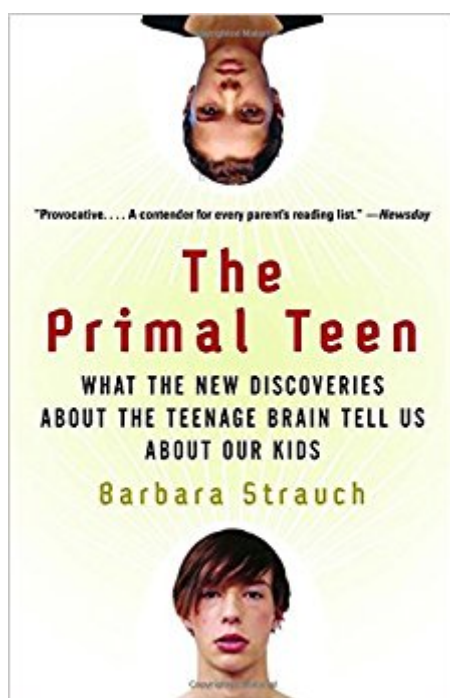


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# The Primal Teen: What The New Discoveries About The Teenage Brain Tell Us About Our Kids



## Synopsis

A groundbreaking look at the teenage brain for anyone who has puzzled over the mysterious and often infuriating behavior of a teenager. While many members of the scientific community have long held that the growing pains of adolescence are primarily psychological, Barbara Strauch highlights the physical nature of the transformation, offering parents and educators a new perspective on erratic teenage behavior. Using plain language, Strauch draws upon the latest scientific discoveries to make the case that the changes the brain goes through during adolescence are as dramatic and crucial as those that take place in the first two years of life, and that teenagers are not entirely responsible for their sullen, rebellious, and moody ways. Featuring interviews with scientists, teenagers, parents, and teachers, *The Primal Teen* explores common challenges “why teens go from articulate and mature one day to morose and unreachable the next, why they engage in risky behavior” and offers practical strategies to help manage these formative and often difficult years.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Strauch, medical science and health editor at the New York Times, sets out to offer reassurance to parents baffled by their kids' seemingly irrational and erratic behavior. She discusses the latest research, including brain scans that show changes in the brain's structure and function that could explain the crazy behavior exhibited by teens. In addition to reviewing various research projects around the country, Strauch also includes discussions with both parents and teenagers. Parents

lament their inability to understand why a straight-A student suddenly loses interest in school or starts behaving miserably. The teens are surprisingly open about their often ill-advised behavior, but seem unable to offer reasons for such actions. One possible explanation, still debated by scientists, is whether adolescence is a critical brain period, that is, an important period of development. Particularly interesting is the chapter Crazy by Design, in which Strauch offers evidence of the cognitive and emotional development of teens. Just as there are growth spurts for babies and young children, there are developmental milestones for teens roughly ages 11, 15 and 19. For example, While a younger teen might see a parent as a hypocrite if he holds two opposing views, an older teenager would begin to understand how two things can be true at the same time, and weigh the evidence for each. While the book does not offer how-to guidance, readers will be struck by the wonderfully candid comments by those interviewed as well as Strauch's insightful narrative. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Contrary to what scientists have assumed until recently, teenagers act weird not because of hormones but because their brains are still trying to get all the wiring right. From the health and science editor at the New York Times. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

there aren't many books i read more than once. but this is my third read of barbara strauch's must-read book for all youth workers and parents. this single book has lead me into more youth ministry conversations in the past 5 years than any other single book. i've hosted multiple multi-day retreats with youth workers focused solely on the findings reported on these pages (including one a couple months back, which is what caused me to read it again). but now, as i write this review, i'm in a new quandry: robert epstein's book, teen 2.0 (which i'm reading right now), counter-punches against many of the underpinnings of the primal teen. epstein doesn't buy the "nature" assumption that seems an implied foundation to this book (and, more accurately, the research and discoveries of jay giedd and other adolescent brain specialist that the primal teen reports on). epstein's contention -- which he builds very convincingly -- is that the issues and implications of new findings in adolescent brain development are a "nurture" issue. in other words, we've created them. i still think strauch's book is a book every youth worker needs to read, but i'm now viewing it from a more critical place.

Why do teen-agers shoplift, vandalize, argue illogically, indulge in high-risk activities, pierce their bodies, and exude obnoxious behavior (feel free to add items to this list)? MRI studies of brain component size and activity document that adolescents' brains are unfinished, are chock full of neurological and hormonal changes, and work differently than the brains of adults. In 1997, neuroscience made a surprising discovery. In early adolescence, the brain's gray matter - its outer layer - thickens, then dramatically thins out. In brain thickening, tiny branches of cells bloom madly, a process called "exuberance." This is followed by "pruning." As adolescence progresses, "there is an enormous loss of gray matter...a wholesale slashing of cell branches & synapses...a massive synaptic re-organization." This is very much like what happens at birth through late childhood, but scientist didn't realize that it happens again in adolescence. "The frontal lobes, the very area that helps teen-agers make the right decisions, are the very last areas to reach stability...When shown fear producing images, teen-age brains 'lit up' in the amygdala, a key area for instinctual reactions such as fight or flight, anger, or 'I hate you, Mom.' When adults were shown the same stimulus, they 'lit up' in the frontal lobes...What can we expect if that inhibition machinery, the pre-frontal cortex, is not yet fully formed?" This book tells us to maintain vigilance, appropriate consequences for behavior, and some influence over that all-important peer group. At the same time, take it easy. "The old instinctual knowledge familiar to our grandparents 'They'll grow out of it,' now has a modern scientific foundation."

This is helpful research. I've shared this book with a friend of mine as well as our son who is working with a group of first and second year college students. I believe the reading of this book, would be helpful for people planning a family, or in the midst of raising children.

WOW. Did you ever wonder why teens do crazy things? We as adults are many times perplexed as to some of the things our teens do. We think "Don't they know better?" My daughter used to spend time doing homework and then not turn it in the next day. When asked why she did not turn the work in, she would reply "i don't know" I could not fathom this. After reading this book it makes so much more sense. As a counselor at a high school, I am amazed at what teens do. I now have some idea and it makes sense. I recommend this book to all the parents and staff I work with in understanding the teenager. Well worth the money.

A very well written of the incredibly complex teenage brain. Great insight from research and scientists. Real life anecdotes many can relate to with their own teenagers. I gained understanding

and sympathy for the choices teenagers makes on a daily basis.

This was a good read for parents of teens or pre-adolescents who are not in the medical field or some related field. The author is not a researcher but a journalist putting together what they've learned about the topic. (Some parents may have already done this for themselves.) It's not as detailed as someone well-read on the topic may hope, but for someone just becoming interested, perhaps someone experiencing shocking episodes in their own home with their own primal teen, it's a good starter book! Glad she put it together. Hopefully there's more to come with more neurological detail.

If you have a child approaching or already a teenager, this book is a must read!!

I have referred this books to many other parents, our school advisors, and other professionals. Barbara's work is incredible, humorous, timely, and full of rich meaningful content. I use this book as a mental framework for understanding teens, not that I subscribe to the brain development as the only explanation of teen behavior. A book to read, re-read, and take to parenting groups. Vastly sage, articulate, and informative.

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