

Teach your teen that their brain is NOT fully developed

After three decades, the comments your teens make still help me see the world through their fresh eyes. For example, last year one of our student leaders discovered that **imagining her future and making plans for college should be a challenge** rather than come easily.

“What!” she exclaimed. “Why didn’t anyone tell me that? I thought I was the only one struggling. Everybody must be faking it!”

Her sudden realization that she wasn’t the only student having trouble seeing past the near horizon deflated her stress. She realized that she didn’t have to pretend that she could see her future clearly. That unnecessary pretense only added to her college-planning stress. Using a false assumption, she expected something that no teen’s brain can do effectively.

Seeing progress clearly

Accurate knowledge about exactly what our children should be capable of helps us, and our teens, wait with more patience and greater confidence for things like organization and planning to come together. It correctly shows us where we need to supplement and demonstrate for them.

I encourage you to watch our Knight Insights newsletter for aspects of Adolescent Development that can help you and your teen agree on reasonable expectations. You might be surprised at these examples of when adolescent development insights can help your family plan:

- **AP Course Selections**—I don’t have a one-size-fits-all answer to when and how many AP courses students should take. Planning and organizing skills vary depending on how much physical development occurs in the brain. No two teens are alike, not even twin siblings.

Understanding that improving organization is one outcome of AP courses can help you decide what’s right for your teen. For students still struggling to stay on top the materials and schedules of high-school life, I recommend just one AP course—on the one subject that interests them most.

Achieving in just one course will demonstrate for college admissions the intellectual ability to master complex material taught at a college level. Focusing on a single course allows students to demonstrate their best. They don’t overextend their organization abilities trying to juggle multiple challenging classes.

- **Extra-curricular Responsibilities**—A similar principle applies to selecting which activities and what level of commitment to each. It takes adult-like skill to stay ahead of a complex schedule.

When responsibilities vary day to day, teens with fledgling skills get overwhelmed.

Knight Insights: Partnering with Families to Help Students Succeed

If your teen relies on you to help them get out the door with the right materials and gear and to meet deadlines, then keep it simple. In doing so, you give your teen time and energy to focus on building skills that support organization.

Simplicity also will give you time to “walk with them” as I’ve suggested before. The physical development of the brain connections your student needs to become organized will set more quickly if you both have the time to patiently work through the steps. Your teen must do the work, while you coach.

If complexity consistently forces you to step in to help, your teen won’t learn. With time to problem-solve together (since problem-solving is another ability that comes with Adolescent Development), your teens can build supports to keep them on track. Things like reminder systems and routines not only save frustration, they build abilities that translate to other organizational demands.

Our teens need educators and families to work together

Adolescent Development impacts every aspect of your teen’s existence—stress management, sleep demands, peer relationships, irritability, and more. We try to support your family when we share insights from research and our educational expertise. Along with information, we offer tools to help you and your teen navigate the changes with less challenge and less stress.