Youth/Adolescent Decision Making

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Interventions with youth

• As helpers, family members, caregivers, our goals are both short and long term as well as complicated
• Counseling
• Mentoring
• Restorative justice, empathy development
• Anger management
• Sometimes all of the above
Interventions with youth

- Kids/youth/adolescents are different in terms of development rate and stages
- Age ranges, developmental issues
- Where, when, who for the intervention—always aware of family, cultural, other concerns
- Decision making process is different than for adults
Interventions with youth

- In most situations, when possible, we want to emphasize skill building
- Empathy development
- Mentoring
Interventions with youth

• Risk assessment in terms of harm to self/others
• High level of impulsivity
• Special needs
Middle youth and adolescent developmental stages

- Middle youth (6-12) industry vs inferiority-
  academic achievement, focus; moving closer
to friends; control of emotions
- Adolescence (12-18) identity vs role confusion
- Physical/sexual maturation, experimentation,
  expression; identity tied to career and
  educational path
Brain development

• Our brain matures from bottom to top and from the inside out... Basic functions and emotional areas mature first and the frontal lobe (executive level thinking) matures last... This is one of the reasons that teens rely (and respond) so much more to peers and peer pressure and are more emotionally reactive and impulsive than adults, less empathy towards others.
Research on youth & adolescent decision making

- Puberty has moved to younger ages
- More and more powerful technology used by ever younger humans
- Risk level to self and others is higher and society is paying more attention to these issues
- Brain research
- Breakthrough research regarding adult decision making about risk
• Adults tend to believe that they will have a more positive experience, that they will be less likely than others to experience negative outcomes. Adults favor their own prior experiences and anecdotal evidence rather than statistics or probabilistic information.
Adult decision making

• Includes critical thinking but we are still basing our positions on the idea that my experience will be more positive than others.....

• Even as adults, we are not always grounded in probabilities and facts....
Frischoff et al research program on adolescent decision making (studies through the 1990s)

- See only either or choices, not a range
- May lack the experience, knowledge or feeling of control over their lives to come up with alternative choices OR to quickly come to the best decision
- Difficulty interpreting the meaning or credibility of information when making decisions
- May focus more on the social reactions of their peers when deciding to engage in risky behaviors
- May not be accurately able to estimate the probability of negative consequences
- Influenced by their emotions more than adults
Building on these studies: “the gist”

- Adolescents are very aware of their vulnerability
- Adolescents overestimate their risk BUT due to their way of thinking, they go ahead and do it because to the teen, the benefit seems more likely than the risk
- Reyna & Farley (2007)
Age brings humans to the gist more quickly

• For adults, our experiences, learning from our own outcomes and consequences, gets us to the bottom line or “gist” more quickly - the researchers also use the term being able to see the forest more than the trees

• Teaching teens to get to the gist - learn to say no if you want to and not be so focused on the consequences (social, loss of relationship)
2015 study on working memory helps us understand the gist issue

• Working memory: What we keep in mind when we make decisions and solve problems

• For teens, there are significant differences in the brain’s working memory and as we discussed, development occurs at different rates. So, adults can provide a lot of information and it will be processed differently by teens based on the WM differences.
Thinking this through

• Driver’s education, sex education, difficult discussions about complicated issues such as texting, sexting, use of substances, marijuana.... Lots of effort to provide basic information. From the brain development information, one can see why the discussion/talk through with parents and caregivers as well as peers (in a directed way) would be so necessary if each youth retains the information a bit differently
Thinking this through

• Peers and personality are important as well as level of impulsivity which is hard wired as well as based on experience

• For myself, one of the big picture issues that I read and think about for teaching is the impact of the internet on development for adolescents- what does it mean to compare oneself potentially with everyone on earth and with all the dark corners?
Thinking this through

• The next slides will give examples of teen behavior in the context of technology.
  Decision making issues we have been discussing in the context of the impulsive and impermanent world of the internet - which our brain sees as accessible, anonymous, affordable... And which we now know to be permanent and perhaps eternal
Social and cultural response includes criminal behavior, law enforcement and public policy response

- Society reacts to these patterns, we see this in the news:
- High levels of stealing related to smart phones across major cities
- Legalized marijuana
- Legislation related to teen age driving
- Roper vs Simmons, US Supreme Court, 2005
- Sexting
With adolescents and sexting

• The images are of far more concern than sex chat or talk- the unintended consequences of sending the images comes into conflict with current laws, statutes, perception

• What is a first amendment right as an adult is seen very differently when engaged in by those under 18
Within the CJ work group....

• Due to technological advances, lessened privacy of juvenile court system and individuals accused or convicted, (e.g., person of interest, offenders or ex offender), collateral consequences for the ex felon have become a concern

• Not just rights but options for being able to live in society have been impacted due to technological advances
Pew internet & American life project (March, 2012)

• 25% of teens own smartphones (teens between 12-17), total
• By age, 31% of those 14-17 have a smartphone, 8% of those 12-13. 46% of adults own a smartphone
• Among teens, texting volume is up, voice calling is down
• 63% of teens exchange texts every day
• 77% of teens age 12-17 have a cell phone
Clashes between technology, teen decision making and CJ system

• Case examples that have alarmed and informed the CJ work group:

• Newly turned 18 year old boyfriend, 16 year old girlfriend. She sends him nude pictures. They have a fight and he sends the pictures out (at 2 am) to his address book. Arrested and charged with disseminating child pornography, a felony. He was convicted, due to state laws, has to register as a SO until the age of 43
Another example

- Eight teens (13-17) who were all acquainted, were accused of taking, sending/receiving nude photos of themselves. Each teen was charged with a felony level pornography charge. This case was adjudicated in 2010

- Feel free to google cases and case law regarding sexting
Brings our discussion back to the issue of decision making and prevention

- Prevention means educating youth in general and of course, finding ways to educate and move kids away from malicious, abusive, reckless, criminal behavior. Helpers and school personnel, while likely to learn about all types of sexting cases, are more likely to learn about and manage the experimental, malicious, abusive types.
• Move away from just providing information about risks- the Reyna & Farley research indicates that teens use risk information in a different manner than adults, a different risk calculation. Teens calculate that the risk is less than they thought so, the benefit outweighs the risk. The researchers use the example of a “normal adult”- Russian roulette, no thanks.....
The “gist”

• Talking, training, practice decision making... when to swerve the car and when not to, when to have sex and when not to.... Similar to the models used for adolescent aggression management - put the decision in a context, peer driven

• And of course, take action to minimize risk such as the changes to teen driving laws, no texting while driving, etc.
Strategies to improve decision making

• Provide teens accurate information on risk taking among their peers to counteract media spin/distortion

• Practice and rehearse decisions and decision making skills with relevant examples

• How to search for new and accurate information to help make decisions
Strategies to improve decision making

• Active parental engagement and involvement can help. Kids make less risky decisions when their parents are actively engaged. Adults can help them reframe, actively recall what was learned, move that learning up to a more prominent place in their view finder. We can share our own examples and life lessons but active discussion would be the way to go with that as well.
Sort out your thinking/approach

• Not to control but to challenge and redirect-
  point out:

• The behavior is ineffective in meeting goals,

• Provide examples for different options and
  choices,

• Bring empathy towards others into the
  discussion along with accountability...
Sort out your thinking/approach

• Remind yourself, it takes time and experience to get to the gist... There will be repetition of information and still, actions that are not so good..
• This is called normal
• Watching for signs of learning, change, so you can encourage movement towards the gist...
Questions

• Thanks for participating!
• Questions?

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