

# **Fostering Teen Resiliency**



**Communication & Survival Tips for Parents**

By Dr. Adria O'Donnell

A little bit

# About me...

Who i AM...

Who i WAS...



# WHO I WAS...

I was a below average student

I was overweight, had glasses (& not cute ones), had terrible acne and braces for 5 yrs

I was disorganized, messy, distracted, dysgraphic, dyslexic, angry, creative, funny kid

I attending a private catholic all girls schools. I got along with boys WAY better.

I took the SAT 4 times (barely improved)

I NEVER took an AP course. Ever.

I never studied psychology in college

I was rejected from grad school my first time around

I had NO idea what I wanted to "be" until I was 24



# TODAY'S MENU

- ANXIETY - (YOURS & THEIRS)
- MATURATION & THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN - (DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS, NEEDS, LIMITATIONS)
- PARENTING PITFALLS & COMMUNICATION ERRORS (YOURS & THEIRS)
- CONFIDENCE & GRIT
- BATTLE GROUNDS (PROCRASTINATION, TECH BOUNDARIES, "PRIVACY" & FREE-TIME)

***ANXIETY***

US:

But what if  
she forgets  
her uniform?

***SHE SHOULD BE  
ABLE TO HANDLE  
THIS BY NOW!***

Why can't he  
just go up and  
brush his G.D.  
teeth?!?!

If i don't  
handle this now  
it's going to  
spiral out of  
control



But maybe I  
should just  
email the  
teacher and  
let her know...

**THEM:**

*I look  
hideous!!! No  
one will ever  
like me.*

What if  
coach yells  
at me today  
in practice?

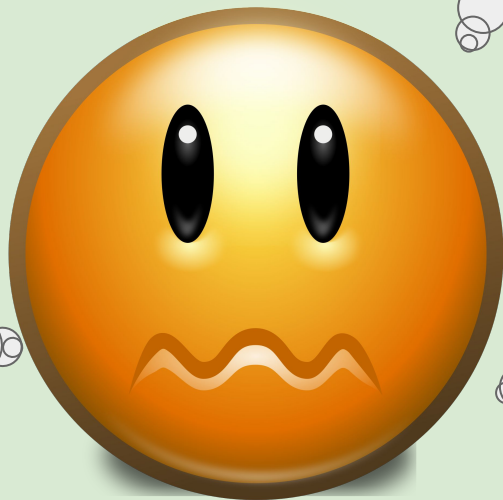
They all  
HATE me!

*I should be  
better at  
this by  
now!*

I hate when  
my dad yells  
during the  
game

I can't walk in  
now!!  
Everyone will  
look at me  
weird.

There is NO  
way I am doing  
that  
presentation -  
I'll die!



I am the ONLY  
one who doesn't  
get what the  
teacher is  
talking about



# Anxiety is a thought that make you feel something

+/- (mad...sad...bad...glad)

- Nocturnal & Contagious
- Self-Reinforcing “whack a mole”
- Habit forming BUT controllable
- Invisible to others
- Is a “SHAPE-SHIFTER”
  - Anger
  - Avoidance
  - Apathy
  - Irritability
- All in our head (but in our body\*)



# WHAT IF...?

- What If's are **negative future predictions of worst case scenarios**
- What if...

I fail      Everyone laughs at me      No one likes it      He yells at me

They all hate me      I do it wrong      They all find out I lied

She gets really mad at me      No one talks to me      I look bad

YOUR "What If's" might seem dumb to others, but to you, they are VERY Real

# ANXIETY & THE BODY

WHAT are you feeling  
vs.

WHERE are you feeling it?

SWEATING  
BLUSHING  
HOT/COLD  
SHAKING  
RINGING IN EAR  
FACE TINGLE OR NUMBNESS  
NAUSEA  
HEADACHE  
STOMACH ACHES  
DIZZLE SENSATION  
DREAM-LIKE FEELING  
HARD TO SWALLOW OR BREATHE  
CAN'T TALK OR FIND WORDS

# Parental Anxiety

Let's face it,  
**ONE**  
of your kids makes you really  
nervous.

Parenting is about **PERCEIVED** Control:

You **HAD** it. You've **LOST** it,

& this is when you lose it!

Anxiety blocks our ability to tolerate the  
discomfort during the learning/  
maturation\* process.

Anxiety increases in middle school  
\_\_\_\_\_ (for **US & THEM**)

# Maturation Process for Tweens

Maturation comes in random spurts,  
requires repeated experience & repeated consequences.

It **REQUIRES** that we stay consistent - mean what say & say what you mean.

Understanding how your parental **ANXIETY** is interfering with your ability to tolerate this will significantly improve your ability to **respond vs react**.

# The Brain & How Gender Matters

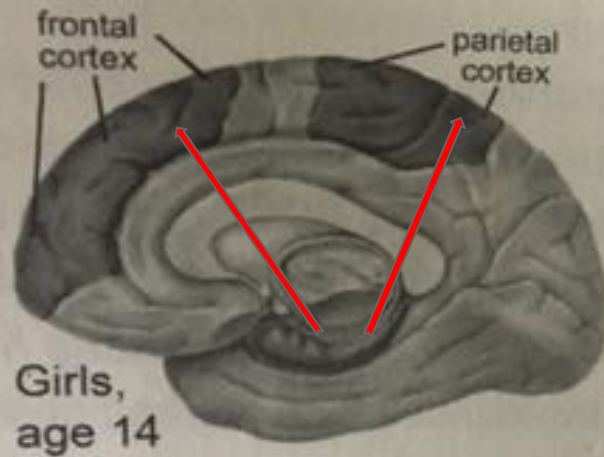


Their brains are different.

Like ... literally,  
structurally different.

For reals.

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As girls mature, brain activity associated with emotion moves out of the amygdala and into the cerebral cortex.



As boys mature, brain activity associated with emotion remains in the amygdala.

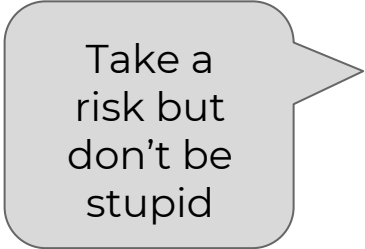
ular sex difference at greater length later on in the book. For  
think about the implications of this differ-

# Different switchboard


- Boys are told to “use their words” vs their hands
- Brain parts don't connect the same
- These guys aren't connected in boy brains very well if at all
- VERY HARD to say WHY you are feeling something

## MIXED MESSAGES:


Boys are told to...



Take a  
risk but  
don't be  
stupid



Be strong  
but  
gentle



Be  
aggressive  
but sensitive



BOYS ARE VISUAL  
GIRLS ARE VERBAL

Squirrel!! VS. Blah Blah Blah

**This is a DANGEROUS Intersection for Teens via  
Text..snapchat...**

# Trouble for Girls

- Girls are VERBAL & EMOTIONAL 1st - then visual
- Girls are HIGHLY sensitive to injury & tend to HOLD onto their hurt
- Girls get JUST as mad as boys
  - How do i stay “nice” when i am mad?
- Girls can be verbally aggressive & impulsive ...hence the egregious text wars
- Girls are RELATIONAL so they wage war on each others relationships
- Girls tend to act IN (boys tend to act OUT)

**\*\*Girls are highly INSENSITIVE to HOW they injury while they are injured\*\***

**Emotional entitlement is RAMPANT at this age.**

# Brain development

- At 6 years old the brain is approximately 90% of its adult size.
  - the brain becomes specialized via “pruning”.
  - **Pruning:** Unused connections are cut, while used connections grow stronger.
- The highest level of pruning happens in adolescence.  
\*\* THIS IS WHY THEY GET STUPID \*\*

**They.  
Need.  
More.  
sleep.**

**Technology IS interfering with Sleep**

**NO LIGHT** in their faces after 9 (ish)

**NO screens** in room\*

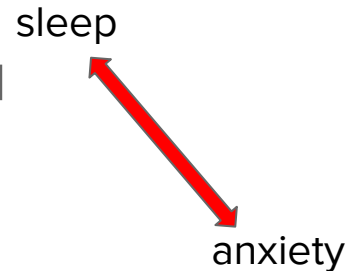
**Bedtime “boundary” vs. bed time**

**A Little “help” is OK**

# To Recap:

- Anxiety increases in middle school & is about thoughts **AND** the body
- Maturation is inconsistent and intermittent & requires patience
- Anxiety is **INTERFERING** with the learning moments & your patience
- Their brains are **WEIRD**. Just know this.
- Boys are **VISUAL**
- Moms (girls) are **VERBAL**
- Sleep and anxiety are directly but inversely correlated

... moving on ...



# DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

**What they NEED to do that you cannot do for them**

# PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTAL CONFLICTS

Grammar School “ER”

5-11 years old

Goal: to develop competence, useful skills

School identities “*I am a good speller*”

Social comparison: “*Can I spell as well as Michelle?*”

**RULE FOLLOWING CAN DEFINE THIS PHASE - esp for girls!**

Adolescence “**who**” Cliques and Stylistic Identity

Identity: a well-organized sense of self, with values, beliefs, goals.

Teen “Identity Crisis”

**RULE BREAKING DEFINES THIS PHASE**

# **Adolescent Developmental Task: Separation & Individuation**

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This psychological task of a tween - to push away from YOU into “adulthood” is vital to their independence.

It means we have to STOP KNOWING where all their crap is!!  
**You must tolerate this process. It builds GRIT.**



GRIT: COURAGE OR  
RESOLVE, STRENGTH OF  
CHARACTER, PERSEVERANCE

BUILDING GRIT:  
RISK TAKING &  
"FAILURES" ARE A VITAL  
PART OF THIS PROCESS

# ARE YOU FOSTERING GRIT?

- Do you nag and remind them to do things?
- Do you “know” where everything is for them?
- Are you HELPING them to learn how much WORK actually yields success?



Your child need to struggle, fail & struggle then find their OWN success

This means NOT fighting every battle OR them or bailing them out

“Sure you can bail on practice.

I'll drive you there so you can tell your coach yourself”

“When you email your coach, CC me so she can see im involved”

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**Prepare the child for  
the road not the road  
for the child**



# CONFIDENCE IS EARNED, NOT GIVEN

Teens only learn when they are

**UNCOMFORTABLE.**

They must **STRUGGLE** with something **CHALLENGING.**

EASY TASKS WITH TOO MUCH ADULT INVOLVEMENT DON'T YIELD  
CONFIDENCE.

**teens only grow when they are  
uncomfortable!**



**This is incompatible with my parental QUEST to  
make them happy (and quiet).**

# Incompatible agendas

- They need to face adversity. WE need to tolerate it.
- Adversity builds GRIT & RESILIENCY.
- Our kids ONLY learn through mistakes & “failures”.
- WE have an inappropriate reaction to “failure” because ...  
it was *avoidable!*
  - *“Didn’t I tell you to email your teacher about that !?!”*
  - *“How many times have I reminded you to check your phone ?”*
- The learning moment is lost when your BIG feelings eclipse theirs.



ANXIETY IS RUINING ALL OF  
OUR PARENTING MOMENTS  
&  
(MAKES OUR TEENS TUNE US OUT)



# **Parenting Pitfalls & Communication Errors**

**effective parenting involves:**

**Good Timing  
&  
Observational Language**



**Moms -  
We TALK WAY TOO  
MUCH & WAY TOO  
LONG & AT THE  
WRONG TIME.**

# Effective Parenting Includes Good Timing

We pick terrible times to address a problem--in the moment! We know it, yet we persist.



- \* The Blender & the Rabbit Hole
- \* The Window Divides
- \* THE CLOCK



# LOADED LANGUAGE

IN AN EMOTIONALLY CHARGED MOMENT, THE LANGUAGE WE CHOOSE CAN SET THE CHARGE OF THE MOMENT

# REACTIVE AND LOADED LANGUAGE

***“YOU’RE BEING RIDICULOUS!!”***

***“Man up!”***

***“You are SO ungrateful!”***

***“CALM DOWN! IT’S NOT THAT BIG OF A DEAL!”***

***“Grow up!”***

***“So what, you’re going to cry about this?”***

***“Are you going to keep freaking out about this?!”***

***“You’re acting like a BRAT. Get it together!”***

***“Well, your sister can do it. Why is this so hard for you?!”***

# LEADING & LOADED LANGUAGE TO PEER ISSUES

**“HE SAID WHAT?! WHERE IS YOUR TEACHER DURING ALL OF THIS, HMM?”**

“I don’t know why she is always picking on you.  
Poor baby. She’s just jealous.”

**“OK - THAT’S IT! I’M CALLING THE SCHOOL. THIS HARASSMENT HAS TO STOP”**

**“That little boy is a sociopath – just like his brother!”**

**\* Interviewing for pain\***    So...how was Ashley today?... was she nice to you?

.... Did she sit with you? What happened at break...? Did she text you?

# **4 tips for managing social conflict**

# **1. Assume Omission**

“LORD OF THE FLIES”

**Know you may NEVER get  
the whole story or how  
your kid played into a  
situation.**

**In highly charged  
emotional moments, they  
will not accurately  
perceive events  
(Nor do you)**

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## 2. Seek & Share Information

“You get more flies with honey than with vinegar”

Dear Teacher X,

I hope this finds you well. I am wondering if you can help me understand whatever seems to be happening at lunch.

I am only hearing my son's side of things and I'm sure there has to be missing information as his view of things can't be accurate.

Can you help?

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### **3. Get Consent to Contact**

“I’m just gonna shoot Sam’s mom a quick text so she knows what her daughter is saying”

Your trust relationship with your child is most valuable pre-high school.

Colluding with or confronting another mom may “cost” you dearly so choose carefully.

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## **4. Leave Room for the Wrong**

Your ego is not your amigo

Teens HATE to be wrong but are oftentimes in the wrong.

Refrain from

**“SEE?!?”**

**&**

**“I told you!!”**

Leave room to BE wrong  
Leave room for THEIR wrong

# **Teens need to be listened TO before they can Listen**

**Looks like  
Seems like  
Sounds Like**

# EFFECTIVE PARENTING INCLUDES OBSERVATIONAL LANGUAGE

The words we use to describe a situation is POWERFUL

Observational Language takes your emotion OUT of the moment

Looks like ...

Seems like ...

Sounds like ...

Observational language  
(no judgement)

Say what you SEE

# HELPFUL & OBSERVATIONAL LANGUAGE

“Looks like you are really upset. Nothing went right today. I get it. I’d like to help. First, find a different tone please.”

**“You are saying this at a level 9. I need you to say it again on a level 5”**

“This looks like it is too hard for you to do right now. Yesterday it was fine but not today”

**“I think what you meant to say is, ‘thank you for dinner’ ”**

“Sounds like you tried everything you could think of at the time. It didn’t work. I hate it when that happens.”

# Parenting language for GRIT moments

“Hey - this is SUPPOSED to feel hard. Your worried feeling means you care and that’s good. But it looks like it doesn’t feel good.”

“You may perform well. You may not. That’s up to you. Just perform HARD. We value effort in this family”

“Right now you FEAR is tricking you to feel weak. But you are stronger than you think. But for now, let’s take a break from this and...”

# What this sounds like

**“OBVIOUSLY YOU SAW “RED” - & OF COURSE YOU FELT THAT WAY, BUT YOU HAVE TO LEARN TO CHOOSE YOUR REACTION.”**

VS

**“WHAT THE HELL WERE YOU THINKING??”**

“Do you feel proud of your choice here? Is this the look you were going for? - making a younger kid cry? This reflects on YOU, not me”

VS

**“YOU SHOULD BE ASHAMED OF YOURSELF. YOUR DAD AND I ARE HORRIFIED!”**



**“YOU CAN FEEL THAT WAY OF COURSE – BUT WE EXPECT YOU TO ACT  
MORE RESPECTFULLY. THIS IS WHERE MATURITY STARTS.”**

**“YOU CAN GET MAD. YOU CAN’T GET MEAN. YOU NEED TO SET THIS  
RIGHT.”**

**“BEING RESPONSIBLE MEANS DOING THE RIGHT THING  
AFTER YOU DO THE WRONG THING”**

**“WE EXPECT YOU TO COME UP WITH A PLAN TO MAKE THIS RIGHT.  
WE KNOW YOU WILL DO THE RIGHT THING”**





# Parenting Tips for Learning Moments

- Ask yourself, "what do I want him/her to learn here?"
- Ask better questions...
  - "Can you tell me what you think went wrong?"
  - "When did you start to FEEL that this was a bad idea?"
- State your experience w/o blame: "Can I tell you what happened for me?"
- Sleep on it
- Preemptive compliments *"I trust you'll make the right choice"*

**“EGO” Protection: teens have very sensitive egos. Create learning without shame**



MAKE THEM FEEL “SAFE” to EXPLORE MISTAKES  
By ASKING ABOUT THEIR **INTENTIONS** vs THEIR ACTIONS

**RESPECTING THIS PROCESS TO YOU KID, FOSTERS RESPECT IN YOUR KID**

# Safe Intention Exploration

"Did you mean to make her cry? OK, well that's good - but that's what ended up happening, so...what do you want to do about it now?"

What would YOU want if this were you? "

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"Were you hoping it would just go away if you waited long enough?"

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"Did you mean to let your friend take the fall? OK - I didn't think so."

**NO MATTER WHAT THE ANSWER - ASSUME THE BEST OF THEM.  
THIS WILL BE INTERNALIZED OVER TIME**

# Battle grounds

When and where to pick your battles

Technology & privacy

Self-care/sleep hygiene

Boundaries

Friends/rules

Responsibilities/expectations

Summer Free-time

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# Outpost Summer Camps

Being of service  
Being in a community  
“Superordinate” goals  
UNplugged activities

# TODAY'S MENU - IN REVIEW

- ANXIETY
- MATURATION & THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN - (DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS, NEEDS, LIMITATIONS)
- CONFIDENCE IS EARNED, NOT GIVEN & BUILDING GRIT IS MESSY & ANNOYING
- PARENTING PITFALLS & OBSERVATIONAL LANGUAGE
  - THE BLENDER & THE RABBIT HOLE
  - LOOKS LIKE...SEEMS LIKE...SOUNDS LIKE...
- 4 TIPS FOR MANAGING CONFLICT
  - ASSUME OMISSION; CONSENT TO CONTACT; SEEK & SHARE INFO; LEAVE ROOM FOR THE WRONG