How Teens Make Decisions

[Host]
Hello, everyone! Welcome to The Dr.Brain Show. I'm your host, Joseph Emerson.

Can you think back to a time when a friend upset you?

Let's imagine that you decided to write an angry message to that friend.

You say some harsh things that you normally wouldn't say.

You're so angry that you don't care.

When you're about to push "send," you think about whether it's a good idea.

Before you know it, you've sent the message anyway.

Teens are more likely to make these types of decisions than adults.

With the help of our guest, we'll learn why teens tend to act before thinking everything through.

Now, here's our guest for tonight, Dr. Jenny Clarkson! Thank you for joining us, doctor!

[Dr.C]
Thank you for having me, Joseph!

[Host]
Dr.Clarkson, could you first tell us about how we make decisions?

[Dr.C]
Sure. It seems like we make decisions almost immediately, but our brain actually has to go through several steps before deciding anything.
Neurons, which are special brain cells, make up different structures in our brains.

These structures send signals to each other.

After the structures finish evaluating all the signals, they will send out a response that will tell our body what to do.

[Host]
I see. Does this process happen exactly the same way in everyone’s brain?

[Dr.C]
People basically go through the same decision-making process, but there is a slight difference between teens and adults.

Scientists used to think that the brain was done growing by the time you turned 12 since the brain reaches its maximum size around that age.

However, studies show that some parts of the brain continue to develop until the early twenties.

That means teens’ brains are still maturing and not completely developed.

This may be why teens seem to make risky decisions.

[Host]
Very interesting! Please tell us more about the relationship between their brains and their decision-making.

[Dr.C]
Well, the region that controls emotions matures faster than the part of the brain that helps you think ahead and measure risk.

Teens therefore rely on it heavily, which means they are influenced more by feelings and instincts than by reason when making decisions.
In other words, teens are usually not inclined to consider all the consequences of their actions, so they make choices that they end up regretting.

[Host]
So what you're saying is teens are likely to make choices based on their feelings since their brains are not fully developed.

[Dr.C]
That's right. However, this is not the whole story.

Teens' brains are also going through other important changes.

Their brains are constantly identifying and removing any weak connections between neurons.

For example, if teens aren't reading, doing experiments, or solving problems, then the brain will get rid of the connections that are related to those activities.

Once those are gone, their brains will put more energy into making other connections stronger.

[Host]
So, do you mean that the activities teens are involved in can shape the way their brains develop?

[Dr.C]
Exactly. This is why the types of activities teens choose to participate in are especially important.

If a teen decides to play sports or learn an instrument, then the brain will strengthen those connections.

On the other hand, if he or she chooses to surf the Internet or play online games all day long, then those connections will survive instead.

The harder teens work at building good habits, the stronger those connections in their brains will be.
Lesson 8. It's Up to You!

[Host]
I see. Do you have any final comments for our viewers?

[Dr.C]
If we view the adolescent period as merely a process of becoming mature, then it's easy to dismiss it as a passing phase.

However, we shouldn't look at the changes that occur in teens' brains only in terms of maturity.

Adolescence is also a period when significant changes happen in the brain that help new abilities appear.

Therefore, adolescence is not a stage to simply get through, but an important stage in people's lives where they can develop many qualities and abilities, and shape their future.

[Host]
Thank you for your insight, Dr.Clarkson!

We hope the information you've shared will help our viewers at home make more reasonable choices in the future.

That's it for The Dr.Brain Show tonight.

Good night, everyone!