

FACT SHEET • SECONDARY

Understanding Your Young Person's Brain

Adolescence rebuilds the brain. The parts that feel, want and react are running at full speed while the part that plans, weighs risk and applies the brakes is still being wired, and that gap is why a sensible child can make a baffling decision. These five tips work with the brain your young person actually has.



TIP 1

Expect the feeling first

An adolescent child reads a situation with the emotional part of the brain before the thinking part catches up. Give it a minute before you expect reason.

TIP 2

Say less, and say it later

Long explanations in the heat of the moment go nowhere. Make your point in a sentence, then come back to it when things have cooled.

TIP 3

Protect the sleep

The adolescent body clock genuinely shifts later. Sleep is when the rewiring happens, so guarding it does more than any amount of nagging.

TIP 4

Let them practise deciding

Judgement is built by making choices and living with them. Give real decisions where the stakes are small, and let the learning happen.

TIP 5

Stay the safe place

Young people pull away at the same time as still needing you close. Keep the door open, keep the routines, and keep talking about ordinary things.

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Helping Your Young Person Manage Stress

Secondary school brings exams, friendships and a packed timetable all at once, and a young person's stress response is easily triggered because the part of the brain that sounds the alarm matures faster than the part that calms things back down. What looks like overreacting, or shutting down completely, is often a nervous system that hasn't yet learned to settle itself. These five tips help you support that without taking over.



TIP 1

Name the feeling out loud

Simply saying "that sounds really stressful" calms the brain's alarm system faster than trying to fix the problem straight away. Save the solutions for once they feel heard.

TIP 2

Break big worries into pieces

A mountain of coursework feels impossible; a list of small, specific tasks doesn't. Help them write down just the next step, not the whole exam or the whole term.

TIP 3

Build in proper downtime

A packed week of school, clubs and homework needs real gaps in it, not just screen time between tasks. Protect at least one evening where nothing is scheduled at all.

TIP 4

Watch for the physical signs

Stomach aches, headaches and trouble sleeping often show up before a young person can put their stress into words. Take these seriously as a signal, not just a symptom to treat.

TIP 5

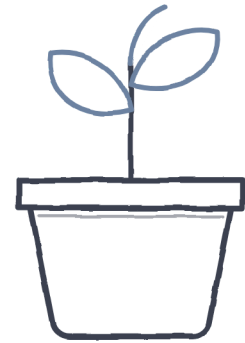
Model calm, not panic

Young people pick up on how the adults around them handle pressure. Let them see you take a breath and think something through rather than react, and they'll learn to do the same.

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Helping Your Young Person Build Confidence

Confidence at this age is built by evidence: proof, gathered from real experience, that they can actually handle things. A young person who is only ever told they're brilliant can start to doubt it the moment something goes wrong. Confidence built on genuine competence holds up far better than confidence built only on compliments. Here's where to start.



TIP 1

Praise the effort, not the result

Which subject felt hard this week and why matters more than the grade itself. Notice the work and effort that went in, not just the final result.

TIP 2

Let them do hard things alone

Booking something online or sorting out a mix-up with a friend builds more self-belief than any pep talk. Step back before you step in.

TIP 3

Let failure be survivable

A challenging test result or not getting a part in the school play is proof that setbacks don't end the world. Resist rescuing them from the disappointment itself.

TIP 4

Point out their own growth

Remind them what they couldn't do a year ago that they can do now, from cooking dinner to managing their own timetable. Progress is easier to see looking back than looking forward.

TIP 5

Find something just for them

A hobby, sport or instrument they choose themselves, away from school grades entirely, gives confidence a second source. It matters less what it is than that it's genuinely theirs.

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Helping Your Adolescent Child Handle Peer Pressure

Fitting in matters more in the adolescent years than at almost any other age, because the brain places a high value on what the peer group thinks, sometimes higher than what a parent thinks. That's not a character flaw; it's a normal part of learning to be part of a group. The aim isn't to remove peer influence but to help them notice it and choose well within it.



TIP 1

Talk about it before it happens

Discuss a tricky scenario in the calm of a car journey, not in the middle of one. Ask what they'd do if a friend pushed them to do something they weren't sure about.

TIP 2

Give them a ready-made excuse

A simple line like "my mum will kill me" lets them say no without losing face in front of their friends. Having the words ready matters more than having the willpower.

TIP 3

Ask about the friendship itself

If a friend keeps pushing them towards things that don't feel right, that says something about the friendship. Widen the conversation beyond the single incident.

TIP 4

Praise them when they push back

Notice out loud when they've stood up for their own choice, even in something small like what they wear. It tells them you saw it and it mattered.

TIP 5

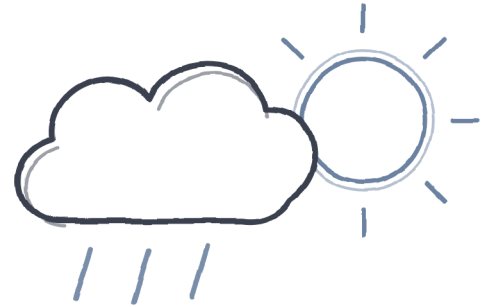
Keep their circle wide

Friendships outside one tight group, through clubs, sport or family friends, give them somewhere else to belong if one group turns difficult. Don't let their whole social world sit in one place.

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Helping Your Young Person Manage Strong Emotions

A slammed door or a flood of tears over something small isn't an overreaction so much as an underdeveloped brake system: the emotional brain is fully online well before the part that regulates it has caught up. Trying to reason with a young person mid-storm rarely works, because the thinking brain has temporarily gone offline. These five tips help you ride out the storm and build the skill for next time.



TIP 1

Wait for the storm to pass

Trying to talk sense into a young person who is mid-meltdown rarely lands, because the part of the brain that listens has temporarily gone offline. Come back to it once things have calmed.

TIP 2

Name it without judging it

'You're really angry right now' lands better than "calm down". Naming the emotion helps the thinking brain start to come back online.

TIP 3

Give the body somewhere to go

A walk, a run or even a few minutes pacing the garden helps a flood of adrenaline burn off. Movement often calms a young person faster than talking does.

TIP 4

Hold the boundary, not the grudge

Consequences are separate from your relationship. Deal with the behaviour, then let it go rather than replaying it for days.

TIP 5

Talk it through once it's calm

Once everything is settled, go back and talk through what happened and what might help next time. This is where the actual learning happens, not in the moment itself.

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Helping Your Young Person Cope With Setbacks

A poor mock result, being dropped from a team, or not getting into a friendship group can feel, in the adolescent brain, every bit as serious as an adult crisis, because a still-developing sense of perspective hasn't caught up with the intensity of the feeling. Rushing to fix it or minimise it both miss what's needed. Here's how to help them recover and learn from a setback rather than be defined by it.



TIP 1

Let them feel it first

Before any advice, just sit with how disappointed they are. Jumping straight to "never mind, there'll be other chances" can feel like their feelings are being brushed aside.

TIP 2

Separate the result from their worth

A rejected college application says something about that one application, not about them as a person. Say this plainly, more than once, because they won't quite believe it the first time.

TIP 3

Ask what's actually in their control

Once the disappointment has settled, gently help them pick out the one or two things they could genuinely do differently next time, rather than a long list of regrets.

TIP 4

Share a setback of your own

At a strategic time, tell them about something that didn't go your way and what happened afterwards. It shows a setback is something you survive and move past, not something that defines you.

TIP 5

Watch how long the low lasts

A few flat days after a real disappointment is normal. If a low mood settles in for weeks rather than days, it's worth a conversation with somebody outside the family in order to seek extra support.

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Helping Your Adolescent Child Revise Effectively

Most young people revise by rereading notes and highlighting, which feels productive but barely touches long-term memory; the brain actually learns by being made to retrieve information, not by looking at it again. That mismatch between what feels like working and what actually works is why revision so often doesn't pay off on the day. These five tips point them towards methods that genuinely stick.



TIP 1

Test, don't just reread

Closing the book and trying to write out what they remember, then checking, builds memory far better than reading a page for the third time. It feels harder because it is working.

TIP 2

Spread it out, don't cram

Four short sessions on a topic across two weeks beat one long session the night before, because spacing forces the brain to retrieve the same thing more than once. Help them build a simple timetable.

TIP 3

Teach it to somebody else

Explaining a topic out loud, to you, a sibling or even an empty room, exposes the gaps in understanding that just reading over notes hides completely.

TIP 4

Break subjects into short bursts

Twenty-five minutes of focused work followed by a proper five-minute break gets more done than a vague hour of half-attention. Set a timer rather than an open-ended session.

TIP 5

Try past papers

Doing a past paper against the clock is far closer to the exam itself than reading through a revision guide.

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Helping Your Young Person Get Enough Sleep

A young person's body clock genuinely shifts later during adolescence, so the tiredness at 7am and the wide awake feeling at 11pm are about biology. Most secondary aged young people need more sleep than they are getting, and the shortfall shows up as low mood, poor concentration and a short fuse. These five tips work with that shifted clock rather than fighting it.



TIP 1

Get morning light early

Daylight in the first hour after waking, even a few minutes by an open curtain, helps reset the body clock for the following night. Dim, screen-lit mornings do the opposite.

TIP 2

Get screens out of the bedroom

A phone left charging in the kitchen overnight removes the single biggest reason bedtime keeps slipping later. Agree the where together rather than confiscating it as a punishment.

TIP 3

Keep weekends close to weekdays

Sleeping until 2pm on a Saturday feels like catching up but actually shifts the body clock further, making Monday morning harder. An hour or so of lie-in is plenty.

TIP 4

Watch the hidden caffeine

Energy drinks, cola and some fizzy drinks carry more caffeine than young people realise, and it lingers in the body for hours. Cut it off by early afternoon.

TIP 5

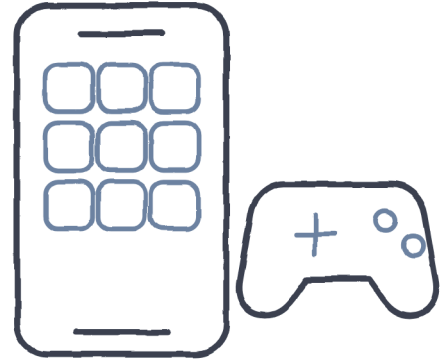
Wind down before lights out

A fixed, calmer half hour before bed, away from screens and revision, signals to the brain that sleep is coming. Consistency matters more than any particular routine.

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Helping Your Adolescent Child Navigate Social Media

Social media arrives at exactly the age when a young person is most sensitive to what their peers think of them, which is why the number of "likes" they get can matter far more than adults think it should. The aim is to help young people understand what is happening and to cope with parental boundaries. Here's where to start.



TIP 1

Keep the phone out overnight

A charging point in the kitchen or hallway, for the whole family, stops the scroll that eats into sleep and stops it feeling like a punishment aimed at just one person.

TIP 2

Ask how it makes them feel

Rather than banning a platform outright, ask whether it leaves them feeling better or worse after twenty minutes on it. That question builds judgement they'll keep using long after you've stopped watching.

TIP 3

Talk about the filtered version

Remind them that a feed is a highlights reel, not real life, and that everyone they follow is doing the same editing. Comparing a whole life to someone's best five photos is an unfair comparison.

TIP 4

Agree the rules together

A screen agreement they helped write, covering when and where, holds better than a rule handed down with no discussion. Revisit it together as things change.

TIP 5

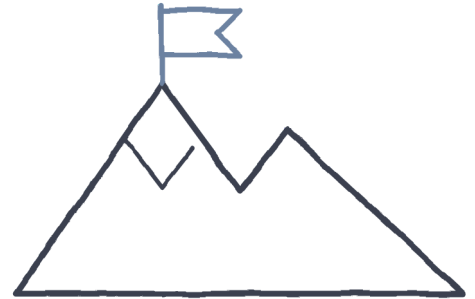
Stay curious, not just watchful

Ask what's funny, what's annoying people, who's saying what, the same way you'd ask about their day at school. It keeps the door open. Stick to age restrictions and boundaries when you can.

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Helping Your Young Person Find Their Motivation

A young person who finds it difficult to get off the sofa for homework can simply seem disinterested, but motivation at this age often depends on feeling some ownership over the goal, not just being told it matters. Here's how to help them find more motivation.



TIP 1

Connect it to their own goal

Homework lands differently once it's tied to something they actually want, like a grade for a course they chose or a place on a team. Help them find that link rather than relying on yours.

TIP 2

Let them choose how

Most young people work harder on things they have picked, or been involved in choosing, for themselves. Offer options instead of a single instruction.

TIP 3

Start with a small first step

A blank page or an overwhelming task kills motivation. Ask for just five minutes or one paragraph, since starting is normally the hardest part, and suggest a way in: pick the favourite question, or the easiest one, first.

TIP 4

Notice progress, not the finish

Point out that this week's essay came together faster than last week's, rather than waiting for the final grade to say well done. Motivation grows on noticed progress.

TIP 5

Don't let rewards replace the reason

An occasional treat for finishing something hard is fine, but leaning on bribery every time can crowd out their own reasons for doing it. Keep reasons visible.