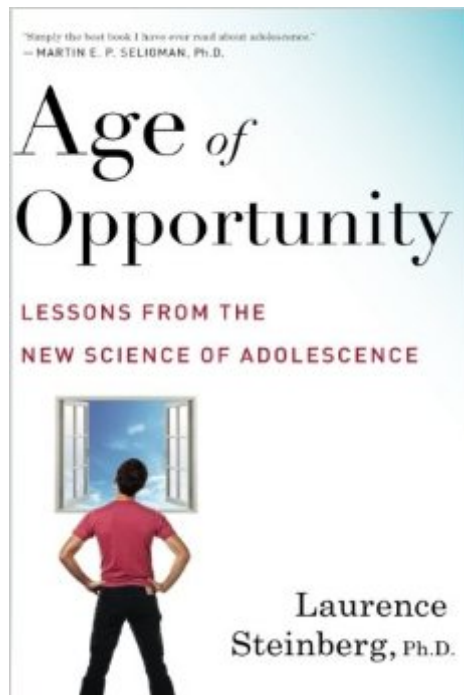


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Age Of Opportunity: Lessons From The New Science Of Adolescence



Synopsis

“Simply the best book I have ever read about adolescence. . . With gentle wisdom, Steinberg guides us through truly novel findings on what happens during adolescence and tells us how, as parents and teachers, we should change our ways.” Martin E. P. Seligman, Ph. D., author of *The Optimistic Child* “If you need to understand adolescents—whether your own or anyone else’s—you must read this book. . . . Steinberg explains why most of our presumptions about adolescence are dead wrong and reveals the truth about this exciting and unnerving stage of life.” Jennifer Senior, author of *All Joy and No Fun* Over the past few decades, adolescence has lengthened, and this stage of life now lasts longer than ever. Recent research has shown that the adolescent brain is surprisingly malleable, making it a crucial time of life for determining a person’s future success and happiness. In *Age of Opportunity*, the world-renowned expert on adolescence Laurence Steinberg draws on this trove of fresh evidence—including his own groundbreaking research—to explain the teenage brain’s capacity for change and to offer new strategies for instilling resilience, self-control, and other beneficial traits. By showing how new discoveries about adolescence must change the way we raise, teach, and treat young people, Steinberg provides a myth-shattering guide for parents, educators, and anyone else who cares about adolescents. “A fascinating book [that] parents and teachers ought to read.” *Atlanta Journal Constitution* “This book belongs on the shelf of every parent, teacher, youth worker, counselor, judge—heck, anyone interested in pre-teens and teenagers.” David Walsh, Ph.D., author of *Why Do They Act That Way? A Survival Guide to the Adolescent Brain for You and Your Teen*

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Customer Reviews

The first third of this book is well worth reading. We get a number of valuable insights into and great perspective on the biological, brain-based reasons (in easily understandable layman's terms) for the issues and problems that commonly arise in adolescence, an understanding of how adolescence has been lengthening on both ends and why that both is and isn't a problem. Adolescence, he demonstrates, is a period of great brain plasticity, much like that which is recognized in early childhood when infants through preschoolers are capable of learning and developing quite rapidly. The same capacity for growth exists in adolescence, but it is more of a double-edge sword because adolescence is a time when teens take many more risks, are less likely to be supervised and have much greater potential for encountering harm. The adolescent's brain changes almost as much as a young child's, but if that change takes place in a negative environment, negative changes can become encoded in the brain leading to life-long behavioral, cognitive and emotional problems that can, in turn, lead to school and work failure, unintended pregnancy, run-ins with the law and relationship difficulties. Steinberg explores, through a great deal of research, exactly what the differences are between children, adolescents and adults as far as cognitive and emotional functioning. Contrary to popular belief, he demonstrates that teenagers are able to reason and make judgments about as well as adults when given adequate information and time to process it, so immaturity is not a direct result of deficits in judgment or understanding. He also sorts through a number of other commonly accepted culprits of adolescent (mis)behavior - impulsivity, self-control, peer-pressure, etc.

I think I'm going to be going against overwhelming opinion here because Laurence Steinberg definitely has the skinny here on what makes pubescent (and post-pubescent) "kids" tick. If he's to be faulted on his observations, it is only insofar as a lot of parents already intuit much of the results of his more formal inquiries, based on our real world experience with the adolescent brain. I didn't need to know that adolescent rats actually imbibe more alcohol in the presence of "peers" than lone rats to extrapolate that kids egg each other on when it comes to short-sighted, reward-seeking behaviors, for one example. But the empirical evidence goes down easy here, interspersed with professional and a few personal anecdotes from Dr. Steinberg. He's certainly right in suggesting that too many parents adopt an extreme parenting style - either autocracy or permissiveness - but

his suggestions for finding the engaged, active and caring "middle path" is less about cutting edge clinical science and more about "standing on the shoulders of giants", going back at least as far as Dr. Spock, who I guess would be considered overly "permissive" today? From Spock to Sears, if you've read the literature over the years, I don't think the parenting information in the book has that much new to offer. Steinberg, however, has a larger audience in mind than simply the parents of today's adolescents. His work has brought him into contact with adults in the criminal justice system who made terrible mistakes as children - sometimes tragically unknowing or uninformed mistakes - and were tried as adults, and sentenced to a cycle of failure, if not multiple decades behind bars. More on that below.

As the mom of three girls ages 14, 12, and 9, I am just beginning to see the ebbs and flows of the adolescent years. I am also the oldest of three girls, so I remember those years as well. Just in one generation, I am shocked by the new averages being thrown at me about when girls entered puberty. One pediatrician told me the average was getting closer to 9 than 10. Age of Opportunity supports the idea that the adolescent phase of life is getting longer. The author states, "The brain is radically transformed by stress hormones like testosterone and estrogen." This is certainly not new information, but when coupled with data supporting an elongated adolescence, it's significant. I also found it interesting that while parents try to delay adolescence, society seems bent on a delayed adulthood. Further studies show, and are illustrated in this book, that our brain is heightened during these years and captures the corresponding memories with vivid detail. In addition to all the brain studies, the book provides worrisome data comparing our teens to those in other industrialized countries. At this point, I was convinced and craving solutions. After all, my kids are there and depending on me. I loved his basic principles: Be Warm, Be Firm, Be Supportive. It's the gray area that gets confusing. When is warm too warm (we create kids who go on American Idol and can't handle any critique and think they can sing even when faced with the reality that they can't) and firm too firm (although he does address that the punishment shouldn't be extreme and to be consistent and fair)? As a parent, we know what we should do in a perfect, calm environment.

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