

Sexuality and the Adolescent Brain

Bullet Points

- 1) The adult brain is now thought to be 'plastic' and developing, not fixed and deteriorating. It continues to change and develop, even into old age.
- 2). Repeated practice brings fluent and automatic skills, as new neuro-pathways are laid down.
- 3) Most brain development occurs before the mid-twenties, when adolescence ends.
- 4) Thoughtlessness and risk-taking behaviour are common features of adolescence.
- 5). Experimentation is a central part of being an adolescent, the desire to 'taste and see'.
- 6) The Amygdala of the brain is responsible for gut-feelings, of both fear and pleasure.
- 7) The Prefrontal Cortex gradually develops wisdom and rational thought, fed by memories, which then constrain adolescent gut-feelings and behaviour.
- 8) The rationality of the Prefrontal Cortex is undermined by alcohol, drugs and the release of hormones caused by sexual triggers.
- 9) Pornography awakens desires, which become addictive with repeated use.
- 10) Sexual 'orientation' is not fixed genetically. Many people are openly bisexual.
- 11) We are all capable of finding pleasures in a range of sexual activities.
- 12) Sexual memories of past behaviour can re-surface in later life in times of unhappiness.
- 13) What we do in early years can lay down neuro-pathways, which strongly influence our futures.
- 14) Sex-education from the internet and in schools introduces new ideas, stirring feelings, intrigue and the desire to experiment.
- 15) The teacher's own value judgements, for good or ill, will inevitably colour their presentation, and influence the pupil's life-decisions later.

Dr. Peter May, July 2020