



What Parents Needs To Know

Reality Check: -

1. Parenting teenagers have always been a challenging and dynamic journey;
2. COVID-19 pandemic has added a new layer of complexity to this already demanding role.
3. One in 10 teenagers in Singapore suffers from at least one mental health disorder^[1], parents need to be particularly vigilant about their teenagers' mental health.
4. Navigating Career and Educational Uncertainty;
5. Recognizing the Uniqueness of the Teenage Experience

Reference:
[1] Study finds 1 in 10 teens suffers from mental health disorder; professionals call for more support from parents (27 April 2023) - <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/teens-youth-mental-health-disorder-nu-study-support-parents-resilience-3448571>

What Parents Needs To Know



What Can We Do?

1. Responsive Adaptation;
2. Holistic Support;
3. Strengthening Connections;
4. Preparing for the Future.



What Parents Needs To Know

Let's understand a bit of our teenagers' clockworks!



What Parents Needs To Know

The fact remains – Parent-Child Interaction represents the most significant relationship in childhood and the growing up years.

As the parenting ride becomes rockier, more demanding and more exhausting – it is NOT the time to step back!

The teenage years are the period when the brain undergoes its most significant overhaul – very much like a total renovation of your house!



What Parents Needs To Know

This is exciting time as it presents valuable opportunities to make adjustments to a previous layout or blueprint of behaviour.

It is also a vulnerable time because the brain is in a highly malleable state – habits and changes adopted during teenage years will be steadily hardwired and cemented in.

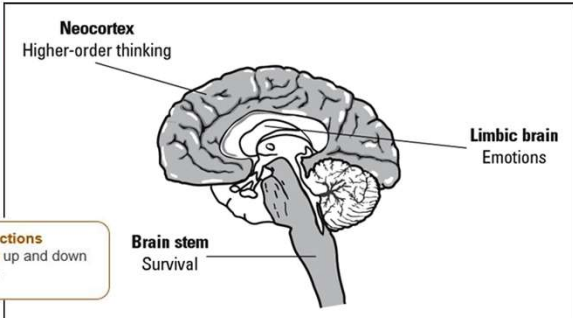
Parental engagement will help to influence the “renovation” at this stage!



What Parents Needs To Know

Complex processes

- Perception, planning, attention, abstract thinking, language...



Neocortex
Higher-order thinking


Limbic brain
Emotions

Brain stem
Survival

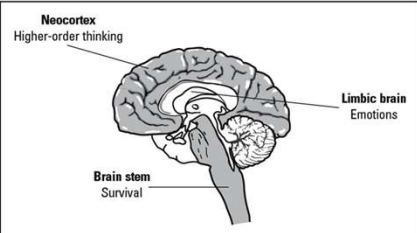
Primitive survival functions

- Fulfilling our animal needs and emotions (feeding, reproduction, parenting...)

Source: Paul MacLean – Triune brain theory (1952), <https://waitbutwhy.com/2017/04/neuralink.html>



What Parents Needs To Know




Neocortex
Higher-order thinking

Limbic brain
Emotions

Brain stem
Survival

1. The Brain Stem and the Limbic brain are hardwired and ready for action from birth. They are concerned with keeping us alive and alerting us to threats.
2. The Neocortex (or cortex), on the other hand is soft wired at birth. Babies are born with billions of genetically pre-programmed neurons capable of making thousands of connections and pathways.
3. But this process is only triggered into “action” as a result of external experiences (the nurturing process).



What Parents Needs To Know

Emotional Meltdown/Hijack



1. Our teenager's "button" is much more sensitive than ours. Once the limbic system is flooded with emotion, it becomes uncontrollable. Much like your computer in the state of being "overloaded".
2. When this happens, door to the cortex (responsible for higher order functions e.g. reasoning) will be closed and your teenager is then operating at their primary systems i.e. the limbic brain and is at the mercy of unbridled emotions.
3. This is when we end up saying and doing things that have not been properly thought through.



What Parents Needs To Know

1. Teenager behaviour become more understandable when we realized that it is the Limbic Brain that usually dominates the proceedings during the teens years because the Cortex is busy with its major overhaul and "renovations".
2. This knowledge then help us manage our reactions and responses better when interacting with our teenagers.
3. Teenage years are window of opportunity – When handled properly, the "renovations" that is going on in the brain allow us to influence changes to the behavioural pathways.



What Parents Needs To Know

4. More importantly, as we set out on this journey with a positive mindset and optimism, it can be contagious to our children.
5. How we respond and interact with our teenager influences their emotions, behaviour and developing personality.



02

What pushes the
"button"

What pushes the "button"

1. Criticism





4. Being Ignored




2. Contescension



3. Lack of gratitude




5. Unrealistic goals / deadlines








What pushes the "button"

Are those the only things that push the "button"?











What pushes the “button”

There are plenty “day-to-day” triggers that do the job equally well: -

1. FOMO
2. Accepting a “no” from parents
3. Exam performance/pressure
4. Identity/image
5. Materialism
6. Friendships
7. Troublesome relationships
8. Misunderstandings
9. Uncertainty
10. Fear of failure
11. Peer Pressure
12. Choices/Decisions



03

Brains: Male-Female Diff.




Brains: Male-Female Diff.

There is a difference between the male and female brain.

Some girls can have fairly high level of testosterone, making their brains a little more like those of boys.


As a result, these girls may find certain male skills, such as navigating or abstract reasoning, a little easier.

The following table will be able to give you a reasonable overview/comparison, which may help you to better understand and support your teenagers' difference



MALE AND FEMALE BRAINS


Brain Functions	Boys	Girls
The hare (girl's brain) and the tortoise (boy's brain)	The maturation of the male brain typically extends until the age of 24, providing parents with an extended period to impact their development.	The female brain finishes its developmental "remodelling" by the age of 18, allowing young women to return to their refreshed and more thoughtful, rational minds.
Right-hand side (RHS) – primitive/emotional : left-hand side (LHS) – logical/language	Boys predominantly utilize the right hemisphere of the brain (RHS) to process experiences, leading to a tendency towards more reactive and negative responses.	Girls engage both the right and left hemispheres of the brain when evaluating situations, which enhances their ability to exercise self-control and manage their responses.



Reference:
Moik, A. and Jessek, D., *Brain Sex: The Real Difference Between Men & Women*, Mandarin (London) (1991)
Feinstein, S.G., *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today's Adolescents*, 2nd ed. Corwin/Sage Publications (Thousand Oaks) (2009).

MALE AND FEMALE BRAINS


Brain Functions	Boys	Girls
Bridge between emotional right (RHS) and chatty left (LHS)	The connection between the two brain hemispheres permits less communication from the right to the left side in males, contributing to boys being less talkative.	Girls have a more open channel between the right and left hemispheres of the brain, granting them the capability to articulate their emotional highs and lows more effectively.
Managing and processing emotions	Boys often trap strong negative feelings in the right side of their brain, making them more likely to suddenly react emotionally. They struggle to understand their own emotions, needing extra time and space to figure them out.	Girls generally have an easier time recognizing, understanding, and managing their emotions. They are less impulsive and better at processing and calming stressful feelings.



Reference:
Moir, A. and Jessek, D., *Brain Sex: The Real Difference Between Men & Women*, Mandarin (London) (1991)
Feinstein, S.G., *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today's Adolescents*, 2nd ed. Corwin/Sage Publications (Thousand Oaks) (2009).

MALE AND FEMALE BRAINS


Brain Functions	Boys	Girls
Expressing and articulating	Due to limited communication from the right to the left hemisphere and handling more negative emotions, boys often face challenges in expressing and articulating themselves. Their reluctance to talk is less about unwillingness and more about difficulty in doing so, leading to grunts and minimal verbal communication.	The smoother interaction between the right and left hemispheres of the brain, combined with greater socialization, enables girls to express and talk about their feelings. This practice aids them in becoming more objective and enhances their emotional intelligence.



Reference:
Moir, A. and Jessek, D., *Brain Sex: The Real Difference Between Men & Women*, Mandarin (London) (1991)
Feinstein, S.G., *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today's Adolescents*, 2nd ed. Corwin/Sage Publications (Thousand Oaks) (2009).

MALE AND FEMALE BRAINS


Brain Functions	Boys	Girls
Sleepyhead!	The male brain is sometimes prone to daydreaming, appearing sleepy or lazy, which can stem from fear or uncertainty, often due to overindulgence. Engaging in physical, risky, and exciting activities, as opposed to sedentary ones, provides the necessary stimulation and acts as an effective wake-up call.	Girls typically experience fewer issues with attention and lethargy compared to boys. However, to maximize their focus and concentration and to reduce stress, they also benefit from mixing study or work periods with short periods of physical activity or spending time outdoors.



Reference:
Moir, A. and Jessek, D., *Brain Sex: The Real Difference Between Men & Women*, Mandarin (London) (1991)
Feinstein, S.G., *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today's Adolescents*, 2nd ed. Corwin/Sage Publications (Thousand Oaks) (2009).

MALE AND FEMALE BRAINS


Brain Functions	Boys	Girls
Taking risks	The male brain is often stimulated by risks, competition, and danger, which can lead to a surge in dopamine and increased motivation. However, too much excitement can impair sound judgment, self-control, and the ability to foresee negative consequences.	Confronting risks and challenges often triggers fear and stress responses in girls, which can lead to feelings of nausea. Increased exposure to such situations, by stepping outside their comfort zones and trying new things, can help in mitigating these side effects. Girls' natural inclination towards caution acts as a brake, enabling them to more carefully consider potential consequences.



Reference:
Moir, A. and Jessek, D., *Brain Sex: The Real Difference Between Men & Women*, Mandarin (London) (1991)
Feinstein, S.G., *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today's Adolescents*, 2nd ed. Corwin/Sage Publications (Thousand Oaks) (2009).

MALE AND FEMALE BRAINS


Brain Functions	Boys	Girls
Stress	The male brain lights up with excitement and thrill at the prospect of a chase or challenge, sharpening their focus and engagement in a hunter-gatherer style. This drive acts as an accelerator, enhancing their alertness and action-orientation, but excessive excitement can lead to difficulties.	The female brain is wired to prioritize safety and assess risks, leading girls to frequently worry about potential dangers and sometimes struggle with decision paralysis. They often find impulsive male actions perplexing.



Reference:
Moir, A. and Jessek, D., *Brain Sex: The Real Difference Between Men & Women*, Mandarin (London) (1991)
Feinstein, S.G., *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today's Adolescents*, 2nd ed. Corwin/Sage Publications (Thousand Oaks) (2009).

MALE AND FEMALE BRAINS


Brain Functions	Boys	Girls
Making mistakes	Boys often process mistakes through the negative aspects of the right hemisphere of the brain. Experiencing failure, appearing foolish, or making errors can lead to feelings of toxic shame, anger, or fear. This emotional response may manifest in aggressive behaviour or a doom and gloom attitude.	Girls are generally better at reflecting, discussing issues, and considering alternative approaches for future situations.



Reference:
Moir, A. and Jessek, D., *Brain Sex: The Real Difference Between Men & Women*, Mandarin (London) (1991)
Feinstein, S.G., *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today's Adolescents*, 2nd ed. Corwin/Sage Publications (Thousand Oaks) (2009).

MALE AND FEMALE BRAINS

Brain Functions	Boys	Girls
Linking actions to consequences	The final piece of development falls into place around the age of 24 for boys. They need time to discuss the pros and cons of various situations to cultivate the art of accountability and consideration.	When encountering risk, the part of the brain responsible for caution activates in girls, leading them to think, "If I do this, then that will happen." This natural response predisposes them towards protective, caring, and nurturing behaviours.







Reference:
Moir, A. and, Jessek, D., *Brain Sex: The Real Difference Between Men & Women*, Mandarin (London) (1991)
Feinstein, S.G., *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today's Adolescents*, 2nd ed. Corwin/Sage Publications (Thousand Oaks) (2009).




04





What Works & What Backfires

What Works & What Backfires

-  Telling you teen to “stop thinking about it” and focus on your studies
-  Giving Excessive Reassurance
-  Jumping in with advice
-  Using Absolute Language



What Works & What Backfires

Connect Before You Correct			Begin with Empathy
Team Up With Your Teen			Be The Coach
Help Your Teen Challenge Negative Thinking			Creating a Supportive Environment
Maintaining Perspective and Balance			Knowing When To Seek External Help

