Understanding Adolescent Addiction
Part I
Generation Rx

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What’s Ahead

- Try to remember those years (Adolescent Developmental Issues)
- Parenting (Systems) Issues
- Adolescent substance abuse... from experimentation to dependency
- Common co-occurring disorders seen with adolescents
- Strategies for Recovery
- Our Value Proposition
Adolescent Developmental Issues

Try to remember…
There are no bad kids, just bad decisions!
THE AVERAGE TEENAGE BRAIN
Physical Changes in Adolescence

Major physical transition period
Raging hormones
Rapid growth
Skin eruptions
Massive and uncomfortable change in body image
Sexual drive can be overwhelming
Not comfortable in their own skin
Cognitive Changes in Adolescence

More brain changes during adolescence than in any other time except first year of life

Brain is malleable...vulnerable to substance abuse disorders

Parts of the brain that process reward and pain are the first to mature

Parts that govern assessing situations, making decisions, controlling impulses (prefrontal cortex) matures later (up to mid 20’s)

Metaphor: Fully functioning gas pedal...bad brakes
Cognitive Changes in Adolescence

Decision making becomes a major challenge
Impulse control a daily challenge
First period where consideration of consequences becomes confusing and challenging
Freedom expands without parallel expansion of responsibility and awareness
Social Changes in Adolescence

Peers become the norm
Peers play largest role they will ever play in self-judgment

Childhood: Family is reference group; peers are secondary
Adolescence: Peers are reference group; family becomes secondary

Exploration of vocational world and market place
Exploration of finances and financial limits
Responsibilities gradually increase with freedom
Transportation becomes less dependent on parents
What Adolescents Need

Sense of competency
Effective coping skills
Ability to postpone rewards
Ability to move in linear fashion toward goal completion
Positive social bonding to positive peer groups and institutions
Freedom commensurate with responsibility
A gradually increasing level of autonomy
To feel heard (they sometimes feel that we trivialize their concerns)
What Adolescents Need

Family Environment that are:
- Warm
- Safe
- Firm
- Predictable
- Clear expectations of who is responsible for what
- Mutually understood and agreed on consequences when those expectations are not met
If these needs are not met...

Suicidal thoughts and/or attempts
Self-identity questioned
Depression & Anxiety
Runaway
Drug/ETOH abuse
Psychosexual development difficulties
Eating disorders
Anger management problems
Trust Issues
Self-Mutilation
Parenting Issues
Skills and Contributing Parenting Patterns
Parenting Styles most common in kids with substance abuse issues

Dysfunctional Nurturing

Dysfunctional Exploitative
Dysfunctional Nurturing Orientation (Taking over life experiences for the child rather than letting him fully experience them...the good and the bad)

Over-indulgence
- Shields child from frustration
- Motivated by desire for child’s adoration, gratitude, dependency
- Child often responds with failure to develop his own personal strength, and co-dependency

Over Protection
- Excessive shielding from danger
- Fosters helplessness and incompetence, as well as adoption of parent’s fears
Pity
Excessive sympathizing.. exaggeration of child’s misfortune
Motivated by need to nurture, have one’s own wounds licked, etc.
Child develops learned helplessness

Nagging
Excessive reminding, correcting
Failure to simply connect behaviors with logical consequences
Again, excessive and irrational need to control
Child becomes “parent deaf”... learns passive/aggressive skills
Exploitation-Oriented

Parents use child as a medium of gratification at the expense of his basic needs and rights... parents struggling with their own impulse control

Verbal Abuse
Belittling, name calling, threatening, sarcasm, yelling, swearing

Physical Abuse
Hitting, shaking, burning, hair pulling, slapping

Motive: confusion between discipline and physical pain, and poor impulse control

Neglect
Deprivation of shelter, food, clothing, etc.
De-juvenilization
Using child as adult for excessive closeness, companionship, emotional intimacy
Robbing child of childhood through various means
Attempts to gain adult support through child

Sexual Abuse
Forcing or enticing child into witnessing or participating in sexual activity
How to prevent or correct...

Dysfunctional nurturing-oriented Parenting Styles
Clarify and resolve feelings of inadequacy
Affirm parenting skills
Help set realistic standards
Disengage parents from guilt motivation
  Disengage love of person (child) from acceptance or rejection of inappropriate behavior
Tame the passion to please the child
How to prevent or correct...

Exploitation oriented parenting style:
Often, separating parents and youth is necessary
Anger and/or impulse control training
Getting parents intensive treatment for their psychopathology and destructive behaviors
Providing empathy and compassion
Best intervention for poor adolescent parenting skills

Go to Al-Anon or other 12 step support groups (Families Anonymous)
Understand the steps
Understand the slogans
Understand the Serenity Prayer
Really try to separate what’s yours and what’s the kid’s, and keep it separated!
Family Beliefs about their kids using drugs

My child is too young (most adolescents try their first drug between grades 6 and 8).

My child passes drug tests (most drugs youth are using are undetectable).

My child doesn’t have any of the signs and symptoms (some adolescents are able to maintain appearances, and will go to any length to hide use).

My kid is involved in sports (amphetamines, steroids, GHB very popular. ETOH very popular because it is undetectable in drug screens).
Family Beliefs about their kids using drugs

I would know. Adolescents are smart, and they share methods for avoiding detection with each other.

My kids attend church. Many kids in treatment are involved in church. Many first experiences happen in church functions.

We are good parents. You don’t have to be bad parents for your kid to use drugs.
How to Raise a Criminal
(Ann Landers, circa 1950’s)

Begin from infancy to give the child everything he wants. This way, he’ll grow up to believe the world owes him a living. When he picks up bad words, laugh at him. It will encourage him to pick up cuter phrases that will blow the top of your head off later. Never give him any spiritual training. Wait until he’s 21, and then let him decide for himself.

Avoid the use of the word “wrong.” It may develop a guilt complex. This will condition him to believe later, when he is arrested for stealing a car, that society is against him and he is being persecuted.
How to raise a criminal

Pick up anything he leaves lying around – books, shoes, clothing. Do everything for him so that he will be experienced in shifting responsibility to others.

Let him read any printed matter he can get his hands on. Silverware and drinking glasses are sterilized, but let him feed his mind on garbage.

Quarrel frequently in the presence of the youth. They won’t be too shocked later when the home is broken up.

Give the child all the spending money he wants. Never let him earn his own. Why should he have things as rough as you had them?
How to Raise a Criminal

Satisfy his every craving for food, drink, and comfort. See that every desire is gratified. Denial may lead to harmful frustrations. Take his part against the neighbors, teachers, and policemen. They are all prejudiced against your child.

When he gets into real trouble, apologize for yourself by saying, “I never could do anything with him.”

Prepare for a life of grief, for you’re sure to have it.
Building Resilient Families
What do bungee cords & families have in common?

Both need bouncability!
Resiliency

The ability to bounce back, or the ability to cultivate strengths that allow us to meet the demands of life. With resiliency, we can not only survive but thrive!
Why is family resiliency so important?
Families face many challenges...divorce, job loss, financial challenges, and daily time pressures to name a few.

By building on a family’s strengths, we can minimize the stress they will experience as a result of these challenges.
Characteristics of Strong Families
Commitment to each other

Committed families feel a sense of trust, belonging, and unity. They solve problems together and look to the future. This gives them purpose and direction.
Physical, spiritual, and emotional wellness

Family wellness means that the family has a healthy lifestyle with proper nutrition, exercise, rest, and relaxation. Spiritual wellness means we look outside ourselves and tune in to the feelings, needs, and welfare of others.
Effective family communication maintains positive, healthy relationships, helps solve problems, and lowers stress. Positive speaking is being kind and encouraging, sharing your thoughts, feelings, and experiences.
Appreciation of all family members

Showing you care brings families together.

Accentuate a person’s good qualities. Show you care through words, a hug, a gesture.

Accept the appreciation sent by other family members.
Meaningful and sufficient time together

Research has shown that strong families eat, play, work, and share outside activities together. They celebrate traditions that enrich family life and build memories for the future.
Effective strategies to deal with stress

Characteristics that help families deal with stress include support from friends, relatives, neighbors and others in the community; a positive outlook or long-range view that things will get better; and a way to work together to overcome difficulties.
Why is it important to foster resiliency in our children, teens, and young adults?
Children, teens, and young adults today face more stressors than ever…school, sports, family relationships, changing schools, changing neighborhoods, divorce, bullies (including cyberbullying), making friends and difficulties with friends.

We can’t protect them from them all stressors (and they must face some alone to build resilience).
When we raise our youth in strong, resilient families, we begin to equip them with the tools they will need to respond to the challenges of adolescence and young adulthood and to navigate successfully into adulthood.
The 7 C’s of Resilience: How to Help your Child Recognize His Abilities and Inner Resources
Competence

The feeling of knowing that you can handle a situation effectively.
Confidence

A child’s belief in his own abilities.
Connection

Close ties to family and community creates a sense of security and helps lead to strong values.
Character

Youth need to develop a solid set of morals and values to determine right from wrong and to demonstrate a caring attitude toward others.
Coping

Learning to cope effectively with stress will help your child be better prepared to overcome life’s challenges. We must model this behavior to deter our youth from destructive means of coping.
Control

When we empower our youth, we show them they can control their own decisions (and therefore consequences both good and bad).
Here is what we know for sure...
Children need to know that there is an adult in their life who believes in them and loves them unconditionally.

And...
Children will live “up” or “down” to our expectations.
Resilient families build resilient kids who grow into resilient adults who build their own resilient families.
I'm not sure if resilience is ever achieved alone. Experience allows us to learn from example. But if we have someone who loves us—I don't mean who indulges us, but who loves us enough to be on our side—then it's easier to grow resilience, to grow belief in self, to grow self-esteem. And it's self-esteem that allows a person to stand up.

— Maya Angelou —
Adolescent Addiction

From experimentation to dependence
Progression of Addiction in Adolescents

Principles to remember

Drugs and alcohol create temporary euphoric states...desirable and tempting to repeat for most kids

Postponement of rewards is one of the hardest lessons for adolescents to absorb

Drugs=instant rewards; delayed consequences
The adolescent brain’s reward circuits (dopamine system) get thrown out of whack under the influence of drugs and alcohol.

This causes an adolescent to feel “in a funk” when NOT using, leading them to repeat using behavior in order to feel “normal” again. As a teen repeats this behavior over time, it takes more and more substances to simply bring dopamine levels to normal (tolerance increase, then addiction).
Progression of Addiction in Adolescents

Most adolescents respond to the negative consequences of continued use.

We’re dealing with the kids that continue in spite of mounting and increasing consequences.
Milestones in Progression

Experimentation leads to various kinds and degrees of euphoric states.

Peer pressure reinforces pursuit of these states, e.g., change in friends, identification through clothing, music, etc. choices... as peer groups change, so does status in the pecking order.

Continued use leads to a certain pride and “expertise” at street smarts in growing width and depth of use.
Milestones in Progression

Negative consequences typically start slowly, and the early ones are often difficult to identify...

- Interference with goal-directed activity
- Interference with or from old peer group
- General withdrawal from people, places, things that used to matter

As parents notice and confront changes, withdrawal continues and intensifies, and shifts to blaming, denial, victimhood, etc.

The dots don’t always connect! (at least in the eyes of the child and often the parents)
Milestones in Progression

During all this, use can intensify.
Tolerance has begun, requiring greater quantities (or different drugs) to achieve desired states.
As consequences develop, there are more things to escape from, spurring greater use.
Consequences increase in quantity and seriousness.
Definition: Continued use in spite of increasing consequences.
Or... if it causes problems (or continues to), then it is a problem.
Strategies for Recovery

Important principles in adolescent treatment
Intervention and Treatment Strategies

**Intervention**

Never insist that a child be fully motivated to get help...unnecessary. External pushes can become internal pulls.

Make full use of all means of external leverage.
- Juvenile justice
- Schools
- Family

Coerced or persuaded treatment can open doors of perception and awareness.
Holistic Approaches and Realities

Pharmacology is not enough...
Cognitive Sobriety
Stress, emotions, and addiction
Spirituality
Changing playgrounds and playmates
Longevity of engagement greatest predictor of success
Some important concepts

Importance of long term, medium term, short term goals

Key developmental milestones in recovery: ability to postpone rewards

Recovery is connecting values and behavior, addiction is disconnecting

Anything you can do to help a child really internalize how the dots connect is powerful
“All Time Champion”
Life Management Tool

Serenity Prayer

Can’t Control…it belongs to You…give me peace to accept that.
Can Control…it belongs to me…give me courage and commitment to do my best.
Help me figure out what goes where…constant exercise in “course correction.”

(Hint: it all goes under “can’t control” except you…your thoughts, attitudes, choices, behaviors).