

Why Is Adolescence a Sensitive Period for Development and Mental Health?

1

A time for brain reorganisation

Brain development continues throughout adolescence, with regions involved in **planning, decision-making, and social cognition maturing later.**

Key developmental processes

Synaptic pruning

Myelination

Increased connectivity between brain regions



These processes make the adolescent brain highly plastic, and especially shaped by experience.

2

The social world becomes more important

Why?



1. *Peer relationships become increasingly important*
2. *Sensitivity to social rejection increases*
3. *Adolescents are more influenced by peers when taking risks*

3

Puberty and mental health become closely linked

Rates of depression increase sharply in girls

Earlier puberty is associated with increased anxiety and depressive symptoms

Boys show higher rates of substance misuse and suicide mortality

4

Stressful experiences may have a strong impact

The adolescent brain may be especially sensitive to stressful or adverse experiences during this period, including factors such as **bullying, chronic stress, substance use, and negative family environments.**