



VS.



Understanding Teenage Girls

Teacher: “Why are you talking in my lesson?”

Pupil: “Why are you teaching during my conversation?”



Aims of session:

- To understand what goes on in the teenage brain
- What you can do to maintain the teenage/parent relationship
- how to help your teenager to do the right thing

What are girls made of?

What are little girls made of?

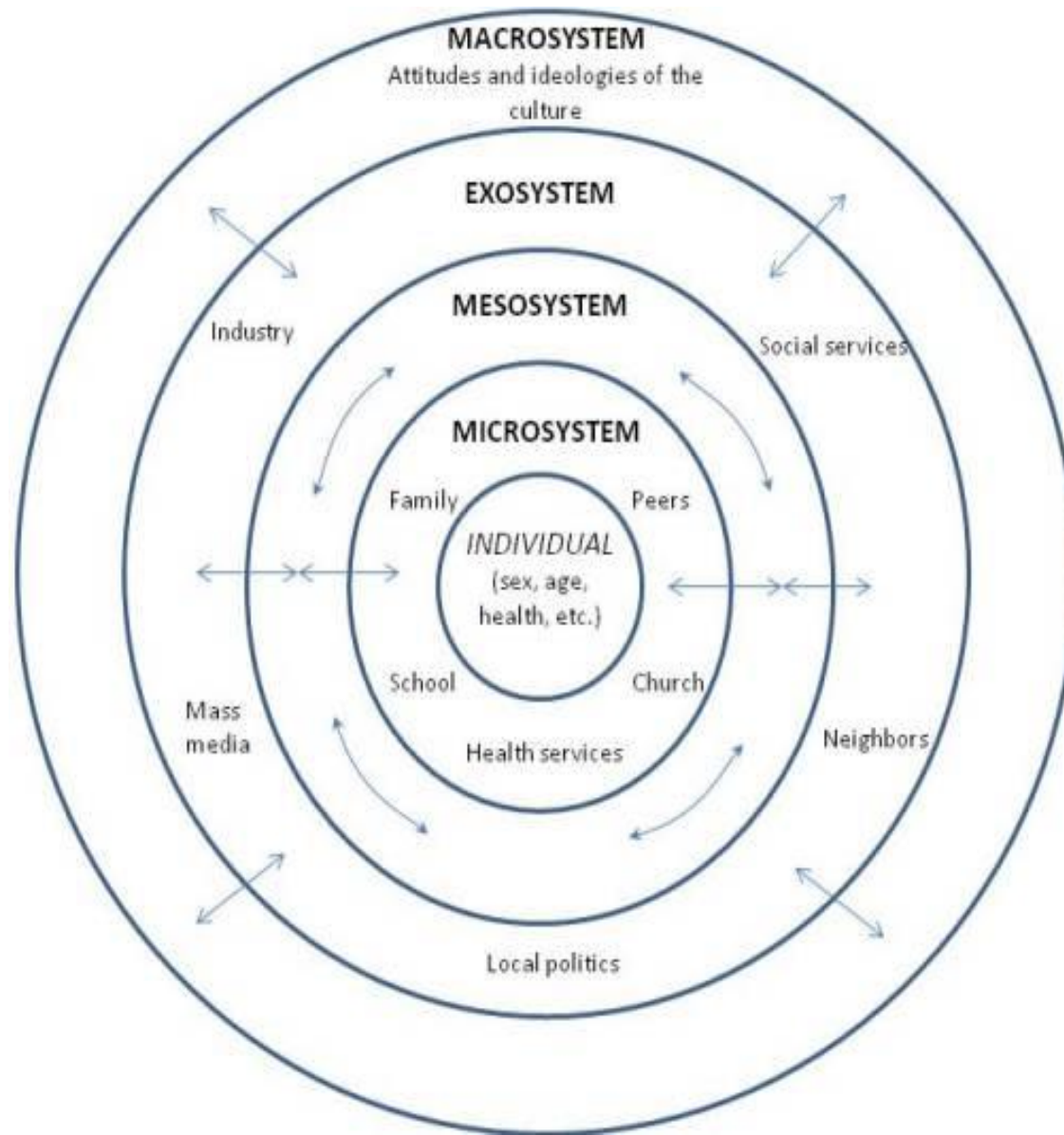
Sugar and spice,

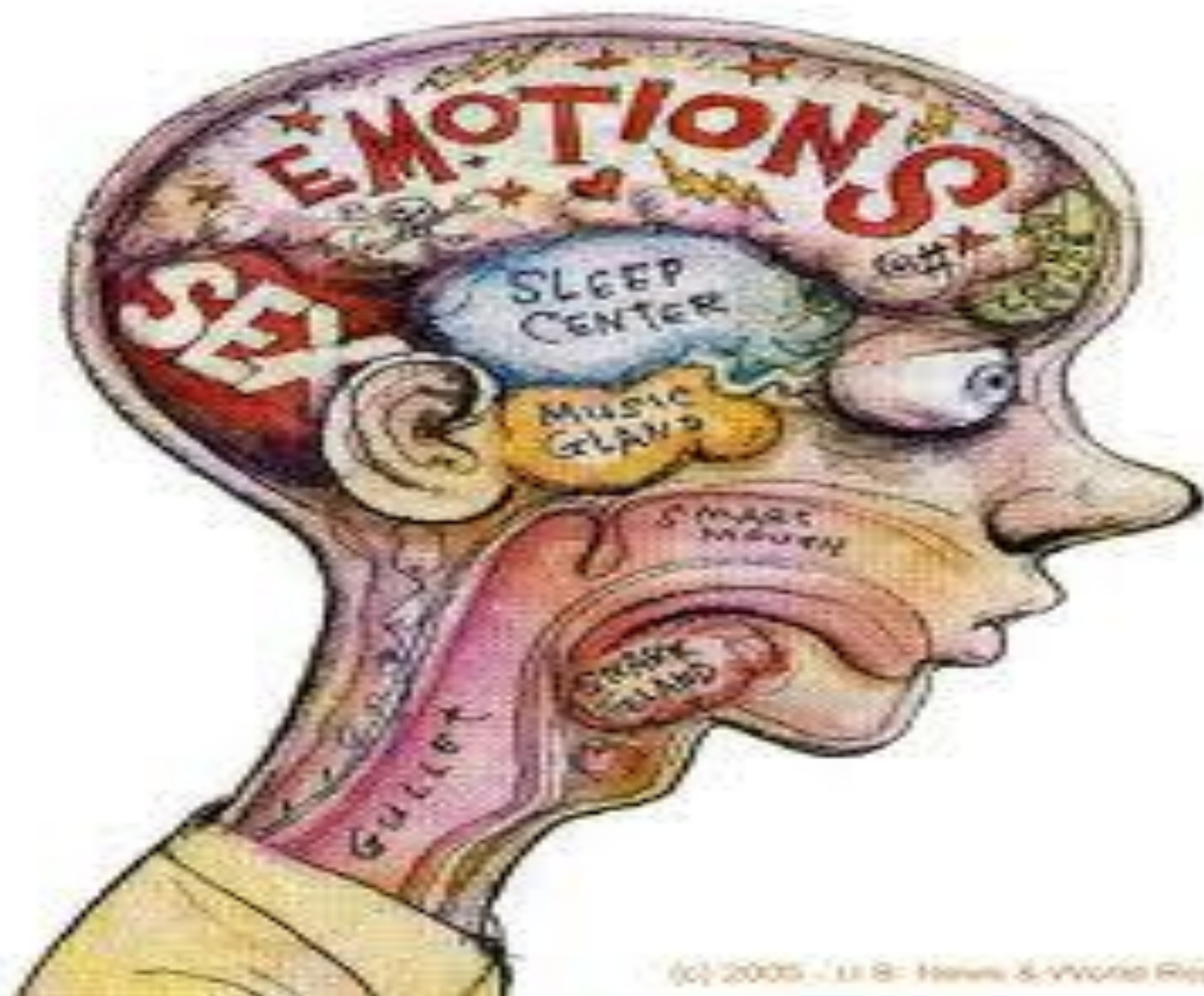
And everything nice,

That's what little girls are made of....

not quite....

Bio-ecological Model for Teenagers





Neurological or 'Blame my Brain'

- bad-tempered, unfriendly, snappy, tired and volatile - “smells like teen spirit”
- All caused by increased nerve activity in the brain
- This increased activity make it more difficult for teenagers to process information and read social situations

Development of the teenage brain

- **Experiences/excitement** – to grow the brain; they need new things, unpredictable things – “I am bored”
- **Engagement** – involved in things they find interesting, challenging and relevant to them
- **Love** – they need to know, whatever they do, they will have unconditional love of the significant adults in their lives; “you might hate their actions, they may have crashed your car, left the shower running for three days, killed the neighbour’s cat by accident, but your love for them is non-negotiable” (Ian Gilbert)
- **Structure** – to help grow safely; they need clear boundaries, they will push against them, it’s their job – doesn’t mean they don’t want them or need them! Remember though: Love and structure does not mean stifling them.

How very dare you!

- Because of the increased brain activity teenagers get social interactions wrong
- They misread signals because the emotional part of the **brain** is hyper active at this time
- The brain is working on instinct and gut reaction it is not functioning logically
- To ask a teenager “what were you thinking” may be fruitless, as they actually are not thinking
- Adolescents are not people. (I.Gilbert)
- A 13 – year – old acts like a child because they are a child. Even if some of them look like adults.

However...

- They need to be taken seriously when they raise problems
- 'I understand that this is upsetting for you...'
- **Not** 'wait till you grow up and have some real problems'

Boundaries

- Have clear boundaries e.g. about swearing, coming home on time etc.
- Use fair sanctions that fit the crime
- Don't go in too high with your sanctions and then don't stick to them, use small, manageable sanctions (e.g. you are grounded for a week – difficult to enforce)
- Certain things can be punished by school, don't punish them twice (e.g. homework detentions)
- If persistent issues, sit together, make a plan, find solutions to solve the problem
- Excessive punishment does not work
- Support the school in their use of sanctions

The Untidy Room

- Whichever theory you prefer Evolution, Nature Vs Nurture, Culture and so on
- There is a common feature to most teenagers lives that may be relevant to their state of mind
- THE UNTIDY BEDROOM – may actually mirror the chaos of the teenage brain and the way they experience life at that time
- Think of it as building a house: The brain is a work very much in progress during adolescence. You have to make a mess to build a house and for most of the time, it is completely uninhabitable – the brains, thoughts and minds of the average teen are equally vast and dangerous building site, where no-one would want to live.

Physiological Changes

- It is well documented that hormones play a large role in teenage mood swing and behaviour
- Chemicals produce a need for and supply Oxytocin and Dopamine responsible for the gossiping, shopping and exchanging secrets in teenage years
- Any activity that involves communicating gives girls a real buzz and this is why the loss of friendship can be so devastating at this age
- Teenage girls actually use communicating to reduce their stress levels and this is why a teenager and her phone are hard to part

Taking Risks

- We all take risks every day but teenagers are primed to take more risks
- Displayed in adolescence, risk taking is classified as limited conduct
- An evolutionary necessity by which the young test out the world from the relative safety of the home
- Some people can be predisposed to take excessive risks and this can lead to poor long term outcomes

- Risk taking that persists into adulthood is termed persistent conduct and has its origins in early childhood socialisation. It can be marked in the teenager by:
- Excessive preoccupation with peers to detriment of family
- Escalating conflict and challenging authority
- Sleep disturbance
- Decreased happiness/ anger issues
- Drug and substance abuse

Brave New world

- TV in the bedroom, mobile phone, IPad, social networking
- All electronic devices have an impact on the way the brain functions and develops – its structure and biochemistry
- Studies suggest such devices are reducing teenagers attention span, intercommunication skills and the ability to reason in the abstract
- Physical Health and Stamina
- Eyesight

It's all about me

- Modern technology and in particular social media sites are by their nature egocentric. Feeding a desire for instant gratification and fostering an inability to empathise with others
- We have discussed a teenage girls **need** to talk for her mental well being, but modern technology is changing the outcome of this need

Snap chat me...

Teenage girls obsess through modern technology on their problems, incidents with friends or failures socially or academically

These repeated conversations are said to worsen mood, heighten disappointment and lead to increased anxiety/depression

ROTFL

- **Rolling on the floor laughing**
- Heightened emotion is already the natural state of the teenager
- Technology has made their lives more anxious, stressed and depressed than ever before
- Biddulph says the “big bad world of media and advertising can now reach them wherever they are”

What shall I do today? Becomes what shall I wear today?

- Technology has been the media's Trojan horse persuading girls that they need their merchandise or services
- A certain look, size, hair, clothes phone etc.
- Biddulph suggests the answer is no TV in bedrooms, phones on charge in the kitchen overnight and no late night texting
- Is this unrealistic in the 21st Century?

The Good News

- Like Bandura before him in the 1970s, Biddulph says that adults *do* still matter and our messages *are* getting through
- *Role modelling* is the key to how we as adults deal with adolescence, our behaviour still has a huge impact on teenage behaviour and actions

The importance of communication

- in communications, teenagers learn about themselves and about other people
- Teach empathy: accept others for who they are/experience situations from their perspective/communicate in a way that makes sense to the person listening
- find solutions together
- This will develop their EQ – emotional intelligence
- Without emotional intelligence, people do not get very far in life, despite a high IQ

Open Conversations

- To build understanding about what is happening to them emotionally
- take a genuine interest in the thoughts and feelings of each other – *but don't overreact!*
- Express a desire to *understand* them better
- This will help young people to explore assumptions about the way others think and feel, interpreting other people's actions, find alternative ways of going about things

a restorative approach

traditional approach:

- what happened?
- who is to blame?
- what should be the appropriate punishment?

restorative approaches:

- What perspectives do people have on what has happened?
- Who has been affected and how?
- How can the harm be repaired?
- How can we learn from the situation to do things differently next time?

Building Resilience

- Learning involves setbacks and challenges
- Girls need to be resilient enough to deal with setbacks in order to learn from their mistakes
- They need to know:
 - 1) It is okay to make mistakes and fail
 - 2) They need to believe that they can succeed, and success is measured in small steps
 - 3) That you are there for them *if* they need you

Last thought for the day...

- If it all gets too much and you feel like everything is just not getting better.....
- Remember this quote I once read:

‘Nature has made teenagers difficult on purpose, so we don’t miss them too much when they leave home...’ 😊

Bibliography:

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Steve Biddulph: Raising Girls

Ian Gilbert: Why do I need a teacher when I've got Google?

Lisa Darmour: Untangled

Thank you for listening!