Healthy Connections: Understanding the Relationship Between Adolescents and Addiction
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Goals for today:
• Have a general understanding of what is happening in the brain during adolescent development.
• Be able to identify how their can be a relationship between adolescents and substance use.
• An introduction to the risks and protective factors that can foster or prevent the development of an addiction.
• Understand how addiction is a disease.
• Identify signs of struggle related to addiction.
• How to talk about addiction with our loved ones.
• Know where to look for help, and what it looks like to get help.

Overview
IPNB is an interdisciplinary field that utilizes the common findings across multiple areas of study to understand how we develop as people.
The Adolescent Brain

What's so different?

- Brain: Physically we get a burst of new neurons, puberty is starting to happen, and the pre-frontal cortex is starting to grow while the pleasure center area of the brain is growing faster.
- Relationships: Starting to shift from learning from caregivers to learning from peers. Generally, community is getting larger as well.
- Mind: Shift from concrete thinking to abstract thinking, while learning about self and others and how to interact with the world around us that is now getting larger.

Neuroplasticity is the ability of the brain to adapt, grow, and prune.

- Think play dough.
- Nature vs. Nurture – Both work together to help us reach our full potential.

The Name of the Game is Experiences

The brain's intentional imbalance of slower forming pre-frontal cortex and larger more active limbic region area or pleasure center is so adolescents can take more risks to have more experiences.

- Sparks greater growth of pre-frontal cortex
  - Emotional Regulation, Abstract Thinking, Decision Making
- Fosters more overall neural pathways and networks
- Leads to more information to better understand who we are as individuals, the people around, and the world us.
- Unlocks genetic potential, dormant positive traits of resilience that have been passed down but not fully activated
That is all good stuff, what’s the catch?

- Being programmed to take more risks, means greater likelihood to experiment and/or abuse substances and other risky behaviors.
- Dormant genetic traits or susceptibility to addiction passed down through the family gene pool can be activated.
- If an adolescent struggled to form healthy relationships this will increase chances to connect to “something,” possibly substances or other risky behaviors.
- A better perspective of addiction is to view it as an attachment disorder.

### The Name of the Game is Experiences

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One risk factor alone will not lead to someone growing from experimenting or abusing substances to developing a substance use disorder.

### Risk and Protective Factors

- Access to Friends and Family
- Lifestyles
- Routine
- Access to reliable and helpful coping skills
- Death of loved ones
- Watching those around us struggle to find ways to cope

### Impact of the Pandemic

A time of persistent grief and loss is and continues to be a risk factor. The full scope of the negative impact will not be realized for years to come.

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Repeated use of substances and behaviors that flood the brain with dopamine will short circuit our brain.

- The brain will try to adapt and using neuroplasticity will physical create a new unhealthy circuit (neural pathway) that bypasses the part of the brain that can realize this is bad and I need to stop.
- This is a physical change in the brain.
- The part of the brain needed to self-regulate is already at a disadvantage for an adolescent because it is still growing and not at full strength.

What’s the Difference between Substance Abuse Disorder and Substance Use Disorder?
Structural Damage
(The wall that blocks our critical thinking/personality)

Signs of Struggling

The Drift

Relationships
- Strain with prior healthy attachments
- Isolated – Friends, Family, Clubs, Teams
- Active in toxic relationships
- Struggle to form new connections

Health/Mood
- Appearance – weight, complexion, pupils, cuts/bruises, scabbing
- Morning sickness
- Severe and persistent shifts in mood – tricky one
- Memory loss, confusion, struggle to concentrate
- Withdrawal Symptoms
- Illness related to heavy use

Behavior and Function
- Negative change in academic performance (grades and attendance)
- Struggle to perform in employment, sports teams, extracurricular activities
- Change in sleep pattern – Insomnia and Nodding Out
- Aggression
- Risky Behaviors – Late nights with no contact, theft, vandalism, driving while under the influence

What you might find?
- Alcohol
- Old Scripts (Benzodiazepines, Opioids, Stimulants)
  - Find pills whole, but also see them crushed up you know struggles have progressed
- Bongs, Glass Pipes, Rolling Paper, Cigars, Dime Bags
- Vapes (Tanks, E-Cigarettes, E-Pen, Dab Pens)
  - Are not just used for nicotine but THC as well
  - THC often at the root of the news reports of adolescents who end up in the hospital
  - The THC itself is a risk, often not regulated, and mixed with other chemicals
  - The Vitamin E that is often added as thickening agent to the liquid is now learned to be lethal after being heated for clogging up the lungs.
How to Start the Conversation?

Conversation can be anxiety provoking and awkward, but first step is to lean into the discomfort and have it.

- The experience itself when done with transparency will lead to you feeling like a safe place to ask questions, share concerns, and ask for help.
- Key word is transparency, no mind games, no tricks, no entrapment.
- Use I-Statements to express your own concern and anxiety.
- Use O.A.R.S. to keep a safe feeling and motivate change:
  - Open Ended Questions
  - Affirmations
  - Reflections
  - Summaries

Conversation Tips – What to Avoid

The Four Horseman of Communication - Dr. Gottman

- Criticism
- Stonewalling
- Power Struggle
- Contempt
- Defensiveness
What Help is Out There?

There are various levels of help available based on current risk and protective factors for each person.

- Community Supports
  - A.A
  - N.A
  - SMART Recovery
  - Refuge Recovery
  - Celebrate Recovery
  - Mountainside has free community supports available on website that range from support groups to wellness group.

- Recovery Coaching

- Treatment options and the various levels of care.
  - Inpatient Services
    - Detox Programs (Medical support to help during withdraw)
    - Residential Programs (30-90 Days)
  - Outpatient Services
    - Intensive Outpatient Programs (IOP)
    - Outpatient Programs (OP)
  - Psychiatry and Medications Assisted Treatments (MAT or MATS)
    - Should be paired with outpatient services/psychotherapy

Key Points to Take Away

Adolescent period of development is a natural time to take risks, and if enough risk factors are in place can lead to a relationship started with substances.

A protective factor to add is being transparent and curious in having conversations with our loved ones.

There is help available through community supports, and professional help available through a variety of treatment options.
References