

A person with dark hair, wearing large black headphones and a yellow t-shirt, is seen from behind, sitting at a desk. They are looking at a computer monitor which displays a blue, abstract image. The room is dimly lit, with a warm orange glow from a light source on the left and a cooler blue glow from the monitor. The background shows a doorway and some furniture. The overall atmosphere is focused and somewhat isolated.

How teenagers tick...

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Being a teen is tough!

- What are some of the challenges that teenagers face in today's culture?
- What is easier about being a teenager today than when you were a teenager, and what is harder?

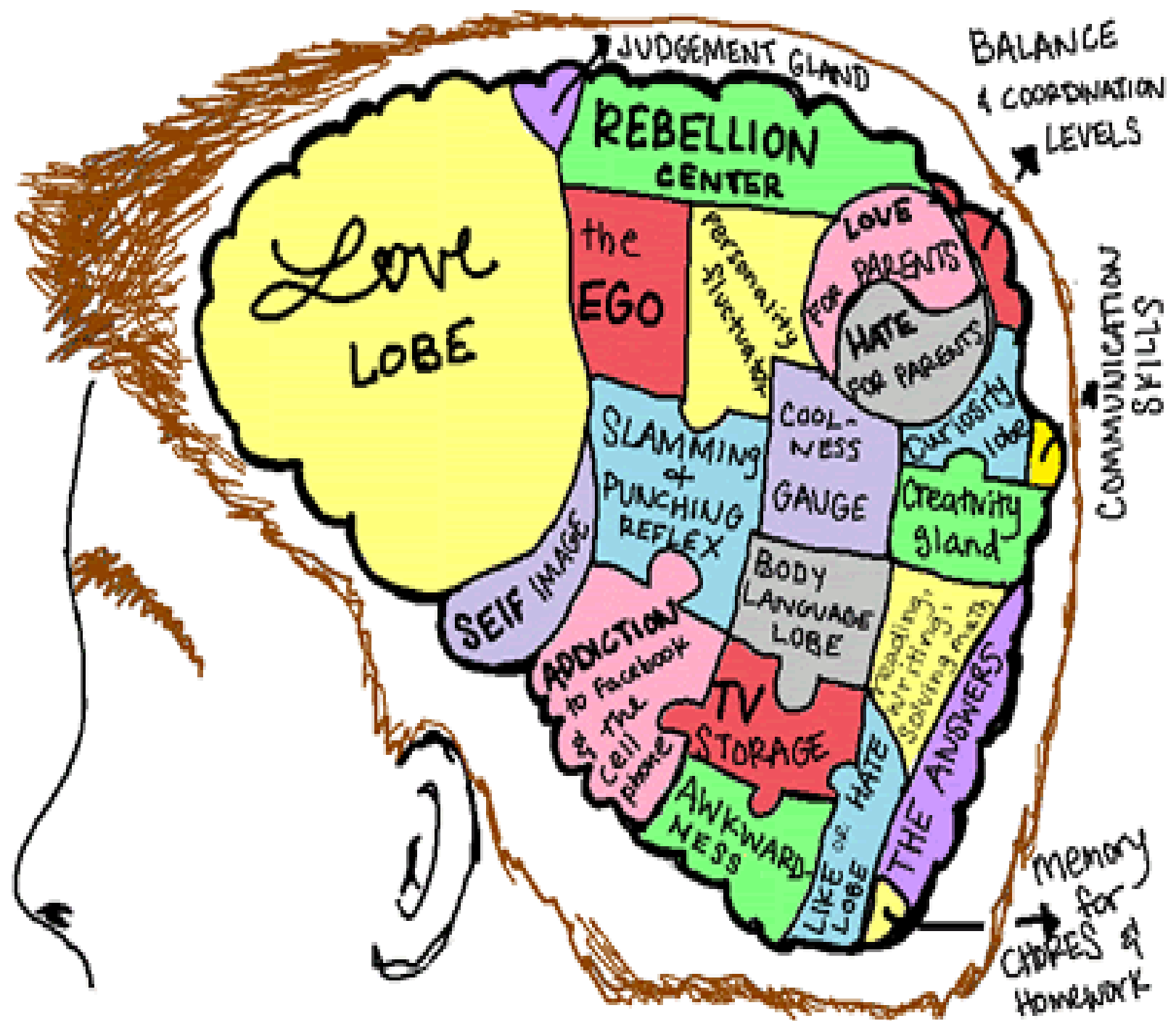


Growing and changing



- There are many obvious physical changes during puberty.
- But the brain is also working hard very behind the scenes – rewiring the system for adulthood.
- We now know that these changes are happening from before or around the age of 11 to about the mid twenties for females and the late twenties for males.

THE AVERAGE TEENAGE BRAIN



It's complicated!

- Changes in their brains can influence everything else.
- But brain development is only one aspect influencing their behaviour.
- Genetics, environment, education, experiences, relationships, etc. also influence behaviour.
- Good news! Their brain is at its peak performance level for learning and creativity.

Good news!
Teen brains are
amazing!



Changing differently

- Every teen develops differently.
- Each brain works differently.
- The brain is rearranging and re-organising itself to prepare for adulthood.
- Unwanted and weaker connections are pruned to make the brain more efficient and stronger.



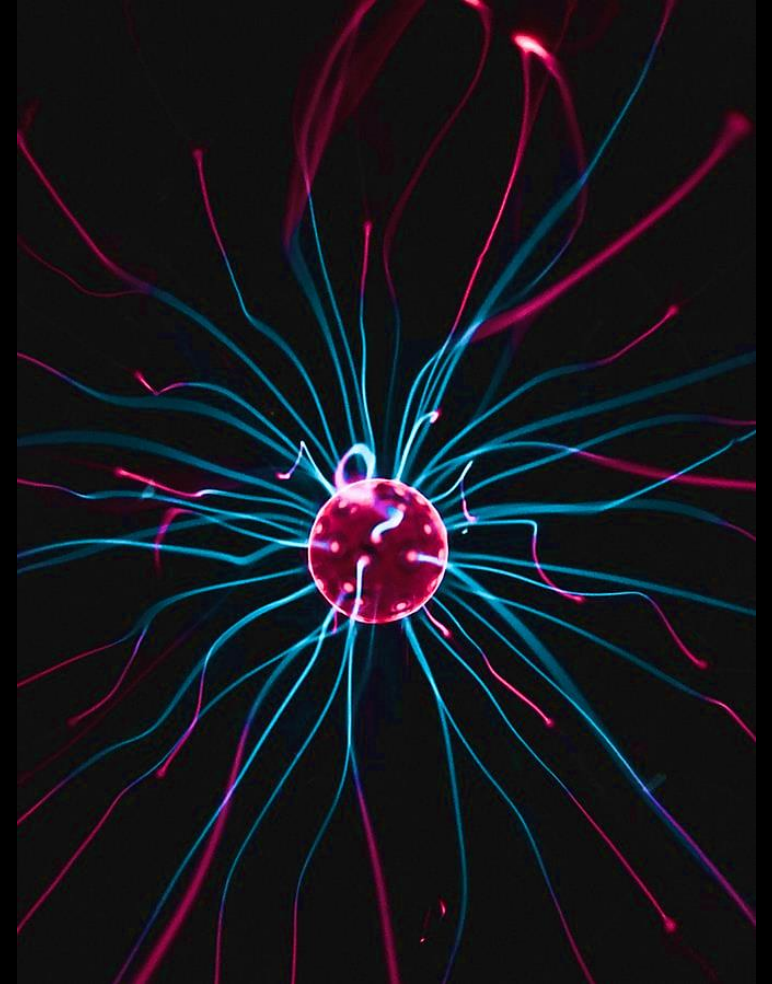
Construction sites - amygdala

- During teenage years, the amygdala changes rapidly.
- This is the area in the brain that is most responsible for sensations, emotions and arousal.
- This area can be very sensitive to stimulation in adolescence - they become arousal seekers.
- This *may* explain why teenagers are more prone to risky and spontaneous behaviour.



Construction sites – prefrontal cortex

- During teenage years, the prefrontal cortex is undergoing rapid development.
- This is the area in the brain most responsible for intellectual activity, self-awareness, planning, problem solving, decision making and appropriate social interaction.



Construction sites – prefrontal cortex

- Some studies suggest that this area of the brain doesn't develop as fast as the amygdala.
- This may explain why teenagers appear to behave irrationally at times, and why they don't always think ahead, plan and assess the consequences.
- Joel's jump...



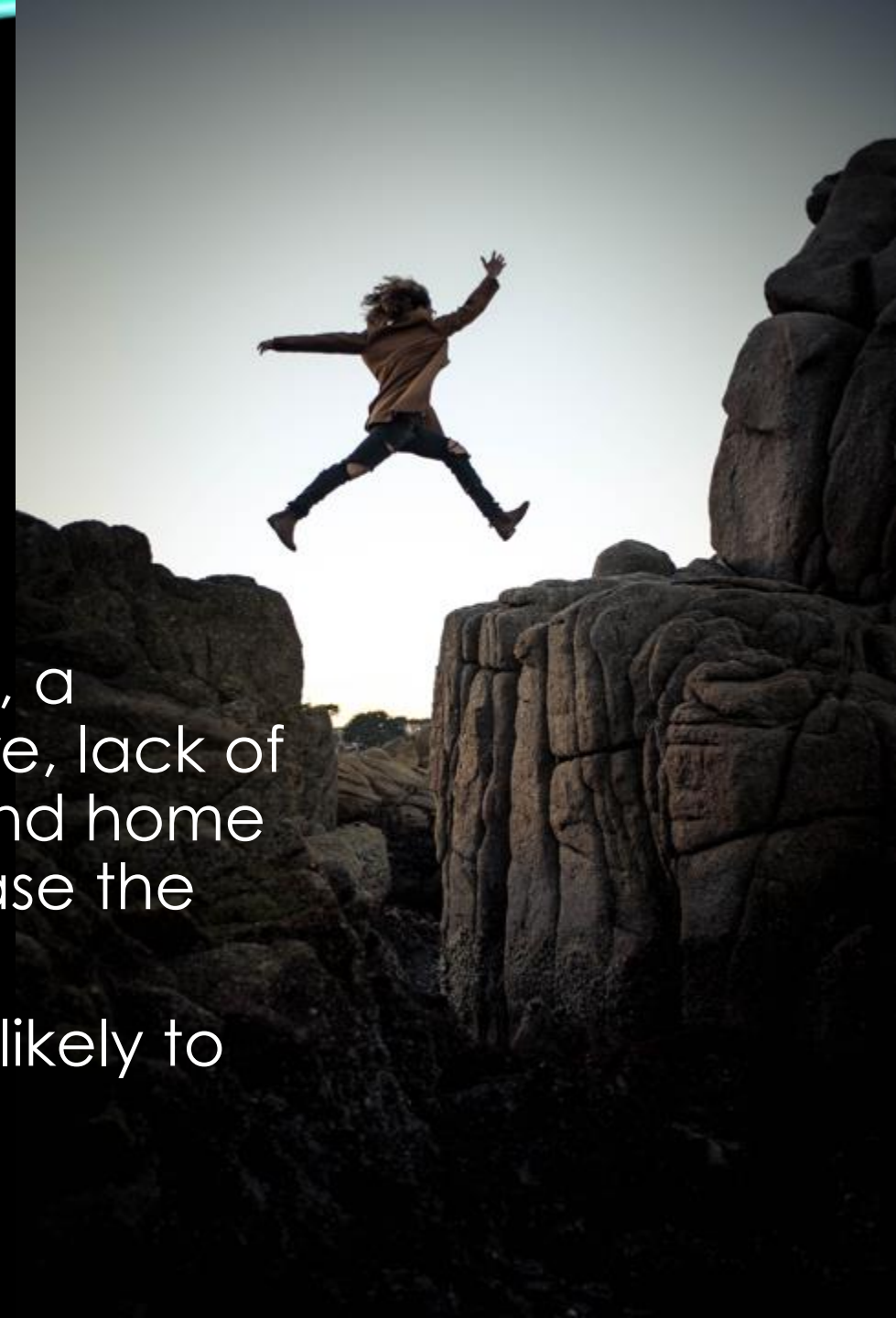
How adults can help

- Be understanding and supportive rather than frustrated and critical.
- Give teenagers space to develop in their unique God-created way.
- Remember that each teenager has many different influences that can affect their behaviour.
- Strong connections - family, school, community, mentors, and role-models, can all help to support the teenager.



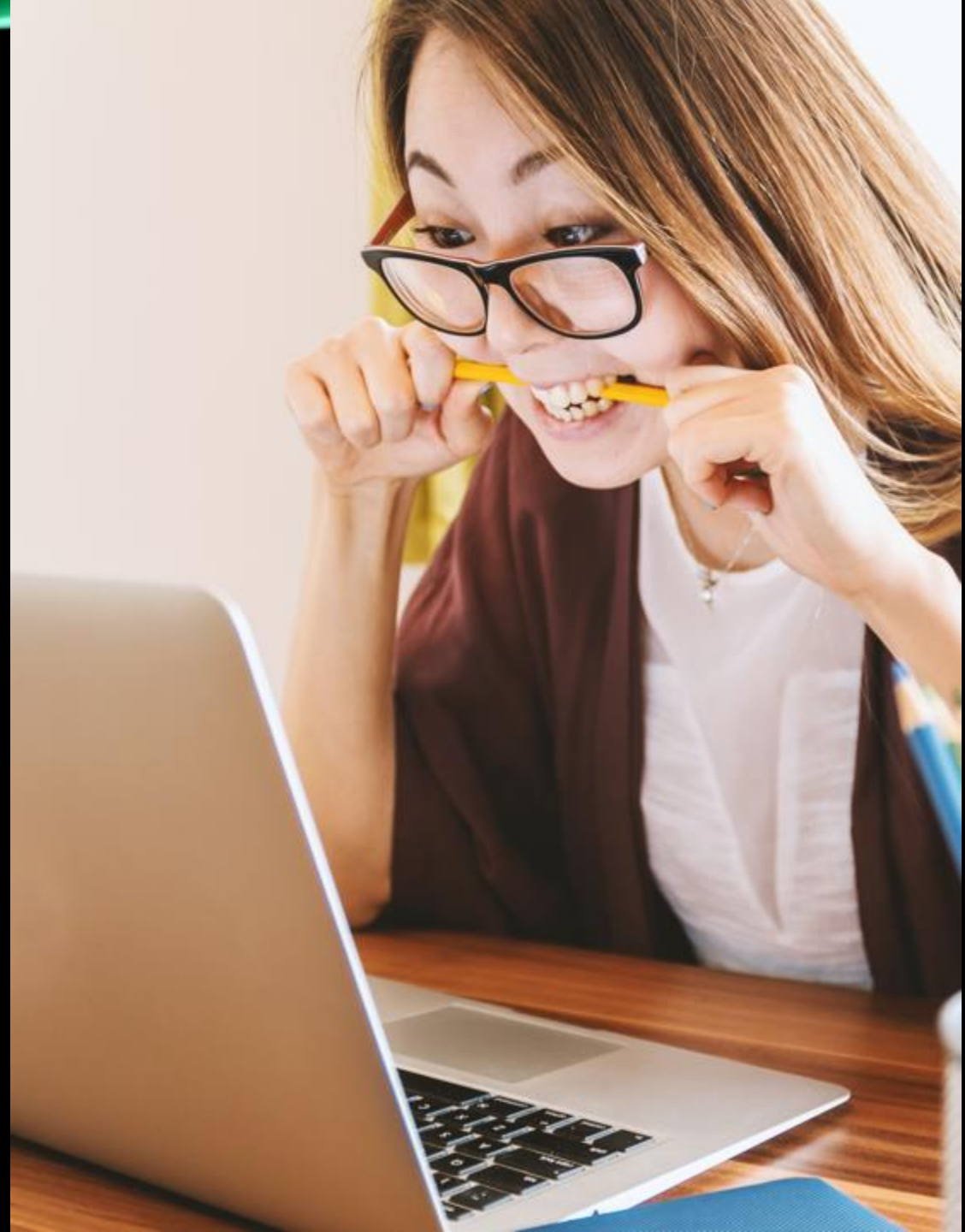
Risky behaviour

- Teens are **trainee adults**.
- They are just learning, and learners make mistakes occasionally.
- Low self-esteem, a sense of hopelessness, a disconnection from parents, peer pressure, lack of future goals, and challenges at school and home are some of the factors that might increase the incidence of risk-taking behaviour.
- Extrovert personalities may also be more likely to seek risks and take risks.



Risky behaviours might include:

- Leaving homework to the last minute.
- Not studying for exams and tests.
- Self harm.
- Experimenting with drugs, sex, alcohol, and smoking.
- Trying dangerous activities and challenges (aerosol lighting!).



Managing risky behaviour

- Teenagers are likely to take risks.
- Help them to stop and think through the different consequences of their actions and choices.
- Make safety/escape plans with them.
- Be there to catch them when they make mistakes.



How adults can help with risky behaviour

- Understand that some risk-taking is essential for learning to occur.
- Talk about the risks and your concerns for their safety and wellbeing.
- Give teens increasing independence.
- Let go gracefully – holding them tightly can make things worse.
- If things go wrong, be warmly accepting, comforting and supportive. Talk later.



Protective factors

- Warm, open, supportive and trusting relationships with parents and family.
- Parents and mentors who help teens when they get into difficulties.
- Faith, responsibility, good mentors and positive hobbies can all help to protect the teen.



Educate and empower about drugs, alcohol, smoking, etc.

- Help teens to learn the facts about addictive substances from reliable sources.
- Help them develop safe and strong values.
- Encourage them to interview/talk with people who made serious mistakes as teenagers.
- Role play situations and develop fun and creative ways for them to be a positive role model and influence
- Empower them to become peer influencers.



Know their friends

- Make your home/group a safe and accepting place for teens to hangout together. Be hospitable and get to know them.
- Ask for their friends' mobile numbers so they can help you if you are ever concerned about a teenager.



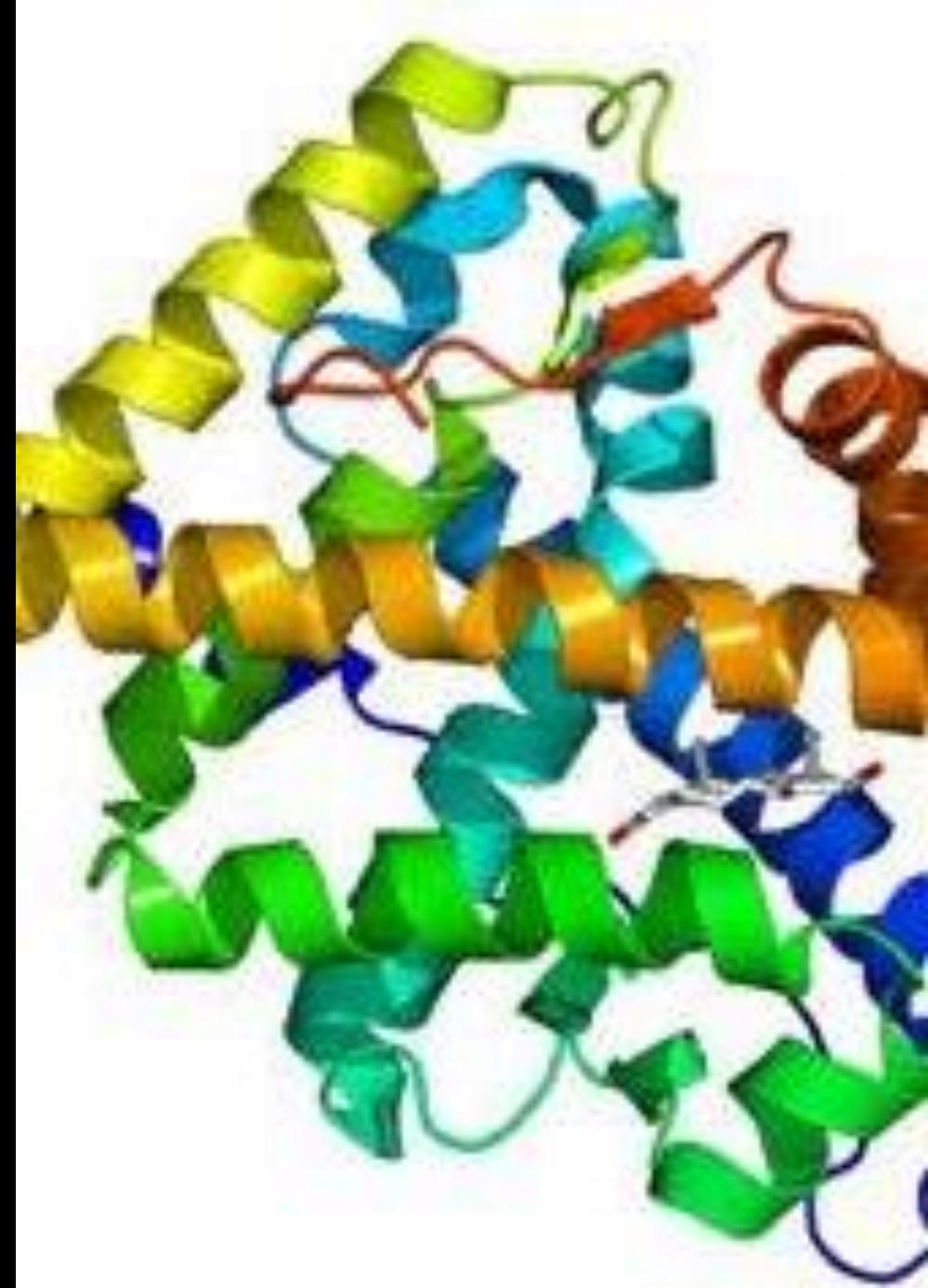
Full of hormones

- During and after puberty the sex hormones are released into the body – oestrogen and testosterone.
- Feelings of stress, anxiety and fear can also flood their brain with the hormone cortisol
- Teens can feel overwhelmed by the effects of these hormones and make it harder for them to make good choices.



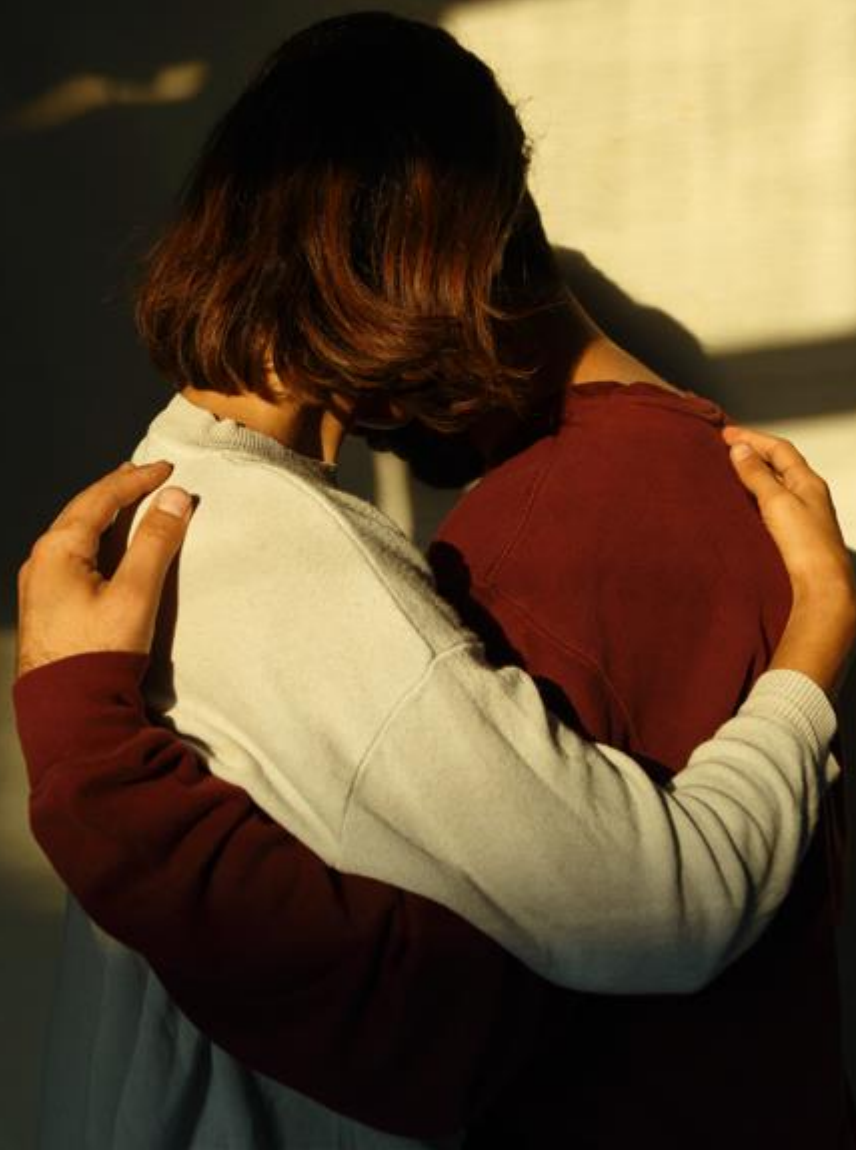
Full of hormones

- High levels of stress hormones in the body can affect the development of the brain, especially when it is in the rapid development phase of adolescence.
- It is very important to help teens to manage their stress levels and anxiety.



How adults can help

- Teenagers can be illogical, irrational, inconsistent and unpredictable.
- Help them manage mood swings by showing empathy, love, acceptance and understanding.
- Your calming presence will help them to calm down too.
- Find fun and soothing things to do together.



Sleep deprived?

- Teenagers release sleep hormone melatonin about two hours later than children or adults.
- This explains why they stay up late and why they are so sleepy in the morning.
- But they still need lots of sleep to help them learn well, reduce their stress, and for their wellbeing.



How parents can help with sleep

- Understand their sleep patterns.
- Encourage a calming, regular night-time routine, including putting away phones and devices, winding down, and relaxing.
- Encourage them to read before bed rather than using screens and phones.
- Let them catch up on their sleep at the weekend.



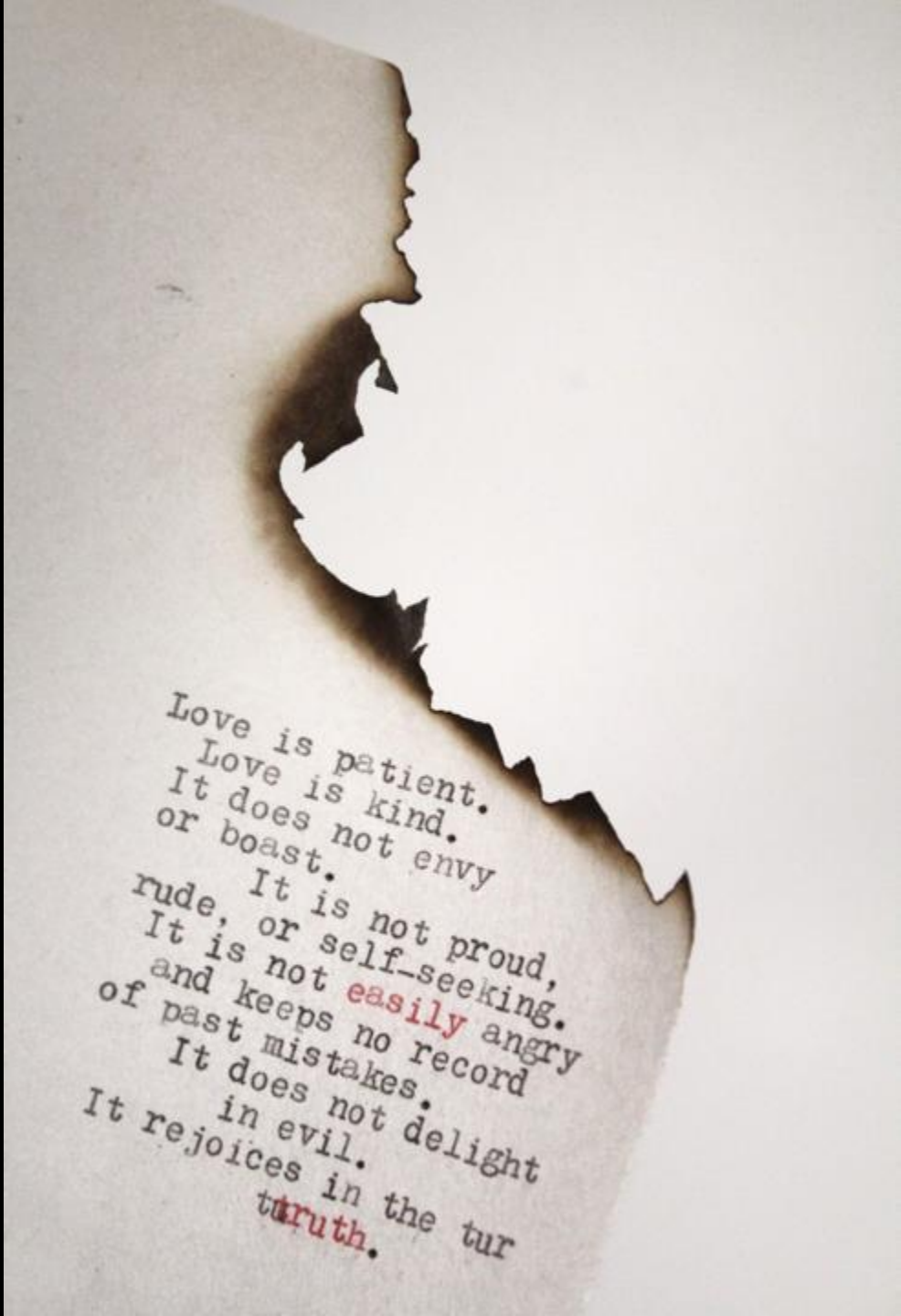
Parents are important

- Teens sometimes behave disrespectfully, or inconsiderately towards their parents.
- Teens need their parents as much as when they were a toddler.
- Having a warm, supportive, involved, interested and guiding approach to parenting will help your adolescent to stay connected with you.



Love them anyway, always

- Parents need to let teens know that they will always love them, no matter what they do, say, or how they look.
- Let them know you will always be there for them – whatever their life choices and mistakes.
- I have loved you with an everlasting love. Jer. 31:3



Love is patient.
Love is kind.
It does not envy
or boast.
It is not proud,
rude, or self-seeking.
It is not **easily** angry
and keeps no record
of past mistakes.
It does not delight
in evil.
It rejoices in the tur
truth.

Be present and connected

- Know the top ten relational needs.
- Meet teens' relational needs as often as possible.
- Be aware of what causes painful aloneness in teens and avoid doing these things.
- When in doubt - prioritise your relationship with them.



LOVE

Comfort
Acceptance
Affection
Appreciation
Attention
Respect
Encouragement
Security
Being valued
Support

ALONENESS

Neglect
Rejection
Abuse
Criticism
Being ignored
Shame
Discouragement
Fear
Being put down
Abandonment

Be present and connected

- Be humble enough to apologise to teens when you mess up, or when you cause them pain and hurt.
- After a conflict – it's best if the adult moves to mend the relationship as quickly as possible because teens and young people don't always know how to do this.
- Disconnect can lead to guilt and depression – look for their body language.



Catch them doing something good

- As often as possible – even daily – affirm them for something they have done well or right.
- This is powerfully encouraging and shapes their character.



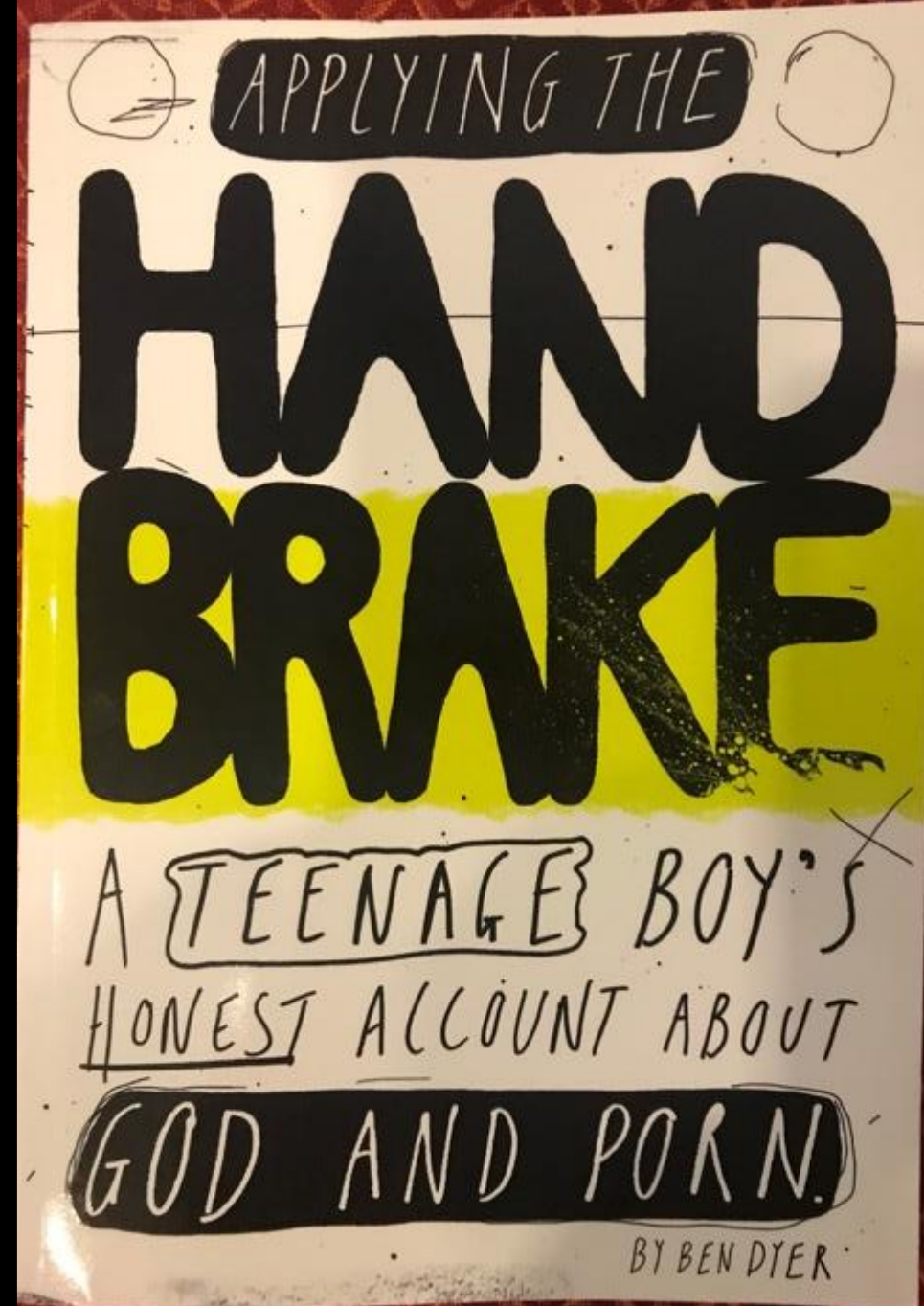
Educate about pornography

- Find good resources to help you – <https://thenakedtruthproject.com/>
- www.newfreedomtolove.org (SDA pornography training and resources)
- TED talk - The Great Porn Experiment
- Protective filters on internet
- Accountability partners.



“Applying the Handbrake” by Ben Dyer

- “The book is the perfect mix of honest and relatable experiences, real truth about God’s views, and amazing advice on how to live as a Christian in today’s world.”
- (15 year old boy)



Why teens don't always talk

- Sometimes teens grunt, turn away, go silent, or show indifference. But this doesn't mean they don't want to talk to you.
- They need to feel safe first.
- It helps if we have listened to them well when they were younger.



Why teens don't always talk

- Avoid asking lots of questions and interrogating them. They can find this confusing and unsafe.
- Play games with them, drive them where they need to go, take them to their favourite café, sit and chat late at night...



Watch your face

- Adults read the emotions in people's faces in the rational and thinking part of their brains.
- Teens read people's faces in the amygdala of the brain – which focuses on sensing and responding to danger.
- They can be hyper-alert to 'threat', disagreement or disapproval.
- Fight – respond angrily and aggressively
- Flight – run out and slam the door



Listening well

- Respond to the feelings fueling the words rather than reacting to their words and tone of voice.
- Listen for their unspoken needs and emotions (help, respect, affection, time with you, comfort, security, encouragement, etc.)
- Ask them how you can help.
- Keep your promises and their secrets.



Listening well

- Ensure privacy and don't shame teens.
- Listen to them first. Don't rush them.
- Sum up what they say – so you're saying that?... Can I just check I understand properly?...
- Empathise – let them know that their feelings touch you in some way – I am so sorry that you are feeling...That must be so...



Underneath the argument the teen is really asking:

- Do you love me/care about me?
- Are you able to understand what I am feeling right now? Can you empathise with me?
- Are you willing and able to help me when I am struggling?
- Will you always be there for me? Can I depend on you?



Speaking well

- Choose a good time for both of you.
- Stay calm and speak quietly – this reduces the release of stress hormone cortisol in their brain.
- Let them know you love them.
- Express appreciation.
- Turn complaints into polite requests:
- In this situation...when this happens...I feel...and it would really help me if you would... and then I can help you by...What ideas do you have?

Respect

- Show respect for teens by asking for their opinion and listening to their ideas.
- If you have different opinions state them calmly and clearly and say why you don't agree.
- Invite teens to help you make good rules for their safety and well-being.
- If they break the rules, invite them to suggest possible disciplines that involve logical consequences.



Boundaries

- Many conflicts happen because teens want to push the boundaries.
- Boundaries help them to feel safe and loved.
- Enforce boundaries warmly and make it easy for them to comply.
- Rules should be made for the benefit of the teen, not for the parent's convenience.



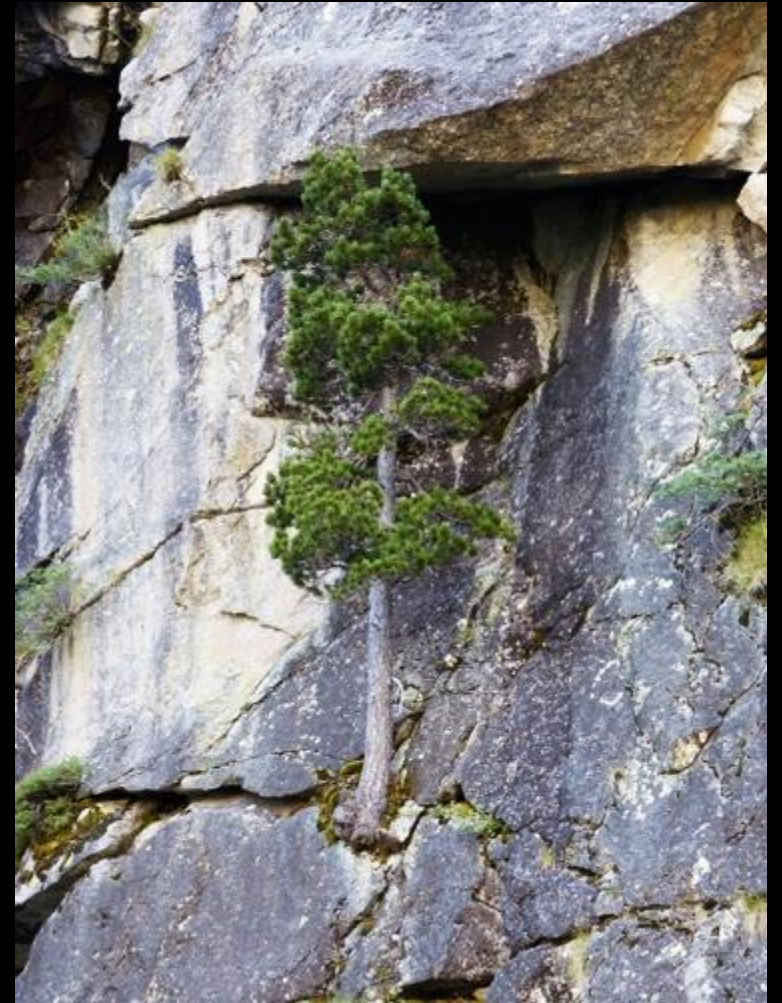
Enforcing boundaries

- Rules without a warm relationship leads to rebellion
- Help the teen understand the importance of complying with the rules – safety, well-being, future hopes, etc.
- Avoid harsh punishment – it can lead to greater conflict.
- Don't taking away personal property like phones and tablets.



Resilience

- Nurture, affirm and encourage the teen's positive character strengths.
- Help them to persist with difficult things.
- Support them well so that they can bounce back from challenges with your help and love.
- Pray for them daily – It's tough being a teen!



RESOURCES

- Conflict with teens
- www.scottishconflictresolution.org.uk
- Helping with troubling behaviours and helping them to flourish
- www.handsonscotland.co.uk – esp. emotional balance on flourishing side
- Dan Siegel – Power and purpose of the teenage brain – you tube – look for the one about 2 hours long <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1pf1xTMUng>
- Brainstorm – Dan Siegel’s book for teens about what is happening in their brain