



NATP
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF THERAPEUTIC PARENTS



Centre of Excellence in
CHILD TRAUMA

Understanding the Teenage Brain – strategies

Jane Mitchell 2018

Strategies

Boundaries and structure (but don't sweat the small stuff.)

- Simple (and few) house rules
- Routine and structure around timing of meals, relaxation, activities, screen time and rest time. Be prepared to negotiate, as your adolescent's abilities and needs will change rapidly – think toddler.
- Rupture and repair – there will be arguments. Be prepared to repair the relationship

Natural consequences

- Breaking equipment means they will not have it to use
- Too much alcohol means feeling ill
- If you spend all your money, you may not be able to do the things you want to with your friends

BUT where teaching new skills, ensure that these are supported and scaffolded and repeated to allow new neural connections to be made. **Think developmentally.**

MODEL appropriate behaviour, and give a narrative

Show them the behaviour you expect, the attitude you expect, and the language you expect. **Remember** there is brain building in progress and be patient.

Parental presence: increased parental presence is a cornerstone of the approach recommended by Peter Jakob in Non-Violent Resistance and emphasises the need for the parent to be alongside the child and keep them in mind, demonstrating that the child is important to them. This is harder as children get older, but can be accomplished by

- Waiting to collect your child
- Caring text messages
- Notes (post its, etc)
- Spontaneous gestures – buying a treat, offering a shopping trip
- Being a taxi service (so you know more or less where they are)
- Allowing their friends round
- Taking up opportunities to spend time enjoying the young person - at **their** convenience!

Praise

Hard for young people to accept when it does not match their self-image. Praise should be:

- Appropriate to their **developmental** ability (especially if praise is for behaviour, incident of self-regulation, helpfulness)
- Specific – You got 9/10! That is great work, and I know you worked hard to achieve that. Well done! I am so proud of you.
- If the child finds direct praise too tough, talk to someone else in front of them about why you are proud – again be specific

PLACE

Use the Dan Hughes approach to create an attitude of safety and acceptance by use of playful interactions, loving attitude, acceptance, curiosity and empathy (review previous chapters)

Be Aware of level of development and respond accordingly to the needs of the young person.

Pre-plan any event, outing or celebration with your child in mind. Use visual aids to help them, and to build executive function. **DO NOT** be side-tracked by what other people, however well meaning (grandparents etc) think would be “fun” Use your own knowledge of your young person’s current state of mind to plan events which they can succeed at enjoying.

Responsive Be responsive to the young person when they need to talk, especially about tricky subjects. Use developmentally appropriate resources. Be responsive to their methods of communication: talking, texting, writing notes, keeping a diary?

Step Back Mentally or physically if it helps before responding to your young person. Use **empathy** for their state of mind. Reflect back what they say to you and use your curiosity to wonder why that is. Have they “Flipped their lid?” then de-escalate.

Strike while the iron is cold - another technique from NVR. This reminds us not to try and engage a young person in a discussion or logic while they are in overwhelm, feeling scared, threatened and angry. We can defer our response and ensure that this is appropriate and a natural consequence.

Self-Care Build time for you into your routine. If necessary, take time off while the young person is at college. Find small ways to reward yourself that you can easily do to take a break – walk the dog, cup of tea, chat with friend, bath, gym, take turns taking time out with your partner (if you have one) but build it into the routine so that young people expect it to happen. Practise self-calming, breathing or mindful techniques that help you to decompress after stressful incidents. **Be kind to yourself** – especially if you feel you have made a mistake. Model appropriate reconciliation and give the child the valuable opportunity to see that mistakes happen – that is how we learn and develop.