

The Longhorn Way

Parent Edition No. 32 March 24, 2017

Over break I had the opportunity to read the book, Power of the Adolescent Brain, by Thomas Armstrong. I am personally fascinated by the workings of the human brain. Each day working at West Middle helps me to understand kids better and better. I wanted to share with you some on the information from the book, because I know raising adolescents can be difficult.

During the age of 11 for girls and 12 for boys, the brain undergoes an increase in the gray matter. Because of the increase in gray matter, the brain must go through the process of pruning. Pruning, just like a gardener does to plants, increases nutrients to the brain to build strong connections in the brain. This process happens last in the frontal cortex. The frontal cortex is the part of the brain that is used for planning, decision making, forming strategies, setting priorities, impulse control and controlling appropriate behavior. The bad news is that it doesn't finish pruning until age 16 and when it is formed, it still cannot perform like an adult under emotional circumstances. Now what? You ask! How do I survive until my child's frontal cortex is fully developed? Here are some things you can do to help develop that frontal cortex:

1. Recognize that talking about good choices isn't enough to ensure teens make those choices. Give them opportunities to choose. This helps them to healthy risk to experience success and failure. Whenever possible, allow teens to make decisions and have control over their lives.
2. Provide opportunities for structured risk taking by encouraging teens to try new things (sports, music, art, etc.).
3. Develop clear expectations for behaviors, such as staying in contact when away from the home, access to the internet, driving, dating, etc. Discuss these expectations explicitly with your teens, reviewing them often.
4. Know who your child's friends are. Remember, in the presence of peers, teens' desire for potential reward can overpower the concept of right and wrong.
5. Support healthy brain development by making sure teens get enough sleep, physical activity, and healthy nutrition.

Thanks for sharing your child with us!

~Annie

Looking Ahead

March 28, Tuesday
Park

7:30pm All District Orchestra - Queeny

March 28-31, Tuesday-Friday Team 6 - Red Outdoor School

Each day of our lives we make deposits in the memory banks of children.