



Working with “disengaged” young people

Youth Connections National Network
John Coates and Jenny Allen

www.transitions.youth.gov.au



Lazy **Moody** **Impulsive**
Self Centred
Argumentative
Peer pressure **Emotional**
Challenging **Risk taking**
Irrational **Hormonal** **Anxious** **Impulsive** **Confused**

“... beguiling at breakfast, disgusting at dinner,
masterful on Monday, sleepwalking on
Saturday.”

National Geographic, October 2011



A word cloud featuring various terms related to youth and transitions. The words are arranged in a roughly triangular shape, with 'Leaving' being the largest and most prominent word. Other significant words include 'Freedom', 'Capable', 'Energetic', and 'Possibility'. Smaller words include 'Expectation', 'Anticipation', 'Sensitive', 'Responsible', 'Peers', 'Risk taking', and 'Young'. The colors of the words range from dark brown to light brown.

Expectation
Leaving
Anticipation
Sensitive
Freedom
Capable
Responsible
Peers
Risk taking
Energetic
Possibility
Young

The world needs to see
young people, not as a
threat, but as a promise.

Rita Afifi (Lancet, 22 June 2013)

5

UNDERSTANDING YOUNG PEOPLE



6

← Agree

Disagree →

Adolescence is predominantly about the changes that occur as a result of puberty

PHYSICAL CHANGES



Brain development

**YOUTH
ATTAINMENT
AND TRANSITIONS**

At Birth 6 Years Old 14 Years Old

The diagram illustrates the progression of brain development. It features three circular orange brain network diagrams. The first, labeled 'At Birth', shows a sparse network of neurons. The second, labeled '6 Years Old', shows a significantly denser and more interconnected network. The third, labeled '14 Years Old', shows a very dense and complex network. Below each diagram is a corresponding image of a person: a crawling baby for 'At Birth', a young girl for '6 Years Old', and a teenage boy for '14 Years Old'. The 'YOUTH ATTAINMENT AND TRANSITIONS' logo is in the top right, and the 'Ei' logo is in the bottom right.

**YOUTH
ATTAINMENT
AND TRANSITIONS**

Agree Disagree

←—————→

The Amygdala is more active in adults than in adolescents

The slide contains a horizontal scale with 'Agree' on the left and 'Disagree' on the right, connected by a double-headed arrow. Below the scale, the text 'The Amygdala is more active in adults than in adolescents' is centered. The 'YOUTH ATTAINMENT AND TRANSITIONS' logo is in the top right corner.

EMOTIONS

YOUTH
ATTAINMENT
AND TRANSITIONS



YOUTH
ATTAINMENT
AND TRANSITIONS

Agree

Disagree



Emotions are stronger than thoughts

RATIONAL THINKING AND PLANNING



Agree Disagree

A horizontal blue double-headed arrow spans the width of the text, indicating a scale from 'Agree' on the left to 'Disagree' on the right.

Young people value rewards more than consequences

REWARD SYSTEM



15

Agree

Disagree



Young people today are more difficult
to deal with than any previous
generation





“Teenagers are the terrible twos, only on a more sophisticated level. It is a time of inarticulate eloquence.

Adolescents never quite belong – they no longer fit like they did as a child. They lose their fundamental connections. It is almost a time of grief. An angry teenager is a grieving one. If you remember this it will be easier to be more compassionate.”

Andrew Fuller, March 2014

ADDITIONAL RISK FACTORS



- Family dysfunction, conflict or violence, removal from home, disconnection from family and/or culture
- Intergenerational poverty/unemployment, homelessness
- Mental or physical health issues or disability
- Lack of significant caring adult relationship
- Academic failure, poor literacy/numeracy or negative school experiences, including bullying
- Critical life events
- Drug/alcohol misuse, juvenile justice issues
- Limited support networks

21

YOUTH AT RISK



- Critical role of parents for a longer period
- Greater inequality in regards to educational attainment, economic success and family life
- Those at risk are even less likely to follow an orderly, predictable sequence
- Many systems still function as if youth become independent adults overnight
- Importance of post secondary education support so as not to leave vulnerable youth without a safety net

(Furstenberg, F., 2010, On a New Schedule: Transitions to Adulthood and Family Life)

22

Practical strategies to engage with disengaged young people

- Best practice tips
- Successful engaging activities

There is a tendency, in practice with young people who present as detached from their families, to treat them as though they exist independently of others and of their history or culture, in a sort of vacuum. In planning intervention, workers may focus on the young person alone and 'in-the-moment', without considering how their history of relationships and experiences interacts with their current circumstances and what this could mean for effective planning.

Source: A framework for practice with 'high-risk' young people (12-17 years) QLD Govt. 2008



- Work with a case management model that is client focussed and holistic
- Building on the knowledge and existing referral networks of experienced staff
- Provide a service in combination with small group work to introduce employability skills and positive social interaction.



- Recognise young people's rights to make decisions that will directly impact upon them.
- Promote respect by listening to young people's views and taking them seriously.
- Build and maintain strong relationships with young people; trust and respect often have to be earned.
- Build on young people's knowledge, strengths and skills, helping them to reach their full potential

- Recognise young people's different situations and backgrounds, particularly those:
 - from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Island backgrounds
 - from culturally diverse backgrounds
 - with disabilities
 - in out-of-home care
 - from vulnerable or marginalised groups

- Encourage young people to provide feedback on the effectiveness of your service delivery.
- Work at a holistic level; human beings are complex therefore need to consider their physical, environmental, emotional, social, spiritual and lifestyle situation.
- Motivate and encourage the young person, use tools such as motivational interviewing which seeks to engage the client to facilitate meaningful change.

- Be flexible as disadvantaged young people will often encounter challenges that change daily. Don't assume laziness
- Have a sound knowledge of available youth services in your local area.
- Always educate; if you disagree with a choice made by the young person explain why and how they could have handled the situation differently, rather than assuming they had this knowledge/ punishing

Engagement activities

- Most beneficial when young people have barriers like socialisation, anxiety, confidence issues.

Two examples

- Life Skills Program
- Industry Tours



Core Topics

- Health & Fitness
- Healthy Food on a Budget
- Smart Shopping
- Budgeting
- Banking
- Renting
- Cleaning
- Healthy Relationships
- Sexual Health
- Safe Partying



Employment related

- OH&S
- Appropriate Workplace Behaviour
- Career research
- Personal Presentation
- Career Life Coaching
- Interviewing and applications
- *Work place communication*

Industry Tours

- Concept – *to open up young people’s minds to the variety of career opportunities within their own community.*

Working party:

- Councils – Mayor
- Department of Employment - Regional Education, Skills & Jobs Coordinator
- Partnership Broker
- Alternative learning centres – this was to increase participation numbers

Approached a range of industries

- Mining
 - Viticulture
 - Construction
 - Manufacturing
 - Automotive
 - Hospitality
 - Horticulture
 - Councils
 - Waste & Recycle
-
- <http://vimeo.com/99501866>



Case studies

- Discussion groups

The slide features a logo in the top right corner with the text "YOUTH ATTAINMENT AND TRANSITIONS" in blue and green. On the left side, there are two vertical bars, one blue and one green. The main content is centered on the slide.

**UNDERSTANDING
MINDSETS**



Trying is the first step towards failure.

MATT GROENING



37



“Just removing risk does not turn young people’s lives around. Acquisition of protective factors is what turns them around.”

(Andrew Fuller, 2014)

38

Touchpoints for action



- “Come in without the full tin”
- Build relationships with young people and their families
- Provide case management and/or mentoring
- Address barriers, identify strengths
- Keep initiatives activity based
- Build basic skills and aspirations

Touchpoints for action



- Work in partnership
- Identify and link young people into existing programs, such as alternative education programs or specialist services
- Deliver local services in local communities
- Acknowledge the different service delivery needs of young people – a different model and different approach

Where to next?



- Peak bodies
- Youth Service providers – Youth Connections providers
- Alternative education providers
- Youth Connections National Network documents
- Research
- Plan for young people's future

Good luck as you help young people realise a future full of possibility

