

Developmental Competence

Strategies for Youth believes that adults who are developmentally competent have more effective interactions with youth. Here's how we define that concept:

Developmental Competence refers to the understanding that children and adolescents' perceptions and behaviors are influenced by biological and psychological factors related to their development stage.



Photo by Romana Vysatova

DEVELOPMENTAL COMPETENCE is based on the premise that specific, sequential stages of neurological and psychological development are universal. Children and adolescents' responses differ from adults because of fundamental neurobiological factors and related developmental stages of maturation.

A PERSON WHO IS DEVELOPMENTALLY COMPETENT recognizes that how children and youth perceive, process and respond to situations is a function of their developmental stage, and secondarily their culture and life experience. Developmentally competent adults align their expectations, responses, and interactions — as well as those of institutions and organizations — to the developmental stage of the children and youth they serve.

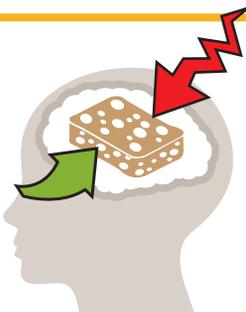
IN ORDER TO BECOME DEVELOPMENTALLY COMPETENT, AN INDIVIDUAL MUST:

- 1 UNDERSTAND** that children, adolescents, and adults interpret and respond differently to situations, social cues, interpersonal interactions, and the inherent power of adults, making them more vulnerable to external pressures and more compliant with authority;
- 2 APPLY** this knowledge to enhance and improve interactions with children and youth and;
- 3 ADJUST** institutional responses to the developmental stage of the children and youth served.

Are they out of their mind?

These notes offer a way to think of brain development and how it affects people's perceptions, processing and responses. The changes taking place during each developmental phase of life are profound. Understanding the brain's characteristics in each phase helps interpret people's behaviors and respond effectively.

CHILD'S BRAIN



BRAIN CHARACTERISTICS

- Absorbs information easily
- Brain structure is most vulnerable to neglect/trauma
- Brain's "wiring" becomes permanent

BEHAVIOR CHARACTERISTICS

- Absorbs information
- Concrete thinking
- Great capacity to mimic and learn
- Imprinted by good/bad experiences
- Wants to please adults
- Magical thinking about cause and effect

TEEN BRAIN



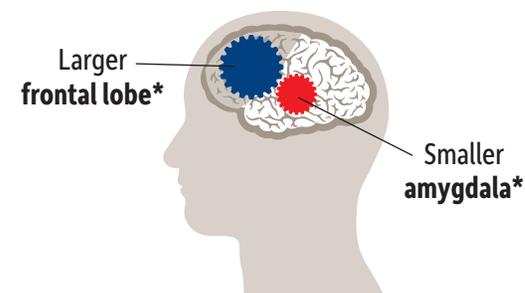
BRAIN CHARACTERISTICS

- Big amygdala
- Active pruning of un-useful neurons
- Myelination strengthens pathways between brain areas

BEHAVIOR CHARACTERISTICS

- Impulsive
- Extreme responses and difficulty self-regulating
- Concerned about image with peers
- Self-image trumps self-interest
- Tests boundaries
- Cannot quickly predict both positive and negative consequences
- Focuses on own emotional responses
- Easily distracted

ADULT BRAIN BY 25



BRAIN CHARACTERISTICS

- Frontal lobe harnesses amygdala

BEHAVIOR CHARACTERISTICS

- Can control expression of emotion and impulses
- Adheres to boundaries and recognizes benefits of doing so
- Able to plan and put things in sequence
- Can more accurately anticipate consequences.
- Less subject to peer influences as own identity "sets"

*DEFINITIONS: **amygdala** – processes memory and emotional reactions **frontal lobe** – conducts executive functioning activities of the brain.



Communicating EFFECTIVELY with Youth



1 REMEMBER CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Your expectations should not be the same for 6-year-olds and 16-year-olds. Remember that even if a youth is 16 years old by age, he/she may not act or think that at that level of maturity.

2 KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

The more you know about a given youth, the more likely you are to be successful in dealing with him/her. Knowing their name, habits, friends, family gives you a great advantage.

3 FIND SOMETHING TO PRAISE

Many youth you'll be seeing have had lives filled with failures and may not have experienced much success. It's easy to find fault with them and hard to find something positive to say. Any words of praise may affect them deeply.

4 BE SPECIFIC, CONSISTENT AND SIMPLE IN YOUR REQUESTS

Tell them what you want and how it should be done. Keep things simple. Complexity leads to confusion and failure. Let them know how their actions will shape what happens next.

5 SAVE YOUR THREATS

Don't make threats in anger. Don't bluff. It's more effective to explain the situation, outline the choices, and explain the consequences of each choice.

6 OCCASIONALLY CHANGE-UP

When an approach isn't working, you may want to try a new approach. If you've had the same interaction with someone again and again, do something different. The element of surprise can be powerful.

7 BE FAIR

No one likes dealing with someone who isn't fair. Youth are acutely concerned by what appears to be unfair treatment or favoritism. Be aware of your biases and be able to explain any differential treatment.

8 ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

Being fair does not mean treating all youth the same way. You must take a case-by-case approach, and determine which approach is most likely to get the response you seek.

9 HELP EACH OTHER OUT

Sometimes you can get caught up in a "no win" situation with a particular youth. At those times it is often helpful to have someone else take over to help get things back on track.

Mark I. Singer, Ph.D.

Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences

Case Western Reserve University

The Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences

BEST PRACTICES

for Effective Police/Youth Interactions



For Relationship Building & Incident Interventions

1 De-escalation

- Distract youth with out-of-left field question
- Direct youth to concentrate on breathing/counting
- Give time
- Separate youth from each other
 - Use an explanation for the separation to reduce anxiety of friends
 - Riff on comments

2 Listen

- Look for signs of diminished capacity: PTSD, mental illness, etc.
- Allow venting; when repetitive use distraction
- Seek GIGA: Good Intentions Gone Awry
- Re-State youth's view out loud
- Explain/translate ramifications

3 Explain

- Explain the reason for your action.
- Look for signs of diminished capacity: PTSD, mental illness, etc.
- Allow venting; when repetitive use distraction
- Seek GIGA: Good Intentions Gone Awry
- Re-State youth's view out loud
- Explain/translate ramifications

4 Responses at the Incident

- Look for Face-Saving Outcome
- Collaborative Problem Solving
- Set plan of Action going forward – Graduated sanctions
- Check-ins
- Involve Parents

GENERAL RULES:

Watch Your Pronouns

- Don't start sentences with "You"
- *It's sad* (takes blame off person/situation for what's sad)
- *We need* (not "you have to...")
- *We have to figure this out* (not "you better get your act together")

Don't ask "why"?

- Ask how
- Ask *at what time* did you....

Don't take it personally:

- "Just doing a job."
- "It's the law."

REMEMBER: You may not be a social worker but to keep safe you need to be a psychologist!

Explain why...connect the dots for them...work through the implications.

B.L.T.

BEHAVIOR – LANGUAGE – TIMING



	What's the Kid's BLT?	What's Your BLT?
 BEHAVIOR	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.2.3.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.2.3.
 LANGUAGE	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.2.3.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.2.3.
 TIMING	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.2.3.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.2.3.