

The Secrets of the Teenage Brain

Gavin Keller- EduEXCEL

Between 11 and 19, the human brain undergoes MASSIVE re-construction of neural pathways. Roads tarred from birth to 10 years of age are ripped up, detours result in traffic jams, congestion and irritations. What used to be a rapid travel experience, now becomes a frustrating and irritating navigation experience.



When parents and teachers understand the concept of front end loaders moving into their young teens brains and literally reconstructing the neural roadways on the mind - then we start to have a better understanding of our role as Elders - wisdom providers, GPS navigators - those who can guide from experience and previous knowledge, leading, teaching and setting boundaries, without hovering in order to allow our teens to lay new roads that will determine their adult life neural pathways.

This is a difficult age. We often allow our teens to step blindly off the cliff of childhood unaware of the massive chasm that exists between childhood and adulthood.

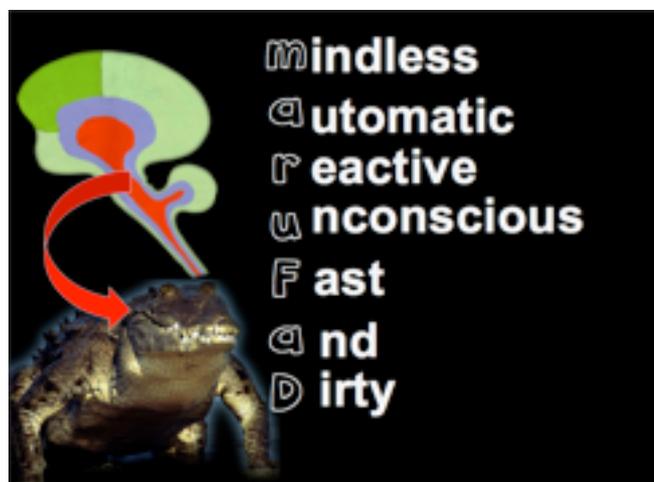
There are three secrets in this presentation. These simple understandings, when mastered, will fundamentally change the way we start the **conversation** around taking the plunge from childhood into adulthood.

Gone are the days when adult men took boys into manhood - teaching them how to behave to be a warrior. In cultures where it still exists, the practice has been simplified into an event with little training for the youth.

SECRET ONE

The Brain is under massive construction

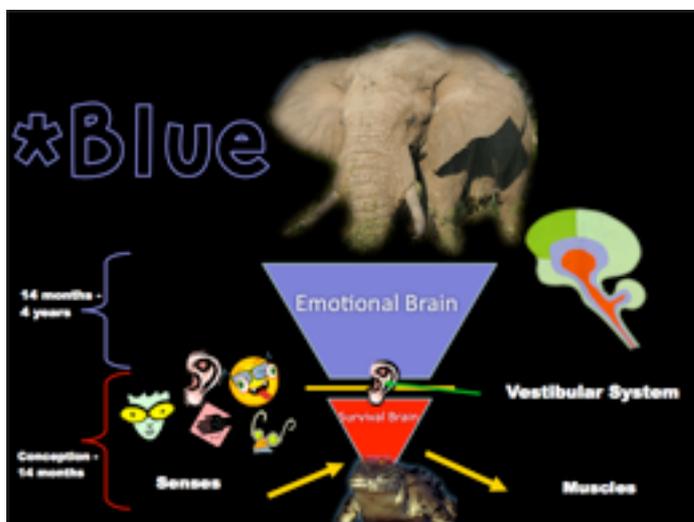
The Crocodile brain needs to feel safe.
The Crocodile Brain is called MARUFAD.
If the teen brain does not feel safe it



behaves in a MINDLESS way. During the teen years expect AUTOMATIC reactions that are not conscious. They tell their parents that they HATE THEM without thinking about the consequences of their words. Their brains are FAST and DIRTY, doing things that adults would consider inconceivable. "What were you thinking about?" comes flowing out of the adult mouth. Brains that are under construction don't have the privilege of conscious thought.

Lesson 1: Make sure your teen feels safe at home. Home must be the SECURE BASE, the ROCK SOLID FOUNDATION. Here in the safety of the cave, the brain learns through repetition how to process data and laid neural pathways that, when practised over and over, will become a tarred freeway in their adult life. This requires adults to be very present during the teen years. Monitor their behaviour without them feeling that there is a surveillance system attached to their shoulder. Fetch and carry! Make your home a SAFE PLACE for friends.

The second level of brain is the EMOTIONAL or LIMBIC brain. I call this brain the ELEPHANT BRAIN. Access to this brain is through the vestibular system, so do not be concerned if your teen likes to rock, move, dance etc. The movement is a self-medication to access the feelings centre of their brains.



Many days during their teen years, parents will experience the elephant in action. Loving, gentle and beautiful to look at, the elephant brain does not forget what it hears or sees. This is a vulnerable brain, sensitive to implied messages, visual cues and comments made in passing. Sarcasm hurts deeply. When the elephant brain becomes BE-WILD-ERED, the teenager behaves in a WILD fashion. This magnificent creature becomes so dangerous. This happens when our teens become confused, puzzled, bamboozled and perplexed.



Lesson 2:

Our role as parents and teachers of teenagers is to make sure they feel a sense of belonging. This leads to WORTHINESS. When the teenager feels SAFE and WORTHY

it allows access into the CORTEX, the CEO of our human brains.

The PRE-FRONTAL CORTEX is the part of the brain, above the eyes in the front of the brain. This is our CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER. It controls all our thoughts, our behaviours and our ability to problem solve, make wise decisions, collaborate with others and facilitate change. If the teen brain does not feel

SAFE and WORTHY, there is simply no way the neural pathway will allow processing to reach this section causing them to make unwise decisions, engage in dangerous, damaging activities and set them up for guaranteed failure.

Here in the CEO the big SEVEN are controlled. Our Time Management, Organisation, Prioritisation, Working Memory, Impulse Control, Flexibility and Empathy reside here. We often don't see these big SEVEN in our teens because they do not feel SAFE and WORTHY.

SECRET TWO

The brain loves DRUGS - good DRUGS. Neurotransmitters are required to lay neural pathways. The drug allows the rapid connection between neurons. The more the connection happens the faster it becomes. Repetitions of connections leads to myelinisation. This is the tarring of pathways to create highways.

Boys need dopamine. This is the REWARD drug. The picture alongside explains the big FOUR that our TEENS require. If we don't give it to them in our ROCK



SOLID FOUNDATION (home, schools, youth group, sports team), they will self medicate with DRUGS, SEX, ALCOHOL and NICOTINE.

Girls need SEROTONIN. This is the CALMING drug. It is achieved by having friends around, talking, feeling adorable and being accepted by a group.

Work hard as parents and teenagers to ensure that they produce these drugs daily. Boys must be rich in dopamine and girls need serotonin.

Lesson 3: Don't allow the words and behaviours of your teens to frustrate you.

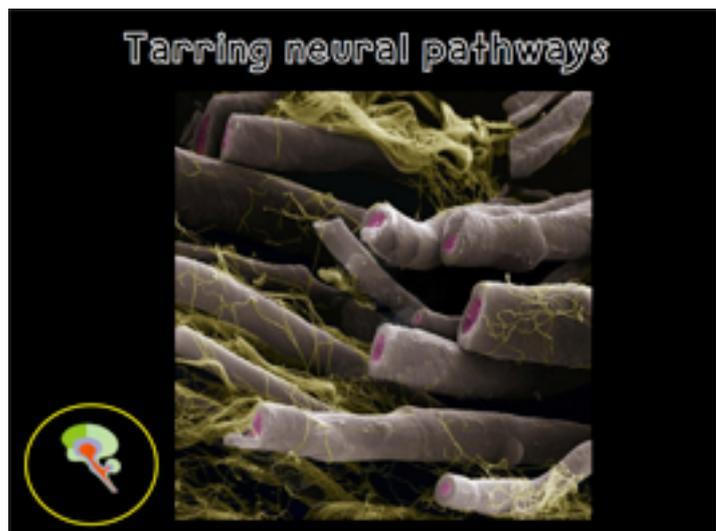
Always ask yourself, "What drug do I need to produce in their brain to allow a pathway to be laid from the Crocodile brain - to their elephant brain - into their CEO?" Recognise your teen boys daily. Highlight their strengths and talents. Always consider if your words will lay neural pathways to the CEO or bring out bewildered elephant or mindless crocodile reactions. This requires a ROCK SOLID parent and teacher - a true secure base!

SECRET THREE

Practice makes PERMANENT, not perfect. If we repeat the wrong thing, it is not perfect, but it will become permanent.

Keep this mantra on your lips while raising your teens: ***"What you do much of in your TEEN YEARS will determine who you become as an ADULT!"*** If our teens spend much time playing sport, reading, engaging in youth group activities, helping in service groups etc. there is a strong chance that this behaviour will be tarred

and become automated in their adult life. If they spend hours surfing porn, drinking with friends, hanging out with the wrong crowd, then this too may become their adult pattern.



Lesson 4: Practise neural pathway behaviours with your teens.

Idea 1. Create a talk time. A great way to talk is to create a habit of switching off their light at night and sitting on their bed in the dark and chatting through the day. Without having to read facial cues, teens unpack their day and parents share ideas while giving the odd DRUG boost with recognition to the boys and assuring our girls of their uniqueness.

Idea 2. Car talk. This is great way to communicate. Avoid asking questions - just talk. Talk about their peers. Talk about wise decisions. Talk about temptations at an upcoming party. Talk about alcohol and the effect it has on value systems. Talk about drugs and the guaranteed downward spiral. Don't ask - just talk! Teens love to listen to stories. They

want someone to talk to them - not lecture them on their faults, but just to talk and laugh and make the odd joke. I see it daily in my school, how teens love to hang around

Secrets of the teenage brain

- 1. The brain is under massive construction**
- 2. The brain loves DRUGS, natural drugs!**
- 3. Practise makes permanent.**



teachers who are happy to chat to their students.