

Online Learning Series

Wordless Humor for Increased Connection with Older Kids and Tweens

September 21, 2020



Welcome
Glad you're here!

Vermont Family Network



Housekeeping

- Workshop is being recorded
- Recording will be saved on [VFN website](#) and [YouTube channel](#)



Wordless Humor For Increased Connection with older kids and

tweens

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Objectives

- ▶ To consider how humor and novelty might stimulate the brain to experience more reward and increase motivation for connection
- ▶ To learn some new ideas for how you might surprise your loved ones with humor or wordless connection to increase ability to connect during hard times and to co-regulate.

Gear up for a Storm

- ▶ Building connections when everyone is happy and regulated is like putting on your rain gear **BEFORE** you go outside into a storm.



Brain Development During Adolescence

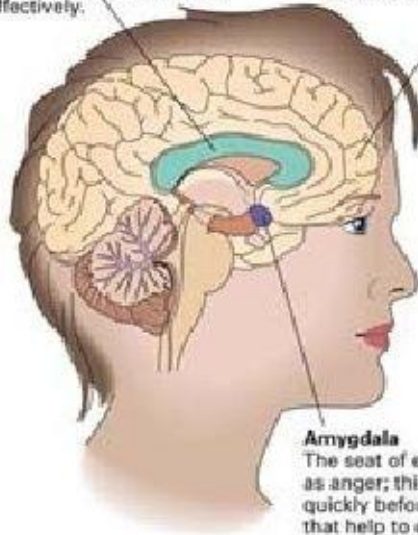
BRAIN DEVELOPMENT ADOLESCENCE (12 – 19 YEARS)

Corpus callosum

These nerve fibers connect the brain's two hemispheres; they thicken in adolescence to process information more effectively.

Prefrontal cortex

This "judgment" region reins in intense emotions but doesn't finish developing until at least emerging adulthood.



Amygdala

The seat of emotions such as anger; this area develops quickly before other regions that help to control it.

Brain undergoes structural changes

Age 12 - Parietal Lobe mature

- **Corpus callosum**

- nerve fibers connect the brain's left and right hemispheres
- thickens, improves adolescents' ability to process information

- **Amygdala** - matures earlier than the prefrontal cortex

- **Synapses** – at adult density

18 – 25 years: Frontal Lobe/ Prefrontal cortex matures

How Novelty Works to Open kids to Connection

- ▶ There's a region in our midbrain called the **substantia nigra/ventral segmental area** or **SN/VTA**. This is essentially the major “novelty center” of the brain, which responds to novel stimuli.
- ▶ The SN/VTA is closely linked to areas of the brain called the hippocampus and the amygdala, both of which play large roles in learning and memory. The hippocampus compares stimuli against existing memories, while the amygdala responds to emotional stimuli and strengthens associated long-term memories.

Dopamine for healthy rewards

- ▶ “A recent study showed that in addition to activating areas of the brain involved in language processing, humor also stimulated regions of the brain known as reward centers, such as the amygdala, which releases dopamine. Dopamine is a powerful chemical that plays a vital role in the brain's pleasure and reward system.”



Implications for Connecting Effectively

- ▶ Create surprises and humor in the home environment and daily routines that keep kids feeling seen, heard, and motivated to be in relationship
- ▶ Connect through wordless games, especially partnering games and activities throughout our days
- ▶ Notice your child's preferences, take an interest in their skills, interests, and hobbies, and build on sharing preferences even when they are different

Surprises around the House

- ▶ Put balloons in strange places
- ▶ Googly eyes on things that shouldn't have them
- ▶ Upside down furniture or paintings
- ▶ Food surprises (serve cupcakes for dinner)
- ▶ Clock change to a different time
- ▶ Pet wearing clothes
- ▶ Hair chalk or temp dye
- ▶ Clothes swap (wear your child's clothes or your spouses clothes)
- ▶ I love you and encouragement notes in unexpected places (jeans pockets, shower door, in a textbook)

Humor around the house

- ▶ Joke-a-day calendar on the kitchen table
- ▶ Watch funny (appropriate) movies or shows together
- ▶ Write and perform a rap for your family
- ▶ Read school assignments and act them out like charades

Connection games and wordless partnering

- ▶ Throwing, kicking, and catching: kush ball, tennis ball, football, frisbee, water balloons, soccer ball, basketball, etc.
- ▶ Two-person chores like folding sheets, washing and drying dishes, washing the dog
- ▶ Jigsaw puzzles
- ▶ Daily fitness challenge
- ▶ Family art or continuous drawing
- ▶ Scrabble or magnetic poetry hanging around for messages
- ▶ Coloring together to music

Share your preferences

- ▶ “Choose my outfit day”: you get to choose what your kid wears and they get to choose what you wear (or do each other’s make-up)
- ▶ Favorite music session: Each person in the house picks one beloved song for a dinner playlist and everyone listens together.
- ▶ Make funny masks of favorite tv characters and have a conversation as the characters (or facetime a friend or relatives in character)
- ▶ Notice preferred colors and add a little something with the color into everything you do with child that day.

Resources in Vermont

- ▶ <https://vtnetwork.org/askableadult/#interviews>
- ▶ <http://www.vermontafterschool.org/vt9to26/who-we-are/>

References

- ▶ <https://lifehacker.com/novelty-and-the-brain-why-new-things-make-us-feel-so-g-508983802>
- ▶ <https://www.webmd.com/balance/news/20031203/funny-thing-about-humor-brain>
- ▶ <https://www.jofrancesphotography.co.nz/galleries/family-children-photos/>
- ▶ <https://buffer.com/resources/novelty-and-the-brain-how-to-learn-more-and-improve-your-memory>

Upcoming Virtual Events

- Parent Focus Groups for VT Developmental Disabilities Council 5-Year State Plan



1-800-800-4005
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ONLINE LEARNING SERIES:
PERSEVERING
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How Can We Help You?



Info@vtfn.org

1-800-800-4005 or (802) 876-5315

<http://www.VermontFamilyNetwork.org>