

Coping with COVID-19: Psychosocial support - A PANCAP - PAHO Webinar

**COVID-19 and psychosocial
support for adolescents**

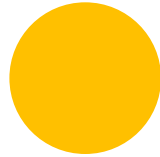
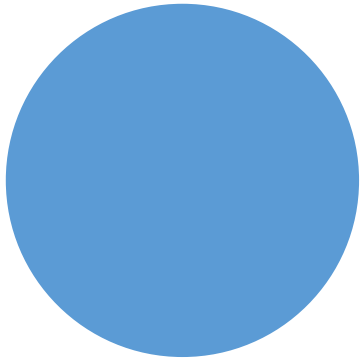
Presented By

Hanif E. A. Benjamin, LMSW, BSc., C.C.T., C.F.T.
Clinical Therapist & Clinical Traumatologist

COVID-19 AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT FOR ADOLESCENTS

Presented
By:

Hanif E. A. Benjamin, LMSW, BSc., C.C.T., C.F.T.
Clinical Therapist & Clinical Traumatologist
President & Chief Executive Officer
The Centre For Human Development Group of
Companies Limited



INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

SESSION OUTLINE

YOUTH BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

THE WHY'S OF ADOLESCENT BEHAVIOUR

MAJOR ISSUES FOR DURING COVID-19

**SUPPORTING OUR
TEENAGERS/ADOLESCENTS DURING THE
COVID-19 CRISIS**

STRATEGIES FOR SELF-CARE



Youth Brain Development

- Youth brain development research shows that youth behaviour and thinking is significantly attributed to their developmental stage
- The teen brain is not fully developed until the mid to late 20's including functioning that **controls impulses, calms emotions, provides an understanding of the consequences of behaviour and allows rational decision-making**
- The frontal lobe and the cerebellum are still developing in adolescents are still developing in teens, causing lack of logical reasoning
- The developmental stage youth are in can lead to a lack of mature capacity to self regulate in emotionally charged contexts, compared to adults

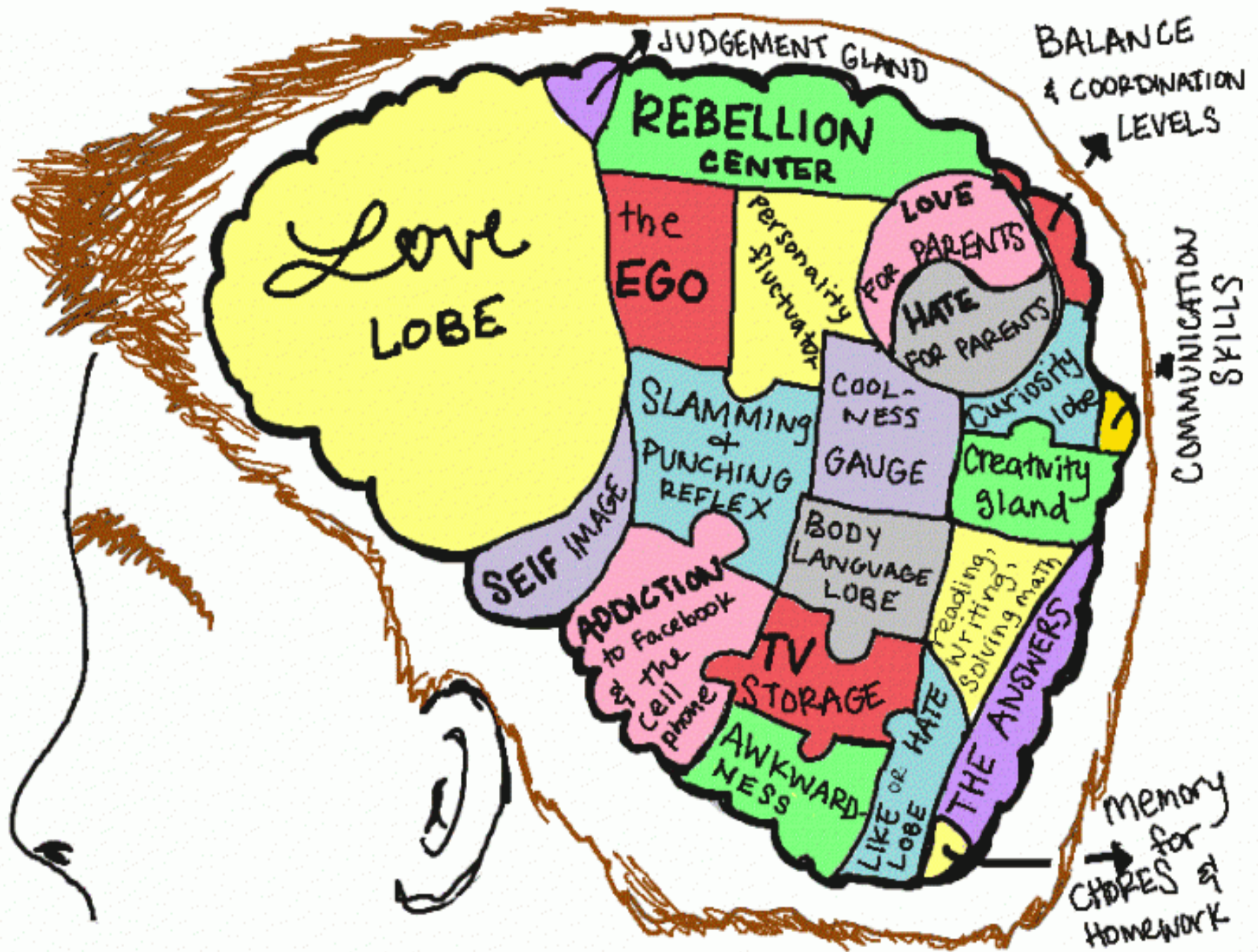


Youth Brain Development

1. The connection between adolescent brain development and behaviour is an important factor to consider.
2. Research on adolescent brain, cognitive, and psychosocial development supports the view that adolescents are fundamentally different from adults.
3. More important, consideration that youth are still learning about their environment and how to react and behave in different situations is critical.

The Why's of Adolescent Behaviour

- Youth are highly susceptible to **peer influence**; they crave short-term rewards; and they do not fully grasp the potential negative consequences of their actions.
- As a result youth are more prone to the thrill of risky and dangerous behaviour, making them vulnerable.
- The prevalence of offending peaks in the teen years of 15- 19 and then declines in the early 20's.
- *Remember, risk is part of everything youth say, do eat, sleep and breathe!*





Youth Brain Development

1. The connection between adolescent brain development and behaviour is an important factor to consider.
2. Research on adolescent brain, cognitive, and psychosocial development supports the view that adolescents are fundamentally different from adults.
3. More important, consideration that youth are still learning about their environment and how to react and behave in different situations is critical.

MAJOR ISSUES FOR DURING COVID-19

EMPHASIZE SOCIAL DISTANCING



```
graph TD; A[EMPHASIZE SOCIAL DISTANCING] --> B[REDUCED SOCIAL INTERACTION]; B --> C[EMOTIONALLY AND SOCIALLY READY]; C --> D[FREE TIME CRISIS]; D --> E[TIME]
```

REDUCED SOCIAL INTERACTION

EMOTIONALLY AND SOCIALLY READY

FREE TIME CRISIS

TIME

EMPHASIZE SOCIAL DISTANCING

- The first challenge with teens and young adults may be getting them to comply with the guidelines for social distancing.
- Teenagers tend to feel invincible, and they are likely to be well aware that the new coronavirus is not as problematic for their age range as it is for older people.
- Parents are reporting a lot of pushback when teens are told they can't go out and get together with friends.
- The fact that data actually is on their side, that coronavirus *is* less severe for them, is a problem in terms of getting them to follow along.
- They want to see their friends, and don't see why the social distancing should apply to them.

REDUCED SOCIAL INTERACTION

- The reduced social interaction will negatively impact all age groups.
- Considering that an inherent element of the life stage of adolescence is the expansion of their social network beyond the immediate family.
- Increasingly counting on their peer network for validation and support,
- The sudden loss of these networks can have a profound effect on the health and wellbeing of young people.

EMOTIONALLY AND SOCIALY READY


- Because of their developmental stage, young people may be less equipped emotionally and socially to deal with the uncertainties that come with the epidemic.
- They may have negative impact in the interruption of education, loss of employment, etc.

FREE TIME CRISIS


- With closings of schools, universities, workplaces and increasingly parks and recreational spaces, young people are finding themselves in a situation of excessive amounts of free time, and limited options to spend this time.
- However, many young people are also suffering the socioeconomic and tragic consequences of the pandemic, such as the loss of family and friends, as well as risk of famine or homelessness.

How Do Adolescents React?

- Every adolescent may reacts differently
- Reaction will depend on:
 - Developmental level
 - Individual interpretation of the event
 - Premorbid functioning
 - Previous life experiences
 - Level of exposure to trauma
 - Parental reactions and level of support
 - Subsequent changes in living situation
 - Level of physical, emotional and social support
- The majority are resilient



Supporting our Teenagers/Adolescents During the COVID-19 Crisis



CHANGING THEIR PERCEPTION OF RISK

- **Development of youth-focused messages.**
- Development of youth-focused messages and materials informing that young people are at risk for COVID-19 morbidity and mortality, and that there have been significant numbers of hospitalizations and deaths in this age group.
- Even in young people with no pre-existing conditions, using social media and digital platforms as the main vehicles.
- Remember - *Adolescents believe themselves to be invincible*

ADDRESS ADOLESCENT WELLNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH

- Concerns about the coronavirus can make adolescents and youth feel worried, anxious, and helpless in the face of this new situation.
- Considering that suicide persists as the third leading mortality cause for young people in Latin American Countries, and the high percentages of young people reporting recent suicide attempts ideation in surveys, their mental health should be an important element of the youth-focused response.
- Create opportunities for them to talk about how they feel
- Measures should be put in place to help families support their young people, and to access professional support when needed.

UNDERSTAND THEIR FRUSTRATION OVER NOT SEEING FRIENDS

- Acknowledge that you know it's frustrating for them to be cut off from friends.
- Listen to what they're feeling, validate those feelings and then be direct about how you can work together to make this situation bearable.
- Loosening rules about time spent on social media, for instance, will help compensate for the socializing time lost with school closings. Encourage them to be creative about new ways to interact with their friends socially.

VALIDATE THEIR DISAPPOINTMENT

- For many the most painful part of the coronavirus crisis will be losing important experiences: high school sports seasons, proms, theater productions, high school and college graduations.
- And while we're all missing out on very valued activities, "it's especially problematic for teenagers who are wired in their brains to think about novelty and pleasure seeking and seeking out new frontiers to be limited in this way."
- Give them room to share their feelings and listen without judgment (or without reassuring them that everything will be fine).



STRATEGIES FOR SELF- CARE

Protect Your Mental Health

- The COVID-19 pandemic is a stressful time for everyone, including young people.
- It is normal to feel sad, stressed, confused, scared or angry during a crisis
- Limit how much social media and news on COVID-19 you consume. Avoid rumors and misinformation by getting news from trusted sources
- Exercise or meditate at home
- Chat or video-call with friends and family
- Reach out to a trusted adult or professional if you need help

Help Them Practice Mindfulness & Mind Your Response

- Mindfulness techniques can be very helpful in this kind of situation, where our routines are disrupted and we may feel overwhelmed by frustration and disappointment.
- Mindfulness teaches us to tune into our emotions in any given moment and experience them without judgment.
- Model calm yourself. Don't share your worries with them.
- After this crisis is over, your children are going to walk away from this having learned things.
- What will they have learned from you in the way you handled this?

References

- Supporting Teenagers and Young Adults During the Coronavirus Crisis – Child Mind Institute
- Coping with stress during the 2019-COVID outbreak – WHO
- Helping children cope with stress during the 2019-COVID outbreak – WHO
- Positive Youth Development – Cornell University





THE CENTRE
FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
GROUP OF COMPANIES LIMITED (TCHD)

The Centre For Human Development Group of Companies Limited

No. 9 Pasea Main Road, Tunapuna Trinidad and Tobago

☎ Cell: 1(868) 317-3471 | ☎ Cell: 1(868) 374-9996

Livelifewelltt@gmail.com / www.livelifewelltt.org