

Edition 10 of NCO PME: Teaching the Adolescent Brain

This edition of **Professional Military Education** (PME) contains a wealth of knowledge and resources on the neuroscience of adolescent brains. This page on [Adolescent Learning](#) talks about the significant developmental changes that occur in the brain up until the age of 25. It identifies strategies on how to teach, discipline and communicate with adolescents and will also give you an insight into the inner working of your own brain.

First, read through the article about adolescent learning. Then, watch the short video about youth brain development, behaviour and learning. Lastly, listen to the short Cove Clip which contains the key points out of the full Cove Talk on Adolescent learning by COL Brad Kilpatrick, CSC.

WANT MORE?

Listen to the full Cove Talk on Adolescent learning by COL Kilpatrick. This provides considerable detail into how the human brain operates and how the function of the adolescent brain is different to that of an adult.

Complete the 'Understanding Our Younger Workforce' ADELE online course contained in the article. This will give you a good understanding on how to work most effectively with adolescents. This is a great course for those working in training establishments and anyone in a leadership position.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Considering the majority of our training force are adolescents, do you think our ADF training systems and reward systems account for working with the adolescent brain? Why or why not?
2. Have you experienced trainees, junior soldiers or officers use the emotional part of their brain in difficult or stressful situations. What was the situation and what was the outcome? What happened once they 'cooled down'?
3. Of course we can all fall into the trap of letting the emotional part of our brains take over when under stress. Can you think of a time this has happened to you? What was the situation, what happened, how did you feel and what was the result? How did you feel when you revisited the situation after you had cooled down?
4. Do you feel that the information in this article and video is correct? Have you found that the way you react and respond to situations are different now compared to when you were an adolescent?
5. Should we change the segment of the population we recruit from and aim for a slightly older candidate with more life experience similar to the Police force?
6. How much should we tailor the way we train people to the people we are training. Now that we are more aware of the neuroscience of adolescent learning, should we adjust the way we educate them?

7. Have you ever adjusted the way you have taught someone or dealt with a situation based on the age of the person/people you were dealing with?
8. Do you think this study gives adolescents an excuse to behave poorly? How do we avoid this from happening?
9. Is there anything you have learnt about teaching or dealing with adolescents from this PME? Are there any strategies you may try to use in the future to better communicate messages or better instruct? What will you change?

OTHER ACTIVITIES

If you enjoyed this activity, why not try the other [PMEs](#) available on The Cove?

Want more material? For JNCOs to conduct with their soldiers, [here](#) is a link to our Quick Military Education resources. For Junior Officers [here](#) is a link to our Junior Officer PME sessions.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

If you have suggestions for improvements - additional readings or reference material, alternative discussion points, new delivery methods - or just wish to provide feedback, please contact The Cove Team via the.cove@defence.gov.au

FACILITATOR NOTES

There is no 'right answer' to these questions. The points provided below are only prompts to help the facilitator foster conversation

1. Considering the majority of our training force are adolescents, do you think our ADF training systems and reward systems account for working with the adolescent brain? Why or why not?
 - Encourage discussion about our reward and discipline systems.
 - Do you think DFDA works well on an adolescent?
 - Is the 'question, answer technique' that the ADF uses work well with a brain that is programmed to 'fight, flight or fright' when placed under acute stress?
 - Do we provide enough positive feedback and encourage to our soldiers to reward them for good actions?
2. Have you experienced trainees, junior soldiers or officers use the emotional part of their brain in difficult or stressful situations. What was the situation and what was the outcome? What happened once they 'cooled down'?
 - Encourage discussion around the emotional part of the brain 'hijacking' and taking over all thought.
 - Discuss that reason is diminished when this happens and the rational part of the brain that solves problems is not able to operate effectively.
 - Discuss the impact this can have on a soldier or commander in the heat of battle.
3. Of course we can all fall into the trap of letting the emotional part of our brains take over when under stress. Can you think of a time this has happened to you? What was the situation, what happened, how did you feel and what was the result? How did you feel when you revisited the situation after you had cooled down?
 - Encourage the sharing of examples when the audience has felt their rational brain be overtaken by their emotional brain.
 - How much rational thought and self-control was diminished when this happened?
 - Discuss that this happens to all of us, but adolescent brains are especially susceptible due to the late myelination of the rational part of the brain.
4. Do you feel that the information in this article and video is correct? Have you found that the way you react and respond to situations are different now compared to when you were an adolescent?
 - Concentrate on discussing how the brain changes over time, rather than any thought of adolescent brains being under-developed.
 - There may be some younger members of the audience who are defensive when presented with this information. Concentrate on the scientific facts rather than any stereotypes.
5. Should we change the segment of the population we recruit from and aim for a slightly older candidate with more life experience similar to the Police force?
 - Encourage debate on the balance between recruiting younger candidates straight out of school versus slightly older candidates.
 - Would it make it more difficult to recruit if we had an age limit? Would we miss out on some candidates that move into other careers?

- Would we have issues with injuries if we recruited older candidates or do you think our injury rate may decrease?
 - How might our psychological injuries change if we recruited older candidates?
 - Is it better that we train adolescents how to deal with stress at a young age? Or rely on the external life experience of older candidates?
 - Why do you think agencies such as the police force focus on recruiting people with more life experience?
6. How much should we tailor the way we train people to the people we are training. Now that we are more aware of the neuroscience of adolescent learning, should we adjust the way we educate them?
- Encourage debate around how we should accommodate adolescents in the training environment and what we should not change in order to ensure we challenge our people.
7. Have you ever adjusted the way you have taught someone or dealt with a situation based on the age of the person/people you were dealing with?
- Encourage sharing of experiences and what worked/didn't work.
8. Do you think this study gives adolescents an excuse to behave poorly? How do we avoid this from happening?
- Encourage debate and compare thoughts between the different age brackets within the group.
 - Remember that neuroscience is science. It has been proven. Although it shouldn't be used as an excuse for bad behaviour, understanding adolescent brains helps us to teach, lead and manage them better.
9. Is there anything you have learnt about teaching or dealing with adolescents from this PME? Are there any strategies you may try to use in the future to better communicate messages or better instruct? What will you change?
- Ask each individual to reflect and share what they have learnt.
 - Come up with some ideas that are relevant to your training centre or unit.