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21st Century Adolescents: Strategies for Parenting Today's Teens

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Laura Kastner, PhD, is a clinical associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the University of Washington and a nationally renowned expert on teen behavior and development. She writes and lectures widely on adolescence and family relationships. With Jennifer Wyatt, she co-wrote *Getting to Calm: Cool-Headed Strategies for Parenting Tweens and Teens*, *The Seven Year Stretch: How Families Work Together to Grow Through Adolescence*, and *The Launching Years: Strategies for Parenting from Senior Year to College*.

Focal points:

1. What is fundamentally different for today's adolescents?
2. What misconception does even the most high-functioning parent have when their child enters adolescence?
3. What does brain science research teach us about teen development and what implications does it have for parenting teens?
4. What are some "take home" parenting tips that enhance life for nearly every family?
5. What are Seven Brain Fitness components?
6. What do Menlo Students have to say?

Challenging teen development dynamics with implications for parenting:

1. Increased autonomy-seeking (risk-taking)
2. Individuation from parents (challenging authority)
3. Identity development and exploration of different values (related to religion, education, substance use, media, sexuality)
4. Hormonal changes (emotions more intense, sexual interests)
5. Brain development changes

Neuroscience research has documented changes in the teen brain ~age13:

1. Up to half of the neural branches in the neocortex are sloughed off (pruning).
2. Over the next ten years, new brain growth occurs (blossoming).
3. The neurons that *fire together wire together* (what you do and think and experience determines brain growth).
4. Hard wiring of genetics and soft wiring of experience interact to determine outcome.
5. During the remodeling of the prefrontal cortex during adolescence, behavior is often governed more by the emotional centers of the brain than the thinking part of the brain, especially in contexts of high arousal and peer presence.
6. Wholesome, authoritative and high functioning parents ALSO have teens with increased moodiness, emotional reactivity and impulsivity.

Implications of teen brain and developmental research for parents:

1. Accept that good teens from good parents still undergo biological changes which will usually make for mistakes and disappointments.
2. Develop excellent personal emotional regulation skills in order to manage teen's intense reactions (self calming).
3. Choose productive parenting approaches to optimize the quality of the parent-child relationship and learning opportunities for the teen.

The Checklist for parents of tweens and teens:

1. Control media and electronic use and avoid giving into excessive materialistic desires.
2. Don't let up on family dinner rituals.
3. Keep chores a priority—they are a vital preparation for life
4. Let your kids struggle, fail and learn, both socially and academically.
5. Keep having fun and building the family bank account of 5 +’s for every 1 -.
6. Support your teen's academic development.
7. Insist that your teen participate in athletic activities at school over the full year.
8. Encourage at least one extracurricular activity at all times and keep this expectation intact through-out high school.
9. Practice authoritative parenting, which includes firm limits and boundaries, warmth and connectedness, and effective communication.
10. Be proactive about talking to your teens about sexuality, substance use, violence and media literacy.
11. Build family resilience and spirituality by your own conduct and values.
12. Engineer a calm home

Parent emotional skill modeling (emotional and social competence; EQ):

1. Recognize your feelings
2. Understand the cause
3. Label appropriately
4. Express accurately
5. Regulate and manage emotions effectively:
6. Use the C.A.L.M. protocol for meltdowns (e.g. amygdala hijack)
 - Cool down-“don't talk under the influence of extreme emotion” BREATHE
 - Assess your options- with lower heart-rate, engage your PFC
 - Listen with empathy- it doesn't mean approval/agreement; no “But's!”
 - Map a plan- do you need to change some policies? Get some help?

BRAIN and health fitness and the neuroscience of happiness:

1. Sleep, exercise and nutrition
2. Highly engaging intellectual life
3. Positive emotions
4. Thriving friendships
5. Media and electronics control
6. Use your brain in novel ways
7. A calm home- What is the brain consuming/absorbing?