



Helping Young People Make Positive Choices

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The good old days



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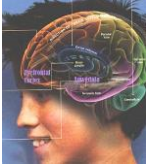
www.riskyadolescentpathways.com

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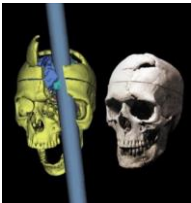

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Adolescent brain development and risk



Prior approaches to neurological development

- Phineas Gage (1823-1860)

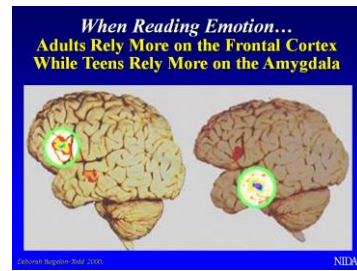
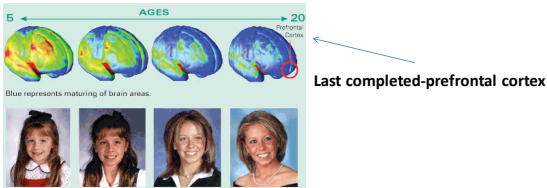
Technology has propelled us in new directions...



(and continues to do so)

What is going on?

The adolescent brain is being sculpted. Brain maturation occurs slowly over the course of adolescence, from back to front.



Teens and adults use different regions of the brain in responding to certain tasks

Adolescents have immature *judgment*

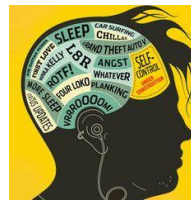
Adolescents unduly affected by^{1,2}

- Over reliance on peers
- Decreased risk perception
- Increased sensation seeking
- Shortened future-time perspective

Seems to be underpinned by biological and neurological changes that occur during adolescence

¹ Cauffman & Steinberg (2000) ; ²Modecki (2008; 2009)

All told, adolescents are “coping with inputs”



Difficulties creating “equilibrium”

- Peer influence
- Rewards of risk
- Emotional lability
- Stressors and strains

(Luciana, 2013; Modecki, Zimmerman-Gembeck, & Guerra, 2017)

How does this translate to everyday behaviour?



For teens, there are unique drivers of risk-taking

- Peers add to the “reward value” of risk-taking (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005)
- Short-term incentives impel risk (Modecki, 2017)
- Sensation seeking is a reward in and of itself (Modecki, 2009)



Asking youth about their risk decisions.

Youth Decision-Making Questionnaire

“You’re out shopping with some of your close friends and they decide to take some clothing without paying for it. You don’t think it’s a good idea, but they say you should take something too.”

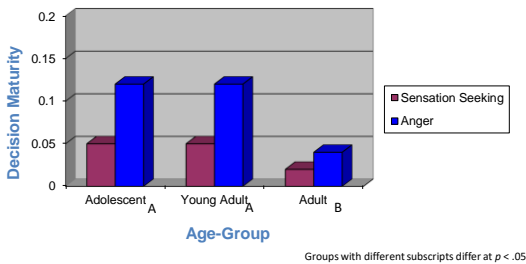
What are all the reasons that you would steal the clothes?

Modecki, 2009

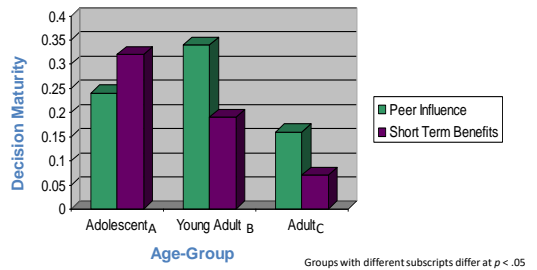
Code responses to vignettes for:

- *Peer Influence*: he’s my boy; made me more accepted; going along with him; my friend told me to; to be cool.
- *Sensation Seeking*: fun; excitement; a “rush”; just to have a good time.
- *Anger*: I was mad; he pissed me off.
- *Lack of Perceived Risk*: I won’t get caught; it’s easy; no chance I’d get caught.
- *Short-term Consequences*: because I get new clothes; I get to look good.

Age Differences in Reasons for Risk Taking



Age Differences in Reasons for Risk Taking



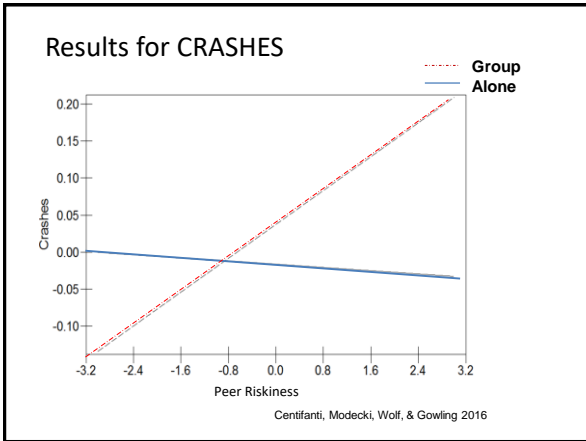
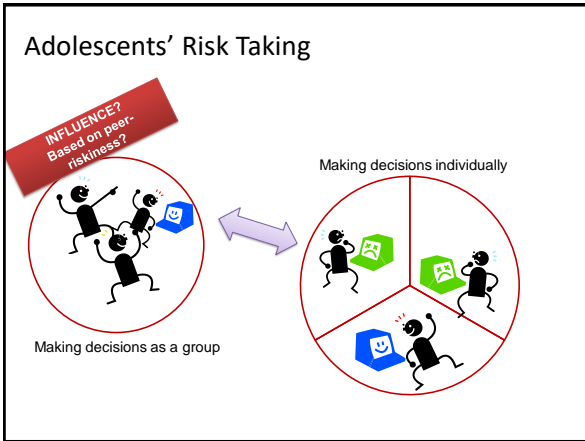
For teens, peers play a critical role in risky behaviour



Centifanti, Modecki, Wolf, & Gowling, 2016

Simulated Real-World Behaviour: Stoplight Task





For teens, there is an undue focus on rewards, which seems to propel risky behaviour

Modecki et al., 2015

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Adolescent Research Partners

- 206 adolescents from two schools in the South West Corridor (SWC) of Western Australia (Whadjuk people on Nyungar Country)
- Recent concerns about the emotional wellbeing of youth in the SWC

Mandurah community reeling after six teenage suicides

April 19, 2016, 12:05PM Written by Rachel Turner Mandurah Coastal Times

Perth teen creates suicide prevention video urging peers to get help

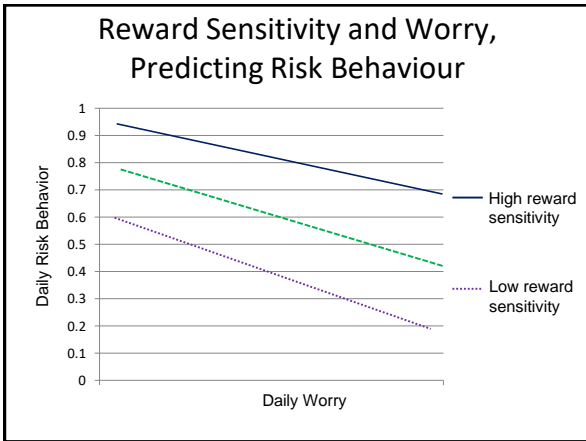
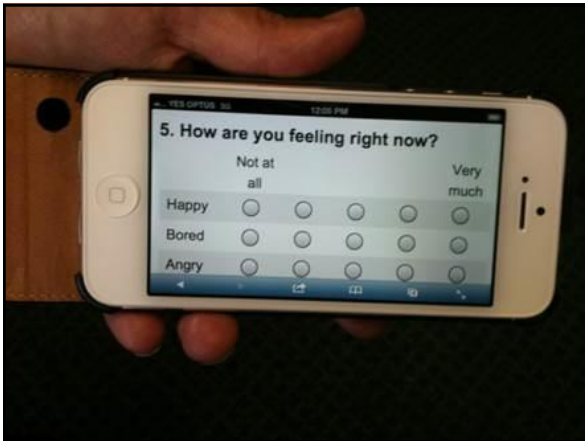
ABC Radio Perth | By Emma Wynne
Posted 21 May 2016, 12:57pm

- Prompted state and federal government action

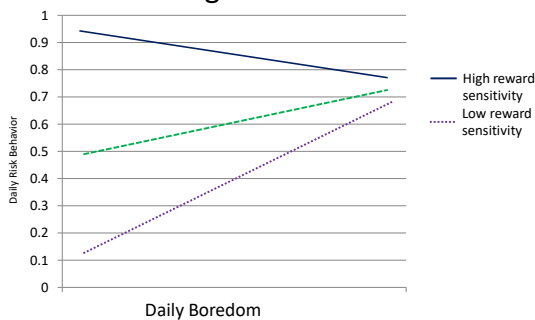
Turnbull in Mandurah to tackle youth suicide

Mandurah Mandurah @mandurahmail
12 Aug 2016, 12:57 pm
http://www.mandurahmail.com.au/story/4093049/turnbull-in-mandurah-to-tackle-youth-suicide/

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Reward Sensitivity and Boredom, Predicting Risk Behaviour



What does this mean for educators?

Acknowledge adolescents' strengths—their:

- creativity
- openness to emotional experiences
- positive peer influences

Assist with strategies in decision making—help them to consider :

- outsized influence of peers
- boredom often tied to problems
- need to “listen to (their) gut”
- Consider consequences stemming from those perceived rewards

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What about schools?

- “Naturally occurring” interventions—for example structured, supervised, extracurricular settings (e.g. Modecki, Barber, & Eccles, 2014)
- Opportunities to mentor and take on positive identity experiences (e.g. Modecki, Neira, & Barber, 2018)
- “Arranged opportunities” for positive/different peer interactions
- Focus on strengths, building positive identities

Thank you

Young and Well CRC

This research was funded by the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre (CRC), an Australian-based, international research centre that unites young people with researchers, practitioners, innovators and policy-makers from over 75 partner organisations. Together, we explore the role of technology in young people's lives, and how it can be used to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 12 to 25. The Young and Well CRC is established under the Australian Government's Cooperative Research Centres Program.

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Thank you

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Participating schools and youth
participants in the US, UK and Australia

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