Understanding Brain Development
How the choices we make change our brain and make us who we are

Our brain is the most amazing “computer” that has ever been created. It has billions of neurons that make connections and control hundreds of body functions—including everything we think, feel, say, or do—all at the same time! Forty percent of our neurons are “wired” or connected at birth. The other 60 percent are waiting to be wired by our learning and experiences. Everything we think, say, or do causes new neural growth which changes our brain structure. This means that teens can direct the development of their own brains. The ages between 12–25 is a critical time of brain development. Important connections are being made that link brain areas together, helping us become smarter and make better decisions. Alcohol suppresses brain activity, harming its development. It is essential to protect it from alcohol and drugs during this critical “wiring” period.

“Teens, through their choices and actions, have the power to direct the development of their own brains. . . . [They are] laying the neural foundations that will serve them for the rest of their lives.”
- Dr. Jay Giedd, MD, Chief of Brain Imaging, National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH)