

# Yoga for Adolescent Mental Health: The Changing Brain and How Yoga Can Help



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# Overview



## Understanding the Adolescent Mind:

- ❖ Changes within the adolescent:
  - Moving from a 'generalist' brain to a 'specialist'
  - Pruning the brain causes vulnerabilities in mental health
  - Drop in level of dopamine and the impact on mood
- ❖ Changes in how adolescents see/behavior around/with their peers:
  - Impact of the shifts from home life to focus on peers
  - Building skills of identifying intentions of others
  - Increase in risk taking behavior and the need to help adolescents find 'meaningful risk'
  - Belonging vs. Fitting-In — The Science Behind Inclusion

## How Can Yoga Help? Strategies for having a successful yoga class:

- Let's discuss strategies for having a successful class or workshop to help with adolescent development including lesson planning tips and classroom techniques.



# Overview



## **PART 1: Understanding the Adolescent Mind:**

- ❖ Changes within the adolescent:
  - Moving from a 'generalist' brain to a 'specialist'
  - Pruning the brain causes vulnerabilities in mental health
  - Drop in level of dopamine and the impact on mood

# TIME\* TO MOVE FROM A GENERALIST TO A SPECIALIST

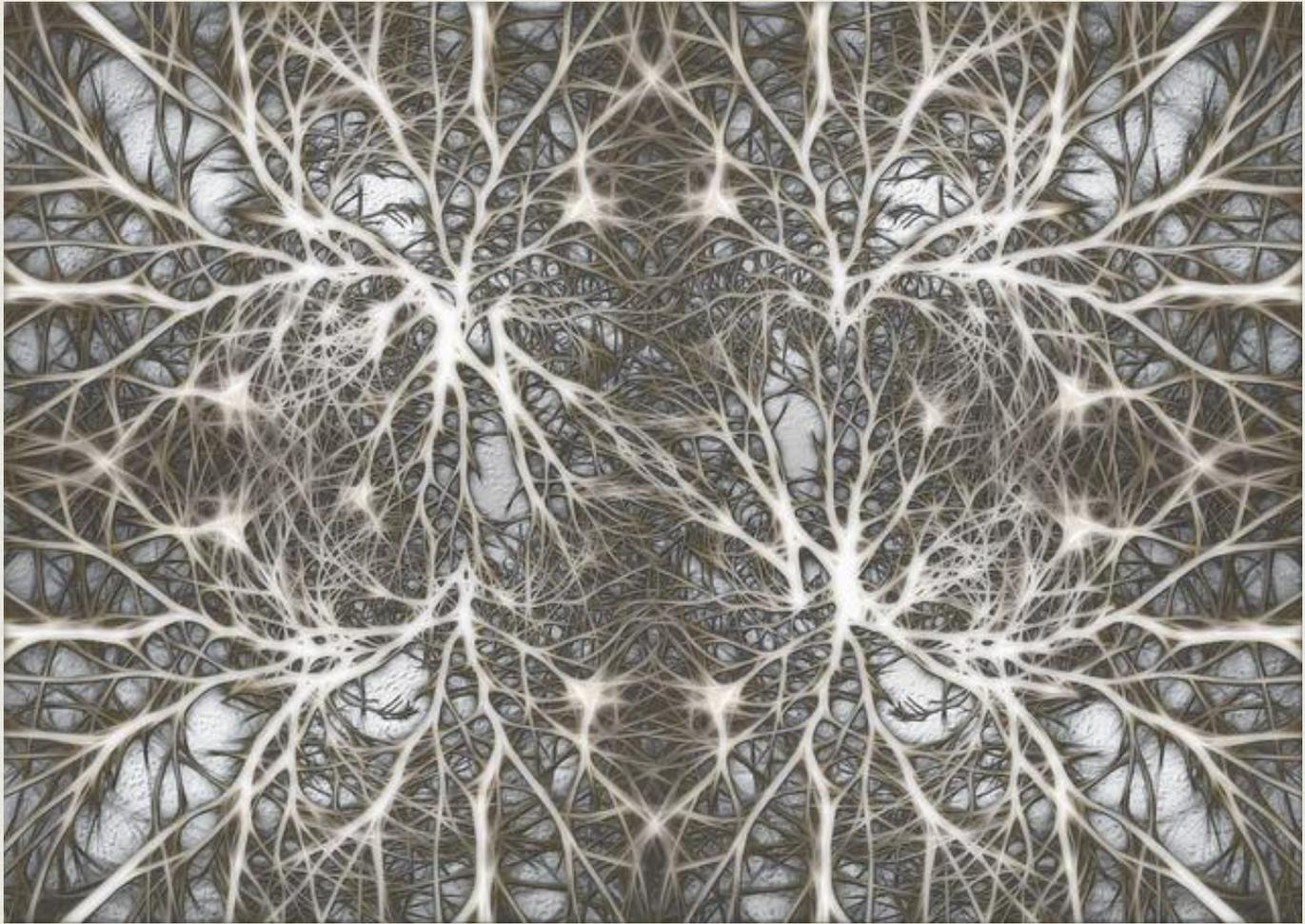


\*12-25 is the time period of adolescents



# OUR AMAZING BRAINS ARE FULL OF 86 BILLION NEURONS PRUNING BEGINS





AS WE MOVE FROM A GENERALIST TO A SPECIALIST  
WE PRUNE BACK NEURONS  
THIS CAN CREATE MENTAL HEALTH VULNERABILITIES



Neurons need neurotransmitters like trees need sun & water.



# STRESS IS A CHANGE IN OUR PHYSIOLOGY



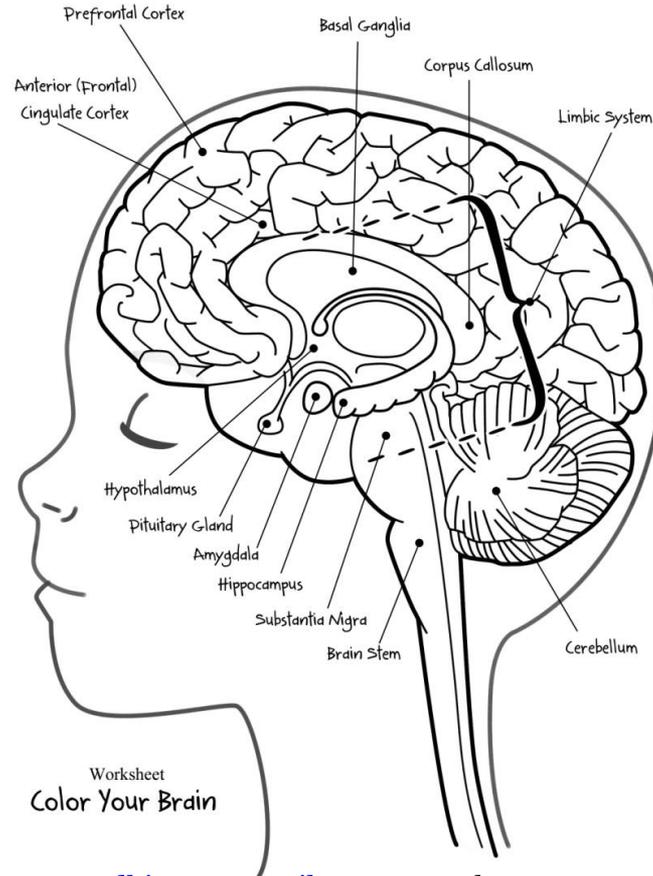
- The more we know the better we understand
- Increase in heart rate
- Restriction in the chest and breath
- Blood flow to the arms and legs
- Gut slows or stops
- Feeling of gut pain or need to use the restroom
- Feeling of vomiting
- Difficulties concentrating outside of the body
- Yoga helps with all aspects of stress both mind and body





# FIGHT/ FLIGHT/FREEZE RESPONSE STARTS IN THE AMYGDALA AKA “THE HORNET”

Developing amygdala  
is getting larger in  
volume during  
adolescence.



Worksheet  
Color Your Brain



[hornetsandhippos@gmail.com](mailto:hornetsandhippos@gmail.com) From the Hornet and Hippo workbook Can be downloaded from my website



DROPS IN DOPAMINE = NEED FOR NOVELTY OR RISK TAKING  
INCREASES DOPAMINE



ADOLESCENTS ARE WILLING TO DO THINGS ADULTS MIGHT NOT  
DO. THIS CAN BE THOUGHT OF A TIME PERIOD OF TESTING OF  
LIMITS AND ABILITIES

YOGA CAN BE A PART OF THIS





# Overview



## PART 2: Understanding the Adolescent Mind:

- ❖ Changes in how adolescents see/behave around/with their peers:
  - Impact of the shifts from home life to focus on peers
  - Building skills of identifying intentions of others
  - Increase in risk taking behavior and the need to help adolescents find 'meaningful risk'
  - Belonging vs. Fitting-In — The Science Behind Inclusion



# DEVELOPING INTEREST IN PEERS



CAN'T LEAVE THE NEST WITHOUT PEER CONNECTION



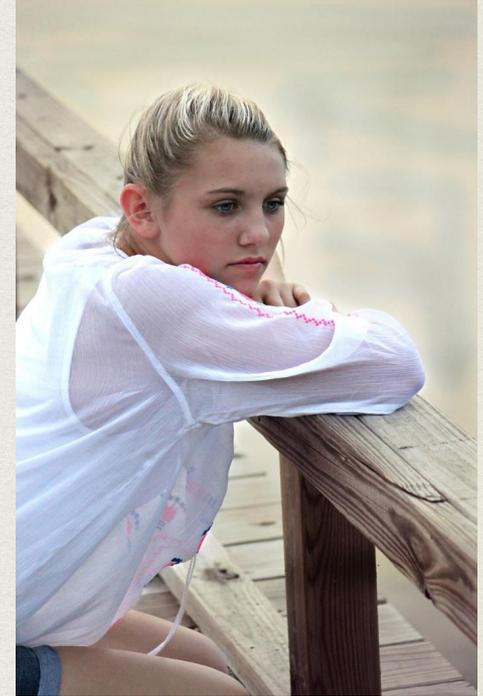
Adolescents need to have positive peer connection, preferably in more than one environment

School    Sports    Clubs    Yoga Classes    Church

Without connection outside of home they are more likely to have increased anxiety or depression.



# DEVELOPING SKILL OF ASSESSING OTHERS INTENTION.



Adolescents are still developing their skills in assessing intention, leaving them more vulnerable to fearing their peers rejection or misunderstanding them.

Listening Skills Help



# BELONGING VS. FITTING-IN (The Science Behind Inclusion)



“We have to belong to ourselves as much as we need to belong to others. Any belonging that asks us to betray ourselves is not true belonging.” Brene Brown Atlas of the Heart



# Overview



## PART 3: How Can Yoga Help? Strategies for having a successful yoga class:

- Let's discuss strategies for having a successful class or workshop to help with adolescent development including lesson planning tips and classroom techniques.

Q&A: What questions do you have?



# Strategies for Yoga



- Age for Class?
- Ideal Class Length: 45-60 minutes (“sweet spot” = 45 minutes)
- Some Objectives for Class:
  - Making the mind and body connection
  - Helping them take healthy risks in class (as applicable by class - i.e. bakasana vs hip openers vs pranayama etc)
  - Build listening and speaking skills – esp. practice listening skills to help with understanding intentions of others
  - Other?



# Strategies for Yoga



- Lesson Planning Tips:
  - Create a “base lesson plan”
    - Breathing/opening circle?
    - Asana? Focusing on physical anatomy (maybe an area of the body - hips?)
    - Games?
    - Chanting? Energy anatomy?
    - Meditation?
    - What are all of the elements/parts of a class for you?
  - Vary this plan based on age/developmental stage, length of class, etc.  
—> and then if this class is part of a 4 week series, use that to further vary your plan (let's discuss)



# Strategies for Yoga



- Classroom Techniques:

- Opening circle? Closing circle (to meditate or not to meditate)?
- Mat set-up?
- Lighting? Music?
- Timing for each element of your lesson plan. When to “mix it up” (i.e. it’s not working bc the children are just too tired today or vice versa and super excited today)
- When to demo? When to walk around? How much to focus on anatomy? Physiology? Chanting?
- Language - always teach the pose names (ex. Warrior 1 is always Warrior 1 not cloud pose)

# Questions



Contact:

Margaret Jessop, Psy.D.

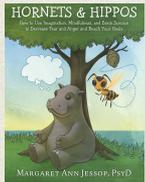
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Soul Power Yoga Children’s Yoga Teacher Training:

<https://soulpoweryoga.com/kids-yoga-teacher-training/>

# References

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