

## The Adolescent Brain: Why Do Teens Behave The Way They Do?

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From sleeping in late to forgetting their homework and acting out, teenagers are sometimes enigmas to their parents. [Nancy Brown, Ph.D.](#), a health educator and child and adolescent development expert at PAMF, discusses one of parents' top questions: Why do my teens behave the way they do?

### Teens often act in ways that baffle adults. Why is this?

Parents often wonder what makes teenagers do (or not do) certain things—text constantly, sleep too much, or act indifferently to them or other adults. Some teenagers are compliant and easy going, but as many parents know, it is also common for teens to go through a period of rebellion and resistance. Understanding teen behavior requires an understanding of the teen mind and how it develops.

### Are teens' brains really different?

We're only beginning to understand the development of the human brain, but we now challenge previous notions that brain development stops early in childhood. Brain development continues well into the 20s for most people. And some areas of the brain, particularly the neocortex – the part of the brain responsible for language, planning, empathy and executive functions (like prioritizing and organizing) – develop later than other areas, such as the amygdala, which is the "gut instinct" part of the brain.

### If the adolescent brain is still developing, does this impact a teen's behaviors?

Yes. Some days teens may act their age and other days, they may act like they are 4 years old again. This is because the neocortex is not fully developed. Therefore, teens rely more on the amygdala, the part of the brain that manages emotions and memory.

### Does this mean I should cut my teen some slack?

The brain of a 12- to 14-year old is going through the same level of change it did at 2 to 3 years of age. Neurons that are being pruned away (the unused ones) or strung together into their neural network as a result of experience. This is when your teen really needs you!

If you recognize that most teens are inconsistently, and that this behavior does not reflect a lack of caring, it will be easier to be patient and use these situations as an opportunity to provide character education. For example, explain to your teen why the teacher is probably annoyed and feels disrespected when assignments aren't done on time.

But while patience and understanding are important, we should also not make excuses for our teens. They still need to learn how to control their own behavior. We can provide the most support by modeling the same type of behavior we want to see our teens display.



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