



# The Teen Brain and What to Do About It

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COSA Convention 2022 - Atlanta

# Family Story

The family IS our story. Like it or not, it resides within us. Regardless of the story we have about them, our parents cannot be expunged or ejected from us. They are in us, and we are part of them - even if we never met them.

(Wolynn, Mark. *It Didn't Start with You*. Penguin Publishing Group)

# Epigenetics

- Epigenetics is the study of how your behaviors and environment can cause changes that affect the way your genes work. Unlike genetic changes, epigenetic changes are reversible and do not change your DNA sequence, but they can change how your body reads a DNA sequence.

# Epigenetics

The latest scientific research, now making headlines, also tells us that the effects of trauma can pass from one generation to the next. This “bequest” is what’s known as inherited family trauma, and emerging evidence suggests that it is a very real phenomenon. Pain does not always dissolve on its own or diminish with time. Even if the person who suffered the original trauma has died, even if his or her story lies submerged in years of silence, fragments of life experience, memory, and body sensation can live on, as if reaching out from the past to find resolution in the minds and bodies of those living in the present.

Wolynn, Mark. *It Didn't Start with You* (pp. 1-2). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

# Tyler's Story

Traumatic experiences do leave traces, whether on a large scale (on our histories and cultures) or close to home, on our families, with dark secrets being imperceptibly passed down through generations.

Kolk MD, Bessel van der. *The Body Keeps the Score* (p. 1). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

## Tyler's Story

Tyler, an athletic twenty-eight-year-old pharmacist, dearly loved his wife, Jocelyn. They had been married for three years, yet had made love to completion only twice since their wedding. Prior to their marriage, sex had been frequent. However, from the day they exchanged vows, Tyler felt anxious and unsettled.

He was certain that she would leave him for another man. "Within six months, you'll cheat on me," he proclaimed. Jocelyn persistently assured him of her loyalty, but Tyler couldn't hear it. His insistence that she'd be unfaithful was corroding their relationship. "I'm sure of it," he told me in our first session together. "She'll cheat on me and I'll be devastated." Since the wedding, Tyler had struggled with erectile dysfunction. Medical testing had confirmed that he was healthy and had no physical issues. Tyler knew that his answer lay beyond his grasp. He just didn't know where to look. His core sentence, however, functioned like a map, directing him where he needed to go. Tyler's Core Sentence: "She'll cheat on me and I'll be devastated."

Unbeknownst to Tyler, he was not the author of this core sentence. This painful mantra had resounded forty years earlier in the history of his family, though Tyler was unaware of the specific event. Tyler's father had been married to his first wife for less than a year when he walked in on her having sex with another man. The shock was more than he could handle. He left town, left his job, left his friends, and never spoke about what had happened. Tyler never knew any of this. He learned about it only when his symptoms appeared and, upon my urging, he asked his father if he had had a previous relationship before marrying Tyler's mother.

In our next session, Tyler reported that, when asked the question, his father had momentarily stopped breathing and his lips tightened against his teeth. It sounded to me as if he literally was trying to keep his past from spilling out. Eventually, though, he told Tyler about his first wife. It was clear to Tyler that, despite time, distance, and a remarriage, his father's broken heart had never healed all the way. What remained unresolved in his father's heart was now affecting Tyler's marriage. Although his father had never spoken about the pain he experienced, the feelings were very much alive in Tyler's body. Tyler had unknowingly inherited his father's trauma.

For Tyler, the light of understanding awoke his entire body, as if from a deep sleep. He could now understand why his body froze when he attempted to make love to Jocelyn. He finally understood the intelligence behind his body's shutdown. Impotence had allowed him to remain distant from the very love he desired. On the surface, it seemed counterintuitive, but at a deeper level, Tyler understood that he was terrified that Jocelyn would hurt him. By not being able to have sexual intercourse with her, he was unconsciously protecting himself from being vulnerable to any infidelity she might commit.

Tyler could not bear the idea of being "not good enough" for Jocelyn the way his father was "not good enough" for his first wife. Erectile dysfunction kept him safe from risking that the same rejection could happen to him. The idea of being rejected by Jocelyn was a place Tyler refused to visit. In his insecurity, he nearly brought about his own rejection. For Tyler, making the connection was all he needed. He could see that Jocelyn really loved him and had stood by him through their sexual challenges. Although he had inherited his father's feelings, Tyler understood that he no longer had to relive them. His father's nightmare did not have to happen to him.

# Building Positive Family Relationships

- **Love and appreciation**

Show your child how much you love and appreciate them. Simple things like saying 'I love you' each night when they go to bed or thanking them for following through with a task are invaluable.



# Building Positive Family Relationships

- **Family meals**

Regular family meals are a fantastic opportunity for everyone to chat about their day or about interesting stuff that's going on or coming up. If everyone is encouraged to have a say, no-one will feel they're being put on the spot to talk. Also, many families find that meals are more enjoyable when the electronics are switched off!

# Building Positive Family Relationships

- **Family outings**

Try setting aside time for fun family outings. Take turns choosing activities. A weekend or even a day away together as a family can also build togetherness.

# Building Positive Family Relationships

- **One-on-one time**

One-on-one time with your child gives you the chance to stay connected and enjoy each other's company. It can also be an opportunity to share thoughts and feelings. This might be as simple as going for a walk together, watching a movie, or telling your child a story. Or you might find a regular hobby to do together, like cooking or yoga.

# Building Positive Family Relationships

- **Celebrate your child's accomplishments**

Celebrating your child's accomplishments, sharing their disappointments, and supporting their hobbies sends the message that your child's interests and concerns are important to you. You don't have to make a big deal of this – sometimes it's just a matter of showing up to watch your child play a sport or perform music or taking them to extracurricular activities.

# Building Positive Family Relationships

- **Family traditions**

Family traditions, routines and rituals can help you and your child set aside regular dates and special times. For example, you might have a movie night together, a favorite meal or cooking session on a particular night, a family games afternoon or an evening walk together.

# Building Positive Family Relationships

- **Household responsibilities**

Agreed household responsibilities give children and teenagers the sense that they're making an important contribution to family life. These could be things like chores, shopping or helping older or younger members of the family. It helps to give your child some say in which responsibilities they take on.

# Building Positive Family Relationships

- **Family rules**

Agreed-on rules, limits and consequences give teenagers a sense of security, structure and predictability. They help your child know what standards apply in your family, and what will happen if they push the boundaries. When your child is involved in making your family rules, they're more likely to see them as fair and stick to them. Negotiating rules with your child can also help you to reduce and manage conflict with your child.

# Building Positive Family Relationships

- **Family meetings**

Family meetings can help to solve problems. They give everyone a chance to be heard and be part of working out a solution. Setting a regular time and keeping that time as “sacred” to the family communicates the importance of both family unity and individual input.



# Things we do that have an impact

- Tell the Truth and Know the Truth
  - Parents who try to hide things from their kids—a health condition, a pending divorce, the fact that the child is adopted—often aren't fooling the little ones. Children are highly sensitive and intuitive, and they may sense that something is going on in the household. Secrets are especially troublesome. Although youngsters may not know *what* the secret is, they often think that they are somehow responsible for the tension in the air. They take the blame for the problems and are filled with guilt, but they feel powerless to change the situation.

# Things we do that have an impact

- Tell the Truth and Know the Truth
  - (Julana's experience)
  - Parents have the right to ask questions and expect that they will be answered truthfully. Parents should be aware of a teenager's growing need for privacy when invoking this right. Also, remember to ask questions when emotions are not running high to avoid arguing with an angry teen. That will only add to the problem instead of solving it.

# Things we do that have an impact

- Treat everyone with respect. Everyone has the right to be treated with respect.
  - Listen - let others talk.
  - Affirm their opinion
  - Celebrate their achievement
  - Empathize with their perspective
  - Look for common ground
  - Disagree without insult
  - Apologize
  - Try to understand
  - Call out disrespectful behavior
  - Be polite
  - Compliment
  - Do what you say you will do/Keep your promises
  - Offer assistance / Serve others
  - Take care of yourself
  - Use the COSA Communication Guidelines

# Things we do that have an impact

- Set Rules and Limit Privileges
  - Parents have the right to set rules and limit privileges when rules are not followed. This includes house and family rules that are followed out of respect for everyone who lives in the home. Some examples are rules about chores, guests, curfews, and illegal substances or activities within the home.
  - Parents can say "**no**" even when they just *think* something is wrong.

# Things we do that have an impact

- Set Rules and Limit Privileges
  - Trust is a big issue between parents and teens. While teens are allowed to make mistakes—and parents should give their teens the ability to earn back their trust—that does not take away the responsibility of a parent to keep their minor child from hurting themselves by setting rules and saying 'no' when needed. (Truth telling has a huge impact on trust.)

# Things we do that have an impact

- Ask About the Who, What, and Where
  - Parents have the right to know where their teenagers are, who they are with and generally what they are doing. While teens do not have to go into detail about private matters, like their thoughts about the person they are dating, for instance, they do have to let parents know things like the location of the party they will be attending and who is chaperoning the party.

# Things we do that have an impact

- Maintain Family Unity
  - Parents have the right to encourage family unity. They can expect all members of the family to take part in family traditions, family vacations, family meetings, and other activities that build strong family bonds.

# Things we do that have an impact

- Teach and Model boundaries
  - Young people rely on their parents to learn about the rules of society. This was true when you taught them how to take turns when they were three and is true in adolescence when you teach them the rules of the road and prepare them for how to present themselves for their first job interview.
  - Adolescents rely on their parents to set the boundaries around safety. They need to test their limits but do so best within clearly set boundaries.



# Things we do that have an impact

- Teach and Model Values

- Adolescents care about parent's values and want to know what is important to us. They seek guidance from us on what it means to be a good person
- Adolescents want to know their parents' opinions about substance use and healthy sexuality and value those opinions more than they do that of their friends. Long-term scientific research verifies this.

# Things we do that have an impact

- Teach and Model Values

- More than anything, our children want their parents to be well and happy. Children and adolescents are most secure when they know their parents are okay. So, you want to know how to best influence your child? Show them a healthy, responsible adult. Be the person you want to see as a reflection in your child's eyes.
- Parents are their adolescent's most valuable and desired teachers. Parents. Not peers. Not the media. Parents.



# Opportunity to Share Your ESH

# Share re: Truth telling / Truth asking

- What have you done that's worked?
- What do you think you could improve?

# Share re: Treating Others With Respect

- What have you done that's worked?
- What do you think you could improve?

# Share re: Setting Rules/Limiting Privileges/ Asking Questions

- What have you done that's worked?
- What do you think you could improve?

# Share re: Maintaining Family Unity

- What have you done that's worked?
- What do you think you could improve?

# Share re: Boundaries

- What have you done that's worked?
- What do you think you could improve?



# Share re: Values

- What have you done that's worked?
- What do you think you could improve?

# Resources

- Kolk MD, Bessel van der. The Body Keeps the Score
- Wolyann, Mark. It Didn't Start with You
- <https://www.verywellfamily.com/the-rights-and-responsibilities-of-parents-of-teens-2609100>
- <https://parentandteen.com/peers-may-matter-to-teens-but-parents-matter-more/>
- <https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/communicating-relationships/family-relationships/relationships-with-parents-teens>
- <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-the-secrets-you-keep-are-hurting-you/>

# Working the STEPS Around Your Teen

- Think of a situation that caused tension between you and your teen recently.
- Take two minutes to write a short narrative about what happened.
- You'll need paper and a pen or pencil – or a computer.

**1. We admitted we were powerless over compulsive sexual behavior – that our lives had become unmanageable.**

- a. What am I powerless over *in this situation*?
- b. List those people, places, and things that I am powerless over, especially the ones that particularly frustrate me.
- c. What am I powerless to control or change?
- d. How has my life become unmanageable?
- e. How has my serenity been affected?

**Acceptance**

## 2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity

- a. Where is my Higher Power in this situation?
- b. What am I doing that just might be insane? Insanity might include doing the same thing over and expecting different results, but it is not limited to that.
- c. Do I believe my Higher Power can restore me to sanity?

HOPE

### **3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.**

- a. Am I ready to turn over any outcome to the care of God?
- b. What do I understand as the CARE of God?
- c. Is my HP trustworthy enough to handle this?
- d. Say a prayer turning over the specific situation.

**Faith**

## 4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

- a. Talk briefly about any important points you have not already mentioned.
- b. List your defects in this situation. (Partner, write these down.)

**Courage**

## 5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

a. See if you can identify the core beliefs or problems that are causing you grief.

b. Examples of core beliefs include: I am bad, I am not enough, I am unlovable, unwanted, unsafe, or defective. Sometimes core beliefs are about the world or life: The world is unsafe, life is unfair, etc.

Honesty



## 6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

- a. Talk about how the character defects you listed in Step Four are hurting you and others.
- b. What is the payback? That is, what are you getting by using this character defect?
- c. There may be none. Are you ready to let God remove those defects?
- d. If not, pray for that willingness.

Patience

## 7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

a. Ask your HP out loud or silently to remove all those shortcomings which do not serve you or others in this situation

**Humility**

**8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.**

**a.** Who have you hurt? Don't forget you. If you have hurt someone else, you have surely hurt yourself.

**b.** Are you willing to make amends to each of these people?

**Willingness**

**9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.**

- a. Consider how to make amends.
- b. Make a commitment to make those amends. If you have a sponsor, check with them first. With practice, discovering appropriate amends will be easier.

Love

## 10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

- a. Commit to looking at the situation again and again until it is cleared up for you. Realize it may never be cleared up for the other person(s) and that your side is what you need to be concerned with.
- b. Especially look at your progress with the character defects you asked God to remove.

Integrity

**11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.**

- a. Pray about this situation, and pray for everyone involved, including yourself.
- b. Ask God into the situation if you have not already.
- c. Pray for knowledge of God's will for you and the power to carry that out.

**Self-discipline**

**12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all areas of our lives.**

- a. Have you had a spiritual awakening as a result of working the Steps this time?
- b. What principles are involved? Examples include honesty, humility, faith, hope, detachment, and God-Reliance.
- c. Make an attempt to live the principles that are involved. Share the lesson(s) you learned in a meeting.

**Service**

# To receive both presentations

- Check the COSA-Teen link on the website.
  - Go to [cosa-recovery.org](http://cosa-recovery.org)
  - Click on What is COSA?
  - Click on COSA for Teens
  - It should take you to the page with the documents to download.