

31st FALL JUVENILE JUSTICE INSTITUTE

When All the Stars Align: Partnering for Better Outcomes for Court-Involved Children



ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

Using Adolescent Development to Better Understand Kids in the Juvenile Justice System

Presented by

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VIRGINIA JUVENILE JUSTICE ASSOCIATION

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Agenda

- Introduction
- Basic Facts about Adolescent Development
- Cognitive Development
- Identity, Autonomy and Independence
- Implications for Working with Kids in the Juvenile Justice System

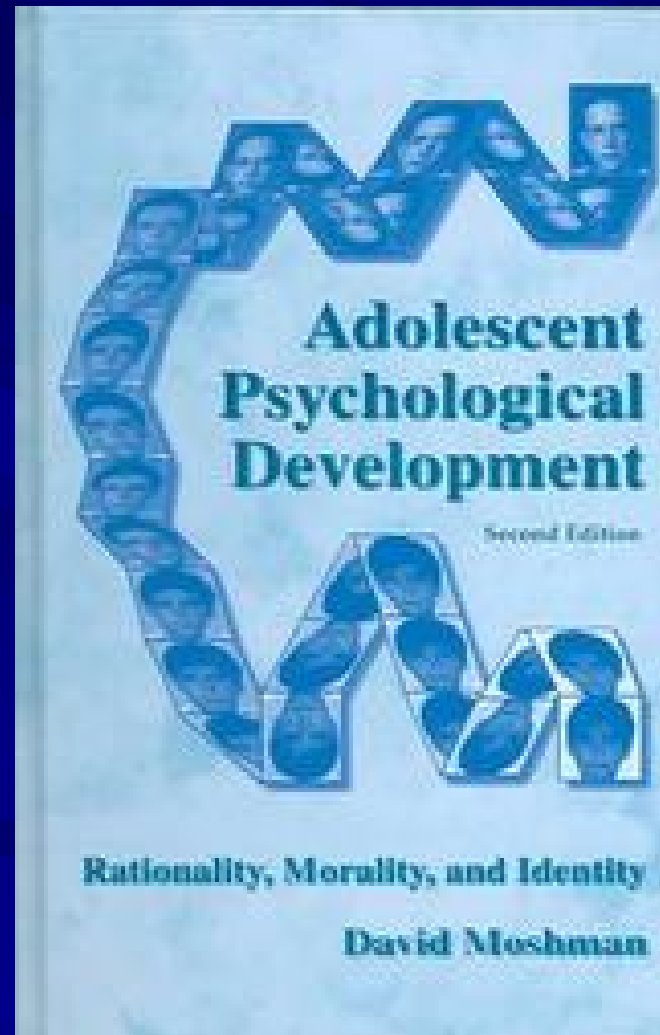


Introduction

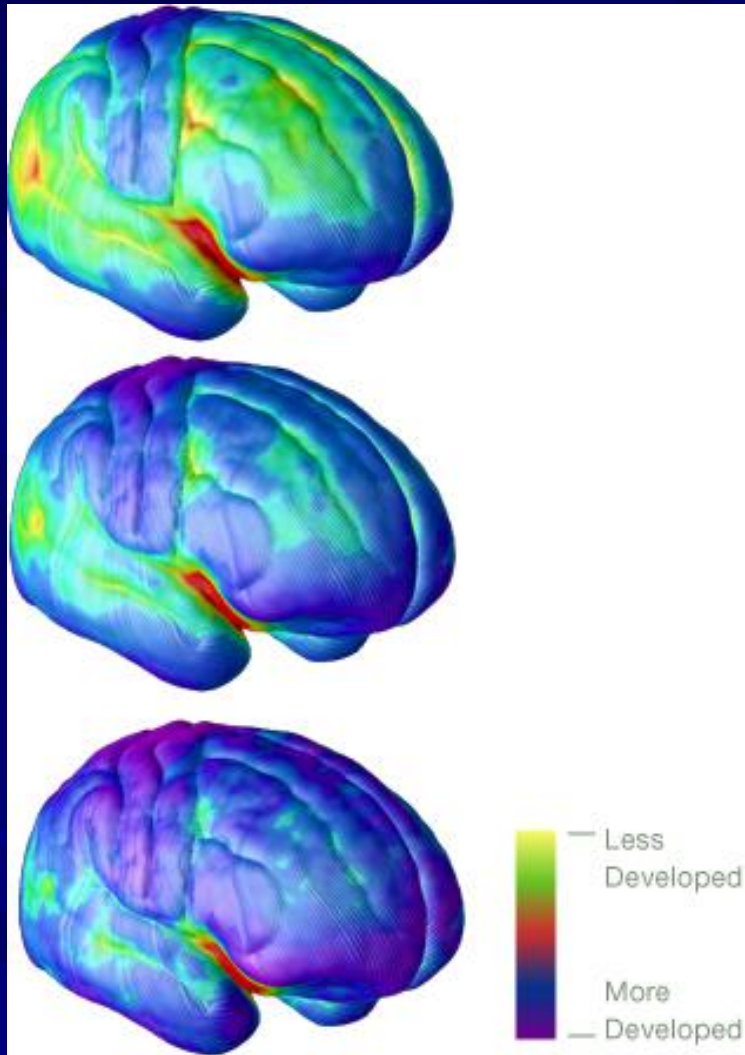
- The first juvenile court was established in 1899 in Chicago, and reflected the belief that developmental factors are central to understanding kids' involvement in the justice system

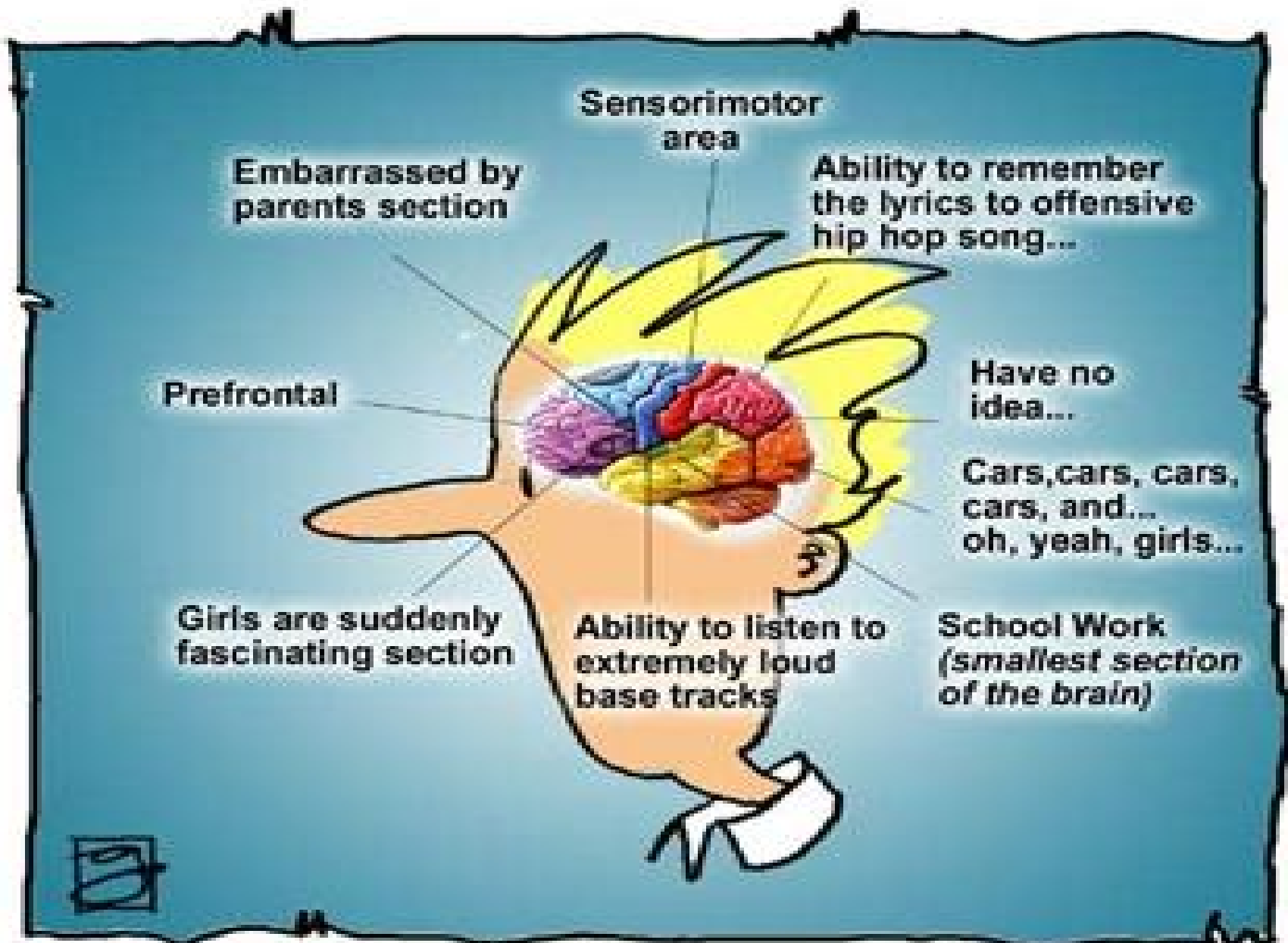


Some Basic Facts About Adolescent Development

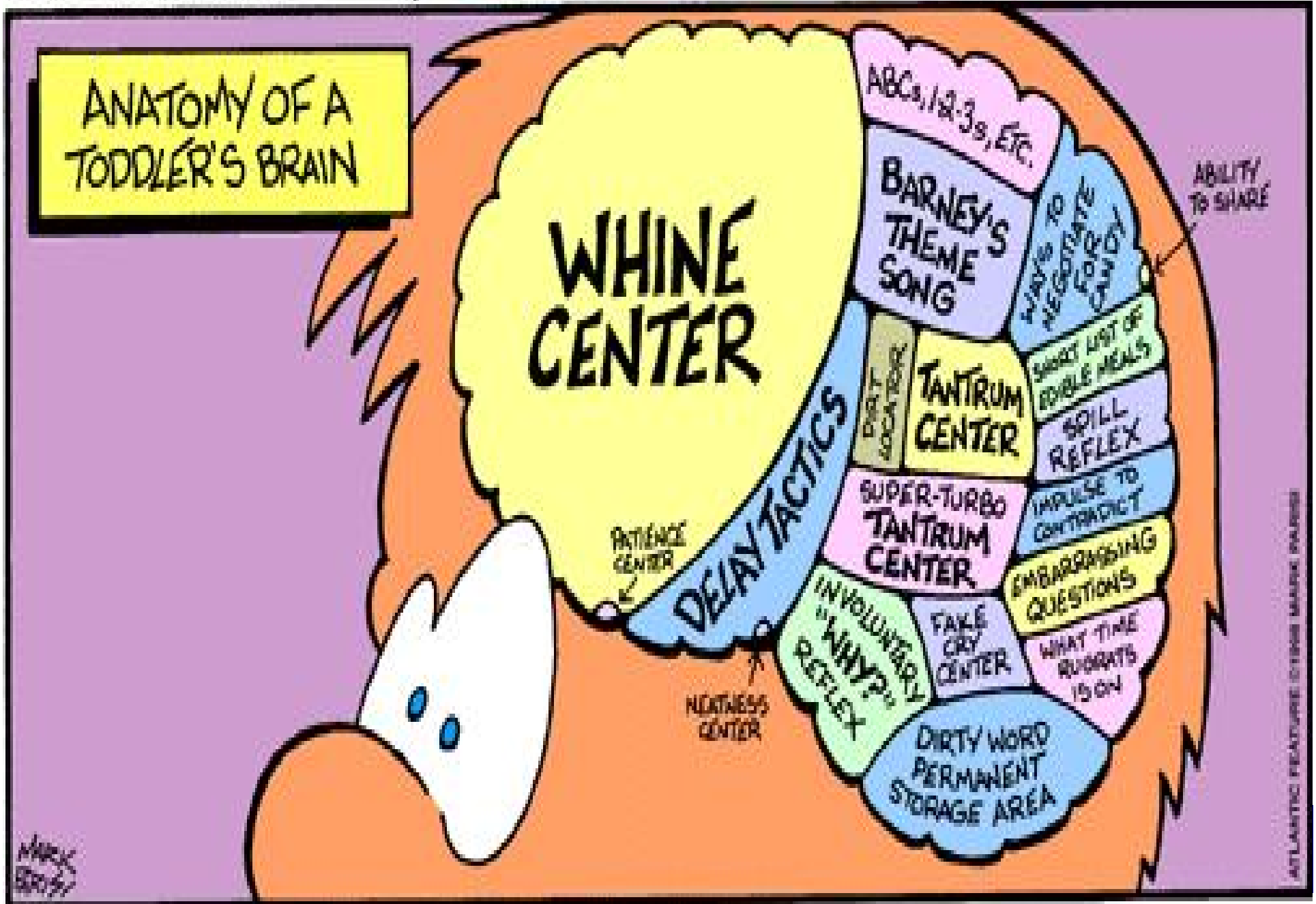


Some Basic Neuroanatomy





Anatomy of a Teenager's Brain



Most Research Describes Behavior That is Normative

- Alcohol use is normative (not desirable)
- Delinquent behavior is normative (not desirable)
- Aggressive behavior is normative (not desirable)

Implications

- Kids in the juvenile justice system may not be that different from kids who avoid the juvenile justice system...at least in some ways
- Involvement in the juvenile justice system is a function of the juvenile, the family, the environment, and system issues

Little Developmental Research Describes Kids Who Develop in “At Risk” Contexts

- Kids in the juvenile justice system, as a group, show more delayed development than those who avoid the system
- The same circumstances that increase kids’ risk for involvement in the legal system also affect their biological, cognitive, emotional, and moral development

Low Socioeconomic Status as a Risk Factor

- Children from poor families are more likely to be exposed to a variety of risk events and factors
 - Greater “biological” challenges
 - Less parental supervision and knowledge
 - Increased likelihood of impaired parental continuity
 - Riskier environments

Biological: Exposure to Toxins & Poor Nutrition

- Children from poor families are at greater risk for exposure to toxins, which is associated with
 - Intellectual limitations
 - Difficult temperaments
 - Physical limitations

Low SES: Parental Supervision

- Children from low SES families are more likely to
 - Live with a single parent
 - Go for extended periods of time unsupervised
 - Spend less positive time with parents
 - Be subject to authoritarian parenting styles

Classification of Parenting Styles

Parenting styles

Accepting,
responsive

Rejecting,
unresponsive

Demanding,
controlling

Authoritative

Authoritarian

Undemanding,
uncontrolling

Indulgent

Neglectful

TABLE 10.7

Parents' Involvement and High School Students' Grades

Survey Item	Self-reported Grades			
	Mostly A's	Mostly B's	Mostly C's	Mostly D's
Mother keeps close track of how well child does in school.	92%	89%	84%	80%
Father keeps close track of how well child does in school.	85%	79%	69%	64%
Parents almost always know child's whereabouts.	88%	81%	72%	61%
Child talks with mother or father almost every day.	75%	67%	59%	45%
Parents attend PTA meetings at least once in a while.	25%	22%	20%	15%
Child lives in household with both parents.	80%	71%	64%	60%

Note: This table, based on a survey of more than 30,000 high school seniors, shows the percentage of students with various grade averages who gave positive answers to each survey item. In each instance, the higher the grades were, the more likely the parents were to be involved with the child.

SOURCE: NCES, 1985.

Low SES: Language

- Language development impacts school performance, problem solving, communication skills, and self regulation
- By age 4, kids in poor families are exposed to adult speech at half the rate of kids in middle class families, and one third the rate of kids in professional families
- Low SES parents offer negatives to their kids (“don’t, stop, bad, wrong”) at twice the rate of parents who are professionals

Impact of Abuse & Neglect

- Abused and neglected children have difficulty forming secure emotional attachments, often misinterpret the behavior of others as hostile, and often respond with aggression
- Rejected children become emotionally numb and have trouble learning the basics of empathy, sympathy, and caring

Impact of Abuse and Neglect

- Abused and neglected children are almost twice as likely to be arrested for violent crime than non-maltreated children
- Maltreated children are 4 to 7 times more likely to commit a violent act than non-maltreated youth
- Abused and neglected children who are arrested at an earlier age are more likely to be repeat violent offenders

Impact of Trauma

- Children whose psychological functioning is overwhelmed by abuse, trauma, or neglect often
 - Feel disconnected and isolated from the world around them
 - Have little hope and that life is without meaning
 - Are unmotivated as they see little chance for change

Abuse, Violence, and Social Learning

- Children learn to use violence as a way to manage daily situations when they are the victims of violence and/or see others victimized
- Abuse encourages victims to learn to use aggression as a means of solving problems and obtaining desired results

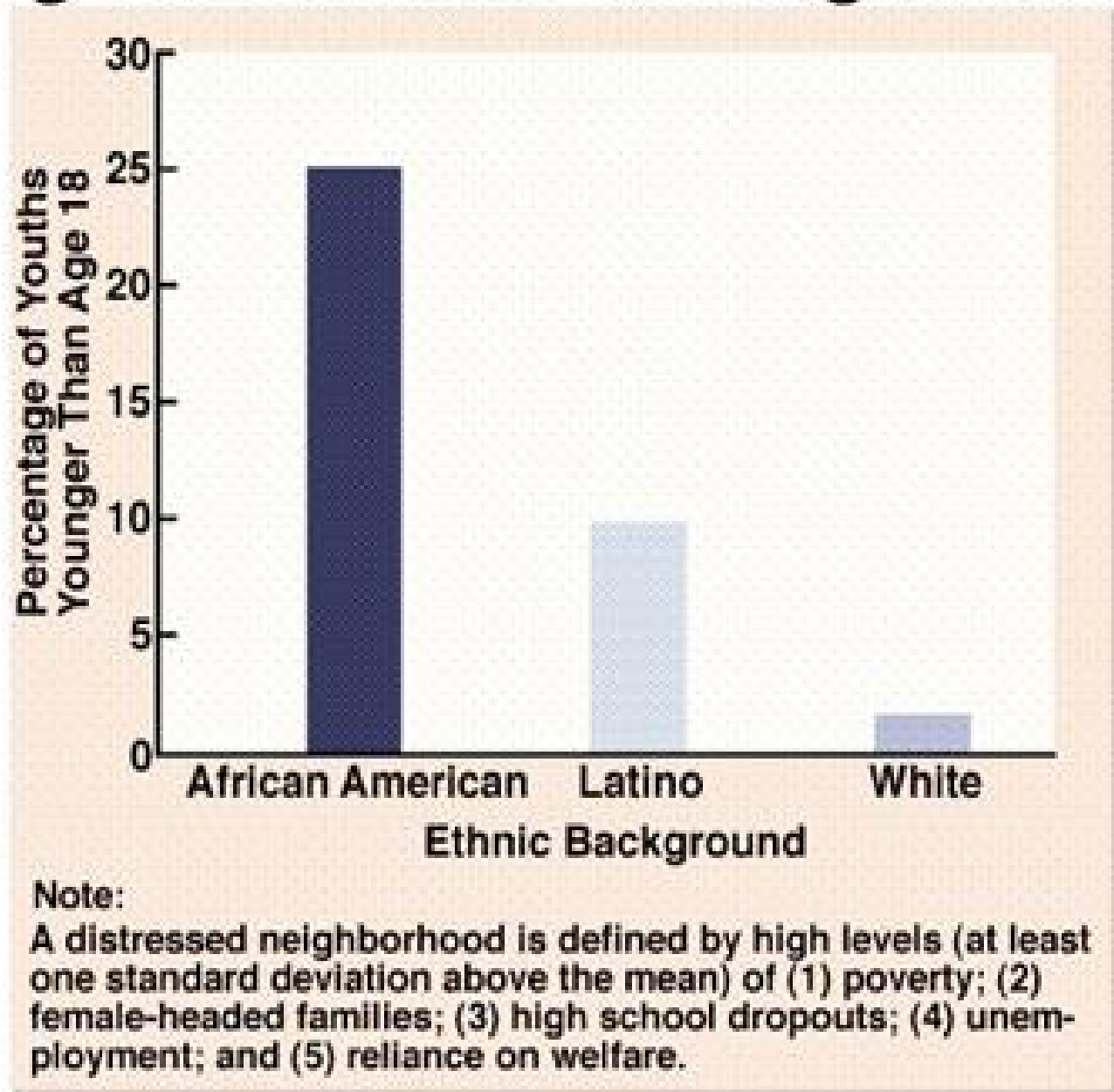
Low SES: Risky Environments

- Poor children are more likely to
 - Be exposed to negative peer groups
 - Be exposed to negative role models
 - Witness and experience community violence
 - Be the victims of domestic abuse and neglect

Low SES: Risky Environments

- Living in a disorganized, high crime neighborhood is associated with
 - greater rates of violence
 - Increased likelihood of drug use
 - Earlier onset of delinquent behaviors

Living in Distressed Neighborhoods



Low SES:

Emotional & Behavioral Disorders

- Poor children are more likely to experience emotional, cognitive, and behavioral disorders:
 - Learning disabilities
 - Limited intellectual functioning
 - Conduct disorders
 - ADD/ADHD
 - Substance abuse
 - Mood disorders
 - Anxiety disorders (including PTSD)

Kids in the Juvenile Justice System

■ Incarcerated Kids

- Between 28% and 60% have an educational disability; within that group:
 - 11% have a Learning Disability diagnosis
 - 20% meet Severely Emotionally Disturbed criteria
 - 18% have Attention Deficit Disorder diagnosis
 - 3% to 10% have a Mental Retardation diagnosis

■ Arrest Rates

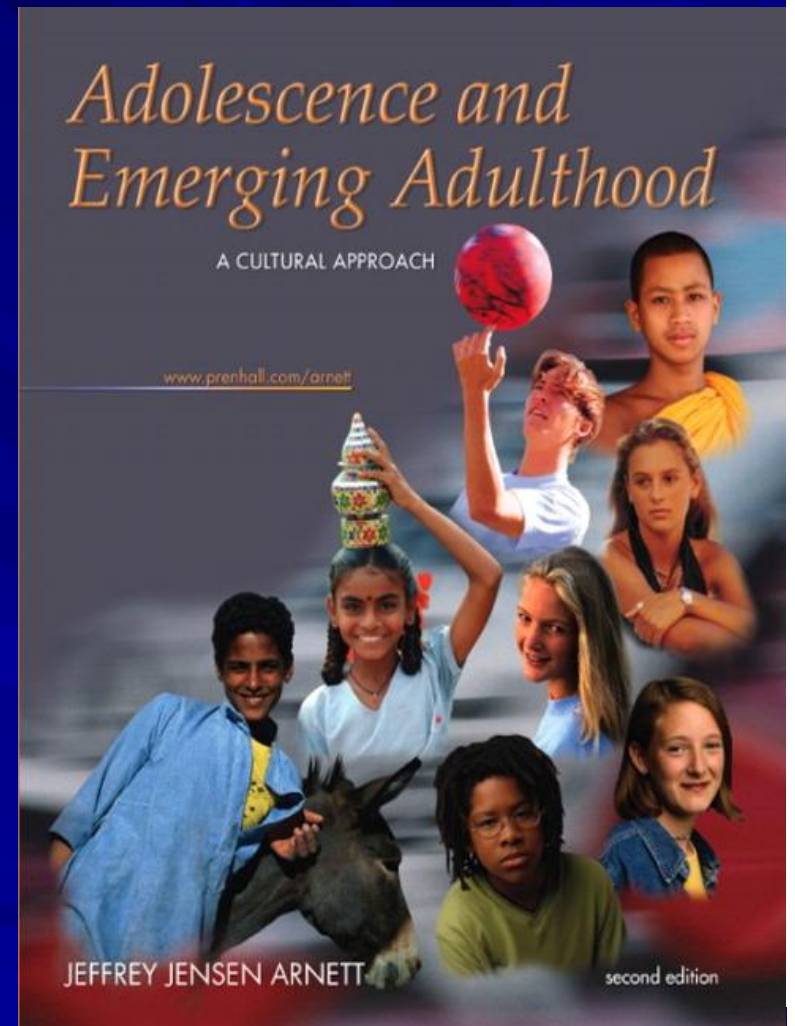
- 18% of kids with mental retardation diagnoses, 31% of kids with learning disability diagnoses, and 57% of kid classified as SED are arrested within 5 years of leaving high school

Ongoing Impact of Disability

- Kids with disabilities are twice as likely to be arrested than non-disabled youth for comparable delinquent activity, and they receive more severe adjudications
- Possible explanations
 - Lack of avoidance/non-detection strategies
 - Used as scapegoats by peers
 - Act defiantly, uncooperatively, or evasively
 - Less adept at knowing how, when, and with whom to talk

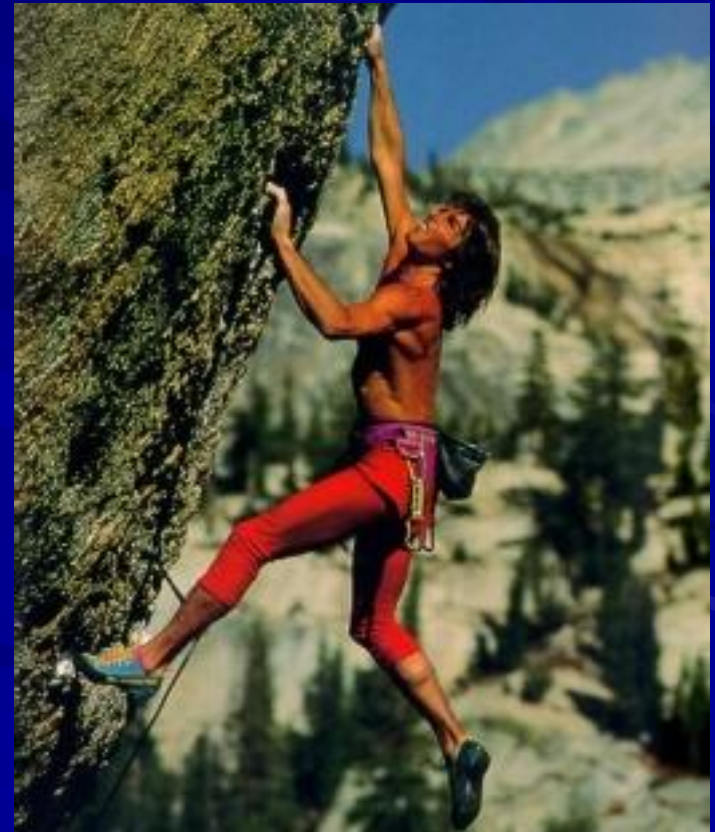
Implications

- “Textbook” descriptions of adolescents and adolescent development may fall far from describing the kids in the juvenile justice system



Adolescence is a Time of Experimentation & Change

- Adolescence (in the US) provides for increasing independence and autonomy, with associated risk for mistakes and error
- Risky behavior is *normative* among adolescents



Implications

- Personality, roles, and values are changing during adolescence and may be “tried on” by the juvenile
- It is difficult to predict what a teenager’s personality and values may be at a later point in time



Adolescents Develop at Different Rates and in Different Ways

- Not all adolescents develop at the same rate, in the same way, and at the same time
- Development in one domain is not accompanied by development in another domain
- Development in any domain is gradual and non-linear, steps forwards and backwards

Implications

- One cannot assume a linear and perfect relationship between development, capacities, and age



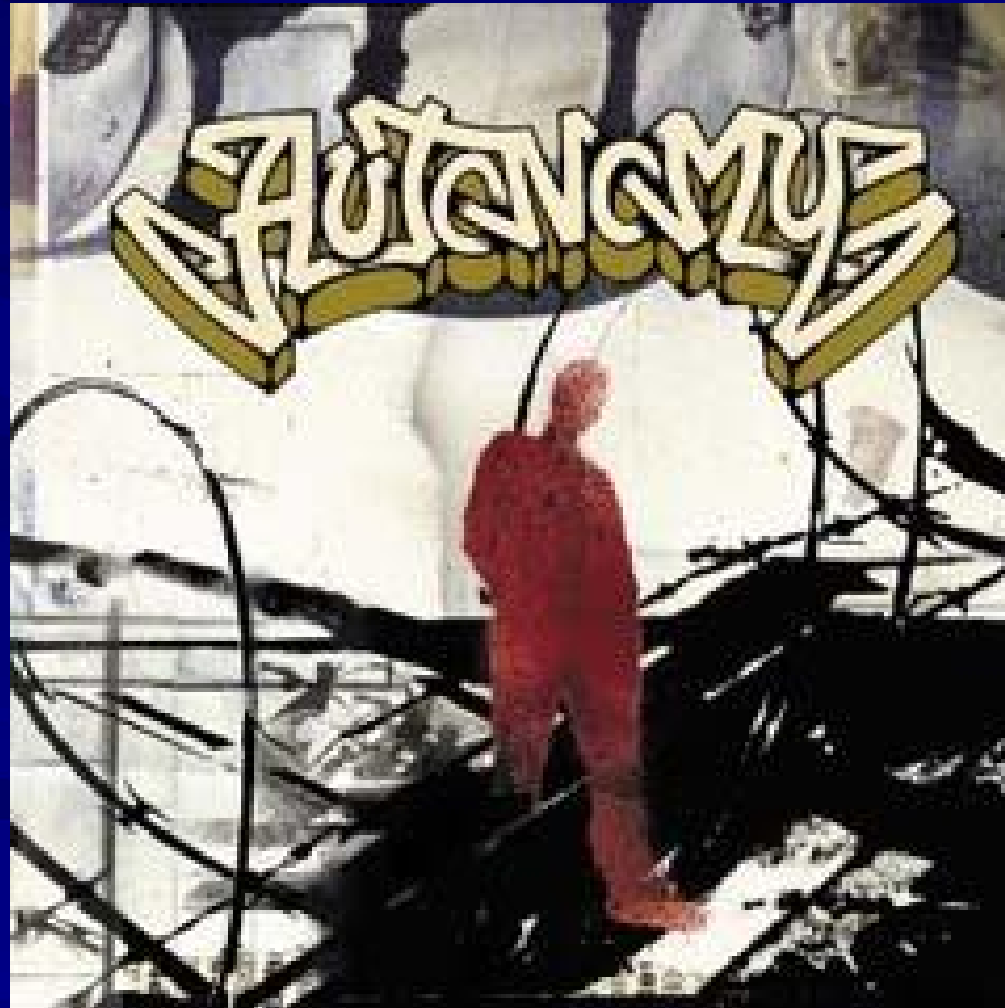
Implications

- One cannot assume a linear and perfect relationship between development in one domain or sphere and development in another (e.g., physical, cognitive, emotional, moral)
- One cannot predict development in one domain, based on development in another

Implications

- Juveniles can show varying abilities over time and across situations
- There will be times when we are positively surprised and negatively surprised
- Keep in mind that physical development can often serve as a pass key to adult opportunities

Autonomy, Identity and Independence



Development of Autonomy

- Adolescents ideally develop and refine cognitive, emotional, and social skills to function effectively in society
- Emotional, cognitive, and environmental challenges can limit an adolescent's development of these competencies
- Presence of close, supportive relationships with parents, or a parent figure, increases likelihood of positive development in this sphere

The Role of Families and Peers



The Role of Family

- Family provides or models:

- A safe environment
- Nurturance
- Protection
- Direction, and limits
- Values

The Role of Peers

- Peers provide or model:
 - Sense of belonging and acceptance
 - Recognition, advice, encouragement
 - Role models
 - Sense of competence and mastery
 - Values

Peer Relationships

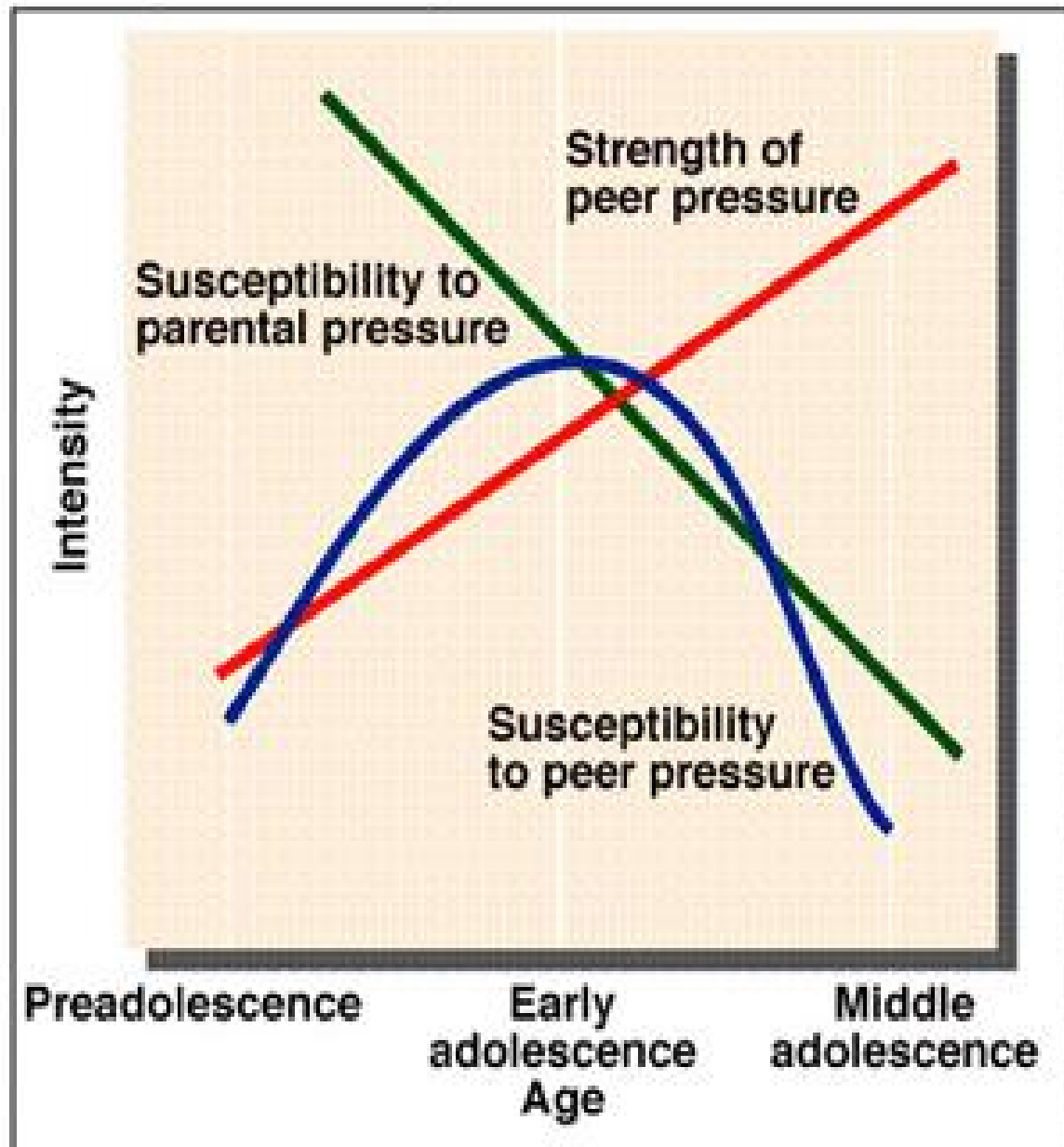
- During adolescence, teens
 - Spend more time with peers and less with family
 - Are less monitored by family and institutions
 - Increase contact with the opposite sex
 - Associate with peer groups with which they identify (which can change over time)
- Close peer relationships are integral to healthy social development

Influence of Peer Groups

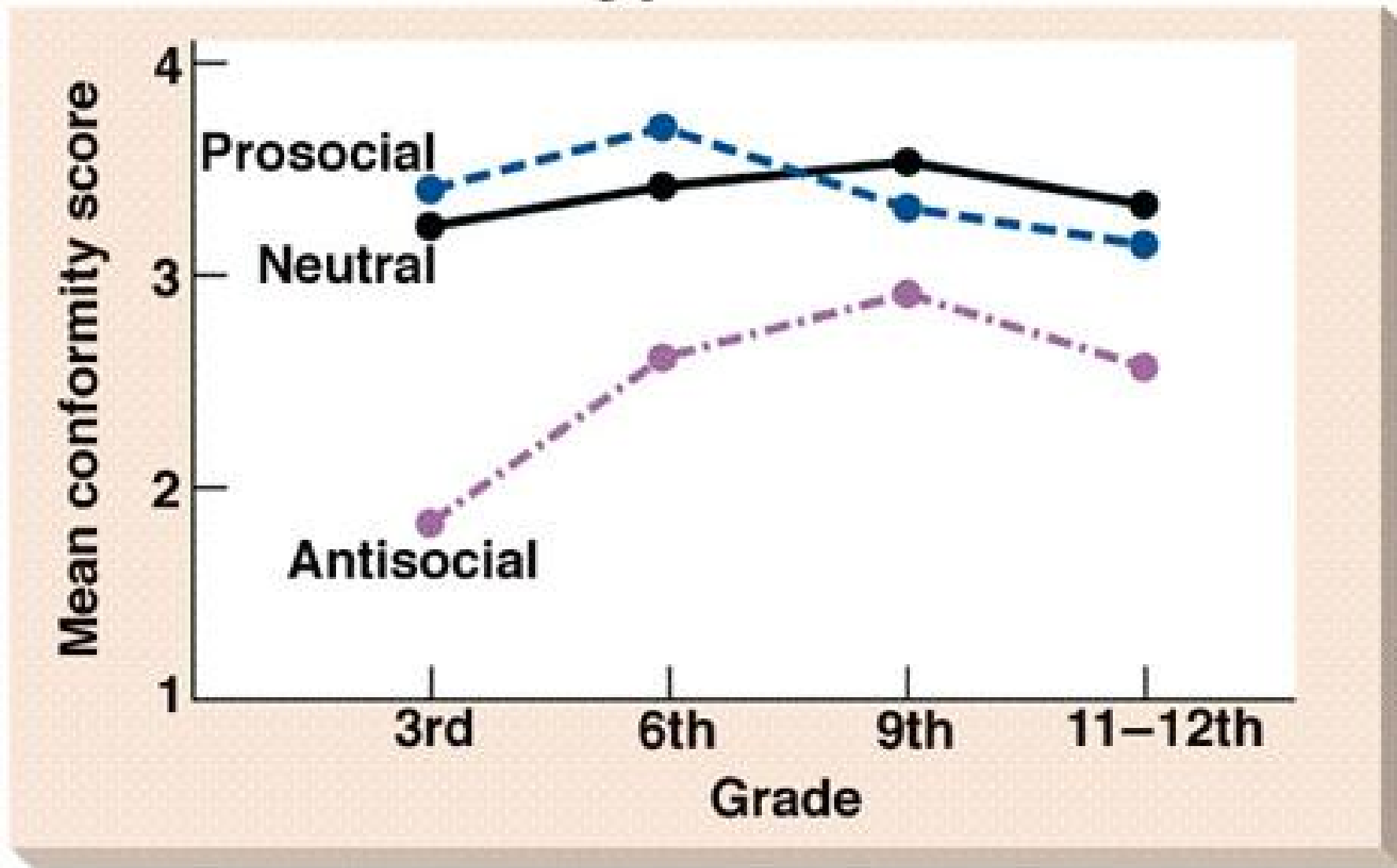
- Although historically over-estimated, peer group influence is greatest during adolescence, so that peer group values and choices may affect an adolescents' choices despite thoughts to the contrary



Susceptibility to Peer Pressure



Mean Scores for Peer Conformity on Different Types of Behavior



Identity Summary

- Adolescents are attempting to establish a coherent identity
- Adolescents may “try on” different personalities and experiment with different peer groups
- Although the impact of family decreases in adolescence its effects remain
- Peer groups play an increasingly important role with adolescents

Cognitive Development



5 Major Cognitive Changes That Occur During Adolescence

- Thinking about what is possible, not just what is real
- Thinking about abstract concepts
- Appreciation of logic and the process of thinking
- Thinking simultaneously about multiple facets of a problem and weighing them before taking action
- Increasing ability to see things in relative, rather than black-and-white, absolute, terms



Adolescents' Cognitive Abilities

- New abilities develop over time and may be used inconsistently
- Behavior, of course, is not solely the product of abstract cognitive abilities and includes things like:
 - Risk perception and risk taking behavior
 - Time perception and present oriented thinking
 - Egocentrism
 - Ability to empathize
 - Reversion to magical thinking
 - Values of peer group

Distinguishing Between What Adolescents Are Capable Of And What They Actually Do

- Although adolescents are developing new cognitive abilities, they do not use these abilities consistently over time or over a variety of situations
- Other characteristics of adolescent thought, as well as external factors, can interfere with or compromise the ability to use adult-like cognition on a consistent basis

Adolescents' Risk Taking

- Risk taking behavior peaks during adolescence
- Adolescents perceive themselves as less vulnerable to risk than do adults
- Sensation seeking (the need/desire for varied and novel sensations and experiences) is more present during adolescence than during adulthood

Temporal Orientation

- Adolescents have more difficulty thinking about the future and delaying gratification than their adult counterparts
- As compared to adults, adolescents discount the future, value more heavily short term benefits, and discount risks



Egocentrism

- Adolescents, as they attempt to identify who they are, become self conscious, self focused, and self absorbed, and they may show less empathy
- Adolescents may mistakenly conclude that others spend as much time evaluating them as they spend evaluating themselves
- Adolescents' self focus may lead them to believe that their experiences are unique and cannot be understood by others

Reversion to Magical Thinking

- When stressed, adolescents, may revert to “magical” thinking that is more associated with pre-adolescence
- Magical thinking may lead adolescents to misjudge the likelihood of otherwise predictable and obvious outcomes

External Factors Can Interfere with Cognition & Problem Solving

- Learning difficulties can lead to faulty thinking: between 30% and 50% of children involved in juvenile court have some type of learning disability
- Previous victimization leads to a heightened sense of danger and self-protection

Psychosocial Development

- “The complexity and sophistication of the process of individual decision making as it is affected by a range of cognitive, emotional, and social factors”
 - Beth Cauffman & Lawrence Steinberg

Psychosocial Development

■ Responsibility

- Ability to be self reliant and unaffected by external pressure in decision making

■ Perspective

- Temporal-ability to appreciate short term and long term consequences
- Interpersonal-ability to take others' perspectives

■ Temperance

- Ability to exercise self restraint and control one's impulses

Implications of Psychosocial Development

- Ability to appraise risks and consequences
- Ability to act with prudence and after consideration
- Ability to resist peer pressure
- Ability to experience victim empathy

Adolescent Decision Making & Delinquent Behavior

- Cauffman & Steinberg (2000)
administered measures of responsibility, perspective, temperance, & antisocial decision making to 1015 adolescents (8th grade, 10th grade, 12th grade, & college students)

Adolescent Decision Making & Delinquent Behavior

- Moderate relationship between antisocial decision making, and sex and age
- Responsibility, perspective, and temperance were all correlated at significant levels (r 's = .36 to .40)
- Moderate relationship between age and responsibility, perspective, and temperance, with 8th and 10th graders showing lower levels of maturity

Adolescent Decision Making & Delinquent Behavior

- Anti-social decision making was negatively correlated with measures of psychosocial maturity
- Age was not a significant predictor of antisocial thinking and decision making when psychosocial maturity was considered
- Psychosocial maturity was a more powerful predictor of antisocial decision making than age



Implications for Working with Youth

Implications for Working with Youth

- Understand the youth in the context of his or her environment or experience
- Make a concerted effort to assess cognitive, emotional, and personality development during contacts

Implications for Working with Youth

- Do not make assumptions about ability or development based on physical appearance
- Do not assume capacity in one area based on capacity in another
- Remain cognizant of the power of peer groups and family, and craft dispositions accordingly

Implications for Working with Youth

- Communicate in a way that the youth understands
 - Interviews
 - Documents
- Consider issues of psychosocial maturity (temporal, emotional control, perspective of others, self reliance) when it comes to
 - Making sense of youth's behaviors and goals
 - Deliberating about and crafting dispositions

Questions



Contacts

■ www.mac-adoldev-juvjustice.org

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