



The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults

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A New York Times Bestseller

Renowned neurologist Dr. Frances E. Jensen offers a revolutionary look at the brains of teenagers, dispelling myths and offering practical advice for teens, parents and teachers.

Dr. Frances E. Jensen is chair of the department of neurology in the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. As a mother, teacher, researcher, clinician, and frequent lecturer to parents and teens, she is in a unique position to explain to readers the workings of the teen brain. In *The Teenage Brain*, Dr. Jensen brings to readers the astonishing findings that previously remained buried in academic journals.

The root myth scientists believed for years was that the adolescent brain was essentially an adult one, only with fewer miles on it. Over the last decade, however, the scientific community has learned that the teen years encompass vitally important stages of brain development. Samples of some of the most recent findings include:

Teens are better learners than adults because their brain cells more readily "build" memories. But this heightened adaptability can be hijacked by addiction, and the adolescent brain can become addicted more strongly and for a longer duration than the adult brain.

Studies show that girls' brains are a full two years more mature than boys' brains in the mid-teens, possibly explaining differences seen in the classroom and in social behavior.

Adolescents may not be as resilient to the effects of drugs as we thought. Recent experimental and human studies show that the occasional use of marijuana, for instance, can cause lingering memory problems even days after smoking, and that long-term use of pot impacts later adulthood IQ.

Multi-tasking causes divided attention and has been shown to reduce learning ability in the teenage brain.

Multi-tasking also has some addictive qualities, which may result in habitual short attention in teenagers.

Emotionally stressful situations may impact the adolescent more than it would affect the adult: stress can have permanent effects on mental health and can lead to higher risk of developing neuropsychiatric disorders such as depression.

Dr. Jensen gathers what we've discovered about adolescent brain function, wiring, and capacity and explains the science in the contexts of everyday learning and multitasking, stress and memory, sleep, addiction, and decision-making. In this groundbreaking yet accessible book, these findings also yield practical suggestions that will help adults and teenagers negotiate the mysterious world of adolescent development.

The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults Details

Date : Published January 26th 2016 by Harper Paperbacks (first published August 12th 2014)

ISBN : 9780062067852

Author : Frances E. Jensen , Amy Ellis Nutt

Format : Paperback 384 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Parenting, Psychology, Science, Education, Audiobook

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From Reader Review The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults for online ebook

Richard says

The author was interviewed on the KQED Forum show: *Neuroscientist Explores the Contradictions of the Teen Brain* .

Squibart says

The question of whether my 14 year old son was a narcissistic pathological liar or was just experiencing immature teenage brain syndrome was running rampant through my mind as I wandered through Barnes and Noble last week when this book appeared on the New Reads table with what seemed divine intervention. I didn't even question the price- which is not the way I shop in a retail book store, ever. I found myself experiencing different opinions as I moved through the chapters. At first I was fascinated just to be learning about the neurology and chemical make up of the brain. I have to say that I relied heavily on my past neurology courses I had taken in college oh so many years ago. Learning about the way the brain develops from back to front was the highlight of this book and how it applies to the developmental "brain stage" my son is currently in was enough for me to think that every person who works with adolescents should be reading this information. As the chapters started delving into different dangers and risks that our children take and discussing all the negative consequences of them to the brain, I felt panicked and eventually scared. I was disappointed that a book that touts itself as a "survival guide" offered little advice about how to use this information in any real life situation. It was filled with horror stories of children dying, becoming addicts, and developing mental illness or criminal records. The advice that was given can be summed up as "use these scary examples of bad things that dumb kids like yours did and tell your kids to not do the same things even though their brains are not equipped to make good choices." Oh and "Be involved." Hardly riveting information. As a result of reading this book I am not only worried about my own son, but everybody's child and I am watching to see which ones will not survive the ordeal of adolescence. And then she ends the book by completely dismissing much of what she had taught me by saying that since more research needs to be done we can't actually count this as truth yet. So- can I recommend this? yes- if you love neurology and want to know more about how the brain develops. No- if you are a parent looking for real advice. Maybe- if you are a professional who works with teens and want to gain a better understanding of how they think, As long as you are not looking for advice on how to teach them to overcome their own biology. If you have a highly intelligent teen who likes reading and you want to scare the crap out them- then have them read this! As for my original question, it was sorta answered but I don;t know what I can do about it anyway. Maybe read a copy of The Boy Who Cried Wolf?

Shelley says

You have to work pretty hard to screw up a pop science book, but this fails on all fronts: basic science (HS stuff) presented as new and complicated, useless anecdotes (one reads books by neurologists for science, not for crap like "I received an email from a parent who said their child was going crazy"), screaming privilege (I'm guessing not all readers know that feeling when you have a lesson with a tennis or golf pro and disappoint yourself when you play the next day), and a condescending authorial voice. (Imagine a cross

of the material. I found her explanations of what's physically going on in the brain throughout adolescence super helpful in making a foundation for the style of teaching I intend to adapt as I switch grade levels, and providing the immediate reference to point to if anyone has any questions as to why I do what I do. (I've since found a few other books that essentially say a lot of the same things, so it seems there's a consensus.)

Some of this is geared specifically towards parents rather than just people working with adolescents, and there are parts that might be specifically more helpful to counselors than teachers, but I think the important points work for everyone dealing with a teenager. The book can be somewhat repetitive at times, and there are definitely some chapters that I didn't find super relevant to me, but I'd say over half of the chapters were more than worth reading and I expect I will refer back to this book repeatedly this year.

Kathleen says

When I was pregnant with my fourth child, I saw a doctor who asked the ages of my older children and said, "You're going to have teenagers forever!" Even the thought of it clearly exhausted him, and I suspect he had at least one teenager himself.

That said, I love teenagers. I love them more now than when I was one because I was someone whose asynchronous brain development made me make **different** teenage mistakes than were typical -- and I didn't have much sympathy for the typical ones.

This book explains the science behind the teenage brain, with a strong focus on the differences between teen and adult brains. The author doesn't come across as a scold, but she definitely emphasizes why addictive substances are that much more of a problem for teens.

I don't think there's all that much how-to advice in the book, however, so the title is way off. This is not a "survival guide" so much as an explanation. I have been wavering between four and five stars for this book, and the misleading title kicks it down. That said, I think the main content of the book itself is great.

The best and most practical advice comes early on, where Dr. Jensen encourages parents to talk about other teens' tragic and near-tragic misadventures, and it's woven into the content. The worst part comes near the end, when you can tell that the book's editor said, "OK, now we need to come to some conclusions about What To Do." The most ludicrous tip, and I am paraphrasing: Embrace texting. If you don't know how to do it, ask your teenager.

I am actually completely happy without helpful prescriptive advice. The information on its own makes the book worth it.

Barb says

Obviously every chapter in this book could have its own book but the author pulls out just enough information on each topic to be helpful to parents and share some interesting anecdotal stories to illustrate the points presented.

Certain chapters drew more of my attention. There's a history of alcoholism and mental illness in my family and so my fear that my children will at some point struggle with these issues may be higher than other parents. The neurological and statistical information in these two chapters are of particular interest to me,

though I don't know if I'll be worrying less or more after reading them.

Jensen states; three-quarters of young adults with psychiatric illness had their first diagnosis between the ages of eleven and thirteen; between 20 and 60 percent of adults with bipolar disorder experienced the initial symptoms of the illness before they turned twenty; the use of cannabis in the early teens can hasten the onset of psychosis and increase the risk of schizophrenia. Even without smoking pot teenagers with a family history [of mental illness] have roughly a 1-in-10 chance of developing the condition. Marijuana use, though, doubles that risk to 1-in-5. Of course I know I would have been presenting a strong case for my children to avoid experimenting with drugs and alcohol but maybe even more so now after knowing the link between pot smoking and mental illness.

The chapters on technology and concussions were equally fascinating and made me feel good about the choices and restrictions my husband and I have made regarding our children's participation in organized sports as well as the rules we have for the limited technology we've chosen to allow into our home. We have no Wii, no Play Station, no Gameboy, no hand-held devices of any kind. And while I have never felt any guilt about this before, now I feel reaffirmed in these choices for our children. We allow a limited amount of screen time for each child and my son is much more attached to his time than my daughter. I can imagine a version of the future where he's a teenager addicted to technology, I'd like to think I'm doing what I can to avoid that version of the future and I feel like this book gives good insight as to how that path can very easily happen if you aren't diligent.

Jensen talks about parents approaching her and e-mailing their concerns about their teenage children and the crazy things they've done. The parents are trying to understand how their children could...sneak out of the house, raid the liquor cabinet, smoke pot in their bedroom while they were supposed to be studying. Some of these questions had me raising my eyebrows. Was it really that long ago that those parents were young? Maybe they never did anything naughty when they were teenagers? Well, I'll be honest, I did, I was naughty and it was fun to be naughty in the ways mentioned above. And if nothing else I will at least have a clue about what sorts of mischief my children will likely be up to when they think I'm not watching. A tip for all you parents who think you are clever by putting a lock on the liquor cabinet; if the hinges on the cabinet are exposed they can be removed and the cabinet can easily be accessed from the hinge side of the door. However Jensen offers neurological information about poor choices, faulty decision making and the thrill of engaging in risky behavior and how all of these things influence teenager's behavior. Much more helpful than just knowing kids think doing naughty things is fun.

Another reassuring bit of information, while 50 percent of the risk of developing alcoholism is genetically influenced, environment contributes to the other 50 percent. And experts have found that children model their behavior on the adults who are the most important to them and with whom they most frequently interact. Those who are monitored closely by their parents and who are given clear rules are less likely to abuse alcohol. Parents who heartily disapproved of underage drinking tended to have teenagers who engaged in less binge drinking once they got to college and the converse was true. Teens with lax parents were more likely to engage in risky drinking behavior and to surround themselves with friends who abused alcohol. Binge drinking was defined as consuming more than four or five drinks in a single session - a span of about two hours.

I marked up this book as I was reading, underlined and marked passages with arrows and brackets and happy faces and I read some passages aloud to my family. I think this will be a good book to come back to. As my children get older there will be things that resonate on a different level than they do now.

Thank you to Harper Collins publishing and the Amazon Vine program for a free advanced reader copy, given in exchange for an honest review of the book.

Sarah says

This is a book about trying to understand adolescent behavior by learning about adolescent brain development. She cites a number of studies and includes anecdotes from her life as well as her acquaintances'. It began with a general overview about how brains develop in the adolescent years and how teen brains are very different from adult brains. Then she dove into a DARE-esque portion where she gave as many reasons as she could why drug use is a terrible idea for teens. Super interesting, if not obviously biased (understandably). If you're into brain chemistry, then you will enjoy that part.

Here are some big take-aways:

- 1) The teenage brain has too much grey matter (brain cells) and not enough white matter (the material that helps get signals from one part of the brain to another). Messages don't always make it where they need to go!
- 2) Multi-tasking is impossible at any age.
- 3) Teens have the same amount of hormones as young adults - they just respond to them differently.
- 4) Teens have a lower tolerance for stress hormones and are more likely to have stress-related disorders and illnesses.
- 5) Prospective memory, the ability to remember to do something in the future, stops developing at about 10 years old and doesn't start up again until your 20's. (Students need to use reminders and planners!!)
- 6) Babies are basically in a constant acid trip - they have tons of neurons that aren't connected yet.
- 7) Brain growth in adolescence makes learning lots of new stuff possible and easier - including addictions.
- 8) Kids and teens have more excitatory neurotransmitters than inhibitory - it's easier for them to act than to not act.
- 9) Adolescents' circadian rhythms are different than adults - they are late to bed and late to rise.
- 10) Sleeping is so important!! Your brain prunes and streamlines connections you've made during the day. Sleeping before a test is just as important as studying.

Mary-Jane says

I heard about this up-to-date book about development and neuroscience of the adolescent brain on a radio interview. I would recommend the book because the research data is current and relevant and thought-provoking, but I found that the book was repetitive (links to the frontal lobe not yet developed) and provided too much case study about the primary author's own family.

The book first provides an overview of brain biology and physiology and is then well-organized into chapters about topics such as sleep, drugs, and crime, including references to relevant news stories. The adolescent and his or her developing brain is especially vulnerable to drug addiction (cigarettes, marijuana, other drugs), mental illness, and repeated concussions. The adolescent's phase shifted sleep cycle is convincingly shown to be late waking and late sleeping, a contrast from the early to bed and early to rise

pattern of the young child. Concerning is the chronic sleep deprivation of teenagers and the dependence on energy drinks to stay alert and awake. Clearly, the generally early start times for high schools need to be reevaluated, and the author shows benefits to the students in schools that made adjustments.

The author's suggestions of how to apply the knowledge about the neuroscience of the adolescent brain have no references. Also, the chapter about juvenile delinquency and the author's role in recent Supreme Court precedents to consider the potential for rehabilitation in the adolescent offender does not include research about the effectiveness of juvenile rehabilitation programs. The author makes neuroscience and adolescent brain development accessible to the parents of teenagers and provides useful information, but she compromises on science by talking about her own children and family friends and by providing advice based on what she did as a parent of teenagers.

Christopher Barry says

I read this because I teach 7th grade and I'm teaching a research writing unit on brain development - so unlike my few other 1-star reviews, I actually read the whole thing.

I'll paraphrase each chapter for you: "My children are great. Here's some science. Here's a completely unresearched anecdote I heard from somebody that relates to the science. My children are great because I talked to them. I'm great. Also, drugs are bad mmmkay."

I'd also suggest an alternate title: *The Upper-Middle Class Teenage Brain: A Privileged Neuroscientist's Guide to Raising Adolescents who Go to Private Schools and Elite Colleges.*

As a teacher in a very socio-economically diverse school, I was hoping for the book to address socio-economics and adolescent development in any substantial way - it did not. The tone of the book in some places was almost offensive, but was mostly laughable in regards to the way it ignores the realities of many working class and poor families and how that likely impacts brain development.

It is not a book I would recommend to the parents of my students. Also, if you are already familiar with adolescent brain development, pick a different book.

Elizabeth? says

This is a good primer on the brain and its development through adolescence.

There are chapters on sleep, stress, alcohol, sports and other relevant topics to navigating the world of being a teenager. The illustrations help the reader better comprehend the material.

There is a lot of work cited based on animal experiments which is sometimes difficult to swallow. If you are sensitive to this issue, be aware. There isn't anything too graphic, but it is where a lot of the research thrives.

This will help me better understand the teens I teach and why they can't help being impulsive or tired or indecisive.

Jennifer Heise says

I tried, I did. I just couldn't.

Jensen knows a lot about Neuroscience. I believe her on that one. But I'm really concerned whether she actually paid attention to what she wrote here, or whether she (and/or her ghostwriter, if she had one) just summarized statistics from a powerpoint.

It's a pity, because this could have been a really useful, interesting book about how our brains function and how they function on adolescence. But once she gets out of the functional parts, and into the parenting parts... I can't even.

Up to the point where I gave up in discuss, this was really more like "how to argue with your teenagers with neuroscience." These are the points where I got frustrated:

- first of all, she admits right off that she catastrophized when her son came home having dyed his hair blue. Blue hair? Blue hair is an emergency? I don't think so. She does seem to explain how she and other parents should come down off it, but I just get this feeling that she's coming from a white-picket-fence situation and terrorizing all the things that can go wrong.

- She seriously claimed that life offers more dangers to teenagers than in any time in history and that teens are less supervised than ever before. Look, I don't claim that life is a bed of roses for teenagers. But just because we have more different ways for a kid to get high and to embarrass themselves on social media, that doesn't mean life is more unsafe. Kids in the 1950s and 1960s were at a lot more risk for vehicular related deaths, alcohol related deaths, rape, teen pregnancy, getting killed AT WORK, being victimized sexually and not believed, poisoned, sent to war, dying in FISTFIGHTS, and other risks. There was a time when a 16 year old was an adult, and they could easily get married, get pregnant, and completely ruin their life socially or in truth by, oh, having their toddler accidentally burndown the house while they were in bed after a miscarriage. (Laura Wilder!) [Another anecdote: in the 1960s, my father and his teen friends were driving around the countryside in the middle of the night in a car with a broken heater which they heated with a kerosene stove in the back, holding pitchers of beer.]

- the author likes to use anecdotes of terrible things happening. This strengthens the impact of her arguments but can backfire, as when she talks about 'a disaster' when a teenager steals the family car keys in a rage but backs through the garage door-- disaster would have been if they had been killed or killed someone else.)
- Furthermore, a lot of her arguments about how young people show impaired ability to balance risks center around alcohol-fueled exploits that end in death from exposure. First of all, young people have a risk to measure re: getting caught drunk that older people just don't have; furthermore, exposure has been demonstrated to mess with people's ability to judge what's the right thing to do-- fully grown adults have fled rescuers. So, that undermines her argument.

The part that started to really grate on me was the use of epidemiological studies that conflate causation and correlation. Ok, teen smokers are more likely to be smokers when they grow up. Is this because they were more exposed to smoke-- or that being the kind of person who becomes addicted to smoking causes them to try it? Teen smokers are more likely to suffer from mental illness. This is no surprise: those of us in whose families mental illness gallops know that smoking is one behavior people with mental illness get addicted to in an effort to manage reality. But since mental illness has such a strong genetic component, I'd accept nothing less than twin studies to show that smoking causes crazy.

At the end of the chapter on smoking, she suggests that if our teens insist on smoking, perhaps we should steer them towards *smokeless tobacco*, *vaping* or similar. CHEWING TOBACCO? You WANT your kid to

rot their face off? what is wrong with you lady? <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lif...>
and if you're a scientist you should know that vaping liquids are not tested or regulated. That's just crazy.

Then we get into pot. She starts out by admitting that originally nobody in the medical establishment believed that pot made you crazy and stupid. Ok, I'm willing to believe that long-term use of pot messes with your brain. But all her data are epidemiological studies, or FLOODING SLICES OF RAT BRAIN with chemicals. Still, I was willing to sit through that.

And then she flat out says that pot-smoking causes schizophrenia.
All those parents and families who struggle to help, support and tolerate a schizophrenic family member will be pleased to know that the problem is just that they haven't kept their family member away from pot when they were a teenager. *headdesk* yes, I've seen the studies. The genetic link for schizophrenia is really really strong. Compared to that, very little makes sense. In fact, given that schizophrenia often rears its head before pot smoking... Anyway, there are studies that justifiably point out there's probably a genetic link between a tendency toward schizophrenia and a tendency toward pot addiction.
<http://www.nature.com/mp/journal/v19/...>

She did not just seriously go there.

She did.

book drop
