

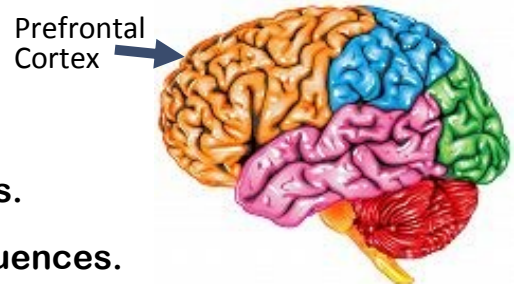
What Were You Thinking?

You may wonder why your teenager does things that cause you to look at them in wonderment...and not the good kind. There's something important you need to know. Although they may look grown up and fully mature physically, their brains are still being developed.

In the last several years, scientists have discovered that the pre-frontal cortex is not fully mature until the mid-twenties.

The Prefrontal Cortex, often called the Executive Center, controls a teen's ability to:

- Reason
- Set priorities
- Organize and plan for the future
- Suppress impulses
- Weigh consequences



What can you do to help counter-balance this?

- Teach the importance of setting personal boundaries.
- Use real-life examples to teach the reality of consequences.
- Be patient with them, try not to overreact.
- Be consistent when setting expectations.
- Discuss the risks involved when using drugs, alcohol or being sexually active. (Teens sometimes have trouble connecting the dots regarding how drugs/alcohol can lead to behavior they might otherwise avoid).
- Hang in there. Don't become so discouraged that you give up teaching them what's right.

If your child has gotten into trouble because of unwise decisions, they need correction. It's okay to show your teens why their poor decision led them into trouble. That's how they learn. In fact, without correction, there is a real possibility that they can get into more serious trouble next time. Even if they don't realize it, they continue to need your guidance.

To all those mothers and fathers who are struggling with teen-agers, I say, just be patient: even though it looks like you can't do anything right for a number of years, parents become popular again when kids reach 20.

Marian Wright Edelman, American Activist for the Rights of Children