

The Teen Brain (and How to Deal With It)

Ever have a run-in with your teen that left you speechless in the wake of their illogical passion? Though your child might be looking more like an adult every day — and they're probably better at Snapchat and golf than you'll ever be — the gray matter inside their skulls is far from fully developed.

This can mean a bumpy ride for parents, who rather famously [just don't understand](#).

It's All About the Frontal Lobes

The brain's frontal lobes (the big part behind your forehead that makes us human) are [responsible for regulating emotions and making rational decisions](#). Brain imaging studies suggest that this area of the brain is still growing and changing throughout adolescence and even into some youngsters' early twenties.

The upshot is that your teen just isn't fully capable of making decisions based on logic. Surely you've caught your child red-handed doing something less-than-smart (painting the dog's toenails, putting off a research paper until the night before it's due, starting a bonfire in the back yard). When confronted, your kid can't explain the reason why *because there isn't one*. He or she just never envisioned the future consequences because the brain isn't completely ready for that kind of thinking yet.

Even worse, when you call them on the irrational behavior, teens are likely to blow up at you. Still-developing frontal lobes leave parents at the receiving end of the one-two punch of illogical decisions *and* emotional outbursts from their kids, because those [frontal lobes also help regulate emotions](#). Try not to take it personally: Your child really may not be able to help it when strong emotions are in play.

Survival Tips for Stressed-Out Parents

Knowing that the teen brain is to blame for much of the turbulence in your home right now may be cold comfort when your child is in the throes of yet another emotional outburst. Try these tips for weathering the storms of adolescence:

- **Take a Breath:** Try to pause before reacting to whatever your teen is dishing out in the moment. If you can weather the onslaught without blowing up, you'll be able to talk out the problem *after* the heat of the moment has passed. (Hugs are important at this time, too.)
- **Help Your Teens With Planning:** Those frontal lobes are responsible for [executive functioning](#), so breaking down long-term projects and goals into manageable bites is difficult for teens. Help them by tracking academic progress and making an agenda to stay organized with due dates. Teens may also have trouble understanding how to reach long-term goals, so be ready with reminders about how golf camp and good grades lead directly to college success.
- **Make Time for Outdoor Exercise:** [Outdoor play helps children and teens regulate emotions](#), so don't be tempted to take away golf as a punishment — it'll be counterproductive. Instead, encourage your teen to get as much fresh air as possible: It's good for the golf game *and* their brains.

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