

My Middle Schooler Is Driving Me Crazy!

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In this presentation, I hope to help you understand what your middle-schooler is going through physically, emotionally, and socially so that you can successfully perform your role as a parent. And, as an added bonus, have fun, make positive memories, and enjoy these short but important years.

How The Middle School Brain Works

I. The Pruning Process (Synaptic Pruning)

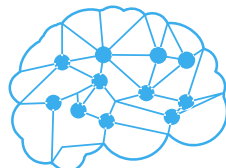
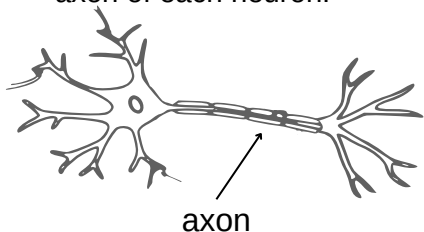
- In the Garden, we will _____ away the dead and unused branches so that the branches that are healthy will grow stronger and flourish.
- It happens in the brain at the synapse (a junction between two nerve cells). Some are no longer needed, and those they will lose. Some are needed, and those they will keep.

If they don't use it, they lose it!

- Since the old connections are cut away, the ones they _____ will become stronger (and faster).
- Approximately 40% of the synaptic connections are eliminated during adolescence.
- The middle-schooler (adolescent) brain has a lot of *plasticity* (moldable and easy to change).

II. Myelination

- The formation of *mylon* around the axon of each neuron.



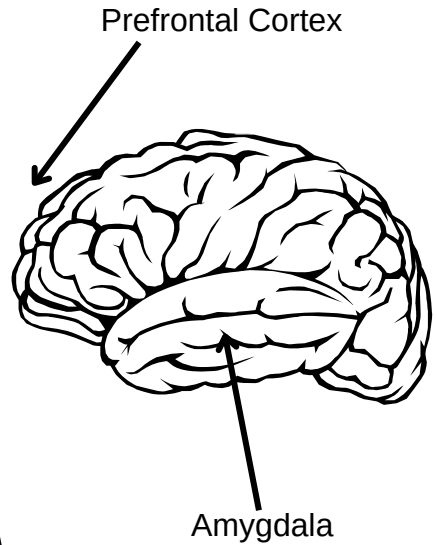
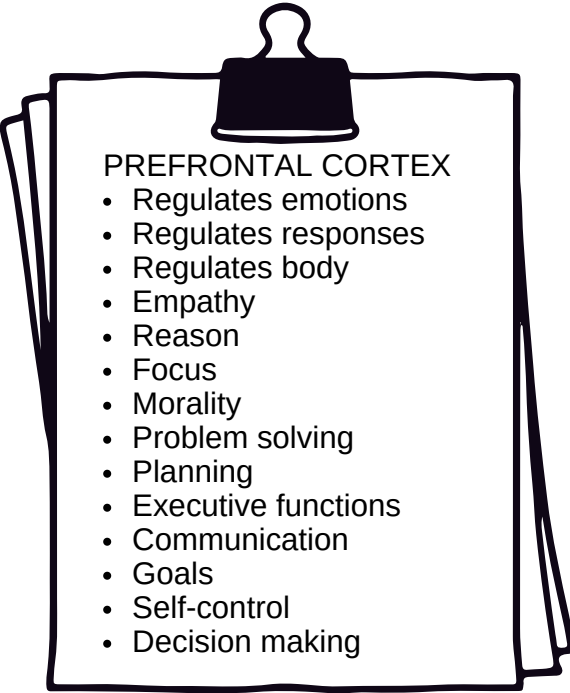
When the *mylon* is added, the speed can _____ up to 100 times faster.

Nutrition, sleep, socializing, complex thinking, and exercise aid in the healthy formation of _____.

White Matter: When there is Mylon on the axons.
Grey Matter: When there is no Mylon on the axons.

III. Prefrontal Cortex

- The brain develops from the back to the front. The prefrontal _____ is the last to develop.



- Because the prefrontal cortex is underdeveloped, the limbic system takes over, specifically the amygdala.

FUNCTIONS OF THE AMYGDALA

- Emotional responses: triggers fear, anger, sadness, anxiety, etc.
- Storing & forming Memories associated with emotions.
- Desires satisfaction & gratification immediately
- Recognizes threats

The *amygdala* develops at the age of _____.

Our middle-schoolers are experiencing these emotions for the first time and in a very INTENSE way.

Because their *prefrontal cortex* is not developed, they cannot control these emotions and responses.

These hard-to-control emotions have a direct effect on their mood, self-confidence, and relationships between peers and families.

IV. The Power of Hormones

- *Estrogen & testosterone* increase the production of white matter (myelination) as well as specific physical changes.
- *Dopamine* is the "happy" neurotransmitter (chemical) and its release is more intense during adolescence.
- It releases when we feel pleasure, excitement, and satisfaction (eating food, video games, driving fast, etc.).
- The release of dopamine causes one to seek out and search. It makes you *curious* and want to take *more risks* than you normally would take.

No Self-Control or Regulation from the Prefrontal Cortex!

Social & Emotional Challenges

You will see sad, happy, anger, scared, depressed, and many more types of emotions displayed, individually or all simultaneously, with much intensity.

Why? _____

I. What Do We Do When Their Emotions Are High?

- We don't always know how to respond.
- Be that strong parent.
- Don't yell, don't argue, don't take that ticket to ride!
- Wait for the emotions to calm down before you attempt to talk to them. During intense emotions they cannot think rationally since their amygdala has taken over.

Tools During Melt Downs

- Deep Hugs/Calming Touch
(Gives them stability, esp w/ADHD, SPD, autism, etc.)
- Soft Words ("I'm here for you. Are you okay?")
- Punching Bag
- Counting & Breathing Exercises
- Physical Exercise

II. When They Calm Down

- Ask Questions. Why did they do what they did?
- Have them retell the situation & express their feelings.
- Ask them what they could of done differently.
- This is an okay time to gently correct, redirect, give advice, and explain any punishment.
- Teach them the importance of self-discipline.

"If you don't discipline yourself, your parents or someone else will."

III. Self-Awareness

- Increased Sensitivity
- Finding Their Identity
- Increased Insecurity

They need direction from you.

Wrong Vs. Right

Where are the boundaries?

You need to lay these boundaries.

They will fight you at first.

But, most kids desire boundaries & know that they need them.

However, most will never admit it.

Their Brains are Being HARD-WIRED!

V. Social Development

- Friendship
- Aware of other people
- Independence is a good thing
- Form different opinions on things than you
- Test you to see how serious you are about those boundaries
- Test your faith and morals
- They do not fully recognize how their words and actions can affect others and themselves

Parents affect a child long term in the area of social development while friends only affect them short term.

Now What?

Model

- Show them how to be *calm*, patient, loving, and stable.
- Demonstrate how to have *self-control* when life goes crazy.
- You have had time to get STABLE.
- You have gone through the adolescent years, and you survived.
- Show them how it's done.

Listen

- Take the time to *learn what they love*, even if you are not interested in it (e.g., video games, sports, ballet, certain music bands, etc.).
- *Listen* to them when they are struggling, but also when they are happy and excited about things.

Understand

- *Repeat back* to them the feelings they expressed.
- Correct them with *gentleness*.
- Give them *positive reinforcement*; they're already insecure, and they do put themselves down. Why not point out the good parts about them?
- Show *empathy & respect*.

A student will become like
their teacher.

You are their teacher!

Bible Verses Mentioned

*I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Wonderful are Your works,
And my soul knows it very well.*

Psalm 139:14

*Fathers, do not exasperate your children so that they will not
lose heart.*

Colossians 3:21

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,
goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such
things there is no law.*

Galatians 5:22-23

*Train up a child in the way he should go,
Even when he is old he will not depart from it.*

Proverb 22:6

*To know wisdom and instruction,
To discern the sayings of understanding.*

Proverb 1:2

*Correct your son, and he will give you comfort;
He will also delight your soul.*

Proverb 29:17

*For the Lord will be your confidence
And will keep your foot from being caught.*

Proverb 3:26

Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.

1 Corinthians 12:27

*A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been
fully trained, will be like his teacher.* Luke 6:40