

Age of Opportunity by Laurence Steinberg **Lessons from the New Science of Adolescence**

(parent notes from January 26, 2016 GPS event)

The message we're sent is that "Adolescence is something to be survived" – he wants us to see adolescence as a time for our children to thrive.

In the 1900's adolescence was a 5 year span, in the 50's it was a 7 year span. Now it's 15, from 10-25. Because puberty starts earlier and because most children go to college which means they start living the role of an adult at a later age (approx. 25 yrs.)

Obesity is the leading cause of the earlier start of puberty

Also cosmetics – conditioner/shampoo/makeup. You want to look for products that DO NOT contain endocrine disrupters

Exposure to light also causes puberty (light from electronic devices) – messes with melatonin which accelerates onset of puberty

People recall adolescence more than any other time period. Why? Because the adolescent brain is very sensitive to experience. The brain from 0-3 is very susceptible to change. Also during adolescence, the brain is very plastic. Brain is always a little plastic which is how we can learn new things. Adolescence is the last time in human development the brain will ever be that open to change and sensitive to experiences. It's the difference between remodeling and redecorating a home. The adolescent brain is one you can remodel – tear down walls, create new rooms, rewire it. The adult brain can only be redecorated – change the paint and curtain colors.

The brain is most plastic in the adolescent phase in the pre-frontal cortex (behind the forehead) – use that part for advance thinking – reasoning, planning, self-control

There is no trait more important for a child to develop than strong self-control. Self-control is a better predictor of school/work success than intelligence/talent.

If you do these four things, you will have a successful life:

1. Graduate college
2. Don't have a child before married
3. Don't break the law
4. Don't have a period of being idle (don't quit one job before you have another, don't wait for your "dream job" to come around)

What do these four things have in common? They require self-control!

Adolescence is a time when kids engage in the most risky behavior. 18 yr. olds are at the height of risky behavior.

How do you cultivate strong self-control? With authoritative parenting – which is THE BEST style of parenting. It involves

1. Warmth/involvement
2. Being firm and having articulated standards
3. Support kids in becoming more independent

Dr. Steinberg wrote a book called “the 10 basic principles of good parenting”

1. What you do matters – a lot! Parents are the most important influence in a teen’s life – NOT social media or peers
2. You cannot be too loving to your child. You can’t spoil a child with love. You can’t love a child too much or praise a child too much. You CAN spoil a child if you replace love with STUFF.
3. Be involved in your kid’s life. Attend functions at school, watch extra curriculars, know their friends, let your house be the social house. DOES NOT mean you want to micro-manage their life. Ask them if they did their homework but don’t do it for them.
4. Adapt parenting to fit child. Adjust parenting to fit the child’s temperament. All children should not be parented the same.
5. Establish rules and set limits/boundaries. Adjust with age and maturity so the rules are more suitable for the age the child is.
6. Help foster independence – give the child more independence gradually over time. Test the child to see what s/he can handle. Don’t squelch the need for autonomy that teens have by making all decisions for them. PROTEGE WHEN YOU MUST, PERMIT WHEN YOU CAN. Let your child practice making decisions. When you make decisions for your child that they are capable of making, you rob them of that opportunity for growth.
7. Be consistent day to day. Don’t be permissive one day and strict the next. The kids don’t know what to anticipate. Be consistent with your partner in parenting; present a united front to the kids. It doesn’t mean to be stubborn or dogmatic – get the phrase “do it because I said” out of your vocabulary. If your child presents a new way of doing things in the family that makes sense to you, adopt it! Don’t turn a disagreement into a power struggle. Don’t fight with kids just to maintain power.
8. Avoid harsh discipline. Don’t yell, hit or humiliate. Those strategies don’t have positive long term effects. Be authoritative, warm, firm and support independence.
9. Explain the rules you have. When a child understands why a rule is in place, she is more likely to obey it.
10. Treat your child with respect. Best way to get respect from your child is to treat him/her with respect.

Effects of puberty on the brain: increase activity in parts of the brain that rely on dopamine (pleasure)

Sensation seeking + immature self-control = reason why kids get in trouble

Adolescence – rewards system is very easily aroused

Too many times, education changes what the kids know but not how they behave. (education like driver's ed, etc. not school specifically)

They engage in risky behaviors because they can't help it.

Don't try to change kids, try to change context. A 16 yr. old with 3 other teens in the car is as impacted by that as s/he would be driving under the influence. So, don't try and change the child but change the context under which s/he can drive. Don't let them drive with other kids in the car.

The prime time for experimentation with drugs/alcohol/sex is weekday afternoons in the home when parents aren't around. So you need to give your kids something to do after school that is structured/supervised.

We need to minimize stress and teach our kids how to cope with stress

We have unfair expectations on our kids – we expect them to be perfect in all areas (that's how kids feel)

Adolescents should be getting 9 hours of sleep a night but with after school activities, homework, etc. they're getting much less.

Lack of sleep = lack of self-control

We need to cut back on the amount of activities our kids are involved in

Want kids to be challenged in school but not overwhelmed

Mindfulness meditation helps with self-control, immune system and performance/behavior

Kids should exercise EVERYDAY – exercise makes us function better

If your child is having negative thoughts about something, ask them "How could you think about this differently?"