



Facilitating System-Impacted Youth Classes

April 22, 2025

What We'll Explore Today

- 1. Introduction: a little about my journey**
- 2. What's going on in the teenage brain?**
- 3. Teenage physiology and the practice of yoga**
- 4. Challenges and opportunities with incarcerated youth**
- 5. Building trust with staff and participants**
- 6. What a four-part practice can look like for youth**
- 7. The importance of self-practice**
- 8. Questions?**



Introduction:

My Journey



Whether prompted by a crisis or a profound curiosity to discover that which is hidden within, the path of awareness arouses a heartfelt dedication to uncover insights into both our human potential to open, and our human predicament to struggle.

~ Sarah and Ty Powers



What's Going On in the Teenage Brain?

The Beauty and Power of the Teenage Brain...

Research suggests that the changes that occur in the adolescent brain are not merely about 'maturity' vs. 'immaturity,' but rather are vitally important developmental changes that enable certain new abilities to emerge that are crucial for both the individual and our species.

~ Daniel J. Siegel. M.D., *Brainstorm*

Four Changes in the Fundamental Circuits

1. Novelty Seeking
2. Social Engagement
3. Increased Emotional Intensity
4. Creative Exploration

Source: Brainstorm, Daniel J. Siegel , M.D

Novelty Seeking

Emerges from an increased drive for rewards that creates the inner motivation to try something new and feel life more fully.

Upside:

- Open to change
- Fascination for life (passion), sense of adventure
- Design new ways of doing things

Downside:

- Sensation seeking and risk taking that emphasizes thrills and downplays risk
- Can result in dangerous behaviours and injury
- Impulsivity can turn an idea into action without pause to reflect on consequences

Novelty Seeking

How we can harness this:

- Willingness to try new things
- Willingness to challenge themselves
- Mix it up!
- Offer treats (if allowed) on special occasions

Social Engagement

Enhances peer connectedness and creates new friendships.

Upside:

- Leads to the creation of supportive relationships that are research-proven best predictors of well-being, longevity, and happiness throughout life span

Downside:

- Teens isolated from adults and surrounded by other teens have increased risk behavior, and the total rejection of adults and adult knowledge and reasoning increase those risks

Source: Brainstorm, Daniel J. Siegel , M.D.

Social Engagement

How we can harness this:

- Playfulness and humour
- Introducing the concept of Sangha
- Tying yoga to other activities

Increased Emotional Intensity

A range of emotions gives an enhanced vitality to life.

Upside:

- Life filled with emotional intensity can be filled with energy and a sense of vital drive that give a zest for being alive

Downside:

- Can rule the day, leading to impulsivity, moodiness, and extreme reactivity

Source: Brainstorm, Daniel J. Siegel , M.D.

Increased Emotional Intensity

How we can harness this:

- Talking about emotions in the context of yoga, and the benefits of regulation
- Giving participants autonomy

Creative Exploration

An adolescent's new conceptual thinking and abstract reasoning allow questioning of the status quo, approaching problems with 'out of the box' strategies, the creation of new ideas, and the emergence of innovation.

Upside:

- If the mind can hold on to thinking, imagining, and perceiving, creatively exploring the spectrum of experiences that are possible, a rut that can sometimes pervade adult life can be minimized
- Cultivating an experience of the 'ordinary being extraordinary'

Downside:

- Searching for the meaning of life during the teen years can lead to a crisis of identity, vulnerability to peer pressure, and a lack of direction or purpose

Source: Brainstorm, Daniel J. Siegel , M.D.

Creative Exploration

How we can harness this:

- Practicing challenging participants appropriately
- Through discussion; creating new patterns and neural connections

The Beauty and Power of the Teenage Brain...

“When adults lose the four distinctive features of adolescence, when they stop cultivating the power of novelty seeking, social engagement, emotional intensity, and creative exploration, life can become boring, isolating, dull and routine. Who would intentionally choose to live like that?”

~ Daniel J. Siegel. M.D., *Brainstorm*



Teenage Physiology and the Practice of Yoga

Teenage Physiology

- Generally more flexible and physically adaptable
- Rates of development
- Growing pains
- Injuries
- Smelly feet and bodies

Exploring Novelty and Creativity Safely

- Crow/ Side crow/ Flying Crow
- Dragonfly
- Handstand against a wall
- Bird of Paradise
- Peacock



Building Trust With Participants and Staff

Building Trust With Staff

- Respect them as people and their position
- Offer classes
- Be impeccable with your word
- Ask permission/ respect the rules

Building Trust With Participants

- Show up; be true to your word
- Offer autonomy
- Practice as a facilitator/ guide, not a 'teacher'
- Be authentic
- Be aware of 'favouritism'
- Make it secular



Challenges and Opportunities with Incarcerated Youth

Challenges

- Safety
- Testing
- Trauma
- Mental health/ behavioural/ developmental issues
- Detoxing
- Be aware of group dynamics
- S*# happens
- Inappropriate comments/ actions

Opportunities

- Meet them where they are at
- See them as they are
- Create 'agreements'



The Four-Part Practice

The Four-Part Practice

1. Discharging
2. Breathing/ Meditation
3. Poses
4. Deep Relaxation



The Importance of Self-Practice



“The secret of human freedom, is to act well,
without attachment to the results.”

~ The Bhagavad Gita



Questions?

Resources

The Body Keeps the Score, Dr. Bessel van der Kolk

A pioneering researcher transforms our understanding of trauma and offers a bold new paradigm for healing in this *New York Times* best-seller.

Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain, Dr. Daniel J. Siegel

Between the ages of twelve and twenty-four, the brain changes in important and, at times, challenging ways. In *Brainstorm*, Dr. Daniel Siegel busts a number of commonly held myths about adolescence—for example, that it is merely a stage of "immaturity" filled with often "crazy" behavior. An exploration into how the brain develops during this critical period, to better understand yourself, or the adolescents in your life.

The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog, Bruce D. Perry and Maia Szalavitz

In this classic work of developmental psychology, renowned psychiatrist and the coauthor of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *What Happened to You?* reveals how trauma affects children—and outlines the path to recovery



Thank you!