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Understanding the Adolescent Brain

50-Minute Lesson Plan

For Key Stage 4 pupils

Lesson Overview

Purpose:

To help KS4 pupils understand how the adolescent brain develops, why teenagers may take risks, and how early experiences shape behaviour, emotions, and decision-making. The lesson uses VR (if available) or VR-inspired discussion to deepen empathy and insight.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the lesson, pupils will be able to:

- Describe key features of adolescent brain development.
- Explain why teenagers may struggle with impulse control and risk assessment.
- Reflect on how early experiences can influence emotions, relationships, and behaviour.
- Identify healthy support networks and protective factors.

Required Materials

- VR headset(s) and selected VR experience
- Projector/board
- Discussion prompts (printed or displayed)
- Evaluation slips

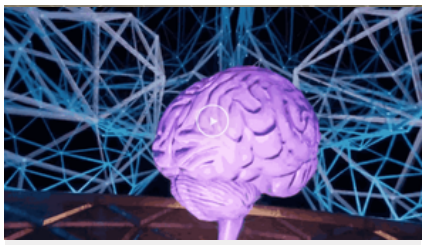
VR Film(s):



Welcome to the Teenage Brain



The Brain Explained



The Connected Brain

Where can I find these films?

In the headsets: Go to the category labelled 'Adolescent Brain'.
On the portal: Go to the 2D films area, click 'Adolescent Brain'.

Safeguarding & Preparation Notes

Drawn from the document's guidance:

- Ensure pupils know what VR is and what "fully immersive... puts you into the perspective of a person/child" means.
- Remind pupils they may remove the headset at any time.
- Highlight emotional health warnings: some content may evoke "anger/upset/fear".
- Ensure seating is safe and stable.
- Establish a supportive, non-judgemental atmosphere.
- Let pupils know who they can talk to afterwards if anything feels difficult.

Lesson Breakdown

0-5 min | Welcome & Warm-Up

Activity:

- Quick pair-share: "What do you think is the age when the brain becomes fully mature?"
- Gather a few responses.

Purpose: Activates prior knowledge and primes curiosity.

5–10 min | Welcome to the Teenage Brain

Teacher Input:

- Brief explanation of the prefrontal cortex (decision-making, planning) vs. limbic system (emotion, reward).
- Explain that the brain continues developing into the mid-20s.
- Link to risk-taking: teenagers often feel emotions intensely but have less developed impulse control.

Prompt:

- "What were your thoughts on the age of brain maturity?"
- "Did anything stand out for you?"

10–25 min | VR Experience or VR-Inspired Walkthrough

If using VR:

- Introduce the experience and safety notes.
- Remind pupils: "360-degree viewing allows you to see things from a different perspective.

If not using VR:

- Show stills or a short clip.
- Narrate the scenario as if the viewer is inside it.

During or immediately after viewing: Use prompts adapted from The Brain Explained and The Connected Brain:

- "What did you understand from this film?"
- "What might risk-taking behaviours look like?"
- "Did you know that early-life experiences impact how our brain develops?"
- "How might early negative experiences influence relationships or decision-making?"

Encourage pupils to connect the content to real-life examples (without personal disclosure).

25–35 min | Group Discussion – The Connected Brain

Small-group task: Give each group a scenario (e.g., a young person feeling overwhelmed, taking risks, or withdrawing socially).

Groups discuss:

- What might be happening in the brain?
- What protective factors could help?
- Who is in the young person's "network" and why are they important? (Drawn from the document: "Using the film to understand the people in the young person's network… will help you think about who should be involved in the plan.")

Share-back: Each group offers one insight.

35–45 min | Personal Reflection – My "Planes"

Individual task: Pupils write privately:

- What are the "planes" (priorities, pressures, responsibilities) they are juggling?
- Which ones feel heavy?
- Which ones help them thrive?
- What support helps them land safely?

45–50 min | Closing & Follow-Up

Teacher wrap-up:

- Summarise key messages:
  - The adolescent brain is still developing.
  - Risk-taking is linked to brain development, not character flaws.
  - Early experiences shape the brain.
  - Support networks and protective factors matter.

Wellbeing check:

- ·Check in with the participants about how they are feeling following the VR experience.
- Remind pupils who they can talk to if anything comes up later.