

Child Development for our **Foster and Adoptive** **Children**



Part Three

A presentation of
Alabama Pre-/ Post-Adoption Connections



Learning Objectives

- 1) What happens to the **human brain** during adolescence?
- 2) What are “**developmental tasks**” in adolescence, and why are they important?
- 3) What happens to teens if healthy development is impaired by **disruption or trauma**?
- 4) How can parents **help impaired teens have success** in this stage of development?

What we learned in Parts I & II:

- The brain develops from **bottom to top, and from the inside out**. A child's positive and negative experiences promote or inhibit healthy neural connections.
- **Neural connections organize and regulate** brain functions sequentially, from low-level automatic responses, through mid-brain emotional processing, to high-level rational thinking (**Remember, this comes last – the brain doesn't stop developing until the early 20's!**).
- Impairment or trauma at any stage of brain development can **prevent healthy development** of higher-level brain functions.
- Impaired children get stuck in lower-level **reactive behaviors**, and end up with **negative “emotional maps”** of themselves and the world.

Trauma in infancy affects later brain development:

Cortex

Mid-Brain

Brain Stem

A negative internal “map” keeps the *mid-brain on high alert*, and interferes with accomplishing *normal developmental tasks*.

The “Mid-Brain’s” Flight or Fight



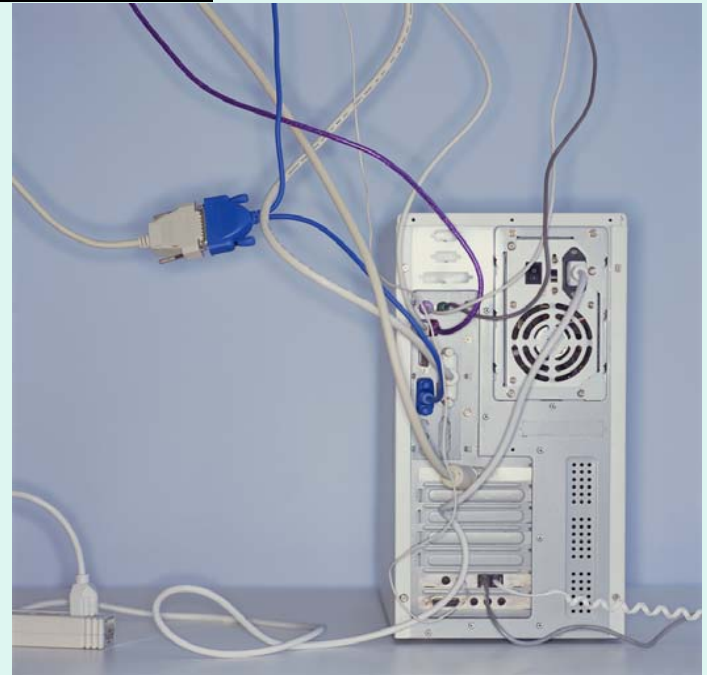
Response:

- Stores memories and response repertoires
- Seat of passion
- Scans incoming senses (for signs of danger)
- Sends messages to every part of brain

- Triggers secretion of hormones such as norepinephrine (alert senses)
- Critical memory systems triggered to retrieve any knowledge relevant to the emergency



MID-BRAIN – also the seat of Attachment:



**This is where empathy, impulse control, and the beginning of cause/
effect thinking are formed and promoted....**

**Mid-brain connections build the bridge between reactivity and
reasoning.**



Prefrontal Lobe regulates emotions:

There is a prefrontal cortex growth spurt
at 9 to 10 years for **TWEENS!**

A “pruning process” (use it or lose it)
occurs around 12 years; this helps
the brain begin to think more efficiently,

REMEMBER, THIS IS A BUILDING PROCESS
THAT IS NOT COMPLETED YET!!

But if the teen has had too
much disruption, some of the
positive connections may
remain **under-developed**.



What does an “impaired” child (who has experienced trauma or disruption) look like?

Remember, the Limbic System is the Center of Power and Control:

Volatile, reactive, irrational, oppositional, aggressive, impulsive, lacking empathy or reciprocity, etc.

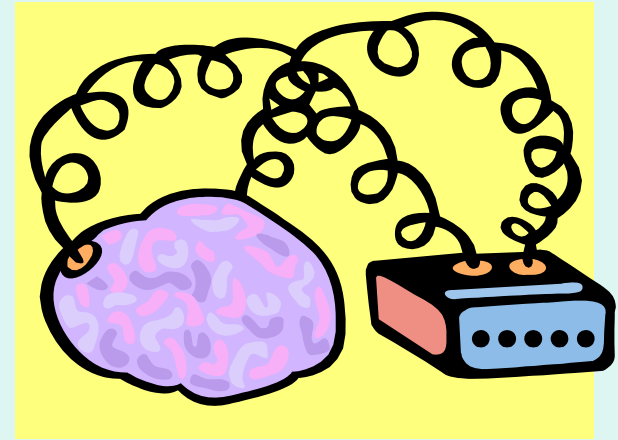
(any of this sound familiar?)

The “Mid-Brain” Gives us Cues:

Body language, voice tone and volume, eye contact,
“ATTITUDE”



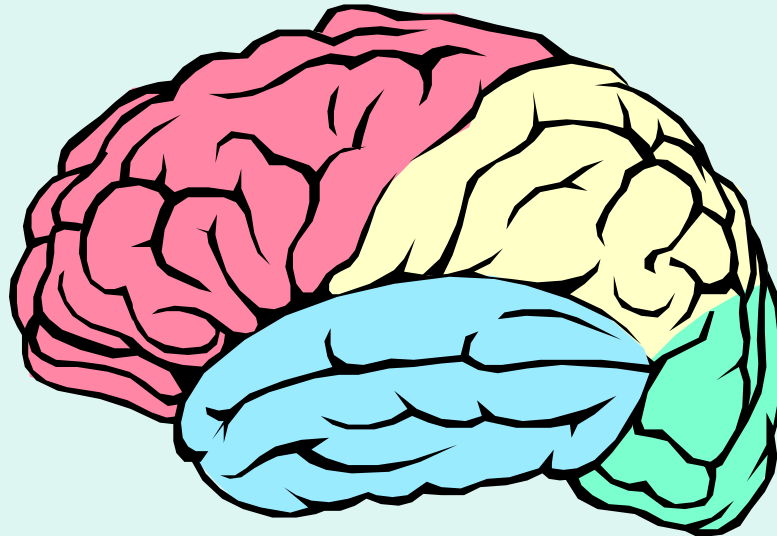
And it gets worse when you become a Teen...



- Organizing and multi-tasking are difficult because all the connections to attempt these operations are not completed
- Teens are still concrete thinkers, and have difficulty grasping abstract ideas
- Teens cannot gain instant access to critical memories or emotions (thus, the famous “*I don't know*” response...)

And FURTHERMORE...

- Teens operate primarily out of the “Mid-Brain” (aka: limbic system).
- This part processes danger, and regulates sexual arousal
- Sex hormones affect the emotional center of brain and are in hyper-drive
- The **last** part of brain to develop is the part for making sound judgments and controlling unruly emotions



What else we learned in Parts I & II:

- Erikson spelled out **developmental tasks** for each stage of child development (which correspond to age and healthy brain development).
- Mastery of each task **builds upon the previous task**, but children need parents to help them achieve the tasks.
- Children with early disruptions such as foster care or adoption may get **stuck in stages inappropriate for their chronological age**, because they still need help mastering a task.
- Being “stuck” can make our impaired children look a little “weird” or “immature”, so we need to **identify and address the stage** they are stuck in...

What are the first tasks that must be mastered?

Impulse / Self
Regulation

1) TRUST

Parents nurture and protect, so child feels safe

2) AUTONOMY

Parents set limits so child can safely explore the world around him

3) INITIATIVE

Parents guide and encourage child identify own strengths

4) INDUSTRY

Parents create social opportunities and connect dreams with possibility

The primary task of adolescence is to achieve IDENTITY

Impulse / Self Regulation

IDENTITY VS. ROLE CONFUSION

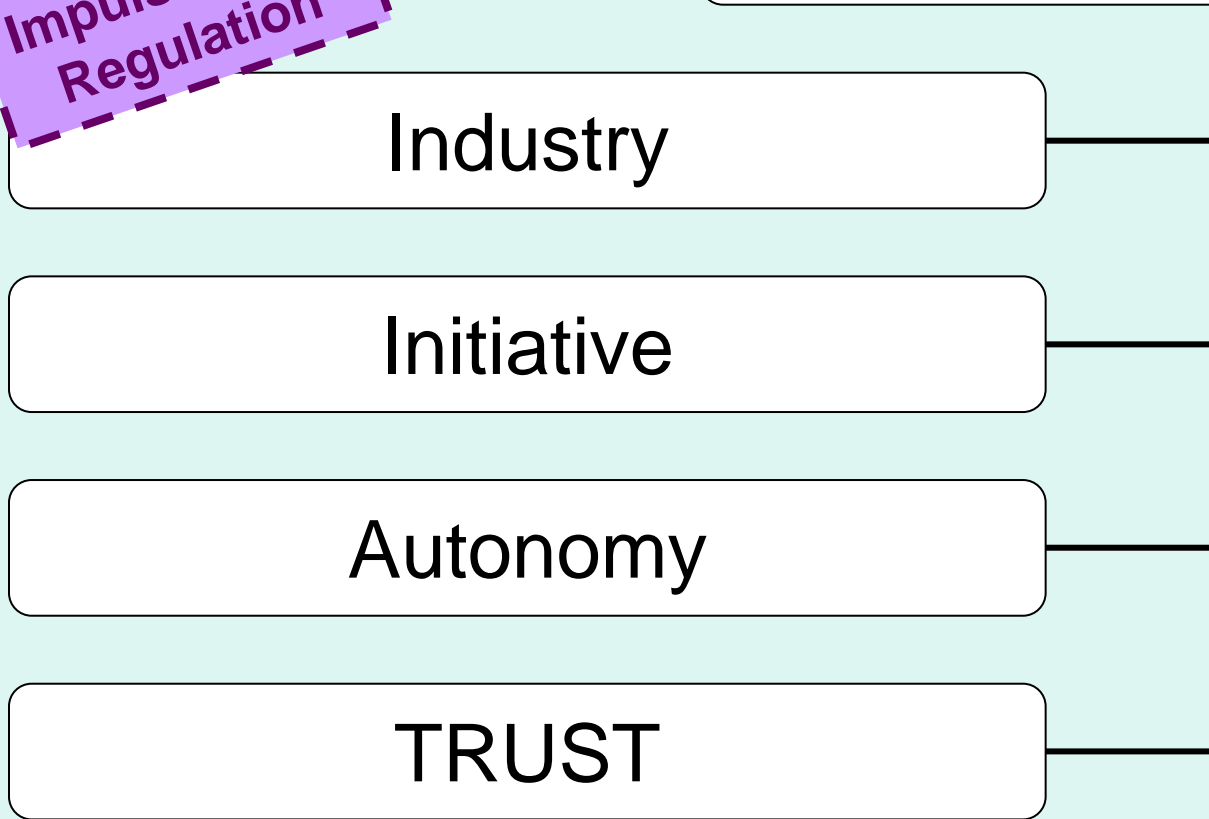
Industry

Initiative

Autonomy

TRUST

Parents
Peers



How do parents help adolescents avoid role confusion?

**Impulse / Self
Regulation**

**Identity
Vs
Role Confusion**

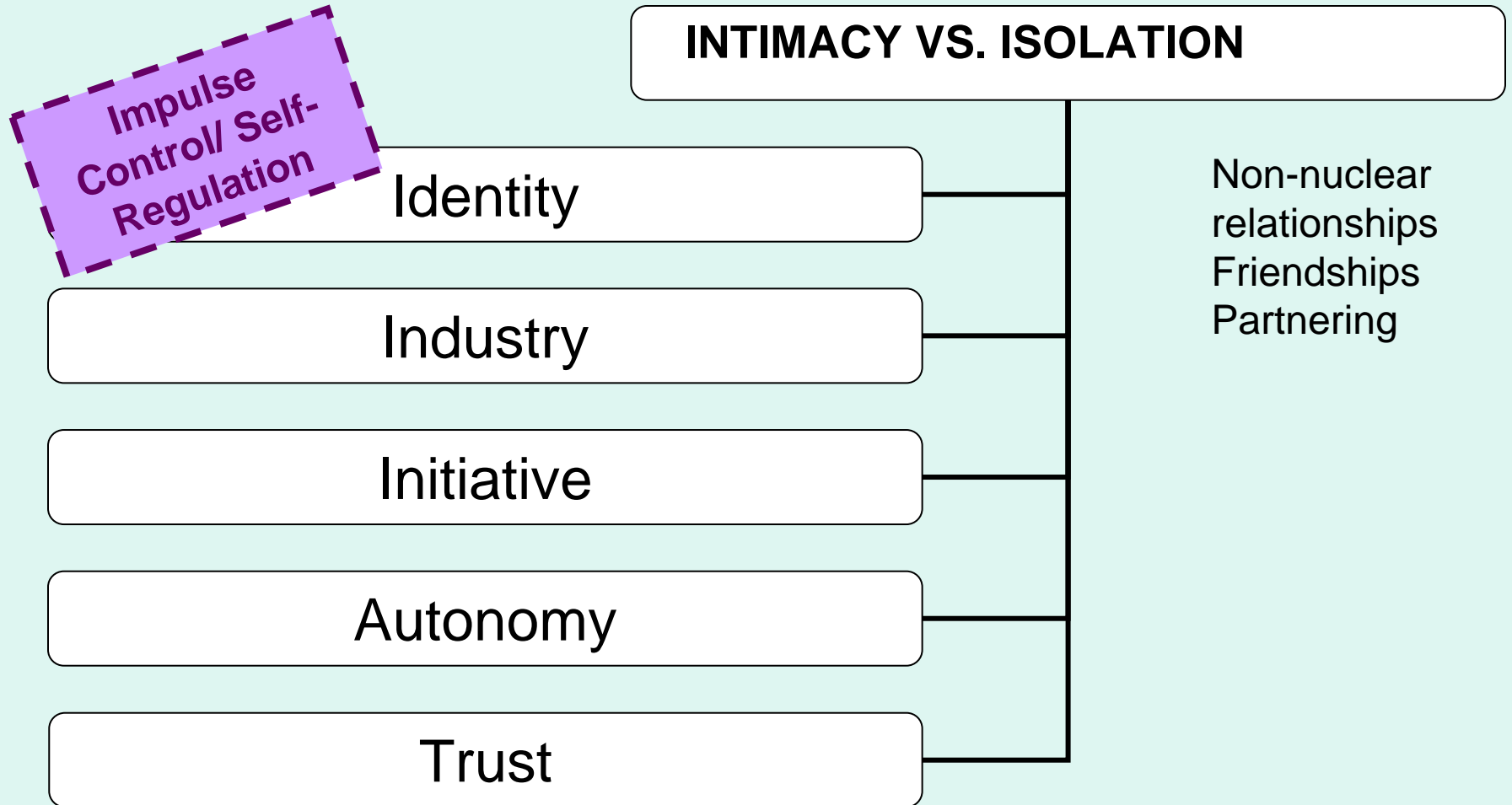
Peers
Parents
Hormones

Navigation and
Direction

Support and
Safety

Boundary
Refinement &
Maintenance

Without secure identity, teens will struggle to achieve INTIMACY:



Symptoms of poor developmental task mastery due to MULTIPLE TRANSITIONS, ABUSE, NEGLECT, GRIEF & LOSS:

STRESS can result in **HORMONAL OVER-ACTIVATION** that can influence brain connections.

SYMPTOMS CAN HELP YOU ASSESS your teen's prior experience of trauma/ neglect/ grief-loss

Anger
Moodiness
Resistance
Defiance
Disrespect

Excessive demands
Negative attention seeking
Over-reactions



Secrecy
Lying
Stealing
Withdrawal
Depression
Poor Social Skills
Pseudo-maturity
Sexual Acting out
Poor school performance

- Persistent stress can damage attachment, and result in poor self-regulation and poor impulse-control.
- Developmentally, teens are trying to connect how they feel to how they think and behave.
- This process is influenced by hormones, peers, **parents**, and community interactions.



NORMAL ADOLESCENT FEATURES:

- **Risk taking** – generated by dopamine release that some teens seek
- **Serotonin** – levels temporarily decrease in teens making them more likely to act impulsively
- **Sex Hormone Releases** –
 - A) surges of **testosterone** in males (swell amygdale results in anger-irritability-aggressive responses.
 - B) Increased levels of **estrogen** in females causes growth of hippocampus (memory area).



Why do teens sleep so **MUCH?**



Hormones critical to physical growth are released during
SLEEP!

Final Step in Making an Adult Brain:

- Myelin coating insulates the nerves and allows electrical impulses to travel fast and efficiently.
- This process is not completed until our early 20's!
- Dr. Benes says that process earlier than



Teen Challenges:

- In order to form their own age-appropriate identities, teens **MUST** challenge adults' on almost every level (it's how they explore).
- But our hurt teens are trying to become independent at the **SAME TIME** they are still learning how to attach.
- Creating connections from the limbic system to the prefrontal lobe, all while coping with the release of sexual hormones, makes this **VERY** “challenging”.

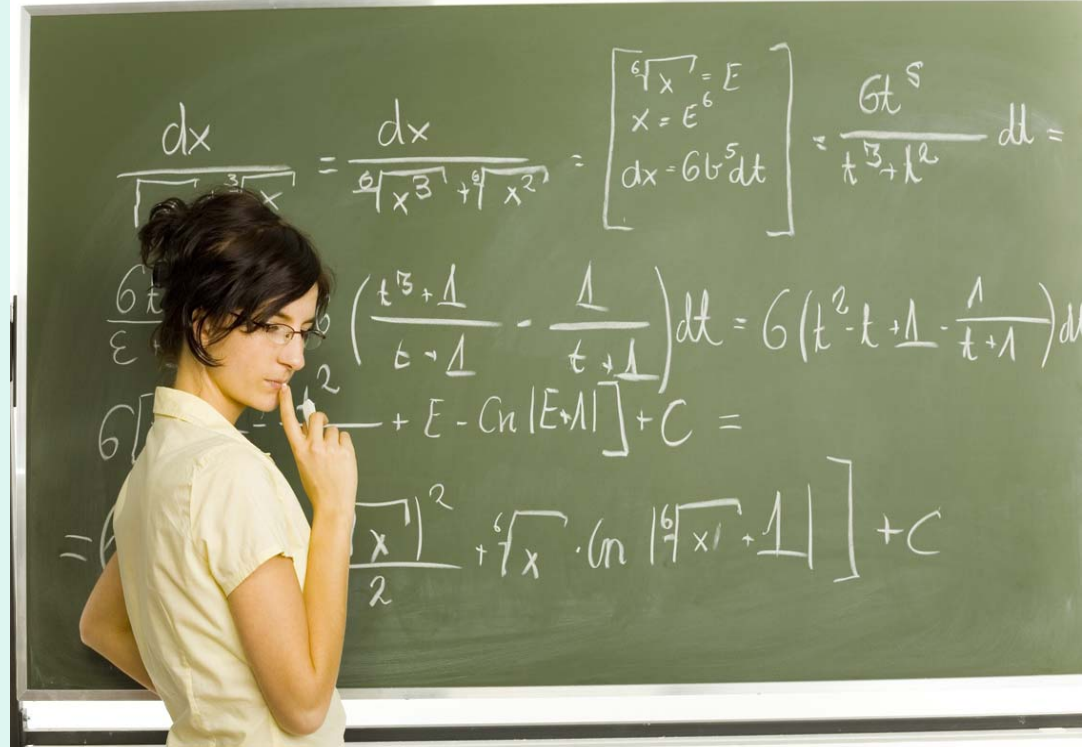




Building an Influence Sphere

- Think about Power vs Influence
- There is a “delicacy” to being influential:
 - Communication skills
 - Non-reactive posture
 - Teaching w/o preaching
- Provide the teen with a safety-base!
- Use empathy to ALLY with the teen: let the consequences do the teaching as you support the child to keep practicing positive behaviors...

FACTORS to CONSIDER:



- How parents react to “failure” is **CRUCIAL!**
- Can you identify the child’s **BEHAVIOR CUES?**
- Don’t forget to acknowledge the child’s inherent value as separate from the behavior to neutralize child’s reaction to feeling shamed.
- Don’t forget to get the child’s input on what s/he thinks could happen differently, and assure them you are available for support advice.

(This actually cuts down on the parents’ work and helps form healthy TRUST with child)...

COACHING ADOLESCENTS

- **LISTEN TO THEIR POINT OF VIEW** (even if it's irrational)
- Look for *something* you can validate about it
- Ask for reasons why you should say "YES"
- Weave your parent desire into their request:
 - *Offer a compromise*
 - *Let them make suggestions*
 - *Negotiate*

Give no more than 30 sec. lectures

Try not to look like You're making the decision

Take your time (and rehearse if necessary)

Pick only the battles you can win

STAY CALM -- REACTIVITY ACTS AGAINST YOU!!



Examples of Coaching Language:

- Tell me what you have in mind.....
- Details are very important -- it's my job to know who is going and where you'll be.
- What do you think would be fair in this situation?
- I have some concerns about this (person or situation); is there any information that would help me not be so concerned...
- Give me three reasons I should say "YES".

Coaching Language IS:

- Absent of emotion and loaded with sense
- Always seeking to hear what the adolescent is thinking
- Looking for “win-win” (in most circumstances)
- NOT being reactive to the adolescent’s “attitude”
- Teaching and encouraging the teen to think for themselves
- Providing the foundation for THE PARENT DIRECTIVE!!!

A note about “Disrespect”

Parents who get stuck on this power struggle will **LOSE. PERIOD.**
Do yourself a favor by identifying whether the behavior is:

- a) **Protest** = “Why do I always have to do it?”
- b) **Disrespect** = “You’re stupid if you think I’m doing that!”
- c) **Defiance** = “I won’t, and you can’t make me...”

Protest and Disrespect only make the teen look bad – not you!

Don’t bother lecturing about what’s right and wrong – they know!

Your teen is watching to see if your “buttons” will get pushed...

Surprise them by modeling how to let others’ bad behavior
“slide off your shoulders”!

But when Defiance causes problems for others around the teen, it should be addressed with appropriate consequences.

What are some effective “Plays”?

- a) **Protest** – Give a simple response, and let it go:
“Everyone in a family contributes, and we all appreciate your contribution”.
- b) **Disrespect** – Don’t react to it: “I’m sorry you feel that way, and I hope you’ll change your mind so you can enjoy some free time after you’ve finished the chore”.
- c) **Defiance** – Give a choice of acceptable consequences: “I see you chose not to complete the task when I asked you to. Lucky for you, I’m very patient, so you may try again after dinner, or have an extra chore added tomorrow evening. Which would you prefer?”

A note about POWER



- A PARENT WHO DOES NOT ABUSE POWER TEACHES THE ADOLESCENT NOT TO ABUSE POWER
- A PARENT WHO DOES NOT ABUSE POWER TEACHES THE ADOLESCENT S/HE IS A VALUABLE PERSON

So what have we learned?

- The adolescent brain is unique due to changes that occur at no other time in human development.
- Trauma and stress cause impairments that make it ***MORE difficult than usual*** for our hurt children to accomplish expected developmental tasks.



**Parents are a teen's best, last hope for a good launch into adulthood:
THEY NEED YOU!!!**

What are we asking from Parents?



- Identify the early tasks that your teen has not yet mastered, and offer **remedial** help with those tasks.
- At the **same time**, encourage the teen to accomplish all the age-appropriate tasks s/he reasonably can.
- Use coaching to avoid power struggles with teens who need to challenge, but also need **effective, committed role models.**