

# The Challenges of Teens and Risky Behavior

Menlo School  
Parent and Faculty Education Conference

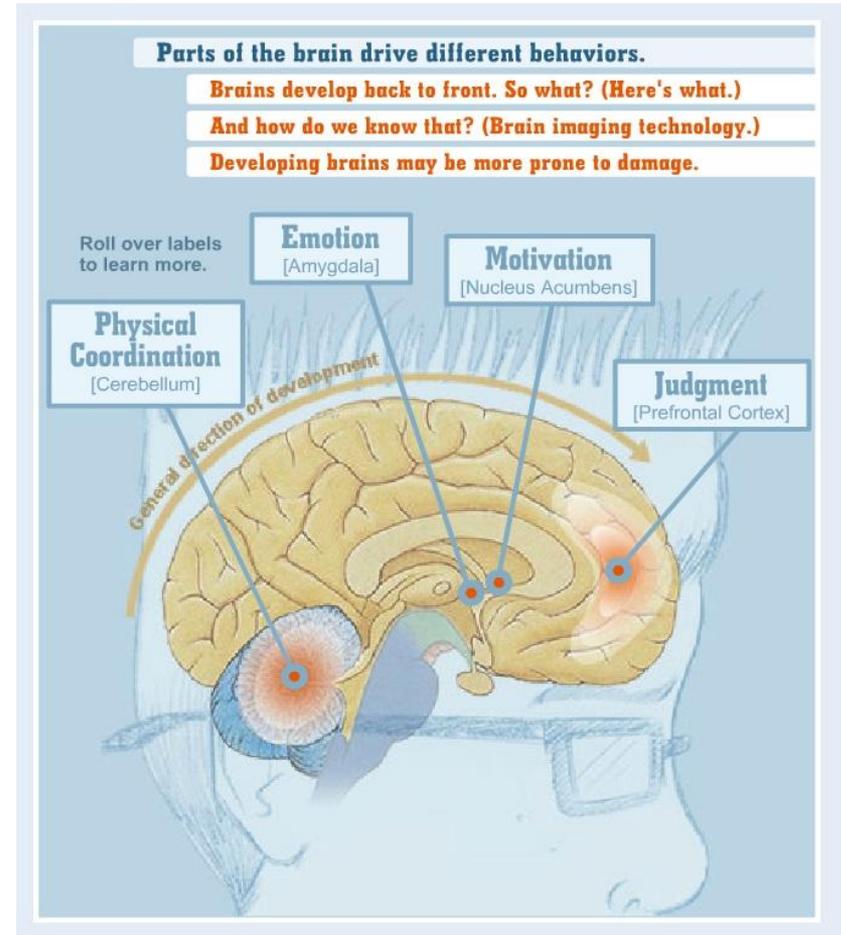
Lea Goldstein, Ph.D.

# The Adolescent Brain and Behavior

- ▶ Reasoning
    - Smart kids do dumb things
  - ▶ Judgment
  - ▶ Decision Making
  - ▶ Cognition, Emotion, and Rationality
    - Affect can disrupt cognitive abilities
    - Separating intelligence from rationality
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# Brain Development

- ▶ Develops back to front
- ▶ Cerebellum
  - Physical coordination
- ▶ Amygdala
  - Emotions
  - Often overreactive
- ▶ Nucleus Acumbens
  - Motivation
  - Desires
- ▶ Prefrontal Cortex
  - Judgment
  - Reasoning
  - Impulses
  - Not fully developed until 25



# Development Throughout the Life Span

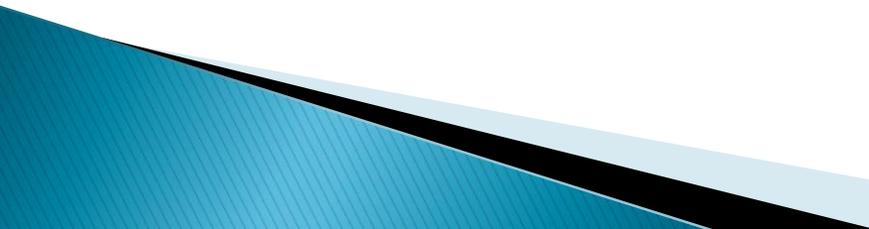
- ▶ Developmental stages throughout our life span
- ▶ Each stage has specific tasks
- ▶ Successfully completing tasks paves the way to move into the next stage of development
- ▶ Adolescence is one developmental stage
  - But a relatively long period of time

# Developmental Tasks of Adolescence

- ▶ Form a positive and secure identity/sense of self
- ▶ Separate from caregivers
- ▶ Get an education
  - Formal
  - Informal

# Developmental Tasks of Adolescence (cont)

## Form a Positive Identity

- ▶ Try on different “hats”—clothing, styles, music, values & beliefs, even personalities
  - ▶ Try different peer groups
  - ▶ Disagreeing with family—trying out own beliefs that may differ from what is common in family
  - ▶ Learn to deal with experiences of inadequacy or discomfort: self-conscious; feelings of alienation or emptiness, anxiety, depression
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# Developmental Tasks of Adolescence

## Separate from Caregivers

- ▶ Disagreeing with family—establishing oneself as a separate person; not wanting to be seen w/family
  - ▶ Peer group more important than anyone—their opinions & ideas come before one's own and before the family's
  - ▶ Risk taking—seeking a thrill, facing danger; experimenting with drugs/alcohol
  - ▶ Testing limits
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# Developmental Tasks of Adolescence

## Get an Education

### Formal

- ▶ School
- ▶ Religious
- ▶ Extra-curricular

### Informal

- ▶ Personal
- ▶ Social
- ▶ Life-gathering tools

# Drugs, Sex, and Rock and Roll

- ▶ What's happening today
  - Substance use
  - Hooking Up (otherwise referred to as sex)
  - Social Media
  - Thrill seeking

# Statistics on use

- ▶ Monitoring the Future Survey (NIDA) 2011
  - Alcohol: 45% report drinking; 70% report trying alcohol (more than a few sips) by the end of high school
  - Marijuana: 25% report using in past year
  - Cigarettes: 40% have tried them; 19% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders are current smokers
  - Hallucinogens (including ecstasy): 3.7%
  - Cocaine: 2%
  - Amphetamine: 2.1%

# Stages of Adolescent Substance Use

- ▶ Experimentation
  - ▶ Regular Use/Misuse
  - ▶ Abuse
  - ▶ Dependence/Addiction
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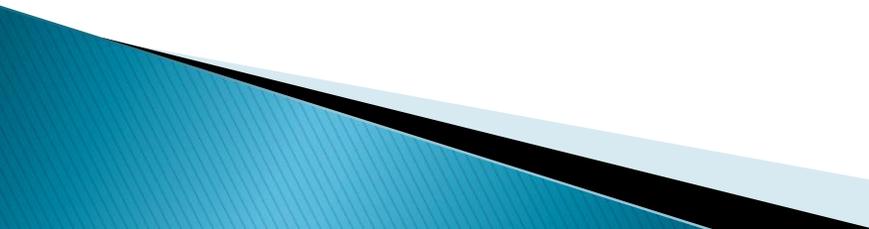
# Experimentation

- ▶ Curiosity
  - ▶ Thrill of getting high
  - ▶ Commonly use alcohol, marijuana, tobacco
  - ▶ Unplanned, infrequent use
  - ▶ Use small quantities because of low tolerance
  - ▶ Few, if any, negative consequences
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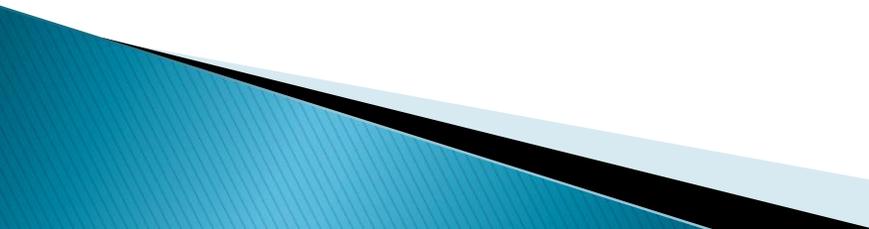
# Regular Use

- ▶ Planned in advance
  - ▶ Consumption amount increases
  - ▶ Pride in being able to handle larger amounts
  - ▶ Perception that “everyone does it”
  - ▶ Few negative consequences
  - ▶ Parents become aware
  - ▶ Lying, excuses
  - ▶ Drop in grades and/or activities
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# Abuse

- ▶ Solitary use/Isolation from non-using friends
  - ▶ Increased tolerance
  - ▶ Increase in number of days using/money spent
  - ▶ Promises to cut down or quit unmet
  - ▶ Depression/suicidal thoughts
  - ▶ Use of harder drugs
  - ▶ Preoccupation with using/Using is the activity
  - ▶ Negative consequences
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# Addiction / Dependence

- ▶ Similar to Abuse stage
  - ▶ Compulsive use (feels a need to use)
  - ▶ Use less under control
  - ▶ Deterioration of physical and mental health
  - ▶ Break own code of ethics
  - ▶ Poor self image
  - ▶ Denial about impact of use
  - ▶ Continued use in spite of negative consequences
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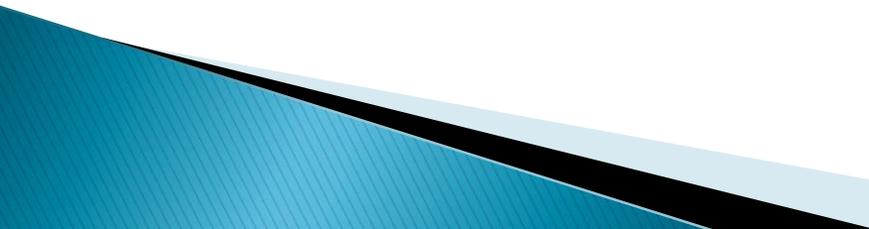
# Addiction is most frequently

- ▶ Chronic
- ▶ Progressive
- ▶ Relapsing
- ▶ Fatal
  - Youth whose use is *chronic* and *progressive* need structured treatment

# Facts Specific to Adolescents

- ▶ While adults also move through the stages of use, it can take 10 or more years for an addiction to develop. Teens can progress to Abuse or Addiction in less than two years
  - ▶ The younger a teen begins using drugs or alcohol, the more likely they will have a problem or develop an addiction
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# Factors Contributing to Use

- ▶ Genetics and Family History
    - Adoption and Twin Studies
    - Examine Family Tree
  - ▶ Stressors
    - Privileged, but pressured?
  - ▶ Parent Behavior and Attitude
    - Coping Skills
    - Drug and Alcohol Use
    - What do you believe?
    - Sharing values and expectations
  - ▶ Your child's environment
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# Denial is not a river in Egypt

- ▶ Parents routinely underestimate the amount, frequency, and types of substances used
  - ▶ Often surprised at teen's own assessment
  - ▶ Downplay seriousness of use
  - ▶ False sense of security if no drinking and driving
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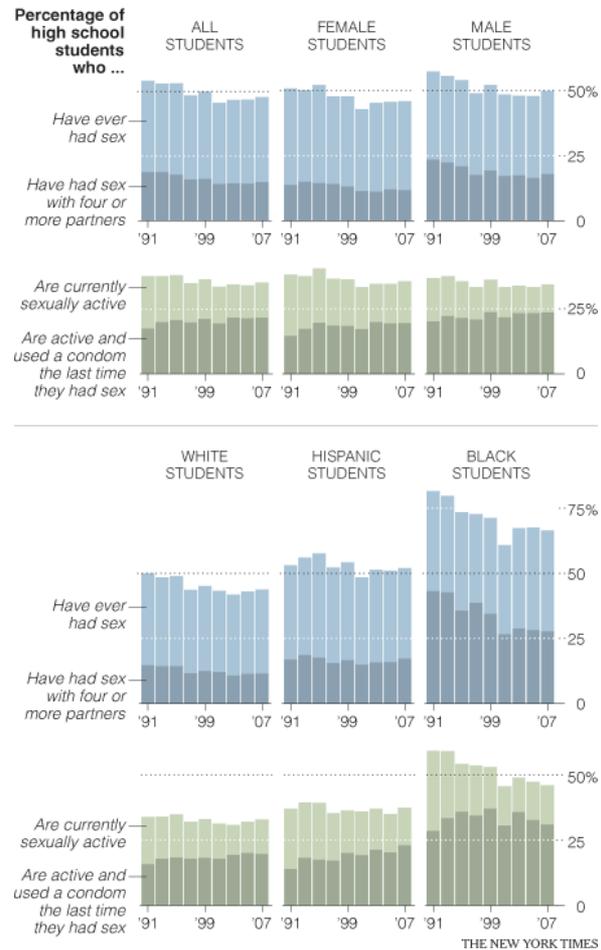
# Sexual Activity

- ▶ Whether we want to admit it or not, teens are sexual beings
  - 100+ years ago a 15 year old girl would be married and pregnant
  - Puberty is beginning at earlier ages than even a generation ago
- ▶ Younger teens are less likely to have a boy/girlfriend, and instead are experimenting with casual petting/digital penetration and oral sex
- ▶ Many teens believe that if you are not having intercourse, you are *not really* engaging in sex

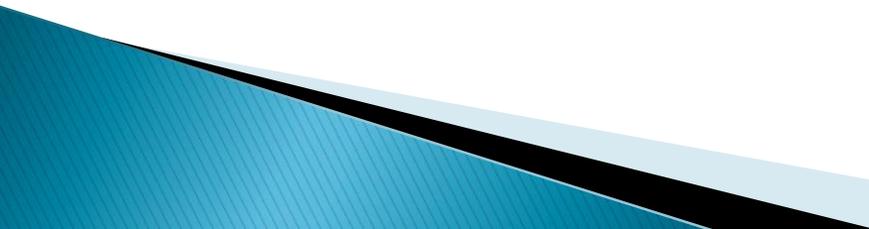
# Statistics on Teen Sexual Activity

- ▶ Currently 46.8% of all high school students report they have had sexual intercourse
  - ▶ Among the 33.9% of currently sexually active high school students nationwide, 23.3% had drunk alcohol or used drugs before their last sexual intercourse.
  - ▶ A majority of both girls and boys who are sexually active wish they had waited. Of those who have had sex, more than one half of teen boys (55%) and the majority of teen girls (70%) said they wish they had waited longer to have sex
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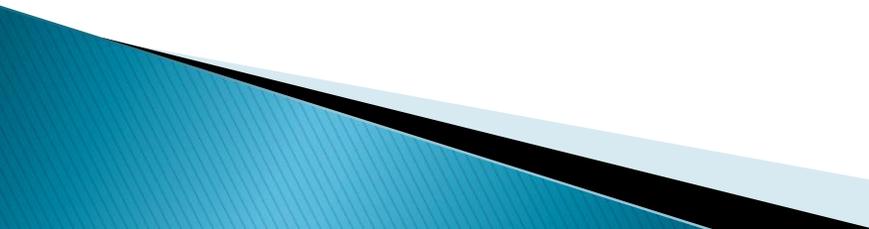
# Statistics on Teen Sexual Activity



# Internet and Social Media

- ▶ Email, Text, Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, Formspring
  - ▶ 51% of American teens log on to a social network site more than once a day, and 22% log on more than ten times a day.
  - ▶ Media “multitasking”: Media exposure time for teens is around 7.5 to 8.5 hours/day due to the practice of using more than one medium at a time.
  - ▶ 97% of teens report playing video games
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# Social Media

- ▶ “Sexting” is the exchange of explicit sexual messages or images by mobile phone. Ten percent of 14–24 year olds report having shared a naked photo or video of themselves via digital communication such as the internet or text messaging. They consider it being “flirty”
  - ▶ Disclosing personal information
  - ▶ Inflating one’s age
  - ▶ Turning virtual into reality–meeting up
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# Thrill Seeking Behaviors

- ▶ Taking risks (even negative ones) is all about feeling good
  - ▶ The teen version of a WMD (weapon of mass destruction): the automobile
  - ▶ Sports
  - ▶ Adventurous activities
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# Parenting a Teen

- ▶ Be mindful of developmental tasks
  - ▶ Support the behaviors associated w/ tasks
  - ▶ Do not take behaviors personally
  - ▶ Adult role begins to change *gradually* from that of parent to coach
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# Parenting a Teen

- ▶ Adolescence is about pushing limits (and adults provide something stable to push against)
- ▶ Choose battles (explain unbreakable rules)



# Successful Communication

- ▶ Create opportunities
  - Family dinners
  - Car rides
  - Media
- ▶ A two-way street—listen more than you talk
  - One minute rule
  - Ask probing questions as if you don't care
- ▶ Honesty and Integrity

# Successful Communication

- ▶ Not just with your teen
  - ▶ Importance of co-parenting
  - ▶ Stay in touch with:
    - Teachers, coaches, clergy, etc.
    - Parents of their friends
    - The friends themselves
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# Parent's Behavior

- ▶ Model a healthy living style (“Do as I say and not as I do” will not cut it)
- ▶ Role Modeling
  - What do you do to celebrate/socialize?
  - What do you do to relieve stress?
  - Open communication
  - Reaching out to others; network of support
- ▶ Emotional Support
- ▶ Connection to family, friends, school, church

# High Risk Behaviors

## Parent's Role

- ▶ Take your head out of the sand
    - Sex, drugs, violence; a reality for teens
    - Get educated; teens may know more than you do
  - ▶ Be clear about your attitudes and discuss them openly and frequently
  - ▶ Provide structure. Free time closely monitored
  - ▶ Be vigilant and monitor behavior—what, where, when, w/ who
  - ▶ Clear and frequent communication
  - ▶ A sense of unity and shared goals
  - ▶ Healthy rituals
  - ▶ Designated responsibilities
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# High Risk Behaviors

## Parent's Role

- ▶ Set clear and consistent rules and expectations
- ▶ Set clear and consistent rewards and consequences
  - Both should match the behavior; should be a logical consequence of both positive and negative behavior
  - Computer, smart phones, and the keys to the car are *not* a right, but a privilege
- ▶ Balance limits with support and nurturance

# High Risk Behaviors

## Parent's Role

- ▶ Rules and Family Contracts
- ▶ Snooping
  - Balancing privacy with your right to know
- ▶ Drug testing
- ▶ Access to social media sites
  - Be as involved in your teen's digital life as you are in their academic and sports life. If your teen has facebook, be sure you have passwords and you are their friend. Read, read, read and read between the lines

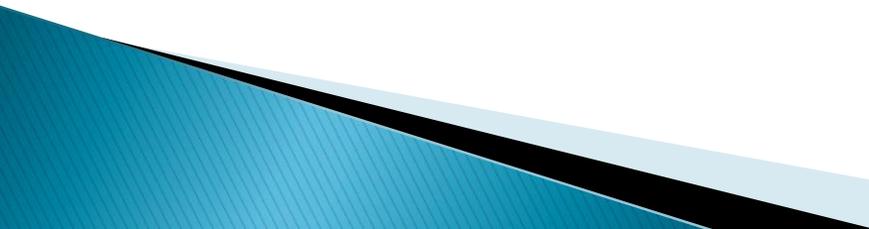
# High Risk Behaviors

## Parents' Role

- ▶ Give teen an out
  - Discuss ideas of how to avoid or leave a risky situation
  - Be willing to be the bad guy (drug tests; cell phone message; curfews; consequences)
  - Offer “no questions asked” support (rides)
  - Stress safety over all else
- ▶ Unite with other adults about policies

# High Risk Behaviors

## Parent's Role

- ▶ Encourage healthy risk taking
    - Have your teen plan a trip for family or friends
    - Sign up for a service learning trip to a less developed country or area (Habitat for Humanity)
    - Orienteering or mountain/rock climbing
    - Try out for a new sport; train for a marathon or triathlon
    - Take up a new activity (hip-hop dancing; bike racing)
    - Compete in a Battle of the Bands; enter an Art Show
    - Get involved in a cause or political campaign with adults that would push their comfort level
    - Start a small business
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# Harm Reduction

- ▶ A controversial concept for professionals and parents alike
- ▶ Safety first
- ▶ Delicate balance between not condoning behavior, yet insuring safety
- ▶ Reduce negative consequences
  - Encourage disclosure so you can help
  - “Responsible”(?) drinking
  - Drinking and driving
  - Condoms and birth control

# What You Can Do

## Discovering Risky Unsafe Behavior

- ▶ Separate teen from the problem
  - ▶ Focus on how to make situation better
  - ▶ Support him/her
  - ▶ Remain calm and in control
  - ▶ Get support for yourself
  - ▶ Unite with other parent (s)
  - ▶ Professional evaluation
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# Parenting is an Art

- ▶ Be actively involved in your teen's life
  - ▶ Promote family activities
  - ▶ Promote healthy separation and individuation
  - ▶ Express your beliefs and values
  - ▶ Listen to your teen and practice acceptance
  - ▶ Realize that they will be on their own.....*soon*
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