



## Rosario Counseling & Associates July 2012 E-News



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### Resources

[Boundaries with Teens: When to Say Yes, How to Say No](#) – Dr. John Townsend

“The Teen Brain: Behavior, Problem Solving, and Decision Making” - The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

### Help! My Child is a Teenager!

If you are a parent of a teenager, you may feel that this season of life has completely blindsided you. It is not uncommon for teens to have difficulty controlling their emotions. They may quickly misinterpret social cues and emotions of others. Teens also often exercise poor planning and judgment, rarely think of negative consequences, and engage in more risky, impulsive behaviors.

Here’s a bit of science behind an adolescent’s irrational, and sometimes risky, behavior: The prefrontal cortex, which controls reasoning and impulses, isn’t fully developed until around age 25. However the amygdala—the brain’s emotional center—is slightly over-reactive in teenagers, causing them to frequently act on their emotions.

While a teen’s actions are guided more by emotions and less by rational thinking and impulse control, this doesn’t mean that they are incapable of making good decisions or distinguishing the difference between right and wrong. If left unchecked, adolescents will likely act out to the point that their parents feel hopeless. Acting out behaviors are essentially behaviors that adolescents are allowed to get away with. They may begin with seemingly harmless attention-seeking behaviors, but may result in high-risk behaviors such as alcohol and drug abuse.

It is imperative that parents proactively set clear expectations and have consistent accountability for their children at a young age. While they might test these limits to their fullest potential, structure helps children and teens feel secure. As they demonstrate more responsibility, more freedom should be given. Conversely, if they show poor judgment, restrictions should be imposed. Quality time is also critical—whether their behavior is good or bad. According to Dr. John Townsend, parents need to give their teens “connection and consistency” to help them learn self-control and responsibility. Limiting your child’s exposure to television and video games, while encouraging their participation in social activities, team sports, and other extracurricular activities, will help promote brain development needed for rational thinking and impulse control. Finally, parents should set a positive example because teenagers are likely watching!

**If you are experiencing a difficult time with your teenager, our experienced therapists at Rosario Counseling & Associates are prepared to help. Please contact our office at 919-649-5882 to schedule an appointment.**

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