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Smarter Decisions through Psychology

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Using what you have learned about the adolescent brain and social development, answer the questions in this case study assignment. Your goals are to help Monica understand why her son makes the choices he does and recommend some strategies that may help solve the problem.

For each question, you should write a paragraph-length response (5–7 sentences) to receive credit for this assignment. You may use your Sophia tutorials as a resource.

Question 1: What happens inside the brain of a teenager that makes it difficult for Jordan to weigh the risks and rewards of his behavior? Describe how the adolescent brain weighs risk and reward.

At this age, the brain has high levels of dopamine and oxytocin. Dopamine and oxytocin help in making decisions. Teenagers seek their peers and engage in activities that have more social rewards. This is what is happening to Jordan; he has become disconnected from his mother, is seeking out other teenagers his age, and is engaging in risky behaviors. A teenager's brain is more associated with social rewards, which counts when weighing risks and rewards.

Question 2: Why does it appear that Jordan values the opinion of his peers more than the opinion of his mother? Explain the psychological concepts that may account for why Jordan places value on his peers' opinions.

Unlike adults, teenagers take more risks mainly because they weigh risks and rewards differently. For teenagers, acceptance by a peer group becomes very important. That is why one finds them modifying their speech, walking style, and clothing, among other behaviors which might be risky, like smoking marijuana, as in the case of Jordan. He is trying to fit in with his peers who are misleading him. However, because of the social reward associated with the acceptance he receives from the group, he does not realize the risk he is putting himself into.

Question 3: What advice would you give Jordan's mother, Monica, that would teach him how to make better choices and decisions? Discuss a strategy Monica may implement to help her son make better decisions.

I would advise Monica that this is a phase all teenagers go through. It has to do with identity crises and confusion as teenagers try to discover themselves. This is because the brain is developing and is affected by high dopamine levels. I would advise her to take Jordan for counselling. I would also recommend stricter measures, not just grounding, for instance, boot camp. Additionally, she can try to teach her son about the risks associated with marijuana, for example, prison life.

Question 4: If you were in Monica's shoes, how would you feel? Explain why a better understanding of Monica's perspective could result in more constructive advice.

I would feel worried or even think that I am a terrible mother. After trying hard to raise a son and then finding that he is engaging in activities that would harm him, one would be disappointed. However, all parents deal with certain aggression with their teenagers. There is no specific way to deal with this because it varies from teen to teen. Getting help and guidance for parents and their teenagers is the best solution.



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