

# **Recognizing Early Warning Signs**

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**Parents and Teacher as Partners**

# Topics of Discussion

- Challenging behaviors
- Adolescent Brain Development
- Mental illnesses
- Parents and teachers as partners
- Strategies for success

# Let's Talk

- **What is frustrating?**
- **What are the behaviors?**
- **What is the role of brain development?**

# What are the behaviors?

- Impulsive
- Frustrated
- Argumentative
- Disrespectful
- Aggressive
- Fidgety
- Fatigued
- Angry
- Defiant
- Irritable
- Touchy, sensitive
- Rigid, inflexible
- Explosive

## **Other Behaviors?**

- **Is constantly interrupting teacher or peers**
- **Doesn't finish class work or homework**
- **Doesn't listen to teacher or directions**
- **Is disorganized, loses assignments**
- **Has difficulty concentrating**
- **Blames others for mistakes**

## **Are these behaviors too?**

- **Frequently misses school**
- **Often visits school nurse**
- **Lacks self confidence**
- **Worries constantly about grades**
- **Refuses to join social activities**
- **Blames others for mistakes**

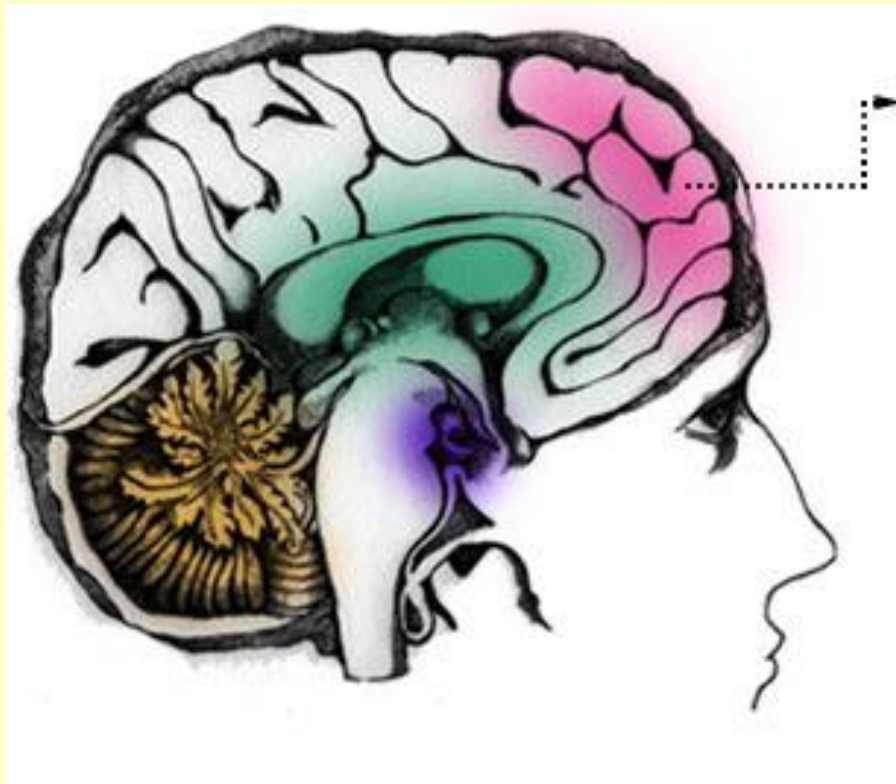
# **Brain Development sets the stage for behavior**

- **Brain not fully developed until age 25**
- **Changes in the teen brain mimic the changes occurring in a toddler's brain**
- **Hormones influence behavior**

# Brain Statistics

- Brain messages travel at 360 m.p.h.
- 100 billion neurons connect to thousands of others
- Trillions of different routes a message can take around the brain
- Each brain cell receives hundreds and thousands of incoming signals every second

# Anatomy of the Brain



## Frontal Cortex

The frontal cortex is often referred to as the "CEO" of the brain, because it is the part responsible for planning, strategizing, and judgment. Recent research has shown that this area undergoes a growth spurt at around the ages of 11-12, followed by a period of pruning and organizing of the new neural connections during the teen years.

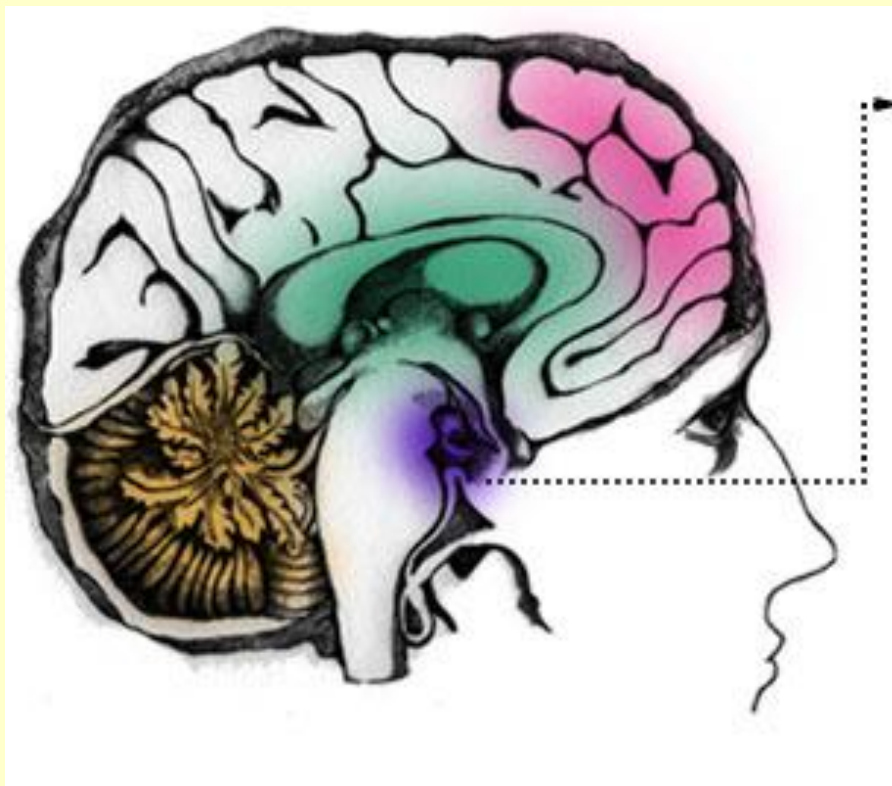
# Anatomy of the Brain



## Corpus Callosum

This is a cable of nerves that connects the two hemispheres of the brain, and is believed to be involved in creativity and problem solving. It appears to change and grow significantly through adolescence.

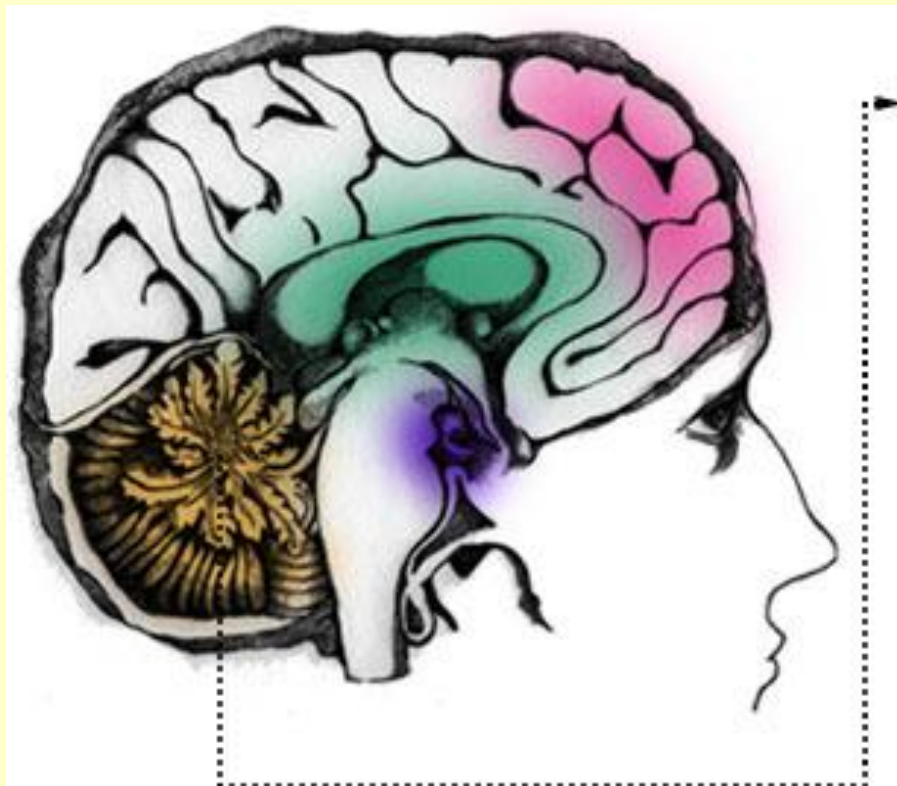
# Anatomy of the Brain



## Amygdala

This area of the brain is associated with emotional and gut responses. New imaging studies suggest that teenagers, when asked to interpret emotional information, use this reactive part of the brain rather than the more "thinking" region, the frontal cortex, while adults rely more heavily on the frontal cortex. Scientists speculate that this may be why teens have trouble modulating their emotional responses.

# Anatomy of the Brain



## Cerebellum

This part of the brain has long been thought to be involved with the coordination of muscles and physical movement. Recently, scientists have come to believe that it is involved in the coordination of thinking processes, as well. New research has shown that it is an area that undergoes dynamic growth and change during the teenage years.

# Normal Adolescent Development

- **Oppositional behavior and risk-taking is common**
- **Emotions govern teen behavior**
- **Self-centered and insecure**
- **“Showmanship” (boys)**
- **Peer relationships (girls)**

# Normal Adolescent Development

- Common time for onset of mental health issues
- Maturity brings greater ability to grasp abstract ideas such as morality, and to better understand other people
- Often strongly believe that their own ideas are the most true

# Emotional and Social Development

- Much of teens' emotional and social growth is about finding their place in the world
- They are trying to figure out “Who am I?” and “How do I fit in?”
- It is normal for their emotions to change from day to day

# Emotional and Social Development

- They are likely to be on an emotional roller coaster
- Push adults away and keep more information private
- Create conflict within the family

# Mental Health

- Academic success requires students to be engaged in learning and have expectations of making progress
- Emotional and social concerns can interrupt and/or distract learners, making the school experience frustrating and hindering academic achievement
- Negative experiences in school may also impact a student's mental health

# Mental Health

Students today face a multitude of daunting issues, and the choices they take to make themselves feel better can be difficult decisions.

All school stakeholders need to work together to make the school community healthy and vibrant and welcoming.



# Define Mental Illness

- A biological brain disorder that affect a youth's thinking, moods, feelings and ability to relate to others
- A medical illness whose symptoms are predominantly behaviors
- Behaviors that limit the youth's ability to interact positively in the world

# **Common mental illnesses that affect kids at school**

- **ADHD**
- **Anxiety**
- **Mood Disorders**
- **Behavior Disorders**
- **Asperger's Syndrome**
- **Reactive Attachment Disorder**
- **FAS and FAE**

# Children's Mental Health Facts

- **1 in 10** children in the U.S. have a mental health disorder
- **80%** of these children fail to obtain treatment or services
- **Half** of all lifetime cases of mental illness start by the age of **14**

\*U.S. Surgeon General report and NIMH Research.

# Impact on Schools

## 2007 School Year

- 69,693 total disciplinary incidents
- 5113 in-school suspensions
- 61,936 out-of-school suspensions
- 204 referred to law enforcement
- 334 expulsions

# Lost at school



# Who Needs Help?

- **Students**
- **Teachers**
- **Administrators**
- **Parents**

# How Do We Help?

- Understand strengths and barriers
- Work to create partnerships
- Provide resources and
- Add empathy and support

# **Why Parents as Partners?**

**When everyone works together . . .**

**The evaluation process, individualized education programs and services will reflect the real and practical needs of students and their families.**

# The need for partnership

- Parents often see serious behaviors at home that are not apparent in the classroom  
and
- Educators observe behaviors at school that parents don't see at home

**For the benefit of the child, there has to be conversation between parents and educators**

# Value of Partnership

- The best results are achieved when the home, school, and community work together
- When they all come together to create a partnership to help the child . . . . a team is developed
- Everyone on the team is important - No one is dispensable

# Why is working together and giving each member of the team a voice important?



# **Equal but not identical roles**

**Equal partners does not mean that parents and educators assume each others' roles, but rather that they respect each other's roles and contributions**



# Dilemma

- Some parents are unwilling to **listen** to their child's teacher
- Some teachers are unwilling to **talk** to the student's parent
- Some parents **perceive** that they are seen as the problem
- Parents have to **weave** through a maze of services that can be very confusing

## On the Other Hand

- Educators who have spent many years in training in order to work with children everyday, are obviously seen as the “professional”
- Therefore, it is difficult to view parents as “professionals” much less regarded as “equal partners at the table”

# So families worry about

- Stereotyping by professionals
- That the system will retaliate if they don't conform in the way the system wants

**But . . .**

***Families are forever***

***Almost always families are the ONE  
constant in the child's life***

***Families long for genuine  
empathy, understanding and  
support***



# Recognizing the Importance of the Relationships

- Engage



- Empathize



- Educate

# **What strengths does the team bring to the process?**

- **Strengths**

- **Parents know their child and their child's individual skills and weaknesses**
- **Professionals have special training in different areas and can bring that knowledge to the table**

# What about Baggage?

- We all bring “baggage” to the team process. Recognizing it is the first step to building a trusting relationship within the team.
- What “baggage” do you bring?



# **It is helpful when the team**

- **Focuses on what the child needs**
- **Provides practical interventions and strategies**
- **Recognizes and value parents for their strengths**
- **Encourages a cooperative relationship**

# **It is helpful when parents**

- **Listen and consider educators ideas**
- **Encourage a cooperative relationship**
- **Inform of changes in treatments, medications and/or strategies**
- **Provide information based on facts, not emotions**

# **It is helpful when educators**

- **Listen to parents**
- **Refrain from imposing their own agenda**
- **Provide information on services and programs are available at school**
- **Provide referrals to outside agencies**

# Strategies for Success

- **Acknowledge the challenges, barriers, frustrations and limitations within our own systems**
- **Stay positive – agree to build on strengths and not always dwell on the negative aspects of our lives and the systems of care**

## **Other Strategies . . . .**

- **Meet parents where they are. Parents may be angry with the system. Use that anger as a motivator to make changes.**
- **Parents need to learn to direct that anger into a positive energy to make changes.**
- **Parents need to remember that the people at the table may be as frustrated about the systems' limitations as they are.**

## **And even more Strategies . . .**

- **Help the family cope with stress, social isolation, concerns for the sibling by**
- **Telling them about support groups and advocacy organizations like NAMI and**
- **Help families understand that it is not their fault, it is their challenge**

**Help them to feel hopeful**

# **Don't forget about the kids**

- **Engage them in the process**
  - Listen to their concerns
  - Include them at the meetings
  - Teach them advocacy skills
- **Learn new strategies to teach**
  - Collaborative problem solving

# **Make Parent Involvement Work**

- **Providers and parents should have training to be ready to work together**
- **Parents must feel heard and respected and so must providers**

# **Train each Other**

- **Recognize that both educators and parents can be a source of knowledge as to how systems work and where to channel energies to make the most change**
- **Learn to tell the story – what the child’s behaviors are, how it impacts their child’s education and what services are available to help their child**

# Reduce or Eliminate Barriers to Participation

- Meeting times
- Childcare
- Transportation
- Location
- Availability



# Develop a Shared Vision

- Build an atmosphere and a team where there is mutual trust
- Listen respectfully to each other
- Talk to each other *not* at each other
- Acknowledge strengths/baggage
- Do what you say and share the work

## **AND . . .**

- **Take us from where we are – not from where you would like us to be**
- **Allow us to have a valid voice**
- **We are all sometimes vulnerable and don't know all the answers, but together we can work it out**

# **Help parents find their voice**

- **Encourage parents to become advocates for their child**
- **Teach them how to be prepared and be organized**
- **Understand learning how to be an effective advocate takes time**
- **To be an effective advocate, parents need take care of themselves**

# Teach Parents

- How to prioritize and choose what's important; too many topics cause confusion
- How to clearly state their expectations
- To ask questions if they don't understand what is being said or proposed

## **Educators can be effective advocates too . . .**

- **Good communication helps the child receive appropriate services and includes:**
  - verbal language
  - non verbal language
  - listening skills

# Non-Verbal language

- Facial expressions
- Eye contact
- Voice tone
- Body movement and gestures
- Touch
- Space

*It's not what you say, it's how you say it*

# Verbal Language

- I-Statements - start sentences with “I” first. “I heard you say . . . Is that correct?”
- Paraphrasing - Put into your own words what the other person has said.
- Reflective Listening - You state back what you hear
- Questioning - ask open-ended questions to clarify what has been said

# Listening

- Listen attentively – make eye contact
- Watch your non-verbal signals and body language
- Don't interrupt the other person
- Keep an open mind

**“I take risks, sometimes patients die,  
but not taking risks causes more  
patients to die - so I guess my  
biggest problem is I've been cursed  
with the ability to do the math”**

*Dr. House, House M.D.*

# **Change Occurs**

**when families, educators, and  
professionals collaborate to  
create change**

## **NAMI Minnesota Offers**

- **Support Groups**
- **Workshops and Classes**
- **Booklets on the children's mental health system and fact sheets**
- **Kidshops program for siblings**
- **newsletters**

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