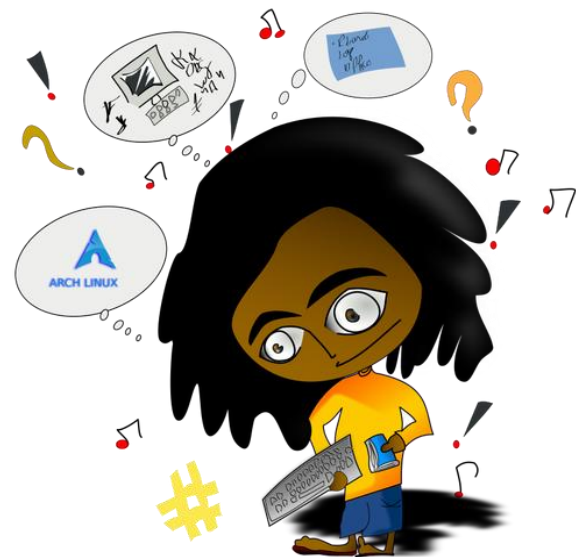


# The Teenage Brain

**Stormont House Parent Coffee Morning 03.11.25**

**Dr Holly Seaman (Educational Psychologist)**



# What words come to mind when you hear the word 'teenager'?



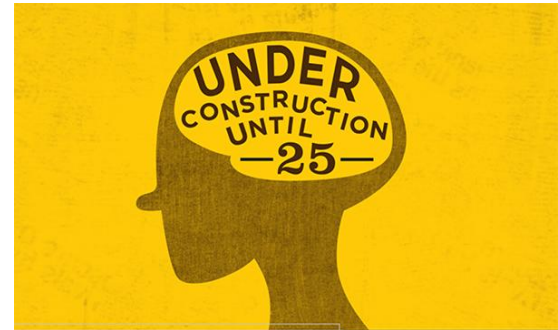
# Teenagers today are growing up in a noisy world....



What factors are influencing teenagers today?

# The Adolescent Brain

- **By the time a child is 6 years old, their brain is 90 – 95% of adult size**
- **During adolescence, the brain develops intensively into the mid 20s to become an “adult brain” – time of significant growth and development in the brain**
- **Brain change depends on age, experience and hormonal changes in puberty**



# The Teenage Brain Is Under Construction.

- During the teenage years, the brain goes through a massive renovation. It's like the Wi-Fi network is being upgraded - **signals get faster and stronger.**
- The brain does this in two ways:  
**Myelination** – it's like adding insulation around the brain's 'wires,' so messages travel more quickly and smoothly.  
**Pruning** – the brain removes connections it doesn't use much, a bit like tidying up old apps on your phone to make space for the important ones.
- This is why teenagers can seem brilliant one minute and forgetful their brain wiring is still under construction!"



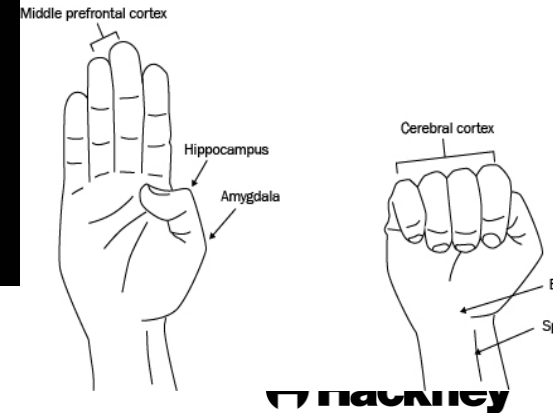


# Why it matters...



- **Parts of the teenage brain don't all get renovated / upgraded at the same time.**
- The process starts at the back of the brain working to the front.
- The front of the brain is the last to develop (**the Prefrontal cortex**). This is the bit that helps us think things through, plan and control impulses (our executive functioning skills).
- **Teenagers process information through the emotional hub of the brain (Amygdala).** Therefore emotions and instincts drive their behaviour rather than logic.

# The Hand Model of the brain



Working for every child

‘Flipping your lid’

THACKER



# Changing Brains Mean that Adolescents Act Differently From Adults

*Based on the stage of their brain development...*

## More likely to...

- Have strengths in adapting and learning
- act on impulse
- misread or misinterpret social cues and emotions
- get into accidents of all kinds
- get involved in fights
- engage in dangerous or risky behaviour

## Less likely to...

- think before they act
- pause to consider the consequences of their actions
- change their dangerous or inappropriate behaviours





Plane metaphor (15:24 - 16:54 )

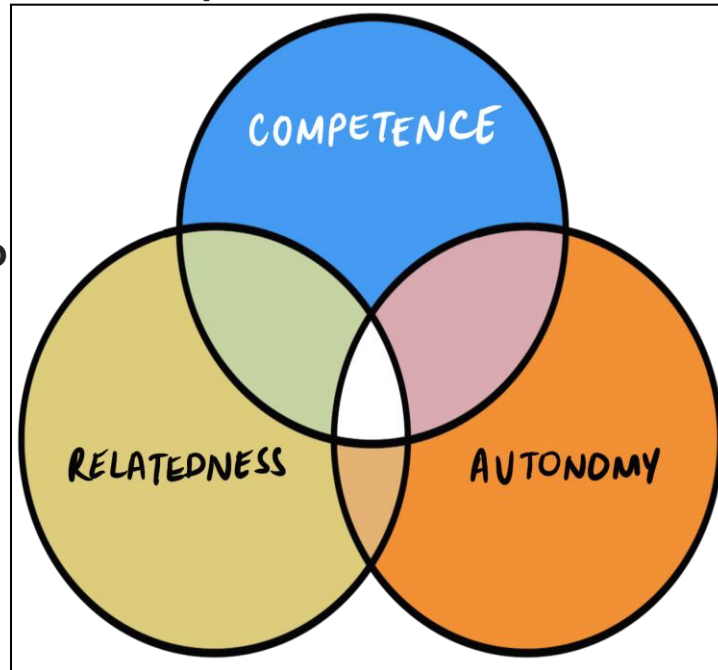


# Second Window Of Opportunity

- It's not all bad!
- The teenage years are a second chance for the brain to grow and adapt.
- Adolescence as a vital period for intervention, where appropriate support can lead to significant positive outcomes in an individual's life trajectory.

# The ABCs of Teenage Needs

**Competence** - They need to believe they are capable



**Relatedness** - they need to feel loved and understood even when they push us away

**Autonomy** - they want to feel some control over their lives

# 5 Ways to Support Your Teen's Brain

- 1. Stay Calm – Be Their Emotional Anchor** 🧘♂️  
*Model calm responses; pause and breathe before reacting.*
- 2. Give Choices, Not Ultimatums** 🤝  
*Offer structured options to encourage responsibility.*
- 3. Notice Effort and Progress** ★  
*Praise effort over outcomes to build motivation and resilience.*
- 4. Keep Connection Alive** 💬  
*Short daily moments of listening and curiosity strengthen trust.*
- 5. Protect Sleep and Downtime** 🛌  
*Consistent sleep and quiet time support brain development. (teenagers require 8-10 hours of sleep a day for memory consolidation)*



# Language That Connects....

Instead of...	Try saying...	Why it helps
"Calm down!"	"I can see you're upset - I'm here."	Acknowledges emotion (Relatedness)
"Because I said so."	"Let's figure out a plan that works for both of us."	Offers choice (Autonomy)
"You never listen."	"Can we try again - I want to understand you."	Keeps communication open (Competence & Relatedness)
"What were you thinking?!"	"Looks like that didn't go as planned - what could help next time?"	Encourages reflection, not shame (Competence)





Thank You For Listening!

Any Questions?