also not yet at optimal levels during adolescence. Dopamine is the chemical messenger that is responsible for our ability to filter in/out what is and is not all that important. Without this ability, teens have a very difficult time paying attention to what is most important at any given time. For example, *I've got a big test coming up, I need an A to pass the class, and oh, look, this video game looks fun.*"

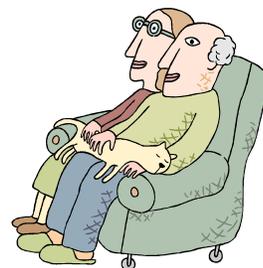
Researchers have discovered that beginning in puberty and continuing into the early 20's, adolescents need 9 hours of sleep per night to optimize brain development. What's more is that the circadian rhythms of a teen shift during this time. This has been shown by the sleep-promoting hormone Melatonin rising later in teens than children and adults. Translation: Teens are physically programmed to stay up later and sleep in later than children and adults.

Simple Ways to Care for Your Brain (from pg. 1)

- Meditate! The hippocampus, the part of the brain in charge of long term memory and spatial navigation also plays a huge role in learning. The amygdala is in charge of processing emotional events, and is trained to be on the alert for danger. We want to support/activate our hippocampus and quiet our amygdala—and these can both be accomplished through meditation. Meditation is the practice of quieting your mind while focusing on breathing to reduce stress and lower blood pressure among other benefits.
- Too much stress is harmful to your brain. When stress hormones are increased, brain growth decreases. In fact, too much stress can actually shrink the brain making it harder to learn new information or retain the information you already have. Another good reason to manage stress!
- Brain growth and change is a positive thing, but it has a dark side. When you (cont'd)

Couple's Corner—Facebook is being linked to Majority of Divorces!

I was recently surfing online when I came across a statistic that said that Facebook is being cited as evidence in 66% of US divorces. As I thought about this, I wasn't necessarily surprised. I have witnessed it in my practice with multiple clients. It starts out innocently enough. A person sees an old friend or someone they dated and decide to say "hello" and catch up on where that person is and how they're doing. Within a short amount of time the sharing of personal stories can lead to a deepened sense of intimacy, which can in turn create feelings of desire. Receiving this additional attention can feel validating, and make us question what might be missing in our current relationship/marriage. Though already strained marriages are most vulnerable, a couple doesn't have to be experiencing marital difficulties for online relationships to become full-fledged affairs. Here are some safeguards couples can apply when using social networks. First, assess who you talk to the most. Is it a good mixture of men and women? Do you favor one friend over others? Do you wait impatiently for a particular friend's posts/responses? Most importantly, are you talking *more* to online friends than your spouse? Are you sharing more details of your life with online friends than your spouse? If so, your sense of true connection to your spouse is at risk. Next, do not engage in an intimate online conversation with someone who is not your spouse. If you feel the need to hide any part of your conversation from your spouse, it should be a red flag warning that you are crossing the line. Couples should share their social networking passwords with their spouses so that both of you know what is happening and there are no secrets or private conversations with others. Finally, couples should set parameters about how much time and when they are online each day. If you are using Facebook at 2 a.m. when everyone in your household is asleep, this could spell a problem. You are likely to feel the most connected to the relationship you invest the most in, so invest the most in your marriage!



Understanding Your Teen –continued from page 2

Studies have shown that up to 20% of high schoolers fall asleep within the first two hours of school. Some High Schools have experimented with later start times, and have already drastically reduced their drop out rates.

Finally, let's look at why teens are so quick to overreact to simple requests or innocent comments. Physiologically, they are less able than adults to accurately interpret facial expressions or inflections in tone. A study out of McLean Hospital tested teens abilities to accurately identify the emotion of a woman in a picture. 100% of adults guessed "fear" correctly, but only 50% of teens were able to do so. The study further confirmed that teens were using the part of their brain responsible for memory and emotions and adults relied on the frontal cortex which governs reason and forethought. This may explain the emotional impulsiveness in some teens; they are being ruled by their emotional state, without much access to their reasoning skills such as, "This will pass, or Things will improve." Here are some ways parents can help. Remind a distraught teen that things will get better—offer empathy along with reinforcing the adult (reasoning) perspective. Ask your teen to come up with their own solutions to problems. This helps to wire those areas of the brain and feeds the teens desire for autonomy. Educate your child about sleep—share with them that you are not enforcing a curfew just to be in control. Finally, don't make excuses for them—this information isn't saying that teens can't be responsible or think ahead—their level of brain development just makes it more difficult. Keep encouraging and enforcing it!

Teens are less able than adults to accurately interpret facial expressions or inflections in tone of voice—making them more prone to misinterpreting others.



Simple Ways to Care for Your Brain— Cont'd from pg. 2

are experiencing trauma, your brain is laying down neural connections that include memory and sensations of terrifying experiences. That's why it is important to deal with trauma with a trained professional as soon as possible before this trauma state becomes a trait. The better you care for your brain, the more flexible it will be when you desire change.

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If you are in need of individual, couple or family help, call me. Together with you, I will design a treatment plan that helps you achieve your goals and gets you on the road to feeling life more fulfilled. I specialize in working with teens, adults and children who are struggling with depression, anxiety, low self-worth, past experiences of abuse, and who are believing there must be more to life than what they are currently experiencing. I look forward to speaking with you.

Dear Pam,

My husband and his family love horror movies, and allow our young children to watch them. My husband's argument is that he tells our kids that it is all "fake" beforehand, so they won't be scared by it. I can't shake the feeling that it is not good for them, but don't have solid evidence to convince my husband. Can you help? - R.L.

First of all, let me commend you for asking the question and trusting your instinct that it is NOT good for your young children. Telling our children that it is "fake" does nothing to erase the damaging images that are being implanted in their young and growing brains. Up until approximately age 3 to 4, children cannot decipher what is on television from what is really happening. Therefore, if they are watching a gory image of violence or death, it is NO DIFFERENT than watching this happen for real. I ask you, would any parent in their right mind assume that their young child would not be harmed by watching a murder? Even after age 4, the damaging effects are well documented. As adults, our brains are capable of recognizing that it is an image created in a studio, yet sometimes the images remain disturbing even for adults. Kids simply get the images in their brains and then try to master them by playing them out. It can lead to several problematic factors including anxiety, increased aggressiveness, desensitization to violence, nightmares and even trauma. It does not toughen our children up—it hurts them and children should not be exposed to these images/stories. The "solid evidence" you need is available. Well over 1000 studies, including the Surgeon General's office and the National Institute of Mental Health along with other leading mental and public health facilities overwhelmingly have concluded that there is a causal connection between violent (horror) media and aggressive attitudes, values and behavior in children. Furthermore, it confirms that exposure to violent media leads to emotional desensitization to violence and leads these children to see violence as an acceptable way to resolve conflict. It's time for your husband to see these overwhelming facts to prevent these effects from happening to your children. Good luck!

