

# THE PREVENTATIVE PARENT

HELPING PARENTS BE PROTECTIVE FACTORS IN THE  
LIVES OF THEIR TEENS

## In this Newsletter:

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- The Adolescent Brain
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## Setting SMART Goals

Maddie Louder - Student Assistance  
Professional Monroe High School

Be SMART when kicking off the new year! Goal setting and planning can help teens find purpose and decrease depression or feelings of hopelessness. Accomplishing goals also helps teens naturally release dopamine, the reward hormone in the brain, and build self-efficacy. Basically, we are teaching teens that they *can* do hard things when they face challenges they set for themselves. This makes them more likely to overcome challenges in the future. Be SMART about goal-setting!

**Specific.** Set real numbers with real deadlines for specific results you want to see. Instead of saying "I want to run more," say "I want to run 1 mile a day 3x a week."

**Measurable.** Make sure your goal is trackable. Measuring, checking off lists, or reaching milestones helps create the rewarding feeling to help you stay motivated!

**Attainable.** Work towards a goal that challenges you, *and* is possible. Starting with smaller goals helps build the confidence to chase after bigger goals. It is okay to start small! For example, if your student is struggling with turning in assignments, maybe help them set the goal to make a to-do of all their assignments at the end of each school day.

**Realistic.** Be honest with your abilities, mental capacity, and time limitations. We are also human and are limited! It is important to acknowledge the reality of your circumstances to make sure your goal is something you could realistically accomplish.

**Time-bound.** Give yourself a deadline for the task or goal. Making sure you have a time frame helps keep you focused and helps you prioritize tasks. If a deadline is too far away, it might increase procrastination. Make your deadline doable, but also something that motivates you to get the task done.

Setting goals and reaching them helps teens understand that they can overcome challenging tasks to learn and grow from them. Checking in on teens as they work toward goals helps them know someone also cares about their success. Celebrating their accomplishment when they reach a goal is also beneficial to encourage teens to set more goals for themselves in the future.

# The Adolescent Brain

Ever wonder why teens are SO moody? Let me give you a hint, it's their brains! Teens are in a prime time in their life, where they are also hit with a changing brain, a hormonal storm, and changing interactions that leave them vulnerable to many different things. Let's break down a few of the key players in an adolescent's brain development and how it impacts their functioning.

During the adolescent years, teens are experiencing something called synaptic pruning. This is the process where neurons that are no longer needed start to disappear so new neural connections can form. This is good news for teens! This means this is the time in our lives when we can start specializing on a specific skill or ability. However, scientists also call this the "use it or lose it" phase, which means the neural connections that are constantly firing will stay and those that aren't will be lost. The activities teens are engaging in matters! If they are trying sports, music, clubs, and learning new knowledge, those connections will be formed. However, if they are engaging in substances, influenced negatively by peers, and undergoing chronic stress, these can have long-term impacts on mental health.

The pre-frontal cortex is also an important factor in teen development. This is the part of the brain that controls decision making, logical thinking, and problem solving. Because this part of the brain is last to develop, teens typically operate from a different part of the brain, called the amygdala. This part of our brain is responsible for emotions. Ever make a risky, impulsive, irrational decision as a teen? The amygdala is the culprit! Our amygdala is the "green light" for our emotional responses, and our pre-frontal cortex is the "break pedal." Unfortunately, the green light is always going, and the break pedal is still learning how to work. Helping teens recognize and regulate emotions can be important during this stage. In other words, "name to tame" those emotions!



## Community Resources

SEE WHAT RESOURCES ARE IN THE COMMUNITY

### After School Programs for Children & Youth:

Take the Next Steps Kidz Club:

<https://www.tns.org/kidz-club-after-school-program>

Monroe Boys & Girls Club:

<https://bgcsc.org/clubs/monroe-club/>

Sky Valley YMCA After School Care: <https://ymca-snoco.org/programs/child-care/school-age-care/>

### Mental Health Services

CH Counseling Services

<https://www.chcounselingservices.org/counselors>

Stories of Hope

<https://www.rosydeprado-storiesofhope.com/>

SeaMar Behavioral Health

<https://www.seamar.org/snohomish-bh-monroe.html>

### Community Support Groups for Teens

Queer and Trans Youth Community Group:

<https://www.rosydeprado-storiesofhope.com/groups>

### Monroe School District offers a new way to engage with mental health services!

Care Solace is a company devoted to connecting you with a mental health provider in two weeks or less. Check out this link to start your mental health journey:

<https://caresolace.com/site/monroefamilies>