

Teens, Stress, and Resilience

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The brain

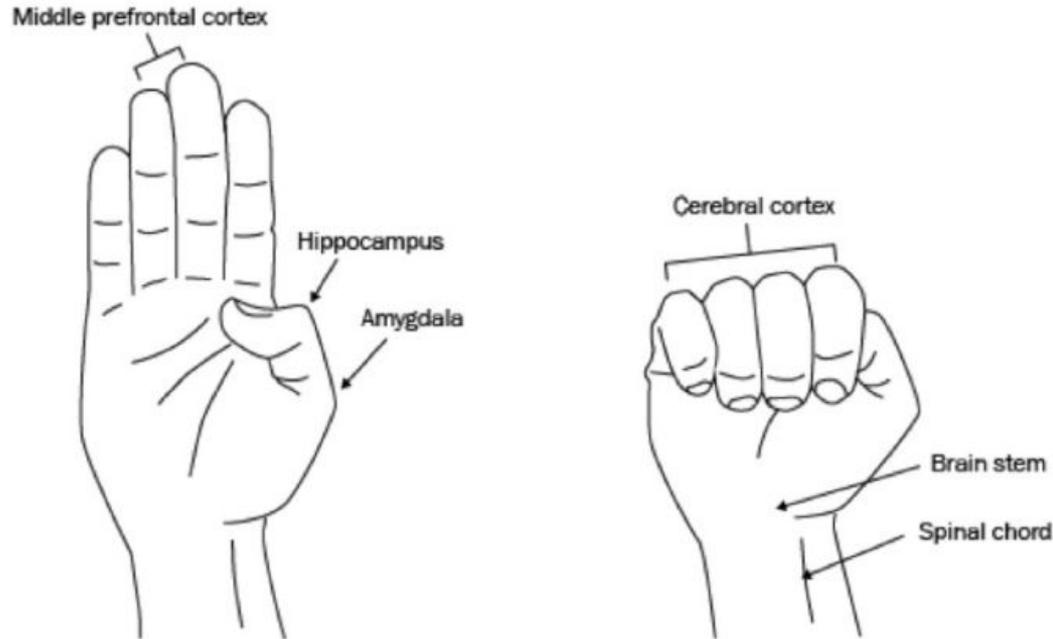
The brain is the most undifferentiated organ at birth--builds itself and changes in response to experience

Adolescence (which doesn't end officially until 24 y.o) is a developmental phase in which the brain is particularly moldable

Experience dependant development means that neural networks can get shaped in one direction by stress and trauma and in another direction by experiences of safety, connection, and support

The good news is that although we can't control much of the stress and difficulty from the outside world, we do have the opportunity to make our relationships with our children places of support and connection which will buffer the impact of negative experiences

“Flipping Our Lids” (Stress and the brain)



Hand model courtesy of Dan Siegel

CORTEX (fingers) executive functioning, planning for future, consequences, language, self reflection

LIMBIC SYSTEM-Hippocampus and Amygdala (thumb) emotions and reactivity **MORE ACTIVE IN ADOLESCENCE**

BRAIN STEM(palm) regulates basic processes including fight/flight/freeze

SPINAL CORD(arm) neural tissue that sends messages between brain and body

Mapping your teen's stress

Pandemic

- uncertainty about the future
- health fears
- economic impact
- social isolation
- remote learning
- missed experiences

Academics

- demands of HS
- college
- learning/attention issues

Identity Formation

- sexuality
- gender identity
- religious/spiritual
- peer group
- interests/talents
- drive toward separation & individuation

Family

- divorce/separation
- financial, housing, concrete needs
- conflictual relationships
- loss, illness

World Events

- politics
- Climate crisis

Racism & Oppression

- structural oppression
- interpersonal experiences (peers, authority figures)

Building Resilience

The way we respond to our children can protect them from many of the negative effects of stress in their lives. It's never too late!

When humans feel closely connected to others, it regulates the nervous system (soothes limbic system and brings the cortex back online)

Our interactions with our children can teach them that in times of stress they can reach out for contact and support and be soothed. This builds secure attachment, which has been linked to every positive index for mental health including **confidence, optimism, curiosity, sense of belonging, assertiveness, high self esteem**

Key factors are accessibility, responsiveness, and emotional engagement of caregivers

CALM framework

Centered--ground ourselves (make sure our own thinking brain is online)

Attuned--invoke the mental model of your child's sources of stress. This allows us to relate to them and understand the emotions and needs underneath the behavior. Use "Name it to Tame it"

Logical--only use logic after their thinking brain is back online

Meaningful--keep long term goal in mind; remove focus from the particularities of the interaction/issue and orient towards the emotional growth we are helping to develop