

# Parenting Connection

Volume 5 Issue 5

March/April 2009

## The 4 Wonders of Adolescence

Written by MaryAdele Revoy, MS; Adolescent Development Specialist WCCF

Chances are if you are reading this newsletter than you have navigated through the wonderful time period of human development we call "adolescence". Believe it or not, this recognition of "adolescence" as being a distinct stage in human development is relatively new compared to the long continuum of research on the development of humans. Through the use of technology, (ex. PET scans, functional MRIs, etc), the top researchers around the country are discovering unique and significant changes in the brain occurring during the adolescent years (10-25 years old). While this research provides information on brain development, it delves into questions that have bewildered parents, teachers, and adults who have crossed paths with the "mysterious adolescent."

### What were you thinking?

The greatest question to plague the youth of today may be: "What were you thinking when you did X? And the most common answer to throw the parent, teacher or adult over the proverbial edge: "I don't know. This answer is not meant to add to the frustration of all involved, but could truly be the thought or lack of thought process going on in the adolescent's brain. Results of research with adolescents and scans of their brains show that the front of the brains, the area known as the pre-frontal cortex (PFC), is not fully developed. Thus the capability of the adolescent to think logically, make inferences, anticipate consequences, and control impulses is limited until the PFC comes into fruition.

Five areas of thinking are developed and strengthened as the adolescent brain matures.

1. Reasoning = ability to problem solve by identifying choices
2. Decision making = ability to imagine hypothetical situations and the use of choices
3. Processing = efficiency of the thought processes within the brain; i.e. shortening the time of the blank stare that the teen may portray when asked a question.
4. Expertise = the ability to learn from experiences and recall past lessons to apply to present and future situations
5. Consciousness = part of social cognition, which includes impression formation, social perspective taking, social conventions and moral reasoning (continue on page 2)

- 1-4 The Four Wonders of Adolescence
- 5 Winnebago County Literacy Council Newsletter Articles
- 5 Grocery Shopping with Children
- 5 President Supports Family Literacy
- 6-7 Using Narratives and Letters in Parenting Classes
- 8 Books for Children with Incarcerated Parents
- 9 64<sup>th</sup> Annual CEA Conference Information

The Parenting Connection is a publication of the Parenting Special Interest Group and the Wisconsin Chapter of the Correctional Education Association.

#### Send articles and comments to:

Mary K. Knox  
Wisconsin Resource Center  
P.O. Box 16  
Winnebago, WI 54985  
Mary.Knox@wisconsin.gov



(continued from page 1)

When working with teens, it is important to remember that the environment and every one in it can affect cognitive development, i.e. how and what they think. A few items that you can do with adolescents in every day interactions are:

1. Ask opened ended questions and wait for an answer --- no matter how long the wait.
2. Help the youth think about hypothetical situations by prompting him/her to answer, “*What if X happened?*” and brainstorm answers together. Use this exchange as an example for the youth to come up with his/her own hypothetical question and possible answers.
3. If a youth is questioning social rules or moral guidelines, use it as an opportunity to talk about the greater philosophical questions that we have all struggled with at some point in our lives. It is normal and part of the developmental process for the youth to question your authority (even if it doesn’t feel good) and disagree with you as they explore these higher notions of social and moral development.

For more information on cognitive development in adolescents contact:

- DANA Foundation <http://www.dana.org>
- National Institute of Mental Health <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/teenage-brain-a-work-inprogress>

### **Why would they ever do that?**

It would be great if we could blame all the adolescents’ whacky behaviors on the raging hormones that come with puberty. While puberty adds a nice spice to this time period, it cannot take all the blame. Puberty is separate from brain development. Changes during puberty correspond to internal and external physical changes that have a distinct beginning and end. The popular hormones testosterone and estrogen do their magic changing girls and boys into tall, curvy , muscular, youth with zits, breasts, and beards. Hormones may affect behavior changes by creating appearance changes in the youth and (a) how they see themselves and/or (b) by creating how others react to their physical changes.

Adults may wonder why teens would ever think jumping off roofs or skateboarding down stairs would be a good idea. Behaviors that they, as mature and logical adults, think are stupid and careless. But I dare to ask the question: Are kids riskier today than the adults who talk about their own adventures “back in the day”? Could it be that the culture of today and the resources available to youth have created this perception that youth are riskier? Or is it that the risks, behaviors, and consequences that the youth endure are noticed (and may be even publicized) because of the growth in technology and quick communication? The adolescent brain thrives in this fast-pace, quick-reward culture.

As noted above, the job of the prefrontal cortex (PFC) is to keep the risks and rewards in check, but the PFC is not fully developed in the changing bodies and brains of our adolescents. The brain’s “reward circuit” is actually the great motivator telling us what we want more of and what feels good. This circuit corresponds to changes in our limbic system; a system comprised of the amygdala and hippocampus that helps regulate emotions. When given the opportunity to jump off a roof a 13-year old may find it exciting, but I may hesitate at the thought of breaking my legs. This hesitation on my part and thought process of possible consequences can only be accomplished because I have a PFC that tells me jumping off a roof may not be a good idea. The 13-year old however, doesn’t have this thought filter (yet) so she gets caught up in the moment, may be influenced by peer pressure and/or may even have the experience of jumping off shorter platforms as successful experiences to draw from when deciding to jump or not jump. She takes the leap without thinking twice. The trick is how to create healthy risks with healthy rewards that will ignite the same level of passion in the reward circuit of our beloved youth.

A few tips to get you thinking about creating this environment are listed below.

1. Make a note of when youth are taking risks in other areas of their lives and discuss the similar feelings in those situations compared to other risky events. For example, there is some level of risk



in giving a public presentation, participating in drama productions or musical concerts, or trying out for a sports team.

2. Create opportunities for youth to broaden their skills in their “risk” areas in order to adapt the behavior into mainstream activities. For example, if a teen loves to skate board, maybe find a way for the youth to teach younger children how to skate board safely. Same would go for jumping off roofs, maybe the teen could teach diving at the local swimming pool.

The Search Institute works with communities in order to develop partnerships and networks to support the successful development of adolescents and younger children. <http://www.search-institute.org/>

## How come they don't care?

I can actually hear myself saying it to my mother, “*I don't care,*” followed by a shift on the hips and rolling of the eyes. Or another favorite of mine was “*Who cares?*” as I flicked my hair, turned my head and walked out of the room. It was all about me and I couldn't believe that she didn't know that.

To the dismay of many adults, adolescence is all about egocentrism and it needs to be. This is the time when the teen needs to discover who she/he is and figure out how she/he fits into the world. Up until now, everything was told to them about the workings of their environment. But with the development of more complex cognitive processes and increases in the number of life experiences, adolescents can now ask “*Who am I?*”

In trying to answer this question, adolescents may experiment with a number of different things ranging from dying their hair, piercing their eyebrows, and wearing layers of black clothes on a warm summer day to smoking cigarettes, drinking beer, and driving fast.

Teens will probably deny it, but this search for an independent identity is affected by the relationships in their lives. As hard as they try to pull away from their families and the childhood they are growing out of, the pull to fit in and be a part of something is just as great. Relationships or human interactions, whether good or bad, are keys to motivation, especially in the area of change. Empathy, sympathy and general care increase when you can relate to the situation --- when there is a RELATIONship.

One of the most popular ways organizations use to broaden a youth's perspective and expand their level of human interactions is through volunteer work. Volunteerism is a great tool and a valued commodity in today's world. In order to enhance the volunteer experience even more, and to support adolescent brain development, organizations should try adapting to a service-learning (SL) model. Not only does the youth still volunteer for a worthy cause, but they are asked to be active participants in the planning, facilitating and follow-up of the event. More importantly in the SL model there is time for reflection about how the work affected them as individuals and their world which can lead to a deeper exploration into social consciousness.

For more information on service learning, check out the resources at the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse: <http://www.servicelearning.org/> or the Search Institute's publication *An asset builder's guide to service-learning (2000)*.

## When are they going to get up?

This is not a figurative, clever little question. Parents all over America, dare I say the world, ask themselves when the kid is going to get out of bed. “*They could sleep all day if I let them.*”

Melatonin is a hormone released by the brain that contributes to our sleepiness. The levels of melatonin  
(continued on page 4)



(continued from page 3)

change during a 24-hour period to let us know when it is time for us to slow down and get some sleep. The production of melatonin in teens (who have completed puberty) is two hours later. Therefore, teens can stay up late and not feel sleepy. But the paradox is that teens actually need more sleep. Due to the physical changes and emotional stresses, researchers suggest that adolescents get nine hours of sleep per night (adults should get 7-8 hours of sleep). If left to their own schedules, it may be common for teens to adopt a sleep cycle of 1am to 10am. This, however, doesn't usually work for the family, nor for the school. You may have noticed that some schools are pushing start times back in the morning and working with their partners to coordinate services later. In order to cope with your sleepy teen:

1. Encourage them to get into a regular sleep cycle that fits into their schedule.
2. They will have greater success in school if they get a good night's sleep rather than stay up all night for a cram session. Moreover, job performance and athletic ability are strengthened when the body gets enough rest.
3. Do not let your teen sleep in on the weekends. If they must, limit it to one hour past their normal wake up time. You cannot make up for loss sleep, but may in fact be throwing off your natural sleep cycle when you try to "catch up."
4. Talk to your teen about the need for sleep and the problems too little sleep can cause. For example: problems focusing attention, can't think logically, difficulties remembering, feeling tired, and lacking the ability to regulate emotions.

A great handout is available from the National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. (2007, May 21). *Brain basics: Understanding Sleep* (NIH Publication No. 06-3440-c). Available at: [http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/brain\\_basics](http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/brain_basics)

For additional great, easy-to-read handouts on sleep and other topics, visit the website of the Society for Neuroscience. <http://www.sfn.org/>

A few other great resources for parents (or anyone working with teens) include:

- Feinstein, S. (2007). *Parenting the teenage brain – understanding a work in progress*. Lanham, MD: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
- Sax, L. (2005). *Why Gender Matters*. NY: Doubleday.
- Steinberg, L. (2004). *The 10 basic principles of good parenting*. NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks.
- Strauch, B. (2003). *The Primal Teen. What the new discoveries about the teenage brain tell us about our kids*. NY: Anchor Books.
- Taswell, R. (Ed.). (2004). *Parenting at the speed of teens: positive tips on everyday issues*. Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute.

If this article excites your brain and you want to learn more, WCCF offers two-day trainings on adolescent brain development. [http://www.wccf.org/event\\_unlockingmysteries2008.php](http://www.wccf.org/event_unlockingmysteries2008.php)

If your agency or community network would like to host a training please contact MaryAdele Revoy at 608-284-0580 ext. 328 or [mrevoy@wccf.org](mailto:mrevoy@wccf.org). Registration fees could be decreased depending on what resources you can provide. Ms. Revoy is also available for workshops and public presentations.

Check out the Parenting Special Interest Group Discussion Forum at [www.ceanational.org](http://www.ceanational.org)



# Winnebago County Literacy Council Newsletter Articles

In the newsletter published by the Winnebago (Wisconsin) County Literacy Council, WCLC Executive Director and newsletter Editor Liz Rice Janzen include information on the latest literacy initiatives in Winnebago County, as well as, helpful teaching tips for literacy instructors and tutors. Following are two articles from their most recent newsletter which Liz has allowed us to reprint.

If you would like to contact Liz, the easiest way is by email at [janzen@winlit.org](mailto:janzen@winlit.org). She can also be reached by phone at 920.236.5185 or mail at 106 Washington Avenue, Oshkosh, WI 54901

## Grocery Shopping with Children

For any of you whose students have families, grocery shopping is sure to be a weekly activity and can be quite the undertaking with children along! Experts agree, however, that grocery shopping with kids fosters skills they need for life. School-age children can sharpen a variety of skills in the supermarket, including how to make wise food choices.

Working with your student to make the shopping trip a success can be a different and fun lesson plan!

The important part is to plan ahead:

1. Pick a time when their grocery list is not too long. Talk about what meals and snacks they are shopping for and have their children make the list.
2. Assign specific tasks at the store such as checking items off the list as they are put in the cart, matching coupons you have to the items, etc.
3. Have a light snack before leaving for the store to ward off the “shopping when hungry breakdown”!
4. Have them give their children limited choices when possible. e.g. “What color/type of apples would you like?”
5. Older children can play detective, searching out certain items such as cereals that list a whole grain as the first ingredient.



You could also incorporate nutrition and healthy eating, exercise, preparing and cooking skills, etc. into this lesson. Have fun!

## President Supports Family Literacy.

President Obama and his Secretary of Education Arne Duncan are both familiar with and very supportive of family literacy.

Duncan oversaw the implementation of the Toyota Family Literacy Program while superintendent of Chicago Public Schools and experienced the power of family literacy firsthand. President Obama supported family literacy while serving as a United States Senator, even requesting an earmark to expand family literacy in Chicago. Recently, on [Meet the Press \(December 7, 2008\)](#), he discussed that he and Mrs. Obama have a goal of wanting “to talk about parents reading to their kids.”

(continue on page 6)



(continued from page 5)

President Obama clearly believes parents have the key to educational success. His support of literacy is longstanding. As stated during a library conference in 2005, "There is plenty that needs to be done to improve our schools and reform education, but this is not an issue in which we can just look to some experts in Washington to solve the problem... We know the more reading material kids are exposed to at home, the better they score with reading tests throughout their lives. So we have to make investments in family literacy programs and early childhood education so that kids aren't left behind and are not already behind the day they arrive at school."

For old issues of the *Parenting Connection* newsletter, go to [www.ceawisconsin.org](http://www.ceawisconsin.org)

## Using Narratives and Letters in Parenting Classes

In the video "Bad Dads", inmates involved in a parenting class write letters to their fathers telling them how the things they did to them growing up effected their lives and hurt them. In role playing situations, they read these letters to counselors acting as their fathers. The counselors try to get the inmates to react in anger or hurt to help them work through the feelings. The inmates also write letters to their own children apologizing for the things they have done to them.

Two of those inmates read their letters to their actual children in the video. This video is very emotional for the students to watch. The exercise of writing a letter like this is very beneficial to the parenting students. Writing to their own fathers helps the inmate Dads understand the impact they have had on their own children.

In a paper titled *Teaching Parenting Skills To Incarcerated Fathers* by Carl Mazza DSW, ACSW reprinted on the Family Corrections website, the author describes teaching parenting to incarcerated fathers in a New York State prison. He describes how he discovered that the most powerful and successful technique for teaching has been using narratives. "Combining the long periods of empty time experienced by inmates with a supportive classroom environment where insight is encouraged, incarcerated fathers, through narratives can begin to understand their earlier motivations in life, the consequences their incarceration has had on their children, and the healing process they need to be involved in with their children."

The author does not grade these papers but he writes "extensive comments on them, noting strengths that often go unnoticed by the writers themselves". "Using a strength perspective (Compton and Galaway, 1998; Goldstein, 1997; Mills, 1995) on narratives often helps; many incarcerated fathers begin to see positive qualities about themselves that they've never noticed before." In regular classroom assignments, the fathers are assigned specific topics to write about allowing them to recall past childhood experiences. Working through these feelings allows them to come to terms with their own lives and in turn helps them work toward being better parents themselves.

Based on these experiences and the evidence in the research, writing activities suggested in many of the parenting materials should be encouraged and not passed over as not worthy of the time and effort needed to engage in them. (continued on page 7)



(continued from page 6)

A mother in prison wrote the following letter. This and other poems by incarcerated women were offered in the paper "Female Prisoners' Poetry" by Sue Stauffacher [www.suestauffacher.com](http://www.suestauffacher.com) on the FCN website.

Sue Stauffacher writes, "The mothers that I worked with were anxious to do something to help make up for their mistakes. They miss their children desperately. Many consented to use their own names and to write their most painful thoughts in the hope that they could somehow help others. Their children's names have been changed to protect their privacy."

**My dearest, my precious, my beautiful daughters,**

Hello sweethearts. Yes, it's me, I'm still alive, even though the break in my heart branches out and tears holes in my soul each and every day. Every second since the last time I saw my two beautiful daughters has been filled with agony. You are both loved beyond description. There truly is no possible way to put into words how very precious you both are to me. I know the both of you know deep in your soul how much I love you!!

I am so mad at myself, in fact, at times I hate myself for letting you down. I didn't walk away from you. I was shoved away long before either of you were ever born by becoming a drug addict.

On the days you were born, I held you up and looked directly into your eyes and swore with every fiber of my being that I would always love you and be there for you. And to always protect you, to see to it that you would never hate me for one iota of a second the way I hated my mother and father for all the mean nasty things they did to me, and the way they made me feel worthless. I would always try my hardest to make you both know how beautiful, special, sweet and awesome, smart and wonderful you are.

I know a lot of people tried to make you believe that you two didn't mean as much to me as drugs. They were so wrong. Please don't believe that. I did drugs to keep from hurting deep inside my heart. And I've come to realize drugs don't make it better. It only stops the pain for a minute, then it comes flying back at you, twice as hard.

Both of you meant everything and still mean everything to me. God gave me the opportunity, the beautiful moment, to be your mom. Not just your mother. Any woman can be a mother. But it takes love to be a mom. And I love you with every fiber of my being.

Please don't think for a fraction of a second that it's your fault or that I didn't want you. Because that is not true. It was the drugs. I didn't do drugs, baby girls, they did me! And since you have been gone, not one day has passed that I didn't think of you, miss you or wonder if you were all right. I'm clean now. And I'm gonna stay clean one minute at a time. I look forward to the day you come home.

Please forgive me! You can go to any courthouse and find me! Just tell them to look it up. It's in the paperwork from the court, the ones that took you away...they have to tell you!

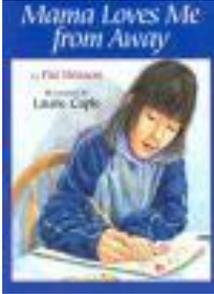
Love you with all of my soul!

Your mother,  
Jodelynn Billington

Submitted by Mary K. Knox, Wisconsin Resource Center

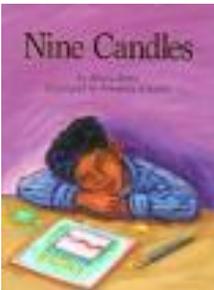


# Books for Children with Incarcerated Parents



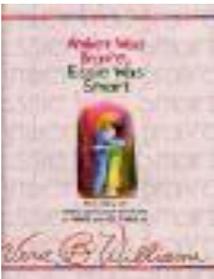
Brisson, Pat  
**Mama Loves Me from Away**

When a mother and daughter are separated by the mother's incarceration, they find a special way to keep their loving relationship alive.



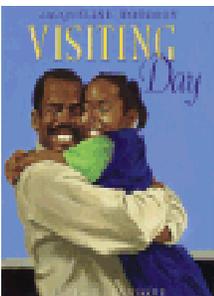
Testa, Maria  
**Nine Candles**

After visiting his mother in prison on his seventh birthday, Raymond wishes it were his ninth birthday when Mama has promised to be home with his dad and him.



Williams, Vera  
**Amber Was Brave, Essie Was Smart**

A series of poems tells how two sisters help each other deal with life while their mother is working and their father has been sent to jail.



Woodson, Jacqueline  
**Visiting Day**

A young girl and her grandmother visit the girl's father in prison.

*Children are natural mimics: they act like their parents in spite of every attempt to teach them good manners. Anonymous*





## 64th Annual CEA Conference Concourse Hotel, Madison, Wisconsin

We would like Parenting education to be an important part of the 64<sup>th</sup> Annual CEA Conference to be held in Madison, Wisconsin on July 19-21, 2009. The Annual Conference is one of the best opportunities to spread the word regarding the importance of providing Parenting programs in corrections. Parenting instructors are encouraged to submit proposals to present workshops on your Parenting class, Parent Support Group, Parent/Child Literacy program, or Parents' Fair at this conference.

The deadline for presentation proposals is Wednesday, April 15. All presenters must register for the conference. Full and one-day registrations are available. Address all inquiries about presenting to Barbara Wulfers, Program Chair, at [barbara.wulfers@wisconsin.gov](mailto:barbara.wulfers@wisconsin.gov).

### Registration & Hotel Information

#### Full Registration before June 1, 2009:

\$298 for CEA Members  
\$353 for Non-Members  
\$265 for CEA Retiree or CEA Student

#### Full Registration after June 1, 2009:

\$358 for CEA Members  
\$413 for Non-Members  
\$325 for CEA Retiree or CEA Student

#### One Day Registration:

Monday: \$160 for CEA Members  
          \$215 for Non-Members  
Tuesday: \$125 for CEA Members  
          \$180 for Non-Members

#### The Madison Concourse Hotel

1 West Dayton Street  
Madison, Wisconsin 53703  
1-800-356-8293  
[www.concoursehotel.com](http://www.concoursehotel.com)

#### Room Rates

Concourse Level:  
                    Single \$ 95.00 Double \$105.00  
Governor's Level:  
                    Single \$159.00 Double \$169.00  
Reservation cut off date: June 18, 2009

All registration materials are on the National website: [www.ceanational.org](http://www.ceanational.org). Open to the home page and look at the yellow column (Hot Topics) on the left. Click on "64<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference." Everything is there.

When making hotel reservations, please identify that you are a part of the Correctional Education Association Conference.



# Editorial

Happy Winter!!!! Now that we are entering our tenth month of the white stuff on the ground I am officially tired of this season. I try to never complain about the weather but enough already!

In my last editorial I wrote about the wonderful Adolescent Brain training that I attended and so included MaryAdele Ravoy's article from the WCCF website in this newsletter. The article is very informative for understanding the argument the council is using for changing our juvenile laws in Wisconsin. Getting the public to buy into the new brain science that supports this change is difficult.

I have also included the info on the International CEA conference in Madison, Wisconsin coming up this summer. I hope the snow piles have melted by then. It's iffy at this point. The staff here at WRC, has turned in the travel requests and are looking forward to this event. I am looking forward to meeting some of you at the conference.

**Mary K. Knox**

**Mary K. Knox  
Wisconsin Resource Center  
P.O. Box 16  
Winnebago, WI 54985**

