

9 Keys for Success for Foster and Adopted Adolescents



Jeanette Yoffe, MFT

jeanette@yoffetherapy.com

Ronald Jenkins

rongolf6807@gmail.com

4 Tasks of Adolescence

- **Sense of Industry and Competency:** believing in their abilities.
- **Sense of Control Over One's Fate in Life:** believing in their future.
- **Connectedness to Others:** experiencing positive peer and adult relationships.
- **Sense of Identity:** integrating all of the above helps unify their sense of self.

Adolescent Brain Development

- The front part of the brain, called the prefrontal cortex, is one of the last brain regions to mature. This area is responsible for skills like planning, prioritizing, and controlling impulses. This takes 31 years to develop, in normal development.
- Traumatized teens have at least 2 years of developmental delay, emotionally and psychologically and more depending upon their history.
- Because these skills are still developing, teens are more likely to engage in risky behaviors without considering the potential results of their decisions.

Research

- The brain of the adolescent goes through a phase of plasticity and pruning of brain pathways develop as did the brain of the toddler years.
- Because adolescents are so readily influenced by emotions, they stand to profit from learning in a positive emotional context that is intentionally designed to train emotional regulation.
- The same plasticity that creates the unique adolescent experience gives parents and teachers the ability to wield strong influence on the adolescent brain.

Research

Repetitive exposure to emotionally regulated people and regulating experiences (rhythmic and repetitive sensory experiences like breathing, dancing and walking) and extensive practice in handling difficult social interactions prepare the teen brain to withstand peer pressure when it inevitably arrives.

Why understand the brain?

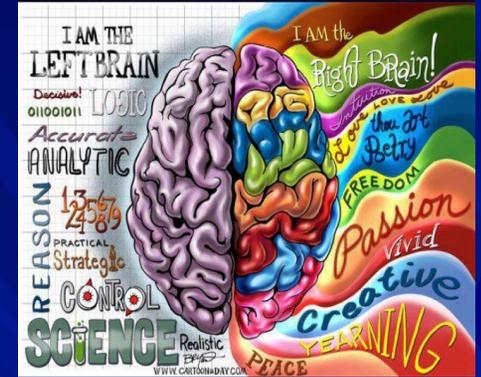


- To have influence and build a teen's independence.
- The 2 parts of the brain, the **Right and the Left Brain** are under a lot of construction and “vacillating” like a “seesaw” during adolescence.
- When a teen comes to you with a behavior, you will ask yourself, which “**seesaw**” part of the brain are they in and how do I approach that part of the brain?
- ***And you will assess your own brain... where are you on the seesaw... in relation to the teen?***

Brain Hemispheres

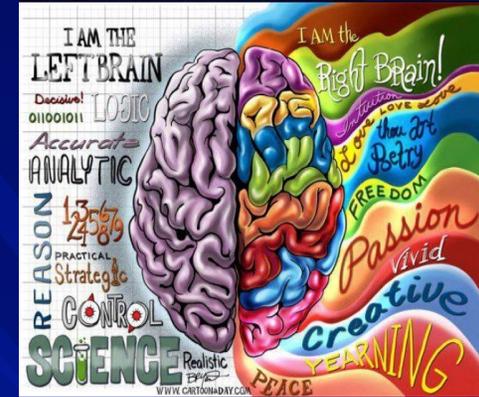
Left Brain- High Road

- Logic, Linear, Linguistic and Literal
- Approaches things, to feel good *and* deal with things aggressively, to get them out of our way (road rage)
- *Anger has been found to be a left brain emotion along with joy!*
- Loves the letter of the law!
- Emotional Desert
- Functions different than the right!



Brain Hemispheres

Right Brain- Low Road

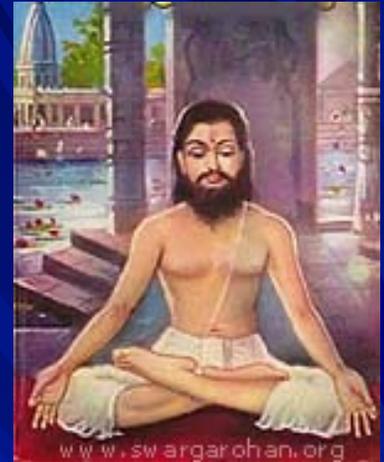


- It senses emotion
- Protects us from harm and learns what to avoid in life – defends out of fear!
- Non-verbal
- Stores Autobiographical memory
- Senses body info
- Emotional Tsunami!
- Is dominant the first 3 years.
- Thrives on rhythmic, repetitive, relational, and the senses for soothing.

Your GOAL...

Take the High Road

- You will be in a Receptive State.
- You will be flexible and open to learning.
- **Research shows the physiological study that muscles in the face/body relax.**
- Your goal is to “keep it together.”
- **GOAL OF a Brain Based Approach - To Be Mindful and TAKE A SECOND LOOK** at the teen’s behavior to understand it’s meaning, step back from their reactions personally, and reappraise the situation.



Integrating the UPstairs-High Road and DOWNstairs-Low Road of the Brain

- Engage teens with warmth and comfort so they **“feel felt.”** – Right brain
- ***“I see you want...I want that too...”*** – Left brain
- Emotional responsiveness engages the upstairs brain. – Left brain
- **The goal is NOT to “stop the low road” asap, the goal is to help the teen develop an integrated brain through a connected relationship.**

How to Connect so they will talk....

- Teens need A LOT of listening.
- Don't give unsolicited advice. When teens talk, plant yourself close, relax and let them direct the conversation.
- Send them warmth and confidence non-verbally face, eyes, tone of voice and body language.
- Important talks begin with topics that may seem unimportant.
- When a teen brings up feelings, stay and listen. Don't argue, defend, or reason stay and listen. Be their ally and MODEL, their brains learn by EXAMPLE.

CONNECT and REDIRECT

Connect first w/ the right brain

- Non-verbal
- Comfort
- Touch
- Tone of voice
- Facial expressions
- Empathy
- Pausing
- Breathing

Redirect with the left brain

- Solutions
- Words
- Planning
- Logical explanations
- Boundaries

The 9 Keys



Overall Message

- We are all in this together.
- Like many before, we will make it too.
- We will thrive because we belong too.
- We are above any circumstances or stigmas attached to us.
- We are clear examples of resilience and self empowerment.
- We, more than anybody, understand that how one is CARED for, matters most.
- We are white, tan, black, and brown.
- We are human.

1st KEY- Accepting Truth: *What happened to you?*

- I've been adopted.
- I've been fostered.
- I was adopted.
- I was fostered.
- Who am I?
- Accepting their story as invaluable.
- Owning their story as victoriabile.

Exercise: Tapping In Value & Worth

2nd KEY- Resiliency Road:

What's your story moving forward?

- Teach self-advocacy so they can speak up for what feels right to them.
- *What feels good and belongs to me, may be different for others and that's ok.*
- Creating a path that acknowledges their inner compass, that knows right from wrong.
- Help them identify and take pride in the Strengths and Vulnerabilities for better self understanding.

Exercise: Stretch Beyond Pose

3rd KEY- Accountability:

What is the value of change?

- Accept things that I cannot change.
- Be accountable to things I can change.
- Be inculpable to things I cannot change.
- *I can't change my parents, I can change my attitude towards my past.*
- Make a list of of both.
- Take responsibility for new changes.

Exercise: Letting go and holding on

4th KEY- Setting Goals:

What accomplishments are possible?

- Create a dream wish list.
- Accomplishments I want to create for myself.
- Create a list of daily goals that are attainable.
- Create short term goals 1 month at a time.
- Break down a goal into steps to make it happen. *Who? What? Where? When? How?*

Exercise: Congratulate yourself for daily achievements. Even the small stuff!

5th KEY- Self-Love:

What is the Greatest KEY!

- Supportive environment, family, home, friends , again choices, self advocated therapy .
- I know how I feel, want, believe better then anybody else does.
- *I surround myself with people I know are good for me, despite what I was going through.*
- I am the expert in my life.
- I accept I can receive help.
- I accept my flaws as my greatest asset.
- I embrace all of me.

Exercise: Tapping In Self- hug

6th KEY-Navigating the System: *Who is out there?*

- Educate, educate, educate. Learn, learn, learn.
- There are resources.
- Don't be afraid to research.
- The first step, is always the hardest.
- Let's, we, us do this together.
- Make the call, write the letter, show up for the interview.
- *If you can see it in your mind, you can hold it your hand.- Bob Proctor*

Exercise: Visualization

7th KEY- Instilling Hope:

Who better than us, to support?

- We come with different circumstances, that gives us the strength to stand up for not only ourselves, but for others.
- Who better than us to support us.
- Share your story to help others.
- Our success lessons somebody else's pain.
- Be vigilant, others like us have made it.
- So can you!

- Exercise: HOPE Acronym

8th KEY- Embrace:

What we resist, persists?

- Everything that your experience has to offer needs support.
- Have an understanding that guidance, education and support is geared to harness, not hurt.
- Parents
- Teachers
- Counselors
- Therapists
- Trusted souls (friends)

Exercise: Making eye contact

9th KEY- Trust:

What foundation do I have when I fall?

- Trust means, when I reach out someone who I know is there for me. *“I can fall reaching.”*
- When they reach out, their window of trust is open. You don't have to do much, but be the ledge they lean on.
- You must be authentic and honest in your stance.
- When a teen has “trust in a person”, to help them sort out the questions about where they've been, what's happening now and where they are going. They can integrate a sense of self, identity formation and begin to make authentic choices on their own.

Exercise: The Human Knot

Q&A



Good Parent Messages

Early Life

- I love you.
- I want you.
- I see you and I hear you.
- I welcome and cherish you.
- I'll take care of you.
- Over and over, I will show you how to trust.
- My consistency of meeting your needs, will last longer than your chaos.
- I am not leaving.
- Sometimes I will tell you no, and that's because I love you.

School Age

- I love you. I want you.
- I give you permission to be different from me.
- I see you and I hear you.
- My patience is stronger than your anger.
- My consistency of meeting your needs, will last longer than your chaos.
- You can trust your inner voice.
- It is not what you do but who you are that I love.

Teen

- I love you. I want you.
- I give you permission to be different from me.
- I see you and I hear you.
- My love is bigger than your hate.
- My care is more lasting than your rejection.
- It is not what you do but who you are that I love.
- I will not give up on you.
- I have confidence in you.
- I am proud of you.

7 Core Strengths of Foster Youth

Brave *Thomas Paine*
Adaptable
Observant
Strong Minded
Believe in Goodness
Futuristic Thinkers
Determined to live a better
life!

@JeanetteYoffe
Former Foster Youth



A person with long, vibrant red hair is sitting on a large, dark rock in the foreground. They are facing away from the camera, looking out over a calm body of water. The water is misty and reflects the surrounding environment. In the background, a dense forest of tall, thin evergreen trees stretches across the horizon under a soft, hazy sky. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

The Seven Core Strengths of Adoptees

**Compassionate
Highly intuitive
Adaptable
Creative
Brave
Wounded healers
Strong willed
Unrelenting when driven!**

- Jeanette Yoffe