

# The Middle Years: Developmental challenges for all concerned

WA Middle Years Forum  
Perth 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2011

Clinical Professor David Bennett  
Head, NSW Centre for the  
Advancement of Adolescent  
Health



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# A psychiatrist & a physician



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# Conceptual framework

- Understanding adolescence circa 2011 - Generation Z
- Developmental goals in the Middle Years
- Some implications for parents, teachers & policy makers



'And, just to make it interesting'

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## Why focus on the middle years?

- Adolescence is a distinct, significant and fascinating time of life - unique!
- Profound and rapid changes occur with potential for huge impact on both current and future wellbeing.



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# Understanding adolescence

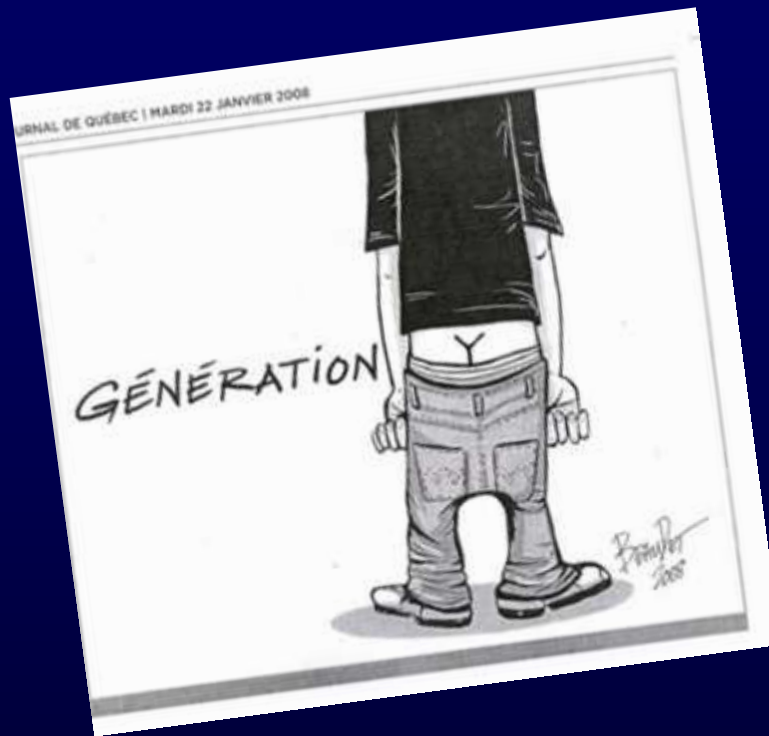
“A time of cosmic yearnings and private passions, of social concern and private agony”

Haim Ginott, *Between Parent and Teenager*, 1969



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# Generation Y: born 1980 - 1995



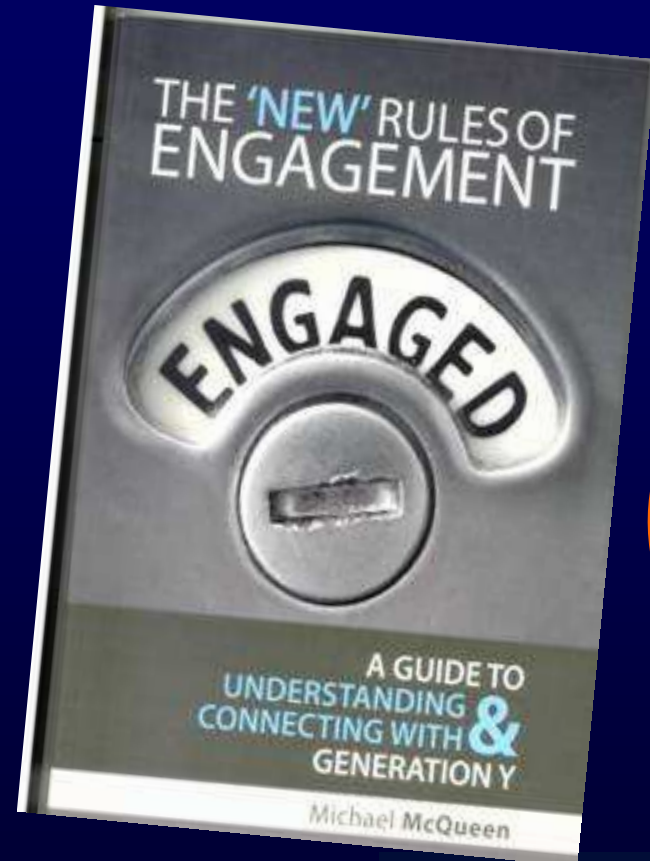
“...towering self-esteem and unabashed assertiveness”

Hugh Mackay

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## Generation Z: late 1990s - ?

- Addicted to technology
- Prematurely mature - a lowering of innocence
- Risk averse



info@thenexgengroup.com caah

## A developmental definition

‘A period of personal development during which a young person must establish a **sense of individual identity and feelings of self-worth** which include an acceptance of his or her body image, adaptation to more mature intellectual abilities, adjustments to society’s demands for behavioural maturity, internalising a personal value system, and preparing for adult roles’

Ingersoll GM, Adolescence, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed, Englewood Cliffs,  
NJ: Prentice-Hall 1989

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# Puberty & Adolescence

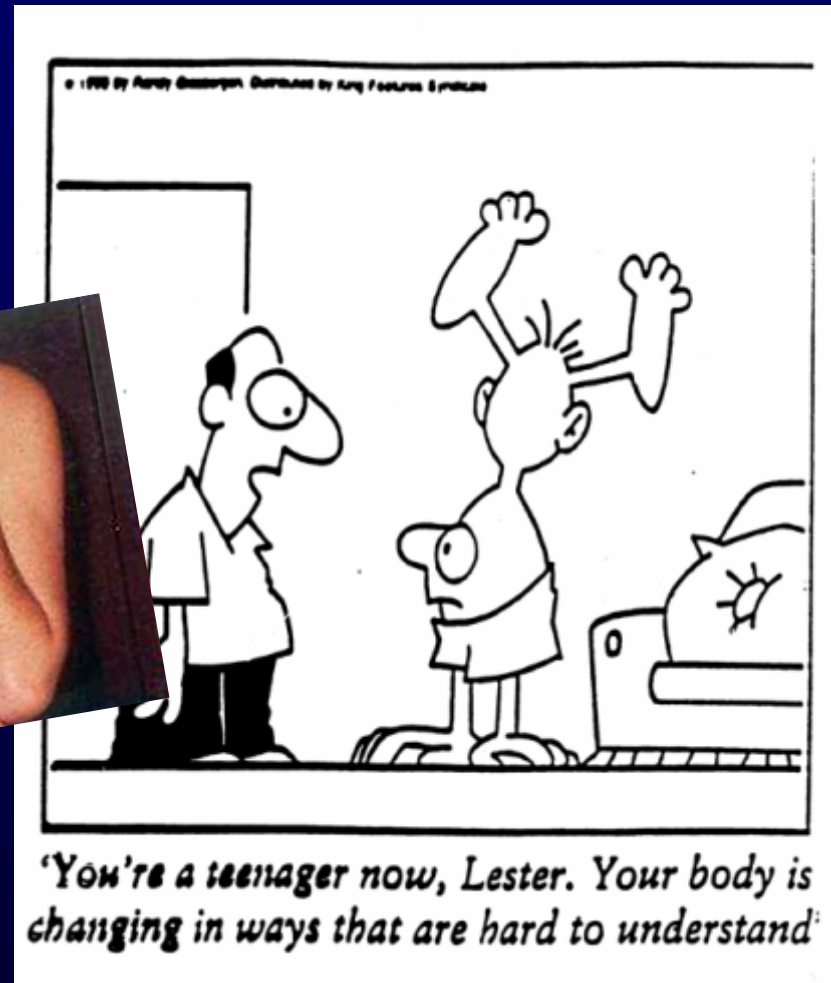
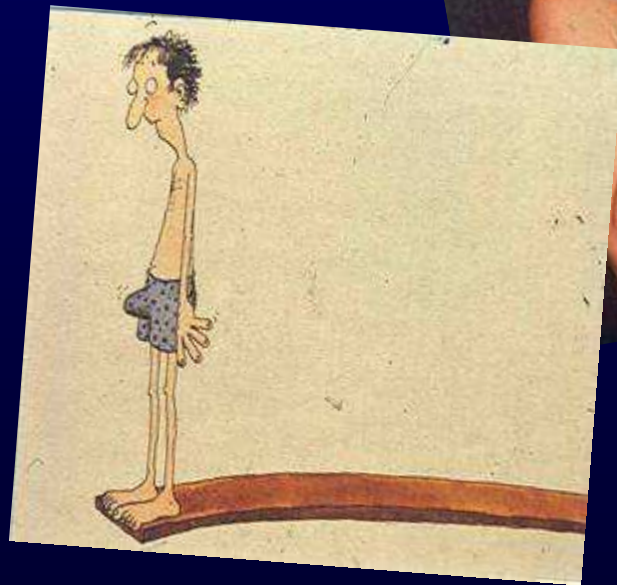
- The unique set of events involving changes in physical appearance and hormones from those of a child to a mature adult
- A longer and more complex period of cognitive and psychosocial development during the second decade of life



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## Developmental goals: 9 - 14

Coming to terms with the physical & sexual changes of puberty...



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## Missing information about puberty

- Scientists are able to accurately describe the physical and hormonal changes in puberty, but we do not understand how the body decides “It’s time”
- The effects of puberty hormones on behaviour, health and wellbeing are not well understood because the research is yet to be done.

# Psychosocial and cognitive goals

- **Psychological** - acquiring independence & autonomy
- **Social** - dealing with changing family and peer group relationships
- **Emotional** - shifting from narcissistic to mutually caring relationships
- **Cognitive** - moving from concrete to abstract thought (supported by brain development)
- **Moral** - developing a set of moral beliefs and standards (supported by brain development)

## Infuriatingly normal behaviour

“Teenagers dominate the telephone, play unbearably loud music, never tidy their rooms, are incredibly moody, and push their parents to the limit.”

Bennett, *Growing Pains*, 1987



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# Introspectiveness & egocentrism

- The 'imaginary audience' - the belief that everybody is watching them, often with excruciating self-consciousness
- The 'personal fable' - think of themselves as unique with special qualities that make them indestructible

Elkind D. Understanding the young adolescent.  
Adolescence 1978;13:127.

# Erikson's psychosocial stages

- He believed the essential crisis of adolescence is discovering one's true identity amid the confusion created by playing many different roles for the different audiences in an expanding social world.
- Resolving this crisis (role confusion) helps the individual develop a sense of a coherent self.

Erikson E. *Childhood and society*. New York: Norton, 1963.



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# Social (& emotional) development

- Much of the study of social development in adolescence focuses primarily on the **changing roles of family (or adult caretakers) and friends.**
- Adolescents participate in peer relationships at the three levels of friendships, cliques and crowds.



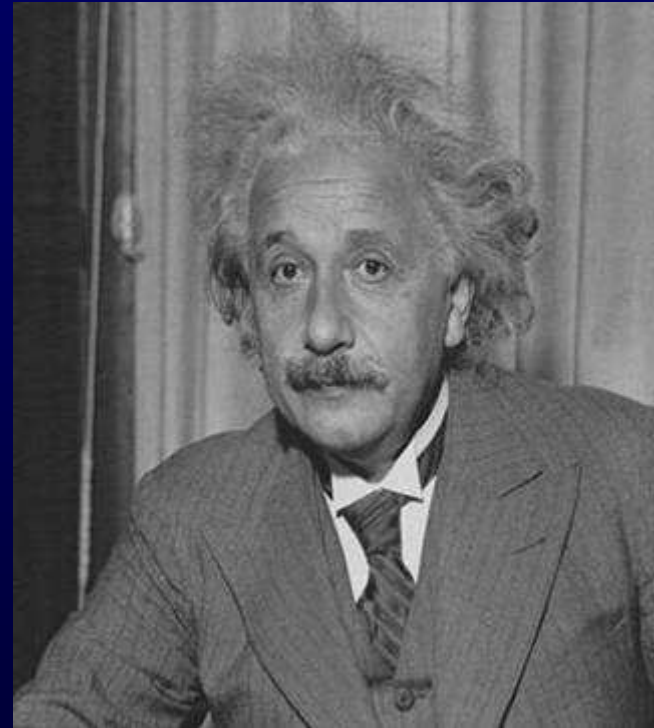
Smetana JG et al, Adolescent development in interpersonal and societal contexts. Annual Review of Psychology, 2006:57, 255-284

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## What's going on in an individual's mind?

“I am enough of an artist to draw fully upon my imagination. **Imagination is more important than knowledge.** Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.”



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# Cognitive development

- “Study of the processes and products of the mind as they emerge and change over time”
- Piaget’s theories of cognitive development (4 stages) -> ‘formal operational thinking’ (Capacity for abstract reasoning and hypothetical thinking; 11 years ->)



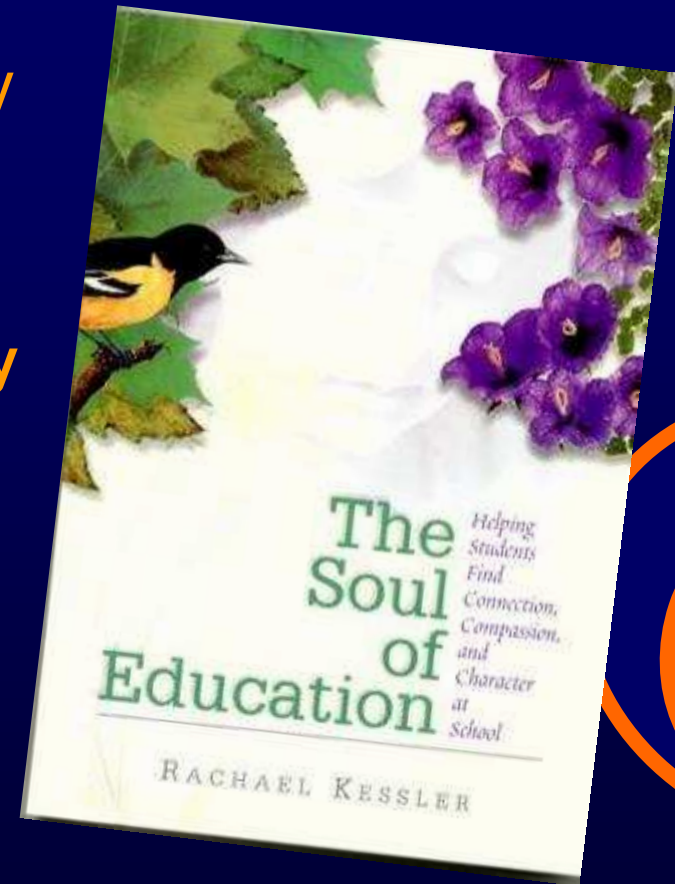
Piaget J. Science of education and the psychology of the child (Coltman D, transl). New York: Orient Press; 1970:30-33

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# Implications of cognitive growth

“Adolescence is a time when longings awaken with an intensity that many have misunderstood and dismissed as “hormones”. The larger questions about meaning, identity, responsibility and purpose begin to press with an urgency and loneliness we can all remember.”

Rachael Kessler, “The Soul of Education”, 2000



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# Moral development

- An increasing sense of their own values
- An increasing sense of empathy - the ability to see things from another's perspective
- Discerning right from wrong - thoughts, feelings and behaviours related to moral issues
- A growing interest in broader community values and societal issues

Stanrock JW. *Adolescence*, 11<sup>th</sup> edition, McGraw Hill, Boston, 2007

Kohlberg L (1981). *The philosophy of moral development*. New York: Harper & Row.

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## Risk-taking behaviour

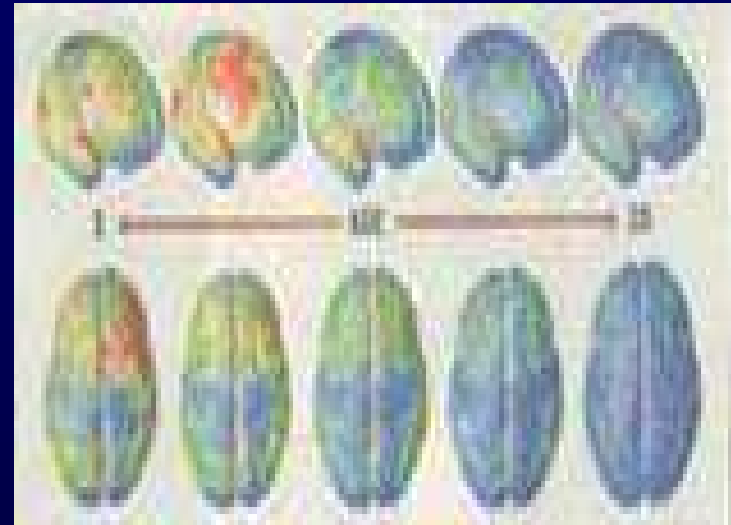
- “Adolescents experiment with new activities, testing their limits, exploring new skills, and enjoying the often exhilarating sense of freedom involved.”



Bennett, *Growing Pains*, 1987

## Neurodevelopment - new findings

- Adolescence is a period of profound brain maturation
- The pre-frontal cortex continues to develop into early adulthood
- Brain immaturity provides context for risk taking behaviours

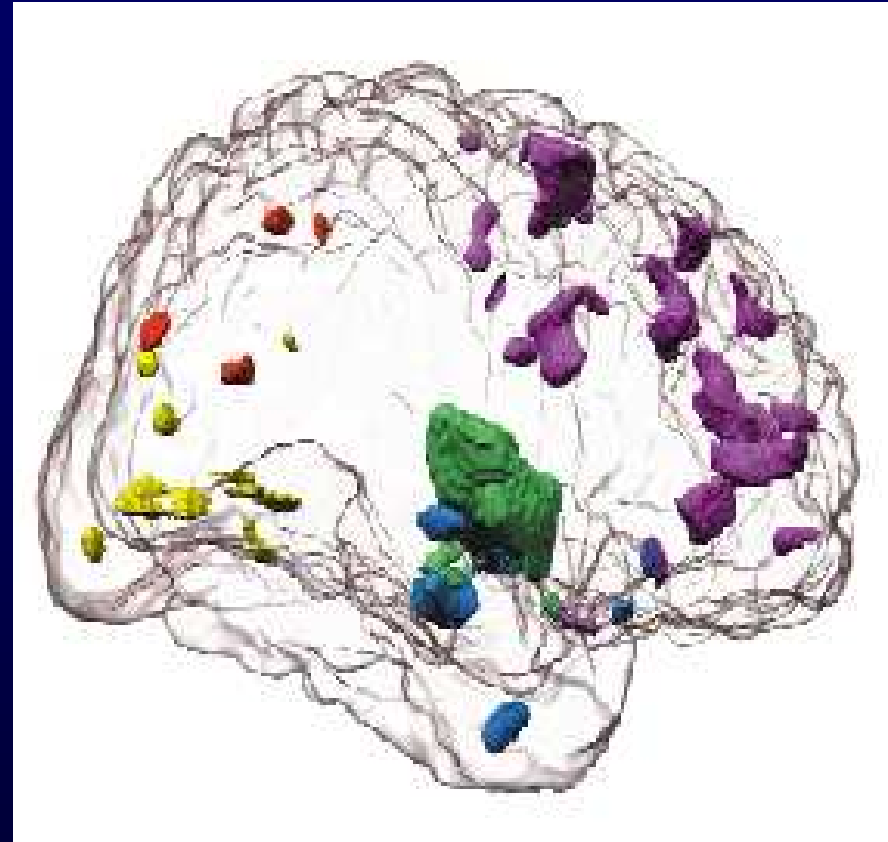


Gied JN. Structural Magnetic Resonance Imaging of the Adolescent Brain. Annals of The New York Academy of Sciences 2004

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# Neurodevelopment - “from awkwardness to awareness”

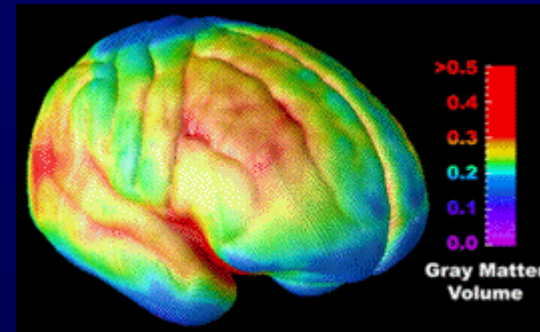
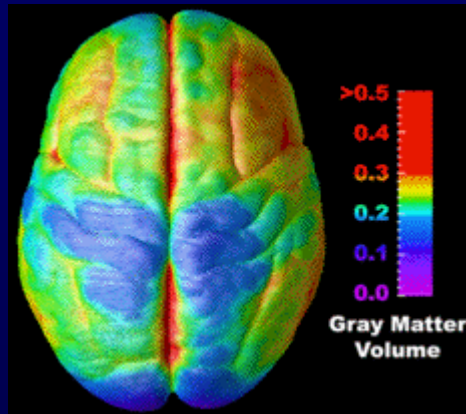
- Brain areas where volumes are smaller in adolescents than young adults →
- Maturation of the brain’s gray matter moves from back to front



Sowell, E.R. et al., Nature Neuroscience, 2(10), pp. 859-861, 1999

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# Adolescence: waves of synaptic pruning & myelination



Abstract thinking

Identity development

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## This imbalance leads to...

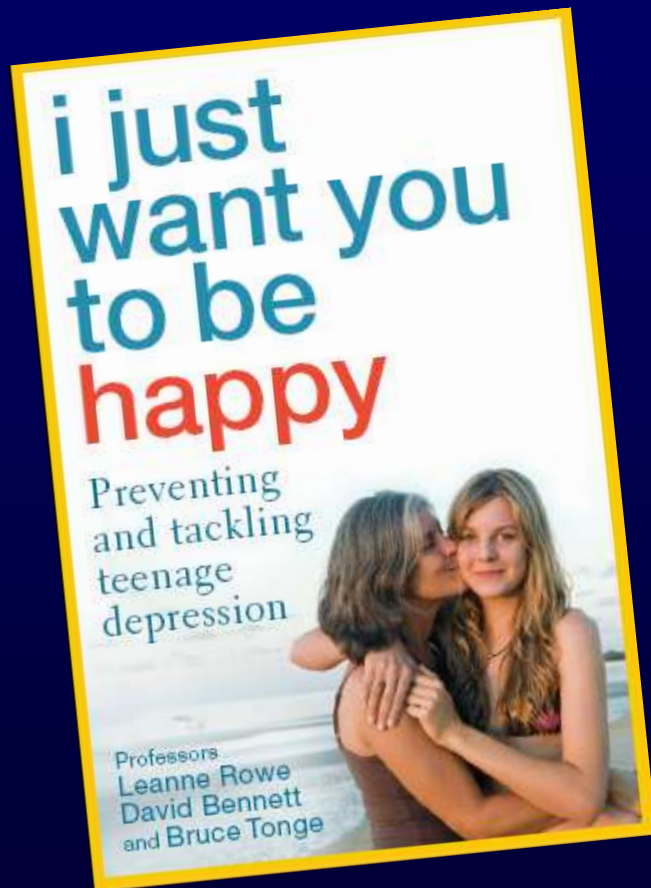
- ↑ risk taking
- ↑ low effort - high excitement activities
- ↑ interest in novel stimuli
- ↓ planned thinking
- ↑ impulsiveness

PFC



amygdala

# The concept of mental health



A state of wellbeing in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of everyday life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.

WHO. Mental Health: New Understanding, New Hope. Geneva 2001.

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# Resilience

Resilience is a summary term used to refer to a range of characteristics that enhance one's ability to bounce back from tough times.



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## Broader concepts of resilience

“Resilience is not only an individual’s capacity to overcome adversity, but the capacity of the individual’s environment to provide access to health enhancing resources in culturally relevant ways..”

Ungar et al, *Family process*, 2007; 43(1):23-41

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## Protective factors

- **Personality characteristics:** social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy and a sense of purpose and future...
- **Family cohesion,** warmth and an absence of discord
- **External support systems** that encourage and reinforce a child's coping efforts

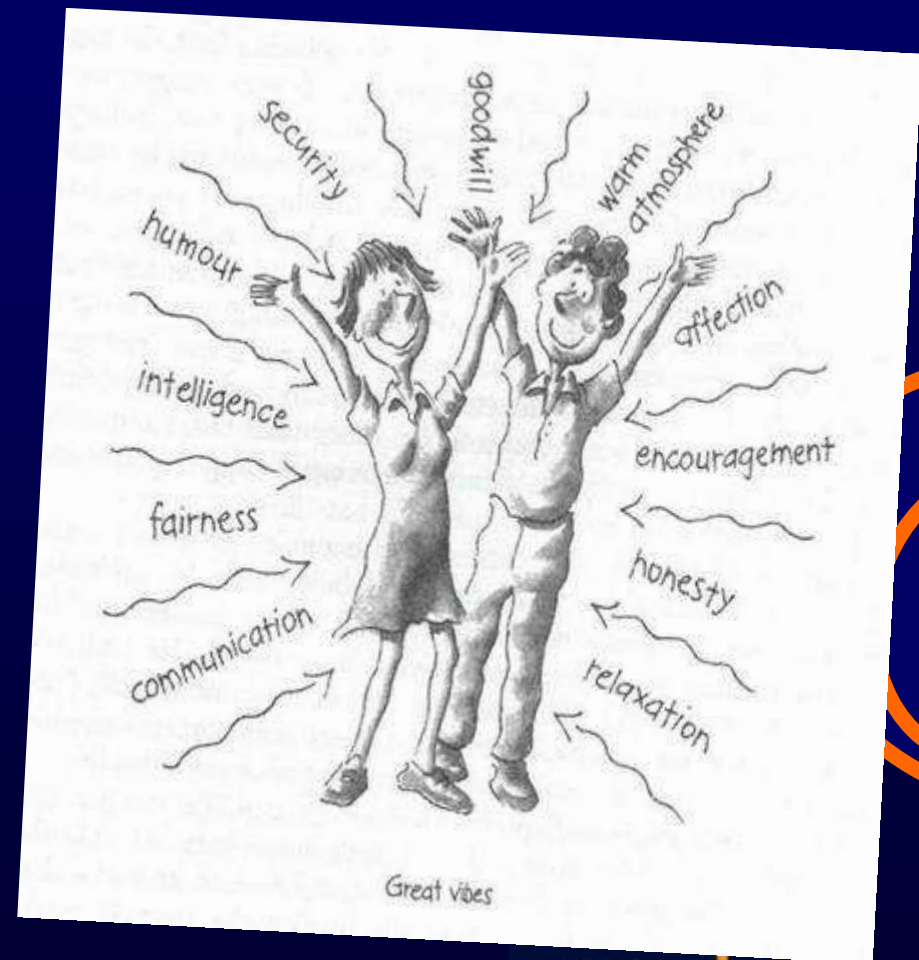
Masten & Garmezy, 1985

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# Relationships and resilience

“... the central importance of caring relationships between children and adults for the development of resilient adolescents and young adults ...”

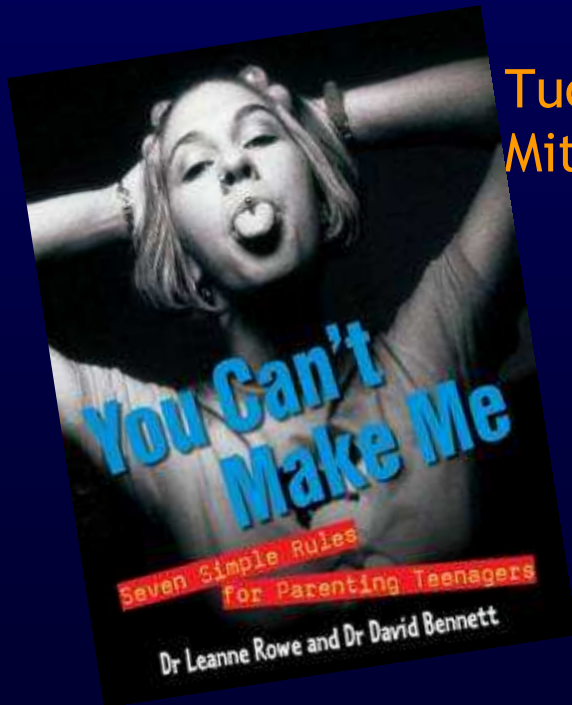
Michael Resnick et al, 1993



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# Challenging stages for parents

- The years 0 - 3
- The years 11 - 15



Tucci, Goddard & Mitchell, 2004



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## The family at adolescent transition

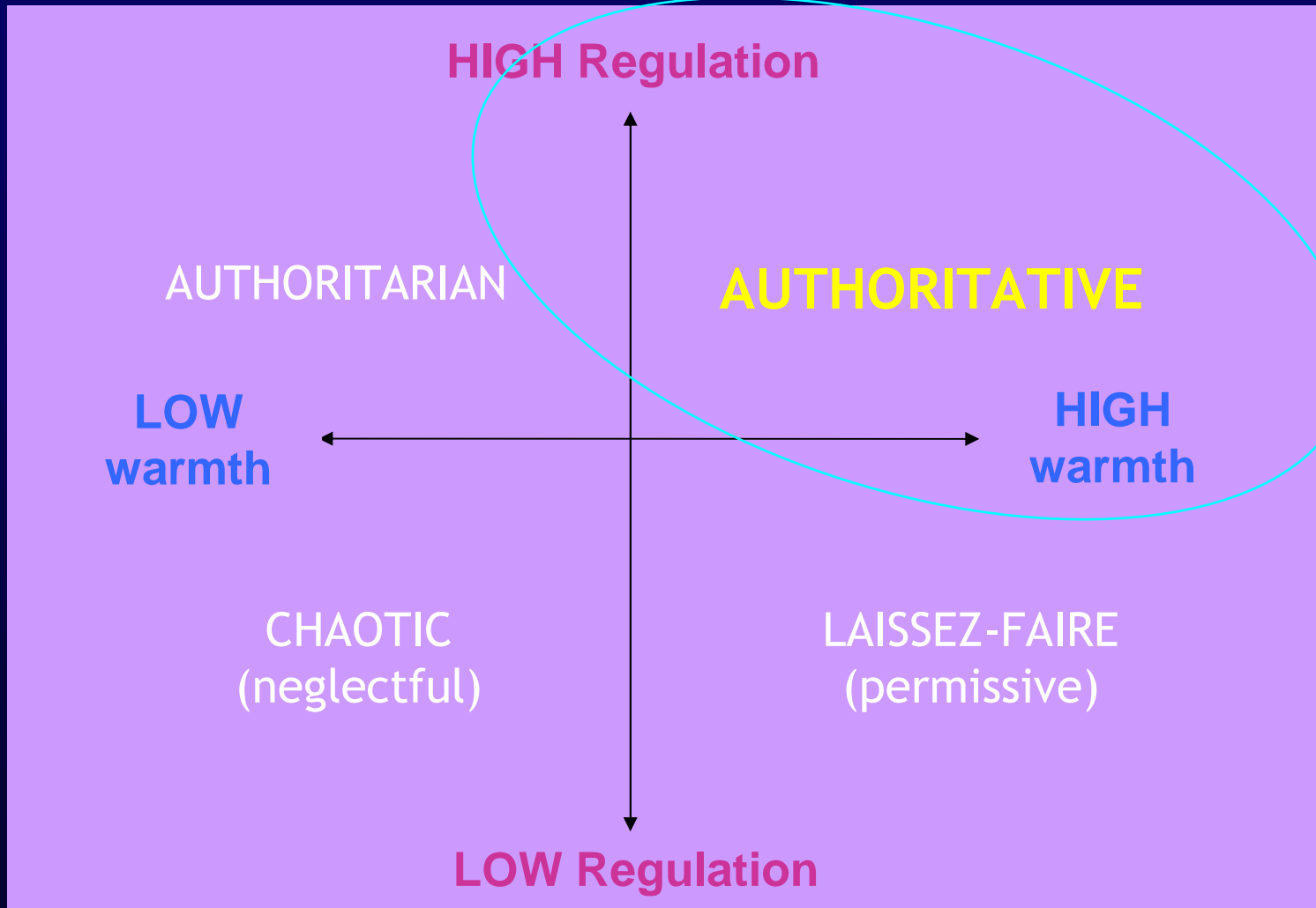
- Like a living organism, families seek to adjust to natural changes that occur across the family life cycle.
- 40% of parents report an increase in distress (especially mothers) in the early adolescent years



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# Parenting style (Diana Baumrind)



# Authoritative parenting

- Warm, involved and responsive
- Firm & strict and demanding of maturity
- Fosters and encourages psychological autonomy

Diana Baumrind, 1971, 1991



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## Participation and responsibility

“The lessons we instil by insisting that our children do mundane tasks may very well be the ones that stay with them longest, helping them to become self-reliant adults, responsible community members, and loving parents.”

Wendy Mogel, *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee*, 2001

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## Family meals

- Eating meals as a family benefits young people above and beyond their general sense of connectedness to family members
- Frequency of family meals is inversely associated with tobacco, alcohol & marijuana use, depressive symptoms & suicide involvement, particularly among adolescent girls.

Eisenberg et al, 2004

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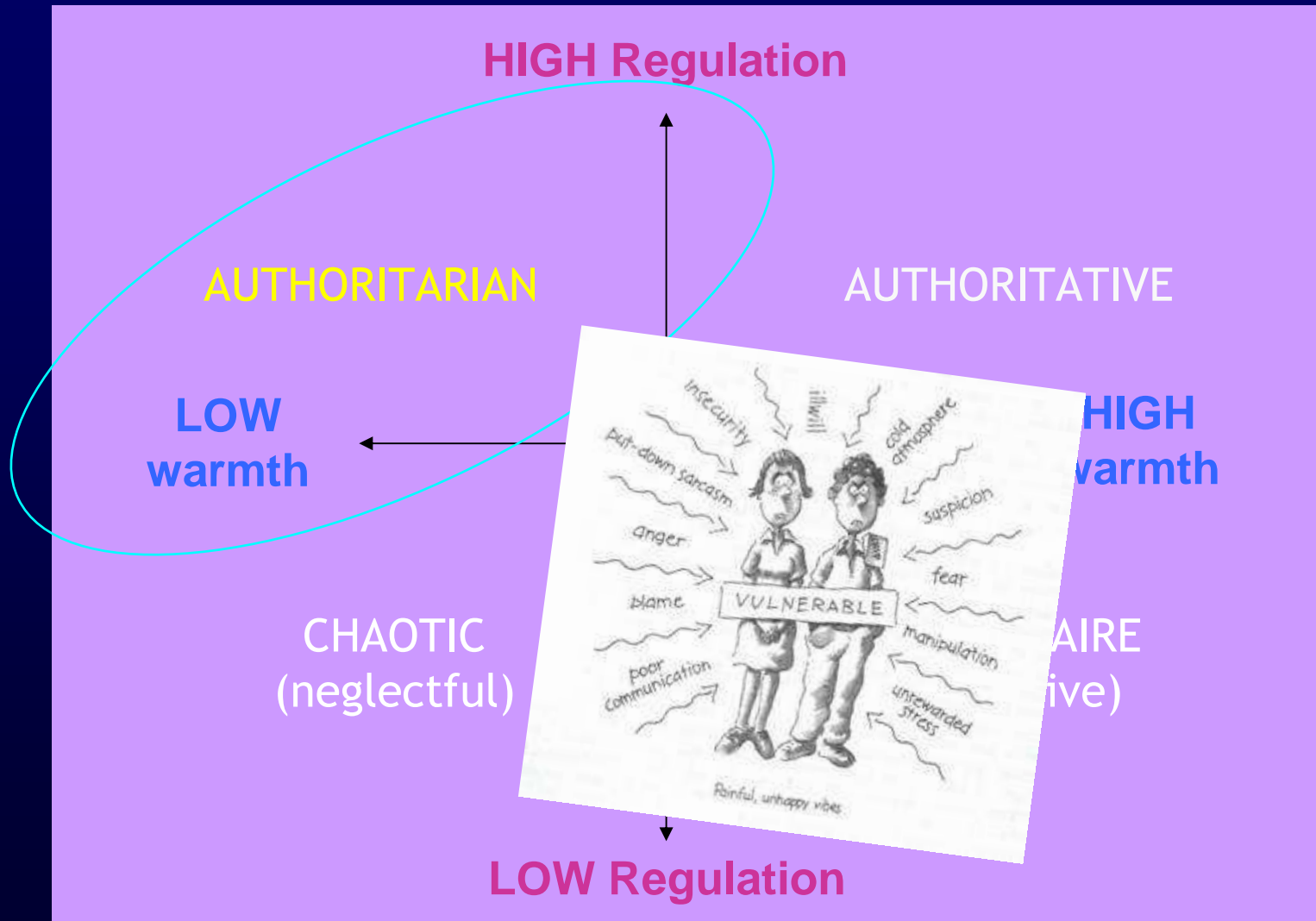
## Adolescents from authoritative homes

- **Achieve more in school**
- **Better self-reliance & self-esteem; less depression and anxiety**
- **More positive social behaviour, self-control, cheerfulness & confidence**
- **Less likely to engage in anti-social behaviour**

Lawrence Steinberg, 2001

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# Parenting style



# Message to policy makers



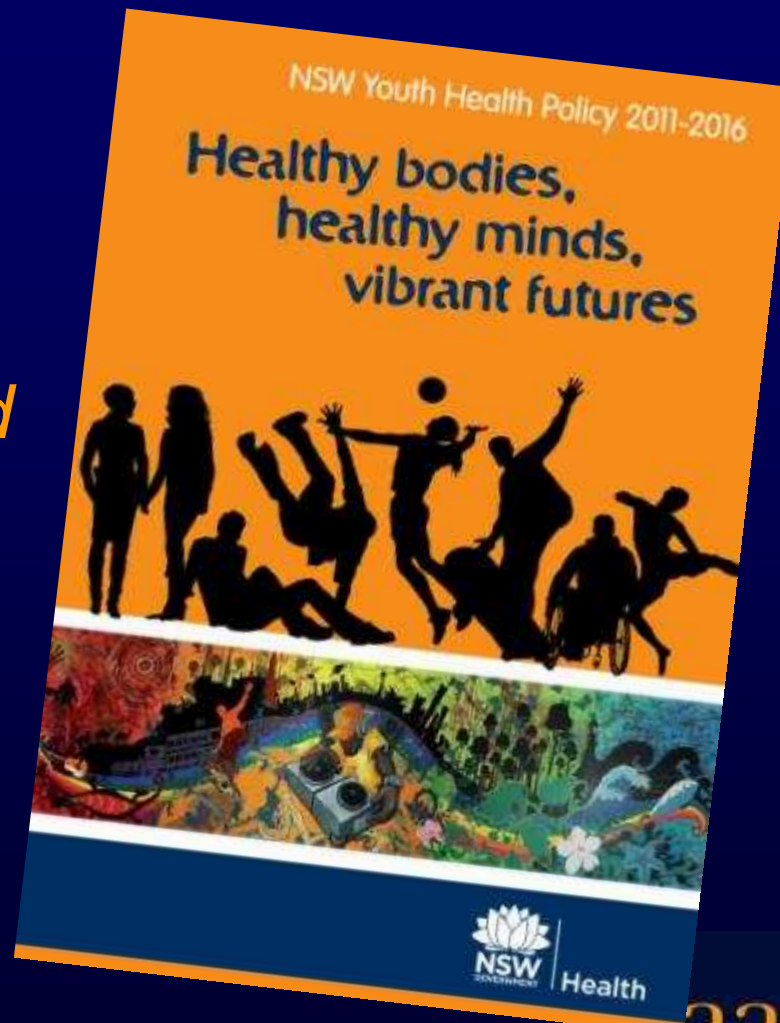


## Launch by Deputy Premier & NSW Minister for Health – December 2010



# Youth Health Policy - Vision

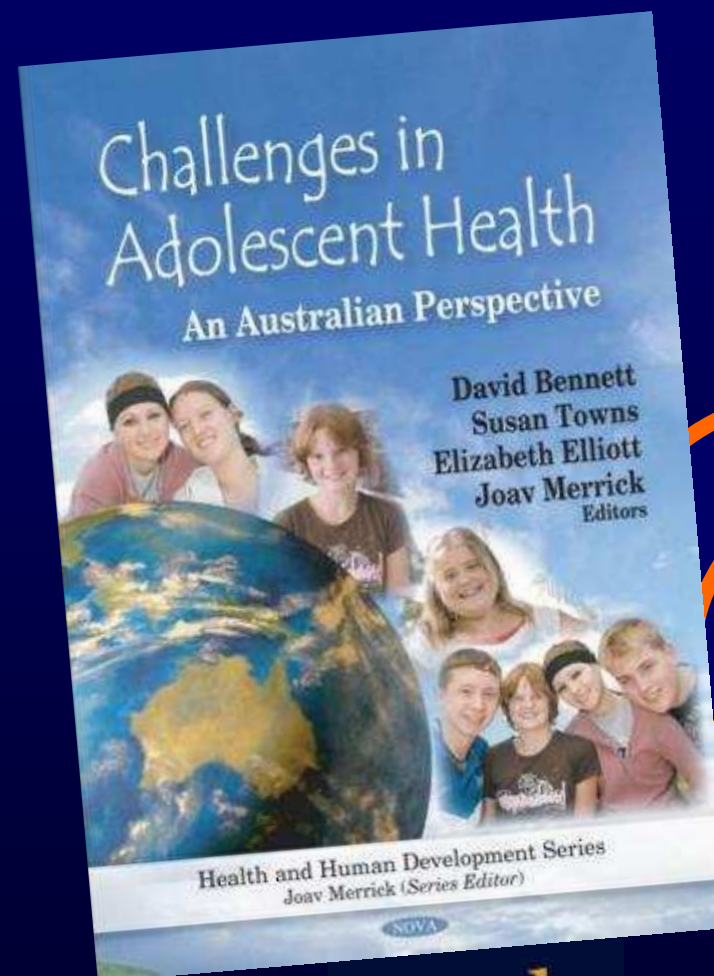
*A community in which young people's health and wellbeing is valued, supported and optimised.*



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# Our goals for adolescent health

- To improve the health and wellbeing of young people
- To ensure best practice in service delivery, research, training and advocacy
- To assist in making the world a better and more equitable place for children and young people



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[www.youthhealth2011.com.au](http://www.youthhealth2011.com.au)

# Youth Health 2011

The 8th Australian & New Zealand  
Adolescent Health Conference  
3rd IAAH Asia Pacific Congress



Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre  
Darling Harbour, Sydney

**9-11 November 2011**

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the children's hospital at Westmead  
NSW Centre for the Advancement  
of Adolescent Health

  
**I.A.A.H.**  
International Association for Adolescent Health

the children's hospital at Westmead

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# www.caah.chw.edu.au

**caah** NSW Centre for the Advancement  
of Adolescent Health

the childr<sup>e</sup>n's hospital at Westmead

**The NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health**  
(NSW CAAH) was established in 1998 under the NSW Youth Health Policy, to create better health and well-being for all young people aged 12–24 in New South Wales. Situated in The Children's Hospital at Westmead the Centre is funded by NSW Health.



**Our Mission** is to protect and promote the health and well-being of young people in New South Wales by partnering with health care, non-government, education, academic, community and advocacy bodies to ensure better adolescent health outcomes.



[www.caah.chw.edu.au](http://www.caah.chw.edu.au)

Email: [caah@chw.edu.au](mailto:caah@chw.edu.au)

Tel: + 612 9845 3338

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